From Odessa to Florence: Elena Comparetti Raffalovich. A Jewish Russian Woman in Nineteenth-Century Italy

by *Asher Salah*

Elena Comparetti Raffalovich (1842-1918)

Abstract

In the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, Italy held a strong appeal for Russian travelers. Several of these Russian émigrés were women of Jewish lineage, who had come with their families or were sent abroad on their own in order to complete their education at one of the newborn kingdom's prestigious universities. Elena Raffalovich (Odessa 1842 – Florence 1918) is one of the earliest and most intriguing examples of this phenomenon. While her intellectual trajectory, as a pioneer in children's education and an advocate of women's rights, is representative of that of many other Russian Jewish women living in Italy at that time, it also challenges a number of historiographic commonplaces about Jewish women and their emancipation process in nineteenth-century Europe. Moreover, through the archives of different prominent members of the Raffalovich dynasty, it is possible to follow its vicissitudes over at least five generations, completing our knowledge of Elena's biography and reassessing the importance of her intellectual contribution to Italian culture.

Introduction

In the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, Italy held a strong appeal for Russian bourgeois, exiled dissidents and ailing intellectuals, who were attracted by the mildness of the Italian climate, by its historical sites and by its liberal political regime.[1] Italy's artistic cities and summer resorts were, therefore,

[1] The foremost scholar on the subject of Russians in Italy is Michail G. Talalay. Among his main works see in particular *Russkie v Italii: Kul`turnoe Nasledie Emigratsii, Mezhdunarodnaia Nauchnaia Konferentsiia (Russians in Italy: The Cultural Heritage of Emigration: International Scholarly Conference)* ed. Michail G. Talalay (Moscow: Russkii Put', 2006); ID., "Organizations of Russian immigrants in Florence (1917-1949)" in *Russia and Italy*, 5 (2003): 32-39 (in Russian). Other authors who wrote on the topic: Ettore Lo Gatto, *Russi in Italia: dal secolo 17 ad oggi* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1971); *I russi e l'Italia*, ed. Vittorio Strada (Milan: Scheiwiller, 1995); N. Komolova, "Russian Emigration in Italy in the Early Twentieth Century (1905-1914)" in *Russia and Italy*, 3 (1998): 283–306 (in Russian); I. Revyakina, "Russian Capri (1906-1914)" in *Russia and Italy*, 5 (2003): 12–32 (in Russian). For a general overview of the Russian Diaspora in Italy, the site http://www.russinitalia.it is very useful. I would like to thank my friend and collegue Professor Igor Aronov of the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design

included in the itinerary of many Russians' *Grand Tours*.[2] Among those Russians who sojourned in Italy for longer or shorter periods of time were many Jews born in Odessa, or its former residents,[3] such as Vladimir Jabotinsky (1880–1940)[4] and Isaac Babel (1894–1940).[5] Several of these Jewish Odessites eventually settled in Italy, taking an active part in its political and literary life, as did Alexander Pekelis (1902–1946),[6] a professor of jurisprudence at the universities of Florence and Rome, and Leone Ginzburg (1909–1944), one of the most prominent anti-Fascist activists and heroes of the Italian Resistance.[7]

---

in Jerusalem for his bibliographical references in Russian, and to express my gratitude to Giulia Rispoli and Paolo De Luca for having allowed me to read their forthcoming article *Russian emigration in Italy in the pre-revolutionary period: the case of the school of Capri*.

[2] For a European perspective on the representation of Italy in the literature of the Grand Tour see Marie Madelaine Martinet, *Le voyage d'Italie dans les litteratures europeennes* (Paris: PUF 1996); Cesare Seta, *L'Italia del Grand Tour. Da Montaigne a Goethe* (Naples: Electa, 2001); Attilio Brilli, *Il viaggio in Italia: storia di una grande tradizione culturale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008). Concerning the Russian romantic fascination for Italy, which reached its peak in the middle of the nineteenth century see Olga Matich, *Erotic Utopia. The Decadent Imagination in Russia's Fin de Siècle* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005) and Sara Dickinson, *Breaking Ground: Travel and National Culture in Russia from Peter I to the Era of Pushkin*, (New York & Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006).

[3] About the Russian Jewish diaspora in Europe, although with scant references to Italy, *The Russian Jewish Diaspora and European Culture, 1917-1937*, eds. Jörg Schulte, Olga Tabachnikova, Peter Wagstaff (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Michael Parkhomovskii, "Russians Jews in the Diaspora: Italy," *Notes on Jewish History*, 11/158 (2012) http://berkovich-zametki.com/2012/Zametki/Nomer11/Parhomovsky1.php.

[4] Jabotinsky published a number of articles and essays under the pseudonym *Altalena* ('swing' in Italian). During his long sojourns abroad he studied law at La Sapienza University in Rome, where he became associated with another Ukrainian Jewish emigrant, Pinhas Rutenberg (1879-1842), the father of the hydroelectric infrastructure of British Palestine. See Vincenzo Pinto, *Imparare a sparare: vita di Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky padre del sionismo di destra* (Turin: Utet, 2007).

[5] On Babel's Italian journey during the Fascist era see Gregory Freidin, "La 'grande svolta'. L'Occidente e l'Italia nella biografia di I. E. Babel all'inizio degli anni '30" *Storia contemporanea: intelletuali e cultura antidemocratica tra le due guerre mondiali*, 6 (1991).

[6] On this important figure of jurisprudence and philosophy of law see his wife's biography, Carla Pekelis, *La mia versione dei fatti* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1996) [Engl. Trans. *My Version of the Facts*, (Evanston: Marlboro Press and Northwestern University Press, 2005)]; Massimo Giuliani, "Da Odessa a Firenze: Alexander Pekelis (1902-1946): ebreo russo emigrato in Italia," *Amicizia Ebraico-Cristiana*, 34/3-4 (1999): 113ff.; Massimo Mastrogregori, "Il Caso Pekelis. Croce, Russo, Calamandrei e la protezione degli studiosi ebrei nell'autunno 1938" *Storiografia*, 6 (2002): 127ff.

[7] An extensive bibliography exists on Leone Ginzburg. See Gianni Sofri, "Leone Ginzburg," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 55 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 2001). For a first approach to his familiar story and his Odessian years see in particular *Da Odessa a Torino. Conversazioni con Marussia Ginzburg. In appendice: scritti giovanili inediti di Leone Ginzburg*, ed. Maria Chiara Avalle (Turin: Meynier, 1989).

The presence of a significant Russian colony in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Italy is a widely known fact. However, very little has been written about the travelers themselves, their motivations for (permanent or temporary) migration, and the effect of their political and intellectual activity on contemporary Italian culture. A lack of relevant statistical data makes it difficult to paint an accurate picture of the social, religious, ethnic, and gender characteristics of the Russian diaspora in the Italian Peninsula.

Fig. 1 Elena Raffalovich.
Retrieved from http://www.barbiana.it/

Noteworthy in any case is that several of these Russian *émigrés* were women of Jewish lineage, who had come with their families or were sent abroad on their own in order to complete their education at one of the newborn kingdom's prestigious universities. Elena Raffalovich (Odessa 1842 – Florence 1918) is one of the earliest and most intriguing examples of this phenomenon [*Fig. 1*]. While her intellectual trajectory is representative of that of many other Russian Jewish women living in Italy at that time, it also challenges a number of historiographic commonplaces about Jewish women and their emancipation process in nineteenth-century Europe.

The past two decades have witnessed a considerable amount of scholarship devoted to Italian Jewish women,[8] but their stories are still largely absent from the master narratives of the Italian Jewish past.

[8] Tullia Catalan, "Il rapporto padre e figlia in una famiglia ebraica dell'alta borghesia triestina. Elio ed Emilia Morpurgo (1845-1849)" in *Padre e figlia*, eds. L. Accati, M. Cattaruzza, M. Verzar Bass (Turin: Rosenberg & Sellier, 1994) 215-235; Luisa Levi D'Ancona Modena, "Famiglie ebree borghesi dell'Ottocento europeo: tre casi di studio" in *Passato e Presente*, 57 (2002): 73-84, Ead., "Notabili e dame nella filantropia ebraica ottocentesca: casi di studio in Francia, Italia e Inghilterra" in *Quaderni Storici*, 3 (2003): 741-776; Ead., "Jewish Women in Non-Jewish Philanthropy in Italy (1870-1938)" in *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues*, (2010): 9-33; Liana Elda Funaro, "Compagna e partecipe. Donne della comunità ebraica livornese nel secondo Ottocento" in *Sul filo della scrittura: Fonti e temi per la storia delle donne a Livorno,* eds. Lucia Frattarelli Fischer and Olimpia Vaccari (Pisa: Edizioni Plus 2005) 319-339; Marina Arbib, "Dmutah U-Mishnatah Shel Flora Randeger: Ha-Meni'im Le-Masaoteyah Li-Yerushalayim" [The Personality and Thought of Flora Randegger: Motivations for Her Jerusalem Journeys], in *Iggud: Selected Essays in Jewish Studies. Vol. II. History of the Jewish People and Contemporary Jewish Society*, eds. Gershon Bacon, Albert Baumgarten, Jacob Barnai, Chaim Waxman, and Israel J. Yuval (Jerusalem: World Union of Jewish Studies 2009) 149-164 (in Hebrew).

With the exception of an important congress held in Lucca in 2005,[9] the only attempt at an overall appraisal of Jewish women's emancipation is the 2003 volume by Monica Miniati, probing the bourgeois discourse concerning gender roles found in the pages of the main Italian Jewish journals of the time, rather than on the lived experiences of contemporary Jewish women.[10]

Actually, although rabbinical homiletics and the official stances of the Jewish community in Italy as well as elsewhere in Europe present considerable similarities, defending a substantially chauvinistic and traditional vision of women's place in the world,[11] female social practices are much more diverse than they appear at first sight. Moreover, while it is certainly true that in the period with which we are concerned "the overwhelming majority of Jewish women were housewives or future housewives,"[12] Raffalovich represents a different group of women, whose influence and spheres of action have been overlooked by a nationally oriented historiography seeking to depict collective patterns of behavior, rather than minority or marginal clusters.

The intellectual biography of Elena Raffalovich is also interesting in light of the history of the Jewish family in nineteenth-century Europe. As suggested by Tullia Catalan, it would be valuable "to reach a comparative synthesis, which examines the economic and social strategies among port-Jews during the nineteenth century, focusing on the presence of a dense network of business and family ties, from Odessa and the main commercial and intellectual centers of Western Europe."[13] The voluminious information available on the different scions of the Raffalovich dynasty[14] who attained positions of high social prestige

[9] *Donne nella storia degli ebrei d'Italia: atti del IX Convegno internazionale "Italia Judaica," Lucca, 6-9 giugno 2005*, eds. Michele Luzzati and Cristina Galasso (Florence: Giuntina 2007).

[10] Monica Miniati, *Les Émancipées. Les femmes juives italiennes aux XIX^e^ et XX^e^ siècles (1848-1924)* (Paris : Champion 2003) (in Italian *Le Emancipate. Le donne ebree in Italia nel XIX e XX secolo*, (Rome: Viella 2008)). For the early modern feminine condition see also chapter 3 of Marina Caffiero, *Storia degli ebrei nell'Italia moderna. Dal Rinascimento alla Restaurazione* (Rome: Carocci 2014).

[11] Maddalena Del Bianco Cotrozzi, "Ebraismo italiano dell'Ottocento: 'la educazione della donna' di David Graziadio Viterbi," in *Donne nella storia degli ebrei d'Italia*, eds. Michele Luzzati and Cristina Galasso (Florence: Giuntina 2007) 329-345.

[12] Marion Kaplan, "Priestess and Hausfrau: Women and Tradition in German-Jewish Family" *The Jewish Family: Myths and Reality,* eds. Steven Cohen and Paula Hyman (New York - London: Holmes & Meier 1986) 63.

[13] Tullia Catalan, "The Ambivalence of a Port-City. The Jews of Trieste from the 19th to the 20th Century," in *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, n. 2 (2011) *url:* www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=232.

[14] The only general study about the Raffalovich family known to me is S. K. Lebedev, "The

and left significant traces of their accomplishments in the European cultural scene, allows us to view Elena in a diachronic and transnational perspective throughout 'the long nineteenth century.' Too, we will attempt to understand how a Jewish family such as the Raffalovichs reshaped its identities in the course of its wanderings between the Czarist Empire and the West.[15]

Elena Raffalovich's Life

Elena was the third daughter of Leon (Lev Anisimovic) and Rosette Lowensohn, born in Odessa on May 22, 1842 after Marie (1833-1921) and Nadine (1836-1911). Other than the strong attachment of the young Elena to her father, who appears as a mentor and indefatigable supporter of Elena,[16] little is known about her earlier years in Russia. In 1861, Elena's parents left Odessa with their entire family and settled in Western Europe, dividing their time between France and Italy.[17] It is not clear whether this move was made in order to avoid anti-Semitic pressures to convert, or as a consequence of the economic decline of this port city. With the beginning of the railroad boom of the 1860s and 1870s, the export line linking the major grain-producing regions of Russia with the western and southwestern borders of the Empire undermined the city's importance in international trade.

The Raffalovichs may have chosen Italy as a destination because of familial ties to the Morpurgos of Triest. Too, Odessa was in many ways a culturally Italian city, as much as it was under the spell of French models and fashions.[18] While the Raffalovichs never severed their commercial ties with Odessa, and travelled widely throughout Europe, Elena linked her destiny to her country of adoption,

---

Raffalovich Family: Money, Literature, and Politics" in *Power, Society and Reform in Russia in XIX - Early XX Century: Research and Historiography*, ed. Alexiei N. Tsamutali (St. Petersburg: Nestor History 2009) 215-225 (in Russian). It includes only the brief biographical sketches of Herman, Marie and their three sons. Elena is mentioned only in a note drawing information from an article in the Italian Wikipedia.

[15] In the absence of scholarship dealing with the diaspora of Jewish Odessites, it can be useful to refer to the conceptual frame elaborated by Rebecca Kobrin, *Jewish Bialystock and Its Diaspora* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2010) in order to understand the dense intellectual, commercial and matrimonial networks established by the Raffalovichs across Europe as an example of the transnational character of the migrational patterns of Odessa Jews.

[16] According to a quite-widespread pattern in Jewish families of the haute bourgeoisie of the time, as demonstrated by Catalan, "Il rapporto padre e figlia."

[17] Her sister Marie along with her husband Hermann moved to Paris shortly after, in 1863. See Sophie O'Brien, *Silhouettes d'autrefois* (Paris: Alkan 1926) 2.

[18] Anna Makolkin, *A History of Odessa. The Last Italian Black Sea Colony,* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Press 2004).

leaving the traces of her deeds in the annals of Italian history.

Nowadays, Elena Raffalovich is remembered more for her illustrious descendants than for her own merits. Her name appears in short footnotes in the introductions of the many biographies of Lorenzo Milani (1923-1967), an outstanding figure of radical-left Tuscan Catholicism,[19] priest, educator and founder of the Barbiana School for the poor and underprivileged[20] [*Fig. 2*].

Fig. 2, Don Lorenzo Milani (1923-1967)
Retrieved from https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorenzo_Milani#/media/File:Don_lorenzo_milani_3.jpg

In order to highlight the spiritual dimension of Don Lorenzo Milani's intellectual journey, those of his biographers with an apologetic bent linger on his double conversion: the first, his estrangement from his well-off bourgeois

[19] *Left Catholicism 1943-1955: Catholics and Society in Western Europe*, eds. Gerd-Reiner Horn, Emmanuel Gerard, (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2001).

[20] Among the many biographical sketches of Lorenzo Milani that make incidental mention of Raffalovich, see Neera Fallaci, *Dalla parte dell'ultimo. Vita del prete Lorenzo Milani*, (Milan: Rizzoli, 1994); G. Guzzo, *Don Lorenzo Milani. Un rivoluzionario, un santo, un profeta o un uomo?* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 1998); Maurizio Di Giacomo, *Tra solitudine e Vangelo: 1923-1967* (Rome: Borla, 2001); Antonino Bencivinni, *Don Milani: esperienza educativa, lingua, cultura e politica*, (Rome: Armando editore, 2004); E. Martinelli, *Don Lorenzo Milani: dal motivo occasionale al motivo profondo*, (Florence: Società editrice fiorentina, 2007); Antonio Santoni Rugiu, *Don Milani. Lezioni di utopia*, (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2007); Sergio Tanzarella, *Gli anni difficili. Lorenzo Milani, Tommaso Fiore e le esperienze pastorali*, (Trapani: Il pozzo di Giacobbe, 2007); Piero Lazzarin, *Don Lorenzo Milani*, (Padua: EMP, 2007); Mario Lancisi, *Don Milani. La Vita*, (Casale Monferrato: Edizioni Piemme, 2013).

family and association with the Communist party, and the second with his discovery of the Gospel, which drove him turn his back on his secular Jewish background. His mother, Alice Weiss (Trieste 1895- Florence 1978) belonged to a prominent Jewish family of Trieste: her cousin was Edoardo Weiss (1889-1948), one of the first pupils of Sigmund Freud and founder of the Italian Association of Psychoanalysis.[21] Milani also had Jewish forebears on his paternal side: his great-grandmother was none other than Elena Raffalovich.

The second figure in connection with whom the name of Elena Raffalovich is usually mentioned is her husband, Domenico Comparetti (1835—1927), one of the nineteenth century's chief classical scholars of Italy. Comparetti's *Vergil* in the Middle Ages is still considered a masterpiece of erudition and positivistic scholarship.[22] [*Fig. 3*]

[21] Anna Maria Accerboni*, Trieste nella Psicoanalisi. Prigionieri in riva al mare (*Trieste: Lint, 2002); Paul Roazen, *Edoardo Weiss: the House that Freud Built*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2005); Rita Corsa, *Edoardo Weiss a Trieste con Freud. Alle origini della psicoanalisi italiana. Le vicende di Nathan, Bartol e Veneziani,* (Rome: Alpes, 2013).

[22] Translated into English by Edward Felix Mendelssohn Benecke and published by Swan Sonnenschein & Co, London, 1895 from the Italian original, Domenico Comparetti, *Virgilio nel Medioevo*, 2 vol., (Livorno: Francesco Vigo 1872). On Domenico Comparetti's biography see E. Frontali Milani, "Gli anni giovanili di Domenico Comparetti (1848-1859). Dai suoi taccuini e da altri inediti," in *Belfagor*, 24 (1969): 174-180; Giovanni Pugliese Carratelli, "Domenico Comparetti," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* Vol. 27 (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 1982).

Fig. 3 Domenico Comparetti (1835-1927)
Retrieved from
https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domenico_Comparetti#/media/File:Comparetti.jpg

In the winter of 1862, Elena and Domenico met at the Pisan home of Baron Theodor (Anastasios) Tossizza (1795-1870). [23] They married in Genoa on the 13th of August 1863. One child resulted from this marriage, Laura (1864-1913), who in 1884 married a former student of her father's, the archeologist Luigi Adriano Milani (1854-1914). [24] Elena and Domenico separated ten years later. Her independent lifestyle and continuous traveling were apparently incompatible with raising her daughter, who was left in the custody of her father and later put in a college. This is how Domenico describes the reasons for the separation:

Affetta da malinconie isteriche [...] chiese ed ottenne dal marito la facoltà di vivere da se libera ed a modo suo, senza dimora fissa. Ciò avveniva nell'aprile del 1872.

[suffering from hysterical melancholy, she asked and received from her husband the right to live by herself, free and independent, with no fixed abode. This occurred in

[23] Tossizza was a family of Greek descent from Leghorn that had commercial ties with Odessa. See Teresa Cirillo Sirri, *Carteggio Domenico Comparetti-Gherardo Nerucci* (Rome: Gonnelli 2007) 186.
[24] Fabrizio Vistoli, "Luigi Adriano Milani" in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani,* vol. 74 (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 2010), 442-445.

April 1872].[25]

It seems that the separation was decided upon after an attempted suicide by Elena, who could barely tolerate living under the shadow of her loving but patronizing husband.[26] Nevertheless, they did not divorce. The Italian civil code did not offer this possibility at the time,[27] and the only option was to resort to an ecclesiastical forum, a move that would have proved expensive and difficult. Although Domenico's repeated attempts to convince her to return home were unsuccessful, this did not prevent him from closely following and supporting his wife's projects,[28] maintaining with her father, whose intelligence and liberal views on marriage he admired, a stout friendship till the end of his life. [29] Comparetti's copious correspondence is an invaluable source for reconstructing Raffalovich's personality[30] and his admiration for his wife's

[25] Domenico Comparetti, *In memoria di Elena Comparetti-Raffalovich e di Leone Raffalovich suo padre* (Florence: Ariani 1922) 8.

[26] At least this is the conclusion of Mario Alighiero Manacorda, "La breve illusione pedagogica di Elena Comparetti" in *Riforma della scuola*, 26/7-8 (1980): 36-42, based on his reading of the laconic Comparetti entry in his diaries "asfissia. Mia moglie rischia di morire [asphyxia. My wife is at risk of death]."

[27] Lucia Ricci, *Il divorzio in Italia. I giuristi, la società e il dibattito politico nel XIX secolo*, Tesi di Laurea in Giurisprudenza, Università degli studi di Macerata, 1998-1999.

[28] This is what emerges from the correspondence between Elena and Adolfo Pick, now at the Udine municipal library and partially published by Duilio Gasparini, *Adolfo Pick: Il pensiero e l'opera*, 2 Voll., (Florence: Biblioteca Nazionale Pedagogica 1968-1970) concerning the project to found a kindergarten in Venice.

[29] This is how he portrays Leon Raffalovich some 50 years after his death "Leone uomo d'alto ingegno, liberale in sommo grado e con tali principi egli diede a cadauna di esse marito, non imposto, ma di libera e sanamente motivata loro scelta. Abbiamo veduto come di gran cuore egli accordasse la mano della figlia minore Elena ad un giovane filologo professor universitario da lei stessa scelta a suo sposo. A questo fu sempre come un secondo padre e non cesso' mai fino agli ultimi giorni suoi di dargli prove della sua paterna sollecitudine [Leon, a man of high intellect, was extremely liberal, and according to these principles he gave a husband to each one of his daughters, not imposing him [the husband] but giving them [the daughters] a free and healthy choice. We can testify how happily he agreed to the marriage of his younger daughter Elena to a young university professor whom she chose. He behaved toward him as a second father, and he did not cease till his last days to provide him with proof of his fatherly care]," Comparetti, *In memoria di Elena Comparetti-Raffalovich,* 21-22. In the private collection belonging to Elisa Frontali Milani there are many letters of Leon addressed to Domenico, who studied Russian and frequently travelled to Russia for his researches on the Kalevala.

[30] Now at the *Biblioteca Umanistica* of Florence University, where Comparetti's literary estate is preserved. Unfortunately, only one letter in his huge correspondence survives that is seemingly addressed to Elena. See *Catalogo generale del fondo Domenico Comparetti, carteggio e manoscritti*, eds. Maria Grazia Macconi and Antonella Squilloni (Messina: Dipartimento di filologia e linguistica, Università degli studi, 2002).

achievements is attested by the memorial he wrote shortly after her death.[31]

The sole context in which Raffalovich appears on her own merits is in the history of education in post-Risorgimento Italy. Upon separating from her husband in January 1872, Elena left Pisa for Florence, where she became acquainted with Baroness Bertha von Marenholtz-Bülow (1810-1893),[32] an adept of Fredrich Froebel who was committed to the dissemination of his teachings across Europe. "Froebelism" highlighted the spiritual autonomy of the child and stressed the importance of creative games. The approach had an epochal impact on nineteenth- and twentieth-century teachers, making the kindergarten, a word coined by Froebel, an almost-universal educational institution.[33]

In Florence, Raffalovich collaborated with Marta Berduschek, a Jewess from Berlin and a friend of the baroness, to found a kindergarten that succeeded only in registering some children belonging to the foreign colony of the city. Despite the open support of Emilia Peruzzi, one the most influential philanthropists in Tuscany,[34] Elena's initiative was quashed by the opposition of more conservative local elites. Her earlier efforts in March 1872 to persuade the council that oversaw kindergartens in Pisa to adopt Froebelian methods encountered the same opposition in a Catholic milieu, and did not produce any results.[35]
These rough beginnings did not prevent Elena, while in Venice in 1872, from contacting Adolfo Pick (1829-1894), another important figure in Italian Froebelism.[36]

---

[31] Comparetti, *In memoria di Elena Comparetti-Raffalovich*.
[32] Martha von Marenholtz- Bülow was one of the most ardent and energetic promoters of Froebel's ideas in Europe. Her niece Bertha von Bülow-Wendhausen authored a ponderous biography under the title, *The Life of the Baroness von Marenholtz-Bülow*, 2 vols (New York: W. B. Harrison 1901). Loic Chalmel, *La petite école dans l'école. L'origine piétiste-morave de l'école maternelle française* (Bern: Peter Lang 1996) 246 defines Martha's role as the "la première porte-parole féminine des théories sur l'éducation de la petite enfance."
[33] The bibliography on Friedrich Froebel (1782 –1852) is huge. Among the most recent studies see Helmut Heiland, *Friedrich Wilhelm August Fröbel (1782-1852)* (Hohengehren: Schneider-Verlag 2002); Sigurd Hebenstreit, *Friedrich Fröbel. Menschenbild, Kindergartenpädagogik, Spielförderung*, (Jena: IKS Garamond 2003).
[34] Manacorda, "La breve illusione," 38; James C. Albisetti, "Education for Poor Neapolitan Children: Julie Schwabe's Nineteenth-century Secular Mission" in *History of Education*, 35/6 (2006): 166.
[35] Albisetti, "Education for the poor,"167. In a letter to Pick of January 27, 1872, Elena writes that in Pisa "c'e' molta apatia e ostilità a tutto cio' che e' nuovo [there is indifference and much hostility towards everything new]," in Gasparini, *Adolfo Pick,* 63.
[36] Pick was born in Miskowit, Bohemia, and at the age of 13 moved to Hungary and participated in the 1848 revolutions. After having fought in Italy in the Austrian army, he established himself in Venice as a teacher at the Collegio Ravà. He founded the journal

Her goal was to evaluate different options of supporting schools inspired by Froebel's pedagogical method. Two years later, after visiting different kindergartens in Munich, Stuttgart, Gotha, Dresden and Leipzig[37] and obtaining the official support of the municipal council on March 15th 1873,[38] Raffalovich launched in Venice her own Froebelian kindergarten, with Marie Ringler as its head teacher.[39]

While Froebel's intention had never been to spearhead a women's liberation movement and to campaign for Jewish emancipation, it is notable that most of his first followers in Europe were women or Jews, if not both.[40]

Italy in this respect was no exception.[41] The main proponents of Froebelian educational goals in the second half of the nineteenth century were Jewish, such

---

Educazione moderna and *L'educazione dei bambini* in 1868 and 1888, respectively. He held different functions in the Italian ministry of education, and continued to spread Froebel's methods in Italy and abroad. Among his most important writings were *Il lavoro e l'educazione moderna*, (Venezia, 1873) and *Il giardino-scuola* (Venezia, 1874). About Pick, besides the aforementioned monograph by Duilio Gasparini, see also Tina Tommasi, *L'educazione infantile tra Chiesa e Stato* (Florence: Vallecchi 1978).

[37] In the spring of 1872 Elena writes several letters, now included in Gasparini, *Adolfo Pick,* 62-80, from Germany in French to Adolfo Pick, suggesting that he send to Germany an Italian teacher in order to learn there the Froebelian method.

[38] Archivio Municipale Venezia, 1870-76, VII, 9-12. The archive preserves as well a number of letters between the mayor of the city and Elena.

[39] The inauguration of the school took place on the 24th of October, and on this occasion were published *Discorsi pronunciati nella solennità di inaugurazione del giardino d'infanzia Elena Raffalovich Comparett*i (Venice: Tip. Antonelli 1874). Elena was not present at the ceremony and all the official discourses were delivered exclusively by males, among which Adolfo Pick whose lecture has been reprinted in Gasparini, *Adolfo Pick,*(1970), 256-273. *La scuola fa la storia: gli archivi scolastici per la ricerca e la didattica*, ed. Maria Teresa Sega (Venice: Edizioni Nuovadimensione 2002) 158.

[40] Froebel was not against greater gender parity and he was animated by a strong faith in the universal nature of human rights, but his action was intended to promote his pedagogical method and he was not actively involved in politics. His second wife and former pupil Luise Levin, whom he married in 1851, was Jewish. On his relationship with Jews and Judaism see Michael Gebel, *Friedrich Fröbel und die Juden*, (Olms: Hildesheim 1999).

[41] Alessia Moreu, *Il contributo degli ebrei alla diffusione dei giardini froebeliani in Italia nella seconda metà dell'Ottocento*, PhD Thesis, Trieste, 2003-2004; Maria Teresa Sega rightly speaks of the double emancipation of Jewish women and stresses the importance and the impact of their actions in the second half of the nineteenth century in "Percorsi di emancipazione tra Otto e Novecento" in *Donne sulla scena pubblica: società e politica in Veneto tra Sette e Ottocento*, ed. Nadia Maria Filippini (Milan: Franco Angeli 2006) 185-217. On some Jewish advocates of the women's emancipation movement in Italy see Claudia Gori, *Crisalidi. Emancipazioniste liberali in età giolittiana* (Milan: Franco Angeli 2003).

as the aforementioned Adolfo Pick and Adele Levi, the physicians Cesare Musatti,[42] Moisé Raffaello Levi,
Giacinto Namias and Rabbi Vittorio Castiglioni.[43]
Jewish women not only laid the foundation for the first Froebelian schools in the peninsula,[44] they also constituted a substantial segment of the children's writers[45] and educational activists in Italy.[46]
Interestingly, most of these Jewish women were in fact foreigners who had come to Italy for different reasons. Besides Raffalovich, the Anglo-German, Julia Salis Schwabe (Bremen 1819 – Naples 1896) deserves special mention. Salis Schwabe

[42] Founder in 1878 of the journal *L'igiene infantile*.
[43] Yoseph Colombo, "Il pensiero pedagogico di Vittorio Castiglioni," *Scritti in memoria di Enzo Sereni*. *Saggi sull'ebraismo romano* (Jerusalem - Milan: 1970),197-215.
[44] In Tuscany, besides Giulia and Matilde D'Ancona whose interest in Froebel was not oriented by professional aims, the Froebelian method had been introduced in Leghorn by Adele Franchetti Mondolfi since the seventies of the nineteenth century in her private institute for girls from the Jewish community or the foreign colony. See Funaro, "Compagna e partecipe, " 329 and Raicich, "Liceo," 151.
[45] Many of the most important writers for children were Jewish. These include Ada Cagli Della Pergola, Gina and Paola Lombroso, Ida Finzi, Marta Ottolenghi Minerbi, Lina Schwarz, Lina Cohen Enriquez, Laura Cantoni Orvieto, Amalia Pincherle Rosselli, Laura Lattes, Anna and Rosa Errera, etc.. The extant bibliography about the work and the life of these female writers is still scant. See Marina Calloni, "(Auto)biografie di intellettuali ebree italiane: Amelia Rosselli, Laura Orvieto e Gina Lombroso," *Visioni in/sostenibili. Genere e intercultura*, eds. Clotilde Barbarulli and Liana Borghi (Cagliari: Cuec 2003) 139-158. Laura Orvieto (1876-1953) has been the object of valuable studies by Caterina Del Vivo. For the Lombroso sisters see Delfina Dolza, *Essere figlie di Lombroso* (Milan: Franco Angeli 1990). On Amalia Rosselli see Giuseppe Fiori, *Casa Rosselli. Vita di Nello, Carlo, Amalia, Marion e Maria* (Turin: Einaudi 1999). An overview of the Jewish contribution to the Italian children's literature in Sabrina Fava, *Percorsi critici di letteratura per l'infanzia tra le due guerre* (Milan: Vita e Pensiero, 2004), in particular chapter IV. Otherwise some important, albeit incidental, remarks about this cultural phenomenon can be found in Alberto Cavaglion, *Giornale di Emanuele 1822* (Rome: La Fenice1996) 3-8 (republished in *Ebrei senza saperlo* (Naples: L'ancora del Mediterraneo 2002) pp. 95-102) and ID., "L'autobiografia ebraica in Italia fra Otto e Novecento. Memoria di sé e memoria della famiglia: osservazioni preliminari" in *Zakhor. Rivista di Storia degli Ebrei d'Italia*, 3 (1999):171-177.
[46] Among the most prominent educators in the nineteenth century were Virginia Tedeschi Treves (1855-1916), married to the editor Giuseppe Treves, youth writer and advocate of innovative ideas concerning the female labour force revealed in her pamphlet *Le donne che lavorano*, (Milan: Treves 1916), and Erminia Fuà (1834-1876), married to the poet Arnaldo Fusinato in 1856, who taught Italian at the Scuola Normale in Rome and later directed the Scuola Superiore Femminile in Rome. She was also one of the first of the many Jewish female authors for children in Italy during the Savoy monarchy. Also in the projected foundation of a female college in Florence, Jewish women, such as Giulia Raccah and Ester Coen Pardo, occupy prominent roles together with women belonging to the foreign, mainly Anglo-Saxon, colony established in the Tuscan capital. See G. P. Pons, "Erminia Fuà Fusinato ed Emilia Gould" in *Rivista Cristiana*, (1877): 60-62 and Raicich, *Liceo*, 160.

founded the Froebelian institute "Vittorio Emanuele II" in Naples[47] and Elena was acquainted with her.[48] In later decades, the American-born Baroness Alice Hallgarten Franchetti (New York 1874- Leysin 1911)[49] was involved in the field of education, as were Sarina Levi Nathan and her daughter-in-law Virginia Mieli Nathan (Siena 1846 – Roma 1924), [50] both of whom were related to England.

Elena was by no means the first of Froebel's disciples in Italy.[51] By 1868, Laura Veruda Goretti (1822-1902) had already introduced some Froebelian-inspired changes into the curriculum of the San Marziale preschool in Venice, and the Raffalovich kindergarten was preceded by similar institutions established in 1869 in Venice by Adele Levi Della Vida[52] and the aforementioned Adolfo Pick,[53] and

[47] Albisetti, "Education for Poor," 637-652.

[48] The women had met in 1874. It is reputed that Elena did not overly appreciate Salis Schwabe. In a letter addressed to Domenico Comparetti of February 9, 1874 from Naples Elena writes, "elle est devenue impraticable, elle est trop indiscrète et manque de tact a un point incroyable." Quoted by Clotilde Barbarulli, "Dalla tradizione all'innovazione. La 'ricerca straordinaria' di Elena Raffalovich Comparetti" in *L'educazione delle donne. Scuole e modelli di vita femminile nell'Italia dell'Ottocento* ed. Simonetta Soldani (Milan: Franco Angeli 1991) 440.

[49] *Leopoldo e Alice Franchetti e il loro tempo*, eds. Paolo Pezzino and Alavaro Tacchini (Città di Castello: Petruzzi editore 2002); Maria Luciana Buseghin, *Cara Marietta... Lettere di Alice Hallgarten Franchetti (1901-1911)* (Città di Castello: Tela Umbra 2002); Mirella Scardozzi, "Una storia di famiglia: i Franchetti dalle coste del Mediterraneo all'Italia liberale" in *Quaderni storici*, 3 (2003): 697-740.

[50] Rosselli Amelia, *Virginia Mieli Nathan* (Rome: Centenari, 1926).

[51] For a overview of the history of Froebelism in Italy see Valeria Benetti Brunelli, "L'Asilo italiano e l'introduzione del frobelismo" in *Rivista pedagogica*, 23 (1930): 530–556; *La scoperta dell'infanzia. Cura, educazione e rappresentazione, Venezia 1750-1930*, eds. Nadia Maria Filippini and Tiziana Plebani (Venice: Marsilio 1999); Nadia Filippini, "Figure, fatti e percorsi di emancipazione femminile (1797-1880)" in *Storia di Venezia. L'Ottocento*, ed. Stuart Woolf (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana 2002) 453-488; James C. Albisetti, "Froebel Crosses the Alps: Introducing the Kindergarten in Italy," in *History of Education Quarterly*, 49/2 (2009):159–169.

[52] Adele Levi Della Vida, daughter of Samuele Della Vida and of Regina Pincherle, was born in Turin where she directed, together with Clotilde Jarach, the Istituto femminile israelitico of Turin. In 1869 she founded the first Froebelian kindergarten in Venice, in the Sant'Apostoli quarter, and later in Padua and Verona. She was the grandmother of the eminent orientalist Giorgio Levi Della Vida. See Gina Lombroso Ferrero, *Adele Della Vida Levi. Una benefattrice dell'infanzia* (Turin: Opes 1911); Valerie Brunetti Bonelli, "Il primo giardino d'infanzia in Italia: Adele Della Vida Levi" in *Rivista Pedagogica*, 1 (1931): 36-66; 2 (1931): 198-226; 3 (1931): 327-365; Jole Ceccon, ''Adele Levi Della Vida e la sua opera in alcuni inediti" in *Rassegna di pedagogia*, 13/ 2 (1955): 120–32; Miniati, *Le Emancipate*, 69, 129-130.

[53] Initially supporting Adele Levi Della Vida's initiative, he later decided to create his own institution for children near the Rialto, the 'Vittorino da Feltre's school', see Gasparini, *Adolfo Pick*. Noteworthy was the introduction by Felice Momigliano to Adolfo Pick, *Scritti pedagogici*, (Udine: G. B. Doretti 1911).

in Milan by Vincenzo de Castro (1808 Pirano d'Istria-1886 Milan) in 1871.[54] Nonetheless, hers was by far the most successful, growing from an initial 63 children to 167 in 1894.[55] The kindergarten benefited from a perpetual endowment of 4000 lire per year, a considerable amount for the time, and is still extant, though not in its original setting.[56] Annexed to the kindergarten was a special training school for teachers, which until 1881 was under the direction of Pick. Her kindergarten, 'il più splendido istituto infantile della penisola [the most impressive children's institute in the Peninsula]' in the words of the Venetian lawyer Giambattista Ruffini,[57] thus became a model for other preschools that spread throughout Italy in the forthcoming years.

Much has been written on the obstacles Raffalovich encountered in imposing her views in the provincial and chauvinist context of Italian institutions.[58] Her vision of a fully secular school was thwarted in Venice, as in Pisa and Florence, by a clerical provincial council that excluded her from any form of supervision over the school that she had founded.[59] Nevertheless, even after a failed attempt of the authorities to change the name of the institution and efface any reference to her contribution, Elena continued to follow and support the activities of the children.[60]

---

[54] Vincenzo de Castro, "Apertura di tre giardini froebeliani a Milano" in *La provincia, giornale degli interessi civili, economici, amministrativi dell'Istria*, 5/18 (1871): 825.

[55] Figures of registrations per year in Nadia Maria Filippini, "'Come tenere pianticelle': L'educazione della prima infanzia: asili di carità, giardinetti, asili per lattanti," in *La scoperta dell'infanzia. Cura, educazione, rappresentazione 1750-1930*, eds. Nadia Maria Filippini and Patrizia Plebani (Venice: Marsilio 1999) 101.

[56] This piece of information is reported by Oscar Greco, *Bibliobiografia femminile italiana del XIX secolo* (Venice: Presso i principali librai italiani 1875) 275. Nowadays the kindergarten is located in the Ghetto Vecchio of Venice. Elena admits in a letter from Paris to Pick dated January 1873 that she has no experience in dealing with money and that her father was in charge of all the financial aspects of the school, see Gasparini, *Adolfo Pick,* 77.

[57] Quoted in Gasparini, *Adolfo Pick,* 256.

[58] Manacorda, "La breve illusione pedagogica di Elena Comparetti,"39; Barbarulli, "Dalla tradizione all'innovazione." Moreover, it was only since 1890 that the law allowed women onto the board of directors, see Miniati, *Le emancipate,* 142.

[59] Mario Alighiero Manacorda, *Storia illustrata dell'educazione* (Florence: Giunti 1992) 192. Raffalovich was aware that the Catholic opposition to Froebelian schools derived from their perception of them as "foreign" implants. "Mi domando se a Venezia la religione delle direttrici tedesche non li rende impopolari [I wonder whether in Venice the religion of the German principals do not make them unpopular]," letter dated January 27, 1872, in Gasparini, *Adolfo Pick*, 64.

[60] In 1899, the principal of the school in 1899 attested that she "used to visit it and to assist in the classes, the games and the supper of the children. She never stopped helping the poorest, donating jackets and clothes she had made by herself." Relazione scolastica generale. Giardino infantile Elena Raffalovich Comparetti, 1 agosto 1899 (Archivio Municipale Venezia, Ufficio Istruzione, C,

Raffalovich's approach to Froebelism was far from orthodox. In 1872, she wrote that "il n'est pas dans ma nature de me passioner pour un systeme, fut-il le meilleur [it is not in my nature to become enamoured of any system, even the best]."[61] In comparison to other schools inspired by the Froebelian method, Raffalovich's differed insofar it was free of charge and open to children of every faith and social stratum. Jewish and Catholic, female and male children shared the same spaces and participated in common activities.[62] Elena did not approve of the greater care male children received in the mixed schools she had the opportunity to see in France in 1872,[63] where she regularly went to visit with her sister Marie.[64] Countering the widely diffused bourgeois conception of public schools as institutions for the poor, to be supported by wealthy donors whose children studied elsewhere, Raffalovich believed, as she writes in one of her letters, that "les classes aisées ont encore plus besoin que le peuple d'une reforme dans l'éducation [the commoners are less in need of educational reform than the upper classes]."[65] Elena acknowledged that her eclectic approach to educational problems was inspired by her own democratic and liberal agenda, and was dictated by direct experiences more than by a strict ideological stance.

Besides education, Raffalovich was also involved in social projects for the improvement of the working class condition. After the catastrophic floods of 1882, together with Stefania Omboni she ran a popular soup kitchen in Padua, later to become a non-profit corporation.[66] Also in Padua, according to the

5), quoted in Antonella Cagnolati, "La educación de la primera infanzia desde guarderías de caridad a los jardines froebelianos (Venecia, siglo XIX)," in *Temas y perspectivas sobre educación. La infancia ayer y hoy*, eds. J. L. Hernández Huerta, L. Sánchez Blanco, I. Pérez Miranda (Salamanca: Globalia Ediciones Anthema y AJITHE 2009) 128.

[61] Letter quoted in Barbarulli, "Dalla tradizione all'innovazione," 428.

[62] Filippini, "'Come tenere pianticelle': L'educazione della prima infanzia," 91-111.

[63] Interestingly, the revival of Froebelism in France can be traced to the Protestant Clarisse Coignet and her *société* Froebel (1872), following the events of the Comune. See Jean-Noël Luc, "Salle d'asile contre jardin d'enfants: les vicissitudes de la methode Frobel en France (1855–1887)" in *Pedagogica Historica* 29/2 (1993): 433–450.

[64] Maria was married to Hermann Raffalovich (1828-1893) and she hosted in Paris a salon that was attended by the most important liberal intellectuals of the time such as Renan, Arago, Maspero and Claude Bernard. With the latter she had a very strong sentimental, albeit platonic, relationship in the last years of his life. See André Soubiran, "Une amitié amoureuse. Claude Bernard, Madame Raffalovich," in *Historie de la médecine*, 16 (1966).

[65] Letter quoted in Barbarulli, "Dalla tradizione all'innovazione," 426.

[66] Valentina Trentin, "Beneficenza e filantropia: verso l'emancipazione femminile," *Tracciati del femminile a Padova. Immagini e storie di donne*, eds. Caterina Limentani e Mirella Cisotto Nalon (Padova: Il poligrafo, 1995) 138.

testimony of Florence Nightingale (1820-1910), who corresponded with Elena in 1887 and whom she met in London on June 30, 1883, she had in mind to establish a coeducational nursing school in Padua and planned to translate into Italian relevant English textbooks.[67]

Raffalovich's pedagogical ideals and philanthropic activity were tightly interwoven. In fact, she was more highly valued by her contemporaries for the economic means at her disposal than for her specific program of pedagogic renewal.[68] It would be nevertheless reductive to consider her philanthropic activity as a simple instrument in order to ensure "the reverential reception of the existent social order," [69] according to the usual interpretation of philanthropy of the time, both Jewish and Christian.[70] For Elena, engagement in charity was first and foremost a way to escape from the oppressive context of parental sociability and to locate her own independence.

Her freedom was purchased at the price of great loneliness. The bitterness and isolation that characterized her last years, suffering from degenerative paralysis, are attested by her niece Elisa, the last of the four children of Laura, Albano, Giorgio and Piero, who described her as "fredda e silenziosa [cold and silent]," assisted only by a chaperone.[71] Her husband recalled that at her death on November 29, 1918, none of the numerous prizes she had been awarded for her efforts on behalf of youth and the poor were found in her possession. It seems as though she had decided to jettison her past.[72]

---

[67] *Florence Nightingale: Extending Nursing*, ed. Lynn McDonald (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press 2009) 482-483 quotes two letters to A. L. Pringle June, 30, 1888 and July, 2. Elena's correspondence to Nightingale is not extant, except some undated draft letters at the *British Library*, Nightingale Collection, Add Mss 52427 ff 125-26 and 129.

[68] It is curious that the recent and growing scholarship on Jewish philanthropy since Brian Horowitz's *Jewish philanthropy and enlightenment in late Tsarist Russia* (Seattle: University of Washington Press 2008) has till now completely disregarded the considerable role of different Raffalovich family members in Italy, France and England in social relief activities.

[69] Stuart Woolf, *The Poor in Western Europe in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century* (London/New York: Methuen 1986) 40.

[70] David Feldman, *Englishmen and Jews: Social Relations and Political Culture, 1840-1914* (New Haven: Yale University Press1994) 329-352.

[71] Elisa Frontali Milani, *Storia di Elena attraverso le lettere 1863 -1884*, (Turin: La Rosa 1980). Book enthusiastically reviewed by Cesare Cases, *Il testimone secondario: Saggi e interventi sulla cultura del Novecento* (Turin: Einaudi 1985) 454-56.

[72] Comparetti, *In memoria di Elena Comparetti-Raffalovich*, 10. A similar attitude also characterized her sister Maria, according to the testimony of her daughter Sophie "elle voulait disparaitre, ne faire parler d'elle. Elle était la réserve même [she wanted to disappear, not to be mentioned. She was reserved in nature]" in Claude Bernard, *Lettres beaujolaises* (Villefranche-en-Beaujolais : Editions du Cuvier 1950) XXI.

We have seen Elena Raffalovich as mother, spouse, pedagogue and philanthropist. It may now be possible to say something about her ideological commitments and her relationship to Judaism. Of her political credo everything points to a strong inclination toward a radical form of liberalism, not differing in this from her siblings Marie and Nadine, both associated with the republican and democratic milieux in France, sympathizers of the national causes of Europe.[73] Elena, in her youthful letters to Domenico Comparetti, manifests her support of Polish independence vindications, lamenting the scarce interest of her fiancé in similar questions of international politics. She is reputed to have translated from Russian the memories of the Decembrist Nikolai Basargin (1799-1861), although I was not able to find any exemplar of this translation.[74] Her affinity to the ideals of revolutionary nationalism can be found also among other members of her close family, such as Sophie (Odessa 1860 - Paris 1960), Marie and Hermann Raffalovich's daughter, who married in 1890 the Irish nationalist politician, William O'Brien (1852-1928),[75] and George, a sympathizer of the Ukranian independence movement.[76]

Surprisingly, there is only scant information about Raffalovich's links with other members of the Russian diaspora in Italy. Nevertheless, there is evidence that she was acquainted with Alexander Herzen (1812-1870) in Italy at the end of the

[73] Maria's daughter Sophie writes that "ma mère était forte ardente républicaine sous l'empire. Elle ne manquait pas, dans ses voyages, de visiter les exiles, Barbes à la Haye, les Quinet en Suisse" in Bernard, *Lettres beaujolaises,* XXV and in her memoirs, *Silhouettes d'autrefois* (Paris : Alkan 1926) 118 she recalls her mother's enthusiasm for the crumbling of the Tzarist regime in 1917, although she resented the Bolshevik revolution as an attack on freedom.

[74] Barbarulli, "Dalla tradizione all'innovazione," 425. Also lost is a novel supposedly written by Raffalovich. Basargin, a humanist and liberal writer, seems to be very important for any attempt to understand Raffalovich and her views. He and other Decembrists developed new progressive educational methods in Siberia for peasants and their children. They wrote school books and among many new ideas, they stressed notion of moral education.

[75] Sophie converted to Catholicism and devoted her wealth to financing her husband's political activities. She produced a number of books and articles during her lifetime, and she recalls her associations with Elena in her memoirs, Sophie O'Brien's *Silhouettes d'autrefois* (Paris: F. Alkan, 1926).

[76] Son of Nadine Chaptal (1859-1929), daughter of Nadine, sister of Elena Raffalovich, and Theodor (also Gregor or Gregoire) Raffalovich (1849- Paris 1881), George Raffalovich (Cannes 1880-New Orleans 1958) was a writer and translator of Emile Faguet from French into English. Part of George's correspondence is to be found in the archive of the anarchist Jean Grave (1854-1939). About his pro-Ukrainian activities and taking into account some mistakes about his genealogy, see David Saunders, "Britain and the Ukrainian Question (1912-1920)," in *The English Historical Review*, 103/406 (1988): 40-68.

forties, whose family she assisted after his death.[77] Elena had an epistolary releationship with Countess Elizabeth Dehler-Sheremetyeva,[78] wife of the famous European composer and pianist Theodore Dehler (1814-1856), whom she probably met during one of her many visits to Florence. This city was the home of a vibrant Russian community, hosting personalities such as Bakunin (1814-1876) who arrived in Italy in 1864 and Lev Mechnikov (1828-1888), one of the eleven Jews and of the many Russians who took part in the Mille expedition and a famous geographer and sociologist, but an acquaintance with such figures would be only conjecture.[79]

Elena was a life-long promoter of women's emancipation, believing that this process would be triggered not by the upper classes, to which she belonged, but precisely by those whose conditions of life she tried to improve. She wrote:

Je crois que l'émancipation des femmes viendra la d'où on l'attend le moins, c'est à dire des femmes du peuple... Moins inermes et plus énergiques que les femmes de la bourgeoisie elles iront plus droit au but sans se soucier des préjugés. En un mot je crois que la cause de femmes est intimement liée à celle de la démocratie et qu'elles triompheront ensemble. Laissons les classes riches pourrir dans leur corruption et attendons le progrès d'où il peut venir

[I believe that the emancipation of the woman will come from where we are not expecting it, that is to say from the women of lower classes. Less defenceless and more energetic than bourgeois women, they will go straight to the goal without consideration for prejudices. In short, I believe that the women's cause is intimately related to the one of democracy, and that they will overcome together. Let the rich rot in their corruption and let us wait for progress from where it may come]."[80]

This anti-bourgeois stance and almost revolutionarily progressive interpretation of the fight for civil rights in contemporary liberal democracies is deeply rooted in Elena's materialist and utilitarian approach to social phenomena. She admits as much in a letter to Pick from Gotha, dated July 4, 1872:

Vous allez me trouver bien positiviste, peut être même entachée d'utilitarisme ou de matérialisme, mais que voulez-vous ? Je suis ainsi

[77] Barbarulli, "Dalla tradizione all'innovazione," 425.
[78] Dehler archive, fund number 752, at the *Russian State Archive of Literature and Art* (RGALI). See the book of recollections published in 1893 by Sergei D. Sheremetev on Elizabeth Dehler-Sheremetev.
[79] Lev Mecnikov, *Memorie di un garibaldino russo ed altri scritti* (Turin: CIRVI 2011).
[80] Letter from Geneva, October 23, 1872 to Adolfo Pick, in Gasparini, *Adolfo Pick,* 73.

[you will certainly consider me excessively positivistic, perhaps also stained by utilitarianism or materialism, but what do want? I am like that].

The reference to positivism is interesting, as its roots may lie in a meeting at her sister's house in Paris with the French physiologist Claude Bernard, a herald of the experimental method. Elena apparently shared the agnosticism of this intellectual milieu, in which historian Pasquale Villari (1826-1917), another of Elena's acquaintances, was a key figure and advocate.

Thus, while Raffalovich's "Jewishness" is taken for granted by those who have dealt with her story, Elena's relationship to this aspect of her identity is far from straightforward. Religious practice was not particularly strong in her family of origin. Her acquaintances in the Jewish milieu were occasional and purely casual (such as the one with the mathematician David Besso at her father's home during a reception, or the choice to establish her Froebelian kindergarten on a property owned by the Jewish Vivante family in Cannaregio[81]). She spent the bulk of her time in non-Jewish surroundings, making the acquaintance of a wide circle of Gentiles. Her marriage to a Catholic man was accepted by her father with no opposition whatsoever, and even with apparent satisfaction. On the contrary, according to the testimony of Domenico, it was the Comparetti family who disliked his marriage with a Jewess, while Leon would continue to financially sustain his son-in-law even after his separation from Elena. Marriage to Domenico meant conversion to Catholicism, even if not out of religious conviction, since in Italy civil marriage was enforced by law only in 1865 through the "codice Pisanelli." At her death, she asked to be cremated,[82] and she had her ashes buried in the English cemetery in Florence, a burial place chosen not only by Protestants of different denominations but also by many non-Catholic minorities belonging to the large group of those who in those years in the Hapsburg area defined themselves as *konfessionslos*.[83] Thus, Elena seemed to

[81] On this family present in Venice and Trieste see Anna Millo, *Storia di una borghesia. La famiglia Vivante a Trieste dall'emporio alla guerra mondiale*, (Gorizia: Libreria editrice goriziana 1998) and Cesare Vivante, *La memoria dei padri: cronaca, storia e preistoria di una famiglia ebraica tra Corfù e Venezia*, (Florence: La Giuntina 2009).

[82] Cremation was spreading among more traditional Jews as well. Vittorio Castiglioni, chief rabbi of Rome, asked to be cremated, in the midst of polemics but also acquiring support for his choice. See David Malkiel, "Technology and Culture Regarding Cremation: A Historical and Phenomenological Analysis," in *Italia*, 10 (1993): 37-70 (in Hebrew); Arthur Kiron, "'Dust and Ashes'. The Funeral and Forgetting of Sabato Morais," in *American Jewish History*, 84/3 (1996): 155-188.

[83] Joseph Geiger writes in "Some Jewish Scholars in Rome," (*Italia*, 17 (2006): 67) that "Jews

harbor no positive religious sentiments, and the correspondence from Leon to Domenico leaves no doubt about her anti-clerical if not anti-religious ideals.[84]

Against the tide of the proliferating school texts that tried to combine civic education with religious values,[85] so typical of the Italian Christian and Jewish reality of the second half of the nineteenth century, Elena declared her aversion to any form of catechism.[86] For Elena, religious education should be restricted to the private sphere of the family. Concerned about pressures to provide some kind of religious teaching in her establishment, she accepted only the possibility of sending "une ou deux fois par semaine chez un prêtre ceux qui le désirent, selon leur convictions personnelles [once or twice a week to a priest those who desire to do so, according to their personal conviction]."[87] Her personal faith was akin to a universalistic form of deism captured in her exclamation "non capisco come possono affollare chiese e sinagoghe, quando si puo avere come tempio l'universo interno [I cannot understand how it is possible to seek overcrowded synagogues and churches, when we can have the entire universe as a temple]."[88]

---

chose to be buried elsewhere than a Jewish cemetery for a variety of reasons, the chief among these being, one may conjecture, the wish to be buried next to non-Jewish spouses or other family members, though in some cases antagonism to religious rituals, combined with a refusal to convert, will have designated the Protestant cemetery as the closest thing to neutral ground." This second reason seems to explain the choice of Elena, since Domenico Comparetti was inhumated in a Catholic cementery. On the burial of non-Christians, among which number many Jews or former Jews such as the German historian Robert Davidsohn and Adolfo Mussafia, in the cementry of the English in Florence, see the proceedings of the international conference "Eloquenza silenziosa. Voci del ricordo incise nel cimitero degli inglesi," 3-4 June 2004, Sala Ferri, Gabinetto GP. Vieusseux, Palazzo Strozzi, that can be consulted in the site http://www.florin.ms/gimel1.html. In another cemetery for Protestants and other non-Catholic Christians in Florence, called 'cimitero degli allori," Ljuba Samojlovna Raffalovic (Odessa 1825-Florence 1883), Theodor's wife (1818- Vienna 1883) and Elena's uncle who had converted to Russian Orthodoxy are buried.

[84] Letter of the 3rd of May 1873, in which she exhorts Comparetti to respect Elena's "opinions religieuses, ou plutôt antireligieuses. Les dames de votre famille ont été élevées dans des convictions opposées [religious beliefs, or rather anti-religious. Women in your family have been raised with opposite convictions]," quoted in *L'educazione delle donne*, 439.

[85] On this aspect of the pedagogical activity of Italian rabbis see Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, "I catechismi ebraici fra Sette e Ottocento," in *Le religioni e il mondo moderno. Ebraismo*, ed. David Bidussa (Turin: Einaudi 2008), 437-456. On catechisms it is still useful to refer to Jakob Petuchowski, "Manuals and Catechisms of the Jewish Religion in the Early Modern Period of Emancipation," in *Studies in Nineteenth Century Jewish Intellectual History*, ed. Alexander Altman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1964), 47-64.

[86] Letter at the *Biblioteca Comunale di Udine* from Paris, dated February 4, 1873.

[87] Letter from Paris dated December 29th, 1872, in Gasparini, *Adolfo Pick,* 74.

[88] Mentioned by Milani, *Storia di Elena*, 47.

In this respect, there is a substantial convergence between the ideals defended by Elena and those of Protestant women of similar social extraction, active in Italy in education and social aid in the second half of nineteenth century. Besides Giulia Salis, born Jewish but converted to the Unitarian English Church, the Swiss Matilde Calandrini should be mentioned, with her kindergartens in Tuscany, and the American Emily Gould (1822-1875) who in 1871 founded in Rome the Italo-American schools for poor children and orphans.[89] Also in other Catholic countries, Protestant and Jewish women were the vanguard in introducing Froebelian methods and secular curricula. Examples include Emilie Mallet and Octavie Masson in France and Fanny Guillaume Wohlwill in Belgium.[90] Until the end of the nineteenth century, that 25% of secondary schools principals in France were Protestant was due to the opposition of the Catholic Church regarding female higher education.[91]

At this point, we may hazard the opinion that although our heroine's pedagogical sensibilities and philanthropic drive were shared by many women of her social stratum, autonomy of action and radical reasoning mark her as distinct from her Italian contemporaries. Nevertheless, in order to understand her life course we must contextualize her biographical trajectory against the backdrop of her family's history.

Elena Raffalovich's Family

Throuh the archives of different prominent members of the Raffalovich dynasty, it is possible to follow its vicissitudes over at least five generations.[92] [FIG. 8] The

[89] For the similarities between Jews and Protestant women in Italy in the second half of the nineteenth century see *Le donne delle minoranze. Le ebree e le protestanti d'Italia*, eds. Claire Honess and Verina Jones (Turin: Claudiana 1999); Alberto Cavaglion, "La linea cenobitica e le aporie dell'ebraismo laico," in *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa*, 48/3 (2012): 625-635.

[90] Albisetti, "Education for Poor,"163-164.

[91] Raicich, "Liceo,"157. For the access of women to secondary education in a comparative perspective see also *Girls' Secondary Education in the Western World. From the 18th to the 20th Century*, eds. Joyce Goodman, James C. Albisetti, Rebecca Rogers (New York - London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

[92] The papers of Marie Raffalovich are deposited at the bibliothèque de l'Institut de France, mss 3641-3706. The correspondence of Marie's daughter, Sophie Raffalovich, married to the Irish nationalist politician, William O'Brien (1852-1928) can be found at the Cork City and County Archives, Republic of Ireland, while the letters of Marc-André Raffalovich, another son of Marie, are dispersed in different collections. The most important is at the John Rylands University Library of Manchester**,** GB 133 MAR. Other letters are at The National Library of Scotland, Manuscript Collections, which include correspondence between John Gray and André Raffalovich and at The Victoria and Albert Museum. The National Art Gallery holds a collection of letters by Raffalovich. The University of Texas at Austin: Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center Library, in the United States, also holds a collection of letters

family originated in Dubno in Podolia. That Raffalovich ancestors were Iberian conversos escaping the Inquisition who found refuge in Sweden and then came to Russia in the path of Charles XII,[93] is a tale caught in legend relying only on the presence of a swallow flying over the seas in the family arms [FIG. 9].

According to a tradition bequeathed by the Hassidic branch of the family, the first to bear this surname was Moshe Parnes, son of Rafael, ship builder for the Russian army, when in 1783 during a visit of Catherine the Great, the empress would have bestowed upon him his patronymic Raffalovich, replacing the surname Parnes that was used till then.[94] Of Moshe's sons, Kalman and Solomon (1790-1846) expanded to Nikolayev and Mogilev, whereas after the foundation of the port city of Odessa in 1794 Abraham (1783-1857) settled there as a banker and grain trader. Although most of these first-generation Raffalovichs had some degree of familiarity with the Russian language and culture, something quite unusual among the Jews of the Pale of Settlement at the turn of the century, only the branch established in Odessa became rapidly estranged from traditional ways of life. Those living in smaller localities of the interior, such as Bogopol, remained attached to the Lubavitch Hassidic movement till the beginning of the twentieth century.

In 1837 Abraham Raffalovich founded with his sons the Trading House "Fedor Raffalovich and Co" and was awarded by Tzar Alexander II hereditary honorary citizenship for his services to the Crown by Supreme Decree on 24 May, 1857. He was considered to be Odessa's wealthiest Jewish member of the Russian merchant guild.[95] In 1811 he married his first-degree cousin Olga Lowensohn (1792-1872), daughter of Leon and Lea Segal, who begot him thirteen children. Three of these children died in their infancy and one, Mark (1820-1842), perished

from André Raffalovich in the Aubrey Beardsley Collection (1893-1959). Finally the Blackfriars Library, Oxford University, holds letters from the theologian George Tyrrell (1861-1909) to Raffalovich.

[93] As claimed for instance by Comparetti*, In memoria di Elena Raffalovich,* 15-16.

[94] Isaiah Raffalovich, *Tziunim Ve-Tamrurim: otobiographiah* (Tel Aviv, 1952) 4. Isaiah Raffalovich (1870–1956) was Kalman's grandson, a rabbi and author who promoted the development of Brazil's Jewish community. In 1882 he moved with his parents to Palestine, where he became a pioneer of photography in the country. He later studied in the rabbinical seminary of Berlin and served at congregations in Manchester and Wales and the Hope Place Synagogue in Liverpool. He was the brother of Shemuel Refaeli (1867–1927), a numismatist and director of the numismatic department of the Department of Antiquities in Palestine. He left his coin collection to the Bezalel Museum.

[95] Steve Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa. A cultural History 1794-1881* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1985), 67.

in his early twenties while swimming in the Dniestr. Olga was related to the famous *maskil* Isaac Baer Levinsohn (1788-1860) and belonged to an illustrious line of rabbis.[96] Her sister Bella Lowensohn was the wife of Charles Joachim Ephrussi (1792 Odessa-1864 Vienna).[97]

It is noteworthy that five of their six surviving sons married women related to the mother's family, the Lowensohns, members of the narrow circle of the big merchants of Odessa. This is in line with the well-known endogamic practice among the Jewish mercantile elite, in Russia and elsewhere, intended to preserve intact the family endowment. [98] Leon, Elena's father, married Rosette Lowensohn (1807-1895 Parigi), Theodor (also Fedor) married Ljuba Lowensohn, Anissim (Onesime) (1822-1883 Odessa) in 1844 married Nadine Lowensohn (1827-1891 Frankfurt),[99] David (1824-1877 Vienna) after his first marriage to Emilia Morpurgo from Trieste, who died in Odessa in 1848 shortly after the wedding,[100] in 1855 married Therese Lowensohn (1840-1912 Odessa). In one case this endogamy even violates the civil law's prohibition in most European countries forbidding the marriage of an uncle and his niece, but permitted and in some instances even encouraged in the Jewish tradition.[101] Hermann Raffalovich

[96] Curiously, Isaac Baer Levinsohn (1788-1860) in his Hebrew works wrote of a pedagogical reform of Jewish schools that bears some resemblance to the ideals of Pick and Raffalovich, such as the role of manual labor in early childhood education and the establishment of mixed-sex elementary schools. While it is not impossible that Pick, who had a traditional Jewish education in Galicia, would have been exposed to Levinsohn's theories, which were widely disseminated among Eastern Europe Jews, Elena was not able to read Hebrew, the language in which Levinsohn wrote. On Levinsohn see Louis Stanley Greenberg, *A Critical Investigation of the Works of Rabbi Isaac Baer Levinsohn (RIBaL)* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company 1930).
[97] Forefather of the banking dynasty of the same name, established in Paris in the nineteenth century. See Edmund De Waal, *The Hare with Amber Eyes* (London: Chatto & Windus 2010).
[98] A general survey of the diffusion of endogamic practices in wealthy Jewish circles in the nineteenth century can be found in David S. Landes, *Banchieri e pascià. Finanza internazionale e imperialismo*, (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri 1990). A comparative study of parental alliances among British, French and Italian financial Jewish elites in Luisa Levi D'Ancona, "Famiglie ebree borghesi dell'Ottocento europeo: tre casi di studio," *Passato e Presente*, 57 (2002): 73-84. The perceived need to preserve patrimonial integrity is discernable as well in the matrimonial choices of different generations of Morpurgo's and Parente's in Triest. See Tullia Catalan, "I Morpurgo di Trieste. Una famiglia ebraica fra emancipazione e integrazione (1848-1915)," in *Percorsi e modelli familiari in Italia fra 700 e 900*, ed. Filippo Mazzonis, (Rome: Bulzoni 1997) 165-186.
[99] Their son Leone was honorary consul of Persia in Odessa in the eighties. He married Elena Polyakov, daughter of the state counsellor Yaakov Solomonovich Polyakov (1832-1909), brother of the famous banker and merchant Lazzaro Samuele.
[100] Catalan, "I Morpurgo di Trieste."
[101] Talmud, tractate *Yevamot*, 62b and Maimonides, *Hilkhot Issurei Beiah*, 2:14. On endogamic practives in 19th century Europe see Leonore Davidoff, *Thicker than Water: Siblings and their*

married Marie, who was his brother Leon's daughter and the sister of Elena Raffalovich in a set apparently dominated by a strong matriarchy.[102] [*Fig. 6*]

Fig. 6 Marie Raffalovich
Retrieved from http://www.claude-bernard.co.uk/

This is how their daughter Sophie describes their match:

Elle [Marie] s'était mariée très jeune. Elle avait été fiancée quand elle était dans les bras de sa mère, qui l'amena toute petite a la mère de mon père. Celle-ci était une redoutable matrone, petite mais d'une volonté de fer, et quand elle vit le délicieux bébé elle s'écria : voilà la femme de Grisha, son plus jeune fils qui avait quatre ans

[Marie got married very young. She got engaged to my father when she was still in the hands of her mother, who brought her still very small to my father's mother. The latter was an impressive matron, tiny but with an iron will. When she saw the sweet baby she exclamaid: here is the wife of Grish, her youngest son, who was four].

With the exception of the aforementioned Maria, Abraham's daughters

Relations, 1780-1920 (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012) and in particular chapter 9.
[102] Bernard, *Lettres Beaujolaises,* XXII. On Hermann (Grisha) see Comparetti, *In memoria di Elena Raffalovich,* 20 and Lebedev, "The Rafalovichs Family," (in Russian).

benefited from greater freedom in their choice of partner, on condition, however, that the men were of the same economic status. While in Imperial Germany, according to Marion Kaplan, Jewish women "experienced the effects of secularization from their primary position in the home... clinging to religion longer, because they did not acquire either the advanced scientific education or the substitute secular power of men whose worldviews gradually rejected all or parts of spiritual thinking,"[103] women in the Raffalovich family and apparently in the Jewish financial aristocracy of the time in general anticipated the assimilatory trends, such as intermarriage, of their male counterparts of the same social class.[104] This does not mean that men were not exposed to a strong acculturation to the surrounding gentile culture, but only that on them rested the responsibility of keeping intact the assets of the family enterprises. Consequently, their freedom to find a partner outside the inner circle of close relatives was more limited.

Of Abraham's three daughters, Maria (1819-1858) married in 1841 in Mohilev Dr. Moritz Askenasy (1811-1887), member of the Imperial Council of Odessa and later moved to Dresden, while her sister Anne (Chalina) (1830-1851) married in 1848 Heinrich Toeplitz (1822 Warsaw-1891 Wroclaw), director of the railroad of Southern Russia and founder of the Polish Handlowy Bank[105]. Although both men were wealthy Jews, they did not belong to the circle of close relatives.

We perceive another consistent signs of the disintegration of familial solidarity in the wedding of another of Abraham's daughters, Elena (1835 –Vevey after 1921) who married a Christian German aristocrat, Baron August Von Wolf (1828-1888) thus embracing Catholicism. To find the earliest examples of total estrangement from Judaism among male representatives of the family, we have to look to those who did not seek a commercial career. Arthur (Odessa 1816- St. Petersburg 1851), perhaps the most famous among the sons of Abraham Raffalovich, is taken by Steven Zipperstein as the model of assimilatory desire that begins to gain a foothold among prosperous Jews of his generation:

In a conspicuous, though probably quite small, segment of the city's Jewish youth who

[103] Kaplan, "Priestess and Hausfrau," 67; 70.
[104] According to what has been already noticed by Catalan, "I Morpurgo di Trieste."
[105] Heinrich was the brother of Bonaventura Toeplitz (1831-1905), father of Giuseppe Toeplitz (1866, Warsaw – 1938, S. Ambrogio Olona), founder of the homonimous bank in Italy at the end of the nineteenth century. See Ludovico Toeplitz, *Il banchiere*, (Milan: Edizioni Milano Nuova, 1963).

came to view European culture as their primary affiliation, eschewing the Jewish scene (an even, according to local *maskilim*, Jewish instituition designed along modern lines) in favor of the non-Jewish cultural arena.[106]

After attending the Richelieu Lyceum, the most prestigious school in Odessa, Arthur studied medicine in Prague, Berlin and Tartu, graduating in obstetrics and surgery and becoming a leading physician in Odessa on tuberculosis and plagues. Between 1846 and 1849 he traveled extensively in North Africa, Egypt and the Middle East. In 1838 Arthur converted to Russian orthodoxy and changed his name to Artemi Alexievich, [107] the first of the many conversions in the following years, when as for many Jews in Western Europe, social and geographical mobility had eroded the fundaments of traditional Jewish practice.[108] By 1848 also Theodor, Abraham's first-born, with his wife Ljuba had converted to Russian Orthodoxy. In this faith will be raised their seven sons, who will continue to steer the destinies of the Raffalovich bank consortium till its bankruptcy in 1891. Of Theodor's daughters, Maria will convert to Catholicism in order to marry the Italian count Frangipane of Udine.[109]

These first conversions and the geographical dispersion of the Raffalovich family, whose traces can be found in the main European capitals from the second half of the nineteenth century on, did not appreciably affect the Raffalovich and Lowensohn the coherence of their familial structure. This is true in spite of the perceptible degrading of Jewish practice already found among Elena's aunts and uncles.

It is only in Elena's generation, the second after Abraham's migration to Odessa at the beginning of the nineteenth century, that the familial solidarity is completely dismantled. With it disappears every residual attachment to Judaism. Not only their cultural interests appear to be directed mainly to extra-community activities, but many members of Elena's generation and almost all of the following one intermarry, generally adopting the faith of the partner.

The matrimonial strategies of the second generation after Abraham Raffalovich seem to have been dictated by social ascent and intellectual ambition in a non-

[106] Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa,* 66.
[107] Contrary to what has been written by Zipperstein, *The Jews of Odessa*, 67.
[108] On this issue see *Assimilation and community. The Jews in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, eds. Jonathan Frankel and Stephen Zipperstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992).
[109] On the Frangipane family see *Famiglie Nobili delle Venezie*, eds. Giorgio Aldrighetti, Marino Zorzi, Leopoldo Mazzarolli, Italo Quadrio (Udine: Gaspari Editore 2001).

Jewish milieu. Of the three daughters of Leon Raffalovich and Rosette Lowensohn besides Elena, who married the Catholic scholar Domenico Comparetti, Nadine (1836-1911) married in 1857 the count Victor Chaptal Chanteloup (1821-1901), accepted baptism and was buried in Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris.[110] Only Marie will remain Jewish, but only out of respect for her mother and husband.[111] Her daughter Sophie wrote:

Elle resta juive. Elle ne voulut pas se séparer de son mari comme sa mère ne voulut pas cesser d'être juive pour ne pas faire de chagrin a la mère qu'elle avait tant aimée et qu'elle sentait tout près d'elle après que la mort les eut séparées

[She remained Jewish. She did not want to separate from her husband as her mother did not want to cease being Jewish in order not to grief the mother she loved so much and she felt so close to even after death had separated them].[112]

Marie published vehement articles in the French journal *Le Temps* criticizing the rise of the anti-Semitic movement within Russian society during the late 1870s, but they were an expression of her liberal political views rather than of confessional solidarity.[113] Hence, according to her daughter, Marie was not opposed to the conversion of her children, quite the contrary:

Elle avait approuvé quand je m'étais faite catholique et, plus tard, quand mon frère André devint catholique, elle s'intéressa vivement a sa vie nouvelle, et prit sa part de joie lorsque son grand ami et frère d'adoption John Gray devint prêtre. Elle aimait entendre mon mari parler de sa foi.

[She approved when I became Catholic and, later, when my brother André also embraced Catholicism, she was extremely interested in his new life and was happy when his great friend and adoptive brother John Gray became a priest. She loved to hear my husband speak about his faith].[114]

In the following generation, adopting Christianity was no longer a mere

[110] Victor was the nephew of Jean-Antoine Claude, Comte Chaptal de Chanteloup (1756 – 1832), French chemist and statesman under Napoleon. Victor had been the secretary of the Duc d'Aumale and sous-prefet in Algeria.
[111] In her memoirs, his daughter Sophie O'Brien, *Silhouettes d'autrefois,*108-109, recalls that "mon père s'intéressait tout particulièrement aux juifs russes persécutés et qui venaient échouer à Paris," among whom numbered the ebonist Abraham Routchine, father of the painter Maria Routchine-Dupré (1883-1918).
[112] Bernard, *Lettres beaujolaises,* XXV.
[113] Bernard, *Lettres beaujolaises,* 15.
[114] Bernard, *Lettres beaujolaises,* XXV.

formality (what Heine called the "entrance ticket to the world") but had become the natural option to relieve the spiritual restlessness of the most intellectually ambitious members of the family. Of the three sons of Marie, Elena's sister, Marc-André[115] and Sophie, in the nineties convert to Catholicism out of deep conviction.[116] Nadine's first-born, Emmanuel-Anatole Chaptal de Chanteloup (1861-1943),[117] after a successful diplomatic career, took holy orders, was elected as auxiliary bishop of Paris and was active in the service of working class foreigners in France, following a vocation in many aspects not dissimilar to that chosen by his second-degree cousin don Lorenzo Milani. Another of Nadine's daughters, Leonie (1873-), also deeply involved in a Catholic version of social apostolate, became one of the most important nurses in France in the first half of the twentieth century, founding a clinic for nurses and fighting tuberculosis.[118]

Among the fourth-generation descendants of Abraham Raffalovich at the end of the First World War only Arthur Raffalovich (1853 - Paris 1921) married to Ida Wertheimer from Frankfurt,[119] remained faithful to his Jewish origins, becoming one of the main experts in Russian economics and counselor to the Czarist embassies in Paris and London.[120] He was the only member of the family who held a strongly conservative view of world politics, and objected to the revolutionary movements that began to threaten the stability of the Russian Empire. Furthermore, Arthur represents the last case of endogamic practice that

[115] Fredrick Roden, "Marc-Andre' Raffalovic: A Russian-French-Jewish-Catholic Homosexual in Oscar Wilde's Lonon," in *Jewish/Christian/Queer*, ed. Frederick S. Roden (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009) 127-138.

[116] The conversion from Russian Orthodoxy to Catholicism of Artemi Raffalovich, Theodor's son, seems to have been driven by sentimental reasons, in order to be able to marry in a second wedding the German Henrietta Freygang in 1895 in Odessa.

[117] On this figure of a diplomat and liberal Catholic churchman see P. Boisard, De la diplomatie à l'épiscopat : Monseigneur Chaptal, évêque d'Isionda, 1861-1943, Paris, Flammarion, 1945 and Jean-Louis Clément, "Mgr Chaptal et la Mission diocésaine des étrangers. Entre pastorale, intégration et assimilation 1922-1930," *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 76 (2008): 53-63.

[118] Evelyne Diebolt, "Esquisses biographiques : Anne Hamilton et Leone Chaptal," *Cahiers de l'Amiec*, 10 (1988): 85-121 and Renee Magnon, *Leonie Chaptal. La cause des infirmieres*, (Paris: Lamarre, 1991).

[119] On the Wertheimers, originally from Hanover and then installed in Frankfurt, see Werner Eugen Mosse, *The German-Jewish Economic Elite, 1820-1935: a Socio-Cultural Profile* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1989).

[120] On Arthur Raffalovich see Lebedev, "The Raffalovichs Family," 222-225 (in Russian). His necrology was apparently written by J. M. Keynes (see, Richard J. Kent, "Keynes as Biographer and Obituarist," **in** *History of Economics Review*, 52 (2010)) and published in *The Economic Journal*, 32/125 (1922): 129-131. His works have been frequently reviewed by Vilfredo Pareto in the Italian *Giornale degli economisti*.

had characterized the earlier generations of the Raffalovichs. His two daughters, Alexandra (Ada) (1885-1963) and Maria, will marry two Raffalovich brothers, Nicolai[121] and Sergei (1873-1944),[122] sons of Leon and nephews of Anissim Raffalovich. Nevertheless, with him ends the epoch of the great splendor of the Raffalovichs. His son Vladimir[123] died in 1921 of typhus fever in the Bolshevic prisons of Petersburg at age thirty-five. In his memoirs of his wife's family, Comparetti writes of the dramatic end and the exhaustion of their dynasty "Rimangono colà [in Unione Sovietica] trattenute la moglie e l'unica figlia Irene [his wife and only child, Irene, remain there, in the Soviet Union]."[124]

It can be said, then, that over four generations a progressive process of assimilation took place in the Raffalovich family. Abraham was faithful to his ancestral religion; while the next generation was not, it remained at least nominally Jewish; the next two generations witnessed a complete integration into the surrounding gentile society both through intermarriage and conversion. The intellectual and not only financial excellence of most of the representatives of the family over the arch of almost a century attests its acceptance into the gentile dominant elites and local aristocracies.

Elena Raffalovich's story seems to have been shaped by the fantasy of a novelist rather than by history itself. Indeed, it bears bearing striking resemblance to the literary characters Vera Pavlovna in Nikolai Chernyshevsky's *What Is to Be*

[121] In 1917, Nicholas Raffalovich served on the board of directors of Banque Russo-Asiatique of Paris, and in this capacity he met Giuseppe Volpi. In the thirties he played, together with Bank Toeplitz, an important role in the discussions for the electrification of Sicily. See Pinella Di Gregorio, "Crisi e ristrutturazione dell'industria elettrica in Sicilia (1930-1935): L'intervento del capitale americano," in *Studi Storici*, 28/4 (1987): 997 and Giovanni Bruno, "Capitale straniero e industria elettrica nell'Italia meridionale (1895-1935)," in *Studi Storici*, 28/4 (1987): 943-984.

[122] Serguei was graduated from St. Petersburg University with degrees in history and philology. In a form close to the poetics of symbolism and decadentism, he wrote in Russian and French many novels, dramas, poems. In 1905 success came with Raffalovich symbolic drama "The River is coming." He was among the first to review the literary works by the future Nobel Prize winner François Mauriac in 1934 in the *Revue de Paris*.

[123] Not to be confused with his homonym, his cousin born in 1876 as the first of the six children of Michael Raffalovich and the Belgian Catholic Eugenie D'Henin. This figure in 1909 married in St. Paul Cathedral Charlotte Mansfield, the writer who in 1909 made an adventurous trip from Cape Town to Cairo. Vladimir was an engineer in South Africa. See Mick Conefrey, *How to Climb Mont Blanc in a Skirt: A Handbook for the Lady Adventure*r (England: Oneworld Publication 2011).

[124] Comparetti, *In memoria di Elena Raffalovich*, 25. Apparently, they were able to escape to Bulgaria in 1925, see http://baza.vgdru.com/1/26571/ .

Done?, [125] and Nora Helmer in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House.*[126] It also anticipates similar and more famous episodes in the life of Sibilla Aleramo[127] and the separation of Amalia Rosselli and Margherita Grassini Sarfatti from their husbands.[128]

Thus, one might ask if it is best to simply clarify the singularity of Elena's story, or rather to see in her position an example of deeper structures of gender and class identities. Choosing the second, one might refer to Hannah Arendt's term "exception Jews," those whose wealth allowed them to be "exceptions from the common destiny of the Jewish people," as well as "Jews of education," who felt themselves exempted from "Jewishness" by virtue of having become "exceptional human beings" in their education.[129] The latter perspective is certainly more interesting, but more importantly, the case of Elena Raffalovich is emblematic of a larger phenomenon that enfolds within it a whole generation of Jewish women, mostly from Odessa, radically oriented in politics and often married to non-Jewish protagonists of the cultural and political scene in Italy.

Raffalovich's life story sharply overlaps with that of other Russian Jewish women such as the revolutionaries and political activists Anna Kuliscioff (born Anna Moiseyeva Rosenstein 1857-1925,[130] Julia Schucht (1894-1980) (Antonio Gramsci's wife) and her sister Tatiana,[131] Angelica Balabanoff (1878-1965),[132] the painter

[125] Nikolai Chernyshevsky published his novel in 1863. The first English translation appeared in 1886 under the title *A Vital Question or What is to be done* (New York: Crowell, 1886) translated by Nathan Haskell Dole. The chief character is a woman, Vera Pavlovna, who escapes the control of her family and an arranged marriage to seek economic independence.

[126] Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, first staged in 1879 in Copenhagen, relates the feminist awakening of a good, middle-class wife and mother who decides at the end of the play to leave her family. It was brought to the stage in Italy only in 1891 in a version with a different ending from the original – this time "happy!"

[127] Annarita Buttafuoco, *Marina Zancan, Svelamento. Sibilla Aleramo: una biografia intellettuale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1988).

[128] On the question of divorce and the Jews in Italy in the 19th century see the eighth chapter of Ester Capuzzo, *Gli ebrei nella società italiana. Comunità e istituzioni tra Ottocento e Novecento* (Rome: Carocci,1999).

[129] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1951).

[130] Paolo Pillitteri, *Anna Kuliscioff, una biografia politica* (Venice: Marsilio, 1986); Maria Casalini, *La signora del socialismo italiano. Vita di Anna Kuliscioff* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1987). She was among the very first women in Italy to graduate in medicine in Naples in 1885, even if, despite the support of MP Tullo Massarani and FilippoTurati, she was prevented from practicing this profession.

[131] Although of non-academic character see the recent work by Lucia Tancredi, *La vita privata di Giulia Schucht* (Treia (MC): EV, 2012).

[132] Francesco Biscione, "A. B," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Vol. 34, 1988. Author of

Antonietta Raphaël (1895-1975),[133] Ernestina Paper, born Puritz Manasse in Odessa, the first woman to be awarded a university degree in Italy in 1877, graduating in medicine in Florence,[134] Maria Fischmann, the first women to obtain a degree in surgery in Italy in 1893 [135] and many others such as the earlier-mentioned Ginzburgs and the Pekelis. Although these are women who arrived in Italy after Elena Raffalovich, driven to emigration in a period of fresh outbreak of anti-Semitic persecutions in the Czarist Empire and who came either to complete their studies or as refugees – Elena came for neither reason - it is noteworthy that their biographies reveal a common ambition of intellectual promotion, through culture and art, a desire to totally disassociate themselves from their Jewish heritage and a propensity to engage in a form of political and social activism characterized by radicalism and progressivism.

Although Elena did not follow a formal educational path, her vast cultural interests and her striving to be at the forefront of social and political debates characterize a whole generation of women fighting to gain access to university education. In Italy this right was granted in1875. However, since female students until 1883 were prevented in Italy from receiving a high school education, most Italian women were until the late eighties unable to benefit from the right to higher education.[136]

Women with foreign high school degrees were thus at a greater advantage than local ones, and this partly explains why, between 1877 and 1900, among the 224 women college graduates in Italy, many were not natives of Italy. Still, it is

---

an autobiography which does not make any mention of his Jewish origins Angelica Balabanoff, *Erinnerungen und Erlebnisse* (Berlin: E. Laub 1927) (in English, *My Life as a Rebel*, New York, 1938).

[133] Enzo Siciliano, *Il risveglio della bionda sirena. Raphaël e Mafai. Storia di un amore coniugale* (Milan: Mondadori, 2005); Serena De Dominicis, *Antonietta Raphaël Mafai. Un'artista non conforme* (Milan: Selene Edizioni, 2006).

[134] She began her medical studies at the University of Zurich, since higher education was unavailable at that time to women in Russia. In 1872, only ten years after Raffalovich's arrival, she moved to Pisa, where she studied for three years while finishing her specialization in Florence. In 1878 she opened a medical practice for pediatric and gynecologic illnesses. Raicich, "Liceo" 147.

[135] O. Peretti, "Da Odessa a Pisa: una donna medico tra interessi pedagogici, dirtii della donna e impegno sociale," in *Fuori dall'ombra. Studi di storia della donna nella provincia di Pisa*, Elena Fasano Guarini, Annamaria Galoppini, Alessandra Peretti (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2006) 85-129.

[136] In fact till World War I, most of the girls engaged in higher education studied in female institutions, and it was rare to see women studing together with men in colleges. This provided the context of the novel by Giani Stuparich, *Un anno di scuola* (Turin: Einaudi, 1961).

striking that the foreigners were predominantly Jewish and among the Jewish women 80% were Russian-born students, mainly from Odessa.[137] This situation is not unique to Italy, but can be traced in other national contexts as well. Although fewer than 14% of Russian Jews lived in the new Russian territories in the seventies, its four southern provinces furnished 45% of the Jewish students in Russian medical schools.[138] In 1906 more than 62% of the 1,920 Russian students studying in Switzerland (the majority of whom were Jewish) were women.[139] At the University of Paris in 1900-1910, Russian and Romanian women, most of them Jewish, accounted for more the one-third of all female students and about two-thirds of those who were foreign-born.[140]

This was due to a several concomitant factors, first and foremost the fact that women were not allowed into Russian universities, where a *numerus clausus* policy against Jews and many other non Russian ethnic groups was enforced. This occurred in a context wherein it was not unusual for Jewish women of bourgeois background to obtain a high-school degree.[141] Moreover, there were many courses of academic level given by university professors for female students.[142] This was particularly true in the international trade port-city of Odessa, undoubtedly the home to the most secular Jewish community in the Russian Empire, a sort of "anti-shtetl" in Eastern Europe.[143] Female higher

[137] Raicich, "Liceo," 151. Full data in Simonetta Ulivieri, "Donne e scuola. Per una storia dell'istruzione femminile in Italia," in *Educazione al femminile: dalla parità alla differenza,* eds. Emy Beseghi and Vittorio Telmon (Scandicci: La Nuova Italia, 1992), 31-54.

[138] Carole B. Balin, "The Call to Serve: Jewish Women Medical Students in Russia, 1872-1887" in *Jewish Women in Eastern Europe*, eds. Chaeran Freeze, Paula Hyman, Antony Polonsky (Oxford: Littmann, 2005) 133-152.

[139] Jack Wertheimer, "The 'Ausländerfrage' at Institutions of Higher Learning: A Controversy Over Russian-Jewish Students in Imperial Germany" in *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook*, 27/1 (1982): 188; Avi Ohry, "When Grandfather Studied Medicine in Geneva... Foreign Students and Teachers from 1876 Onwards" in *Vesalius*, 12/2 (2006): 64-8.

[140] Nancy Green, "L'émigration comme émancipation: les femmes juives d'Europe de l'Est à Paris 1881-1914" in *Pluriel*, 27 (1981): 47.

[141] Shaul Stampfer, "Gender Differentiation and Education of Jewish Women in Nineteenth Century Eastern Europe," in *Polin*, 7 (1992): 459–483.

[142] L. Bobrow, "High Courses of Professor Gerie for Women in Moscow (1872-1888)," *Proceedings of the Moscow Historical Archives Institute,* vol. 16, Moscow 1961 (in Russian); A. J. Savelyev, A. I. Momot, V. F. Hoteenkov, *Higher Education in Russia: A Short History to 1917*, Research Institute of Higher Education, Moscow, 1995 (in Russian).

[143] John D. Klier, "A Port, not a Shtetl: Reflections on the Distinctiveness of Odessa," in *Port Jews. Jewish Communities in Cosmopolitan Maritime Trading Centres, 1550-1950*, ed. David Cesarani, (London: Frank Cass Publishers 2002), 173-178; Alexis Hofmeister, "Judische und 'Gesellschaftliche' Mission-Partizipation von Juden in der staedtischen Offentlichkeit Odessas," *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts / Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook*, 10 (2011): 125-143; Jarrod Tanny, *City of Rogues and Schnorrers. Russia's Jews and the Myth of Old Odessa*,

educations was favored by a good part of Russian intelligentsia of the time, nihilists in primis,[144] but since legislation barred Jewish women access to local universities, they sought better opportunities of self-fulfillment in Europe's most prestigious Athenea.

The methodological interest in the biographies of Russian Jewish women in Italy in the second half of the nineteenth century lies precisely in their tripartite marginality: as women, as Jews and as foreigners.[145] Paradoxically, if to leave the autocratic and anti-Semitic Russian empire and emigrate to Italy, where since 1848 full civil rights had been accorded to Jews, amounted to an improvement of political status, conversely as women, life in Italy exposed them to the prejudices of a bourgeois society much less open to what was considered to be deviant behavior. What Iris Parush has called the "benefits of marginality,"[146] that is, the greater degree of freedom enjoyed by discriminated groups in certain historical circumstances – as for instance a greater access to general education among high-status Jewish women in nineteenth-century Russia – were in Italy significantly reduced. While in Russia the rapid industrialization in the nineteenth century was not matched with political and social modernization, in Italy the opposite occurred.

One example will epitomize the disappointment of the many women who believed that their emigration to Western Europe would increase their social autonomy: Elena's anger in the face of the affectionate nicknames penned by Domenico to her. "Gattina [kitten]," for instance, connoted in Elena's eyes the petit bourgeois and patronization, and she rebukes her husband for not being able to express his love "properly." So too does Anna Kuliscioff chide her lover, the socialist leader Andrea Costa. Both Costa and Comparetti, despite their principled anticlericalism, obliged their companions to undergo Church weddings, thus forcing them to convert in order to spare the Catholic sentiments

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2011).

[144] Shmuel Feiner, "Ha-Ishah Ha-Yehudit Ha-Modernit," in *Zion*, 58 (1993): 469-499 (in Hebrew); Mauro Rosa, "L'educazione della donna in Russia nel Settecento e nella prima metà dell'Ottocento," in *Studi di storia dell'educazione*, (1984): 65-71.

[145] *Profiles in Diversity. Jews in a Changing Europe 1750-1870*, eds. Frances Malino and David Sorkin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1998), 1-7 stress the importance of such an approach not in order to engage in apologetics regarding Jewish integration, but rather to show the multifaceted spectrum of Jewish reactions towards modernity.

[146] Iris Parush, *Reading Jewish Women. Marginality and Modernization in Nineteenth Century Eastern European Jewish Society*, (Waltham: Brandeis University Press 2004).

of their respective families.[147]

The condition of Russian Jewish women in Italy must be read against the backdrop of what is known about women in other parts of Europe. The story of Elena Raffalovich, the first of a long series of Russian Jewish immigrants in Italy in the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, introduces us to a statistically small but culturally large reality of women belonging to the haute bourgoisie. Unlike middle-class women, whose behavioural patterns are well known from the seminal work of Marion Kaplan, these women are characterized by strong economic and intellectual independence. Indeed, Elena lived alone after her separation from Comparetti, and even left the care of their then-infant daughter to her husband. In her own estimation, she preferred to live "comme l'oiseau sur la branche [as a bird on the branch]" rather than be confined at home, even with the people she loved.[148]
A second important distinction is the Eastern Europe-Central Europe divide. As rightly noted by Paula Hyman:

> As opposed to women originating from Eastern Europe, in Central Europe the experience of civil emancipation, economic integration and a high degree of acculturation enabled Jews to situate themselves securely in the bourgeoisie. Jewish women increasingly participated in philanthropic activities and organizations, which not only gave them a voice in the public sphere without challenging gender norms, but also helped them develop close friendships and ties with non-Jewish women who supported similar causes.[149]

Raffalovich's case, however, further complicates these disparities. A Russian who operated in Western Europe, Elena modeled an alternative version of feminist activism, one that was at variance with the traditional gender-role cleavage then current in Western bourgois.[150] This appears also in the matrimonial strategies of the Raffalovich family. While for middle class Jews in Central and Western Europe, Marion Kaplan is certainly right when she affirms that "before the 20th century Jewish and non-Jewish marriages had, with few exceptions, been

[147] Anna Kuliscioff, *Lettere d'amore a Andrea Costa, 1880-1909* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1976).
[148] Comparetti, *In memoria di Elena Raffalovich,* 10.
[149] Paula Hyman, "Two Models of Modernization: Jewish Women in the German and the Russian Empire," in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry: Jews and Gender. The Challenge to Hierarchy* ed. Johnatan Frankel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 43.
[150] Natalia L. Pushkareva, "At the Beginning of Russian Feminism: Similarities and Differences between Russia and the West," in *Russian Women and Western Culture*, ed. Grigorii A. Tishkin (St. Petersburg, 2002).

arranged,"[151] Elena's marriage furnishes proof against these notions. She was one of the first, but by far not the only woman to intermarry. In fact, virtually all of the marriages of the women in the Raffalovich family, in and after Elena's generation, and of other Jewish women from Odessa mentioned in this study, were love marriages often established despite and against their family's will. While it is true that in Italy this occurred on a relatively less frequent basis, the aforementioned Erminia Fuà Fusinato, also a social activist and married in 1856 to the poet Arnaldo Fusinato, might be kept in mind.
It is clear then that Paula Hyman's conclusions for Germany cannot be transposed unconditionally to Russian women living in Italy or elsewhere in Europe:

> There is some suggestion that among those Jews who attained wealth and became part of a small upper bourgeois stratum, women were much more reluctant than men to jettison Jewish practice and identity.[152]

The Raffalovich story reveals a different attitude of Italian Jewish women, generally more conservative, than those of Eastern Europe who in increasing numbers were coming to the peninsula.[153] Raffalovich was not the only woman of her class who was obliged to rethink herself, her role, the relationship between women and society and the place of women in the new national states, without recourse to a strong female model, at least symbolically, of the "citizen mother,"[154] to whom were attached most of the women of petit bourgeois extraction, both Christian and Jewish.

From this vantage point, Elena's incessant travel may be viewed as a kind of female quest for new spaces of emancipation and liberty. Against this backdrop

---

[151] In her "For Money or Love" (Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook, 1982) and more recently Luisa Levi d'Ancona, "Mediation and Marriage Strategies in the 19th century Jewish European Upper Middle Class," in *La mediazione matrimoniale. Il terzo (in)comodo in Europa tra Otto e Novecento*, ed. Bruno P. F. Wanrooij (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 2004). Barbara Armani, in her recent book on Jewish elites in Florence in the nineteenth century goes even further when she states that intermarriage was a masculine rather than a feminine Jewish phenomenon. Barbara Armani, *Il confine invisibile: l'elite ebraica di Firenze 1840-1914* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2006) 241.
[152] Paula Hyman, *Gender and Assimilation in Modern Jewish History*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995).
[153] A difference noted already by Miniati, *Le emancipate*, 188, but only concerning Jewish female associatianism outside Italy.
[154] Liviana Gazzetta, "Madre e cittadina. Una concezione dell'emancipazione alle origini del primo movimento politico delle donne in Italia" in *Venetica. Annuario di storia delle Venezie in età contemporanea*, 11 (1994), 133-162.

her restlessness can be compared to that of Flora Randegger, a Triestine woman with a Jewish deeply religious background, who traveled twice from Triest to Jerusalem, where she hoped to teach Italian and to establish a school for Jewish girls, thereby securing independence of profession and income.[155] But while Randegger sought a stronger Jewish life than the one constituted within the four walls of her family, Raffalovich leveraged her freedom of movement to rid herself of this very same Judaism. It seems that Jewish women could choose complete emancipation, typically resulting in total estrangement from Judaism, like Raffalovich, or subordination within traditional family structures that permitted autonomy of action only in philanthropic enterprises, like Randegger.

And so we come to the last point that is usually made in relation with the process of women's emancipation in the nineteenth century, namely, that the public sphere of action for women before the twentieth century can be ascribed only to what Marion Kaplan calls "social feminism," that is, a means for liberating women from an exclusive preoccupation with the home. Social work became the path of least resistance for Jewish women intent upon access to the public sphere. Social feminism is an admixture of social work and feminism, moderate and motherly. Raffalovich was precisely at odds with the fact that in Italy at the turn of the century, education had not yet been dissociated from philanthropic preoccupations. She was furious, for instance, that the Venetian authorities referred to her school as an "asilo" (shelter) and not a "giardino d'infanzia" a proper Italian translation of the Froebelian term "kindergarten."[156] In fact, Raffalovich's charitable activity bears no confessional character whatsoever.

Elena never sought out solidarity networks, either on a confessional or on a gender-oriented basis. She acted alone, benefitting from her considerable family resources, and collaborated indiscriminately with men and women who shared her ideals. Raffalovich was spared the caution and self-denial of Jewish women seeking to become bourgeois, a quest of many contemporary German Jewish women, according to Kaplan. What Michael Stanislawski has termed the "twin process of Russification and enbourgeoisement"[157] had taken place for many prominent Jewish families in Odessa much earlier that in Western Europe,

[155] Marina Arbib, "Intercultural Exchange and Maintaining Fidelity to Judaism: The Influene of Italian Literature on Flora Randegger" in *Around the Point: Studies in Jewish Literature and Culture in Multiple Languages*, eds. Hillel Weiss, Roman Katsman, Ber Kotlerman (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 271-282.
[156] Colombo, "Il pensiero pedagogico di Vittorio Castiglioni," 205.
[157] Michael Stanislawski, "Russian Jewry" in *Paths of Emancipation*, ed. Pierre Birnbaum (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

confronted there with a "modernity without emancipation."[158] Elena could allow herself to be more critical of her own bourgeois upbringing than other Jewish women, who were fighting for social recognition.

While for many of her contemporaries the progressive but winding path towards women's emancipation did not necessarily entail the relinquishing of Judaism *in toto*, in Elena's family, as in many others of Russian *émigrés* to Europe, the assimilation process was much quicker and more linear. Thus, Elena's intellectual and familial biography uncovers an Italian way to women's emancipation composed at least of two streams, one of indigenous Jewish women and the other of foreign immigrants. The reciprocity of the two remains to be studied in their multifarious contexts. What is certain is that Elena Raffalovich, a cosmopolitan at home in every European capital but anchored to a permanent condition of exile and errance, personifies the "foreigner in her own home"[159] described by Annarita Buttafuoco in her seminal paper on women's emancipation in Italy from the late eighteenth century to the Fascist period. It is because of women like Raffalovich, who belonged to what Virginia Woolf would have later called a "society of outsiders,"[160] bearers of modernity albeit an accented one, that in Italy it was possible at the turn of the century to spotlight political and juridical aspects of women's emancipation, rather than confining the focus to arenas of cultural and social welfare, anticipating the "feminism without borders"[161] that will be characteristic of the twentieth century fights for women's rights.

Asher Salah is Senior Lecturer at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design and the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He has been a fellow at the *Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies* at the University of Pennsylvania in 2011-2012 and in 2014-2015. His scholarship deals mainly with Jewish literature of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Italy. His publications include a translation into Italian and an analysis of Samuele Romanelli's *Masa' Be'arav* (2006), *La République des Lettres: Rabbins, médecins et*

[158] Ely Lederhendler, "Modernity without Emancipation. The Case of Russian Jewry" in *Assimilation and Community. The Jews in Nineteenth-century Europe*, eds Jonathan Frankel and Steven J. Zipperstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
[159] Annarita Buttafuoco, "Straniere in patria. Temi e momenti dell'emancipazione femminile italiana dalle repubbliche giacobine al fascismo" in *Esperienza storica femminile nell'età moderna e contemporanea,* ed. A. Crispino (Rome: Udi, 1988), 91-124.
[160] Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London: Hogarth Press 1938).
[161] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders. Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

écrivains juifs en Italie au XVIIIè (2007) and *L'epistolario di Marco Mortara: un rabbino italiano tra riforma e ortodossia* (2012).

How to quote this article:
Asher Salah, *"From Odessa to Florence: Elena Comparetti Raffalovich. A Jewish Russian Woman in Nineteenth-Century Italy"*, in Portrait of Italian Jewish Life (1800s-1930s), eds. Tullia Catalan, Cristiana Facchini, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, n.8 November 2015
url: www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?id=365