

**Practices of Cultural Nationalism.  
Alfonso Pacifici and the Jewish Renaissance in Italy (1910-1916)**

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*Alfonso Pacifici (1889-1983)*

**Abstract**

*This essay focuses on Alfonso Pacifici, leader at the forefront of the Jewish cultural revival movement in Italy in the first decades of the XX century. His figure and his philosophy represent a privileged focus through which it is*

*possible to identify and follow the evolution of various intertwined aspects of the Jewish experience in post-emancipated Italy, such as: the elaboration of the Kulturdebatte within Italian Zionism; the development of a form of Jewish nationalism, as well as the dilemmas and the complicated dynamics that shaped the national identity of Italian Jews, torn between their allegiance as Jews and as Italians.*

- Introduction
- Jewish Florence and the Spirit of Renaissance
- Defining the Essence of Judaism
- The Season of the Conventions and the Development of a Cultural Strategy
- Which Homeland for the Jews?
- The Challenge of WWI. Between Civism and Jewish Nationalism
- Conclusion

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## Introduction

In the broad panorama of ways in which Italian Jews shaped their identity after emancipation, Alfonso Pacifici played an exceptional role.<sup>1</sup> He was among those

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<sup>1</sup> Historiography on the subject is extensive. For decades, it converged in affirming that the process of Jewish integration into Italian society was anything but linear and immediate. An overview on the issue is found in the collection of essays *Stato nazionale ed emancipazione ebraica* eds. Francesca Sofia and Mario Toscano (Rome: Bonacci, 1992). See also Mario Toscano, “L’uguaglianza senza diversità. Stato, società e questione ebraica nell’Italia liberale,” in *Storia contemporanea* 5 (1994): 685-712; ID., *Integrazione e identità. L’esperienza ebraica in Germania e in Italia dall’Illuminismo al fascismo* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2003); Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, “Italian Jews,” in *The Emancipation of Catholics, Jews and Protestants. Minorities and the Nation State in Nineteenth-century Europe* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 169-187; Anna Foa, “Il mito dell’assimilazione. La storiografia sull’emancipazione ebraica negli ultimi vent’anni,” in *Ebrei e nazione. Comportamenti e rappresentazioni nell’età dell’emancipazione*, special issue of *Storia e problemi contemporanei* 20/45 (2007): 17-30. More recent works are those of Elizabeth Schächter, *The Jews of Italy. 1848-1915. Between Tradition and Transformation* (London and Portland: Valentine Mitchell, 2011) and of Cristina M. Bettin, *Italian Jews from Emancipation to the Racial Laws* (New York: Palgrave Mac Millan, 2010). The experience of Italian Jewry should be examined in a broad context and perspective, taking into account, at the background, the intricate, dialectical process of reshaping the Jewish identity in modernity and placing it in the wider frame of Western European Jewry. Recent works on such topics are those of David N. Myers, Massimo Ciavolella, Peter H. Riell and Geoffrey Symcox, *Acculturation and its Discontents. The Italian Jewish Experience between Exclusion and*

third-generation-Jews who responded to the encounter with modernity by undertaking Zionism as the path to rediscover and regain a Jewish allegiance<sup>2</sup>; only a minority embraced that option in Italy. In the period before WWI, two main Zionist strands stood out in the peninsula: *philanthropical*, embodied by the “Federazione Sionistica Italiana” (FSI), for whom the national project regarded the persecuted Jews of Eastern Europe and *political*, represented mainly by Zionist groups from Trieste and Florence, who believed in Zionism as a modern form of nationalism, pursuing simultaneously both cultural and territorial objectives.<sup>3</sup>

Pacifici’s view resided mainly in the latter trend; however, what made him peculiar within Italian Jewry was the endorsement of a hybrid form of identity that, despite several differences, owed significant influence to the world of Eastern European orthodoxy. That such a borderline soul, an *Ostjuden*, turned up at the heart of Western Jewry has hitherto received little attention.<sup>4</sup> This essay will focus on the dawn and on the very beginning of his experience, tackling it in

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*Inclusion* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008); David N. Myers, “‘The blessing of assimilation’ Reconsidered. An Inquiry into Jewish Cultural Studies,” in *From Ghetto to Emancipation. Historical and Contemporary Reconsiderations of the Jewish Community* (Scranton: Scranton University Press, 1997), 17-36; Michael A. Meyer, *Judaism within Modernity. Essays on Jewish History and Religion* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> The generational differentiation in relation with Italian Jewry is discussed in David Bidussa, *Il sionismo politico* (Milan: Unicopli, 1999), 19.

<sup>3</sup> On Italian Zionism before WWI I mention only Alberto Cavaglioni, “Tendenze nazionali e albori sionistici,” in *Storia d’Italia. Gli ebrei in Italia*, vol. 2 (Turin: Einaudi 1997), 1291-1320; Simonetta Della Seta, “Il movimento sionistico,” in *ibid.*, 1323-32; Francesco Del Canuto, *Il movimento sionistico in Italia dalle origini al 1924* (Milan: FSI, 1972); Schächter, *The Jews of Italy*, 152-224; Mario Toscano, “Ebrasimo, sionismo, società. Il caso italiano,” in *Stato nazionale ed emancipazione ebraica*, 397-420; Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti, *Fare gli ebrei italiani. Autorappresentazioni di una minoranza* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), 204-23.

<sup>4</sup> See Cecil Roth and Alfredo M. Rabello, “Pacifici Alfonso,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 15 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference Usa, 2007), 563-64; Angelo M. Piattelli, “Pacifici Alfonso,” “Repertorio biografico dei rabbini d’Italia dal 1861 al 2011,” in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 76/1-2 (2010): 184-256, 225-226. More elaborated essays, that focused mainly on Pacifici’s thought are those of David Bidussa, “Tra avanguardia e rivolta. Il sionismo in Italia nel primo quarto del Novecento,” in *Oltre il ghetto. Momenti e figure della cultura ebraica italiana tra l’Unità e il fascismo* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1992), 155-279, 195-213; Maurizio Molinari, *Ebrei in Italia: un problema di identità. 1848-1938* (Florence: Giuntina, 1991), 46-9; Yoseph Colombo, “Alfonso Pacifici ha ottant’anni,” in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 35/6 (1969): 233-234; Alessandro Roifer, “Diversità ideologiche nel sionismo italiano: Cassuto, Pacifici, Artom, Sciacky,” in *HaZman VeHaRaion* 1-2 (2012): 4; Angelo Piattelli, “Alfonso Pacifici e il giornale ‘Israel’ edizione di Gerusalemme (1935-1941),” in *Segulat Israel* 9 (2012): 73-92.

its ideological and historical interplays as it developed between 1910 and 1916.

This focus, moreover, will particularly address broader questions concerning the Jewish experience in Italy in the first decades of the twentieth century, in particular the discourse and the practice of the Jewish cultural revival; the dynamics of Jewish communal life; the development of Zionism, and the process of shaping the Jewish identity.

All those aspects coalesced in Pacifici's experience under the heading of "culture", that he dichotomously intended as a category of discourse and of practice.<sup>5</sup> For him, "Culture" represented the essential bearer of Jewish identity, and consequently he made it a central element in his campaign. On the other hand, "culture" was also a matter of concrete action to which he devoted his entire apostolate; in his view, therefore, Jews should be concentrating all their efforts in a renewal of their heritage.

### Jewish Florence and the Spirit of Renaissance

In the geography of Jewish Italy at the beginning of the XX century, Florence emerged by all manner of means as the cradle of the Jewish cultural renaissance.<sup>6</sup> The figurehead of that movement was the chief rabbi of the city, the Polish Galician Shmuel Zvi Margulies who, in 1899, moved the rabbinical college from Rome to Florence, transforming it in the crucible of a new generation of young Jews engaged in the spirit of the Jewish renewal.<sup>7</sup>

Together with another Galician rabbi, Zvi Peres Chajes,<sup>8</sup> Margulies spread a bit of the Jewish fervor hailing from his motherland into the Florentine milieu. His

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<sup>5</sup> I take this categorization and this definition from Brubaker's approach in the study of nationalism, especially from Roger Brubaker, "Rethinking nationhood. Nation as institutional form, practical category, contingent event," in *Contention* 1 (1994): 3-14.

<sup>6</sup> Del Canuto, *Il movimento sionistico*, 56-57; Mario Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo in Italia. Dal 1848 alla guerra dei sei giorni* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2003), 73; Massimo Longo Adorno, *Gli ebrei fiorentini dall'emancipazione alla Shoah* (Florence: Giuntina, 2003), 9-16.

<sup>7</sup> "Nel I anniversario della morte di rav S. Z. Margulies," *Israel*, March 1, 1923, 3-4; Schächter, *The Jews of Italy*, 173-76, 206-08.

<sup>8</sup> A new interesting overview of Hirsch's philosophy is given by Ephraim Chamiel, *The middle way. The emergence of modern religious trends in Nineteenth century Judaism. Responses to modernity in the philosophy of Z. H. Cahjes, S. R. Hirsch and S. D. Luzzatto*, 2. voll. (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014)

actions concentrated principally on two groups: politically oriented Zionists, (he supported the birth of the local Zionist group that emerged for its marked nationalistic stance<sup>9</sup>) and cultural Jews, crowned in 1904 with the establishment of the journal *La Rivista Israelitica* [The Jewish Review] that, until 1915, divulged scientific studies in the field of Jewish studies, paying particular attention to the Italian repertoire.<sup>10</sup>

In 1907, that lively climate gave birth to the “Pro Cultura”, a movement that sought to shape the Jewish cultural revival through a systematic and institutionalized work of cultural promotion whose meaning, however, went far beyond re-acculturation.<sup>11</sup> As the programmatic discourse delivered by Aldo Sorani clarified, the development of Zionism had proved that Jews were searching for a “homeland” and the only “written homeland of the Jewish people [...] is the Bible.”<sup>12</sup> The national aspect was thus entangled and ingrained in the cultural sphere: the Text, and extensively culture and customs, constituted the source of Jewish national identity, from which, it followed, that only the full possession of those elements could secure a future as a nation among other nations for the Jews.

The accomplishment of that task was attributed to the youth who, fighting “with all the enthusiasm of their young heart against the pseudo-culture and religious fiction” of the older assimilated generation, could lead the Jews simultaneously back to tradition and forward to their national future.<sup>13</sup>

In that way, Italy entered the movement of European Zionism, rooted in the *Kulturdebatte* as its cornerstone, according to which “culture” was to serve the double function of (re)edifying Jewishness in modernity and of (re)building the Jewish national identity. Education and nationalization were therefore indissolubly entwined. However, if in Western and Eastern European Zionism that led frequently to the fracture between *Kulturisten* and Orthodox (which perceived the effort of founding a modern national culture as an improper threat of secularization) in the peninsula the situation was more nuanced and

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<sup>9</sup> Schächter, *The Jews of Italy*, 178-80.

<sup>10</sup> Attilio Milano, “Un secolo di stampa periodica ebraica in Italia,” in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 12/7-9 (1938): 96-136, 116-18

<sup>11</sup> Attilio Milano, “Gli enti culturali ebraici in Italia nell’ultimo trentennio. 1907-1937,” in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 12/6 (1938): 253-69, 254-55.

<sup>12</sup> “Il valore della cultura,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, July 31, 1907, 67.

<sup>13</sup> “Il valore della cultura,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, June 30, 1907, 38-9.

problematic, and not simply due to the absence of Orthodoxy.<sup>14</sup> Italian Jewry, in fact, had passed through emancipation without reform, avoiding in that way the split between the “religious” and the “national” aspect of Judaism. Therefore, the restoration of tradition and the acceptance of Zionism as a national movement easily cohabitated, as “culture” contained a possible ground of encounter and synthesis.<sup>15</sup>

## Defining the Essence of Judaism

Alfonso Pacifici's figure and commitment emerged in that fervent climate. He was born in 1889, in a Florentine Jewish family modestly inserted in the circuit of the local community, meaning that since childhood, he had been familiar with rav Margulies.<sup>16</sup> He described the approach to Jewish nationalism in terms of a “revelation” that manifested itself to him at the age of eighteen, in June of 1907, during a philosophy lesson on the subject of “nation [...] and the necessary elements for its existence, among which the territory.” As he explained, he intervened in the discussion emphasizing that:

the definition of a nation given by the teacher couldn't be completely exact, inasmuch there was at least an exception to the rule he posed: that of the Jewish people, which is of course a nation, which demonstrated the capacity to survive also without a territory.<sup>17</sup>

Beyond that symbolic moment, at the end of the first decade of the XX century Pacifici acceded formally to Margulies's circuit and became his favorite disciple.<sup>18</sup> He soon emerged as the most active participant of the cultural debate that filled

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Berkowitz, *Zionist culture and West European Jewry before the First world war* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 77-98; Ehud Luz, *Parallels meet: religion and nationalism in the early Zionist movement 1882-1904* (Philadelphia: Jewish publication society, 1988).

<sup>15</sup> Alberto Cavaglion, “Qualche riflessione sulla ‘mancata Riforma,’” in *Integrazione e identità. L'esperienza ebraica in Germania e in Italia dall'Illuminismo al fascismo* (Milano: Franco Angeli 1998), 152-66; Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, “Cenni storici per una ricostruzione del dibattito sulla riforma religiosa nell'Italia ebraica,” in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 1-2 (1993): 167-85.

<sup>16</sup> Alfonso Pacifici, “Ha-rav Margulies,” in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 28 (1962): 251-61.

<sup>17</sup> Alfonso Pacifici, *La nostra sintesi-programma. Volume I di Israel Segullà* (Gerusalemme: Taoz, 1955), 76.

<sup>18</sup> We understand the kind of relationship from the epistolary exchanges in Alfonso Pacifici Papers, file 172/132, The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People of Jerusalem [hereafter CAHJP].

the pages of the weekly *La Settimana Israelitica* [The Jewish Weekly] launched on January 1<sup>st</sup> 1910 by Margulies to serve as an arena for the Jewish Italian *Kulturdebatte*.<sup>19</sup>

Under such influences, his ideological background forged two main pillars in religious proto-Zionist thought, and in the world of the neo-orthodoxy of Frankfurt am-Main. In particular, Pacifici recognized a fundamental reference in rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalisher and in his 1863-seminal book *Derishat Zion* [The Quest for Zion].<sup>20</sup> Like Pacifici, Kalisher, a borderline figure between emancipated Western European Jewry and un-emancipated Eastern European Jewry, was convinced that nationalism could serve the Jewish purpose inasmuch as it transformed into a movement of restoration conformed to Torah's teachings. Only in that way would it manage to revive the positive elements of Jewish tradition and to galvanize Jews to such an extent that they might make *'aliya*. Conscious of the fact the dynamic action was not easily accomplishable, Kalisher argued that the "quest for Zion" should begin in the Diaspora in the form of an evolutionary process of re-acculturation that, by funneling Jewish energies, would hasten the fulfillment of the ultimate aim.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, Pacifici identified with the *Trennungsorthodoxie* of Frankfurt am-Main, that is with those secessionist Orthodox groups engaged in the battle against the Reform movement. Various reactions to modernity coexisted in that sphere, from the radical *Austrittsgemeinde*, who refused any sort of cooperation with reformed Jewry, to the more conciliatory *Gemeindeorthodoxie*. Pacifici wavered between those polar positions without opting for either. Choosing the world of Orthodoxy, in any case, was anything but alienating from the world; on the contrary, to him it meant undertaking a position that was militant in its conservatism, in its spiritualism, in its prophetic view and in its controversial, although not closed *a priori*, attitude toward Zionism.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Milano, "Un secolo di stampa," 119-20.

<sup>20</sup> Pacifici outlined his ideological background also in the article "Derishat Zion," in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 16/6-8 (1950): 41-53.

<sup>21</sup> Sam N. Lehman-Wilzig, "Proto-Zionism and its proto-Herzl: the philosophy and efforts of rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalisher," in *Tradition* 16 (1976): 56-76; Jody E. Myers, "Zevi Hirsch Kalisher and the origins of religious Zionism," in *From East and West. Jews in a changing Europe 1750-1870* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 267-94.

<sup>22</sup> Yaakov Zur, "German Jewish Orthodoxy's Attitude toward Zionism," in *Zionism and religion* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1998), 107-15.

Pacifici stepped into the debate in 1910 with the essay *La nostra sintesi-programma* [Our synthesis-program] that, despite his young age, enshrined the organic profile of his ideology. His aim, he explained, was to find a “vision of the world with a synthesis that must translate immediately into action, into the enlightenment of the consciences and into the transformation of life.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, he was looking for a dynamic *Weltanschauung*, a conceptual system that could supply keys to decipher and explain the nature of Judaism in modernity as well as operational tools to intervene concretely in Jewish life.

He thought he had achieved his synthetic intent with the notion of *segullà*. In light of biblical exegesis, Pacifici remarked, the concept referred to the “chosenness” of the Jewish people in a double sense: that of being a treasured possession for God, as well as that of being the repository of a treasured possession, of a distinctive heritage that therefore needed to be redeemed from oblivion.<sup>24</sup>

For that uniqueness, he continued, Judaism transcended every definition: it was “neither nation nor religion,” nor a synthesis of the two.<sup>25</sup> It couldn’t be considered “nation” because the Jewish people had existed uncoupled from a territory, far from its land, owing its survival exclusively to the perpetuation of traditions by individuals.

As a corollary of that conviction, a skeptical attitude was born towards political Zionism, contested by Pacifici for the centrality attributed to the resettlement in Eretz Israel that, in his view, minimized Judaism to a mere territorial issue. His position, however, was more problematic than a simple denial of territorialism: if, on the one hand, he asserted that the “complete fulfillment of the system” was achievable only with “a Jewish organism living of, and through, its own life,” on the other he affirmed that “the core in Palestine is of fundamental importance.”<sup>26</sup> Therefore, he neither retracted Kalisher completely, nor disowned the position of the newborn Mizrachì party, that represented a controversial reference to him. If the continuity stood in considering the essence of Judaism as ethnical, national, traditional and based on Torah, the discontinuity resided in the “emergency” of

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<sup>23</sup> Pacifici, *La nostra sintesi*, 26.

<sup>24</sup> “My covenant than you shall be My own possession among the peoples” (Exodus 19:5); “to be His people, a treasured possession as He promised” (Deuteronomy 26:18).

<sup>25</sup> Pacifici, *La nostra sintesi*, 39.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 348.



the territorial issue. Whereas the Mizrahi individuated in the homelessness of the Jews, the *Zarat haYehudim*, the fundamental source of the modern Jewish problem, as a problem to solve by which the only possibility was to find a secure homeland somewhere in the world, Pacifici, supported the thesis of Ahad Ha-Am, who maintained that the problem was the *Zerat haYahadut*, the oblivion of Judaism, whose solution was a work of acculturation to be pursued in the different homelands of the Jews.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, in that phase his nationalism was a form of “nationalisme diasporique,” for which the national awakening of the Jews should coincide with the rejuvenation of Jewish customs and institutions in the frame of the national states in which Jews lived. The return was first and foremost spiritual to be transformed into a practicable option only through a prophetic perspective.<sup>28</sup>

Pacifici also denied the identification of Judaism with religion as the modern phenomenology of religion, that wavered from ritualism perpetuated with unawareness of its meaning, to ascetical quest for spirituality deprived from normative aspects.

To express the uniqueness of Judaism, Pacifici resorted to the biblical concept of “Nafscenu,” literally “our soul:”

in that tiny word, in that pluralizing of the personality, in that “we” substituted by “me,” I learned to recognize in myself a type of personality that differentiated from the typical individual. [...] it made me feel an intrinsic difference between me and the others, between Israel and humanity [...] I saw Israel proposing to itself, as a conscious program of life for centuries, the accomplishment of a differentiated human being, the accomplishment of the historical type of Israel. Israel that voluntarily creates itself along the centuries.<sup>29</sup>

Theology, history and national reflection overlapped in his mind: Jewish history was the biblical epopee of a people without a territory that transformed traditions and norms in the space of existence. Collective and at the same time individual, the Jewish nation survived through that bond of responsibility for

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<sup>27</sup> Herschel Edelheit, *History of Zionism. A handbook and dictionary* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 62-3.

<sup>28</sup> For a definition of Diasporism see Israel Bartal, “Autonomie, autonomisme, diasporisme,” in *Les Juifs et le XX siècle. Dictionnaire critique* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 2000), 36-46. Pacifici, *La nostra sintesi*, 100. He would have returned to the topic of the “pride of Galut” with the two articles “Il Galut col G maiuscolo,” published on the front page of *Il Corriere Israelitico* on January and March 1912.

<sup>29</sup> Pacifici, *La nostra sintesi*, 158-159.

which “everyone in Israel is the entire Israel.”<sup>30</sup> The encounter with modernity, according to Pacifici, had weakened that sense of mutuality, lessening the role of Judaism in everyday life; therefore a project of restoration appeared imperative to perpetuate the existence of the Jews as a nation.

The responsibility of revival was attributed to an avant-garde group of young activists devoted to the study and to the intensive practice of Judaism. Their exemplary behavior was meant to enlighten the path for “the Jewish multitude to produce the practical return to a full Jewish life.”<sup>31</sup> The reference was evidently to his environment, to the group of graduates of the rabbinical college among which were those who would become the “symbols of Italian Jewry,” like Umberto Cassuto, David Prato, Angelo Sacerdoti, and Angelo Disegni.<sup>32</sup>

The radicalism reflected evidently the vibrant Florentine atmosphere as well as that generational dynamics mentioned by Aldo Sorani in 1907, for which the “sons” desired to blot out the secularized legacy left by the “fathers” that the whole youth movement remained formally independent from the FSI.<sup>33</sup>

With his essay, Pacifici took his place at the forefront of that avant-garde; his attitude and the contents of his reflection impressed the spokesman for political Zionism, Dante Lattes, who saw in that emerging figure “one of the strong comrades of our acrid battle [...] for our program of Risorgimento” and expected “a lot [from you] for the awake of our national consciousness.”<sup>34</sup>

## The Season of the Conventions and the Development of a Cultural Strategy

In July 1911, *La Settimana Israelitica* launched the project of a youth congress to be held in Florence to gather the young Jews involved in the movement of cultural renaissance across the peninsula. The meeting, that took place the

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, *La nostra sintesi*, 100.

<sup>32</sup> Lionella Viterbo, “La nomina del Rabbino Margulies: un excursus nella Firenze ebraica di fine Ottocento,” in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 59/3 (1993): 67-89.

<sup>33</sup> The attitude of the Florentine group was synthesized as the “children’s spirit of revolt against the fathers” by Carlo Alberto Viterbo, “Un maestro ancora presente,” in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 38/4 (1972): 195-208, 197-98.

<sup>34</sup> Dante Lattes to Alfonso Pacifici, not dated, P172/124, CAHJP.

following October, was actually the first of a longer season that constituted the “place” of the Zionist Italian *Kulturdebatte*.<sup>35</sup>

Scholarship has elaborated an ambivalent judgment of those conventions. On the one hand, it has esteemed their representative and political function for the whole Italian Jewry, especially considering that in the same moment Italian Zionism was substantially silent as a consequence of the nationalistic polemics raised during the Libyan campaign.<sup>36</sup> On the other side it has underlined the modest success of the proposals discussed in that siege, that remained “more on paper than in reality.”<sup>37</sup> Not for Pacifici, who, on the contrary, meeting after meeting, strengthened his mentoring role and was finally consecrated as the leader of the Jewish Italian “renaissance.”

Shortly before the congress he intervened in the debate with two articles that prepared the field for the forthcoming lecture. The first, “To be Jewish is to be modern,” was an attempt to actualize the Jewish renaissance, presenting it as an outcome of the *Zeitgeist*. Pacifici, in fact, asserted that its intellectual roots were those of Italian idealism and historicism, for which everyone “tends to tie up bonds with the past [...], and new duties towards posterity appear.” Then, he continued his anti-reactionary defense maintaining that the nature of that revival as well was modern, insofar it consisted in a “practical reaffirmation of the Jewish nationalism,” that he considered an “antibourgeois force.”<sup>38</sup> No other claims, effectively, could have shown better the influence of the context, since the nationalist call and the antibourgeois criticisms were features that in the same period characterized also the political and the ideological discourse of some Italian cultural and political avant-gardes, that were settled mostly in Florence.<sup>39</sup> That self-portrait, moreover, discloses the dynamics that presided over the formation of the cultural identity of Italian Jews, even of a Jewish radical soul as Pacifici. A mechanism of osmosis, of border-crossing between the Jewish and the

<sup>35</sup> “Appello ai giovani,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, July 14, 1911, 1.

<sup>36</sup> Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo*, 74. On the spreading of antisemitism during the Libyan campaign see Stefano Caviglia, *L'identità salvata. Gli ebrei di Roma tra fede e nazione 1870-1938* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1996), 139-51; Tullia Catalan, “L'antisemitismo nazionalista italiano visto da un ebreo triestino. Carlo Morpurgo e il ‘caso Coppola’” *Qualestoria* 1-2 (1994): 95-118; Ferrara degli Uberti, *Fare gli ebrei italiani*, 219-20.

<sup>37</sup> Mario Toscano, “Prime note sui fermenti culturali e le esperienze organizzative dei giovani ebrei italiani tra il 1911 e il 1925,” in *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 7-12 (1981): 136-42, 139.

<sup>38</sup> “Essere ebrei è essere moderni,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, September 15, 1911, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Elisabetta Mondello, “Le riviste del primo Novecento,” in *Storia generale della letteratura italiana*, vol. XII (Milan: Motta Editore, 2004), 286-310.

homeland's national narratives, of interaction of complementary intellectual repertoires that were essential to nurture the development of the "subculture" in its dual nature.<sup>40</sup>

With the same aim to prove the modernity of the Jewish revival, a few days before the congress, Pacifici wrote the article "For a Jewish classicism," in which he explained that the *ethos* of the movement was not that of "classicism for classicism," that is of erudition for erudition's sake, but a form of militancy *tout court* made of everyday work in order to restore Judaism in the daily life of Jews. By seeing Jews practicing their "specific integral life," he concluded, the hosting society would have ceased to perceive them as "*pariah*" and to finally look at them as a people.<sup>41</sup>

On that basis, he presented the lecture on "Religious practices" at the first youth congress between October 29<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> 1911. In this speech Pacifici insisted on the fact that religious practices were the only markers of the Jewish national identity because they were prescribed by the sole source of Jewish nationality, Torah, and because they had constituted the sole track of nationhood in the centuries of dispersion. In that way he created a hierarchy between faith and politics, as well as a differentiation between Judaism and other creeds. In fact, although acknowledging Zionism's credit in awakening the Jewish consciences, Pacifici maintained that only an integral return to religious practices could lead to the restoration of Judaism in its national dimension. On the other side, for the close relation between norms and national identity, Judaism could neither be defined as "religion," nor be compared to other faiths, where rituals and customs had for him only a mere theological value.<sup>42</sup>

The lecture was welcomed by Margulies, who had launched the same message of the importance of religious practices in his speech on the duty of the sabbatical rest,<sup>43</sup> whereas from the columns of *Il Corriere Israelitico*, short after the congress, several voices of dissent raised to criticize Pacifici for his controversial reading of Zionism and for his aversion towards the definition of "religion" applied to

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<sup>40</sup> For a definition of "subculture" and an analysis for the German Jewry's case see David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry 1780-1840*, (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 5-6.

<sup>41</sup> "Per un classicismo ebraico," in *La Settimana Israelitica*, October 27, 1911, 3.

<sup>42</sup> "Le pratiche religiose," in *La Settimana Israelitica*, November 9, 1911, 2-3.

<sup>43</sup> Del Canuto, *Il movimento sionistico*, 68.

Judaism.<sup>44</sup>

He defended himself from the critics of a pale Zionist conviction by addressing the political value of Zionism, both as an ideology and as a form of belonging. He professed himself Zionist because “Zionism is in the air” and inasmuch he perceived the movement as a revival of the “sentiment of Jewish nationality.”<sup>45</sup> By presenting it as a product of osmosis, Pacifici denied his affiliation to any political premise and from the other side, insisting on the “sentiment,” he characterized Zionism primarily as an interior and spiritual itinerary. That a-political stance, however, didn’t prevent him from concern about the process of national self-identification of Italian Jews on the verge of the Libyan campaign, so to pacify in advance any possible remark or criticism of dual loyalty, he clarified that his position was that of someone who “although having regained the sense of his belonging to the people of Israel still feels perfectly Italian.”<sup>46</sup>

He motivated his contentious stance towards Zionism also “from within”, from the point of view of a cultural-religious Zionist, criticizing its laicism for which the Jews had maybe realized to be “a people” but still not to be “the people.” Only “a movement of culture, of high culture” could fulfill the purpose of making them aware of their uniqueness.<sup>47</sup>

On the other side, Pacifici had to face the polemics for his well-known opposition of defining Judaism as “religion,” a conviction that was raised mainly by Samuele Colombo, the chief-rabbi of Leghorn. The two engaged into a journalistic crossfire entitled “Religion or not religion” that took place on *La Settimana Israelitica* for several weeks starting from January 1912.<sup>48</sup> Colombo denied the definition of Judaism as a nationality because it implied the concept of “nation” that was “something contingent, that could exist or not.” On the contrary, “religion” intended as “eternal truth,” was the notion that best, and solely, fit the essence of Judaism that was for him the “law of Israel, of the world, of infinity,” and to sustain his convincement he quoted also Elia Benamozegh’s teachings on Jewish universalism.<sup>49</sup> Pacifici answered punctually with a series of articles that he then collected in what became his second monograph, *Israele*

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<sup>44</sup> The zenith of the polemics was surely represented by the article “Sionisti, A-sionisti, Anti-sionisti,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, January 31, 1912, 169. The article was anonym, signed by “A Young Jew.”

<sup>45</sup> “Il sionismo è nell’aria,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, November 21, 1911, 2.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> “Il Galut col G maiuscolo,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, January 15, 1912, 1.

<sup>48</sup> All the articles are now in Alfonso Pacifici’s paper, P172/312, CAHJP.

<sup>49</sup> Samuele Colombo, “Religione, religione!” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, December 29, 1911, 3.

*l'unico. Ricerca di una definizione integrale dell'ebraismo*, that was published in October 1912.<sup>50</sup>

In the essay, he reaffirmed the *leitmotif* of *segullà* by presenting Judaism as a monistic system that embraced faith, history, daily lives, culture and language. That latter aspect, that was one among the most functional for the Jewish nationalist discourse and that had already been tackled at the congress by the Florentine rabbinical college's graduate Elia Artom,<sup>51</sup> emerged as a new trope in Pacifici's conceptual system.

As such, the "emergence of Hebrew," that represented a central pillar of the European Zionist *Kulturdebatte*, finally involved Jewish Italy as well, where, for the historical specificity of the context – one above all: the absence of the Yiddish question – it would have assumed different nuances and understanding.<sup>52</sup>

The Hebrew language was for Pacifici a fundamental requisite of Jewish identity and not simply because it epitomized its distinctive national spirit, but also because its instrumental function provided tools to access the innermost truth of Judaism enshrined in Torah. For the loss of the competence in Hebrew, he continued, Jews had turned to "translations" into other languages, that is into other conceptual systems, in order to understand Judaism, with the only result of distorting its essence. "De-translating" the Jewish culture, that is regaining expertise in Hebrew to explore it in its original form, was for the Florentine intellectual the key to return to Judaism and to acquire a complete and distinctive Jewish national identity, because "a people who speaks its language can never doubt of its existence as a people."<sup>53</sup>

The theorization, however, wasn't disjointed from practice. In September 1912, he launched the project of the "Palestinian Scholarship," a travel grant for students who wished to go to Palestine to improve their skills in spoken Hebrew. For that purpose, together with Guido Castelfranco, Carlo Alberto Viterbo and other Florentine comrades, he established an apposite Committee appointed to raise funds, to select candidates and to organize the mission; in addition to that, he personally contributed to the enterprise devolving all the incoming profits of

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<sup>50</sup> Alfonso Pacifici, *Israele l'unico. Ricerca di una definizione integrale dell'ebraismo* (Florence: Giuntina, 1912).

<sup>51</sup> Schächter, *The Jews of Italy*, 215.

<sup>52</sup> Berkowitz, *Zionist culture*, 40-76; Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism* (New York: Basic, 1982), 112-24

<sup>53</sup> Pacifici, *Israele l'unico*, 140-42.

his new book to the Scholarship.<sup>54</sup>

The initiative was welcomed by Dante Lattes as well as by the FSI;<sup>55</sup> however, what counted the most, was the support it received from outside. The theologian and leader of the French reformed movement Aimé Pallière, immediately offered his help.<sup>56</sup> Above all, Pacifici found an illustrious supervision in the master of contemporary Hebrew language, Eliezer Ben Yehuda, whom he had contacted to learn from his pioneering experience.<sup>57</sup> Through his son Jonathan, Ben Yehuda welcomed the development of a Hebraist sensitivity in Jewish Italy and guaranteed help to the Italian students who would arrive in Palestine in the frame of the Scholarship.<sup>58</sup>

Galvanized by such an eminent godfather, Pacifici attempted to hasten the project by presenting it publicly at the second youth congress, which took place in Turin between December the 22<sup>nd</sup> and the 25<sup>th</sup> 1912.<sup>59</sup> His lecture “The Hebrew language”, chosen as the opening speech, emphasized the duty Jews have to learn and to practice Hebrew so intensively as to become bilingual. The repercussions to that call were ambivalent. On the one hand, it was a sincere wish that Italian Jews regain proficiency in Hebrew, eventually reaching the competence showed by David Krinkin, Russian Jew living in Rome, president of the local section of the “Pro Cultura,” active participant to the *Kulturdebatte*, whom Pacifici had always admired for his expertise.<sup>60</sup> On the other side, however, he was also conscious that an excessively strong focus on Hebrew may have appeared prejudiced, stirring the endless polemics on the Jewish double affiliation, so he clarified that he wasn’t calling for the substitution of Italian language.<sup>61</sup> Bilingualism as a regime of coexistence of two idioms that is of two

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<sup>54</sup> The Committee was composed by Guido Castelfranco (President), Alfonso Pacifici (secretary), Carlo Alberto Viterbo (treasurer), Umberto Cassuto (counsellor), Moisè Foa (counsellor), David Krinkin (counsellor), Adolfo Ottolenghi (counsellor). For the resume of the annual activity see “Committee for the Palestinian Scholarship,” March 12, 1913, P172/82, CAHJP. Informations about the Committee’s activity also in “Israele l’unico,” *La Settimana Israelitica*, September 11, 1912, 3; “Per la riconquista della nostra lingua,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, September 20, 1912, 1.

<sup>55</sup> Lattes praised the initiative in a conclusive comment to Pacifici’s article “Per la rinascita della nostra lingua,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, September 15, 1912, 2.

<sup>56</sup> “Sottoscrizione per la Borsa di studio palestinese,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, November 15, 1912, 3; a reference to Aimé Pallière in Collette Sirat “Pallière Aimé,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol.15, 602.

<sup>57</sup> Alfonso Pacifici to Eliezer Ben Yehuda, 2 December 1912, P172/82, CAHJP.

<sup>58</sup> Jonathan Ben Yehuda to Alfonso Pacifici, 15 December 1912, P172/61, CAHJP.

<sup>59</sup> “Alla vigilia del secondo congresso giovanile,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, December 20, 1912, 1-2.

<sup>60</sup> Schächter, *The Jews of Italy*, 216.

<sup>61</sup> “La lingua ebraica,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, January 3, 1913, 3.

systems of identity markers was in fact the linguistic *figura* of the dynamics of self-identification of the “returned” Jews of Diaspora. With that claim, thus, he sought to reconfirm that the revival of Jewish culture, even in its most radical aspects as that of the “Hebraist emergence,” wasn’t to the detriment of Italian patriotic affiliation, that the two spheres of belonging could cohabitate, although differently, as “homeland”, exactly like languages coexist as mother tongues in the bilingual status.

The commitment to the linguistic enterprise, affirmed Pacifici in Turin, could constitute the Italian contribution to the Zionist *Kulturfrage* and for that reason he challenged unwaveringly the Jewish communities not to be “prudent”, to “cut the dead branches” of the local charity, and to cooperate on the initiative.<sup>62</sup> The polycentrism of Jewish Italy and the persistent lack of an institution that centralized sources and strengths was a structural obstacle for the development of projects on wide scales.<sup>63</sup> In particular, Pacifici was addressing the *Comitato delle Università Israelitiche Italiane* (Committee of the Jewish Italian Communities), whose establishment was being discussed in that same period and in which he was evidently placing expectation for support to the Scholarship.<sup>64</sup>

Nonetheless, in Turin his wishes seemed partially satisfied: the “Hebraist campaign” was inserted in the agenda of the convention and, on the side of the youth cooperation, the *Federazione Italiana della Gioventù Ebraica* (Jewish Italian Youth Federation) was established.<sup>65</sup> In the frame of that new institution, and with Pacifici’s decisive support, in October 1913 a new Jewish nationalist group, called “Giovane Israele” [Young Israel] was also founded. Its main activity coincided mostly with the publication of a homonymous journal.<sup>66</sup>

In Milan and Florence the Committee for the Palestinian Scholarship worked intensively to implement his activities related to the teaching of Hebrew language,<sup>67</sup> but the other local branches the Federation remained substantially

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*; Pacifici had already solicited the Jewish communities to help locally the youth’s movement (“Il movimento giovanile e le Università israelitiche,” in *Il Corriere Israelitico*, December 13, 1912, 1-2).

<sup>63</sup> Ester Capuzzo, *Gli ebrei italiani dal Risorgimento alla scelta sionista* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2004), 79-107.

<sup>64</sup> Tullia Catalan, “L’organizzazione delle comunità ebraiche dall’Unità alla prima guerra mondiale,” in *Storia d’Italia. Gli ebrei in Italia*, vol. 2, 1243-1290. Pacifici sent the same message at the VII Zionist congress that took place in Milan in May 1913, see “Il VII convegno federale sionistico italiano,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, May 9, 1913, 2-4.

<sup>65</sup> Del Canuto, *Il movimento sionista*, 77-8.

<sup>66</sup> Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo*, 89-90; Attilio Milano, “Un secolo di stampa,” 129.

<sup>67</sup> The committee managed to publish a Hebrew grammar book (a copy of the volume is now in



lethargic. It was as though all the youth fervor that had imbued the debates during the previous years had dissolved exactly when it should have turned into practice. Or at least, it seemed that further incentive was needed. And it was precisely what happened with the third youth congress that took place in Rome in February 1914,<sup>68</sup> where it was up to Pacifici to rekindle the Federation with the speech “The organization of the Jewish youth.”

He individuated in the persistent localism and in the lack of top-bottom relations the main reasons of the weakness of the institution. As remedies he suggested centralization, a strong leadership and a clear program of action to be replicated in every community without possibilities of deviations. He attempted to solve personally and immediately the first two necessities by entering, together with Elia Artom and Giuseppe Levi, the Directive Committee designated to write the Federation’s statute.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, he responded to the third necessity by illustrating a program in four main points, each one corresponding to a field of action in which young Jews should operate: language (study of Hebrew); culture (cultivation of Jewish studies); tradition (extension of *Halakah* in daily lives, especially the Shabbat rest) and Palestine (interest in the development of the *Yishuv*).<sup>70</sup> And again, he gave an example of what cultural militancy should look like in “his” Florence by establishing the youth group of “Bachurei Israel” that used to gather on Saturday around “one of the benches in the Temple” and to use Hebrew for any sort of communication.<sup>71</sup> However, that venture “was terribly, and too early, interrupted in its birth by the War.”<sup>72</sup>

## Which Homeland for the Jews?

At the onset of WWI, the debate on the Jewish national affiliation mounted massively in Italy. Jews considered the conflict as the supreme occasion to

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Alfonso Pacifici’s papers, P172/82, CAHJP); to hire an instructor coming from Palestine (“Firenze,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, November 21, 1913, 3), to introduce spoken Hebrew in the program of studies at the local Jewish school and to establish a fellowship for an external student who wished to study Hebrew in Florence (“Comitato per la borsa di studio palestinese,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, October 31, 1913, 3)

<sup>68</sup> “Il compito del III convegno,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, February 13, 1914, 1.

<sup>69</sup> “Statuto provvisorio della Federazione,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, August 28, 1914, 3.

<sup>70</sup> “Dell’organizzazione della gioventù ebraica,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, February 27, 1914, 3-5. Pacifici then explained his proposal in the pamphlet *La Federazione giovanile ebraica* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1914).

<sup>71</sup> Memorandum Sezione Bachurei Israel, not dated, P172/7, CAHJP.

<sup>72</sup> Alfonso Pacifici’s memory, not dated, P172/82, CAHJP.

demonstrate the complete dedication to their homeland, however the mobilization disclosed more urgently the crisis that was affecting Italian Jewry: the clash between Zionist and anti-Zionist intensified; the anxiety to prove the loyalty grew tremendously and the idea that Palestine could become an asylum for persecuted Jews of Eastern Europe became more concrete.<sup>73</sup>

Alfonso Pacifici was brought into the debate by Ferruccio Servi, director of the journal *Il Vessillo Israelitico* [The Jewish Flag], who perceived in his system of integral Judaism an obliteration of Italianness and a disavowal of patriotism and consequently solicited him to dissipate any doubt on merit by clarifying his conception of “homeland.”<sup>74</sup> Pacifici answered enshrining his belief into two complementary manifests: “My homeland” and “Our homeland.”

In the first, differently from what the title might suggests, he didn’t choose between Zion and Italy, rather he explained “his” conception of homeland, that was anything but linear and uniform. He distinguished two possible ways to understand the concept: one civic-territorial; the other ethno-anthropological. If “homeland” was to be conceived as the land of residence, of civic duties and of education, so Italy could be intended as such. But if “homeland” meant “also that land, or better, that civilization, that ethnic group with whom one feels so fused and assimilated” to sense “the unrestrained nostalgia for the land once abandoned that keeps calling it “my Land”, so “Zion” was homeland.<sup>75</sup> The two conceptions weren’t alternative, rather coexisting; so patriotism was saved.

The second article, “Our homeland”, appealed to those assimilated Italian Jews who recognized exclusively Italy as their homeland, disregarding Zionism as a nationalist movement. To validate Zionism, to legitimize it as a possible cultural and national element of identification, Pacifici recalled the historical experience during which Italian Jews completely recognized themselves at the same time as Italian citizens and as emancipated Jews, that is Risorgimento.<sup>76</sup> Zionism was for him an “enterprise of Risorgimento” because Jews were imbuing it with the same Universalist values of national pride and freedom they had learnt by

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<sup>73</sup> Ester Capuzzo, *Gli ebrei nella società italiana: comunità e istituzioni tra Ottocento e Novecento* (Roma: Carocci, 1999), 119-44; Toscano, *Ebraismo e antisemitismo*, 110-54.

<sup>74</sup> Pacifici was contested for his too audacious use of the term “nationalism” for the Jewish renaissance (“L’imprudenza della prudenza,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, June 27, 1913, 1).

<sup>75</sup> “La mia patria,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, August 15, 1913, 2.

<sup>76</sup> The bibliography is extensive; an interesting reflection on the relationship between the Jewish understanding of nation and the National discourse elaborated in Italy during Risorgimento is that of Francesca Sofia, “La nazione degli ebrei risorgimentali,” in *Un’identità in bilico: l’ebraismo italiano tra liberalismo, fascismo e democrazia (1861-2011)*, *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 86/1-2 (2010), 95-112.

participating actively to Italian unification.<sup>77</sup> Rather than historical antipodes, thus, Risorgimento and Zionism were twin-paradigms of national identification. On a conceptual stage, that coexistence was possible because Pacifici differentiated between two forms of national affiliation and their respective legacies: Risorgimento was a political one, that had consecrated Jews as Italians, while Zionism was a spiritual one, that would provide them with a rejuvenated cultural identity.

The commitment with the latter would not endanger the affinity to the former. Only “sentimental conflict” could possibly descend from that double-belonging, but in no way Jews would disappoint “the major or minor participation to Italian life.”<sup>78</sup> Italy was firmly “homeland.” However, when WWI broke out that “conflict” evoked by Pacifici came into being, with fundamental influences on the evolution of the Zionist discourse.

### The Challenge of WWI. Between Civism and Jewish Nationalism

In the war period, the Jewish sentiment of national affiliation faced a sort of inner split: On the one side, Jews answered to the call of their respective homelands enrolling in the army; on the other hand they became more sensitive to the call of the Jewish nation, for the evolution of international Zionism that brought the perspective of a solution to the Jewish quest closer.

The two complementary cores of Pacifici’s thought and identity – the Italian and the Jewish – submitted to the same force of the “trial of the nation”, and strengthened simultaneously: the haste of the civic duty grew inasmuch Italy’s entrance into the conflict approached, as well as his Zionism moved to more proper political postures.

He spoke about war in terms of a “tragedy” that, by compelling Jews to fight one against the other in their respective national armies, interrupted the project of *segullà*.<sup>79</sup> By exploiting the category of “nation”, war shattered the *Kelal Israel*, therefore Jews should take a position against it and proclaimed themselves “pacifist.”<sup>80</sup> Pacifism, he maintained, didn’t coincide with “cosmopolitanism,” that is with the dismissal of the concept of “nation” for the sake of universalism, otherwise such a stand would have sacrificed his theory of the uniqueness of

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<sup>77</sup> “La nostra patria,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, January 16, 1914. The text was born as a lecture, that was delivered at the Jewish cultural circle of Verona on January 6<sup>th</sup> 1914.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> “Nell’ora della nostra tragedia,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, August 7, 1914, 1.

<sup>80</sup> Alfonso Pacifici to Eldad, 16 May 1915, P172/11, CAHJP.

Judaism and of the Jewish people.<sup>81</sup> The Florentine intellectual intended pacifism as an inner attitude that would permit the Jews to take part in the war and simultaneously to save their identity; to answer to the homeland's call without forgetting to be Jewish.

He expressed that stance with the formula of "sentimental neutralism," that was also an echo of Italy's position in the first phase of the war.<sup>82</sup> "Neutralism" didn't mean either abstention from civic duty nor forgetfulness of the allegiance, rather participation to the "two mobilizations."<sup>83</sup> Italian Jews couldn't decline the enlistment both because it was their duty as citizens and because it was the supreme demonstration of their loyalty to the homeland that had emancipated them, but at the same time they couldn't ignore the Jewish nationhood, all the more in the moment when the recognition of the national aspiration of the Jewish people seemed "really tomorrow."<sup>84</sup>

Pacifici then conceded to his traditional a-Zionism; for the first time, he entered the flow of political discourse and assumed a radical position supporting "Palestine" as the sole possible solution to the Jewish question. That turn wasn't a sudden conversion to territorialism, rather the adoption of one of the core-terms of the secularized vocabulary of Zionism re-semanticized in its meaning.<sup>85</sup> The influence of both the philanthropism of Italian Zionism and the messianism of proto-Zionism to which he aspired was evident. Palestine was to be the nation first and foremost for East European Jews, for whom "homeland" had turned to a place of persecution. Not for Western European Jews, least of all for Italian Jews, who could live their Jewishness openly.

Although contingency was making the "return" a matter of concrete survival and the recognition of the Jewish national aspiration on territorial basis a political issue, Pacifici didn't abandon the eschatological view. He fathomed the eventual development of international Zionism as a:

solemn and practical recognition of our millenarian historical national aspirations that express themselves in the reacquisition of an organized core of Jewish life, also partially autonomous in our land.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> "Israele e la pace," in *La Settimana Israelitica*, August 14, 1914, 1-2.

<sup>82</sup> "Quel che dobbiamo volere," in *La Settimana Israelitica*, March 11, 1915, 1.

<sup>83</sup> "Le due mobilitazioni," in *La Settimana Israelitica*, June 3, 1915, 1.

<sup>84</sup> "L'anno della vigilia," in *La Settimana Israelitica*, March 25-April 1, 1915, 1.

<sup>85</sup> The same dynamics occurred in German Jewry, as discussed in Y. Zur, "German Jewish orthodoxy," III.

<sup>86</sup> "Quel che dobbiamo volere," in *La Settimana Israelitica*, March 11, 1915, 1.

The return was not presented as *‘aliya* but as the retake of the national continuity that had seen his solution with the beginning of the exile. In that messianic reading, the development of the “core of Jewish life” as an institutional organism was set in a sort of a-temporal dimension: it was a perspective that could “also” materialize sometime in a prophetic future, to individuate which hermeneutics, and not politics, was necessary.

However, although involved directly in the return, Western Jews, as well as Western society as whole, should feel committed to the destiny of Eastern European Jewry. For that reason, in January 1915 Alfonso Pacifici and three members of the Florentine group of “Bachurei Israel” established the “Pro Causa Ebraica” Committee to spread consciousness about the condition of Russian Jewry, particularly among the gentile society, and to gain support for the recognition of the Jewish national right on a territorial basis.<sup>87</sup> For the purpose, the Committee elaborated an apposite pamphlet, enlarged the net of cooperation with two analogue groups in Milan and Turin and, above all, contacted illustrious elements of Italian politics and society, among which the historian Pasquale Villari and the former (Jewish) prime minister Luigi Luzzatti, to have them sign the petition.<sup>88</sup>

In that perspective, the territorial option evolved further, insofar it transcended the Jewish discourse and the context of Jewish nationalism itself to become an ethic issue, that, as such, deserved to be brought to the limelight beyond any religious distinction.<sup>89</sup>

Pacifici’s personal commitment to the cause, however, was limited in time since in 1916, after obtaining the title of *maskil*, he enrolled as a military rabbi.<sup>90</sup> The new role and the new enterprise didn’t mean a deviation or a release from the nationalist apostolate;<sup>91</sup> for him, on the contrary, they were a sort of crowning. He considered military rabbis, in fact, the harbingers of the Jewish sense of nationhood – in its double Italian-Jewish articulation – on the lines. Their task was to “motivate Jews to military duty” but also, and mainly, to assure spiritual aid and above all to solve “the divisions that could rise” among Jews soldiers “for nationals matters.”<sup>92</sup> In other words, military rabbis would reinforce “Israel’s

<sup>87</sup> Alfonso Pacifici’s memory, 15 January 1915, P172/7, CAHJP.

<sup>88</sup> Comitato Pro Causa Ebraica, 14 May 1916, P172/7, CAHJP.

<sup>89</sup> Alfonso Pacifici, *La questione nazionale ebraica e la guerra europea* (Firenze: Comitato fiorentino Pro ebrei oppressi, 1917).

<sup>90</sup> Piattelli, “Repertorio,” 225; Pacifici announced his departure in “Verso il nostro domani,” *Israel*, May 11, 1916, 3.

<sup>91</sup> “I rabbini militari,” in *La Settimana Israelitica*, July 15, 1915, 1.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid. On the military rabbinate see Mario Toscano, “Religione, patriottismo, sionismo: il

lines on the lines,” reminding Jews of the homeland they were fighting for and to which ultimate *Heimat* they belonged.

## Conclusion

Pacifici didn't leave a void behind him when he departed for the trenches. In January 1916, together with Dante Lattes, he had established the weekly *Israel*, that became the most important Jewish Italian cultural enterprise in the Twenties and the Thirties.<sup>93</sup> The journal was the perfect synthesis of his conception of Jewish nationalism based on a pragmatic conception of “culture” as a herald of Jewish nationhood and as a tool of Jewish nationalization. As an intransigent pioneer of the *Kulturfrage* and at the same time as an Italian, he understood how that nationalization, necessarily had to run parallel in order to succeed. Strongly Jewish in its contents and in its goals, at the same time it was complementary, in the cultural address and in the historical paradigms of reference, to the Italian nationalization that, by then, was fully and deeply accomplished.<sup>94</sup>

*Israel's* first front page was emblematic in that sense: with its title in Hebrew fonts, it proposed to be mirror of Jewishness, the voice of, and for, the Jewish national redemption. Redemption that, again, was presented and expressed as “Risorgimento.”<sup>95</sup>

Pacifici approached the theme of Jewish nation and engaged in Jewish nationalism when both concepts became diriment for the Italian culture and politics in a way and with an exclusive meaning that were problematic for the accomplishment of the integral project he was supporting.<sup>96</sup>

Such a “political eye” as Weizmann's, however, years later, acknowledged and praised that apostolate, judging it as a “great moral force” that not simply animated Italian Jewry in the Twenties and forth on, but also stirred the vocation of the tiny élite of people who, in the Thirties, “were turning their eyes to Palestine.”<sup>97</sup> Vocation that Pacifici himself assumed in 1934, as a sign that culture

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rabbinato miliatre nell'Italia della Grande Guerra (1915-1918),” in *Zakhor* 9 (2005): 77-133.

<sup>93</sup> Milano, “Un secolo di stampa,” 121-22.

<sup>94</sup> I take the well-known expression from Arnaldo Momigliano, *Pagine ebraiche* (Turin: Einaudi, 1987), 237-39.

<sup>95</sup> “Il nostro programma,” in *Israel*, January 13, 1916, 1.

<sup>96</sup> Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti, Daniele Menozzi, “Ebrei e nazione. Comportamenti e rappresentazioni nell'età dell'emancipazione,” in *Storia e problemi contemporanei* 20/45 (2007).

<sup>97</sup> Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and error* (New York: Harper&Brothers Publishers, 1949), 287. The

could definitely succeed in transforming nation, religion and Eretz Israel into a way of life.

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relation between Pacifici’s apostolate and the Jewish Italian emigration to Palestine is underlined also in Ferrara Degli Uberti, *Fare gli ebrei italiani*, 208. For a history of the Jewish Italian emigration to Palestine until 1940 see Arturo Marzano, *Una terra per rinascere. Gli ebrei italiani e l’emigrazione in Palestina prima della guerra. 1920-1940* (Genova: Marietti, 2003).