

Fascist Jews Between Politics and the Economy: Five Biographical Profiles

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Abstract

The relationship between Jews and Fascism was troubled, complex and, in some respects, paradoxical. This article tells the story of some of the protagonists of Fascist political and economic life: Guido Jung, Gino Olivetti, Ettore Ovazza, Guglielmo Reiss-Romoli and Oscar Sinigaglia. With this essay, I wish to offer a sample, albeit neither exhaustive nor complete, of the political history of some key individuals who entertained diverse relationships both with Fascism and with their religious identity. Whether they acknowledged their Jewish roots or had drifted apart from the community had little relevance when the racial persecutions began: they all ended up being classified as racially Jewish by a regime they themselves had helped to build.

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Ettore Ovazza

Guido Jung

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Preliminary remarks

This article intends to illustrate the role played in Fascist Italy by Guido Jung, Gino Olivetti, Ettore Ovazza, Guglielmo Reiss-Romoli and Oscar Sinigaglia. At center stage will be placed their personal support of Fascism and, at the same time, their relationship with their Jewish roots. What was Fascism for them? How did they experience it? What form took on their Jewish identity? And how did they reconcile the traditions of their religion of origin with a regime that was increasingly steering the nation towards national-Catholicism?

One of the historians who has studied the totalitarian regime in detail, has warned us that one of the most widespread forms of “defascistization” of Fascism takes place through the tendency to empty it of the very same fascists.¹ Telling the story of these men allows us to illustrate the multicolored social and ideological landscape of Fascist Italy, but also to enquire what it meant to be Jewish and to be Fascist, to reflect on the unhappy, complex and from some points of view, paradoxical relationship that existed between (many) Jews and the regime. Indeed, these men, who had embraced Fascism from its very beginning, were in the end all racially labeled as Jews with the anti-Semitic legislation (even those who had distanced themselves from their religion of origin) and were, therefore, victims of the same regime they had supported. According to the anti-Semitic legislation, in particular the Royal Decree [*Regio Decreto Legge*] 1728/1938, a child whose parents were classified as belonging to the “Jewish race” was automatically considered of “Jewish race,” even if his professed a different religion.²

Fascist racial classification was based on bloodlines and not on the individual’s religious choices; the label “Jewish” was given even to those who did not feel any attachment to Judaism or Jewish communities, who had abandoned religion or renounced it and converted. This fact complicates the scenario and forces us to reflect on Jewish identity – a most slippery issue in the post-emancipation era. Therefore, it is essential to analyze how each individual related to his religion of origin; so, connections with Judaism must be traced back to the subjective level.³ Gathering information on how each individual envisaged his identity is not an easy task, further complications arise due to the fragmentation of the sources

¹ Emilio Gentile, *Fascismo, Storia e interpretazione*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza editore, 2005), 7.

² Michele Sarfatti, *Gli ebrei nell’Italia fascista. Vicende, identità, persecuzione*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2007), 170.

³ Ilaria Pavan, “Ebrei in affari tra realtà e pregiudizio. Paradigmi storiografici e percorsi di ricerca dall’Unità alle leggi razziali,” *Ebrei borghesi Identità familiare, solidarietà e affari nell’età dell’emancipazione*, eds. Barbara Armani and Guri Schwarz, *Quaderni storici*, 114 (2003): 776-821.

(excluding the private archives of Ettore Ovazza⁴ and Guido Jung⁵) and the need to critically deconstruct the narratives that those men wanted to transmit to their descendants; representations of recent history which had been completely cleansed of their involvement with the regime. Their *ex post* reconstructions of figures such as Jung, Olivetti, Reiss-Romoli and Sinigaglia (Ovazza did not survive the war) were, for many years, borne out by some economic historians, who were the first to draw up the biographical descriptions of the protagonists of public intervention in the economy during the years spanning from the crisis of 1929 to the post-war transformations. A national-patriotic view of the State's intervention in the economy, downplaying the role Fascist ideology, allowed for a celebration of the role played by such figures as *grand commis d'état*.⁶ The interpretation proposed by several scholars of Italian economic history tended to be non-political, reading the stories of those figures as that of experts being lent to the different governments, the Fascist one among others. Thus, the *caesura* of 1943 (representing the fall of the regime) was not given appropriate relevance, dwelling instead upon the continuity in those men's work, some of whom occupied key positions in the post-war Italian Republic. The confusion is understandable: on the one hand, because Fascism had identified itself with the nation, while on the other, the new Republican governments' choice to make use of such 'experts', who had worked with the regime, offered the chance to cover up or downplay their Fascist past.

The Protagonists

The protagonists of this essay – Jung, Olivetti, Ovazza, Reiss-Romoli and Sinigaglia - all played a part in the economy and politics of Fascist Italy. They were pillars of the regime, occupying important positions in the economy and in Fascist politics, some with a more distinct technical profile (but always politically involved) and others with a clearly more political one.

⁴ Kept in the Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea (Centre for Contemporary Jewish Documentation)

⁵ Kept in the Archivio Storico of the Banca d'Italia (from now on known as ASBI)

⁶ Ernesto Cianci, *Nascita dello Stato imprenditore in Italia*, (Milan: Mursia, 1977); Gianni Toniolo, *L'economia dell'Italia fascista*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza editore, 1980); Bruno Bottiglieri, "Guglielmo Reiss-Romoli" and Gianni Toniolo, "Oscar Sinigaglia," in *I protagonisti dell'intervento pubblico in Italia*, ed. Alberto Mortara, (Milan: Franco Angeli editore, 1984); Felice Guarneri, *Battaglie economiche fra le due guerre*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1989); Nicola De Ianni, *Il ministro soldato. Vita di Guido Jung*, (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2009).

They were characterized by an advanced economic-technical-financial education (almost all of them had a degree⁷) and came from very similar work experiences: entrepreneurial class, banking and industry. They were involved in industry, commerce, banking and all belonged to the upper-middle class.

Naturally, these men cannot be seen as representative of the orientation of their social class, nor do they offer answers to all the issues in play concerning the relationship between Jews and Fascism, and certainly they certainly do not provide a complete sample of the varied Jewish universe present in the peninsula. Rather, they offer access to a story that has still not been studied in detail; one that is difficult to tell as it represents a delicate but relevant theme, offering some insight into the complex relationship between the regime and the Jewish minority.⁸ We are aware then, as Ilaria Pavan writes, that this is an incomplete analysis of the relationships between part of the Italian-Jewish élite and Fascism and that this research path excludes most Italian Jews from the analysis.⁹ Nonetheless, the biographical approach remains the most suitable criterion to gauge the complexity of these issues.¹⁰

The rise and social integration of these men follow the path of the Italian nation: they develop a strong, evident patriotic, nationalistic and then Fascist conscience and this is why they were chosen for this article. They cultivated a strong sense of being Italian, of belonging to the nation, and shared a very clear national-patriotic identity-model.¹¹ They believed Fascism was the natural interpreter of their devotion to the nation.

Their Jewish identity and way of observing Judaism instead varied deeply. Ovazza was the only one who felt a strong attachment to his Jewish roots and openly, proudly, declared himself a Jew. The position of Olivetti, committed to the Zionist front, could also lead us to presume a certain degree of commitment to his Jewish identity. Jung, Reiss-Romoli and Sinigaglia, however, distanced

⁷ Jung was forced to interrupt his studies for professional reasons.

⁸ On the same theme see, Ilaria Pavan, “Les juifs italiens et le fascisme (1922-1938),” *L’Italie et la Shoah, Revue d’histoire de la Shoah*, 204(2016): 35-61.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁰ The studies that have dealt with this issue favouring the biographical tone are Luca Ventura, *Ebrei con il duce. «La nostra bandiera» (1934-1938)*, (Turin: Zamorani 2002); Ilaria Pavan, *Il Comandante. La vita di Federico Jarach e la memoria di un’epoca (1874-1951)*, (Milan: Proedi, 2001); Id., *Il podestà ebreo. La storia di Renzo Ravenna tra fascismo e leggi razziali*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza editore, 2006); Roberta Raspagliesi, *Guido Jung. Imprenditore ebreo e ministro fascista*, (Milan: Franco Angeli editore, 2012).

¹¹ Pavan compares the same attitudes in Renzo Ravenna, Federico Jarach and Giorgio Del Vecchio, *Les juifs italiens*, 54-57.

themselves from their Jewish origins, embracing the cult of their homeland in its lay and totalitarian versions.

Many Italian Jews practiced their religion privately, within the domestic walls. The only things that set them apart from the gentiles were, maybe, a distinct patriarchal spirit, a respect for their fathers' traditions, some ties of family and friendship, and their membership to the Jewish community. For example, Ovazza's niece recalled: "we knew we could not eat salami at home and that you could not marry someone who was not Jewish."¹² In fact, endogamy is the element that many shared and that confirms some sense of Jewish belonging; just like our protagonists, who married Jewish women or ones of Jewish origin.¹³ The Jewish family revealed itself to be, in some respect, a more conservative force than religion. In some families, the practice of using distinctive, biblical names persisted: Olivetti's first name was Jacob, Reiss-Romoli's second name was Simon.¹⁴

However, simultaneously, the processes of secularization, of estrangement from Jewish traditions and culture, and that of national integration had long since begun;¹⁵ in fact, participation in social and political life often coincided with a reduced religious practice. The Great War played a considerable role in favoring the approach towards a sacralization of the nation and a contextual estrangement from community ties.

Since the Risorgimento and then the unification of Italy, a particular relationship of fidelity and devotion between the Jews and the House of Savoy had developed: many took part in the struggle for national unification by offering financial support or signing up as volunteers in the suite of Garibaldi.¹⁶ The processes of building a national, independent and unified state and that of the Jews' judicial emancipation were parallel, coincident and intertwined.¹⁷ The

¹² Alexander Stille, *Uno su mille. Cinque famiglie ebraiche durante il fascismo*, (Milan: Mondadori, 2011), 20.

¹³ Except for Jung who never got married.

¹⁴ Concerning the evolution of Jewish first names in modern Italy see Stefano Pivato, *Il nome e la storia. Onomastica e religioni politiche nell'Italia contemporanea*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999), 84-85.

¹⁵ *Gli ebrei in Italia. Dall'emancipazione ad oggi. Storia d'Italia, Annali*, ed. Corrado Vivanti, (Turin: Einaudi, 1997); Mario Toscano, "Gli ebrei italiani e la prima guerra mondiale, 1915-1918: tra crisi religiosa e fremiti patriottici," *Italia Judaica: Gli ebrei nell'Italia unita 1870-1945*, paper presented at the IV international meeting, Siena, Italy, June 12-16, 1989, 298.

¹⁶ On the question of Jews and the Risorgimento see, Franco Della Peruta, "Gli ebrei nel Risorgimento fra interdizioni ed emancipazione," in *Gli ebrei in Italia*; Francesca Sofia, "Su assimilazione e autocoscienza ebraica nell'Italia liberale," *Italia Judaica*.

¹⁷ Arnaldo Momigliano, *Pagine ebraiche*, ed. Silvia Berti, (Turin: Einaudi, 1987), 141.

attitude of many Jews towards the Italian national movement was understandable since, thanks to the Statute granted by King Carlo Alberto (1848), they were finally freed and given equal rights.

Italian national and patriotic sentiment, though, were destined to change in the first ten years of the 1900s. Indeed, the Great War represented for many the continuation of the national unification project. The presence of Jews in the war held a deep and cathartic meaning for many of them, especially those who had distanced themselves from religion, or for those who were inclined to make traditional Jewish culture subordinate to Italian national identity.¹⁸

Except for Olivetti, our protagonists all shared the experience of the front: not only had they volunteered, but they were also strong supporters of intervention from as early as 1914. At the end of the conflict, they shared anti-socialist sentiment as well as the fascination for order and discipline that the war had helped to promote. Some of them were involved in the peace negotiations, in the associations set up to articulate Italian demands, they were ready to defend the homeland for which they had fought and wanted to see changed as compared to the 'little Italy' of the liberal age. In the climate of the post-war years a negative idea of liberal-democratic politics and a tension towards the building of some alternative circulated widely. For them, like many others, Fascism represented the alternative to the old order.¹⁹

They each had a different role within the regime: Ovazza was perhaps the most intellectual – he tried to reflect in his own way on Fascism and on the relationship between Jewish identity and Fascist commitment; Jung's role was clearly more political: member of Parliament from 1924 to 1938, he was the Minister for Finance from 1932 to 1935; Reiss-Romoli and Sinigaglia were committed on a more technical level but agreed with the politics of the regime and its corporative ideology.²⁰ The corporative solution, in fact, represented a basic tendency in Fascist ideology and was followed by Olivetti.

Their final course was also different: Ovazza was the only one not to survive the persecution, while Sinigaglia and Reiss-Romoli not only survived, but managed

¹⁸ On the Italian Jews' participation in the First World War, Ester Capuzzo, "L'ora della prova: l'ebraismo italiano di fronte alla guerra," in *Gli ebrei nella società italiana. Comunità e istituzioni tra Ottocento e Novecento*, (Rome: Carocci, 1999); Toscano, "Gli ebrei italiani e la prima guerra mondiale."

¹⁹ Adrian Lyttelton, *La conquista del potere. Il fascismo dal 1919 al 1929*, (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1974); Roberto Vivarelli, *Storia delle origini del fascismo. L'Italia dalla grande guerra alla marcia su Roma*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991).

²⁰ Alberto Aquarone, *L'organizzazione dello Stato totalitario*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1965); Alessio Gagliardi, *Il corporativismo fascista*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza editore, 2010).

to obtain key roles in the new post-war Republic as advisors in those same industries they had fought to save after the 1929 crisis. Jung, having been a Minister, was subjected to the process of post-war retribution, while Olivetti fled to Argentina to escape persecution without ever coming back to Italy.

Brief notes concerning Fascist anti-Semitism

As Michele Sarfatti wrote, there are at least two questions that historians considering the relationship of the Fascist regime with its Jewish minority should be interested in: how can it happen that some men believe in an ideology that will end up persecuting them? And secondly, how can it happen that a political movement persecutes its very supporters, not characterized as internal political opponents?²¹

Anti-Semitism did not seem to play a significant political or ideological role in early Fascism: among those participating in the founding of the *Fasci di Combattimento* in Milan, there were some Jews. Many also took part in the March on Rome and others had signed up to the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (PNF) or the nationalist party.²² This does not imply that Jews were especially favorable to Fascism, but it represents Italian Jews' way of behaving like non-Jewish Italians.²³ The five figures selected were not the only ones to have pre-eminent roles within the regime. We must remember, among others: the Podestà of Ferrara Renzo Ravenna,²⁴ the Triestine senator Teodoro Mayer²⁵ and also Camillo Ara,²⁶ Edgardo Morpurgo,²⁷ the latter group being *gran commis* of public and private administration.

²¹ Michele Sarfatti, "Gli ebrei fascisti e il mito dell'antisemitismo obbligato," *L'Unità*, April 6, 2001.

²² For a detailed analysis of the percentages see Michele Sarfatti's introduction to this booklet *Quest*.

²³ Sarfatti, *Gli ebrei nell'Italia fascista*, 23.

²⁴ Born in Ferrara in 1893 (d. 1961). Lawyer, interventionist, he signed up for the First World War; he was podestà of Ferrara from 1926 to 1938. Pavan, *Il podestà ebreo*.

²⁵ Born in Trieste in 1860 (d. 1942), founder in 1881 of the newspaper "Il Piccolo," in 1930 he was appointed Senator and then President of the IMI [*Istituto Mobiliare Italiano*], a mid and long-term credit institution, in 1931.

²⁶ Born in Trieste in 1876 (d. 1944), he was among the leaders of the local liberal-national party, an interventionist and signed up for the Great War. In 1932, he became President of Sofindit (the financial investments company that managed the changeover to the *Istituto di Ricostruzione Industriale della Banca Commerciale* during the 1929 crisis); in 1933 he became vice-president of the IRI. Mario Migliucci, "Ara Camillo," in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*,

Having said this, we do not intend to deny that there was no anti-Semitism in the background, and we cannot forget that some violent incidents concerning Jews did occur since the very early years of Fascism.²⁸ Indeed, within the regime the most extremist groups expressed themselves in racist language and a part of the Fascist press did nothing to hide anti-Semitic undertones, like the newspaper *Cremona Nuova* by Roberto Farinacci (a radical Fascist and Party Secretary from 1925 to 1926), the nationalist paper *La Tribuna*, Rome's *L'Impero* and the periodical *La Vita Italiana* guided by Giovanni Preziosi.²⁹ Moreover, some segments of the Fascist party considered the Jews as an anti-national group linked to freemasonry, Antifascist parties, high finance and the so called 'Jewish International'.³⁰ Giorgio Fabre identified an anti-Semitic sentiment in Mussolini as early as 1919³¹ and traces of an innate Fascist anti-Semitism in the political turning point of 1922. Furthermore, the Duce's attitude is not believed to be an isolated case, as the culture of the time was permeated by racism with traces of anti-Semitism, alternating with attitudes that Taguieff defined as "heterophylly," an excessive exploitation of differences.³² Mussolini, in fact, acknowledged the Jews were gifted and skilled, above all in the economic and financial field.³³ If, in the beginning, Jewishness could live side by side with Fascism, since the early 1930s the relationship became more complicated and began to crack. With the Lateran Treaty (1929), the regime embraced an increasingly nationalist-Catholic ideology; at the same time, it strengthened its totalitarian grip: Starace entered the PNF secretariat (1931), the conquest of Ethiopia began and all political opposition had by then been liquidated. Fascism needed to set its radical

[http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/camillo-ara_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/camillo-ara_(Dizionario-Biografico)/) [last access, 2 September 2017).

²⁷ Born in Trieste in 1866 (d. 1948). He held important positions in the insurance sector, was President and Director General of the *Assicurazioni Generali* in Trieste, and member of the *Confederazione Fascista delle Aziende di Credito e delle Assicurazioni*.

²⁸ In Livorno in 1923 and in Florence in 1925 there were reports of Fascist assaults and violence against Giuseppe Emanuele Modigliani, Uberto Mondolfi and the brothers Carlo and Nello Rosselli. Besides those at Tripoli, in August 1923, and in Padua in November in 1926. Sarfatti, *Gli ebrei nell'Italia fascista*, 65-67.

²⁹ Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), 78-81.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 81.

³¹ Giorgio Fabre, *Mussolini razzista. Dal socialismo al fascismo: la formazione di un antisemita*, (Milan: Garzanti, 2005).

³² *Nel nome della razza. Il razzismo nella storia d'Italia (1870-1945)*, ed. Alberto Burgio, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999); Pierre-André Taguieff, *La forza del pregiudizio. Saggio sul razzismo e sull'antirazzismo*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1987).

³³ When he named Jung minister he said to those closest to him that a Jew was what was needed in Finance. Fulvio Suvich, *Memorie 1932-1936*, (Milan, 1984), 6 and 17.

wing in motion again, animated by that “great desire for perpetual motion” as the famous theorist on totalitarianism, Hannah Arendt³⁴ defined it. By 1928, Mussolini was already asking the Jews: “are you a religion or are you a nation?” The reference was to the Zionist Jews. The so-called “clarification” highlighted the incompatibility of a double bond: Italian or Jewish-Zionist.³⁵ Nevertheless, it was with the Ponte Tresa incident that the Jews were publicly qualified as Antifascist for the first time by all the main press organs. On March 11 1934, two representatives of the clandestine Antifascist movement *Giustizia e Libertà* [Justice and Liberty], Mario Levi and Sion Segre from Turin, were stopped and searched at the Italian-Swiss border checkpoint of Ponte Tresa, they were transporting Antifascist propaganda leaflets. The incident was reported by some newspapers, which exploited the Jewish Antifascist coupling.³⁶

In the Thirties, “anti-Jewish legislation became part of Fascist racism as a totally consistent choice, for ideological and political reasons, with the regime’s totalitarian logic.”³⁷ Anti-Semitism, in fact, did not intend to please public opinion, which continued to be perplexed more than anything, but it reflected internal dynamics within the party.³⁸ Most Jews were aware of the progressive deterioration of relations, but they could not believe in the idea of persecution. On the eve of the racial laws, many shared a feeling of disbelief and bewilderment.³⁹

The Fascist regime did not hesitate to persecute its own followers. In order to tone down this paradox, the category of the so-called “discriminated” was introduced into legislation: discriminated Jews were initially and only partly made exempt from the application of the racial laws due to patriotic (a relative fallen during the country’s wars, having received decorations for valor or a having been volunteer or wounded in the Great War, or having taken part in the March on Rome or in the *Impresa di Fiume*) or political merits (joined the PNF before 1923 or in the second term in 1924 after the murder of Giacomo Matteotti).⁴⁰ The discrimination clause is a trait of Italian anti-Semitism legislation which reflects the degree of improvisation and paradoxical relationship between a category of citizens, not only well integrated in the country but within the regime. In a short period of time the title of “discriminated” remained little more than a symbolic

³⁴ Hannah Arendt, *Le origini del totalitarismo*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2004), 242.

³⁵ Sarfatti, *Gli ebrei nell’Italia fascista*, 82-83.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 98-101.

³⁷ Emilio Gentile, *Fascismo. Storia e interpretazione*, 28.

³⁸ Salvatore Lupo, *Il fascismo, La politica in un regime totalitario*, (Rome: Donzelli 2000), 417.

³⁹ Alberto Cavaglion, Foreword to *Il podestà ebreo*, by Pavan, 279-282; Arnaldo Momigliano, *Sui fondamenti della storia antica*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1984).

⁴⁰ Sarfatti, *Gli ebrei nell’Italia fascista*, 177-178.

distinction. Indeed, in November 1938, those who had been classified “of Jewish race” were expelled from the party and a month later from the army, even if they possessed Fascist merits or had been baptized.

Ettore Ovazza

The story of Ettore Ovazza⁴¹ is the most tragic and maybe the most emblematic of those selected. He represents the example of a strong adhesion to Fascism and at the same time, of participation in the Jewish community he belonged to. The tension between religion and politics, between his Judaism and his Fascist commitment, was to dominate his existence until the very end.

Born in Turin in 1892 to a family of Turinese Jews,⁴² he worked in the family bank, Vitta Ovazza & C. (named after his grandfather and founded in 1866). Homeland, Faith and Family represented a triad of words in perfect harmony for the Ovazzas. Faith is here understood in its religious sense: in fact, Ettore would never abandon the religion of his fathers (even if he distanced himself from the Turinese Jewish community in the autumn of 1938, as a protest against the community’s insufficient expression of Fascist enthusiasm, to then rejoin in 1939⁴³). It remained an essential bond, tying him to his loved ones and his family. Despite formal religious observance not being particularly important for him, his Jewishness was displayed in a strong sense of the family. A niece recalled: “the Ovazzas were a real clan; they always went to the Moncalieri Villa: grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles and children.”⁴⁴

Although there were many Catholics among his friends, he maintained endogamous ties by marrying Nella Sacerdote, his first cousin, who belonged to a rich Turinese Jewish family. He studied law and, like the other protagonists of this essay, he had an open, international outlook, based also on periods of study abroad: he had spent some time at Freiburg, Germany. He read books on the Risorgimento and his political role models were Garibaldi, Mazzini and Cavour⁴⁵. Not only Ettore, but the entire Ovazza family took part in the Great War, from his father Ernesto to his brothers Alfredo and Vittorio (they had this in common with the Jung family and the Reiss-Romoli brothers). Signing up *en*

⁴¹ Stille, *Uno su mille*, 13-95.

⁴² His father, Ernesto, was President of the Turin Jewish community during the first years of fascism, *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴³ Stille, *Uno su mille*, 82.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

masse was a display of patriotic spirit and also suggests that they were in some way behaving like citizens on probation:⁴⁶ they felt obliged to show their gratitude and patriotism by proving to be even more patriotic than other Italians.

After the war, he joined the *Fasci di Combattimento* in Turin, yet his role as member of the Fascist squads was probably limited to providing financial support. He helped to found and finance one of the first Fascist newspapers in Turin: *L'Eco d'Italia*.⁴⁷ During the 1930s he became regional president of the Association of Fascist Bankers; but besides work, Ettore was very keen on literature and writing and he undertook the realization of a theatrical work *L'uomo e i fantocci* [The man and the puppets], which celebrated the March on Rome and Mussolini's rise to power. He published *Politica fascista* [Fascist politics] in 1933: a rhetorical piece of writing that starts in 1914 and describes the Duce as a genius, the man the country was waiting for, who would set the nation on the path to glory: "only he is the judge. We will go where he wants to go; we will do what he commands, as nothing is as nice as obedience and discipline with such a leader."⁴⁸ He had a veneration for the Duce: having succeeded in talking to Mussolini in 1929, when he went for an audience with him as head of a delegation of decorated Jewish war veterans, he described the encounter in a typical hagiographical, reverential tone in the introduction to *Politica fascista*. For Ovazza, Fascism was "the strength of the nation through harmonious class collaboration – supremacy of state interest over private ones – corporative regime."⁴⁹ He celebrated all Fascist battles: from "quota 90," the famous maneuver with which Fascism wished to stabilize and reevaluate the Lira after the upset of the World War, catching up with the British pound (the exchange rate adopted in 1927 would be 94.47 lire to the pound), to the land reclamation, the politics of public works, Fascist economy policy and even the Lateran Treaty.

In spite of his fervent commitment to Fascism, he always kept up his ties with the Jewish community, in the Thirties entering the governing body of the Turin's Jewish Community and the council of the Union of the Italian Jewish Communities, even if he was aware of the potential conflicts between Fascist faith and the religion of his fathers. He always followed carefully the development, within the regime, of anti-Semitic tendencies up to the 1934 turning-point when, after the Ponte Tresa incident, he intervened more decisively by founding the magazine *La nostra Bandiera* [Our Flag], in order to

⁴⁶ Capuzzo, "L'ora della prova: l'ebraismo italiano di fronte alla guerra."

⁴⁷ Stille, *Uno su mille*, 35.

⁴⁸ Ettore Ovazza, *Politica fascista*, (Turin: Sten, 1933), 78.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 99.

clear up once and for all the position of Italian Jews, oppose the Zionist movement and praise the previous generations' contribution to the Risorgimento and the building of a unified Italy. The editorial that announced the paper's birth and objectives was entitled: *Fuori dall'equivoco* [Beyond misunderstanding]:

We are soldiers, we are fascists: we feel equal to all other citizens, especially in our duty to the common homeland. Members of the same family, we want, in peace and in war, to kiss the Italian flag for which we are prepared now and forever to die; we want to pray to the God of our Fathers with a good conscience.

(...) The perfect spiritual unity between love of religion and love of the homeland constitutes a sentiment that was always jealously guarded by Israelite Italians.⁵⁰

Mussolini's politics regarding the Jews was guided by opportunism: it depended on more general political interests rather than on the Italian Jews' loyalty or disloyalty towards Fascism. Ettore, however, continued to consider himself a front-line soldier and not a pawn that the regime, if necessary, would not hesitate to sacrifice.

Those days were not far off. Following an intense propaganda campaign, the *Manifesto fascista della razza* [Fascist Race Manifesto] was published on the 14th of July 1938. The following day, Ettore wrote to Mussolini directly:

It is the end of a reality: that of feeling we are at one with the Italian people. Was this inevitable? I do not think so...How many have followed you with love from 1919 to today through the Fascist branches, the struggles, the wars, living your life? Today, is this all over? Has it been a dream that cradled us? I cannot think of it so. And I believe that one cannot change religion, because this is a betrayal – and we are fascists. And so? I turn to you – DUCE – because at this time – such an important one for our revolution, you do not want this wholly Italian part to be excluded from our country's historic destiny... We fired gunshots and cannons at the Jews of other countries from 1915 to 1918. Where is the Jewish International?⁵¹

⁵⁰ Stille, *Uno su mille*, 50.

⁵¹ Letter from Ettore Ovazza to Benito Mussolini, 15th July 1938, in Archivio Centrale dello Stato (from now on ACS), Spd, Co, fasc. n. 211.398.

From these few lines, we can hear Ovazza's anger and disappointment; he did not want to renounce his religion of origin as he had always thought that the homeland he believed in could live together with his faith. It was unthinkable for him that Fascism could exclude the Italian Jews from the nation after they had given proof of their patriotism. "I fought in the war, I was wounded and now they tell me I'm not Italian,"⁵² he continued to repeat to his family.

He was included in the category of the discriminated for his war and political merits, but as already mentioned above, this category soon turned out to be purely symbolic. He was forced to sell the family bank, after seventy years of business, and was expelled from the party and from the army.

He paid with his life the price for his adhesion to Fascism, his consistency and the extreme trust placed in the Duce. His relatives, after the armistice in September 1943, begged Ettore to flee to Switzerland, but he continued to answer them: "they'll never touch me, I've done too much for Fascism"⁵³. Politics had been his bedrock for twenty years; renouncing Fascism would have meant disowning everything he had believed in and fought for. However, when Italy was divided into two after September the 8th 1943 and the hunt for the Jews began, with the Italian Social Republic collaborating with the Nazis in arrests and deportations, he decided to leave Turin.

The Ovazzas (Ettore, his wife Nella and daughter Elena) fled from Turin towards Switzerland, settling temporarily in Gressoney. They were arrested by the German SS on the 10th of October 1943 and taken to the German headquarters of Intra, on Lake Maggiore, where they were barbarically murdered in one of the first Nazi slaughters in the country. His son, Riccardo, was betrayed by a guide who should have been leading him to safety in Switzerland, and was also killed by the Germans on Italian soil.

Guido Jung

Guido Jung⁵⁴ joined Fascism in 1924, coming to that political choice after his militancy in the *Associazione Nazionalista*, a trajectory that was very common in Southern Italy⁵⁵, where Fascist branches did not have a great importance

⁵² Stille, *Uno su mille*, 81.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁵⁴ De Ianni, *Il ministro soldato*; Raspagliesi, *Guido Jung*.

⁵⁵ In Palermo, just a month after the March on Rome, many chose to join the local nationalist section and not Fascism to be closer to the new politics, see Matteo Di Figlia, *Alfredo Cucco. Storia di un federale*, (Palermo: Quaderni Mediterranea, 2007).

compared to other locations on the peninsula. He followed Fascist policies scrupulously, committing to all the battles of the regime: his being a soldier referred, not only to the military universe, but also to the political one.

The Jung family originally came from Baden on his father's side and Trieste on his mother's (Randagger). His parents got married in Trieste with Jewish rite. After several wanderings between Milan, Trieste and Palermo, the family decided to settle in the Sicilian capital, where they founded the *Fratelli Jung*, an import/export company dealing in different local products like sulfur, dried fruits, citrus fruits and essences.

Guido was born in Palermo in 1876 and started working for the family business at a very young age, soon taking charge and abandoning his engineering studies due to his father's premature death. In the beginning, he dedicated himself entirely to his work as merchant and entrepreneur, undertaking several journeys to strengthen the company's commercial ties: from Europe to the Orient and even to the United States. But at about the age of forty he was swept away by the glamour of the Great War, the nationalist desire for Italy to be a great nation on the same level as other European powers.

Faith, Homeland, Family, as for Ovazza, were frequently used words by Jung, but faith for him was meant in a non-religious sense, rather one of trust and conviction, until it gradually became the new political religion that found its fulfillment in Fascism. It was in 1914 that he began his political engagement in the ranks of the *Associazione Nazionalista*. He became one of the most active protagonists of the local interventionist campaign and no sooner had Italy gone to war, he had no doubts as to the need to join up as a volunteer.⁵⁶ Also in the Jungs' case, too, the whole family was actively mobilized in the war effort: his other brothers joined up, the women of the house collaborated as Red Cross officers and offered financial help to needy families, whose sons were at the front. As Mario Toscano notes, Italian Jews felt they had to forcefully seal the pact with the land, the nation, to feel Italian and fight for the country, like their fathers had done before them in the battles of the Risorgimento.⁵⁷

A few months before the end of the war, Jung was part of the Italian delegation at the conference of Versailles, in the service of Silvio Crespi, the latter being charged with signing for peace as representative of the Italian State. A member of Parliament from 1924 to 1938, he supported all the regime's battles, in particular as a Sicilian, the one against the mafia: he celebrated the action carried out by Fascism through the prefect Cesare Mori, the public works in the Southern Italy

⁵⁶ On these aspects see Roberta Raspagliesi, "Guerra invocata, raccontata, vissuta. Il caso di Guido Jung," *Intrasformazione: rivista di storia delle idee*, vol. 3, 1 (2014).

⁵⁷ Toscano, "Gli ebrei italiani e la prima guerra mondiale," 290.

that the government would promise, and ‘quota 90’ that he would defend in his capacity as Minister in 1932.

Jung firmly believed in Fascism’s pedagogic intentions, in the projects for the creation of the new Italian, and made several speeches for some of the regime’s celebrations. In one of them, in March 1926, during the commemoration of the *Fasci di combattimento*, his view of Fascism clearly emerges:

Fascism is and must remain a militia and a religion, it has the tight discipline and absolute subordination of the militia, and the faith of religion...A strict religion that does not promise Heaven on earth, that preaches sacrifice and duty...placing the Nation’s secular life as the only objective of every care and effort...the life of the Homeland sacred and everlasting.⁵⁸

He is not a “technocrat,” and neither did he receive a formal education in the field of economics, like Alberto De’ Stefani (the first Minister of Finance of Fascism). As Minister, he demonstrated he was more demanding than his Duce in wanting to keep the lira up with gold, even after the separation of the British pound and the dollar from the Gold standard. This was also presented as a “moral battle.” Despite Mussolini’s very own doubts about wanting to keep the “golden heel,” after the 1929 crisis, Jung, qualified anchoring the lira to gold as “absolute dogma” in a letter to the Duce. He wrote that it was not in economic “technicalities” that answers to the crisis were to be found, but in spiritual resources, and he suggested drastic measures and questionable sanctions, including “corporal punishments if such measures are to be respected.”⁵⁹ As Minister he had encouraged a policy of spending cuts in preparation for war. As soon as he was discharged (1935), in his sixties, he went as volunteer to Ethiopia. These few notes would be enough to question the long-lasting representation of this man as an economics and financial expert. In fact, his support for Fascism was not the colorless act of a technocrat, but the choice of an active militant of the time, one who built his career through politics, too.

On the other hand, his relationship with Judaism is more elusive. Like Ovazza, he had a strong sense of family unity but he never got married; the endogamous ties were, nevertheless, maintained by the rest of the family: his brothers all married Jewish women or women of Jewish origin. Jung was an emancipated Jew, someone who moved within a double platform, the Jewish network and that of

⁵⁸ ASBI, Carte Jung, Pratt. n. 10, fasc. 1.

⁵⁹ Guido Jung’s letter to Benito Mussolini, Rome, 16 May 1934, ASBI, Carte Jung, Pratt. n. 22, fasc. 6.

the gentiles. He openly distanced himself from Zionism, just like Ovazza did. In 1934, he refused to see doctor Jacobson, manager of an international Zionist organization:

The most intense throbs of my soul have always been an infinite devotion for my adored country...For these reasons, Zionism has no hold over me.⁶⁰

Unlike Ovazza and Sinigaglia, Jung accepted the anti-Semitic legislation like a soldier, at least publicly. As Thaon de Revel, Minister of Finance, wrote to Mussolini on November 23 1938:

if among the Jews in Italy there is one true, perfect Italian, then it is Jung. Although Jewish, Jung approves, without reserve, of the Regime's racist orders and declares that his nieces and nephews and all his relatives will stay in Italy, even if they must work as street cleaners to get by: "Maybe street cleaners, but Italian ones!" Furthermore, Jung made the following comparison between the Italian Jews and the soldiers in an assault battalion: If the soldiers are ordered, to attack and die, they will go, even if they do not know why; in the same way, the Jews in Italy do not know what the Fascist anti-Semitic legislation is aiming at, but they must accept it like good soldiers, in the certainty that Mussolini cannot be wrong and that anti-Semitic measures conceal a much greater end for the good of the Nation.⁶¹

The choice of "approving" the persecution seems an extreme, desperate display of devotion to Fascism. Even if such a choice is undoubtedly paradoxical, Jung was not the only Jew to accept the regime's racist turning point.⁶²

According to the racial criterion, he was Jewish in all respects since he was the son of parents who were both "of Jewish race." Even if the political police noted that he had converted to Catholicism in 1935,⁶³ his christening certificate was not among the papers of Jung's archive.⁶⁴ Initially "discriminated," his property on Lake Como was confiscated and he had to register the ownership of his family's

⁶⁰ ASBI, Carte Jung, Pratt. n. 21, fasc. 3.

⁶¹ Roma, 23rd November 1938, Paolo Thaon Di Revel (Minister of Finance, successor to Guido Jung) to Benito Mussolini in ACS, Spd, Cr, b. 142, fasc. 157.

⁶² See the paragraph on Reiss-Romoli.

⁶³ Roma, October 21, 1938, ACS, MI, DGPS, Pp, fp, b. 679, fasc. 57.

⁶⁴ Jung had made an agreement in Palermo with Father Ribaudo to establish the day of his christening in February 1935, but the certificate was missing whilst those for the other family members were not. ASBI, Carte Jung, Pratt. n. 10, fasc. 9.

historic company to an Aryan nominee. He managed to survive persecution and took part, at the end of 1943, in the Badoglio government; later he was subjected to the process of post-war retribution for his role in the regime. He died in Palermo in 1949.

Oscar Sinigaglia

Sinigaglia's Fascism developed in the complex post-war climate characterized by a variety of movements, former combatant associations and Fascist militias, all directed at defending the homeland that had emerged from the conflict and intent on promoting the advent of a new ruling class.⁶⁵

Sinigaglia⁶⁶ was born in Rome, from a Jewish family, in 1877. His father, Moisè, had left the family business, which traded in iron and steel, in serious difficulty. Young Oscar, however, managed to get it back on its feet, graduate in engineering and become the owner of Ferrotaille, a company that produced iron and steel and railway materials.

When the war loomed at the horizon, he lined up with the interventionist ranks and, just so he could leave for the front as a voluntary soldier, he interrupted his civilian commitments and sold Ferrotaille to Ilva (Italian iron and steel company, founded in 1905). In doing so, as he himself wrote, he was “destroying more than twenty years of work.”⁶⁷

He later grew as an administrator of (state-run) business in the economic-administrative organs developed for the industrial war mobilization, in particular in the Ministry of Arms and Munitions and then in the inter-ministerial Committee for the organization of war industries. He was also very active on a political level in various post-war movements, which he personally financed, like the Committee for national demands [*Comitato per le rivendicazioni nazionali*] and the National Union of Officers and Soldiers [*Unione nazionale ufficiali e soldati*]. Therefore, Sinigaglia was busy carrying out the political project that had emerged from the war, knocking down the liberal institutions. His strong aversion towards the Premier, Francesco Saverio Nitti, was shared by many nationalists, who were called “*antinittiani*” for this reason. Giovanni Giuriati, his

⁶⁵ Andrea Ungari, “Tra mobilitazione patriottica e suggestioni eversive. La vicenda dell’Unione Nazionale Ufficiali e Soldati nel primo dopoguerra,” *Nuova Storia Contemporanea*, v/5 (2001):41-76.

⁶⁶ Toniolo, “Oscar Sinigaglia,” Lucio Villari, *Le avventure di un capitano d’industria*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1991).

⁶⁷ ACS, Spd, c.o., fasc. 106757.

friend from Trieste, also a volunteer and future secretary of the PNF, later recalled “the verbal violence of Corradini and Sinigaglia”⁶⁸ during a political rally held in Rome in June 1919 to protest against Nitti’s government. Sinigaglia also played an active part in the *Impresa di Fiume* and as Giuriati’s trustee (active in Fiume with D’Annunzio), in particular he managed the diplomatic relations with the political circles of the Capital.⁶⁹

Besides the diverse ex-combatant associations, he also financed the *Fasci di Combattimento* and joined the Roman one with the membership card no. 602, dated 15th May 1919.⁷⁰ From 1920 to 1923 he dedicated himself to the Italian League [*Lega italiana*], one of the movements close to the Fascist, and which was conceived as

a second-line trench in the deprecating case that the first line, made up of Fascism should be conquered by the prevailing socialist-democratic tide (...) fortunately, Mussolini and Fascism, which were the secret hope of our hearts, have made the association’s secret aims pointless (...) Fascism in power had finally fulfilled our old dream: the Nation was now in the hands of those who shared the same ideals and sentiments as us: the future of Italy was safe.⁷¹

His, then, was an *ante marcia* Fascism, with a clear right-wing attitude, in search of the strong man and of order through hierarchy and authoritarianism. Once the regime was consolidated, Sinigaglia dedicated himself to more technical sectors, committed to revolutionizing the national iron and steel industry, with the intention of making it the buttress of the whole of Italian industrial system; he became President of Ilva from 1932 to 1935.

As it was in Jung’s case, his Jewish identity had uncertain contours. He maintained family ties with other relatives of Jewish origin: he married Marcella Mayer, daughter of the Senator Teodoro. Both had obtained cancellation from the Jewish community’s registers as early as 1902⁷², without, however, converting and so remaining *konfessionslos* (without religion). There are three declarations

⁶⁸ Giovanni Giuriati, *Con D’Annunzio e Millo in difesa dell’Adriatico*, (Florence: G. C. Sansoni; Rome: Leonardo, 1954).

⁶⁹ Gianni Toniolo, “Oscar Sinigaglia,” 414.

⁷⁰ Villari, *Le avventure di un capitano d’industria*, 50.

⁷¹ ACS, Spd, c.o., fasc. 106757.

⁷² *Elenco generale delle conversioni e delle abiure. Milano*, in ACS, MI, PS, ctg G1. On Triestine Jews see Anna Millo, *L’élite del potere a Trieste. Una biografia collettiva 1891-1938*, (Milan: Franco Angeli editore, 1989).

by Sinigaglia that mark his estrangement from the community. The first was in 1918, when Angelo Sereni, president of the Jewish community in Rome, asked members to contribute more generously, to support the growing needs of the communal body. Sinigaglia sent the letter back “both because he opposed any religious donation and because he was decidedly against the system of bringing together Jews like in a caste or race apart.”⁷³ Later, it was the document that formalized his estrangement from the community: he decided to abjure from the Jewish faith on 18th April 1932,⁷⁴ following the establishment of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities in 1930. Hence we imagine he remained a member of the Roman community until 1931, probably without ever actively taking part in communal life. Yet in 1938, when he presented the documents to obtain “discrimination,” he declared he had never been part of the Jewish Community.⁷⁵ In his request for discrimination he did not just express a feeling of total estrangement from his religion of origin, but also formulated a reprimand to Mussolini, who was getting ready to adopt the same measures implemented by the “barbarous Germans” against whom he had fought in the Great War. On 16th July 1938, he wrote to the Fascist leader:

Your Excellency, it is with great sorrow that I read the article on Racism in Italy in the “Giornale d’Italia” and in the “Corriere della Sera”... What general, collective fault are Italian Jews guilty of - worse still, Jews by race, even those who have never had anything in common either with the Jewish religion or the Jewish community – to be pointed at – en masse – as an inferior race, unworthy of belonging to the Italian Nation? And yet, many of them have fully discharged their duty during the Great War and also post-war; many were the first to join Fascism: why are they unworthy of their Homeland? My parents, my grandparents, were Jews, but I have never felt one: simply and only Italian; I grew up in the hate of the foreigner... I have always had Fascist ideas... when not everyone had them. Do not let fanatics, for a love of copying foreigners, cast a shadow on the wonderful work carried out by Your excellency, who must pass on to posterity glowing and bright without the smallest blot.⁷⁶

⁷³ Sinigaglia’s letter of November 20, 1918 to the Jewish community in Rome, in Archivio Storico Comunità Ebraica di Roma (ASCER), b. 21, quoted in Stefano Caviglia, *L’identità salvata. Gli ebrei di Roma tra fede e nazione, 1870-1938*, (Rome: Laterza editore, 1996), 200.

⁷⁴ *Elenco generale delle conversioni e delle abiure. Milano.*

⁷⁵ ACS, MI, DGDR, DR, fasc. pers. b. 27.

⁷⁶ Villari, *Le avventure di un capitano d’industria, 192-194.*

He obtained “discrimination” together with his wife and lived in seclusion until the end of the Second World War. After the war, he was appointed president of Finsider, the public company that joined together Ilva, Dalmine, Siac and Ansaldo, a position he held until his death in 1953.⁷⁷

Guglielmo Reiss-Romoli

The story of Reiss-Romoli⁷⁸ is partly contained in his name. Willy Simon Reiss was born in Trieste in 1895 to Samuele Reiss, a well-off Jewish merchant of Galician origins and to Carolina Frankel, Julian. “Romoli” was the name he and his brother, Giorgio, would use as volunteers in the war,⁷⁹ and from that moment on, it would be the surname he would adopt for the rest of his life.

He completed his university studies at the Faculty of Law in Padua. During the entire period of Italian neutrality, Willy Reiss-Romoli was suspected of being a spy due to the fact he was from Trieste and because his father was “pro-Austrian.”⁸⁰ From 1914, he enrolled in Trieste’s irredentist association and was a militant of the nationalist movement. When the Great War broke out, he shirked his obligations, avoided military service for the Austro-Hungarian Empire (he was condemned to death *in absentia* by an Austrian military tribunal) and, together with his brother Giorgio, joined the Italian army as a volunteer. At the end of the conflict, he worked in the *Banca Italiana di Sconto* and then in the *Banca Nazionale di Credito*.

Reiss-Romoli, like Sinigaglia and Ovazza, was a Fascist from the very beginning, a “fascist from March 1919.”⁸¹ He married the American, Kathleen Martin, a fascist sympathizer and author of a celebrative book entitled *Eleven Years of Fascism through the words of the Duce*.⁸² In 1930, he was called and assigned to the central management of the Banca Commerciale to put the serious financial situation of the Italgas group in Turin back on its feet. In 1932, he moved over to SOFINDIT (the *Società Finanziaria Industriale Italiana*, that operated in the sector of financial investments), as a technical-financial expert in the

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁷⁸ Bottiglieri, “Guglielmo Reiss-Romoli.”

⁷⁹ Alberto Spaini, “Ritratto di un costruttore,” in *Voce giuliana, Reiss Romoli, una storia che vale*, Associazione delle comunità istriane, Trieste, November 16, 1995.

⁸⁰ ACS, MI, PS, A1, 1915, fasc. Reiss Guglielmo.

⁸¹ ACS, Spd, c. o. n. 550.820.

⁸² Kathleen Martin Romoli, *Undici anni di Fascismo attraverso la parola del Duce*, (Milan: Marangoni, 1934)

readjustment of the SIP group (*Società Italiana per l'esercizio telefonico*, the main Italian telecommunications firm.) From February 1935, the Banca Commerciale appointed him manager of their New York branch, where he remained until December 1941.

Even if the information that has reached us is for the most part linked to his technical and professional appointments, we can suppose that he was close to Fascism and shared its values. The letters exchanged between him and Guido Jung, in which they both referred to the racial laws that had hit the Jews in Italy, is an emblematic testimony. In May 1939, while still in America, he wrote:

One cannot choose one's own trench, one fights where and how one is told. – “believe – obey – fight” was the watchword on your desk in via Durini [the Sofindit offices]; if I examine my conscience, I believe I have obeyed. There is nothing higher than this divine gift: Homeland. What matter are personal troubles, as long as the Nation is stronger, safer and higher, to whom the worthy give but do not ask?⁸³

We feel it is important to report Jung's answer, too in order to capture that climate of total obedience and resignation in the face of the anti-Semitic turn:

Nothing of what has happened can humiliate the absolute humility (*sic*) with which I have served the Nation and if I have any regrets it is not having done or given more, not having known how to better show this unique passion I have had and still have in my heart for our adored Italy (...) my greatest torment is for the young, innocent creatures ready to give with greater riches and who find themselves rejected [Jung is making a reference to those Jews who wished to serve in the army] (...) but just like after Caporetto it was not up to us to express opinions on the most suitable line of valiant defense, so too now we must, as you say: Believe – Obey – Fight, and the day when Italy emerges safe from the dangers that threaten her, what does it matter if we have died from pain rather than from wounds?⁸⁴

From this exchange of letters, we note their reference to memories of the Great War, which represented a founding moment for them, giving birth to a brotherly union of ‘*camerati*.’

⁸³ ASBI, Carte Jung, pratt., n. 33, fasc. 15.

⁸⁴ *Ivi*.

During the Second World War, after the declarations of war between Italy and the United States, Reiss-Romoli was arrested by the American police and imprisoned in Ellis Island, as a “dangerous enemy.” He was liberated five months later, as part of an exchange of civilian prisoners, and then boarded a steamer that would take him back to Italy. He returned to Italy when the racial laws were being implemented with growing severity and yet he immediately wished to be of service to his homeland: “he asked only to be able to fight,” even without his stripes.⁸⁵ Mussolini never granted his request.

Some historians believe that he converted to Catholicism;⁸⁶ however, there is neither a sure source attesting to his conversion, nor a clear date. His brother-in-law, his sister Elsa’s husband, was Marcello Loewy (a Jew who, after marrying Elsa with Jewish rite in 1912, converted with her in 1914)⁸⁷. We do not know if Romoli also embraced Catholicism on the eve of the Great War along with his brother-in-law and sister. However, he was considered a Jew by the racial legislation. Between 1943 and 1945, in the years of the German occupation, was forced to hide, protected by friends and by a Catholic priest he was able to avoid arrest and deportation.

After the war, as the Antifascist purges were gradually being scaled down, and the need for experts and public managers who had worked in many key sectors became apparent, he was rapidly reintegrated as a key figure in the public sector. From 1946 to 1961 he was the general manager of STET (the holding company for the telephone sector that he had helped set up in 1933 on behalf of Sofindit). He was also president of the Organization for the Assistance to Julian and Dalmatian Refugees [*Opera assistenza profughi Giuliani e Dalmati*]. He died in Milan in 1961.

Gino Olivetti

⁸⁵ 10th February 1943 letter from Giancarlo Vallauri (vice-president of the Reale accademia d’Italia) to the Duce’s secretary, ACS, Spd, c. o. n. 550.820.

⁸⁶ Bottiglieri, “Guglielmo Reiss-Romoli,” 512.

⁸⁷ In 1914, he changed his name to Labor to affirm his Italian identity. Close to socialist circles, he remained a widow in 1934, and was ordained a priest in 1940, see Livio Labor [Marcello’s son], in Giuseppe Sircana, “Labor Livio,” in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/livio-labor_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/ [last access, 31 August 2017]

Olivetti's position can be best understood from its end. His escape across national borders (the only one to do so, compared to the other protagonists) appears emblematic in that he did not apparently nurture the same blind, sincere faith towards the Duce and the regime. Being the least involved in Fascist politics, he probably felt freer to leave the country once he understood that it would be better to do so.

His full name, Jacob Angelo Gino Benvenuto, reveals once again the family custom of using distinctive Jewish names. His Jewish family was of Spanish origin; both his Father, Raffaele, and his mother, Emilia Coen, were of Jewish faith.⁸⁸ The endogamous ties were also maintained by Gino, who married Mariettina Ottolenghi in 1912.⁸⁹ There is no evidence that Olivetti abjured in the 1930s when it became “practically obligatory” to declare oneself, willing or not, to be registered to the Community. We know that in 1927 he was still active in Jewish communal life and was present on official occasions.⁹⁰ Furthermore, he was a member of the Italy-Palestine Committee [*Comitato Italia-Palestina*], a pro-Zionist association established in 1927-28; among its members were several other important Jewish personalities like: Dante Lattes, Angelo Sacerdoti and Roberto Almagià.⁹¹

Born in 1880 in Urbino, Gino Olivetti spent his youth in Turin. He also went on several educational trips to Great Britain, France and Germany. He graduated in Law, and while still a student, was considered “one of the core members” of the Turin liberal party.⁹² He was the promoter of different industrialists' associations, from the Turin Industrial League [*Lega industriale di Torino*] (1906), to the Piedmontese Industrial Federation [*Federazione industriale piemontese*] (1908) and the Italian Industrial Confederation [*Confederazione italiana dell'industria*], in which he was secretary-general from 1910 to 1934.⁹³

He was the only one of the characters analyzed here to have had a liberal orientation and a political past before the Great War. Little by little, he moved away from the liberal political world and looked for new ideological and political

⁸⁸ The Olivettis arrived in Italy following the anti-Jewish persecutions in Spain, Silvia Granata and Paola Rapini, *Gino Olivetti. Biografia dell'“altro Olivetti,” un protagonista della storia italiana*, (Aosta: LeChateau, 2014), 16.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 153-154.

⁹¹ De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani*, 94.

⁹² Eleonora Belloni, *La Confindustria e lo sviluppo economico italiano, Gino Olivetti tra Giolitti e Mussolini*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), 13-14.

⁹³ Franklin Hugh Adler, “Gino Olivetti,” in *Dizionario del fascismo*, eds. Victoria De Grazia and Sergio Luzzatto, (Turin: Einaudi, 2005).

references, taking a stand in favor of the nationalist movement.⁹⁴ Olivetti was also the only one not to take part in the First World War, actually adopting a fence-sitting attitude towards it. Only when war had been declared did he try to see in it an opportunity for the industrial interests he represented.⁹⁵

After the war, he took part in the 1919 elections in the *Partito Economico*, “the right-wing rib of the varied sub-alpine liberalism” (which strived for a greater presence of industrialists in active politics and not only in economic-political organs), entering Parliament and staying there until 1938.⁹⁶ In that complicated post-war period, many were aware of the need for a return to order, and in that moment, Olivetti also felt that Fascism seemed to guarantee the stability that many industrialists had at heart.

The position of Olivetti and that of the *Confindustria* [Italian Industrialists Association], the day after the March on Rome, was one of “loyal collaboration,” together with the satisfaction for the “streamlining,” “rigor” and “serenity” in the face of the first acts of Mussolini’s government.⁹⁷ Halfway through the 1920s, in particular from the Palazzo Vidoni Treaty in 1925 (which eliminated, de facto, free trade unions) until the 1930s, he expressed praise for the regime’s businesses strategy and initiatives. Moreover, with the new agreement, the *Confindustria* took on the name of fascist: *Confederazione Generale Fascista dell’Industria Italiana* [General Fascist Confederation of Italian Industry]. Therefore, Olivetti accepted the organization’s role within the totalitarian state and the consequent loss of autonomy.

On 3rd January 1926, he joined the Roman branch of the Fascist party. And it is exactly during this phase that Olivetti’s greatest support for the regime can be identified: there are indications of “general consent,” “instrumental support,”⁹⁸ or even “positive collaboration.”⁹⁹ From 1927, he worked with the daily *La Stampa*,” for which he wrote about Fascist economic policies:

fascism is better than every other regime and in a position to achieve the essential foundations for industry, that is the certainty and stability of judicial and economic situations, the principle of authority and

⁹⁴ Gino Olivetti, “I nazionalisti e la borghesia lavoratrice,” *L’Italia industriale ed agraria* IV/3 (1914): 33, quoted in Belloni, *La Confindustria*, 75.

⁹⁵ The manifesto of the *Confederazione Italiana dell’Industria* for the war, LI, IX/ 5 (1915): 65, quoted in *Ibid.*, 79.

⁹⁶ Belloni, *La Confindustria*.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 195, 214.

⁹⁹ Granata and Rapini, *Gino Olivetti*, 119.

individual initiative, the safeguard of earnings and savings, that is of capital and its reproduction.¹⁰⁰

In the article *Dieci anni di economia italiana* [Ten years of Italian economy] he praised Fascism again for having re-established

above all, order where there was disorder, empire where there was anarchy, discipline where there was the most unbridled freedom and especially, giving the State all those powers of command that are indispensable to modern life... the renewed economy is definitely an aspect of political and spiritual renewal.¹⁰¹

Since February 1929, he held the chair of Corporative Law at the Faculty of Law in Turin. In 1936, he helped with the autarchic campaign, supporting the battle for the better use of fuels. Mussolini praised him for “his prolific activity and for his remarkable contribution to the Nation’s autarchy,”¹⁰² but according to some recent interpretations, the relationship between the Duce and the secretary of the *Confindustria* was controversial and ambiguous; Mussolini looked on him with mistrust and did not recognize him among the men of certain Fascist faith.¹⁰³

On the 1st of January 1934, Olivetti resigned as secretary general of the *Confindustria*. On the 12th of February 1938, he also resigned as vice-president of the Corporation for Textile Products [*Corporazione dei prodotti tessili*] (an appointment he had held since 1934), as president of the Italian Cotton Institute [*Istituto cotoniero italiano*] (an appointment he had just received), as commissioner of the Fascist National Association of Cotton Industrialists [*Associazione nazionale fascista degli industriali cotonieri*] and, in October of the same year, as member of the Superior Council for Statistics [*Consiglio superiore di statistica*] and of the Administrative Board of the National Statistics Institute [ISTAT], for personal reasons. He remained a member of Parliament until December 1938, abandoning that role only as a result of the dissolution of the lower chamber of Parliament with the creation of the Chamber of Fasci and Corporations. He justified the aforementioned resignations on personal grounds, but both the presse and the political police sought to investigate the reasons for such decisions further. A Swiss paper, in an article entitled: *Antisemitismo* [Anti-

¹⁰⁰ Gino Olivetti, “L’industria e il fascismo,” in *La civiltà fascista illustrata nella dottrina e nelle opere*, (Turin: Pomba, 1928), 341 quoted in *Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 247.

¹⁰² *L’elogio del capo del Governo all’Enios*, OSL, XIII/ 5 (1938): 267, quoted in *Ibid.*, 282.

¹⁰³ Granata and Rapini, *Gino Olivetti*, 233-238.

Semitism], advanced motivations linked to the requests to limit the Jewish influence in positions of command.¹⁰⁴ Many conjectures were made on his resignations and there is an entire political police file on Gino Olivetti.¹⁰⁵

All the members of the Olivetti family converted to Catholicism on 17th November 1938 and in July 1940, he obtained “discrimination.”¹⁰⁶ The choice, which leaves room for much doubt on whether it was a heartfelt decision or an opportunistic maneuver, was common to many persecuted Jews, even if it was not enough to avoid persecution. In 1942 he went to Davos, in Switzerland, and then on to Olivos in Argentina, probably perceiving the climate of tension that would lead to the tightening of the racial laws in a few months from then, and there he lived out the rest of his life.

Conclusions

Should we wish to label simplistically as Fascist all the characters presented here, and to measure their greater or lesser involvement in the life of the regime, we would conclude that Gino Olivetti and Ettore Ovazza touch the two opposing levels of proximity to the regime’s ideology. Olivetti’s support for Fascism still remains controversial. Moreover, it is not easy to distinguish the man from the industrialist’s association to which he dedicated his whole life, so the positions he decided to adopt always had an indissoluble link with the *Confindustria* and with the position of the interests he represented. Olivetti can then be included in the category of the supporters: he embodies the ambiguities of the relationship between captains of industry and Fascist regime.¹⁰⁷ On the opposite side, the Fascist ideals and values completely permeated Ovazza, starting from his total admiration for the Duce. As we have seen, this did not impede Ovazza from remaining active within the Turin Jewish community, which he led in the second half of Thirties. While the political positions of these two characters represent opposite poles, their Jewishness is less elusive compared to the other three: both are members of the community, they do not abjure and are actively involved in communal life, even though they belong to two different trends of Italian Judaism. Ovazza embodies the Italian Jew who nurtures feelings of aversion to Zionism, while Olivetti is a member of a pro-Zionist association. Of course

¹⁰⁴ It was the “*Neue Zuercher Zeitung*” in ACS, MI, DGPS, Pol. Pol., b. 916 fasc. personali.

¹⁰⁵ According to Paola Rapini, Olivetti abandoned his appointments as the result of a plot against him, Granata and Rapini, *Gino Olivetti*, 158.

¹⁰⁶ *Ivi*.

¹⁰⁷ Franklin Hugh Adler, “Gino Olivetti,” 264.

Jewish social interactions are complex and varied and a brief analysis of these characters cannot be exhaustive in this regard.

In addition to the positions that move along the anti-Zionism/pro-Zionism axis, there are attitudes of an apparently total assimilation, as is the case of the other protagonists, who, in marrying the national cause, stripped themselves of any other distinctive sign. In particular, Sinigaglia's display of aversion, expressed in 1918, to Jewish communal life described as a system that brought Israelites together "like in a caste or race apart," reminds us of the attitude of Teodoro Mayer, his father-in-law. In 1930 Mayer forbade his Trieste paper *Il Piccolo* to publish an article on the contribution of Jews in the national struggle, justifying his refusal by saying "the Jews should be baptized and that's the end of that"¹⁰⁸. Some members of the upper middle-class could develop a new identity founded on their social integration and their patriotic fervor, later redefined as a total support for Fascism. The more determined and radical ones in distancing themselves from their Jewish roots were often (but not always, Ovazza is a counterexample in that he did not reject his Jewishness) those who took part in the campaigns in favor of intervention in the First World War and then volunteered to fight and became high-profile figures in the regime.¹⁰⁹ This is the argument made by Anna Millo concerning the peculiar situation in Trieste, but to some degree a similar situation can be found in different geographical areas, like in the cases of Sinigaglia (Roma) and Jung (Palermo). It is interesting to note that both were related to families coming from Trieste. In actual fact, the same condition of *konfessionslos* connects Jung and Sinigaglia to their Trieste network (the Aras¹¹⁰ and the Mayers respectively). Consequently, as Pavan has noted, in this case endogamy becomes a tie between individuals, or entire families, who have decided to distance themselves from Judaism without converting to the Christian faith, thus creating a peculiar bond uniting a subgroup of highly integrated former Jews.¹¹¹

And so it is that we come up against a methodological problem, the difficulty of dealing with such a complex theme like Jewish identity after emancipation, an inescapable issue and yet so hard to resolve: the Jews, after emancipation

¹⁰⁸ Angelo Scocchi, "Gli ebrei di Trieste nel Risorgimento italiano," *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, 1951, quoted in Millo, *L'élite del potere a Trieste*, 337.

¹⁰⁹ *Ivi.*

¹¹⁰ Camillo Ara, "born to Jewish parents of Israelite religion," he abjured in 1904 remaining "without religious confession." Archivio di Stato di Trieste (AST), Prefettura Gabinetto, b. 403.

¹¹¹ Both families had decided to distance themselves from Judaism. As Pavan notes, it is indicative that a rite of passage like abandoning the religion of origin was something that often involved an entire family, Ilaria Pavan, "Ebrei in affair," 787.

constitute a group whose contours are often uncertain and elusive¹¹². If different ways of experiencing Jewishness exist, there are also different ways of being Fascist: in fact, the support for the regime has many faces and a wide range of attitudes from indifference to conformist support, like that of Olivetti, to militant participation, like that of Ovazza and Jung. The same Fascist national party is not a monolithic institution but contains different souls within it: from the most radical to the very moderate.¹¹³ The Duce's ambiguous attitude must also be contemplated in this scenario; as the historian Meir Michaelis argued, he uses pro-Semitism and anti-Semitism depending on the needs of the moment, with the flare of an experienced politician.¹¹⁴

Mussolini received continual reassurances from Jewish fascists on their loyalty to the homeland, as the periodical created by Ovazza demonstrates, or as emerges from the behavior of Jung, who refused to meet with a representative of the World Zionist Organization even while his Duce granted repeated audiences to Zionist leaders from abroad.¹¹⁵

Jung and Reiss-Romoli are fascists *in toto*, "they believe, obey and fight" not only in the framework of the Italian economic policy, and on the battlefields, but also in the political arena. Each one of them, then, reflects the different phases that Fascism went through, reproducing the different facets of the regime: Sinigaglia is a Fascist *ante marcia*, perhaps also *ante Mussolini*: mainly involved in the first phase, the revolutionary one, he is present in all the post-war associations close to the Fascist movement, intent on dismantling the democratic institutions. Jung is a member of the Fascist hierarchy who propagates the Fascist verb from the center to the suburbs and elects himself spokesman for all the battles engaged in by the regime. Olivetti represents the moderate supporter of the regime, who does not oppose and always compromises, until he is, in the end, absorbed by Fascism. Reiss-Romoli even wished to defy racial persecutions and be accepted in the army to fight for the homeland. Ovazza follows the Fascist course from start to finish and pays with his life for the extreme faith placed in Mussolini and in the Fascist Italy he identified with.

Jewish identity, already eroded, appears for some of these men to fade in the face of other strong emotional bonds, like nationalism and Fascism. That process struck many Italian Jews, as it affected all the nation, reshaping identities on the basis of the Fascist paradigm. Yet their devotion to the regime did not prevent

¹¹² Fabio Levi, "Gli ebrei nella vita economica italiana dell'Ottocento," in *Gli ebrei in Italia*, ed. Vivante, 1171-1172. Pavan, "Ebrei in affari tra realtà e pregiudizio," 623-640.

¹¹³ Lupo, *Il fascismo*, 329.

¹¹⁴ Meir Michaelis, *Mussolini e la questione ebraica*, (Milan: Edizioni di Comunità, 1982), 48-52.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

Mussolini from putting the radical, anti-Semitic wing of his movement into the fray and proceeding with his racial policy, ignoring the services rendered with utmost sincerity by many Jews to the Fascist nation. The faith of the protagonists of this essay in the Fascist regime did not prevent them from being alienated from politics, society and the army; except for Ovazza they all survived, but would have been overwhelmed by the pain of losing family members who succumbed to a more tragic fate.¹¹⁶

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¹¹⁶ For a list of those who were deported and killed see Liliana Picciotto Fargion, *Il libro della memoria. Gli ebrei deportati dall’Italia (1943-1945)*, (Milan: Mursia 2002), *ad nomen*.