



Italy's Fascist Jews: Insights on an Unusual Scenario

edited by *Michele Sarfatti*

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Italy's Fascist Jews: Insights on an Unusual Scenario

by Michele Sarfatti

On 23 March 1919, in a small hall in Piazza San Sepolcro in Milan, Benito Mussolini founded a movement called *Fasci di combattimento* [Fasci of Combat], which in November 1921 became the *Partito nazionale fascista* [National Fascist Party, PNF]. The *Associazione nazionalista italiana* [Italian Nationalist Association] merged with the party in 1923. On 31 October 1922 King Victor Emmanuel III invited Mussolini to form the Kingdom of Italy's new government. Mussolini was Prime Minister continuously until 25 July 1943. During that time, he reversed the principles of the liberal democracy that had previously existed, set up a dictatorship, and established a totalitarian regime.

The political program of the *Fasci di combattimento* and, up to 1937, that of the PNF did not include anti-Jewish views or aims. Fascism would proclaim and officially adopt them in 1938. For many years, therefore, Italian Jews who wished to do so could adhere to the Fascist ideology, join the PNF, become involved in the party's public and inner life, and take on important administrative roles (like the *podestà* [mayor] of Ferrara, shown in the cover photo of this issue). Between September and November 1938, after two years of an intense anti-Semitic campaign, the Fascist Italian government enacted a body of very harsh anti-Jewish laws: the rules relating to schools and those affecting foreigners, passed in Italy in September, were harsher than those in force in Germany in that same month. One decree concerned the "Aryanisation" of the PNF. The drafting process of this rule proved very complex. On 7 November the Council of Ministers approved the draft of a decree titled *Modificazioni allo Statuto del Partito Nazionale Fascista* [Changes to the Statutes of the National Fascist Party], which ruled: "Italian citizens who are considered of Jewish race as per provisions in law and do not fall within any of the exemptions provided for in the laws themselves cannot be members of the PNF." The part about "exemptions" referred to a provision contained in another law, which decreed that Jews who had acquired so-called "merits" in war, towards the nation or towards Fascism would be exempt from some of the persecutory measures. This partial exemption was given the (nowadays absurd-sounding) name of

discriminazione [discrimination]. Actually, despite all the announcements that were made, “discrimination” was very sparingly implemented,¹ and in most sectors persecution struck both “discriminated” and “non-discriminated” Italian Jews equally. So it happened in the case of PNF membership: on 19 November the words “and do not fall within any of the exemptions provided for in the laws themselves” were expunged from the decree’s typewritten final draft and on 21 November the King appended his signature under the thus mutilated text. It is also of note that this decree was published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale del Regno d’Italia* [Official Gazette of the Kingdom of Italy] only on 13 February 1939, a very unusual delay.² In conclusion, the official severing of the tie between Italian Fascism and Fascist Jews was no easy matter. It is also not without interest that, chronologically, the decree of 19 November was the last of the 1938 anti-Jewish laws to come into force.

In any case, all card-carrying members who were classified as “of Jewish race” (that is, both those that were born of two parents of that “race” and those who, while having only one parent of that “race,” were not christened) were expelled from the PNF within a short time.³

This issue of *Quest* is devoted to the subject of Fascist Italian Jews. Its main purpose is to trace and compare the life path of some of them and to start looking more closely at some aspects of their experience with Fascism and of their being Jewish. The focus will be on the twenty years during which Fascism allowed them to feel Fascist and to be card-carrying members of the PNF.

The history of Fascist Jews still awaits to be fully researched in its complexity. Several historians have described and commented on the periodical *La nostra bandiera* [Our Flag], which was published from 1934 to 1938. Their studies, however, focus almost entirely on those years and either ignore the fifteen years that went before or deal with them in a few sentences. Of course, the magazine’s

¹ Michele Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini’s Italy. From Equality to Persecution*, trans. by John and Anne C. Tedeschi, (Madison: Wisconsin University Press, 2006), 135-7.

² Michele Sarfatti, *Mussolini contro gli ebrei. Cronaca dell’elaborazione delle leggi del 1938*, (Turin: S. Zamorani, 1994), 55-6.

³ For a letter of expulsion, dated November 29, 1938, see Riccardo Di Donato, “Materiali per una biografia intellettuale di Arnaldo Momigliano, 1. Libertà e pace nel mondo antico”, *Athenaeum* 83/1 (1995): 219 note 25; cf. also the relevant file in the PNF Turin Collection held in the Archivio di Stato di Torino (State Archives in Turin):

http://archiviodistatotorino.beniculturali.it/work/pnf_detl.php?pag=36&rec=44577 (registration required for access, last accessed on 28 July 2017).

pages are an important source of information about the views and expectations of those who wrote in it; however, it would be well not to forget that the history of Fascist Jews dates back to 1919.⁴ One truly remarkable fact ought to be mentioned briefly: an Italian scholar has invented (*sic*) the existence of second publication by Fascist Jews, allegedly called “Tempi nuovi (New Times)” and issued on the same dates and with identical contents as “La nostra bandiera,”⁵ but this obviously is of no interest to us here.

The first research on *La nostra bandiera* was published in 1961 by Guido Valabrega. He described the various issues of the magazine and claimed that “basically, [it] can be compared in many respects to those instances of extensive collaborationism we saw in the Warsaw Ghetto in the actions of the local Judenrat.” Valabrega conceded that in 1934-1938 there was no anti-Jewish persecution in Italy, but reasserted that the magazine “fits exactly into the logical path that would lead some Jewish groups to [...] cooperate to the last with the executioners of the Jewish population.”⁶ Such statements are unacceptable. Put simply, Valabrega’s analysis was political, not historical, and prompted by anti-Fascism. Having said that, it is worthy of note that, due to his role as Director of the *Centro di documentazione ebraica contemporanea* [Jewish Contemporary Documentation Centre] and to the fact that his essay was published by the *Federazione giovanile ebraica d’Italia* [Jewish Youth Federation of Italy], his article also took on relevance as being a first research on how Italian Jews (or rather, many Italian Jews) became followers of Fascism, and carried out by a representative of Italian Jewry at that. In Italian historiography, such a critical enquiry into “our own” recent past, conducted by a member of Italian society, was somehow ground-breaking.

⁴ Guido Valabrega, “Prime notizie su “La nostra bandiera» (1934-1938)”, in *Gli ebrei in Italia durante il fascismo. Quaderni della Federazione giovanile ebraica d’Italia*, 1, (1961): 21-33; later in Valabrega, *Ebrei, fascismo, sionismo*, (Urbino: Argalia, 1974), 41-57; Celeste Pavoncello Piperno, “La Nostra Bandiera”: l’adesione agli “ideali” fascisti di un gruppo di ebrei italiani,” *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 48/7-12 (1982): 15-22; Paola Spagnolo, “Aspetti della questione ebraica nell’Italia fascista. Il gruppo de ‘La nostra bandiera’ (1935-1938),” *Annali del dipartimento di scienze storiche e sociali. Univesità degli studi di Lecce* vol. 5 (1986-1987): 127-45; Luca Ventura, *Ebrei con il Duce. “La Nostra Bandiera” (1934-1938)*, (Turin: Zamorani, 2002).

⁵ Antonio Pellicani, “I gruppi israeliti italiani e il fascismo: la rivista “Tempi nuovi”, in *La Toscana nel regime fascista (1922-1939)*. vol. II, (Florence: L. Olschki, 1971) 583-590; Michele Sarfatti, “L’antisemitismo fascista e l’interruzione della stampa ebraica italiana nel 1938. Con un’appendice su una rivista,” *Bailamme. Rivista di spiritualità e politica* 11-12 (1992): 165-213; 210-3.

⁶ Valabrega, “Prime notizie,” 21-2.

In that same year 1961, in his ampler and more detailed historical analysis, Renzo De Felice wrote that Fascism had had a considerable following among Jews, and that this was due to the fact that “the middle-class character of Italian Jewry [*il carattere spiccatamente borghese dell’ebraismo italiano*]” found itself in agreement with “the upper-class nature of the Fascist party at the beginning [*il carattere classista del fascismo delle ‘origini’*].”⁷ I believe this statement to be incorrect, as in the first year of its existence Fascism had also radical features and not just “middle-class” ones, and even more so because the reasons why individual Jews came to adhere to Fascism were varied.

Further on, writing of *La nostra bandiera*, De Felice stated that its supporters were mostly “deeply assimilated (but non detached) Jews [*ebrei profondamente assimilati (ma non distaccati)*].”⁸ This equation of allegiance to Fascism with “assimilation” was taken up again by Stefano Caviglia in 2013.⁹ I believe this interpretation to be mistaken in general terms, because we ought to regard anti-Fascist Jews and even non-Fascist Jews as “assimilated” too, since they all followed choices or behaviours that were widely present in majority society, and also with respect to individual people, each of whom had their own identity and personality, which moreover changed over time. Take for instance Massimiliano (called Max) Ravà from Venice (1875-1955), a lawyer, banker, “a conservative all his life”: in the early Thirties he was President of the Jewish Community of Venice and member of Executive Board of the *Unione delle Comunità israelitiche italiane* [Union of Italian Jewish Communities, UCII], in the second half of that decade he was among the promoters of the Fascist association called *Comitato degli italiani di religione ebraica* [Committee of Italians of Jewish Faith, CIRE], of which more will be said further on, and after the start of the anti-Semitic persecution he converted to the Catholic Church.¹⁰ The historian Arnaldo Momigliano (1908-1987), who aged sixteen had requested that exams in state schools be not scheduled on Saturday, wrote ten years later that he did not “consider Judaism to have any present value of faith.”¹¹ The entrepreneur

⁷ Renzo De Felice, *The Jews in Fascist Italy*, (New York: Enigma Books, 2001), 66; (Orig. ed., Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo*, 4° ed., (Turin: Einaudi, 1988), 74).

⁸ De Felice, *The Jews in Fascist Italy*, 145. (De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei*, 155).

⁹ Stefano Caviglia, “L’assimilazione impossibile: la tragedia degli ebrei fascisti,” in *Lo spazio della storia. Studi per Vittorio Vidotto*, eds. Francesco Bartolini, Bruno Bonomo, Francesca Socrate, (Rome-Bari: Laterza editore, 2013), 270-87.

¹⁰ Simon Levis Sullam, *Una comunità immaginata. Gli ebrei a Venezia (1900-1938)*, (Milan: Unicopli, 2001), 208-24.

¹¹ Simon Levis Sullam, “Arnaldo Momigliano e la “nazionalizzazione parallela”: autobiografia, religione e storia”, in *Gli ebrei e la destra. Nazione, Stato, identità, famiglia*, eds. Paolo L.

Federico Jarach (1874- 1951), card-carrying PNF member since 1926, President of the Jewish Community of Milan in the Thirties and President of UCII from 1937 to 1939, always maintained a strong bond with the religion of his fathers.¹² The banker Ettore Ovazza (1892-1943), a native of Turin and founder of *La nostra bandiera*, in late 1938 left the Jewish Community of Turin to prove his loyalty to Fascism, but in October 1939 wrote the following letter to the Community's President: "The undersigned Ovazza Ettore [...], herewith submits the present petition, respectfully requesting that on the anniversary of the passing away of his lamented and revered Father, *Commendatore* [Commander] Ernesto on (14 October) 1 Cheshvan, he may be readmitted into the Jewish Community of Turin. This request reflects his feelings of attachment to the Religion of Israel, which has never waned, as his withdrawal was meant as a statement of Italian national devotion and did not involve any religious motive."¹³ A different story again is that of Umberto Cassuto (1883-1951) of Florence, a scholar and professor of the Bible and of Hebrew, who in 1932, having sworn the oath that the Fascist regime imposed on universities, took the place of Giorgio Levi Della Vida (1886-1967), who was Jewish too and had refused the oath; Cassuto was expelled in 1938 and went on to teach at the University of Jerusalem.¹⁴

I believe that if we resort to the category of "assimilation" or to that of "collaborationism" we end up by disregarding the true situation of the times, which – and this is true also for Jews with different beliefs – saw the predominance of political choices, sometimes prompted by social class or by cultural environment, as well as by ideological and ethical considerations.

Luca Ventura's 2002 research, which consists in a long and detailed reconstruction of the history and the contents of *La nostra bandiera*, did not add much as to historical interpretation. Ventura does question the definitions used by Valabrega and De Felice,¹⁵ but then centres his reflections and his contention

Bernardini, Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, Piergabriele Mancuso, (Rome: Aracne, 2007), 61-93; 69-77 (also in *Passato e presente* 25/ 70 (2007): 59-82).

¹² Ilaria Pavan, *Il Comandante. La vita di Federico Jarach e la memoria di un'epoca 1874-1951*, (Milan: Proedi, 2001), 172 ff.

¹³ Archivio storico della Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea CDEC [ACDEC], Fondo Ettore Ovazza, b. 2, fasc. 10, Ettore Ovazza al presidente della Comunità Israelitica di Torino Emanuele Montalcini, October 9, 1939.

¹⁴ Gabriele Rigano, "Umberto Cassuto all'Università di Roma," *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 82/2-3 (2016), tome I: 117-36; 131-2.

¹⁵ Ventura, *Ebrei con il Duce*, 15-20.

around the number of Fascist Jews who subscribed in 1934-1938, rather than on their distinguishing traits.

In a recent essay on Italian Jews and Fascism, Ilaria Pavan has written that we need “exhaustive researches, without preconceptions, on the degree of adherence and interpenetration between the Jewish minority and the Fascist regime, called *Jewish Fascism* [*des recherches exhaustives, sans préjugés, sur le degré d’adhésion et d’interpénétration entre la minorité juive et le régime fasciste, dit fascisme juif*].”¹⁶ The author, however, does not explain what meaning she attaches to “interpenetration” and to “Jewish Fascism.” Although these terms are present in the historical debate, both on this issue and on others, I believe they do not simplify the research that still needs to be carried out.

Having said that, any careful consideration of the question of Fascist Jews must inevitably begin by examining their numbers.

According to an accurate reconstruction of the meeting in March 1919, the event was attended by between six and eight Jews, of whom only a few (between one and three) were “truly Fascist.”¹⁷ Both the movement and the party had Jews among their members; none of them held a high office at national level, except Ivo Levi, who was Secretary of the *Federazione nazionale fascista universitaria* [National Fascist Students’ Federation] from May-June 1922 to the early months of 1923, albeit with very limited powers.¹⁸ Of the PNF members who played major roles at national level in various fields, at least the economist Gino Arias (1879-1940), the intellectual Margherita Grassini Sarfatti (1880-1961), Guido Jung (1876-1940), an entrepreneur who for a brief period was government minister, and Angelo Oliviero Olivetti (1874-1931), revolutionary union leader, deserve a mention. Some years later the first three converted to Roman Catholicism.¹⁹

In the course of the Twenties and Thirties the number of Jews who joined the PNF rose constantly, as did the number of non-Jews. On 22 August 1938 Mussolini ordered a meticulous census of the people he would soon be persecuting, a census that actually resembled the collecting of data for police records. The census had a racist approach, in that it involved all persons who had a least one Jewish or formerly Jewish parent, whatever their religion or identity; it

¹⁶ Ilaria Pavan, “Les Juifs italiens et le fascisme (1922-1938),” *Revue d’histoire de la Shoah* 204 (2016): 35-61; 36.

¹⁷ Giorgio Fabre, *Mussolini razzista. Dal socialismo al fascismo: la formazione di un antisemita*, (Milan: Garzanti, 2005), 233-9 (quoted passage at page 239).

¹⁸ Fabre, *Mussolini razzista*, 396-403.

¹⁹ Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini’s Italy*, 16.

was thus aimed at “people even partially of Jewish race,” not at “Jews.” The census form included two boxes, one for the date of first joining the PNF, the other to indicate membership for the current year, i.e. Year XVI of the “Fascist Era.” (The “Fascist Era” was calculated from the “March on Rome” on 28 October 1922, Year XVI therefore went from 29 October 1937 to 28 October 1938.)²⁰

The data from the forms were summarized in various statistical tables. The one on PNF membership included Italian citizens over 21 and showed membership figures in the Year XVI, first-time party memberships divided into five-year periods, and other connected data. To fully understand the data contained in these statistical tables one must always keep in mind that each single value sums up data relating to a very diverse spectrum of people, ranging from those with Jewish faith or identity to those who had just one parent who was born Jewish but had been baptized at a young age. We know that of all the Italians of whatever age included in the census, those that could be defined as “Jewish” amounted to 77.5 per cent of the total (the remaining 22.5 were people who had been baptized or who belonged to other categories).²¹

In the table that follows I have entered in columns 3 and 4 the data contained in the statistical table on PNF membership: 8,906 persons included in the census had current membership; 1,424 had been members but were no longer so in the current year; 22,736 had never been members. In column 5 I have entered – calling them “data processed by me” – the (rounded-up) numbers obtained by calculating the already mentioned percentage of 77.5: 6,900 “Jews” with current membership; 1,100 with past membership but not currently members; 17,600 who had never been members. In columns 1 and 2 I have inserted the total number of PNF members on dates close to those in the statistical table. Finally, In column 6 I have calculated the percentage of “Jews” among the total PNF membership for 1922: 2,40 per thousand, and for 1938: 2,17.

We need to keep in mind that there were obviously Jews who had been members of the PNF but had died before the 1938 census; moreover, as already mentioned, some people included in the census had been “Jewish” when they first joined but were no longer so at the time of the census; it is impossible, however, to conjecture to what extent these and other situations affect the census numbers.

²⁰ Sarfatti, *Mussolini contro gli ebrei*, 129-182.

²¹ Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy*, 23-24.

Also, we must consider that quite often the actions of individuals cannot possibly be mirrored in statistical datasheets. To name but one example: one Jew of Ferrara, born in 1873, joined the party in December 1920, left it in April 1922, joined it again in October 1932; he was therefore a member *della prima ora* [from the very first hour], was no longer a member at the time of the “March on Rome” and of the murder of the Socialist MP Giacomo Matteotti (June 1924), and overall had spent more years outside than inside the PNF.²²

Having said all this, I believe we may conclude that, over the years, Italian Jews made up between 2.0 and slightly less than 3.0 per thousand of overall PNF membership.

Altogether Jews were less than 1 per thousand of the population, whereas the percentage of their membership is between two and three times as high, something which needs to be analyzed. I believe that the explanation lies not in a propensity of Italian Jews towards that particular party, but rather in the peculiarly Jewish tendency to engage in political life that arose out of their history as a minority, their higher level of education, and their living predominantly in towns. After all, some partial data about the number of Italian Jews who sided with anti-Fascism show their percentage to have been even higher.²³ We may therefore conclude this complex analysis by saying that while Jews joined the PNF just like other Italians, they did so in numbers determined by their social makeup.

²² John Tedeschi with Anne C. Tedeschi, *Italian Jews under Fascism 1938-1945. A personal and historical narrative*, (Madison: Parallel Press, 2015), 241.

²³ Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy*, 16-17.

QUEST N. II – FOCUS

TOTAL OF ITALIAN PNF MEMBERS, EXCLUDING THE YOUNG AND STUDENTS *		ITALIAN CITIZENS OF BOTH SEXES, AGED 21 OR OVER, LIVING IN AUGUST 1938, WHO HAD AT LEAST ONE JEWISH OR FORMERLY JEWISH PARENT **		ITALIAN CITIZENS OF BOTH SEXES, AGED 21 OR OVER, LIVING IN AUGUST 1938, WHO WERE JEWISH (my estimation) ***	
1	2	3	4	5	6
<i>Date</i>	a) men's Fasci b) women's Fasci c) total membership	<i>Date of first joining the PNF</i>	d) member 1937-38 e) not member 1937-38 f) total d + e g) never member of PNF h) relation of d to d+e+g	d) member 1937-38 e) not member 1937-38 f) total d + e g) never member of PNF h) relation of d to d+e+g	<i>Relation of 5 to 2.c (all values are %)</i>
Early October 1922	c) over 250,000	March 1919 – 28 October 1922	d) 609 e) 152 f) 761	d) 500 e) 100 f) 600	-- -- (5.f) 2,40
		29 October 1922 – 28 October 1928	d) 1,504 e) 297 f) 1,801	d) 1,150 e) 250 f) 1,400	//
October 1928	a) 1,027,010 b) 88,006 c) 1,115,016				
		29 October 1928 – 28 October 1933	d) 4,390 e) 530 f) 4,920	d) 3,400 e) 400 f) 3,800	//
October 1933	a) 1,415,407 b) 217,206 c) 1,632,613				
		29 October 1933 – 21 August 1938	d) 2,193 e) 359 f) 2,552	d) 1,700 e) 300 f) 2,000	//
		Unknown period	d) 210 e) 86 f) 296	d) 150 e) 50 f) 200	//
October 1938	a) 2,430,352 b) 743,786 c) 3,174,138	Total March 1919 – 21 August 1938	d) 8,906 e) 1,424 f) 10,330 g) 22,736 h) 26,9%	d) 6,900 e) 1,100 f) 8,000 g) 17,600 h) 26,9%	(5.d) 2,17 -- -- -- --

Sources

* Emilio Gentile, *Storia del Partito fascista. 1919-1922 movimento e milizia*, (Rome-Bari:

Laterza editore, 1989), 550 (his evaluation based on the number of 291, 438 on 31 December 1922); Partito Nazionale Fascista, "Foglio d'ordini," n. 51, October 28, 1928 (October 25, 1928); *Atti del P.N.F. Vol. III 29 ottobre – 28 ottobre Anno XII E.F.*, (Rome: Palombi, 1934), 31 (October 1933); Partito Nazionale Fascista, "Foglio d'ordini," n. 215, October 28, 1938 (October 1938). See also Dante L. Germino, *The Italian Fascist Party in Power. A Study in Totalitarian Rule*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1959), 52; Ital. transl., *Il partito fascista italiano al potere. Uno studio sul governo totalitario* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007), 115; Helga Dittrich-Johansen, *Le "militi dell'idea." Storia delle organizzazioni femminili del Partito Nazionale Fascista*, (Florence: Olschki, 2002), 255.

** Archivio centrale dello Stato, Ministero dell'interno, Direzione generale per la demografia e la razza (1938-1943), b. 13, fasc. 43, table drawn up by the Istituto centrale di statistica, titled *Ebrei italiani classificati secondo la data d'iscrizione al P.N.F.* (my estimation). Data under g) are derived from another table, in *Ib.*; the minors (under 21) were 14.966. The *Istituto centrale di statistica* [Central Statistics Institute] supplied the *Direzione generale per la demografia e la razza* [Directorate-General for Demography and Race] with various updates of this table; the data included here are part of the last of those updates; De Felice, *The Jews in the Fascist Italy*, 65-6, 73, 85, has published the data of the two previous updates, but in a muddled way.

*** As explained in these pages, data in column 5 are the 77.5% – in round numbers – of data in column 4.

In 1938, therefore, PNF members were approx. 26.9 per cent of the entire Jewish adult population having Italian citizenship. Interestingly, a percentage not dissimilar to this is found in late 1937 among the small group of Chief Rabbis: 5 out of 21 were party members.²⁴

All these data refer to Italy as a whole. Yet membership varied from town to town; in Ferrara, for example, the card-carrying "Jews" were 8 per cent of total membership before the "March on Rome" and 22 per cent of the town's Jews in October 1938,²⁵ numbers that are in the first instance considerably higher and in the second slightly lower than the national average. We lack a detailed study of this particular aspect. And any such research would inevitably be faced with the fact that very few of the archives of the PNF's provincial federations survive (one of the few being the one in Turin).²⁶

There is one more statistic in the table to consider: some of the people included in the census had joined the PNF in previous years, but were no longer members in 1937-1938. We may conjecture that for some the discontinuing of their membership coincided with the end of their working life.

²⁴ Gabriele Rigano, "I rabbini italiani nelle carte della pubblica sicurezza," *Zakhor* 8 (2005): 135-73; 152.

²⁵ Ilaria Pavan, *Il podestà ebreo. La storia di Renzo Ravenna tra fascismo e leggi razziali* (Rome-Bari: Laterza editore, 2006), 38; note 32 on page 246.

²⁶ See http://archiviodistatotorino.beniculturali.it/work/pnf_src.php.

For others it was instead a politically motivated choice. Some quit after the movement in 1920 relinquished the principles called *diciannovisti* [of the year nineteen],” i.e. the planks of its political platform of 1919, such as republicanism, anticlericalism, and some social demands.²⁷ Nello (Sabatino) Rosselli, for instance, who was born in 1900 – who never joined the party, and in any case was not included in the 1938 census, having been murdered by Fascism in 1937 –, was thus described in 1927 by the *Prefetto* of his home town: “At the first rise of Fascism he was one of the main followers, because he hoped it would adopt a Republican party line. Since this did not happen, however, he immediately went over to the opposition, directly contacting its most noted supporters.”²⁸ Others, such as Roberto Supino, who as an eighteen-year-old had taken part in the “March on Rome,” quit the party after the murder of the Socialist MP Giacomo Matteotti in June 1924.²⁹ There were also those who left in the Thirties, such as Giuseppe Levi (later Levi Cavaglione), born in 1911, who was sentenced to *confino* [internal exile] in July 1938 for having “betrayed the Fascist cause.”³⁰ Some Jews, on the other hand, acted in an opposite way: Renzo Ravenna (1893-1961), lawyer, “podestà” (mayor) of Ferrara from 1926 to 1938, joined the PNF in January 1924, a few months after Fascists had murdered the parish priest of Argenta, Don Giovanni Minzoni, and from April to November of that same year was the party’s provincial secretary.³¹

The increasing regimentation and fascistization of society and the growing numbers of Fascist followers entailed consequences also for Jewish associations. The first episode in order of time actually remained irrelevant to Jewish life, but cannot be left unmentioned. In September 1925 a young Jew in Pesaro circulated a letter calling for *Fasci religiosi israelitici* [Jewish Religious Fasci] to be

²⁷ Emilio Gentile, *Storia del Partito fascista. 1919-1922 movimento e milizia*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza editore, 1989), 66-101.

²⁸ Prefetto di Firenze, “Scheda biografica di Nello Rosselli, Firenze 7 giugno 1927,” *Carlo e Nello Rosselli. Catalogo delle mostre ed edizione di fonti. Vol. II. Un'altra Italia nell'Italia del fascismo. Carlo e Nello Rosselli nella documentazione dell'Archivio centrale dello Stato*, ed. Marina Giannetto, (Rome-Città di Castello: Edimond, 2002), 87; document kept in Archivio centrale dello Stato (ACS), Direzione generale della pubblica sicurezza, Affari generali e riservati, Casellario politico centrale, b. 4422, fasc. Rosselli, Sabatino Enrico.

²⁹ Bruno Di Porto, “Vittorio di Moisè e i discendenti,” *I Supino. Una dinastia di ebrei pisani fra mercatura, arte, politica e diritto (secoli XVI-XX)*, eds. Franco Angiolini, Monica Baldassarri, (Pisa: Pacini editore, 2015), 186.

³⁰ Lidia Maggioli, Antonio Mazzoni, *Il ponte setteluci. Biografia di Giuseppe Levi Cavaglione*, (Pesaro: Metauro, 2012), 29.

³¹ Pavan, *Il podestà ebreo*, 44.

established, in order to bring about a “reform of ritual and of organizations in accordance with the times.” Its author emulated Fascist language and concepts and declared himself in favor of setting up a new movement that was to be formed by Jews and to have a Fascist structure and Fascist aims. This project apparently originated from just one person and rapidly foundered.³²

Among the Jewish Communities in Italy (of which there was only one in each town), the first to be affected seems to have been the one in Florence: when the elections for the new Council were held on 19 November 1926, a candidates’ list proclaiming itself “Fascist” was submitted, as a result remained the only competitor and won the election.³³ Three years later, on the occasion of the elections for the Chamber of Deputies that were to be held on 24 March 1929 (the ballot contained a single list of candidates, put together by the PNF, and voters could only vote “yes” or “no”), the Community of Turin invited its members to

give [their] warmest and most heartfelt consent to the national list headed by the name of Benito Mussolini! The great task of reconstruction achieved by the Head of Government and the Regime over the past seven years must be crowned by a superb success. [...] The Jews of Turin, having strong bonds of love and loyalty with the cherished Fatherland, and trusting in its lofty destiny, will want to be part of it, not only by casting their favorable vote, but also with an effectual propaganda among their friends, acquaintances and employees.³⁴

The actual situation, however, was not uniform at all: as late as 1934, for instance, just one of the five councilors of the Mantova Community was a card-carrying PNF member.³⁵

In that same year 1934, after a group of anti-Fascists, many of whom were Jewish or had a Jewish surname, was arrested in Turin, the regime launched a harsh anti-Semitic attack, accusing *those Jews* or *the Jews* (the distinction was not at all clear) of being anti-Fascist and anti-Italian. This was a serious accusation, since by that time Italy, Nation and Fascism had become as one. In response, Fascist

³² Olindo De Napoli, “Tempi difficili. Note sugli ebrei italiani nei primi anni del fascismo (1922-1925),” *Passato e presente* 35/101 (2017): 71-90; 87-9.

³³ “Le elezioni a Firenze”, *Israel*, December 20, 1926.

³⁴ “Un invito agli ebrei torinesi”, *Gazzetta del popolo*, March 23, 1929.

³⁵ ACDEC, Fondo Leone e Felice Ravenna, b. 9, fasc. 1, lettera del presidente della Comunità israelitica di Mantova al presidente dell’Unione delle comunità israelitiche italiane, June 11, 1934.

Jews founded a weekly magazine, *La nostra bandiera*, which was published in Turin from May 1934 to June 1938³⁶ and which – according to its editor – within six months had reached 1,100 subscriptions and a circulation of 2,800 copies.³⁷ In the following months they also submitted their own lists of candidates in the elections for Community Councils, often winning them. Consequently, they reached an agreement with the UCII leadership whereby three of their main figures, Guido Liuzzi and Ettore Ovazza of Turin and Dario Nunes Franco of Leghorn, were co-opted into UCII's Council (the first was also co-opted into UCII's Executive Board). They joined Max Ravà from Venice, who was already in the Council. This arrangement, however, lasted only a few months, and in the course of that same year the dissent within Italian Jewry again burst forth in a public manner.³⁸ While this was taking place, the instances of State anti-Semitism were on the rise.

Eventually, on 24 January 1937, Fascist Jews created a *Comitato degli italiani di religione ebraica*, which presented itself as an absolute alternative to the UCII leadership. Within a few months CIRE obtained the support of various Community Councils, such as Rome, Turin, Florence and Leghorn, but not that of Milan, Trieste, Genoa and Fiume³⁹. Comparing these two groups of Communities it is interesting to note that the former had a low (2-6 per cent) and the latter a considerable (15-30 per cent) presence of Jews from Central and Eastern Europe.⁴⁰ One might therefore legitimately conclude that a higher presence of Jews coming from European areas where anti-Semitism was rife did – at least partially – influence the choices of the Communities' Italian members.

When the new UCII congress convened on 21 March 1938, however, the enactment of a Fascist legislation against Jews was actually impending. The two main groups therefore reached an agreement about the makeup of the new Council, which would be formed mainly by men appointed by CIRE. At the same time CIRE dissolved, while setting in motion the closing down of *La nostra*

³⁶ Ventura, *Ebrei con il Duce*, 129-30.

³⁷ ACS, Ministero della cultura popolare, Gabinetto, 1° versamento, Affari generali 1926-1944, b. 12, fasc. 126, "La nostra bandiera," Ettore Ovazza, *Promemoria circa la situazione del giornale settimanale "La nostra bandiera,"* [first half of November 1934].

³⁸ Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy*, 69-96.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 113-6.

⁴⁰ Klaus Voigt, "Considerazioni sugli ebrei immigrati in Italia", in *Stato nazionale ed emancipazione ebraica. Atti del convegno*, eds. Francesca Sofia and Mario Toscano (Rome: Bonacci, 1992), 223-43; 232-3. See also Klaus Voigt, *Il rifugio precario. Gli esuli in Italia dal 1933 al 1945. vol. I*, (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1993), 518-9 (Orig. ed., *Zuflucht auf Widerruf. Exil in Italien 1933-1945*, vol. I, (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1989)).

bandiera. By then, though, Mussolini had already chosen his new anti-Semitic course, based on a biologically racist criterion that totally ignored all diversity within Italian Jewry.

While the (good or bad) relationship between individual Jews and Fascism depended entirely on the political choices of each individual, the relationship between national Jewish organizations, first the *Consorzio delle comunità israelitiche italiane* [Consortium of Italian Jewish Communities], later UCII, and local ones (the Communities) on the one hand and Italian fascistized authorities (the *fasces* were proclaimed the emblem of the Italian State in 1926) on the other was a more complex matter. Jewish organizations, in fact, whatever the majority that governed them, were required to contact national and local authorities every time they needed to solve a problem, be it about a cemetery, a school etc. This continued to be so even after the establishment of the dictatorship and the rise of totalitarianism. It was with the Fascist government of the Fascist State that the *Consorzio* discussed and agreed upon the reform of the laws presiding over the functioning of Jewish organizations, which was enacted in October 1930. And it was the main representatives of that State (King Victor Emmanuel III, the Head of Government Benito Mussolini and the Minister of Justice Alfredo Rocco) that UCII presented with a gold medal, bearing on one side the Tablets of the Law and the *menorah* and on the other the crown and the *fasces*, in celebration of that reform.⁴¹ I believe that these public relations gestures towards central or local authorities, contrary to the rallying call to voters by the Turin Community in 1929, cannot in and of themselves be defined as “Fascist,” and only a close examination can determine if some of them had indeed politically or ideologically Fascist features.

There are many issues of fundamental importance that need to be examined in order to arrive at a full picture on the matter of Fascist Jews, such as the relationship between Jewish bodies and Fascist authorities, the anti-Fascist or un-Fascist stance of the other Italian Jews, the various branches of Zionism and their relationship with Fascism and with Italian foreign policy, the complex history of Mussolini’s and Fascism’s anti-Semitism, and many more, but they clearly cannot be analyzed within this essay.⁴² As for the last issue just mentioned, namely how Fascism and particularly Mussolini arrived at their choice of anti-

⁴¹ “Dopo la legge sulle Comunità Israelitiche italiane. La consegna di una medaglia al Re e al Capo del Governo”, *Israel*, May 12, 1931; *La menorà. Culto, storia e mito*, ed. Francesco Leone, (Milan: Skira, 2017), 290, 358.

⁴² See Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini’s Italy* and the bibliography listed there.

Semitism, it needs to be stressed again, I believe, that this was taking place at the same time that Jews were joining Fascism in growing numbers. They were, however, just contemporaneous processes: the latter in no way influenced, nor could it possibly influence, the former. It was probably the significant number of card-carrying Jews in the PNF that determined the complex path of the decree ordering their expulsion in 1938 and caused the delay in promulgating it. The passing of the anti-Semitic legislation in 1938, however, was unrelated to the presence of Jews within the PNF. Its roots (and its coming to maturation) are to be found in the long history of Mussolini and of the Fascist leadership.

The Jews who joined the PNF represented the full variety of the Fascist universe: they might be nationalists, members of the 1920-1922 Fascist squads, reactionaries, men of order, “Mussolinians,” landowners adverse to Bolshevism, young men who believed in the new doctrine’s anti-bourgeois revolution, later (in the Thirties) young men who had been educated in fascistized schools, people who had joined for self-serving reasons or to follow the tide. People joining in the very first years were mostly, I believe, motivated by the nationalism and the profound patriotism that many had matured during the months and years spent in the trenches of the First World War, perhaps the strongest experience of sharing daily life (and death) with other Italians that Jews had lived through. Nationalism also evolved from the bond that had arisen between the Italy that had granted legal and social emancipation and the Jews who had benefitted from it, but I doubt this carried such a weight as to mark those adhesions as peculiarly “Jewish.”

Those card-carrying Jews were also diverse in regard to religion: some would just observe certain rituals out of family tradition, others had a strong Jewish identity rooted in religion or culture. In the matter of ritual, some of them inclined towards a modernizing, “reform” Judaism, which did not evolve, however, into an actual movement. In late 1934 Angelo Sacerdoti (1886-1935), Chief Rabbi of Rome, wrote to Ettore Ovazza, asking him to

dispel worries of a religious and spiritual nature that are widespread in the Italian rabbinical world due to some statements in the newspaper edited by you and to the past of some men that in some Communities declare themselves faithful followers of the movement led by you.⁴³

⁴³ ACDEC, Fondo Ovazza Ettore, b. 1, fasc. 5, Angelo Sacerdoti a Ettore Ovazza, June 16, 1934.

They all believed that rabbis should limit their activity to matters concerning worship, yet at the same time urged them to publicly extol the State, the monarchy, the Head of Government and even Fascism.

All Fascist Jews were opposed to the existence of international Jewish organizations. In regard to Zionism, they were united in their rejection of the prospect of emigrating to Palestine, but some supported the movement's right-wing current. At the founding conference of Vladimir Jabotinsky's New Zionist Organization in 1935, Leone Carpi said that Fascism had brought Italy "to a state of progress and dignity such as never before had been reached" and that "it is undeniable that strong affinities are to be found between the guiding principles of the two movements as regards national ideology, as well as social and economic achievements; it is undeniable that we have much to learn from a movement that has caught the world's attention and that actually has found itself in situations that show deep similarities with our own."⁴⁴ Over time, even *La nostra bandiera* began to publish some positive comments about "revisionist" Zionism.

On one point Fascist Jews were in complete agreement with the other Jews, and that was in extolling the Italian Jews' contribution to the Risorgimento and to the building of the national State and (after 1933) in their strong denunciation of Nazi anti-Semitism and of the favorable comments it elicited in some Fascist circles.

After 8 September 1943, when Central and Northern Italy were under German occupation and the Italian Social Republic was established, Fascist Jews shared the destiny of all other Italian Jews, be it death or survival. Among those who suffered the former was Ettore Ovazza, killed together with his family on Lake Maggiore by Nazi soldiers.⁴⁵

This issue of *Quest* intends to enquire into the Jewish, political and social life stories of Fascist Jews and to bring into focus some aspects of their experience. Three scholars have researched the first of these subjects. Enrica Asquer investigates with a novel approach the applications for "discrimination" (as defined by the anti-Jewish laws) submitted by Jewish men and women in Milan, examines their trust-worthiness as a source and shows how these people

⁴⁴ Vincenzo Pinto, "Mitologie del realismo? La galassia del revisionismo sionista nell'Italia fascista (1922-1938)," *Gli ebrei*, eds. Bernardini, Luzzatto Voghera, Mancuso, 95-140; 128.

⁴⁵ Liliana Picciotto, *Il libro della memoria. Gli Ebrei deportati dall'Italia (1943-1945). Ricerca della Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea*, 2nd ed. (Milan: Mursia, 2002), *ad nomen*.

described their own life and Fascist ideals. René Moehrle's essay analyses the situation in Trieste, a town that became part of Italy after the First World War, and highlights the life stories of five Fascist Jews (or descendants of Jews), who played a role in the town or within the Jewish Community. Roberta Raspagliesi summarizes the life story of five people who held important positions in the country's public or private economic sectors, highlighting both the different bond each of them had with Judaism (some converted to Catholicism) and the different way in which each adhered to Fascism. Simon Levis Sullam's essay is perhaps the first research devoted to the topic of "muscular Judaism," its features and its presence in Italian Judaism in the early 20th century and during the Fascist period, and pays special attention to revisionist Zionism and to *La nostra bandiera*, which diverged when it came to the question of national belonging, but were in agreement in their view of Fascism and in extolling "muscular" Jews. The presence of Jews in a Fascist party in the period between the two world wars is rather unusual. Yet the study of unusual situations serves to complete and enrich the understanding of "usual" situations. It is with this in mind that we have devoted this monographic section to those Jews who in Italy, between 1919 and 1938, chose Fascism.

(Translation: Loredana Melissari)

Michele Sarfatti has been Coordinator of the activities (1982-2002) and Director (2002-2016) of the Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea CDEC, Milan. He is one of the founding editors of the e-journal [Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Questioni di Storia Ebraica Contemporanea](#) (Editor in chief: 2010-2016). He is the author of *Gli ebrei nell'Italia fascista. Vicende, identità, persecuzione*, 2° ed., (Turin: Einaudi 2007) (engl. transl. *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy: from Equality to Persecution*, transl. by J. and A. C. Tedeschi, Madison 2006; germ. transl. *Die Juden im faschistischen Italien. Geschichte, Identität, Verfolgung*, transl. by Th. Vormbaum, L. Melissari, Berlin, 2014). He published several other works on Jews and anti-Semitic persecution in Modern Italy.

* * *

*With great sadness, the Editors of Quest have to announce that **Petra Ernst** passed away on November 29th last year, shortly after the publication of our 9th issue “The Great War. Reflections, Experiences and Memories of German and Habsburg Jews (1914-1918)”, which she has edited together with Jeffrey Grossman and Ulrich Wyrwa.*

Petra Ernst had studied German literature, musicology, and linguistics in Würzburg and Munich and received her PhD from the University of Munich in 1992, where she also started her academic career as research assistant. In 1991 she became the head of the department for international relations of the University of Music and Performing Arts in Graz. Parallel to her administrative work she pushed on her research, and in 1996 she became part of the Research Project (SFB) ‘Modernity: Vienna and Central Europe around 1900’. Within this international research network she was engaged in analyzing Judaism and Modernity from a literary perspective. In the year 2000, she cofounded together with Klaus Hödl, the Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Graz. In the same year she founded, with Klaus Hödl and Gerald Lamprecht, the journal of the Center: “Transversal. Zeitschrift für Jüdische Studien”. Since then she conducted her German-Jewish literary studies until her passing. In the last years Petra was particularly interested in analyzing Jewish space in German Jewish literature in the 19th and 20th century and analyzed the representation of Jewishness and Judaism during World War I in German Jewish literature and the German Jewish Press. On all of these topics Petra published several articles and books, and just recently, in June 2017, her Habilitation thesis “Schetel, Stadt, Staat. Raum und Identität in deutschsprachig-jüdischer Erzählliteratur des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts“ released by the Böhlau publishing house in Vienna.

The Editors

Being a Fascist Jew in Autumn 1938: Self-portrayals from the “Discrimination” Requests Addressed to the Regime

by *Enrica Asquer*

Abstract

This article investigates how Fascists qualified as belonging to the “Jewish race” reacted to the proclamation of the “Laws for the Defense of the Race” and, in particular, how they tried to take advantage of the special legal treatment called “discrimination”, that allowed them to avoid some of the effects of the anti-Semitic legislation. In fact, together with its persecutory measures, the Royal Decree of November 17, 1938, granted some slight dispensations to “Jewish” Italian citizens who could prove to have special merits in the military, political or economic spheres. Drawing on a sample of Milanese Jews’ personal dossiers submitted to the General Directorate for Demography and Race in 1938-1939, this article analyses the self-portrayals strategically devised by those who declared themselves Fascists, in order to illustrate the ‘good Fascist’ reference profiles they crafted and, indirectly, the varying conceptions of Fascism and Nation which had been at the basis of their closeness to the regime.

Introduction

“Discrimination”: a topic kept to the sidelines

Letters applying for “discrimination” as a source

Fascist features: patriotism, assimilation and autarchy

The power of Fascist education: young people

Fascist Women

Conclusions

Introduction

On December 14 1938 the Milan based lawyer Franco Segré sent a succinct letter to the Ministry for Internal Affairs, General Directorate for Demography and Race.¹ In the form of a list, he set out his many personal civil, political and

¹ This article is part of a research which started in 2013 within the framework of a research program devoted to the topic “Models of Minorities’ Integration” funded by Compagnia San Paolo Foundation (Turin) and coordinated by Luciano Allegra at the University of Turin. I would like to thank Luciano Allegra and the other members of the research group for giving me

military merits and he attached seven supporting documents. The goal of the letter was to request express “access to the benefits of discrimination² as set out in article 14 of Royal Decree Law of November 17, 1938-XVII and retain his right to serve his country in the party rank and file, militia and royal air force.”³

Born in Milan in 1901 “of Israelite (Jewish) parentage and Israelite in religion from birth,” Segré presented himself as a Fascist right from the start. He had joined the *Fasci di Combattimento* in 1921. In August 1922, with the blackshirts of the local *Sciesa* group (Milan centre), he had taken part in the assault on the headquarters of the socialist newspaper *Avanti!*. As a member of the *Pensuti-Aviatori Fascisti* Group, whose directorate he had joined since its foundation, he had carried out “the first Italian parachute jump with an Italian parachute and officially in a blackshirt (Blackshirt Pensuti action for the *Ala Italiana* rally).” He had also taken part in the March on Rome in October 1922, and later he had joined the *Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale*, of which he had been squad leader of the second *University Legion* in Milan. He could also boast of important military experience in Eastern Africa and Spain as reserve lieutenant in the Air Force: two reports, drawn up by the military command under whom he had acted, highlighted his qualities as a “highly cultured, deeply intelligent officer of great courage, [...] a fraternal and sociable comrade” with “his subordinates’ interests at heart,”⁴ “keen to make his contribution to the greater strength of the Air Force,” and “always willing and whole-hearted in carrying out orders with no limit to his spirit of self-sacrifice.”⁵

Despite his great many merits, both “Fascist and patriotic,” in the Autumn of 1938 Segré had been expelled from the Fascist party and struck off the Milan bar

precious suggestions during our seminars and discussions. I also thank Michele Sarfatti for encouraging me and reading everything I wrote on this subject.

² The meaning of the word in this context will be explained in this first section.

³ Franco Segré to Hon. Ministry for Internal Affairs, Demographics and Race Division, Milan, December 14, 1938, in Archivio Centrale dello Stato (from now on ACS), Ministero degli Interni (from now on MI), Direzione Generale per la Demografia e la Razza (from now on Dgdr), Divisione Razza (from now on Dr), bundle 254, f. 17953 DIS, Segré Franco, son of the late Remo and Emma Calvo, and his wife Cesarina Volterra. For every citation from sources the translation is mine.

⁴ Captain Pilot Renato Tombari, *Informative report A.O.I. (Oriental Italian Africa): Lieutenant Segré Franco*, Mai Edagà Airport, June 20, 1937-XV, *ivi*.

⁵ Major Pilot Guido Pelegatti, *Personal Notes, Recall to active duty for exigencies O.M.S. (Military Operations Spain), Lieutenant Air Force Segré Cav. Franco, Pilot with brevet of 2nd grade*, Lonate Pozzolo, September 25, 1937-XV, *ivi*.

register. Like many other Italian citizens declared “of Jewish race,” he had been plunged into a dramatic scenario in which his citizenship rights were threatened. In the face of such a risk and together with a great many other citizens – around 8,512 of them, both Fascist and otherwise⁶ –, he attempted to take advantage of “discrimination,” a privileged treatment set out in article fourteen of the Laws for the Defense of the Race. This legal mechanism provided some slight dispensations from the persecutory effects of the law, especially in material and patrimonial terms: precisely, it could suspend the prohibition of being guardians of non-Jewish minors (Art 10.b), of owing or managing any business with more than 100 employees or which received defense contracts (art. 10.c), of owing land that had a taxable value of more than 5,000 lire or urban buildings worth more than 20,000 lire, of keeping on working for a private insurance. On the contrary, it did not soften other restrictive measures, such as the exclusion from any state employment, including in the education sector, from the Fascist Party and from the military service, in peace and wartime.⁷ Only partially, it applied to professional restrictions stated by the law of June 29, 1939-XVII, n. 1054, concerning in particular skilled professions (lawyers, physicians, etc.).

“Discrimination” could be applied to those who submitted a documented application and through this proved to be particularly meritorious in the military, political or socio-economic sphere. In particular, it was first of all volunteers, decorated soldiers and invalid veterans of the Libyan War, World War One and the two Fascist wars in Ethiopia and Spain, who could hope for “discrimination.” The Fiume legionnaires, early Fascists – members of the movement and the party from 1919 to 1922, or those who joined since the second half of 1924 and who had thus remained loyal to the party during the crisis following the assassination of Giacomo Matteotti – could also offer a valuable personal dossier in order to obtain the special status granted by “discrimination.” In addition to these worthy cases, considered “ordinary” and assessed by a commission which worked at the heart of the General Directorate for

⁶ Until the 1st June 1942, that is to say at the end of the most intensive period of the dispositive application, the requests sent to the General Directorate for Demography and Race were 8.512 (of which 341 coming from Italian Jews who resided in the colonies). Around 15.887 were the individuals concerned (of which 548 resided outside Italy). See ACS, MI, Dgdr, Dr, Affari diversi 1938-1944, b. 6, f. 23, sf. *Statistica delle domande presentate per province, tabella Discriminazioni, Italia*.

⁷ “Discrimination” could apply to this latter restriction (art. 10, letter a) in theory, but not in practice. In the totality of the cases I considered, the document containing the positive ruling explicitly mentioned article 10, letters b, c, d, e and article 13, letter h.

Demography and Race, the law also set out an additional path for those whose cases were “exceptional” in various terms – both civil and otherwise. Their petitions had to be assessed on a case by case basis by a special commission.

The status of “discriminated” had to be applied for normally to the provincial prefecture of residence, together with a letter setting out one’s individual and, often, family profile highlighting the elements held to be most effective in convincing the examining officials. In order to corroborate one’s case, many documents were attached: Fascist party membership cards, certificates showing donations of gold to the nation and local PNF headquarters, certificates of enlistment with the *Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale* or proof of having taken part in the March on Rome; proof of citizenship and professional merit in the economic, social or scientific fields such as proof of charitable work of various sorts, membership cards and receipts for donations to cultural associations, references, letters of thanks and appreciation for roles and activities performed, newspaper excerpts and obituaries. The Prefect was responsible for examining the paperwork, gathering whatever information was available on applicants and assessing their merits on the basis of enquiries with other local bodies, the police station, the *Carabinieri* and the local Fascist federation. A bulky dossier, made up of the letter and its attachments, the report of the provincial head of the party (*federale*) and, lastly, the Prefect’s summary report, was thus sent to the General Directorate for Demography and Race for assessment. A final decision was then issued, in time frames which were often anything but brief, and the appropriate prefecture notified.

This procedure was followed in Franco Segrè’s case too, a positive ruling was issued only in November 1941. However, according to the way in which the Royal Decree was usually interpreted, he was not reintegrated into the Army as well as into the Party. In the meantime, in July 1939, under threat of close surveillance by the police for an ill-judged opinion on Fascist justice, Segrè escaped to Chile.⁸

His dossier is one of the 1,424 “discrimination” applications sent to the Regime by Milanese citizens of “Jewish race.”⁹ His application is one of the 102 personal

⁸ The story is told by his son Enrico Segrè Valdebenito in *Lontano da Campanario*, (Naples: Autorinediti, 2008), 339-342.

⁹ For more information on the procedure and an overview of the Milan case see Enrica Asquer, “Autobiografie di supplica: alcune considerazioni sulle richieste di ‘discriminazione’ degli ebrei milanesi, 1938-1943,” *Società e storia* 151 (2016): 97-135.

dossiers elaborated by Milanese Fascist “Jews” which this paper draws on. The discursive construction of the application letters and the self-portrayals that emerge from them will be the object of my analysis in the pages which follow.

“Discrimination”: a topic kept to the sidelines

In the context of the ample historical debate which has analyzed the practical and ideological genesis of the anti-Semitic policy in the Italian context, as well as the implementation of restrictive measures adopted on the eve of the Final Solution,¹⁰ the exemption mechanism called “discrimination” has been kept to the sidelines.¹¹ The limitations imposed by the accessibility of the sources, for privacy reasons first of all, have certainly played a role. However, a common tendency of historians to underestimate the weight of the “discrimination” has also contributed to this silence.

In some way, this is perfectly understandable. “Discrimination” applied for limited periods and had limited impact especially if viewed in the light of the Final Solution. In the aftermath of the law and with the succession of circulars defining its implementation, the highly restrictive applicability confines of this legal mechanism were soon revealed. Moreover, the status of the “discriminated” in no way proved to be capable of protecting Italian Jews just a few years later, when the new phase of the “assault on Jewish lives” began,¹² in autumn 1943.

“Discrimination” was also an understandably complex matter from the point of view of the commemorative reworking carried out later by those directly involved in it. Especially after the Shoah, it probably became “a delicate subject,”¹³ mentioned only some time later and with some embarrassment or

¹⁰ Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo*, (Turin: Einaudi, 1993), Michele Sarfatti, *Mussolini contro gli ebrei. Cronaca dell'elaborazione delle leggi del 1938*, (Turin: S. Zamorani Editore, 1994); Michele Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy. From Equality to Persecution* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006); Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci, *L'Italie fasciste et la persécution des juifs*, (Paris: Perrin, 2007); *Storia della Shoah in Italia. Vicende, memorie, rappresentazioni*, eds. Marcello Flores, Simon Levis-Sullam, Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci, Enzo Traverso, (Turin: Utet, 2010).

¹¹ See for example, Michele Sarfatti, “Characteristics and objectives of anti-Jewish Racial Laws in Fascist Italy, 1922-1943,” in *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule, 1922-945*, ed. Joshua D. Zimmerman (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 72.

¹² Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy*, 178-211.

¹³ “In accounts written after the war it is difficult to find references to individuals who had applied for, or obtained discrimination (...). It is, as I have had the occasion to note, a delicate

feelings of guilt: “Naturally we were *discriminati*,” remembers Carla Ovazza, niece of Ettore, Turin based founder of the periodical *La Nostra Bandiera*, a publication by Jews close to the Regime. “Ignorant as we were,” she continued, “we were delighted. When I think back it’s absolutely scandalous that we fought for that, but it’s true.”¹⁴ Probably, it may be noticed, such reluctant accounts have implicitly had the effect of setting the record straight to combat what happened in the immediate post-war era when, in a climate of highhanded pacification, “discrimination” was exploited to the advantage of a sympathetic representation of Fascism, as a sign of its ability to preserve the “privileges” of “respectable” citizens. As Silvia Falconieri puts it, the “good Italian” myth of an imperfect totalitarian regime, generally more lenient than German Nazism, found in the exemption mechanism a theoretical and practical foothold.¹⁵

It is no coincidence that, together with this crucial mention contained in Falconieri’s work, a precious reference to “discrimination,” which merits further research attention, can be found in Enzo Collotti’s work devoted to the anti-Semitic laws.¹⁶ In the framework of a fundamental innovative interpretation which has seen Italian Fascism and its anti-Semitic policies as an independent trajectory which cannot simply be attributed to the supposed subordination of the Italian Fascist Regime to Nazi Germany, Collotti has recognised the importance of studying the effects of “discrimination” especially from the point of view of those directly affected by it and with the aim of producing a more sophisticated assessment of the violence perpetrated by the Regime. In particular, perceptions of the “moral” implications of applying for exemption and the risk of internal divisions being created within the Jewish community emerge from Collotti’s considerations as precious pieces in a jigsaw which has still to be fully completed.

subject. After a balanced judgment of the situation, those who were granted ‘discrimination’ believed they had betrayed group solidarity and have sometimes mistakenly been blamed for having done so” (translation mine). Mario Jona, “Le leggi razziali e gli ebrei,” in *Le leggi razziali antiebraiche fra le due guerre mondiali. Atti del convegno*, Accademia Galileiana di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, Padua, 23-24 October 2008, eds. Oddone Longo and Mario Jona, (Florence: Giuntina, 2009), 13-50; 44-45.

¹⁴ Alexander Stille, *Benevolence and Betrayal. Five Italian Jewish Families under Fascism*, (New York: Picador, 1991), 75.

¹⁵ Silvia Falconieri, “Riparare e ricordare la legislazione antiebraica. La reviviscenza dell’istituto della discriminazione (1944-1950),” in *Riparare, risarcire, ricordare. Un dialogo tra storici e giuristi*, eds. G. Resta and V. Zeno Zencovich, (Naples: Editoriale Scientifica, 2012), 139-154.

¹⁶ Enzo Collotti, *Il fascismo e gli ebrei: le leggi razziali in Italia*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza editore, 2004), 94.

“Discrimination” and the exemption mechanism can also be interesting for scholars focusing on the political and cultural history of citizenship. In the light of a culturalist re-interpretation of the Risorgimento, new interest arose in connecting pre-Fascist and Fascist nationalistic and racist narratives: from this point of view, as underlined by Alberto Banti,¹⁷ “discrimination” implies a crucial emphasis on the military involvement and self-sacrifice in national wars as a key qualification of a good citizen. But this was not an original element introduced by Fascism, since it relied on the long tradition of the patriotic discourse.

A part from those references, only rarely have the “discrimination” dossiers been analyzed systematically by scholars. A partial exception is Iael N. Orvieto’s work,¹⁸ which does not focus specifically on “discrimination,” but aims at offering a first overall examination of the letters sent by Jews to the leader of the Regime via his *Segreteria Particolare*. Referring only to the documents accessible at the time she wrote, when scholars were not allowed to examine “discrimination” dossiers for privacy reasons, Orvieto classified the requests for “discrimination” as ‘petitions’ together with many other different kinds of requests explicitly addressed to Mussolini. To this typology she added ‘declaratory’ letters, containing opinions by Jews on the racist laws, and requests to enlist in the army sent in 1939 and 1940 by individuals who wished to continue to serve the nation. With reference to “discrimination” applications, she profitably mentioned both material and “moral” interests behind the requests, thus connecting these sources to the general problem of how deeply Italian Jews were wounded by anti-Semitic laws and how they reacted. As these sources brilliantly suggest, the emotional dimension of belonging to the national community is not negligible among the many reasons for applying for “discrimination” and we can imagine that the intersection between material and ‘immaterial’ motivations was particularly strong in the case of parents with children, who applied also in order to save them both from the restrictive

¹⁷ Alberto Banti, *Sublime madre nostra. La nazione italiana dal Risorgimento al fascismo*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza editore, 2011), 177.

¹⁸ Iael N. Orvieto’s “Lettere a Mussolini: gli ebrei italiani e le leggi anti-ebraiche,” *Rassegna mensile di Israel*, XLIX/1 (2003): 321-346. A similar analysis is contained in Iael N. Orvieto, “The Impact of Anti-Jewish Legislation on everyday life and the Response of Italian Jews, 1938-1943,” in *Jews in Italy under Fascist and Nazi Rule*, 158-181. The historiographical value of these letters has also been highlighted by Alberto Cavaglioni, *Il senso dell’arca. Ebrei senza saperlo: nuove riflessioni*, (Naples: L’ancora del Mediterraneo, 2006), 51-52.

measures and the stigma related to Racist Laws.¹⁹ More work still needs to be done on that, as well as on the entire administrative and political process of “discrimination,” which Orvieto, focusing only on the letters contained in the *Segreteria Particolare*, could not examine in depth.²⁰

Letters applying for “discrimination” as a source

“Discrimination” was emblematic of a perverse logic of domination based on a discretionary dynamic, incidentally aiming to silence those – moderate Fascists, the Vatican and the Savoy court – who were pushing, for the most part opportunistically, for limitations on persecution²¹. For instance, as Robert A. Maryks proved in his critical edition of 44 “discrimination” and “aryanization” requests²² sent to the General Directorate by Catholics recognised by the Regime as “of Jewish race,” through the good offices of the Jesuit Pietro Tacchi Venturi the Vatican put a lot of effort into trying to obtain the “discrimination” for many Jews converted to Catholicism that were nonetheless affected by the anti-Semitic laws.²³

Moreover, “discrimination” was a way of justifying the unjustifiable to public opinion: inserting a racial criteria into citizenship and thus re-writing the national history, of which Fascism claimed to be utmost exponent and guardian, whilst at the same time rooting out one part of it – the Italian Jews. But how

¹⁹ See the story of Bruno Segre and his father, Emanuele, in Enrica Asquer, “Autobiografie di supplica.”

²⁰ A new generation of scholars is beginning to approach these sources with a fruitful perspective. As far as I know, together with me, Florence Largillière, Phd candidate at the Queen Mary, University of London, is conducting her research on the “discrimination” requests, focusing on Fascist and conservative Jews. In particular, for her Research Master (*Les réactions des ‘juifs’ fascistes face aux lois raciales de 1938 en Italie: récits d’une intégration nationale achevée?*, Mémoire de Master, Institut d’Etudes Politiques de Paris, 2013) she worked on *antemarcia* Fascist Jews’ letters and files and then continued adding the letters of veterans of the Great War (*Discourses of Italian Jews Faced by the Racial Laws of 1938*, MPhil, University of Cambridge, 2014). Her Phd dissertation will include a chapter on “Conservative Patriotic Jews and the Nation. A Comparative Study of France, Germany and Italy from 1918 to 1940.”

²¹ Matard-Bonucci, *L’Italie fasciste et la persécution des juifs*, 170.

²² In this context the term Aryanization indicates the procedure through which individuals who had submitted a documented request could obtain to be qualified as not belonging to “the Jewish race”.

²³ Robert Aleksander Maryks, *“Pouring Jewish Water into Fascist Wine”: Untold Stories of (Catholic) Jews from the Archive of Mussolini’s Jesuit Pietro Tacchi Venturi*, (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

could the concept of defending “the Italian race” from a supposed threat by citizens who were to all intents and purposes fully integrated into national history be justified?

Whilst it is essential to keep a sense of this powerfully paradoxical dimension in any analysis of these sources, it is also true that the discrimination letters are a gold mine for anyone seeking to analyse the self-image of those who wrote these letters and thus the words they chose in their attempts to convince the authorities of the legitimacy of their claims. There is nothing random about the choice of words used in these letters as they are very revealing of the patriotic narratives current in Italy in 1938-9.

If this is true of all those, Fascist or otherwise, who applied for “discrimination,” the case which I will be examining in this paper – that of “Jewish race” citizens who were card carrying members of the Fascist party writing to a Regime which appeared not to recognise them as an integral part of its history – is also of further interest in the light of the still unquestionably embryonic research on Fascist Jews.²⁴ What is the ideal Fascist reference profile used? What image of Fascism comes out of these letters? The fact that these applications were the product of a specific emotional state, presumably anxiety and, sometimes, desperation, does not limit their usefulness as a source: what I am attempting to do here is not merely to mechanically capture the “Fascism of the Jewish Fascists,” but rather to take the opportunity to look at the various images of Fascism brought into play precisely on this occasion by those writing. The more persuasive the image had to be, the more we are accessing a credible and thus not random repertoire, first and foremost for the authorities. But the evaluation as to whether this repertoire was likely to be credible to the Regime was always that of those writing such letters and presumably those advising them. In actual fact, applicants had to take account of inputs from the establishment, but they did so in a personal and original manner. These sources thus are the result of a “narrative transaction,” to quote Natalie Zemon Davis,²⁵ and tell us something of the idea that those writing and those who contributed to these letters indirectly had of Fascism.

²⁴ Luca Ventura, *Ebrei con il duce. “La nostra bandiera” (1934-38)*, (Turin: S. Zamorani Editore, 2002); using a biographical approach, Ilaria Pavan, *Il podestà ebreo. La storia di Renzo Ravenna tra fascismo e leggi razziali*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza editore, 2006).

²⁵ *Fiction in the Archives. Pardon tales and their tellers in sixteenth-century France*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

Now, what is interesting about the individuals of Jewish religion or culture or family tradition – and these were not automatically those qualified as belonging to the “Jewish race” by the Regime who will necessarily be considered here – is not that these applicants had some sort of specific and different relationship with Fascist ideology and practice from other Italians. The relationship Jews had with Fascism was the same as that of other Italians, with the same range of varying attitudes and objectives.²⁶ The specific nature of the Jewish case in this matter is rather a question of the paradoxical state in which they found themselves, whatever their personal attitude to the Regime, while facing the anti-Jewish Fascist laws. They had emerged from the widest, however non-linear, range of integration trajectories in post-unification Italy but were all swept away by the same tragic destiny in the autumn of 1938. How did they react? Which narratives did they use? As we will see, for example, emphasising their decision to marry out or convert to Catholicism, together with declarations of total estrangement from Jewishness was one potential way for this minority group to display their adherence to a Regime which had brought an end to religious equality with the signing of the Lateran treaty in 1929 and whose new laws on Israelite communities in 1930-1²⁷ had imposed harsher institutional limitations making it increasingly difficult for Jewish people to shape diverse and varied identities. In these respects, applicants’ narratives reveal a minority group view of what Fascism was in the 1930s.

Jews formally closest to the Regime in 1938 had a specific situation too. Declaring their support for a nationalist ideology increasingly suffused with “Italian race” rhetoric was evidently a strong contradiction. How did they face that? Rationalising a sense of belonging to the nation based on beliefs, feelings, family history and one’s own actions rather than racial purity was a shared key element of their strategy. For some of them, especially for those truly closest to the Regime, these features were also an integral part of a specific way of being Fascist and Jew in 1938.

This article is an integral part of a wider ranging research into Italian anti-Jewish laws exemption procedures which has thus far considered the Milan case study, in order to analyse the documentation sent to the General Directorate by

²⁶ Many agree on this: Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini’s Italy* 15-16; 66-67; Matard-Bonucci, *L’Italie fasciste et la persécution des juifs*, 51-57.

²⁷ R. D. 30 October 1930, n. 1731, *Norme sulle Comunità israelitiche e sulla Unione delle Comunità medesime* and R.D. 19 November 1931, n. 1561, *Regolamento per l’applicazione del Regio Decreto 30 Ottobre 1930*.

individuals qualified as belonging to “the Jewish race” living in the city of Milan and connect it to more general considerations on integration processes affecting Milanese Jews after legal emancipation. Within a randomly chosen starting sample of 170 applications, around 20% of a total of 858 Milan applications now kept at the *Archivio Centrale dello Stato*,²⁸ for the purposes of this article I focused exclusively on the 102 dossiers filed concerning individuals who had been Fascist party members until the anti-Jewish laws were implemented.

To provide an overall framework, it can be pointed out that only 21.6% of the applicants considered here were women and 78.4% men; more than half (63%) were born in the last 25 years of the 19th century, and especially in the 1880s and 90s, and 37% in the twentieth century. Half of them (53%) joined the PNF in 1932 and 1933. With regard to their social profile, a topic on which it is necessary to be very cautious because the data are very incomplete, just to give a general glance it can be said that around 25.9% had a liberal profession (first of all they were lawyers); a not insignificant share (17.6%) worked in the industrial sector, especially in managerial positions; 11.8% were professors (school and university); finally, only 10.6% were merchants and 9.4% private employees (bank and insurance).

Before showing some relevant examples of the applicants’ narratives, two brief concluding remarks are necessary. Whilst, as historians have highlighted,²⁹ the formal party membership can hide many different attitudes to the Regime, it is difficult to underestimate the specific situation of the applicants who were not members of the Fascist party. Both from what anthropologists would call an “etic” point of view, i.e. general and objective, and from an “emic” perspective, namely from the subjective point of view of those involved, there was clearly something unusual about non-party members writing to the Regime post November 1938 claiming to be deserving patriotic citizens. On the contrary, PNF

²⁸ As I said before, 1424 applications were made in Milan in actual fact, but only 858 dossiers survived due to considerable quantitative gaps in the General Directorate for Demography and Race files. For the history of the archive, see Lucilla Garofalo, “La Demorazza: storia di un archivio,” *Italia contemporanea*, 272 (2013): 374-401.

²⁹ A great deal of work has been done on the subject of popular consent for the regime: see at least Simona Colarizi, *L’opinione degli italiani sotto il regime 1929-1943* (Rome-Bari: Laterza editore, 2009²); Paul Corner, “Fascist Italy in the 1930s: Popular Opinion in the Provinces” in *Popular Opinion in Totalitarian Regimes: Fascism, Nazism, Communism*, ed. Paul Corner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 122-146; from a different perspective, Christopher Duggan, *Fascist Voices. An Intimate History of Mussolini’s Italy* (London: Vintage, 2013).

card carrying members shared a condition supposedly favourable and that is why they might be considered as a specific case-study.

Party membership, however, will not prove on its own sufficient to throw light on the form taken by the support of Fascism (real or declared) even of the individuals considered here. The nature of their involvement was diverse, and the tone of the letters which I will look at varied too, as an analysis of some interesting case studies will show. With regard to the narrative construction, I will divide the applications into three groups, which more or less correspond to different typologies of applicants: those born in 1880s and 1890s; those born in the 20th century; women.

Moreover, even if the archival condition of the sources makes it difficult to demonstrate, the applicants' narratives considered here are to be seen in the context of the specific features of Milanese Fascism, which constitutes a case of a not especially successful conquest of mass support until well into the 1930s.³⁰

Fascist features: patriotism, assimilation and autarchy

“Inspired by the fundamental principles of the power of the race, which draws its origins from the greatness of Rome which has been and will be a beacon of light for all peoples from Caesar to Mussolini, the Fascist government has issued laws for the defense and strengthening of the race with R.D.L. 17=11=1938=XVII.

There are those, like the undersigned, whose origins are undeniably racially Jewish but whose personal beliefs, spiritual education and life lived in the absolute dogma of Italian and Fascist faith, cannot and must not be so considered but rather as pure Italian in heart and race.”³¹

Salvatore Marsiglio, born in 1888 and employed at the Milan offices of *Assicurazioni Generali Venezia*, introduced his “discrimination” application in a much loftier tone than that used by Segré. From a family of “patriots and

³⁰ Ivano Granata, “PNF: organizzazione del consenso e società milanese negli anni Trenta,” in *Storia di Milano*, vol. XVIII, *Il Novecento*, t. 1 (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Treccani, 1995), 624-648; Id., “Il fascismo e le sue basi sociali,” in *Storia d'Italia. Le Regioni dall'Unità ad oggi. La Lombardia*, eds. Duccio Bigazzi, Marco Meriggi, (Turin: Einaudi, 2001), 947-984.

³¹ Salvatore Marsiglio to Hon. Ministry for Internal Affairs, General Directorate for Demography and Race, Milan, March 9, 1939, in ACS, MI, Dgdr, Dr, b. 138, f. 8871DIS. Emphasis mine.

workers” who “have never professed the Jewish religion” he recalls his “father’s pride in the name Umberto which his parents had named him in homage to the “good king” [“Re Buono”] and “how his father boasted of having named the first of his sons Vittorio Emanuele (...) in homage once again to the “victorious king” (“Re Vittorioso”). In terms of his private life, he went on, “before the advent of Fascism, and solely by conviction and the constant inspiration of his (Catholic) wife,” he had transformed his “atheism” into a profound, intimate “Christian faith,” thus formally taking his leave of an Israelite community which he had joined only after the 1930 law on his mother’s request as she wished to be buried next to her husband. Whilst in the public sphere, he added, his activities had been “limited to those demonstrations of patriotism and civil solidarity which every good Italian, like himself, feels and must feel” (including support for the Associazione Dante Alighieri, the Red Cross, *Pro Esercito* and the foundation of the *Museo di Guerra* in Rovereto), his professional work in the insurance field could be presented as a “holy work whose vital importance both for individuals and for the Nation he felt to the full.” It was only at the end of this self-celebratory prose that Marsiglio refers to his political activities:

“With all his energies absorbed by work the undersigned took no part in political activities in the belief that the best policy for the Nation is working honestly for it. But when, soon after the advent of Fascism, he understood that the Fascist party was much more than a political Party and truly the Fascio of all the activities, strength and feelings of the Nation, the undersigned also adhered to it in both spirit and action. He joined in 1925, in fact, and had the honour and the pleasure to be on good Fascist terms with the Grande Maestro di Mistica, Arnaldo Mussolini.”³²

The image of himself which Marsiglio presents – and which I have chosen from the many possible case studies – brings together some of the elements to be found in other letters: a national history brought to full fruition in Fascism to which he feels bound in an emotional, deep rooted way; references to the logic of race and his – somewhat contradictory – denial of the influence of his own Jewish “origins” to which he paradoxically juxtaposes the power of “belief,” “education” and “life experience”; his interpretation of his professional life as emblematic of his service to the Nation. The passage on Fascist membership and his negative view of pre-regime political involvement, another recurring theme

³² Salvatore Marsiglio to Hon. Ministry for Internal Affairs, General Directorate for Demography and Race, Milan, March 9, 1939, in ACS, MI, Dgdr, Dr, b. 138, f. 8871DIS.

coherent with the Regime's anti-liberal rhetoric, would seem in this case to be intended indirectly to justify the writer's choices which, in contrast to Segré, show limited real involvement in any party activity and posts whatsoever. What comes across most is thus an image of Fascism as the supreme expression of the Nation's "actions," "power" and "sentiments"; it required devotion and the sharing of some fundamental values, but not necessarily full-blown personal political involvement.

A similar theme comes across in the letter of another applicant for "discrimination," elderly Moise Elia Levi, born in Trieste in 1867 and a party member since 1932, who asked for special dispensation in the name of exceptional merit, firstly, as he had "grown up in a pure Italian environment with a lofty irredentist spirit." Having escaped to Milan during World War One, his letter recounts, he had borne the suffering of these "tough war years" together with other refugees from Trieste and saw "Fascism" as having brought his "long nurtured dream," [namely] the inclusion of Trieste in the Italian state," to fruition as "a victorious reality to the joy of" his "old patriotic heart."³³ To "explain the family's merits in the national context," moreover, he added that his wife Rosa Levi had always shared his patriotic activities and in 1935 had given "her wedding ring to the Nation like all Italian mothers," while his sons all belonged to party professional or youth associations. One of his mother's brothers, moreover, as a "fervent patriot and veteran of his own battles for Italian independence," had "set up the first local Fascist party group in Correggio Emilia (Reggio province) in 1920" as documented in Giorgio Alberto Chiurco's *Storia della rivoluzione Fascista*.³⁴

Aside from this latter comment – emphatically underlined in red ink – this self-portrayal focuses on the Nation, and Fascism is represented as having brought the nationalist aspirations of this elderly patriot to fruition. However, in contrast to Marsiglio's letter, no mention is made of "Jewish origin" here and this is certainly a telling silence. In autumn 1938, a good Fascist profile needed to expressly deny or skirt this delicate issue.

Another Trieste irredentist, Giorgio Schey, born in 1889 and former deputy manager of the *Banca Commerciale Italiana* in Milan, centred his self-defense

³³ Moise Elia Levi to His Excellency, the Minister for Internal Affairs, Milan, December 19, 1938, in ACS, MI, Dgdr, Dr, b. 231, f. 15995BEN.

³⁴ Alberto Chiurco, *Storia della rivoluzione Fascista*, (Florence: Vallecchi, 1929).

letter on his having deserted the Austrian army and enlisted as a volunteer in the Italian army in the Great War “and having always responded, together with his wife, to his country’s appeals and shared its destiny with the heart of one who has consecrated his life to his Nation.”³⁵ As proof of this he stressed that his daughter, who had joined both the Fascist party and the Dante Alighieri society, had been accorded the honour of having a composition of hers “on eternal Rome and its imperial destiny” selected in a competition promoted by the Regime, “[which] is of itself sufficient proof of her sentiments and those of the family she grew up in.” Moreover, he added, an additional fact “worthy of the greatest consideration” was his “mixed marriage” to Gentile Giuseppina Ascoli “of Catholic faith”: right from the start “ignorant of and alien to the Hebrew faith,” he moved progressively closer to Catholicism not simply on the strength of the example of his wife, but also in “thoughts and feelings which he resisted only in so far as consecrating them in baptism could have been interpreted as opportunism and not belief and thus incompatible with a life of faith, loyalty and pride.”³⁶ “Thoughts and feelings,” then, were the basis of his new identity.

A PNF member since 1932, Schey had joined his Fascist trade union in 1927 but he mentions this in just a few lines at the end of his letter. Like Marsiglio, it was Nation – presented in the context of the imperial myth which led from Rome to the African Empire –, Catholic faith and mixed marriage from the religious and/or “racial” point of view which were the foundations of Schey’s self-image and the idea of loyalty to Fascism which he put forward.

Accountant Gino Norsa’s application for “discrimination” was equally centred on love of country with an anything but rare explicit reference to the Risorgimento. As a stockbroker born in 1876 and a party member since 1933, Norsa applied for “discrimination” “on the basis of his patriotic past and [his family’s and his own] evident desire to assimilate.”³⁷ As proof of this, he mentioned his father Pacifico’s merits as a Garibaldi volunteer, member of the Milan Guardia Nazionale and combatant in the “1866 war campaign against the Austrians” together with the military backgrounds of many close family members. To this he added his “43 year long banking and stock exchange career”

³⁵ Giorgio Schey to Exc. Ministry of Internal Affairs, Milan, December 31, 1938, in ACS, MI, Dgdr, Dr, b. 192, f. 12161DIS.

³⁶ Emphasis mine.

³⁷ Gino Norsa to Ministry of Internal Affairs, Department for Discrimination of the individuals qualified as belonging to the Jewish Race, Milan, February 4, 1939, in ACS, MI, Dgdr, Dr, b. 220, f. 15303DIS.

terminated “in homage to the Regime’s directives” with his resignation as stockbroker.

Like Norsa, industrialist Guido Modena, born in 1882 and a party member since 1932, based his application on the “feelings of Italianness” which had been the inspiration for his and his family’s actions and cited as proof the fact that his father Flaminio had fought in the 1859 “campaign to liberate Lombardy” as a volunteer in the Piedmontese army.³⁸ The similar patriotic merits of other members of the family, he underlined, were proof of the fact that “he himself and all his family members had been brought up in an environment suffused with the loftiest patriotic sentiments and absolutely no thought of belonging to any other race than the Italian race.” The “assimilation” referred to by Norsa makes an appearance in Modena’s application, too, in his references to the many mixed marriages in his family history and the inevitable mention of his profession, functionary in N.U.S.I (*Nuova Unione Siderurgica Italiana*), and the “autarchic objectives” of his work.

All these cases show that alongside patriotism and issues of identity another highly important element in these “discrimination” letters is the professed “political” value of applicants’ professional dedication. This aspect relates both to the Regime’s autarchy propaganda and the applicants’ sociological profiles as the lion’s share of these came from the liberal professions, especially as engineers and technicians, or were exponents of the dynamic Milanese entrepreneurial scene. In contrast to the overall preponderance of traders to be found in the Italian and probably Milanese Jewish population at that time,³⁹ my sample makes clear that Milan’s PNF members included significant numbers of professionals from the industrial entrepreneurial milieu whose interaction with the Regime and its trade union activities in particular had brought essential networking and thus financial benefits. Their more or less strongly felt support for Fascism was thus influenced, to a not insignificant extent, by shared interests and social connections with the party hierarchy and the Fascist state. The

³⁸ Guido Modena to Hon. Ministry for Internal Affairs, and to the Hon. Commission for the Discrimination of the Citizens of Jewish Race, Milan, December 12, 1938, in ACS, MI, Dgdr, Dr, b. 231, f. 15889DIS.

³⁹ For Italian data (with reference also to Lombardy) see Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini’s Italy*, 34-35. There are no in-depth studies on the social composition of the Milanese Jewish population in 1938. An initial reference can be obtained from the analysis carried out on the basis of a different, but equally random, sample of Milanese “discrimination” applications, see Asquer, “Autobiografie di supplica,” 114.

disappearance of the Milan party archives unfortunately limits our ability to fully analyse how this relates to the specific characteristics of Milanese Fascism. Certainly the few available studies, most of which are based for the most part on prefects' reports and the Fascist police's secret informants, have identified the Milanese middle class and the professional bourgeoisie as the social basis of consent to the Regime, a consent which was motivated by opportunism to a considerable extent and thus always influenced by careful consideration of the Regime's economic policies.⁴⁰

The letters cited thus far highlight a single type of letter writer on the basis of overall parameters such as date of birth and PNF membership. This typology is, moreover, best represented in the sample considered here. As far as party membership is concerned, as I said, half of the self-descriptions analyzed here (53%) relate to individuals who joined the PNF in 1932 and 1933, namely during the intensification phase designed to widen the party's mass base that was implemented by party secretary Achille Starace. It was, in fact, in this phase that party membership in Milan increased from 13,217 in 1930 to 39,044 in 1933, despite the many obstacles encountered.⁴¹

Only a very small minority of my sample (around 8%) had joined the party at the outset, from 1921 to 1924. This figure is even more significant if interrelated to generational data: it is clearly mostly among the less young that late membership can be interpreted as a sign of conscious choice. From this perspective it should be kept in mind, as I wrote before, that in general more than half of my sample (63%) is accounted for by individuals born in the last 25 years of the 19th century and especially the 1880s and 90s. The bulk of them joined the party no earlier than 1932-33 and their letters can be read also in connection with this: this is the generation which benefited fully from the legal emancipation implemented by the unified state and which fought in World War One en masse, a pivotal experience likely to act as a key reference point in patriotic self-representations, together with a diverse assortment of solidarity activities of a charitable kind prompted by the war.

By contrast, only a small minority (approximately 9%) of the applicants born in the 19th century joined the PNF at the outset. These latter include aristocratic

⁴⁰ Granata, "PNF: organizzazione del consenso e società milanese negli anni Trenta"; Id., "Il fascismo e le sue basi sociali," in *Storia d'Italia. Le Regioni dall'Unità ad oggi. La Lombardia*, eds. Duccio Bigazzi, Marco Meriggi, (Turin: Einaudi, 2001), 947-984.

⁴¹ Granata, "PNF: organizzazione del consenso," 637.

businessman Mario Sacerdoti di Corrobbio, founder of the local Fascist party group of Paris and political secretary to the Massa Finalese and Lisbon groups, industrialist Michele Vitale, member of the Milanese Fascist group directorate and leader of the local Oberdan group, wealthy Lamberto Segre, in his day member of the Ponzzone d'Acqui local group directorate and Mario Zabban, born in Palermo and member of his local group since 1923. Apart from a few colorful outpourings such as Vitale's impassioned appeal at the end of his letter "that your Excellence could return everything to him or at least his March on Rome papers which I am very much attached to," the style of these letters is strikingly concise, even terse. The letter writers leave the strength of their arguments to the documents attached to their dossiers for the most part. Documents attached by Michele Vitale, for instance, included many proofs of his political merits and full integration in the Milanese Fascist network of social and charitable activities. Abstention from long digressions may be evidence of confidence in the writers' ability to obtain "discrimination" or a sense of deep disappointment. In any event a desire to keep faith with a proud and soldierly style comes across powerfully, despite everything.

The power of Fascist education: young people

A significant proportion of my sample, specifically 37% of the letter writers in it, is made up of individuals born in the twentieth century. In contrast to the former group, these latter were too young to have fought in World War One but were more likely to have taken part in the Fascist wars and specifically the campaign for the Empire. More than half of these joined the Fascist party in the fateful years of 1932-3, and many of them had passed through the party's youth and university student organizations. The Italianness of their families, demonstrated mostly using the example of their fathers, and a personal commitment to Fascist pedagogy, as shown in the Regime's youth propaganda activities, are the main themes running through these letters. And in this group there is nothing random about the fact that self-representations exalting an enthusiastic and emotional sense of belonging to the Regime and involvement in party roles and activities come across more frequently, though these latter are often of scant importance and inconsequential from the authorities' point of view. In stylistic terms, these letters often have a structure in common which hinges on personal progression – in a sort of *bildungsroman* – which started with a specific moment of initiation in teenage years and then developed and

came to fruition in adulthood in an emotional connection to the Regime's values.

This is the case, for example, for engineer Piero Forti, born in 1910 “to a family with a highly patriotic tradition” which at his birth did not practice Jewish ritual prescriptions in order “not to burden a new citizen with a stigma incompatible with profound and thoroughgoing Italianness.”⁴² In his letter, Forti declared that he “had played an active part in Fascist life,” “in the Regime's institutions” and “in the revolutionary movement” since he was sixteen. Retracing his progressive sense of identification with and participation in Fascist life in third person in a biographical style, Forti was prompted by a sudden moment of enlightenment: “As soon as he was able to find his place in student life of the school he attended, he joined the *Avanguardie Giovanili Fasciste* at the young age of 16 in 1926.” After acting as squad leader in the Ugo Botti group, “as he matured, his commitment to the Fascist ideal which had attracted him since adolescence grew stronger” and he joined the PNF in 1928, GUF in 1929 and lastly, “wishing to express his Fascist faith in a militant way,” he joined the *Milizia Volontaria per la Sicurezza Nazionale*. Called to arms as a sub-lieutenant and then promoted to lieutenant in 1936, “felt the heroic cause of the Ethiopian war strongly” and received a letter of commendation from Federal Secretary Franco Parenti. His dossier is incomplete and we thus have no way of knowing how his application was received.

Engineer Cesare Grassetti, born in Verona in 1901, employed at the Ercole Marelli firm and holder of the title *Commendatore d'Italia*, granted him “by the Fascist government in recognition of his special achievements in industry and commerce,”⁴³ also started right from the beginning of his personal formation. “When the war broke out,” he recounted, “the undersigned, though just fourteen, made his contribution to the need of the hour at school and outside giving up his holidays and evenings to it (assistance to soldiers, charitable work, etc.)” In 1919 he enrolled at Padua University's Engineering Faculty and there his ardent commitment to Fascism took practical shape: “He brought his Fascist faith and enthusiasm for the Duce to Padua from Verona” and took part in many “retaliation missions against the Reds including burning down the Chamber of Labour and the consequent setting up of the first *Fascio di*

⁴² Piero Forti to His Excellence, the Minister for Internal Affairs, Milan, December 1938, in ACS, MI, Dgdr, Dr, b. 237, f. 16276BEN.

⁴³ Cesare Grassetti to Hon. Ministry for Internal Affairs, Commission for the Discrimination of the Citizens of Jewish Race, Milan, March 31, 1939, in ACS, MI, Dgdr, Dr, b. 280, f. 20198BEN.

Combattimento Patavino. He graduated in engineering and returned to Verona where he joined the PNF in 1926 and unsuccessfully applied for his prior actions during the Red biennium to be recognized. He then worked “tirelessly” in the Verona province council of *Opera Nazionale Balilla* and was appointed major. For all this, which simply demonstrated his “love for his country to which the undersigned and his family have always given everything they could,” he “trustingly” requested the benefit of “discrimination.” In his case, too, we do not know the outcome of his application which probably remained provisional. Significantly, however, the Prefect of Milan rejected his application on the basis of the absence of the “legal requisites.”

“Total confidence that he had done nothing to betray his Nation’s trust” was at least apparently the state of mind of Ruggero Norsa, lawyer, born in 1909 and a PNF member since 1927, at the same time as he joined the Milan Fascist University Students Group (GUF) at the age of 17.⁴⁴ In actual fact this was the second letter that Norsa had written to the General Directorate after his application for “discrimination” had been rejected unanimously the first time around, by the Prefecture and the Central Commission set up to consider such cases, on the grounds of “lack of requisites.” But Norsa had highlighted his early membership of the party in no uncertain terms right from the start “at just 17 years of age, as soon as he was in a position to express his wishes.”⁴⁵ Active then in the Crespi local group, he had recently been gratified by the recognition of his role as *capo-fabbricato*, responsible for surveillance and anti-aircraft measures at the building he lived in Via Canova. Whilst an extremely low rung in the Fascist hierarchy, this role was of some importance in the context of the aims for pervasive social control which the Regime aimed for. Those appointed to such posts were, in fact, generally early days Fascists with no prior appointments or, as would appear to be the case here, the most ardent young people in search of some formal or symbolic return on their dedication.⁴⁶

As far as other forms of participation were concerned, Norsa continued in his first letter, his physical fragility had meant that he had not been able to enlist in

⁴⁴ Ruggero Norsa to Hon. Ministry for Internal Affairs, General Directorate for Demography and Race, Milan, January 27, 1941, in ACS, MI, Dgdr, Dr, b. 238, f. 16400DIS.

⁴⁵ Ruggero Norsa to Exc. Ministry for Internal Affairs, General Directorate for Demography and Race, Hon. Commission for the Discrimination, Milan, dateless but prior to 23rd January 1939, in ACS, MI, Dgdr, Dr, b. 238, f. 16400DIS.

⁴⁶ Emilio Gentile, *La via italiana al totalitarismo. Il partito e lo stato nel regime fascista* (Rome: Carocci, 2008), 195-197.

the *Milizia Volontaria* or take part in the Ethiopian wars “but,” he clarified, “as far as his own wishes and opportunities allowed he had always demonstrated himself to be a fervent and energetic Fascist.” As *Gruppo Rionale Crespi*’s leader, Milanese provincial head of the party, Andrea Ippolito – formerly head of the Milan GUF– and Fabbri, lawyer and member of the Directorate of the National Lawyers and Prefects Trade Union, of which Norsa was a member, would confirm, his personal story was that of a “Fascist since the beginning” and for this reason, he explained vehemently, “there would be no justification for his not being classified amongst those possessing the qualities attributed to those exempted from the effects of the Racial Laws.” Given the merit of the Norsa family, he concluded, moreover, “the undersigned trusts that he should not be excluded from the Fascist family which he had always belonged to with loyalty and devotion and that his qualities deserving of preferential treatment be recognized.” Significantly, these appeals fell on deaf ears and in his second, and unanswered, letter, Norsa emphasized not only his own personal life history but the patriotic virtues of a distant relative, thus obtaining the Prefect’s *nulla osta*. In any event, in both letters he made almost no mention of the Jewish religion, but only gently underlined the presence of mixed marriages in his family history.

Fascist Women

Fascist pedagogy was the focus of the self-representation of another, easily identifiable though smaller group of letter writers, namely women asking for, and frequently being denied, “discrimination” on the basis of their roles as daughters, mothers and wives as well as teachers and assistants in the Regime’s many voluntary activities, which were crucial to the dissemination of Fascist values.⁴⁷

“Education,” “culture” and “sentiments” were, for example, what made of Renata Coen, born in Salonica in 1902 and a party member since 1936, a perfect “Italian and Fascist.”⁴⁸ Wife of lawyer Luigi Franco Cottini, squad leader from the earliest days, World War One volunteer and former federal secretary of the

⁴⁷ Victoria De Grazia, *How Fascism Ruled Women: Italy 1922-1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Perry Willson, *Women in Twentieth-Century Italy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 61-95.

⁴⁸ Renata Coen to Hon. Ministry for Internal Affairs, General Directorate for Demography and Race, Milan, March 15, 1939, in ACS, MI, Dgdr, Dr, b. 217, f. 15087BEN.

Milan PNF in 1929 and 1930,⁴⁹ Coen had trained as a Red Cross nurse and patronised the *Assistenza Spirituale alle Forze Armate* (spiritual assistance for the armed forces) and *Istituti Riuniti Marchiondi e Spagliardi* association, which worked with disadvantaged children.⁵⁰ In a heartfelt letter written in the first person she asked, significantly, to be granted “discrimination” on “moral” grounds alone:

“I am the wife of an early Fascist member who has always played a front rank role in defense of the cause and I have remained both heart and soul by my husband’s side at moments of triumph and time of war. Now I cannot bear to be cast aside from Fascism and from him which, for me, are two expressions of the same idea. [...] I repeat once again that I have nothing to gain in material terms from the measure I am applying for but at such a painful time anything which would bring me closer to normality, however slight, would narrow the void which currently separates me from the many things which are dear to me.”⁵¹

Fascist for love, then – by conviction and education but also in “sentiment” in the most literal sense of the word – Renata Coen requests “discrimination” to avoid being separated even symbolically from “many things dear to me,” including those close to her and her family “normality.” Application for discrimination as capable, however “slightly,” of alleviating the suffering caused by racial persecution was, in this case moreover, subordinate to the writer’s primary desire to be considered “Arian” as she herself “had no connection with the Jewish race and religion because she had never practised it” and this even before her baptism as a Catholic in 1938. Having lived, as she put it, “in an exquisitely Fascist environment, I have always supported all Fascism’s progress and expansion in the world with great passion and I cannot now believe that I am to be considered alien to the Nation’s patriotic life.” At a time in which “the

⁴⁹ At the time Renata Coen was writing, Franco Cottini was “Commissario” at the Istituti Riuniti Spallardi e Marchiondi Onorary Consul of the Kingdom of Albania in Milan, President of the Fascist Institute Africa Italiana (Milanese Section), member of the Ernesto Breda Society’s management board.

⁵⁰ On the Red Cross nurses and their links with Fascism see Stefania Bartoloni, *Donne nella Croce Rossa italiana: tra guerre e impegno sociale*, (Venice: Marsilio, 2005); on the relationship between social assistance in the medical sphere and Fascist ideology see Olivia Fiorilli, *La signorina dell’igiene. Genere e biopolitica nella costruzione della infermiera moderna* (Pisa: Pisa University Press, 2015).

⁵¹ Renata Coen to Hon. Ministry for Internal Affairs, General Directorate for Demography and Race, Milan, March 15, 1939, in ACS, MI, Dgdr, Dr, b. 217, f. 15087BEN.

fortunes of Fascist Italy are always foremost in my thoughts,” she concluded, in a notable attack on the concept of “Aryanism,” “I can’t see why I shouldn’t be considered Aryan if Aryan means Italian and Fascist with an Italian and Fascist education.”

Once again for “moral reasons alone” Elsa Della Pergola - born in Ancona in 1906, party member since 1933 and “full professor in literature at the Royal Technical Institutes” in Bolzano, until she was removed from her teaching post on racial grounds - also applied for “discrimination.”⁵² As an active participant in *Opera Nazionale Balilla* as *Capo-Gruppo delle Giovani Italiane*, as she said in her letter, she had held “patriotic conferences” and “courses in Fascist culture” for young people “and carried out Italianness work in this border province.” “These after-school activities,” she explained, “were additional to her teaching work which, in the school context too, always focused on inspiring a profound love of Nation and absolute devotion to the Fascist Cause in the young people entrusted to her.”

The need to bring their conduct into line with the Regime’s models of femininity was so pre-eminent in these women’s applications that generation and party membership produced limited variations in self-representation. Emblematic of this is the case of Lucia Sacerdoti, born in Padua in 1898, and for one and a half years at the helm of the *Giovani Fasciste* of the *Gruppo Rionale A. Diaz* in Milan and later “as a reward,” secretary of the women’s section of the same group:⁵³ a “high ranking post,” this latter, which she claimed to have stood down from “of her own accord” and

“with huge suffering when she realised that my distant origins, however reduced to a mere accident of birth given my feelings, my Catholic faith and my family and friendship bonds all absolutely alien to the Jewish environment, would have prevented me from playing the role I had previously in the party hierarchy as a result of the laws.”⁵⁴

⁵² Elsa Della Pergola to His Excellence, the Ministry for Internal Affairs, Milan, December 29, 1938, in ACS, MI, Dgdr, Dr, b. 239, f. 16455BEN.

⁵³ Lucia Sacerdoti to Hon. Ministry for Internal Affairs, Milan, March 10, 1939, in ACS, MI, Dgdr, Dr, b. 251, f. 17325BEN.

⁵⁴ Lucia Sacerdoti to Hon. Ministry for Internal Affairs, Milan, March 10, 1939, in ACS, MI, Dgdr, Dr, b. 251, f. 17325BEN.

In addition, then, to emphasising her distance from the Jewish faith, which she declared she had never practised never having “ever followed any of the rites to be admitted to the Jewish church,” as the daughter of a Catholic mother, and reiterating the Italianness of her family, she recounted the role her ancestors had played in the Risorgimento and explained her reasons for joining the party in 1935 as follows:

“Despite the fact that I have lived a private and exclusively family life, my patriotic feelings have always taken precedence over all else and I have followed the new dynamism which Fascism has brought to Italy with huge faith. When the possibility of a colonial war presented itself I felt that every truly Italian woman had a solemn duty to do and having overcome the old prejudices of various family members that women were to occupy themselves with the home and future children alone, I joined the P.N.F. (March 1935/XIII). As the Duce was then emphasising women’s role in building the Nation, my membership of the Party was both a proof of devotion to Him and also a chance to make myself useful in anyway might be felt necessary.”⁵⁵

Emblematic of the style of these women’s letters which showed greater pride and were often written in the first person, Sacerdoti moves ably between the conflicting pressures of a Regime which on one hand made the domestic femininity mystique one of its cornerstones while on the other prompted a previously unknown mass involvement by women in the Nation’s public sphere. This latter participation had, as in this case, nurtured hopes among some women of recognition by the Duce, and more generally by the Regime, of the political importance of the many activities they had carried out in his name. But, as is well known, such hopes could not have been more convincingly dashed. Whilst for Sacerdoti “discrimination” was ruled out from the start by a bureaucratic obstacle detected by the prefect, for others such as lawyer Pia Ravenna,⁵⁶ patroness of the Ferrara branch of the National Mother and Child Agency (Opera Nazionale Maternità e Infanzia - ONMI) right from the start or Carola Rotschild,⁵⁷ assistant and then President of one of the mother and child centres managed by the Milan ONMI branch, the grounds for refusal by the authorities was precisely that there was nothing exceptional about the applicants’ merits.

⁵⁵ Lucia Sacerdoti to Hon. Ministry for Internal Affairs, Milan, March 10, 1939, in ACS, MI, Dgdr, Dr, b. 251, f. 17325BEN.

⁵⁶ ACS, MI, Dgdr, Dr, b. 235, f. 16213BEN.

⁵⁷ ACS, MI, Dgdr, Dr, b. 235, f. 16198BEN.

Conclusions

By analysing a sample of around one hundred “discrimination” applications sent to the Regime between the autumn of 1938 and the spring of 1939 by citizens of “Jewish race” living in Milan who had been members of the Fascist Party prior to the anti-Jewish laws, I have shown that it was patriotism, understood as heroic tribute due on certain crucial nation-building occasions, but also as doing one’s professional duty or performing one’s educational role, which was undoubtedly the essential ingredient at the basis of every claim, however loosely defined, of affinity with the Regime.

Explicit reference to the importance of Fascism’s leader alone is less frequent. Mussolinism does crop up in a few letters, but it is not the dominant note showing how different these documents are from other epistolary sources analyzed by historians thus far. We can think, for example, of the letters written directly to the Regime’s leader which have been systematically analyzed by Christopher Duggan.⁵⁸ There, adherence to Fascism was often inspired by a sense of emotional closeness to the Duce himself and frequently separated off from the Fascist party. The cases analyzed here were not simply written for a specific and different purpose – in which the need to pretend should never be underestimated – but they are an expression of a much more circumscribed social environment from a sociological point of view which encompassed, as we have seen, an upper middle class milieu which had demonstrated a willingness to support the Regime without ever entirely renouncing implicit criticism. This certainly made itself felt in the very varied narrative and reasoning styles of these letters as well as in generating an image of adherence to Fascism which focused much less on the concept of an exclusive and personal relationship with the Duce and, by contrast, took the form, to a much greater extent, of claims to having fully taken part, both individually and as a family, in the nation’s history from within.

⁵⁸ Christopher Duggan, “The Internalisation of the Cult of the Duce,” in *The Cult of the Duce. Mussolini and the Italians* eds. Stephen Gundle, Christopher Duggan, Giuliana Pieri (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 129-143; Duggan, *Fascist Voices*.

A role in this dynamic, however, was certainly played by the specific situation which citizens of Jewish culture, religion or tradition were thrown into in the autumn of 1938, when they were called on to demonstrate their loyalty to this history for pressing reasons and to emphasise an idea of citizenship founded on meritorious actions rather than blood, “origin” or “race” (intended as a biological feature). In some narratives, such as Lucia Sacerdoti’s and Salvatore Marsiglio’s letters show, “distant Jewish origins” were explicitly referred to as a “mere accident of birth” and juxtaposed to “feelings,” “personal beliefs,” a (Catholic and Fascist) “faith,” and “family and friendship bonds (...) alien to the Jewish environment.” In other cases, though less frequent in the letters of applicants who appeared to be closer to the Regime, this issue was completely, and strategically, ignored.

Even if not without contradictions, such idea of citizenship could be proposed by applicants as sympathetic with some crucial issues of the Fascist “political religion,”⁵⁹ and in particular with the sacralized idea of a glorious historical journey begun with the Risorgimento and perfectly fulfilled by the advent of the Regime. What does this tell us about Fascist Jews? The “discrimination” mechanism was effectively designed to highlight the Regime’s coherence in presenting itself as the main author of this national consolidation, so it is not surprising that this rhetoric takes a pre-eminent part in the self-representations analyzed here. However, I think that this might suggest something more about the relationship between Fascism and Jews in the 1930s.

Due to the nature of the sources, it would be inappropriate to use the controversial category of consensus. There is no doubt that the degree of adherence to the Regime of those writing the letters analyzed here, as the different tones in them show, varied widely and cannot be reduced to a single form. The largest group identified, on generational grounds (those born in the second half of the nineteenth century), encompassed individuals who declared a formal adhesion to Fascism for the most part, often without having played any part whatsoever in the party hierarchy. Within this group, in fact, early Fascists and those who had filled posts of importance in the party hierarchy at the end of the 1930s were very few and far between and the distinguishing feature of these letters is above all the terse and concise style in which they were written. Attachments, references and statements of merit make the difference here.

⁵⁹ For a definition see Emilio Gentile, “Political religion: a concept and its critics – a critical survey,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 1 (2005): 19-32.

Beyond this small minority, however, the key feature of this first group's narratives is patriotism.

Letters written by those born in the twentieth century, which I have identified as the second group of writers, with their third person language and their peculiar structure, give a greater sense of these applicants' deep disillusionment in the face of incongruity between their fully Fascist profiles and the limited weight this had in obtaining them the distinction they hoped for between themselves and the mass of those persecuted. It is within this group that we can find the more explicit (and proved) statements of adherence to the Regime. But, more significantly, it is among these applicants that the Nation is accompanied by the "Fascist family" as a community of reference.

Letters from Fascist women, written in the first person and significantly forthcoming on the subject of the "suffering" caused them by their situation, are another important category in that they give us an effective insight into what may have felt like a twofold disillusionment, a twofold betrayal – as Fascists and as women at the heart of the Regime's ideology. Together with patriotism and Fascism, it is the Fascist femininity mystique, and its paradoxical effects in terms of women's mass involvement in the public arena, that seems to be at work here. But also family ties and a sentimental attachment to "normality" played a role, as Renata Coen's letter shows.

Therefore, to come back again to the main group of my sample, if we go beyond the unsolvable question about whether these narratives were true or false or showed 'real' consensus or not and if we bear in mind the "narrative transaction" framework, the fact that most applicants (i.e. the first group) chose to emphasize general Italian patriotism more than specifically Fascist inclinations turns out to be a significant element: for it reminds us that the patriotic narrative built up by the Regime was a powerful shared conceptual tool in 1938's Italy and, in some respect, it matched very well the role played by patriotism, both as a practice and a value, in Jews' emancipation and problematic integration into Italian society. In this respect, it might be said, "discrimination" found a favorable humus and its symbolic implications, together with the material ones, probably explain us why thousands of Jews tried to benefit from it.

Enrica Asquer received her Phd in Early Modern and Modern History in 2009 from the University of Florence. For the year 2016-2017, she has been awarded a research grant from the City of Paris (Bourse de recherche sur la Xénophobie et l'Antisémitisme) and from the Edith Saurer Fonds Foundation (Wien). On this topic, she recently published "Autobiografie di supplica: alcune considerazioni sulle richieste di 'discriminazione' degli ebrei milanesi, 1938-1943," *Società e storia*, 151 (2016): 97-135. Before, she has published extensively on the history of consumption and everyday life in XXth century Italy. She is member of the editorial board of *Genesis. Rivista della Società Italiana delle Storiche* and *Italia contemporanea*.

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Uncovering the Italian Muscle Jew: from Zionist Gymnastics to Fascist Boxing

by Simon Levis Sullam

Abstract

In this article I examine the presence and influence among Italian Jews of Max Nordau's image of the "muscle Jew" and more broadly of a virile imaginary, intertwined with Zionist and Italian nationalist ideas. I first document the relevance of an early phase of Italian muscular Judaism at the beginning of the twentieth century, at the time of the rise of Zionism in Italy. I then study the development, in the 1920s and 1930s, of a virile imagery among the two trends of Italian revisionist Zionism and of what we may call Italian Jewish Fascism. I end by asking whether there were not inherent contradictions, or at least relevant tensions, in the ideal of the muscle Jew, between radical nationalism and Jewish forms of virility, as developed after the First world war and in connection with the rise and stabilization of Fascism.

At the Origins of the Italian Muscle Jew
Nordau's Gymnastics, Italian Zionism and the Muscle Jew
Italian Revisionist Zionism and Jewish Sports
Italian Jewish Fascism, Revisionist Zionism, and Boxing
Muscle Jews: A Preliminary Conclusion

At the Origins of the Italian Muscle Jew

In the Spring of 1903, *L'Idea Sionista*, the first Italian Zionist periodical, published a translation of Max Nordau's essay "What Does Gymnastics Mean for Us Jews?". The article, which had originally appeared about a year earlier in *Die Jüdische Turnzeitung* [The Jewish Gymnastics Journal], stated:

During the thousands of years spent in the ghettos, we [Jews] have necessarily lost our physical aptitude for lack of exercise: we shall now endure great efforts to regain them. [...] It is true that a large number

of Jews have a defective appearance, but this is not natural, descending as it does from the neglect of physical education.

On the contrary, Nordau thought, “Any Jew who feels or is weak can obtain the muscles of an athlete,” and there are three prerequisites for this: “courage and fearlessness;” “complete control of all muscular groups’ for simultaneous and harmonic movements; “the ability to rapidly imagine all the intended movements, so as to overcome any obstacle which may derive from shy and hesitant natures.” “Our mental and spiritual qualities are excellent, Nordau concluded, and we can obtain physical strength through exercise, becoming strong gymnasts and gaining admiration from all: this will elevate our own self-esteem.”¹

As it is well known, Nordau had actually first used the expression ‘*Muskel-judenthum*’ [muscular Judaism] in 1898, in his address to the Second Zionist Conference in Basel. These speech and phrase initiated a movement of ideas and activities especially in the German Jewish world which counter-posed the strong and physically trained Jew to the nervous and weak Jew – via articles, lectures, the promotion of physical activity, and the founding of various successful Jewish sport teams.² In the Italian context the formulas ‘muscular Judaism’ and ‘muscle Jew’ remained apparently unknown both at the time and afterward, as Italian Jewish

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¹ Max Nordau, “L’educazione fisica e gli Ebrei,” *L’Idea Sionista*, III, April-May 1903. All translations into English are mine, unless otherwise noticed. The seminal works inspiring this article are by George L. Mosse and Sander Gilman. See in particular George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985); Id., *Fallen Soldiers. Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Id., *The Image of Man: the Creation of Modern Masculinity* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Sander Gilman, *The Jew’s Body* (London, New York: Routledge, 1991). See also, Daniel Boyarin, *Unheroic Conduct. The Rise of Heterosexuality and the Invention of the Jewish Man* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1997). Special mention should be made of Todd Samuel Presner, *Muscular Judaism. The Jewish Body and the Politics of Regeneration* (London, New York: Routledge, 2007), the first work to thoroughly address the question of Max Nordau’s muscle Jew and its implications and afterlife in the German Jewish context. With regard to Nordau – and Jabotinsky, another major character in my story – I have especially taken into account Michael Stanislawsky, *Zionism and the fin-de-siècle. Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2001).

² See Presner, *Muscular Judaism*. For the broader context: *Jewish Masculinities. German Jews, Gender and History*, eds. Benjamin Maria Baader, Sharon Gillerman and Paul Lerner, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2012). A relationship between muscular Judaism and the previous muscular Christianity movement, born in the 1850s, is possible but has not been proven. Muscular Christianity, however, remained to my knowledge unknown in Italy.

newspapers only published excerpts of Nordau's speech. If '*Musckel-judenthum*' had ever reached Italy, in all likelihood it had done so through the French version of Nordau's speech, published in a widely distributed booklet. There, the expression was translated as '*Judaïsme aux muscles*.'³

In his essay on gymnastics Nordau provided a historical background to his arguments:

We do not know if originally Jews were taller and then became smaller because of the unfavorable conditions in which they lived. [...] Ancient sources disagree. Images of Jews on Egyptian and Assyrian monuments do not allow us to think that they appeared to the artist smaller than their non-Jewish neighbors. In [ancient] Rome, Jews of huge stature exhibited themselves for a fee. On the other hand, the Bible suggests that the Jews of Palestine had neighboring races that surpassed them greatly in height. One might think of Enoch's sons, or consider the description of Goliath vis-à-vis David. To conclude, we do not know whether we became small or always have been: one cannot deny, in any case, that currently we are smaller than the Germans, Russians, Anglo-Saxons, and Scandinavians; whereas we [Jews] are at least equal to the French, Italians, Spanish, Rumanians and Magyars.⁴

To an Italian Jewish audience, Nordau's references to Rome and the parallel with Italian and other Southern European peoples probably sounded as a confirmation of its own ancient presence. At the same time, the current ranking proposed by Nordau indicated a hierarchy of ethnic or racial groups in which both Jews and Italians did not feature prominently. The issue required further exploration and closer analysis from an Italian perspective.

Early twentieth-century Italian discussions on Jews and gymnastics shed light on aspects of the beginnings of Zionism in Italy. They show how Italian Zionist discourse was constructed through aspects of Jewish nationalism combined with

³ See Theodor Herzl et Max Nordau, *Discours pronocés au II^e congrès sioniste de Bale*, transl. Jacques Bahar, (Paris: au Bureau de Flambeau, s.d. [1899?]), 35-36: 'Le Sionisme réveille le judaïsme à une vie nouvelle, c'est ma conviction. Au moral il y amène en rajeunissant l'idéal national et, au physique, en façonnant les générations nouvelles, dont nous attendons la renaissance du *judaïsme au muscles*, des âges antiques (Applaudissements prolongés)' (emphasis added). The passage does not appear in the abridged Italian translation of the speech, given in the conference proceedings which appear in *Corriere Israelitico*, XXXVII, 30 September 1898, 104-105.

⁴ Nordau, "L'educazione fisica e gli Ebrei."

elements belonging to Italian nationalist discourse. Reflections on the national and ethnic characteristics of the Jews, part of the Zionist revival, appear in turn to have borrowed some elements from other nationalist discourses, including the emphasis on gymnastics in German nationalism.⁵ Aspects of Nordau's thinking, moreover, would appear to have been impacted by Italian – and even Italian Jewish – influences, since they also developed from the theories of Italian (and Jewish) social scientists: in particular Cesare Lombroso. This was the starting point for further developments which, through ongoing exchanges and influences surrounding the muscle Jew and Jewish manliness, would take new forms in later phases of Italian Zionism (revisionist Zionism) and in the Italian Jewish experience with Fascism. Italian Jewish nationalism and its imagery, both in its Zionist expressions and in what we may call its Jewish Fascist manifestations, confirm the relevance and role of the theme of masculinity and physical strength, in relation to national characters and nationalist ideas. As is the case in all nationalisms, they were the result of the combined influence of independent and self-reflecting components, as well as of discourses developed in the context of other national and nationalist experiences. In this article I reflect on the relevance of the founding phase of Italian muscular Judaism, which was especially influenced by Nordau at the beginning of the twentieth century, and on the development, in the 1920s and 1930s, of the two trends of revisionist Zionism and of what we may call Italian Jewish Fascism (gathered around the journal *La Nostra Bandiera*), and their connection to virile imagery.

Nordau's Gymnastics, Italian Zionism and the Muscle Jew

In the aforementioned issue of *L'Idea Sionista*, psychiatrist and Zionist activist Edgardo Morpurgo (1872-1942)⁶ published the first installment of a long essay which was to run through numerous issues of the journal under the title "On the Somatic and Psychic Conditions of the Israelites of Europe." A footnote to the first part of the essay introduced the article as a 'valuable theoretical contribution to the physical regeneration of the Jewish race, which is one of our liveliest aspirations'. Clearly the essay followed in the wake of Nordau's work. Morpurgo

⁵ See George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology. Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964); Id., *The Image of Man*.

⁶ The historiography on the origins of Italian Zionism remains scattered: I will only mention here, for a preliminary overview, Alberto Cavaglion, *Tendenze nazionali e albori sionistici*, in *Storia d'Italia, Annali II. Gli ebrei in Italia*, vol. II, ed. Corrado Vivanti, (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), 1291-1320; D. Bidussa, A. Luzzatto, G. Luzzatto Voghera, *Oltre il ghetto. Momenti e figure della cultura ebraica in Italia tra l'Unità e il fascismo* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1992).

examined data concerning the spread of physical and psychological illnesses among the Jews of Europe, but he insisted that the latter were not a “race.” Their condition was the result of a “set of causes [...] connected to the state of their surroundings and to sanitary conditions.” As for most scholars of the time, the Jews’ weaknesses were the result of centuries of persecution, of seclusion behind ghetto walls, and of the priority assigned to intellectual ability over physical strength within the Jewish community. Among the sources of Morpurgo’s ideas – and one of the main influences that shaped Nordau’s – we should certainly include the works of criminologist and social scientist Cesare Lombroso: in particular, *L’antisemitismo e le scienze moderne*. Here Lombroso writes: “The Jewish race is not strong. Especially the Jew living in the great Jewish towns of the East is often small, weak; he has a wrecked and miserable appearance. No other race appears weaker and yet has shown such strength in resisting evil.”⁷

In a concluding section of Morpurgo’s essay, the main solution for the physical and mental problems of the Jews is identified in gymnastics and this is seen as a possibility offered by Zionism. According to Morpurgo this path had already been taken in Germany on the initiative of Walter Rathenau, among others: now, Italy too was to follow this trail. As the Italian scholar remarked in *L’Idea Sionista*: “While the Israelites in Italy find themselves in better bodily conditions than the ones in Germany and Poland, still they are highly disposed towards nervous and mental illnesses, more so even than the Germans. This is why we are proud of the positive and civilizing effects of introducing also among us [in Italy] the Zionist enterprise of improving the bodily well-being of the Israelites.” A few months later, in March 1904, Dr. Morpurgo delivered an address entitled “For the physical education of the Jews” at the fourth Italian Zionist Conference, held in Milan. The speech was published the same year as a short booklet, in a book series edited by the journal. When assessing the history of the Jewish body and the health condition of the Jews, Morpurgo referred to a thriving Italian literature on physical education and gymnastics and thus quoted approvingly, for example, the most recent work by Angelo Mosso, *Mens sana in corpore sano* (Milan 1903). According to Mosso, the Jews had not been a military nation in antiquity and no other people had neglected physical education more than they had.⁸ Another major reference for Morpurgo was, again, Max Nordau himself. Morpurgo had noticed in his own research the emphasis on intellectual and social activities among

⁷ Cesare Lombroso, *L’antisemitismo e le scienze moderne* (Turin-Rome: L. Roux, 1894), 18-19.

⁸ Mosso had also dwelt upon “Latin effeminacy,” the need for physical exercise, and the weakening influence of Catholicism: see Angelo Mosso, “Le cagioni dell’effeminatezza latina,” *Nuova Antologia*, November 16, 1897, 249-265.

the Jews and a consequent lack of concern for their physical conditions, which produced a strong incidence of “mental alienation.” “Should we not educate our youngsters to moderate their aspirations, to limit their desires towards social life?”, the psychiatrist asked. “Such an educational principle would certainly lead to a diminution of that condition of anxiety, of that state of unhappiness in the youth, which Max Nordau has masterly described as a characteristic of modern civilization.”⁹

Morpurgo’s views were thus shaped by the combined influence of two sources: debates within the Zionist movement about the physical regeneration of the Jews, from Nordau to Rathenau;¹⁰ and a growing Italian literature on gymnastics and well-being that had developed in recent years as part of the project to build and reinforce the young Italian nation.¹¹ For an Italian audience, Nordau’s analysis and admonitions thus became part of a larger debate about the Italian character, at the crossroads between gymnastics and nationalist movements: a debate which appears in many ways to have developed along parallel lines in Italy and Germany.¹² At the same time, Nordau himself, for example in *Degeneration*, had quoted one of the major voices in the Italian debate, the aforementioned Angelo Mosso.¹³ And *Degeneration* – one of the works that inspired a whole stream of ideas about “degeneration” and “regeneration,” including that of the muscle Jew – was inscribed to the most prominent and influential Italian social scientist of the time, Cesare Lombroso.¹⁴ Although this hypothesis still requires detailed

⁹ Edgardo Morpurgo, “Sulle condizioni somatiche e psichiche degli Israeliti d’Europa,” *L’Idea Sionista*, January 1904.

¹⁰ Morpurgo’s views about Jewish physical regeneration also show some similarities with the positions held, and policies proposed, by Zionists in the Yishuv, such as those expressed by the demographer Arthur Ruppin (1876-1944), as sketched out by Etan Blum, “Toward a Theory of the Modern Hebrew Handshake. The Conduct of Muscle Judaism,” in *Jewish Masculinities*, 165-170 (with further specific bibliography).

¹¹ On this debate and, among other aspects, on the role of Angelo Mosso in this context, see especially: Gaetano Bonetta, *Corpo e nazione. L’educazione ginnastica, igienica e sessuale nell’Italia liberale* (Milan: Franco Angeli, 1990). See also Suzanne Stewart-Steinberg, *The Pinocchio Effect: on Making Italians (1860-1922)* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

¹² I have outlined some aspects of a possible comparison between the Italian Jewish and the German Jewish experiences in my essay “George Mosse, German Jews, Italian Jews” in *George L. Mosse’s Italy: Interpretation, Reception, and Intellectual Heritage*, eds. Giorgio Caravale and Lorenzo Benadusi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 47-64.

¹³ Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, transl. from the second edition of the German work, (London: Heinemann, 1898), 47.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. VII-IX. The Italian translation also contained a “new preface in reply to Cesare Lombroso,” see Max Nordau, *Degenerazione*, 2nd ed., transl. G. Oberosler (Turin: Bocca, 1896).

exploration through published and unpublished sources, one could make the claim that there were Italian – and even Italian Jewish, in Lombroso's case – influences that had at least indirectly impacted the development of Nordau's *Muskle-Judenthum*, as Nordau, Mosso and Lombroso shared the same discourse which intertwined the ideas of nation, physical strength, and ethnic (or racial) and religious identity.

Italian Revisionist Zionism and Jewish Sports

From its origins Zionism thus proposed an ideal of virility and its organizations would plan and promote sporting activities and gymnastics. As soon as the movement was founded, at the end of the nineteenth century, Jewish sports associations were set up especially in Central and Eastern Europe, which mobilized through physical activities thousands of young Jews.¹⁵ Also in this area Zionism followed the path of other European nationalisms, by emphasizing the ideals of masculine strength, vigor and virility. Such ideals would be further reinforced by the experiences and imaginary of the First World War.

Radical ideals of strength and masculinity further developed in the mid-1920s with right-wing Zionism, including through the influence of non-Jewish national youth and political movements. This was especially true for Revisionist Zionism, which took its first steps in 1923-25 with the creation, by Vladimir Jabotinsky, first of *Beitar* and then of *Ha-Tzohar*, the original nuclei of the Revisionist movement. In Italy, the movement started its activities under the leadership of Leone Carpi (1887-1964) around 1925-26. In 1930 the Italian Revisionist Zionists began

Within the rich literature on Lombroso, see especially Nancy A. Harrowitz, *Antisemitism, Misogyny & the Logic of Cultural Difference: Cesare Lombroso & Matilde Serao* (Lincoln, London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994). The relationship between Nordau and Lombroso, and their mutual influence, still awaits a thorough investigation: as a starting point, also for Lombroso's attitudes towards Zionism and his own Jewish origins, see Emanuele D'Antonio, "Aspetti della rigenerazione ebraica e del sionismo in Cesare Lombroso," *Società e Storia*, XXIV, 92/4-6 (2001): 281-309. One should also not underestimate Lombroso's criticism of and dissent from Nordau: see for example his "Polemiche scientifiche" in Cesare Lombroso, *Genio e degenerazione. Nuovi studi e nuove battaglie* (Milan-Palermo: Sandron, 1898, 233-256). An assessment of this is: Antonio La Vergata, "Lombroso e la degenerazione" in *Cesare Lombroso. Gli scienziati e le nuova Italia*, ed. Silvano Montaldo, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2010), 55-93. See also Roberto Finzi, *Il pregiudizio. Ebrei e questione ebraica in Marx, Lombroso e Croce* (Milan: Bompiani, 2011), 49-80.

¹⁵ For an overview see *Emancipation through Muscles. Jews and Sports in Europe*, eds. Michael Brenner and Gideon Reuveni, (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

publishing their magazine, *L'Idea Sionistica*, which resuscitated the title of the early twentieth-century periodical.¹⁶ The pages of this periodical show the continued and growing relevance and popularity of Jewish sports in the imagination and propaganda of the movement: each issue featured a long section on sports, with news from all over Europe and Palestine, together with reflections on the importance for the Jewish nationalist movement of physical activities, gymnastics, athletics and other disciplines – especially soccer and boxing. In this period, *L'Idea Sionistica* also reflected the influence on the revisionist movement of ideals and catchwords from Italian Fascism, mostly due to the latter's fascination with sports and to its preaching the need for physical exercise.

In the summer of 1930, one of the first issues of the revisionist Zionist journal featured an article on “Jewish Sports around the World” which stated:

If there is a meaning in the reawakening of sports throughout the Jewish world, which coincides with the national reawakening, it is the overcoming of the weak and unhealthy life of the ghetto, the entrance into modern life. [...] Some will say that physical effort is to be blamed as it causes the abandonment of the yeshiva in favor of the sports field. But we say this is not only a matter of physical effort, it is actually an entirely spiritual effort, and we rejoice in it.

Many reasons supported the Jewish interest in and commitment to sports: “We need to regain physical prowess [...] We need to educate ourselves to accept discipline and obedience towards our leaders: group sports are the most efficient means to this end. [...] They] accustom people to that kind of comradeship that really binds together the members of a nation.”¹⁷ The article, which shows a radicalization of language and ideas through increasing references to “discipline,” “obedience” and “comradeship,” ended with the Latin slogan – recently revived by Fascism – *Mens sana in corpore sano*. Every issue of *L'Idea Sionistica* now featured detailed information about competitions, matches and championships in which Jewish teams – for example the clubs Hakoah, Hasmoneah, Maccabea, and Hagibor – and Jewish athletes participated throughout Europe, testifying to the Jewish national and physical reawakening.

That Zionist and Fascist ideals and rituals were at times interwoven by the revisionists can be seen, for example, in the episode of the visit by the Milanese

¹⁶ Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo*, new expanded ed. (Turin: Einaudi, 1998), 114.

¹⁷ “Lo sport ebraico nel mondo,” *L'Idea Sionistica*, I, July 1930.

Jewish sports association “Alberto Ottolenghi”¹⁸ to the city of Fiume – a symbol of Italian and Fascist nationalism on the north-eastern Italian border. Here the Italian team paid homage to the grave of an Italian Jewish patriot, Bruno Mondolfo, who had died in the name of Fascist ideals in Fiume, the city seized in 1919 by the poet and nationalist Gabriele D’Annunzio. The ceremonies in Fiume ended with the collective cry *Eidath!* (*sic*, for the Hebrew ‘*Heydad!*’, i.e. Hurray!) and *Alalà!* (the Dannunzian and Fascist cry for victory), in the name of the “rebirth of Israel.”¹⁹

Italian Jewish Fascism, Revisionist Zionism, and Boxing

The search for the Italian muscle Jew now leads us to the pages of another Italian Jewish periodical which, at the peak of Italian consent towards Mussolini’s regime and four years before the official anti-Semitic turn of Fascism, called itself Fascist and Jewish: *La Nostra Bandiera* [Our Flag].²⁰ The journal, and its homonymous movement, were founded in Turin in 1934, also as a reaction to the discovery of the mostly Jewish circles that led an antifascist conspiracy in the city. At the time the Fascist and anti-Semitic newspaper *Il Tevere* ran the sarcastic title: “Next Year in Jerusalem, This Year at the Special Court for Political Crimes.” In response, *La Nostra Bandiera* attempted to develop a synthesis between Jewish religious values and Italian ultra-nationalistic ideals. A couple of years after its founding, the

¹⁸ No study is currently available on Italian Jewish sports organizations or on the role of Jews in Italian sport; but information on this could be gathered through a survey of the Italian Jewish press. Certainly, Italian Jewish boxers would deserve special attention, especially in the context of Rome: starting with Lazzaro Anticoli, a.k.a. ‘Bucefalo’, (1917-1944), who was to die at the hand of the Nazis in the Fosse Ardeatine massacre (1944), and Pacifico Di Consiglio, a.k.a. ‘Moretto’, (1921-2006), who was captured by, but later escaped from, the Nazis (see *Il ribelle del ghetto: la vita e le battaglie di Pacifico Di Consiglio, Moretto*, eds. Alberto Di Consiglio and Maurizio Molinari, (Rome: Masterbags, 2009), and Maurizio Molinari, Amedeo Osti Guerrazzi, *Il duello nel ghetto. La sfida di un ebreo contro le bande nazifasciste nella Roma occupata* (Milan: Rizzoli, 2017)). Another area which also in Italy saw a relevant Jewish contribution was soccer: the Venice and the Naples soccer teams were both founded, at the beginning of the twentieth century, by Jewish entrepreneurs and sport supporters.

¹⁹ “Lo sport ebraico nel mondo,” *L’Idea Sionistica*, III, June-July 1932.

²⁰ On Italian Jews during Fascism the standard, if partly disputed, accounts are De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani* (which was translated as *The Jews in Fascist Italy: a History*, New York: Enigma Books, 2001) and Michele Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini’s Italy: from Equality to Persecution* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006, orig. ed. Turin 2000). A middle-path was taken by Marie-Anne Matard-Bonucci, *L’Italia fascista e la persecuzione degli ebrei* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008, orig. ed. Paris 2006).

journal celebrated the proclamation of an Italian empire in Ethiopia and showed a keen interest in Italian Jewish contacts with Ethiopian Jewish (the so-called *Falasha* or *Beta Israel*).²¹

Physical strength, military courage, and virility were some of the ideals celebrated by *La Nostra Bandiera*, which was inspired by the Fascist ideology and worldview in this sphere as well.²² One no longer finds in the journal direct references to Max Nordau, and this does not come as a surprise since Nordau's Zionist rhetoric certainly would not have been appreciated by the anti-Zionists – and Italian nationalists – of *La Nostra Bandiera*. In some ways, Nordau's views on degeneration and regeneration had been indirectly incorporated by Fascist ideals of masculinity or, as a negative term of comparison, they had been overcome as decadent and bourgeois (still, Nordau was highly praised by Vladimir Jabotinsky in his book *The War and the Jews* of 1942).²³ On the other hand, the specter of Otto Weininger – a symbol of anti-virility – re-emerged in the same pages, but it was immediately banished as threatening the return of the historical accusations of Jewish effeminacy.²⁴ All this was during the time when the movement *La Nostra Bandiera*, and the Jewish community more generally, were witnessing the establishment of Nazi anti-Semitism as a State policy by the German fellow travelers of Italian fascism.

One episode in the history of the Jewish Fascist journal is particularly noteworthy. *La Nostra Bandiera* was especially stirred by the victory, in June 1934, of the American Jewish heavyweight boxer Max Baer over the Italian world champion

²¹ See Luca Ventura, *Ebrei con il duce. "La nostra bandiera" (1934-1938)* (Turin: Zamorani, 2002). A good introduction to the milieu of the journal and movement is the family story of its founder, Ettore Ovazza, as told by Alexander Stille, *Benevolence and Betrayal. Five Italian Jewish Families Under Fascism* (New York: Picador, 1992). See also my biographical entry "Ovazza, Ettore," in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* (Rome: Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, 2014), vol. 80, 23-26.

²² Mosse's work is again relevant here, especially *The Image of Man* and the essays collected in his *The Fascist Revolution: Toward a General Theory of Fascism* (New York: Fertig, 1999). See also: Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota, 1996) and Lorenzo Benadusi, *The Enemy of the New Man. Homosexuality in Fascist Italy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012, orig. ed. Milan 2005).

²³ See George L. Mosse, "Marx Nordau, Liberalism and the New Jew," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27/4 (1992): 577.

²⁴ See for example: f. m., "La psicologia dell'ebreo," *La Nostra Bandiera*, 15 November 1934, drawing heavily and explicitly on Weininger's *Sex and Character* (1903). On Weininger's Italian reception, especially in the early twentieth century, see Alberto Cavaglioni, *La filosofia del pressapoco. Weininger, sesso, carattere, e la cultura italiana del Novecento* (Naples: L'ancora del Mediterraneo, 2001).

Primo Carnera.²⁵ This victory caused criticism and ironic remarks in the Italian press concerning the Jewish origins of Baer.²⁶ Baer's victory was especially discomfoting for Italians since Carnera had become a symbol of Fascist national virility, and was hailed as such by the Fascist regime. Moreover, Baer had recently also defeated the German boxer and Nazi star Max Schmeling,²⁷ so that this had turned out to be a double setback – caused by a Jewish athlete – for the future Rome-Berlin Axis. Also, beginning with the German match, Baer had placed and proudly exhibited a star of David on his trunks as a clear political statement.²⁸ The entire situation appeared to be contradictory and unsettling for *La Nostra Bandiera*: they had the Italian and Fascist champion Carnera on the ground (for which they were ashamed); and the winner was a Jew (for which they were inevitably somewhat proud). There was also a further complication in the fact that Baer was American, and anti-Americanism was another Fascist mandatory conviction in the 1930s. The Jewish periodical, in any case, took the occasion to clarify that: “We consider sport as the aspiration to the perfection of the body and we glorify the champions [i.e. both champions, Carnera and Baer], so that the youth may take them as an example and may attend to its own body as well as spirit.”²⁹ Responding to anti-Semitic attacks, the Italian Jewish Fascist periodical

²⁵ On the political and cultural aspects surrounding the personality of the Italian boxer, see Daniele Marchesini, *Carnera* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006).

²⁶ On Max Baer (1909-1959) and the prominent role of Jews in American boxing, as well as its symbolic and political implications, see Stephen H. Norwood, “‘American Jewish Muscle’: Forging a New Masculinity in the Streets and in the Ring, 1890–1940,” *Modern Judaism*, 29/2 (May 2009): 167-193. See also Allen Bodner, *When Boxing Was a Jewish Sport* (Westport (CT), London: Praeger, 1997). The relationship between Jews and boxing thus long predates fascism and nazism.

²⁷ Max Schmeling (1905-2005) showed not only pro-Nazi, but also pro-Fascist sympathies, for example during a boxing cup organized by the Fascist regime in Rome in 1933 (see Norwood, “‘American Jewish Muscle,’” 184). He had however become a sports icon already during the Weimar republic, including for Left-wing avant-gardes: see David Bathrick, “Max Schmeling on the Canvas: Boxing as an Icon of Weimar Culture,” *New German Critique*, 51 (1990): 113-136.

²⁸ Norwood, “‘American Jewish Muscle,’” 184. One may also consider here the broader symbolic meaning of this boxing match and the role of the duel in German and German Jewish fraternities in Wilhelmine Germany. Dueling (usually in the form of fencing) was seen as a performance and defense of the male code of honor; but in the case of Jewish fraternities or Jewish students it could also be a means of self-defense against anti-Semitic attacks. For Jews, participation in a duel was at the same time a means of part-taking in German culture and of sharing the German code of honor. There were no Jewish fraternities in Italian universities (nor a real system of fraternities), while the role of dueling among Italian Jewish students, particularly in response to anti-semitism, would require a specific investigation. In the meantime, for possible comparisons, see Lisa Fetheringill Zwicker, “Performing Masculinity. Jewish Students and Honor Codes at German Universities,” in *Jewish Masculinities* cit., 114-137.

²⁹ “L’ebreo Max Baer e le ‘sue’ pagliacciate,” *La Nostra Bandiera*, June 21, 1934.

downplayed the broader implications of the match and of its results: “We do not feel diminished as Italians by the fact that Carnera lost, as much as we do not feel increased as Jews by Baer’s victory.” ‘Boxing,’ the article insisted, “is not a fight between nations [and] races [...], but between strong men, able men, exceptional men.”³⁰ This was actually *La Nostra Bandiera*’s answer to the representation in the Turinese daily newspaper *La Stampa*, of Carnera as Goliath, and of Baer as a “David from the Ghetto” (*‘il Davide del Ghetto’*) and a “very astute *yid*” (*astutissimo yid*).³¹

In the same months of the polemic around the Carnera-Baer match (and of the debate concerning Weininger), another episode shed light on what we may perhaps call Italian muscular Judaism. This was the inauguration in the port town of Civitavecchia, on the Tyrrhenian Sea near Livorno, of the maritime school run by the Revisionist Zionist youth movement Betar, inspired and founded by Jabotinsky. Jabotinsky, who was also a staunch admirer of Mussolini, had convinced the Fascist regime to host in Italy what would become, years later, the first nucleus of the State of Israel’s navy. Preparatory documents signed by the Zionist activist show the role that gymnastics, including boxing, as well as military training, played in the training of the paramilitary group: Betar, moreover, was clearly also inspired by Fascist educational methods and Fascist organizations.³²

In 1931 Jabotinsky had informed the Italian Embassy in Paris that he was “personally very sympathetic towards Italy and Fascism and that [he] desired that Italian culture and influence would side with the movement he directed.” To that purpose, “also with the aim of creating action squads for the fight against the Arabs,” the Zionist activist sought to create in Italy “a special school, based on culture and sports courses, for the young men who should be sent to the Orient.” In exchange, Jabotinsky offered to exert “a wide action in favor of Italy.”³³

In a letter from the same period he sketched out the program of the school, which he called “Central School for the preparation of Jewish instructors of the sport of self-defense.” Jabotinsky enumerated the disciplines that would be taught there:

³⁰ “Marco Ramperti ovvero la slealtà,” *La Nostra Bandiera*, 25 June 1934 (Ramperti is the name of the journalist who attacked Baer because of his Jewish background in the newspaper of Turin, *La Stampa*).

³¹ Marco Ramperti, “Stile Max Baër,” *La Stampa*, 20 June 1934 (the Yiddish ‘yid’ is, unusually, in the original Italian).

³² On the history of the school and the Revisionist Zionists in Italy, see De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani*; Id., *Il fascismo e l’Oriente. Arabi, Ebrei, Indiani nella politica di Mussolini* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1988).

³³ See the report by the Italian diplomat Raffaele Guariglia to the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1 February 1932, *Stato e libertà. Il carteggio Jabotinsky-Sciaky, 1924-1939*, ed. Vincenzo Pinto (Soveria Mannelli, CZ: Rubbettino, 2002), 61.

“French and English boxing, jiu-jitsu [*sic*, i.e. *Jujutsu*, a Japanese martial art], singlestick fencing, swordplay, shooting sports and strength training. As a common base: elements of boy-scouting. [...] We want the young Jew to be able to defend himself in all the countries in which he is in danger.”³⁴ Identical words were used in another letter from the same period, in which Jabotinsky also made his ideological views explicit: “*Betar*, a youth organization, is not concerned with politics; but I personally do not hide my sympathies. [...] What I would like for now is to begin a mental orientation towards Mediterranean and Latin currents.”³⁵ Jabotinsky’s Italian correspondent reported the first arrangements he had made with the representatives of the Italian government concerning the establishment of the school: “The school will have a sports-military character; it will be able to organize sporting events, but not political ones. And it will not be a center of political unrest. There will be no identification with similar organizations of the [Fascist] Regime, for example with the *Opera Nazionale Balilla* [a Fascist youth organization].”³⁶ However, in the first year of the school, Leone Carpi, the leader of the Italian Revisionist movement, wrote to the president of the Italian maritime professional schools that the Civitavecchia school expressed the “aspiration that young Jews learn and promote Fascist culture and the Italian language, and make Fascist penetration in the Near East easier.”³⁷

³⁴ Vladimir Jabotinsky to Angelo Donati, 24 June 1931, copy attached to a letter from Jabotinsky to Leone Carpi, 19 November 1931, Leone Carpi, “Lettere di Jabotinsky,” in *Scritti in memoria di Leone Carpi. Saggi sull’Ebraismo Italiano*, eds. Daniel Carpi, Attilio Milano, Alexander Rofé (Jerusalem: Fondazione Sally Mayer, 1967), 44.

³⁵ Jabotinsky to Isacco Sciaky, 20 April 1932, *Stato e libertà*, 66. Three years later, again writing to Sciaky, Jabotinsky added the following disciplines to the above-mentioned program for the school: “[...] c) climbing; d) swimming; e) languages: Hebrew, Italian and a third one of choice; f) the history of Zionism; g) the history of the great colonization; h) the geography of Palestine, of the Levant and of the Mediterranean; i) the maxims and ritual of religion; j) etiquette (the *Hadar* code of behavior); k) State and society” (8 November 1935), *ibid.*, 89. *Hadar*, literally “majesty,” was the honorable behavior required of Beitar members, as illustrated by Jabotinsky in his writings: see *The Political and Social Philosophy of Ze’ev Jabotinsky*, ed. Mordechai Sharig, transl. Shimshon Feder, (London-Portland, OR: Valentine Mitchell, 1999), 120-125 (from writings of the period 1928-1938, including a letter in Hebrew to the students of Civitavecchia, November 20, 1934).

³⁶ Sciaky to Jabotinsky, 25 April 1932, *Stato e libertà*, 69. Still, in a letter to the representative of the Italian Government, Raffaele Guariglia (2 December 1935), which he copied to Jabotinsky (3 December 1935), Sciaky would describe Beitar as an ‘organization which, *mutatis mutandis*, corresponds to the Opera Nazionale Balilla,’ *ibid.*, 93.

³⁷ Leone Carpi to Paolo Emilio Thaon di Revel, 28 October 1934, cit. in Vincenzo Pinto, “Between *Imago* and *Res*: the Revisionist-Zionist Movement’s Relationship with Fascist Italy, 1922-1938,” *Israel Affairs*, 10/ 3 (2004): 99. On the history of the school see also Leone Carpi, *Come e dove nacque la Marina di Israele. La Scuola Marittima del “Bethar” a Civitavecchia* (Rome: Nemi, 1967).

Two years later, *La Nostra Bandiera* proudly reported on the inauguration of the second year of the Civitavecchia school – there were thus a connection and clear sympathies between the Jewish Fascists and the Revisionists – which though officially set up for non-Italians, displayed a combination of Italian and Jewish pride.³⁸ The report was preceded, a couple of months earlier, by a laudatory review of the Italian edition of the book by Jabotinsky on *The Jewish Legion in the World War*.³⁹ As for the naval school, *La Nostra Bandiera* saluted the “robust Jewish youngsters of all countries” who had reunited to train on Italian waters, and portrayed them as “strong, healthy, full of enthusiasm and faith”.⁴⁰ After the inauguration of the school, a report by another magazine of the Italian Revisionists, *Davar*, recorded that the ceremony had ended with “a salute to the Duce and to Italy,” and with the singing of the Fascist anthem *Giovinazza* and of the Zionist *Hatikvah* [*sic*].⁴¹ This happened in the same month as the aforementioned staging of a Jewish and Fascist ritual in Fiume by the Revisionists. Already in July 1922, before the Fascist rise to power, Jabotinsky, who had spent part of his youth in Italy and greatly admired the country, had written to the future Duce:

Mr. Mussolini, I think you do not know the Jew. Perhaps I am wrong, but it seems to me that when you think about the Jews, you imagine a docile, unctuous, shrewd being, always defensive, always declaring his loyalty towards Italy, towards the ideal, and so on. These are fairy tales from last century, and even then they were fairy tales. If you would like to know our degree of vitality, you should study your own Fascists, and add just a bit more tragedy, a bit more tenacity – perhaps also some more experience.⁴²

“The punch is an exquisitely Fascist means of expression,” Mussolini used to say⁴³ (and Hitler praised boxing in *Mein Kampf*).⁴⁴ Also in this case – considering Jabotinsky’s admiration for and knowledge of Italy, as well as for the Italian Fascist

³⁸ “La scuola marinara di Civitavecchia per gli ebrei stranieri,” *La Nostra Bandiera*, April 15, 1936.

³⁹ Franco Momigliano, “La ‘Legione Ebraica,’” *La Nostra Bandiera*, February 29, 1936.

⁴⁰ “La scuola marinara di Civitavecchia.”

⁴¹ G. M., “La prima squadra marinara ebraica,” *Davar*, August-September 1934.

⁴² Cit. in *Stato e libertà*, 21 (the letter, dated 16 July 1922, was first published in full, for reasons of propaganda and clearly also thanks to Mussolini, by the anti-Semitic activist Giovanni Preziosi, *Giudaismo-Bolscevismo, Plutocrazia, Massoneria* (Milan: Mondadori, 1941), 65-69.

⁴³ Cit. in Marco Impiglia, *Mussolini sportivo*, in *Sport e fascismo*, eds. Maria Canella and Sergio Giuntini, (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2009), 42.

⁴⁴ Bathrick, “Max Schmeling on the Canvas,” 128, note 37.

movement and its values – it is evident that both the revisionist Zionist muscle Jew or boxer, and the Italian Jewish Fascist (the muscle Jew promoted by *La Nostra Bandiera*), found a source of inspiration and a model in Italy. At the same time, the muscular image of the Jewish Fascist movement supported by *La Nostra Bandiera* probably followed, and identified with, the image of Italian Fascism in general: with its myths of virility, manliness, physical strength, physical violence; and without any particular Jewish reference.⁴⁵ Nor did it actually call for a specific Italian muscular Judaism, giving preference to the Italian nationalist ideals of strength and brawn, over a Jewish or Italian Jewish variant or interpretation of them. We know for example that the founder of the movement and journal *La Nostra Bandiera*, Ettore Ovazza (1892-1943), practiced and loved soccer and fencing.⁴⁶ But it is unlikely that he saw anything particularly Jewish about these sports: more likely these interests and hobbies reflected a broader male ideal or model of bourgeois respectability, which included healthy, well-trained and strong bodies.

Still, in a July 1933 issue, *L'Idea Sionistica* rejoiced – from a revisionist Zionist perspective – at the fact that a Jewish boxer had prevailed on a symbol of the “Aryan race,” Max Schmelling. The magazine further denounced, in this issue, its unease with the changing political context for two reasons. There was the fact that Germany had barred the Jewish tennis player Daniel Prenn from joining the national team at the Davis Cup, because of his origins. And there was also the announcement that the Olympic games of 1936 would be held in Germany, despite the Nazi rise to power and the spread of German anti-Semitic intolerance.⁴⁷ The first cracks were thus beginning to open in the epic of the European muscle Jew.

Muscle Jews: A Preliminary Conclusion

There were two major turning points in the history I have briefly outlined. The first was represented by the Great War: a time of profound transformations of the

⁴⁵ I have already recalled, for example, Spackman, *Fascist Virilities*; Mosse, *The Image of Man*, chap. 8, “The New Fascist Man.”

⁴⁶ In one of Ettore Ovazza’s personal Fascist Party files (“Scheda personale del Camerata”), dated 21 February 1931, under the entry “Sports practiced,” Ovazza recorded: ‘*footboal* [sic] – *scherma*’, see Fondo Partito Nazionale Fascista, box 106, file 6694, State Archive, Turin. Ovazza Ettore fu Ernesto. In Ovazza’s writings, for example in his *Diario per mio figlio* (Turin: Sten, 1928), I have not found any special reference to virile or muscular imagery.

⁴⁷ r.[enato] c[oen]., “Lo sport ebraico nel mondo,” *L’idea Sionistica*, IV, July 1933.

image of man. In many ways, this brought to a peak – and hence transformed and radicalized – the ideals of courage, physical strength and virility, which had been developed throughout Europe since the 19th century in relation to the discourse and imagery of the nation.

For Italian Jews – as for all other European Jews – this was also a time of forced integration within the nation: one in which muscular identities were imagined in a more chauvinistic and less particularistic way within each country. While fighting in the trenches, Italian, German, or French Jews would hardly have agitated the ideal of a muscle *Jew*, as they were exclusively and intensively focused on their respective national identities. As George L. Mosse first showed,⁴⁸ this was a time in which a nationalist and especially Christian imagery was imposed on all, deleting minority identities or alternative expressions of identity via the imposition of national and nationalist paradigms. At the same time, the war prepared the grounds for a new virility: for new kinds of brawn, which in Italy would be reactivated, exercised, and celebrated to a maximum degree by Fascism. This transformation also produced new types of muscular Judaism, based on new articulations of and syntheses between the Jewish side and the various (in our case, Italian) national sides. Among the most striking outcomes were the ideal of the new Revisionist Zionist muscle Jew, in its international and Italian articulations, as well as the distinctive aspects of the Italian Fascist muscle Jew, chiefly promoted by *La Nostra Bandiera*, and the various interactions between the two.

The second turning point was also a tragic conclusion to the history of the muscle Jew (before its reappearance in different forms after the Second World War, especially in connection to the founding of the State of Israel and its new virile Jewish identity): just when these experiences and their discourses had reached their peak, they collapsed with the radicalization of anti-Semitism, racism, and the rise of anti-Jewish State persecution. From the very beginning inherent contradictions, or at least relevant tensions, were probably to be found in the ideal of the muscle Jew, between radical nationalism and Jewish forms of virility: but we are only able to state this in hindsight. The extreme exaltation of nationalist identities, and of their bodily expressions, could not tolerate – nor, ultimately, admit – the coexistence within them of different articulations, or versions, of national, nationalist, and ethnic or racial ideals and types, and of their embodiments. Perhaps extreme ideals of strength can only find expression in absolute and holistic national and nationalistic identities, which cannot envision hyphenated, or mixed, or blurred variants. They can materialize exclusively in Italian or German – not

⁴⁸ George L. Mosse, *The Jews and the German War Experience, 194-1918* (New York: Leo Baeck Institute, 1977); Id., *Fallen Soldier*.

Italian Jewish and German Jewish – identities, and their respective national muscles. Thus I have mentioned Italian Fascist Jews mostly sharing a Fascist muscular imagery, rather than articulating a specific Jewish version of it.

While the ideal of the muscle Jew had also emerged in reaction to anti-Semitism,⁴⁹ the fear of degeneration and the striving for physical regeneration, shared by millions, was not to survive the extreme radicalization of national identities and their bodily expressions in Fascism, Nazism and, eventually, the Holocaust. In the final, tragic context of extreme anti-Jewish persecution, bodies would no longer be exercised, celebrated and exalted, but rather despised, ill-treated, destroyed.

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⁴⁹ Presner, *Muscular Judaism*; Norwood, “American Jewish Muscle,” 176 and 178; Bloom, “Toward a Theory of the Modern Hebrew Handshake,” in *Jewish Masculinities*, 156.

Fascist Jews in Trieste: Social, Cultural and Political Dynamics 1919-1938

by René Moehrlé

Abstract

The present article links the empowerment, consolidation and radicalization of Italian Fascism between 1919 and 1938 to the personal trajectories of Fascist and Fascist-sympathizing Jews in Trieste. At the same time, it aims to illustrate the relevance of Trieste as a testing ground for Fascist racism since the 1920ies.

Trieste's ambivalence as a multiethnic city as well as a racist laboratory created a form of "border-Fascism" where a distinctive Anti-Slavism anticipated contents and methods of Italy's 1938 anti-Semitic laws. Becoming part of Italy only in 1919/20, the city's geographical and cultural isolation from the "motherland" created a special political environment that Mussolini described as exemplarily for his – at the time – still nascent movement.

For this article five Jews from different social and cultural milieus in Trieste have been selected, they are: Pietro Jacchia, the founder of the Fascist movement in Trieste (1919), Enrico Paolo Salem, the city's Podestà (1933-1938), Achille Levi-Bianchini (1937-1938) and Marco de Parente (1938-1939), two presidents of the local Jewish Community and, finally, Italo Zolli, Trieste's Chief Rabbi (1919-1940). These figures reflect both interconnections and conflicts between Triestine Judaism and the development of Fascism on a national scale.

Historical Context

Triestine Synergies: Jews, Fascists and Racists

Diverging Biographies of Fascist Personalities (1919-1938)

The Jewish Community of Trieste, its Chief Rabbi and its Presidents

Conclusions

The history of the Jewish Community in Trieste cannot be separated from Trieste's more general culture and history. Linguistic, cultural and geographical diversity in the history of Trieste created a unique political environment. Since the 19th century, Trieste had the reputation of a Central European metropolis, associated with keywords such as *free port*, *tolerance edict*, *multi-ethnic* and

multi-cultural society.¹ Historiography has discussed the ambivalent character of Trieste, stressing the virulence of anti-Semitism, anti-Slavism as well as of a radical border-nationalism.² Founded in April 1919, the local Fascist movement gained momentum through different periods by implementing these “isms,” which describe racist, xenophobic and violent doctrines.

The present article seeks to link the roots and the subsequent consolidation of Fascism in Trieste to the role played by local Fascist Jews and to the wider significance of Trieste as testing ground for Italy’s racial politics. I will proceed by offering some historical context, then the article will focus on the biographies of the five different Jewish personalities selected and on their interdependence with the Fascist movement and regime. I chose these personalities because they held major institutional roles within the local Fascist movement, and for their role in the local Jewish community. In keeping with the title of this *Quest* volume, my analysis is limited to the years 1919-1938.

Historical Context

Trieste stood for more than 500 years under Austrian control (1382-1918) and developed as its most important harbor-city. At the beginning of the 20th century, it ranked as the fourth biggest city of the Habsburg Empire, behind Vienna, Budapest, and Prague. As the only direct Austrian access to the Mediterranean, circa 20% of all the monarchy’s imports and exports were operated through Trieste’s harbor. With the insurance agencies *Assicurazioni Generali* and *Riunione Adriatica di Sicurtà (RAS)*, as well as with the ship

¹ Angelo Ara and Claudio Magris, *Trieste. Un’identità di frontiera*, (Turin: Einaudi, 2007); Giulio Sapelli, *Trieste italiana. Mito e destino economico*, (Milan: Franco Angeli Editore, 1990); Elio Apih, *Trieste*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza editore, 1988).

² Tullia Catalan, “The Ambivalence of a Port-City. The Jews of Trieste from the 19th to the 20th Century,” *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC*, 2 (2011): 69-98; Annamaria Vinci, *Sentinelle della patria. Il fascismo al confine orientale 1918-1941*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza editore, 2011); Almerigo Apollonio, *Venezia Giulia e fascismo 1922-1935. Una società post-asburgica negli anni di consolidamento della dittatura mussoliniana*, (Trieste: Istituto Regionale per la Cultura Istriano-Fiumano-Dalmato, 2004); Almerigo Apollonio, *Dagli Asburgo a Mussolini. Venezia Giulia 1918-1922*, (Gorizia: LEG, 2001); Enzo Collotti, “Sul razzismo antislovo,” in *Nel nome della razza. Il razzismo nella storia d’Italia 1870-1945*, ed. Alberto Burgio, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999), 33-61; Marina Cattaruzza, “I conflitti nazionali a Trieste nell’ambito della questione nazionale nell’impero asburgico: 1850-1914,” *Quaderni Giuliani di Storia*, 1 (1989): 131-148; Elio Apih, *Italia, fascismo e antifascismo nella Venezia Giulia, 1918-1943*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza editore, 1966); Carlo Schiffrer, *Sguardo storico sui rapporti fra Italiani e Slavi nella Venezia Giulia*, (Trieste: Stabilimento tipografico nazionale, 1946).

companies *Österreichischer Lloyd* and *Cosulich Società Triestina di Navigazione*, four global players and some of Europe's biggest corporations of their kind were based in Trieste.³ Due to its economic, financial and industrial status, consecutive emperors established constitutional privileges that increased Trieste's attractiveness, both economically and politically. Its population increased tenfold within one hundred years and reached 200.000 (Austrian) inhabitants in 1910, consisting of an Italian speaking majority (including *regnicoli*, Italian citizens in Trieste), followed by minorities of Slovenian and German speaking citizens and smaller ethnic groups of German, Croat, Serb, Greek and French population groups.⁴ At the same time, circa 2% of Trieste's citizens were Jewish, representing a fundamental part of both the city's history and identity.⁵

Since the beginning of the Italian *Risorgimento* (1848-1871) and especially since the third Italian war of independence in 1866, the political tension between the Italians in Trieste, the Austrian administration and the Slovenian population rose. Vienna feared the loss of Trieste to Italy, it strengthened its centralized system and increasingly supported the city's Slovenian nationalists, which sought to govern the city within a united Slovenia under Viennese rule.⁶ At the same time, Austrian authorities tried to calm the Italian majority by reforming the suffrage, thus allowing wider political participation. However, electoral campaigns were permanently accompanied by serious street clashes between Italian and Slovenian nationalists, causing the first casualties in 1868.⁷ It was mainly Trieste's Italian liberal-national party made the atmosphere incandescent by focusing on ethnic competition, defaming the whole of the Slovenian

³ Anna Millo, *L'élite del potere a Trieste: Una biografia collettiva 1891-1938*, (Milan: Franco Angeli editore 1989); Anna Millo, *Trieste, le assicurazioni, l'Europa. Arnoldo Frigessi di Rattalma e la Ras*, (Milan: Franco Angeli editore, 2004).

⁴ Authorities probably manipulated the 1910 census of Trieste's population (51.8% Italians, 24.8% Slovenians, 5,2% Germans, 1% Croats and Serbs and 16,8% foreigners, who were almost 80% immigrated Italians): *Ministero dell'Economia Nazionale, Direzione Generale della Statistica-Ufficio del Censimento, Risultati sommari del Censimento della popolazione, eseguito il 1° Dicembre 1921, III. Venezia Giulia*, (Rome, 1925), 4; see also, Marina Cattaruzza, *Trieste nell'Ottocento. Le trasformazioni di una società civile*, (Udine: Del Bianco, 1995), 128-137.

⁵ Jewish Community of Trieste, <http://moked.it/triestebraica/la-storia> (last access, 14 March 2017); see also, Tullia Catalan, *La comunità ebraica di Trieste 1781-1914. Politica, società, cultura*, (Trieste: Lint, 2000).

⁶ Marta Verginella, "La storia di confine tra sguardi incrociati e malintesi," *Qualestoria* 1/35 (2007): 5-12.

⁷ Marina Cattaruzza, "Alle frontiere dell'impero: il litorale asburgico," in *L'Adriatico mare di scambi tra oriente e occidente*, ed. Marina Cattaruzza (Pordenone: Edizioni Concordia Sette. Istituto Regionale Studi Europei del Friuli Venezia Giulia, 2003), 141; Angelo Ara, *Fra nazione e impero. Trieste, gli Asburgo, la Mitteleuropa*, (Milan: Garzanti editore, 2009).

population in town as “hostile invaders.”⁸ The party leadership hired so-called *bande nere*, black vested gangs, to physically fight both Italian and Slovenian Socialists, who cooperated shortly within a united political party in 1907.⁹ Italian nationalists dominated regional politics from 1891 to 1915, continuously supplying the city’s Podestà.¹⁰

As an outcome of the *Risorgimento* and of the three Italian unification wars, the local irredentist movement struggled for Trieste to become part of the Kingdom of Italy. Persecuted by Austrian police, irredentists met in secret and founded Masonic Lodges. Their networks pursued the goal of spreading patriotic Italian writings, involving the wider population, gaining support from high officials in Italy and preparing the unification of the “unreleased” land of Trieste and its region Venezia-Giulia.¹¹ Italian nationalists and irredentists overlapped with regards to their followers as well as their political goals. The freemasons’ preparatory work and the political elections - as well as the open street fights - strongly affected Trieste’s Italian population, which mostly supported the irredentist idea. At the same time, influential Italian business groups remained loyal to Austria, mainly because their welfare depended on relations with the Habsburg Empire. It was an open secret that, when the minute Italy would annex Trieste, its harbor, its industry and its finance-sector would lose the Empire’s *Hinterland* as a trade market.¹² Furthermore, these interest groups would have had to face strong rivals from Venice, Genoa and Naples. Therefore, the whole unification-process was not only an ethnic struggle, but just as much an economic question and one of political influence versus political idealism.

From the perspective of the Jewish citizens in Trieste, a positive argument for the city’s transition into Italian possession was Italy’s anti-clericalism. The fact that

⁸ *Il Piccolo*, June 12, 1909, 2.

⁹ About *bande nere*, *Il Piccolo*, May 6, 1907, 2; *Il Lavoratore*, May 5, 1907, 2; about socialism in Trieste, see Sabine Rutar, *Kultur-Nation-Millieu. Sozialdemokratie in Triest vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, (Essen: Klartext, 2004); about the Slovenian-Italian party, which in 1907 won the election for the *Reichsrat* in Vienna, see Eduard Winkler, *Wahlrechtsreformen und Wahlen in Triest 1905-1909. Eine Analyse der politischen Partizipation in einer multinationalen Stadtregion der Habsburgermonarchie*, (München: Oldenbourg, 2000), 182.

¹⁰ Nationalist Mayors in Trieste: Ferdinando Pitteri (1891-1897), Carlo Dompieri (1897-1900), Scipione Sandrinelli (1900-1909), Alfonso Valerio (1909-1915); in AGCTS, *Segreteria Generale, Amministrazioni 1900-1945*.

¹¹ Tullia Catalan, “Massoneria ebraismo irredentismo dal 18 brumaio alla grande guerra,” in *Napoleone e il Bonapartismo nella cultura politica Italiana 1802-2005*, ed. Alceo Riosa (Milan: Guerini e associati, 2007), 197-214.

¹² Angelo Vivante, *Irredentismo adriatico. Con uno studio di Elio Apih: La genesi di “Irredentismo adriatico,”* (Trieste: Edizioni Italo Svevo, 1984).

the Italian constitution secured full religious freedom since 1848 was an important consideration for Jews from Trieste, who experienced anti-Semitism throughout the whole period of Austrian dominion. In fact, Jews – just like all other parts of the population – were a diversified group, amongst them were nationalists, irredentists, freemasons, workers and businessmen, religious and non-religious citizens. For example, some of the main characters of the local irredentist movement, led by the masonic lodge *Alpi Giulie*, grew up in Jewish families but converted or remained religiously unaffiliated. Among them were three grandmasters of the *Alpi Giulie lodge*, Felice Venezian, Camillo Ara and Teodoro Mayer, as well as other highly respected personalities of Trieste, for instance Salvatore Segre Sartorio, vice-director of RAS and later to become a senator of the Kingdom of Italy.¹³ However, in 1910 circa 5.000 citizens of Trieste were still registered members of the Jewish Community.¹⁴

With the beginning of World War I, Austria drafted its male citizens. Many Italian speaking citizens of Trieste deserted, escaped to nearby Italy, changed sides and fought against Austria. Also 101 members of Trieste's Jewish Community fought for Italy between 1915 and 1918, 18 of them perished.¹⁵

From November 1918, with the end of the war, to September 1919, with the conclusion of the conference of Saint-Germain, the status of the territory of Trieste remained vague; nevertheless, Italian troops had already occupied the city. In this atmosphere of a permanent external threat and a lack of internal security, a new movement of armed Italian ultranationalists in black uniforms increasingly took hold of Trieste. The Fascist squads, thriving in the nationalistic, xenophobic and violent atmosphere of April 1919, quickly gained power.¹⁶

¹³ Venezian contracted out of the Jewish Community Trieste in 1885, Mayer, his wife Gilda Ziffer and their children Marcella and Aldo in 1902, the brothers Camillo and Angelo Ara in 1903-1904, Salvatore Segre Sartorio in 1907; see, Millo, *L'élite del potere*, 66/80; Catalan, *Massoneria ebraismo irredentismo*, 80/207.

¹⁴ About the number of Jews in Trieste, Catalan, *La comunità ebraica di Trieste 1781-1914*, 81. About their emancipation, major steps were the inauguration of the first synagogue in 1748 and the end of segregation through the diluting of the ghetto in 1784: <http://www.triestebraica.it/storia/4> [last access, 14 March 2017].

¹⁵ In First World War 1.001 Triestine's fought for Italy. 184 died in the battle. The estimated number of citizens from Trieste fighting for Austria was considered to have been substantially higher, but does not get mentioned since Trieste became part of Italy; *Archivio della Comunità Ebraica di Trieste* (ACET), 1938 *Amministrazione* (1), *Volontari Triestini Ebrei*; see also: Pierluigi Briganti, *Il contributo militare degli ebrei italiani alla Grande Guerra 1915-1918*, (Bologna: Centro di Studi Storico-Militari, 2009).

¹⁶ Stefano Bartolini, *Fascismo antislabo. Il tentativo di bonifica etnica al confine nord orientale*, (Pistoia: Istituto storico della resistenza e della società contemporanea in Provincia di Cuneo,

Austrian officials and their families mostly left the city as a consequence of military defeat. In contrast, Slovenian Triestines remained. Italian internment camps, installed by the military, were holding at least 500 Slovenians as prisoners, arguing they would be a “danger for law and order.”¹⁷ At the same time, Fascist squads patrolled Trieste’s streets, openly threatening and attacking the Austrian but primarily Slovenians, who were forbidden to speak their language in public. Jewish Triestines did not suffer any harm at this stage, an element which underlined their social status and the degree to which they were accepted. Moreover, Jews participated in the newly-founded Fascist movement, which consisted of a high number of demobilized soldiers and which leaders of Trieste’s nationalist party considered as “young and healthy forces.”¹⁸

The long-prepared takeover had linguistic, cultural and political consequences. Geographically Trieste was located at the periphery of a powerful European Empire and became a border-town of the relatively recently founded Kingdom of Italy (1861), on the border with Slovenia and the (now former) Yugoslavian Empire of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians (1918). The continuity of anti-Slavism of nationalists and Fascists promoted racism and violence as a core message. As early as 1920, local Fascism dominated the political landscape of the city and parts of its surrounding region. Benito Mussolini followed this development very closely. He visited Trieste three times between 1919 and 1921. During the last of these visits, he announced that the “*fasci* of Venice Giulia are the superior element and patron of local politics, capable of forming a great movement of national renovation and of constituting the noble and aggressive vanguard that Italy is dreaming of.”¹⁹ Mussolini elevated the racist Fascist movement in Trieste to the phalanx of his nationwide enterprise about to be established.

Triestine Synergy’s: Jews, Fascists and Racists

2006); Dario Mattiussi, *Il Partito Nazionale Fascista a Trieste. Uomini e organizzazione del potere 1919-1932*, (Trieste: Istituto Regionale per la storia del movimento di liberazione nel Friuli Venezia Giulia, 2002).

¹⁷ The government in Rome ordered the prisoners release in March 1919: Milica Emilija Kacin-Wohinz, *Alle origini del Fascismo di confine. Gli Sloveni della Venezia Giulia sotto l’occupazione italiana 1918-1921*, (Gorizia: Centro isontino di ricerca e documentazione storica e sociale L. Gasparini. Sklad Dorce Sardoc, 2010), 85-88; 91-97.

¹⁸ Giampaolo Valdevit, *Trieste. Storia di una periferia insicura*, (Milan: B. Mondadori, 2004), 22. Specifically about Fascism in Trieste: Vinci, *Sentinelle della Patria*.

¹⁹ Benito Mussolini, *Il Popolo d’Italia*, September 24, 1921, in: Giuseppe Stefani, *Il Lloyd Triestino. Contributo alla storia italiana della navigazione marittima*, (Verona: A. Mondadori, 1938), 459.

Keeping in mind that many Triestine Jews were Italian nationalists, irredentists and volunteers of war, it should not come as a surprise that some of them sympathized and participated in the early Fascist movement right from its beginning in 1919. Mussolini's initially explicitly apolitical movement was open to everyone, as was the Fascist party, the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (PNF), founded in November 1921. Even Mussolini's accession to power in 1922 did not change the fact that Fascism had no official restrictions against Italian Jews. The atmosphere changed when the Fascist regime turned towards the implementation of the dictatorship (1922-1928), i.e. blurring the lines between the party and the State, merging their institutions, establishing a system where party and state were more closely interwoven, thus tending towards a totalitarian regime. The preparation of Italy's territorial expansion went hand in hand with the "creation of the new man," accompanied by the fusion of newly created state-departments with already existing eugenic and anthropological institutes.²⁰ State-controlled press and propaganda-centers promoted racism with growing radicality. Governmental anti-Slavism complemented anti-Semitic campaigns which were in turn accompanied by colonial Racism since the beginning of the Italian war and genocide in Abyssinia (1935).²¹

Trieste as a Fascist stronghold and as a city with 25% Slovenian population, as well as the home of the country's third largest Jewish Community, played a major role as a laboratory for the development of the regime's racism. While Mussolini's government was responsible for promoting anti-Semitic and colonial-racist propaganda campaigns at the national level, local anti-Slavism in Trieste had been long tested with measures that - for their content and chronology - became the blueprint for anti-Semitism and colonial racism in Italy. As mentioned before, Mussolini had followed the early success of Trieste's Fascist movement very closely.

Augusto Turati, Italy's PNF-General Secretary (1926-1930), had visited Trieste in 1926; here, in a speech in front of the high Fascist council in June of the same year, he claimed that the freemasons in Trieste, guided by a Jewish elite,

²⁰ Francesco Cassata, *Building the New Man. Eugenics, Racial Science and Genetics in Twentieth-Century Italy*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2011).

²¹ *Der erste faschistische Vernichtungskrieg. Die italienische Aggression gegen Äthiopien 1935-1941*, eds. Asfa W Asserate and Aram Mattioli, (Köln: SH-Verlag, 2006); Gabriele Schneider, *Mussolini in Afrika. Die faschistische Rassenpolitik in den italienischen Kolonien 1936-1941*, (Köln: SH-Verlag 2000), 25-86; Angelo Del Boca, *I gas di Mussolini. Il Fascismo e la guerra d'Etiopia*, (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1996).

represented an unsolvable problem.²² With spreading rumors about a Jewish conspiracy in Trieste, the Jewish Community moved into the focus of high-ranking Fascists for the first time, as underlined by an order from the Ministry of the Interior, directed exclusively at Trieste's prefecture in May 1930, imposing the refusal "of citizenship requests coming from Semitic elements, mainly originating from East and Central Europe, who have a special tendency of flowing into Italy and particularly to settle in the new provinces where they spread ideas and sentiments which dominate the mass of their religious brothers from varying countries of origin and which can create serious inconveniences and threats."²³

With this decision, the Ministry of the Interior primarily seemed to refer to Trieste's status as the most important emigration-point for European Jews embarking towards Palestine and America, which may serve as a partial explanation for singling Trieste out in this manner.²⁴ This Trieste-specific anticipation of a clear Anti-Semitic attitude and policy on the part of the state at large, eight years before the promulgation of the Italian racial laws, is surprising, even though in December 1930 the Fascist government pushed through the creation of an Italian Jewish national organization, the *Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane* (UCII).²⁵

Concerning the city's Jewish population, the German consul in Trieste, Friedrich Illgen, reported to the foreign ministry in Berlin in July 1933, "diverse businesses in Trieste, [...] as banks, assurance companies, big trading companies in coffee, tobacco, south fruits, wine, coal etc. are almost all under exclusive Jewish control."²⁶ There was no doubt, that Illgen ignored his diplomatic training from democratic Weimar times, by now offering his services to the National-Socialist

²² *Archivio Centrale dello Stato* (ACS), *Segreteria Particolare del Duce (SPD)*, folder 28, p. 4; see also, Mattiussi, *Il Partito*, 86.

²³ *Archivio di Stato di Trieste* (ASTS), *Prefettura, Atti generali*, folder 3458, Ministry of the Interior to Prefecture of Trieste, May 7, 1930. I hereby explain, that all translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

²⁴ Catalan, "L'emigrazione ebraica in Palestina attraverso il porto di Trieste (1908-1938)," *Qualestoria* 2-3/39 (1991): 57-107, 107; see also: <http://moked.it/triestebraica/la-storia> [last access, 14 March 2017].

²⁵ Anselmo Calò, "La genesi della legge del 1930," *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 4 (1985): 334-439; Stefania Dazzetti, *Gli ebrei italiani e il Fascismo. La formazione della legge del 1930 sulle comunità israelitiche*, in *Diritto economico e istituzioni nell'Italia fascista*, ed. Aldo Mazzacane, (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2002).

²⁶ Report Consul Friedrich Illgen, 18th of July 1933; PA AA Berlin, *Rom Quirinal 670*, "Politik: Bd. 2) Juden, Italien und die deutsche Judenpolitik 1933/1939."

and anti-Semitic German government.²⁷ Illgen, as all his successors, played an important role for strengthening the German National-Socialists in Trieste, which advanced greatly through tight collaboration with anti-Semitic Fascists in Trieste.

In a similar way Ottavio Dinale, under his pseudonym “Farinata,” published on the 4th of October 1934 an article in the country’s first Fascist newspaper, Mussolini’s *Il Popolo d’Italia*, claiming that Jews were running Trieste and all important offices within it, even though they represented just two percent of the city’s population.²⁸

Then, in June 1937, an unofficial list circulated. It consisted of 104 pages, and once more caused debates and speculations about a Jewish conspiracy in Trieste. Its anonymous author, who sent the list to Rome and who published the names of all Triestine Jews, reporting their jobs, positions, addresses etc., further pointed out that he had “considered only race as a criterion and not the practiced religion.”²⁹ The list’s content was explosive, it gave a rough overview of the financial and political power of Trieste’s Jewish population. Among them, an elite circle that simultaneously occupied positions within the management of both big assurances, *Generali* and *RAS*, as well as within diverse banks and various economic, political and social associations. The “Triestine List” outlined two things: first the financial and political power of Jews in Trieste and second the nepotism among the listed personalities, whose involvement at the highest level extended across the named sectors. As it were, the list fed existing rumors about a Jewish conspiracy. Even despite claiming “race” as the criterion, the list’s author did neither provide a definition of “Jew” nor of “Race.” These two factors and the list’s strong impact on leading Fascist and Anti-Semitic circles in Rome might have motivated further steps from different sides.

²⁷ From July-December 1935, Illgen was German Consul in Trieste; *Biographisches Handbuch des deutschen Auswärtigen Dienstes 1871-1945*, ed. Auswärtiges Amt, Vol. 2, G-K, (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005): 406; see also: René Moehrle, “Fascismo, antislavismo e antisemitismo: i rapporti dei consoli tedeschi a Trieste 1919-1945,” in *Gli ebrei nella storia del Friuli Venezia Giulia. Una vicenda di lunga durata. Atti del Convegno internazionale di studi, 12-14 Ottobre 2015, Salone d’onore dell’Istituto di cultura Casa Giorgio Cini, Ferrara*, eds. Fondazione Museo Nazionale dell’Ebraismo Italiano e della Shoah and Miriam Davide and Pietro Ioly Zorattini, (Florence: Giuntina, 2016), 237-253.

²⁸ Giorgio Fabre, *Il contratto. Mussolini editore di Hitler*, (Bari: Dedalo 2004), 97.

²⁹ ASTS, *Prefettura Gabinetto*, folder 363, List and Anonymous file note, June 1937; see also: Ellen Ginzburg Migliorino, “Il censimento degli ebrei a Trieste nel 1938,” *Storia e problemi contemporanei* 10 (1992): 33-35; Silva Bon, *Gli ebrei a Trieste 1930-1945. Identità, persecuzione, risposte*, (Gorizia/Trieste: LEG. Istituto Regionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione nel Friuli Venezia Giulia, 2000), 40.

In December 1937, half a year after the appearance of this anti-Semitic list, the UCII Vice-President Aldo Ascoli set up a note addressed to the Jewish Community in Trieste, to which he asked to respond at the latest in July 1938. Ascoli prompted the President of the Jewish Community in Trieste to complete an attached scheme which “for statistic reasons” should document the characteristics of the local Jewish population, their total number, birth- and mortality-rates etc.³⁰ This request could be read as a direct reaction towards the Triestine list from June 1937, assuming of course that leading UCII members knew about its existence.

At the beginning of August 1938, Mussolini’s undersecretary to the Ministry Interior, Guido Buffarini Guidi, ordered a census of all Italian Jews.³¹ The “Jewish Census” was an anti-Semitic act. Reverting back to the example of Trieste, the Prefecture did not act professionally in defining the number of Jewish citizens of Trieste, lacking in method and terminological definitions.³² However, at the end of 1938, the official number of Triestine Jews enumerated with the racist population census was 6.215.³³

The last point to mention in this overview of local anti-Semitism in Trieste concerns Mussolini. He himself publicly mentioned the “Jewish Question” just once, namely in nationwide radio-broadcasted speech held in Trieste in September 1938. It was no coincidence that Mussolini chose the capital of Venice-Giulia as the place for this announcement, because the upcoming launch of official state anti-Semitism was strongly connected to measures taken in Trieste beforehand. Once more Trieste was repositioned, this time not geographically but ideologically, turning from a Fascist playbook to the seat of Jewish/Antifascist conspiracy.

³⁰ ACET, *Stato Civile Anagrafe* 1938, Aldo R. Ascoli, July 12, 1938.

³¹ Michele Sarfatti, *Mussolini contro gli ebrei. Cronaca dell’elaborazione delle leggi del 1938*, (Turin: S. Zamorani Editore, 1994): 131; Francesca Cavarocchi, “Il censimento degli ebrei dell’agosto 1938,” *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 2/78 (2007): 119-130.

³² With Italy’s population census in 1931, in which religion had been an obligatory field to fill in, 4.680 Triestines indicated to practice the Jewish religion: *Istituto Centrale di Statistica del Regno d’Italia*; VII *Censimento generale della Popolazione*, 21 April 1931, Vol. III, Fascicolo 33, *Provincia di Trieste*, Rome 1933, 5/18. Instead in 1938, the *Pubblica Sicurezza* noted for Trieste 5.452 Jewish Community members, ACS, *Ministero dell’Interno*, PS, Div. AA. GG. RR. 1912-1945, folder 201 Gr. Also in 1938, the Prefect of Trieste transferred to the authorities in Rome a total number of 6.030 Jewish Triestines, ASTS, *Prefettura Gabinetto*, folder 368, Eolo Rebuta to Ministry of the Interior, September 25, 1938.

³³ Michele Sarfatti, *Die Juden im faschistischen Italien. Geschichte, Identität, Verfolgung*, (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), 347.

Diverging Biographies of Fascist Jews (1919-1938)

Long before the already racist regime turned specifically Anti-Semitic, Jews were commonly found among the participants of the Fascist movement as well as of the PNF. In August 1938, the local PNF in Trieste registered 498 Jewish members, determined even before the regime had given a definition of Jew.³⁴ Twelve of these were enlisted as Fascists *ante marcia* [before the march on Rome], nine were members and three were former members of the local Jewish Community.³⁵

In the following pages I will illustrate examples of Jews from Trieste who were closely related with Fascism: Pietro Jacchia founded the Fascist movement (1919), Enrico Paolo Salem was Podestà of the city from 1933 to 1938, Achille Levi-Bianchini (1937-1938) and Marco De Parente (1938-1939) were presidents of the Jewish Community, Italo Zolli led as its Chief Rabbi (1919-1940). The selection of these personalities is related to their positions as well as to the chronology of the evolution of Fascist policy and of Italian Jewish life.

Pietro Jacchia: the beginning of local Fascism

Vita Ezechiele Jacchia and Clementina Fano were members of the Jewish Community of Trieste. They married on the 15th of August 1880 and had three children, Paolo (17 February 1883), Giusto Pietro (8 April 1884) and Irene (24 May 1889), all born in Trieste.³⁶

All three children went to university, Paolo to study medicine, Pietro and Irene to read humanities. From their adolescence, both Paolo and the younger Pietro participated in the local irredentist movement. Due to being under observation from the Austrian police, Pietro left for some years to live in Bologna, where he worked as journalist for the newspaper *Il Giornale del Mattino*. During World War I both brothers fought for Italy. Paolo served the Navy while younger Pietro joined the Army, ranking as Lieutenant of the *Bersaglieri* [Marksmen], a high

³⁴ Considering the census from August 1938, the value of these 498 Fascist Jews is relatively because it included for example persons who were baptized and born into religiously mixed families. Never the less, Fascist authorities considered them Jewish, what was a failure even in terms of the following “racial” laws, as had demonstrated for instance Enrico Paolo Salem.

³⁵ For overall numbers: ASTS, *Prefettura Gabinetto*, folder 367, Emilio Grazioli to Prefect Eolo Rehua, 22 September 1938. For *ante marcia*, ACET, 1938 *Amministrazione* (1), *Iscritti al PNF prima della marcia su Roma*.

³⁶ ACET, Community Members Register, Vita Ezechiele Jacchia.

mobility infantry unit, where he was decorated with the *Croce al merito di Guerra* [War Merit Cross] in late 1918.³⁷

In those very same days, at the end of the war, “Dr. Paolo Jacchia participated in the expedition to Venice, implemented clandestinely with the steamship ‘Istria’ in November 1918, with the goal to convince the High Italian Military Command to rapidly occupy Trieste.”³⁸ Then, on the 3rd of November, he returned with Italian military troops from Venice to Trieste on board of the cruiser “Audace.” A report from Federico Robba, the captain on duty at the time, and responsible for Trieste’s harbor-traffic, supported the information on the Italian occupation of Trieste, describing Paolo Jacchia as local hero and decisive figure for Trieste’s subsequent affiliation with Italy.³⁹

In Milano on the 23rd of March 1919, Mussolini proclaimed the *fasci italiani di combattimento*, a movement of fighting squads, which mainly consisted of staff from the radical leftwing group of interventionists, *fasci d’azione rivoluzionaria*, founded in 1914. Of about 100 followers, 54 signed up for the program Mussolini’s program.⁴⁰ This was the beginning of Fascism, which from then onwards developed in three forms, as a movement, as a system of government and as an ideology. Among the founders of Italian Fascism in Milano in 1919, up to five were Italian Jews, among them Pietro Jacchia, the younger of the two aforementioned brothers from Trieste.⁴¹

Just ten days later, on the 3rd of April 1919, the newspaper *La Nazione* reported in a brief note that the war veteran lieutenant Pietro Jacchia declared the foundation of a local Fascist unit in Trieste.⁴² In his proclamation Jacchia, who was a free mason as well, stressed the fight “against Bolshevism and governmental institutions,” which he described as “tousled, anti-democratic, inefficient and full

³⁷ ACET, 1938 *Amministrazione* (1), *Volontari Triestini Ebrei*; see also, Briganti, *Il contributo*, 76.

³⁸ ASTS, *Prefettura Gabinetto*, folder 405, Paolo Jacchia. Prefect of Trieste to the Ministry of the Interior, 31 August 1940.

³⁹ Robba approved Jacchia’s request for boat transport to the Military Command in Venice, providing him with the “Istria” under the command of captain Frausin: National Archive Rijeka, 1918/19, folder I-27, Attilio Prodam.

⁴⁰ Herbert Wallace Schneider, *Making the Fascist state*, (New York: Fertig 1928), 56; Zeev Sternhell and Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology. From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), 214.

⁴¹ Giorgio Fabre, *Mussolini razzista. Dal socialismo al Fascismo: la formazione di un antisemita*, (Milano: Garzanti, 2005), 426; other potential participants could have been Cesare Goldmann, Riccardo Luzzatti, Eucardio Momigliano, Enrico Rocca.

⁴² See the article, http://www.atrieste.eu/Wiki/doku.php?id=storia_ts:cronologia:1918_1943 [last access, 14 March 2017]; see also, Mattiussi, *Il Partito nazionale fascista a Trieste*, 6; Tiberio, “Il Fascismo a Trieste negli anni 1919-1923. Documenti e reminiscenze,” in *Partito Comunista di Trieste in occasione del 35° anniversario della fondazione del PCI*, (Udine: Del Bianco, 1956): 14.

of obvious injustice.”⁴³ The contents of his proclamation were largely borrowed from Mussolini’s, even though Jacchia appeared to demand more rather than less democracy. The Fascist fighting unit, *fascio di combattimento Triestino*, attracted a variety of Triestine nationalists as well as a high number of demobilized but still armed and uniformed soldiers, who in thousands remained in the region and its capital after the official end of the war.

The nationalist tension in Trieste directly after the war, as well as the new borders around the city, created preoccupations among civilians, who feared another war. Radical anti-Slavism and the claim of securing law and order lead Fascists to fill a perceived gap of security and identity. The vague and ideology of Fascism was yet to be filled with contents, varying from region to region. Jacchia initiated the launch of Fascism in Trieste, whose Fascist cell counted 14.756 members in July 1920, just after one year of existence, temporarily constituting the biggest *fascio* in Italy.⁴⁴

The reasons for the success-story of Triestine Fascism are threefold. First, the city’s specific geographical and political environment. Trieste was the main center of the newest of Italy’s provinces. It was somewhat isolated, because it lacked a railway connection to the “heartland,” but had to function as an Italian stronghold against the now adjacent Yugoslavia and Austria from one day to the next. Second, the symbiosis of Fascists and politically related nationalists was particularly strong in Trieste due to historical developments. While the former increasingly gained street credibility through on-the-ground work, relying on masses of uniformed troops, the latter added long-standing political experience to the equation and established contacts to the local Italian elite. Third, the quickly consolidated finances of the local movement helped its progress, often – as will be shown – with support coming from Triestine Jewish businessmen.

With his background and role as the founder of Trieste’s local Fascist cell, Jacchia seemed to be the right person to mediate with the higher economic circles, who after the Italian annexation of Trieste in many cases feared repression as (ex-) Austrians citizens who had made a career through their business with Vienna. To continue business and to achieve conciliation with xenophobic Fascists, investments towards the movement seemed to be an adequate method, which at the same time would secure extended political influence, too.

The first and also subsequent meetings of local Fascists took place in the *Café degli Specchi* and the *Sala Dante*, both located within a building right on the

⁴³ Nicola Revelant, “‘Sono Jacchia e voglio andare a Madrid.’ La vita di Pietro Giusto Jacchia (1884-1937),” *Qualestoria* 1/39 (2011): 11-27, 15.

⁴⁴ Mattiussi, *Il Partito nazionale fascista a Trieste*, 20.

market square in the city-center and owned by the *Assicurazioni Generali*, directed by the Jewish manager Edgardo Morpurgo. The stamp tax of the *Il Popolo di Trieste*, the second Fascist paper published in Italy (publication began on December 1920), as well as the rent for its publishing house, the loans and other expenses for its staff, were all financed by the entrepreneur Guido Cosulich, who instead was not of Jewish origin.⁴⁵

Summed up, some of the important financial support for Fascism in Trieste came from influential multinational companies, which rose under the Austrian dominion and which actually had opposed Trieste's annexation by Italy. After the end of the World War I, they adjusted to the new state of affairs. Jacchia's assumable mediating role at this initial stage of the movement's development deserves to be considered. In various occasions he underlined his competence as a far-sighted organizer. For instance, in April 1919, he successfully negotiated an alliance with a nationalist fighting squad under the lead of Fulvio Suvich, that formed the basis for the political coalition between the local nationalist party and the quickly growing Fascist movement. Suvich was another key protagonist of the local irredentist movement. As fraction-leader of Italy's nationalist party - *Associazione Nazionalista Italiana* (ANI) – he would later merge it with Mussolini's PNF in 1923.⁴⁶ The highest Italian military authority in Trieste, General Petitti di Roreto, who governed the city from November 1918 to July 1919, supported the alliance between Jacchia and Suvich, which was named *Comitato antibolscevico d'azione*, the anti-Bolshevist action committee.⁴⁷

In summary, Jacchia established a regional Fascist movement, which quickly developed with solid financial and political grounds to gather momentum. It is no coincidence that the decisive steps for Triestine Fascism's manifestation happened during his time and because of his commitment, his organization skills as well as the crucial and trend-setting coalition with local nationalists. It was exactly this official coalescence that preserved the old liberal-national wing as a sort of a bubble within Fascism, while simultaneously strengthening contacts with the local economic elite, which resisted any state takeover-attempts for the

⁴⁵ Interview with Cosulich's Secretary Carmelich, Livio Sergi: *Io pagavo le squadre e lo stesso Giunta nella sede dell'Associazione industriali*, in *Il Lavoratore*, 21 June 1949. Cosulich was on the board of directors of the family firm *Cosulich Società Triestina di Navigazione* and also high representative of *Österreichischer Lloyd*, cofounded by Jewish Joseph Lazarus Morpurgo, who in 1831 also cofounded *Generali*.

⁴⁶ Anna Millo, "Fra Trieste, Roma e Washington. Note su Fulvio Suvich e la politica estera Italiana durante il Fascismo," *Italogramma* 4 (2012): 405-415.

⁴⁷ ASTS, *Regio Governatorato della Venezia Giulia* (RGVG), folder 51, file 24, *Associazione reduci di guerra delle terre adriatiche*.

entire Fascist period. Pietro Jacchia is to be considered the initiator and most important protagonist of Triestine Fascism from April 1919 to May 1920. Then Francesco Giunta arrived from Florence to take over as charismatic military commander and rhetorically skilled leader. Giunta's anti-Slav, radical and dominant style, which was personally appreciated by Mussolini as he nominated him Italy's PNF-General Secretary (1923-1924), clashed with the interests and the search for autonomy of the old political and economic elites in Trieste as well with Jacchia's Jewish ancestry and political views.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, Pietro Jacchia played his cards well until May 1920 in the leadership of local Fascism. Even if it is not attested, his involvement in Gabriele D'Annunzio's "March to Fiume" on the 12th of September 1919 can be assumed and is strongly suggested by the participation of circa 500 Triestine Fascists. Another hint is the active involvement of his brother Paolo as "Legionnaire of Fiume."⁴⁹ Even if the biographies of the Jacchia brothers would interconnect once more at this stage, the elder Paolo never made a fascist career. It should be taken into account that the retreat from military enterprises since the 1920s might have been the outcome of his private life as a married family man. It was then that he settled and made a name for himself as a pediatrician, while at the same time lecturing at the University of Padua and founding a medical care center for orphans and for the maimed in Trieste.⁵⁰

Pietro, on the other hand, continued a life in uniform. In October 1922 he participated in the "March to Rome," probably expecting a people's revolution. Disillusioned by its absence, the murder of the parliamentary opposition leader Giacomo Matteotti, Mussolini's ban on freemasonry and the authoritarian development of the regime since 1924, Jacchia started to distance himself from the regime.⁵¹ The implementation of an open dictatorship triggered his official resignation from the PNF in 1925. In 1931, he then first emigrated to Holland and in 1936 to the United Kingdom, where he participated in the resistance circle of emigrated Italians. In the very same year, and as a member of a militant Antifascist circle, he transferred to Spain, where he fought on side of the

⁴⁸ Vinci, *Sentinelle della Patria*, III.

⁴⁹ ASTS, *Prefettura Gabinetto*, folder 405, Paolo Jacchia. Prefect of Trieste to the Ministry of the Interior, 31st of August 1940; see also: Michele Risolo, *Il Fascismo nella Venezia Giulia. Dalle origini alla marcia su Roma*, (Trieste: CELVI, 1932), 175.

⁵⁰ Paolo Jacchia had five children from two marriages: ACET, Community Members Register, Paolo Jacchia.

⁵¹ Revelant, "*Sono Jacchia e voglio andare a Madrid*," 18.

Republicans against Franco and Fascist troops from Italy and Germany. Pietro Jacchia died in combat on the 14th of January 1937 in Majadahonda, Spain.⁵² His elder brother Paolo and his family remained in Trieste during all stages of Italian Fascism. The local questor described them as people of “good moral and regular political reputation,” even though Paolo entered PNF only late, on the 31st of July 1933.⁵³ With the promotion of the anti-Semitic laws he tried to plead for special merits, stressing his participation in the D’Annunzio’s occupation of Fiume as well as his social engagement for orphans and handicapped, but encountered the opposition of the local PNF-Secretary, Giovanni Spangaro, who described him as “politically unsupportable and without any outstanding merits for the benefit of the regime.”⁵⁴ Paolo Jacchia, for the sake of his brother, may have suffered under the Fascists and hence may have passively supported the conversion of his brother to Antifascism. The contrary may have been the case, too. As it were, Paolo survived the war and died in Trieste on January 9 1950.⁵⁵ The Italian Resistance honored his brother Pietro, naming the 66th brigade firstly “Pietro Jacchia” and then “Pietro Jacchia Garibaldi.”⁵⁶ The city of Trieste, however, in the postwar did not commemorate either of the ever so influential Jacchia brothers.

Paolo Salem: Podestà of Trieste, supposed Jew and earliest victim of the racial laws

Enrico Paolo Salem was born in Trieste on October 10 1884.⁵⁷ While his father was an Italian Jew from Trieste, his mother was a Catholic born in Vienna who perhaps had Italian citizenship because she descended from an Italian family. While Enrico was baptized and raised as a Catholic, his family had Jewish-Spanish origins. The Salem’s, one of the wealthiest families in Trieste, lived there since 1780. Enrico’s grandfather was the co-founder of the *RAS*-Assurance which is why, traditionally, one of the male family members was on its board of directors. Enrico entered *RAS*-management in 1918 and remained there for 35

⁵² ACET, 1938 *Amministrazione* (1), Community Members Register, Pietro Jacchia.

⁵³ ASTS, *Prefettura Gabinetto*, folder 405, Paolo Jacchia. Questor to Prefect, March 9, 1939.

⁵⁴ ASTS, *Prefettura Gabinetto*, folder 405, Paolo Jacchia, PNF-Secretary to Prefect, February 11, 1943.

⁵⁵ ACET, 1938 *Amministrazione* (1), Community Members Register, Pietro Jacchia.

⁵⁶ Revelant, “*Sono Jacchia e voglio andare a Madrid*,” 27.

⁵⁷ Biographical details about Enrico Paolo Salem, Silva Bon, *Un fascista imperfetto. Enrico Paolo Salem Podestà ebreo di Trieste*, (Gorizia: Centro isontino di ricerca e documentazione storica e sociale Leopoldo Gasparini, 2009); see also, Fabre: *Il contratto*, 97.

years.⁵⁸ At the same time, following his father's political footsteps, he played an active role in the local irredentist movement. Entering the Italian Army long before Trieste's annexation, he underwent military training in nearby Udine, which already belonged to Italy and would have been the Army's headquarter during World War I. In 1912, the Italian Army promoted Enrico to the officers ranks before he participated in the war between 1915 and 1918 and left the military a decorated veteran.⁵⁹

Shortly after the end of war, and similarly to some of his aforementioned contemporaries, the irredentist Salem also participated in the local Fascist movement. In parallel he established a career in the financial sector. The first time he became publicly known was when he saved the savings of hundreds of Triestine's by preventing the bankruptcy of the *Banca Popolare di Credito di Trieste*, one of the city's biggest cooperative banks. In 1933, Prefect Carlo Tiengo proposed Salem, Fascist *ante marcia* and since 1921 registered party-member, as *Podestà* of Trieste. The Ministry of the Interior in Rome agreed with his nomination, after conferring with the Triestine prefect as well as with the PNF-Secretary, who just weeks before received a donation of 200.000 Lire from Salem; a fact which might have influenced his positive vote of confidence.⁶⁰

Nominated in 1933 and confirmed in 1937, Enrico Paolo Salem was the first *Podestà* of Trieste with Jewish roots, one of only two in the whole of Italy.⁶¹

Considering Salem's double role as high ranking politician and part of the *RAS*-management, one could assume that as a Triestine international player he might have undercut the Fascist movement in town. However, he was considered to be an exemplary Fascist and *Podestà*, who modernized the city through his good contacts both with the political and the financial sectors. Salem's economic and financial plan as *Podestà* of Trieste, with a volume of 75 Million Lire, expressed his high political ambitions. Within the first six weeks in office, he visited Italy's well known finance minister Guido Jung in Rome at least three times, to conduct negotiations about a governmental credit, which would allow for the

⁵⁸ Death notice in *Il Giornale di Trieste*, 9 July 1948; see also, Bon, *Un fascista imperfetto*, 127; about *RAS*, Millo, *Trieste, le assicurazioni, l'Europa*.

⁵⁹ Bon, *Un fascista imperfetto*, 49; see also, Millo, *L'élite del potere a Trieste*, 224.

⁶⁰ Salem officially addressed his donation to the party's children section, the *Colonie feriali del PNF*, ACS Rome, SPD, CO, folder 394, files 144-914, *Salem Enrico Paolo*; see, Fabre, *Il contratto*, 98; Bon, *Gli ebrei a Trieste*, 39.

⁶¹ Renzo Ravenna governed Ferrara as *Podestà* from 1926-1938, before escaping to Switzerland in 1943; Ilaria Pavan, *Il podestà ebreo. La storia di Renzo Ravenna tra Fascismo e leggi razziali*, (Rome-Bari: Laterza editore, 2006).

realization of an enormous construction plan in Trieste.⁶² Against public critics who challenged the Podestà's plan, he assured the personal approval of Mussolini for his ambitious project right from the beginning. On the December 22 1933 Trieste's most significant local newspaper, *Il Piccolo*, wrote: "The Duce authorized the master plan for constructions to commence in Trieste and ordered its implementation. [...] The chief of government welcomed Trieste's Prefect, Party-Secretary and Podestà [...] whose working-plan was approved."⁶³ After just two months in office, huge construction-works began, which turned Trieste into a markedly Fascist city from an architectural perspective. More than 180 buildings, and great parts of the old city, were destroyed and substituted by modern buildings designed in neoclassicist style: "cubical, imperial and functional. Salem initiated and spearheaded Trieste's transition into a modern central European metropolis, with new traffic infrastructures, administrative-buildings, a canalization system, a university etc. In the course of the excavations for the new buildings, a Roman amphitheater was found and fully laid bare."⁶⁴ Mussolini highly appreciated this proof of Trieste's ancient Roman roots. Beside this, the interest in the general construction progress seemed to be reason enough for Mussolini to fix a date for an official visit in the city.

As Fascist Podestà, Salem took responsibility for and prepared the whole city for Mussolini's visit in September 1938, pushing forward for the construction to be finished in time, while mobilizing all administrative sectors as well as all citizens and visitors from outside the city. Salem meticulously planned the Duce's three-day stay, which in the end would cost 3.2 Million Lire.⁶⁵ The extensive logistic preparation included a trip in an open limousine useful for the presentation of Trieste's new face to Mussolini. For the visit, Trieste hosted thousands of external visitors, for instance more than 14.000 members of Fascist organizations alone, as well as high ranking politician's (Ciano, Starace, Alfieri etc.), national and international press etc.⁶⁶ On the 18th of September, Mussolini arrived in a destroyer, stepping on land at the Audace-Pier, named after the ship in which Paolo Jacchia had returned from Venice twenty years earlier. More than 150.000

⁶² Salem's travel expense reports documented for the time between January and December 1934 three first class train-trips Trieste-Rom for reasons of "consultation finance minister;" *Archivio Generale del Comune di Trieste* (AGCTS), *Segreteria Generale*, folder 44/1933, *Nomina del Podestà Enrico Paolo Salem*; see also: AGCTS, *Gabinetto*, folder 950/1934, file 715, *Nomina del Podestà a commendatore*.

⁶³ *Il Piccolo*, December 22, 1933, 1; see also, Bon, *Un fascista imperfetto*, 67.

⁶⁴ AGCTS, *Segreteria Generale*, folder I/II, file 36/21-38.

⁶⁵ AGCTS, *Segreteria Generale*, *Uff. X* n 400/1938, n. 666.

⁶⁶ AGCTS, *Segreteria Generale*, folder 36/1938, *Visita del Duce a Trieste*.

spectators awaited Mussolini at the market square, where he began his visit with a speech transmitted nationwide and followed internationally. The few anti-Semitic phrases Mussolini used in the speech would shortly afterward transform the whole country and cause concern to all Italian Jews: “World-Judaism has remained for sixteen years, and despite our politics, a hidden enemy of Fascism. In Italy, our policy has caused among Semitic elements what today one could call a real and direct attempted takeover.”⁶⁷

Going back to Podestà Salem, who had unsurprisingly left office in August 1938, one could interpret Mussolini’s words as a direct strike against him and local Judaism, which leading Fascist’s and anti-Semites had suspected of controlling the city for a long time. Once again, it was no coincidence that Mussolini had chosen Trieste as the place where he publicly introduced the “Jewish-question” to the Nation. It was certainly no coincidence that Salem had to quit just weeks before Mussolini’s arrival. Somewhat ironically, the suspected Jewish Podestà, who was among the first personalities to be removed from the public scene with Fascist anti-Semitism, turned out to be “Arian.” On December 6 1938, Enrico Paolo Salem sent a six-page letter with an attachment of 13 crucial certificates directly to the Minister of the Interior in Rome, successfully defending himself according to the paragraphs provided by the Italian racial laws of November 17 1938:

I was born in Trieste and baptized in accordance with the Catholic ritual [...] on the 2nd of July 1890 (doc. no. 1). My father Vittorio Salem was a Jew from a family which has lived in Trieste for more than two centuries. My mother was Arian catholic (doc. no. 2) and born under Italian nationality in Vienna. My father received the Italian citizenship officially on the 18th of August 1881 (doc. no. 3) [...]. I therefore think to be able to consider myself affiliated to the Arian race and of Italian origin (...). I am asking for the recognition of my Arian and Italian race [...].⁶⁸

The Ministry of Interior confirmed Salem’s request to be recognized as a “Non-Jew” with the Triestine Prefecture on the 9th of March 1939, that recognition would be extended to his whole family shortly afterward. In summer 1939 Salem moved from Trieste to Florence and later on to Rome. Even though German SS-

⁶⁷ Mussolini’s speech, *Foglio d’Ordini, Partita Nazionale Fascista*, in ASTS, *Prefettura Gabinetto*, folder 355, *Visita del Duce 18-19-20 Settembre A. XVI Trieste*; see also Michele Sarfatti, “Il discorso razzista e antisemita di Mussolini a Trieste il 18 settembre 1938,” *Qualestoria* 1/41 (2013): 103-111.

⁶⁸ ASTS, *Prefettura Gabinetto*, folder 409, Enrico Paolo Salem.

troops confiscated properties left behind in Trieste and sought to find Salem in person, he survived the war undetected on Italian soil.

The Jewish Community of Trieste, its Chief Rabbi and its Presidents

Chief Rabbi Israel Anton Zoller, otherwise known as Italo Zolli or Eugenio Pio Zolli

In the late 18th century, “the Jewish community of Trieste became part of the history of Haskalah in central Europe, but by cultural inheritance and its own diverse composition, it belonged as well to the Mediterranean Sephardic rationalist legacies.”⁶⁹ Since 1890 Habsburg law obliged the community to have Rabbis with the Austrian citizenship, so that until the end of World War II key positions were occupied by of Ashkenazi Rabbis.⁷⁰

Israel Anton Zoller, born in 1881 in Brody, Galicia (modern Ukraine), as the youngest of five sons in a Jewish family with Polish origins, held the office of the Chief Rabbi in Trieste from 1920 to 1940.⁷¹ As early as 1918, when Zwi Peretz Chaijes left the position of Trieste’s Chief Rabbi to take over the same office in Vienna, the new Italian governor, who entered the city shortly afterward, nominated Zoller as his designated successor. This decision was influenced by Zoller’s reputation as an Italian nationalist and natural supporter of Trieste’s local irredentism. A broad documentation of the case by Italian High Commissioner reported that Zoller, since he had moved from Florence to become Vice-Rabbi in Trieste in 1911, had been promoting irredentism, especially by protecting and saving Italians from Austrian arrest towards the end of the

⁶⁹ Lois C. Dubin, *The Port Jews of Habsburg Trieste. Absolutist Politics and Enlightenment Culture*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 215; about the Jewish Community of Trieste in specific see Catalan, *La comunità ebraica di Trieste 1781-1914*.

⁷⁰ Triestine Rabbis: Abram Vita Cologna (1826-1833), Marco Tedeschi (1858-1869), Sabato Raffaele Melli (1870-1907), Zvi Perez Chajes (1913-1918), Israel Zoller (1918-1939).

⁷¹ In 1904 Zoller started studying in Vienna and then in Florence, where he took his degree in religious studies and humanities (Greek literature, philosophy and psychoanalysis) in 1911. His first wife died in 1917. Zoller married again in 1920 and became father of a second daughter: Gabriele Rigano, *Il caso Zolli. L’itinerario di un intellettuale in bilico tra fedi, culture e nazioni*, (Milan: Guerini e associati, 2006).

war.⁷² Zoller officially became Chief Rabbi of Trieste throughout the nomination by the Community's assembly on the 20th of February 1920. A contract regulated Zoller's competence as a religious leader (on marriages, teaching, the participation at council meetings etc.) and clarified in detail his salary, which would be renegotiated two times.⁷³ However, and from a religious point of view, Zoller's most active period started right in that moment. The highly respected Rabbi not only fulfilled his religious duties, but also lectured as Professor of Philosophy, Hebrew and Semitic languages at Padua University and at the same time published different books and articles in Italian as well as in German.⁷⁴

As has been shown, Zoller supported irredentism as an Italian nationalist. Many Jewish irredentists in Trieste were almost natural precursors of Fascism, which does not mean that this development is due to Zoller's influence of course. Since April 1927, Fascist law forced all Italian citizens with non-Italian-names to Italianize their surnames.⁷⁵ Israel Anton Zoller chooses to become Italo Zolli (henceforth named thus in this article). At the same time, this clearly political statement was a conscious sign from the religious leader to his Community. Zolli never condemned Fascism, on the contrary he expressed loyalty toward Italy and the Fascist regime. Despite the anti-Semitic laws from 1938, he proclaimed even in late 1945 in the book *Antisemitismo* that "Italy virtually always remained immune of the plague of anti-Semitism."⁷⁶ Yet Zolli himself witnessed

⁷² Zoller was supposed to have: 1. saved Jewish Triestine's, hold by Austrian military in Pola; 2. protected from Austrian arrest a Triestine irredentist as well as Jewish soldier's from Galizia; 3. hidden Italian Triestine students in one of the city's Jewish temple's: ACST, *Commissariato Generale e Civile per la Venezia-Giulia. Atti Generali*, folder 106; see also, PCM, *Ufficio Centrale per le nuove Province al Commissariato Generale e Civile per la Venezia Giulia, oggetto: rabbino Zoller di Trieste, Roma, 31 ottobre 1919*; see also: Rigano, *Il caso Zolli*, 57.

⁷³ Details about Zoller's loan claimed the contracts biggest space. The Community assured him an annual salary of 34.887 Lire, a life-insurance of 50.000 Lire, bound to a yearly sum of 3.000 Lire for his wife. In November 1938 he received an extra payment of 1500 Lire, which he had asked for (ACET, *Carte del Col. A. Levi Bianchini 1937, Rapporti fra la Comunità Israelitica e il Rabb. Prof. Zoller*).

⁷⁴ Eugenio Zolli, *Due privilegi concessi ad Ebrei triestini nel sec. XVII*; Id., *Le origini dei primi due oratori pubblici a Trieste*; Id., *Israele. Studi storici-religiosi*, Udine 1935; Id., *Il Nazareno. Studi di esegesi neotestamentaria alla luce dell'aramaico e del pensiero rabbinico*, (Udine, 1938); Id., *Antisemitismo*, (Roma, 1945).

⁷⁵ Maura Hametz, "Naming Italians in the Borderland 1926-1943," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 15/3 (2010): 410-430.

⁷⁶ Here, Zoller composed a history of Anti-Semitism from ancient Egypt to modern Europe in 1945, also discussing racial theories of the 19th century in several chapters, not mentioning Fascism

Mussolini's speech in September 1938 in Trieste, which was crucial for the following national anti-Semitic campaign and which he personally commented just seven days later:

I would like to end [...] with an appeal to Mussolini's heart. [...] If unfortunately it is true, that groups of Jews have shown and still show that they do not understand the high values of Fascism [...] it is not less true, that within the Duce's discourse in Trieste, one could hear vibrate a deep sense of humanity. I hope that the magnificent Duce will receive our declaration. [...] Our Judaism conserves in his history and in his memory the names of his irredentists, of his volunteers, fallen and injured, of his Fascists, of his legionaries in Spain. Like the Judaism of all of Italy, the Triestine one also has always loved and still desperately loves [...] the nation. The Italian Jews, as before, remain honestly devoted to the Fascist Regime. [...] We have faith in the love of God and in the goodness of the Duce's soul. And it is in the name of this double belief, that we announce in this celebrative moment the inauguration of the new religious year, with God's blessing to Italy, his King Emperor, his Duce.⁷⁷

The attitude presented in this official speech might serve as one of the reasons why Zolli was surprisingly nominated Chief Rabbi of Rome in 1940, in a time when Italy entered the war and the persecution of Jews reached another climax.⁷⁸ This unexpected decision from the Roman Community, to whose members Zolli was virtually unknown, might have been planned well in advance and therefore influenced by the former President of the *Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane*, Federico Jarach. Both Jarach and his Vice-President Aldo Ascoli were powerful personalities and Fascists of the first hour, who collaborated with Mussolini's government.⁷⁹ Both maintained for their whole mandate a close relationship with the Presidency of Trieste's Jewish Community.⁸⁰ Marco De Parente, President of Trieste's Jewish Community and relative of one of the five members of the UCII' board, was in the position to

once, Eugenio Zolli, *Anti-Semitismo*, ed. Alberto Latorre, (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 2005), 201.

⁷⁷ ACET, 1938 *Amministrazione* (1), Italo Zolli, File Notes, September 25, 1938.

⁷⁸ Rigano, *Il caso Zolli*, 151.

⁷⁹ Pavan, *Il comandante. La vita di Federico Jarach e la memoria di un'epoca 1874-1951*, (Milan: Proedi, 2001).

⁸⁰ ACET, 1938. *Pratiche. Rapporti con la Comune e l'Unione*. UCII report no. 8/1938.

exert an influence in Zolli's transition to Rome, a passage which comported prestige as well as influence. In the following pages I will illustrate, primarily, the exchange between the UCII and the Jewish Community in Trieste for the decisive years 1937 and 1938.

The Community's Presidents (1922-1938)

Little is known about the Presidents of the Jewish Community in Trieste during the Fascist era. Despite the lack of organigrams or biographies, various finance and administration folders in the Community's Archive provide information about its Presidents in this crucial phase. They were Giacomo Seppilli (1922-1937), Achille Levi-Bianchini (1937/1938) and Marco de Parente (1938/1939). Considering the lack of studies over larger portions of the archive's files for the period, the following contents provide some limited insights.

In an official report from December 1930, President Seppilli summarized a positive overall situation for the Community, from a financial point of view as well as considering the number of Torah-students and contributing members.⁸¹ Yet in 1936, exactly six years later, the Community was in a deep crisis, ideologically as well as financially. The increase in anti-Semitic acts in Trieste, the regime's growing anti-Semitism and the Italian alliance with Germany lead an increasing number of Community members to opt out, to convert or even to emigrate. Due to the critical financial situation, President Seppilli acted modestly but still with self-confidence when addressing a letter to the local Party Secretary. Representing the Jewish Community, as legal proprietor of the printing house and of the aforementioned Fascist newspaper *Il Popolo di Trieste*, Seppilli asked for outstanding rent payments of 40.000 Lire (29 monthly rates).⁸² This situation reflected the disequilibrium between PNF and the Jewish Community very well. In this context, the "Fascist greetings" located at the end of Seppilli's letter, which appeared in almost every official letter of the time, need not to be

⁸¹ In 1930, the Community had 5.000 paying members, 165 Triestine and 60 external Talmud-Students, 60 children in the asylum. In this healthy year, the Community donated 365.000 Lire for the Jewish caritas in the city and acquiesced real estate like a school, as well as a 3000qm² Park for a children holiday camp: ACET, *Carte del Col. A. Levi Bianchini* 1937, Giacomo Seppilli, *Discorso*, December 18, 1930.

⁸² Since the renewal of the contract between Jewish Community and PNF-Journalist-Inspector in Rome in 1930/31 permanent payment retardations had occurred: ACET, *Carte del Col. A. Levi Bianchini* 1937, President Seppilli to Triestine Party Secretary, December 1, 1936.

interpreted as a sign of the President's ideology or belief. Furthermore, there were no signs of Seppilli having any particular sympathies for Fascism.

On the 13th of July 1937, circa 4.000 contributing members of the Community elected a new council of nine.⁸³ Advertisements accompanying the election promoted "Italian and Fascist candidates."⁸⁴ Unlike the Fascist salutation in official letters, this annunciation was at least a clear nationalist statement. In addition, the council's appointment of war-veteran and army-colonel Achille Levi-Bianchini as new President of the Jewish Community in Trieste was a sign towards the UCII, which expected nationalist commitments from its Communities.

In early 1938, UCII-President Jarach went one step further by officially supporting the *Comitato degli italiani di religione ebraica* (CIDRE- Committee of Italians of Jewish Religion), a national-Fascist association of Italian Jews created in 1937. Jarach sought Italian Jewish Communities to participate adhere to the CIDRE. He did not convince Levi-Bianchini. Instead, he did convince Mario Rava, Chief Rabbi in Gorizia, who then urged his colleague in Trieste to project "an Italian and Fascist rhythm to the Community."⁸⁵ Angelo Sullam, President of the Jewish Community in Venice (1919-1930) and major Zionist personality in Veneto, also repeatedly wrote letters to Levi-Bianchini, pushing in the same direction:

It would be useful to constitute also in Trieste, as has been done in Venice already, a little core of Jewish Fascists. [...] I visited Rome together with my brother in law Max Rava (*magna pars* of this movement) and we fully agreed with the representatives in Rome, Florence, Livorno, Ancona, Turin etc. One can state, that in this moment many Communities, which amount to more than 50% of Italian Jews, are joining the movement. Anyhow, the adhesion of Trieste is strongly desired, also because of the particular situation of your community. My brother in law Max Rava talked about this with Seppilli on the phone, but it seems, that he is not in favor (...). That is what I contact you for, because you, with your very brilliant past as perfect officer and absolute guarantor of fervid patriotism, may be able to

⁸³ In 1938, the decrease from 4.000 to 1.171 paying members lead as well to the council diminution from nine to seven members: ACET, 1938 *Amministrazione* (1), Italo Zolli, File Note, December 13, 1938.

⁸⁴ ACET, *Carte del Col. A. Levi Bianchini 1937, Agli Elettori della Comunità Israelitica*, June 1937.

⁸⁵ ACET, *Carte del Col. A. Levi Bianchini 1937*, Mario Rava to President Levi-Bianchini, September 20, 1937.

reunite also in Trieste some trusted friends with a doubtless Italian spirit.⁸⁶

Instead, Levi-Bianchini resisted by explaining, ultimately on 4th of January 1938, that the Community of Trieste “with its more than 4.000 members, with its council – aorta of one unique and totally Fascist list, which had the unanimity suffrage” refuses to “take an official position towards the invitation of the named committee, because it intends to avoid (...) disagreements.”⁸⁷ President Levi-Bianchini emphasized two points worth mentioning: first, the existence of an “entirely Fascist” council and second, the existence of local or internal disagreements, concerning an openly Fascist denomination of the Jewish Community. However, the President continued resisting external and internal pressures to participate in the Fascist Jewish association, even when he suffered from a serious illness. Less than three weeks later, on 23rd of January 1938, Rabbi Zolli informed the Community about Levi-Bianchini’s death, caused by *angina pectoris*.⁸⁸ Vice-President Marco de Parente stepped in as Interim-President before the Community’s Council officially elected him as President in February 1938.⁸⁹

De Parente, who stood as consultant on the UCII-board already since 1937 and who was and one of the ten UCII-Council members, was the first and maybe the only President of the Jewish Community of Trieste who was not only registered in the PNF but also a Fascist *ante marcia*.⁹⁰ His name appeared in a letter sent to the UCII which listed, among other categories, members of the Jewish

⁸⁶ ACET, *Carte del Col. A. Levi Bianchini 1937*. Angelo Sullam to President Levi-Bianchini, February 6, 1936.

⁸⁷ ACET, *Carte del Col. A. Levi Bianchini 1937*, Levi-Bianchini, Appeal to the Community, January 4, 1938.

⁸⁸ Levi-Bianchini died of *angina pectoris* at the age of 59 on January 23, 1938: ACET, *Carte del Col. A. Levi Bianchini 1937*, *Cedola di Constatazione di Morte*, Achille Levi-Bianchini.

⁸⁹ ACET, *Carte del Col. A. Levi Bianchini 1937*, Emilio Grazioli to Marco de Parente, July 18, 1938.

⁹⁰ President: Federico Jarach; Vice-President: Guido Zevi; Consultants: Riccardo Bachi, Enrico Bises, Marco de Parente, Bettino Errera, Mario Falco, Salvatore Foa, Sabatino Lopez, Alberto Musatti, Angiolo Orvieto, Carlo Alberto Viterbo; In March 1938, UCII-Council-members from Trieste were Riccardo Nagelschmidt, Arturo Coen and Giacomo Seppilli. After the UCII-voting for the five highest Rabbis in Italy, Israele Zolli covered together with three other Rabbis the sixth position (*Unione Comunità Israelitiche Italiane. Roma. Ordine del Giorno. Seduta del 10 Giugno 1937-XV*).

Community in Trieste who were registered in the PNF since before the March to Rome.⁹¹

Several letters with similar content underlined two things. First, De Parente personally stood in very close correspondence with UCII-President Jarach, who was a PNF member since 1926. Second, both Jarach and De Parente were aware, at least since August 1938, about the upcoming anti-Semitic legislation. On the 19th of September 1938, just one day after Mussolini's speech, and still during his visit to Trieste, the UCII sent for a second time a formal request to the Jewish Community in Trieste, which contained precise details and word-for-word quotes of paragraphs that became written anti-Semitic law just weeks later:

“In the first half of August, a friendly request was transferred to President De Parente and President Seppilli asking by when they wished to provide with particular precision the crucial data concerning the participation of Italian Israelites of this Community to the national cause. [...] First, participants in World War I – fallen in the field or in consequence of injuries – wounded – mutilated and invalids – decorated [...]. Second, PNF-members before the March to Rome (or wounded for Fascist cause) – *San Sepolcristi* – martyrs of the revolution. Third, merits in the following wars: Italian-Turkish, Libya, Italian Easter Africa and Spain. Fourth, other services rendered for the State or civil, artistic or scientific merits. [...] Vice-President Aldo R. Ascoli.”⁹²

This was a repetition of the request originally formulated in August by the UCII with a circular letter which had been sent to all Italian Jewish Communities. It obviously pointed out that Trieste had not reacted yet. Consistent with the previously mentioned politics of “avoiding disagreements,” the President and the Council of the Jewish Community in Trieste had blocked any transfer of information that the government might have used against them. However, the impact of Mussolini's anti-Semitic proclamation induced steps out of their comfort-zone. Even though fears and reservations towards the regime proved well-founded, the UCII- proclaimed loyalty from all Italian Jewish Communities towards the regime, despite its anti-Semitism. Jarach's attitude had effects on subordinated Presidents of the Italian regions, especially on the undecided ones. Several of his writings, directly addressed to Mussolini, were similar in content to the following quotation:

⁹¹ “PNF-Members before the March to Rome” and “Jews still registered in the Community”: Marcello Forti, Egone Mayer, Bruno Manli, Tullio Velicogna, Arturo Coen, Angelo Fano, Marco Mordo, Marco de Parente, Paolo Bellaudi. “Fascists *ante marcia*” and “Jews not any more registered in the Community”: Nino Battino, Leone Brunner and Lucian Gattegno: ACET, 1938 *Amministrazione* (1), *Iscritti al PNF prima della marcia su Roma*.

⁹² ACET, 1938 *Amministrazione* (1), Aldo R. Ascoli to Marco de Parente, September 19, 1938.

“Duce, with the speech at the Gran Council’s meeting, you will be pleased to hear the clear and unanimous reaffirmation taken by the Council of the Union of the Italian Jewish Community that Italian Jews do not have and never had anything in common with any Jewish or freemason or Bolshevik or anti-Italian or Antifascist international group. We have sworn fidelity and respectful devotion to the Sovereign of the House of Savoy, who has granted us liberty. We have sworn devoted obedience to you, the Duce of Fascism, because you have given us confidence towards the renovated greatness of our imperial nation. Testimonies for our fidelity are not missing. For Italy, for Fascism we ask to be able to work in dignity and peace and to die with honor in war still. [...] In the name of the Italian Jewish Community, President Federico Jarach.”⁹³

Conclusions

On the 20th of October 1938, the President of Trieste’s Jewish Community De Parente and its Chief Rabbi Zolli produced a letter addressed directly to Mussolini. It stressed their patriotism, “their firm love for the motherland and their unlimited devotion for the regime of the Duce, from whom they simply await comprehension and justice.”⁹⁴ Attached to this text was a list of Jewish Community members who supported their initiative. The first signatures among twenty were those of Paolo Jacchia, Giacomo Seppilli and Bruno Tedeschi.⁹⁵ Other appeals of the same kind followed within the following month.⁹⁶ However, none of them received any reply from Rome.

The impact of the Italian racial laws struck the Jewish Communities. Like Jarach, many Italian Jews with a professional responsibility remained in Italy. He resigned in 1939, as most probably did De Parente. Zolli, on the other hand, remained in office taking the role of Chief Rabbi of Rome. With the German occupation, all three successfully found shelter and survived the war. In February

⁹³ ACET, 1938 *Amministrazione* (1), Jarach to Mussolini, October 4, 1938.

⁹⁴ ACET, 1938 *Amministrazione* (1), Marco de Parente and Italo Zolli to SPD, October 16, 1938.

⁹⁵ The other signers were Alfredo Brunner, Rodolfo Brunner (*Fascist ante marcia*), Ettore Delvecchio, Angelo Fao, Ida Finzi, Emanuele Freud, Renzo Fubini, Mario Levi, Gino Macchiorio, Guido Manni, Arturo Nathan, Gino Parin, Salvatore Sabbadini, Felice Spiegel, Leopoldo Winternitz. See, *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ “The Jewish Community of Trieste demonstrated on different occasions, along with the Union of Jewish Communities in Italy, her profound devotion to the nation and the regime, as well as resolute aversion to unjustified interferences, coming from abroad and regarding Italian Judaism.” ACET, 1938 *Amministrazione* (1), De Parente and Zolli to SPD, September 25, 1938.

1945, Zolli converted to Catholicism and changed his name to Eugenio Pio Zolli, consciously referring to Pope Pius XII.

In conclusion, and picking up the introductory question concerning the relationship and connection between the Fascist minority of Trieste's Jews and local Fascism, there can be no doubt about strong ties and interdependencies, at least on a personal level. Pietro Jacchia participated in the constitution of Mussolini's Fascist movement in Milano in 1919 before he founded Trieste's Fascist cell just weeks later. The early symbiosis of its fighting squads and the ranks of the established nationalist party in town was connected to Jacchia's efforts, who also seemed to have provided the movement with a solid financial foundation. Until the promulgation of the Italian Anti-Semitic laws, 498 local Jews were registered in the PNF, circa 10% of the members of the Jewish Community in Trieste. But just as the diverse paths of the protagonists of Trieste's irredentism has shown, they were often related to Jewish families but not necessarily to Judaism as a religion. Enrico Paolo Salem - active Italian nationalist, decorated war veteran, *ante marcia* Fascist and PNF-Member since 1921 and supposedly a Jew - was the earliest victim of Fascist anti-Semitism in September 1938, when lost his position as Trieste's Podestà, yet a few months later he could prove his "Italian Arian" ancestry. Indeed, different high-ranking members of the local Jewish Community supported ambiguous relations with Fascism, trying to separate religious faith and political convictions. In the end, expressions of Fascist and patriotic sentiment addressed to Mussolini by Rabbi Zolli together with Community President De Parente missed their mark, as did similar efforts on the part of the UCII.

Anti-Slavism, the various correlations between Jews and Fascists, the enormous and unbreakable power of global players like *Generali* and *RAS*, as well as the repeated rumors about a Jewish Antifascist conspiracy led high-ranking Italian anti-Semites and Fascists increasingly looking with ill favor at Trieste. Mussolini's September 18 1938 speech was the preliminary act of some rapid anti-Semitic undertakings that focused on Trieste, underlining the cities key role in the dictator's broader strategy.

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Fascist Jews Between Politics and the Economy: Five Biographical Profiles

by Roberta Raspagliesi

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.

Preliminary remarks

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Ettore Ovazza

Guido Jung

Oscar Sinigaglia

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Conclusions

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 business 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*.

Chaim Gans, *A Political Theory for the Jewish People* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp. 272

by Ian S. Lustick

In 2016 a manslaughter charge against a soldier who was videotaped killing an incapacitated Palestinian attacker in the occupied West Bank provoked public outrage, not against the murder, but against the idea that the soldier was being prosecuted. While the military defended its actions, condemnations of the proceedings were issued by Israel's top political leaders. The episode throws into high relief the effects on Israel of the prolonged occupation of the territories captured in 1967 and reinforces the urgency of Chaim Gans's book—a book based on the palpable sense that Israel teeters on the edge of a moral and political abyss.

Once upon a time Israel was a country that aspired to be a model for struggling peoples all over the world. Now, in many international polls, it finds itself rivaling North Korea, Iran, and Pakistan as the world's most hated state. In December 2016, not one country on the United Nations Security Council, including China and Russia, Japan, the United States, Britain, France, and New Zealand, was willing to accept its policies in the territory it captured in 1967.

As do most observers, Gans links Israel's crisis to the country's sustained oppression of Palestinians, and though he has not given up hope of an escape from quasi-pariah status, the chances for doing so, or the exact route to achieve that end, are not the objects of his book. He is rather engaged in a prior question. Notwithstanding the steep moral and political costs inflicted on others as a result of Israel's creation, and the costs it continues to impose by its policies toward Palestinians, is it nevertheless possible to treat the Zionist movement as just by imagining a plausible outcome of Israel's conflict with the Palestinian Arabs that would be both just and authentically Zionist?

Gans is engaged in a problem of moral and political philosophy. He begins with two main premises: 1) that Zionism, and the crisis of European Jews in the late 19th and early 20th century to which Zionism offered itself as the solution, brought Israel to its current state; and 2) that Zionism and the state it produced wreaked havoc upon the Palestinians—transforming them into an uprooted and stateless nation, oppressed and inspired by an exilic consciousness, and persecuted both in the lands of their diaspora and in Palestine itself. The

question he poses is whether it had to be this way. Gans finds this to be an immensely important question because if it had to be this way, then Zionism must be considered to be, and to have been, immoral. According to Gans, only if there existed an authentic *and* just version of Zionism that had a plausible path toward realization, can Zionism and the State of Israel qualify as a project that was not, and has not been, intrinsically evil.¹ The urgency of Gans's project stems from the implication that depending on how this question is answered, the State of Israel itself might not be deemed worthy of support by moral beings.

To answer the question of whether Zionism (and Israel) could have been and can be "just," Gans is both constrained and guided by his liberalism. He issues clear warnings to his readers. If they do not share his commitments to liberal metaphysics then they will not be, and should not expect to be, persuaded by his arguments. In light of his liberal principles, the specific challenge he confronts is to assert the existence of plausible counterfactual histories of Zionism that feature the realization of the minimum requirements of Zionism in a manner justified by Rawlsian reasoning, i.e. justified by considering the welfare of all individuals, whether Jews or non-Jews, as equally valid indicators of the justice of a position or a policy or a movement.

I do not believe Gans succeeds in saving Zionism from perdition, though there may be other ways to do so. But the problem he poses is profoundly important and the intellectual machinery he constructs to support his effort is worthy of serious consideration. His most important move is a typology of three types of Zionism—proprietary, hierarchical, and egalitarian--each authentic but distinguished by the ground of justification each uses to infer and defend Zionist prerogatives in and over Palestine.

"Proprietary" Zionism asserts exclusive and absolute Jewish rights over the Land of Israel by virtue of the land's status as, in effect, the property of the Jewish people. Whether the deed to that property was issued by God or by history, the implication of a trans-historical and essentialist conception of Jewishness combined with the proprietary metaphor is that Jews, qua Jews, have the absolute and perpetual right to exclude non-Jews from using or even living in the land. Proprietary Zionism does not automatically entail expulsion and exclusion

¹ In fact, Gans's formulations vary somewhat. In places he argues as if the moral value of Zionism can be affirmed even if an ethically acceptable counterfactual outcome of Zionism cannot be considered "plausible," but only to be a 'conceptual possibility.' (52)

of others, but refuses to consider continuous habitation by non-Jews in the Land of Israel to have any bearing on the prerogative of Jews to exclude them altogether. Gans acknowledges that this simple formula for the justification of Zionist claims over and in the territory of Palestine/the Land of Israel is the prevailing, common sense account for most Israeli Jews, most classical Zionist ideologues, the founders of the state, and, today, for most Israeli Jews. It is the formula used by most political parties in Israel and by government agencies responsible for *hasbara* (propaganda). The basic idea is expressed in the name itself “Land of Israel” (According to the Bible, God gives Jacob the name of “Israel” after a wrestling match between Jacob and an angel of the Lord.) It is also asserted in Israel’s Declaration of Independence, which begins by declaring “The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people.” The text proceeds immediately to refer to the forcible exile of the Jews “from *their* land.” (emphasis added)

Given the primordialist, solipsistic, and collectivist nature of proprietary Zionist arguments, it is a simple matter for Gans to reject it as a justification for Zionism incapable of passing any Rawlsian test and therefore inadequate for solving Gans’s problem. Gans’s treatment of “Hierarchical” Zionism is more complicated. He identifies it as a formula advanced by Israeli political theorists, jurists, and legal scholars, anxious to advertise Zionism as honoring liberal principles while granting privileges to Jews, qua Jews, with respect to rights in and over the country. Hierarchical Zionists forego any essentialist claim of a right that Jews, qua Jews, have over the Land of Israel as a result of an ancient or primordial deed-like attachment.

Gans explains hierarchical Zionism by citing one of its chief exponents—Ruth Gavison. In keeping with hard-edged Hobbesian “liberalism,” Gavison imagines any piece of planetary geography as having been available, in principle, for any group of individuals. Having formed themselves into a nation, such a group can appropriate the territory necessary for the state that every similarly constituted nation deserves. On this account, the Land of Israel just happens to be the place, indeed the only place, that Jews, forming themselves into a modern nation in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, were able and could have been able to appropriate for this purpose. Having done so, in a world in which, in principle, any other group of individuals might have done the same, the Jews now have a right to establish a stratification of rights within “their” state so that Jews have more rights than non-Jews.

If the land had not been, and was not, inhabited by non-Jews, Gans might have found this “first come first served” principle as satisfying Rawlsian criteria. But since his liberalism requires him to ground all justifications in the fundamental equality of all individuals, he finds he must reject Hierarchical Zionism as inadequate to the task of offering a morally acceptable basis for establishing and maintaining a state for Jews (if not, strictly speaking, a “Jewish state”). For only if non-Jews living in the country have opportunities for the kind of national self-determination that Jews seek to enjoy via Zionism can the demands of Gans’s liberalism be satisfied. Since Hierarchical Zionism refuses to accommodate the national self-determination of Palestinian Arabs living in the State of Israel, i.e. the 20% of Israeli citizens descended from the remnants of the Arab inhabitants who neither fled nor were expelled from the territory that became Israel in 1948, Gans rejects it, and with it the established “liberal” Israeli position, as a basis for considering the Zionist project as morally justifiable.

However, Gans advances an “egalitarian” version of Zionism which he argues does pass Rawlsian tests. According to Gans, Egalitarian Zionism, via a state whose citizens enjoyed equal rights, not only could have been (and could be) an authentic expression of Jewish national self-determination, but it also could have been realized. He also contends that such an outcome is still plausible enough to justify political action on its behalf.

What does Gans mean by Egalitarian Zionism? He means a Zionism that justifies itself with universal principles and does not assert rights for Jews or the Jewish nation that, as a result of their exercise, are denied to another nation. Gans convincingly argues that peoples, including the Jews, have rights to national self-determination, even if they do not fully conform to every aspect of an ideal story of self-determination based on constructing a national state over a territory that is the ground of the nation’s culture and the home of most nationals. Having established Jews as eligible for national self-determination, he then must then contend that the Zionist project, including the State of Israel, could have been, and can be, realized without eliminating opportunities for equivalent forms of self-determination to others—specifically to the Palestinian Arabs.

Less persuasive than his argument for why Jews should be considered eligible for national self-determination, is a move he makes to establish equivalence between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. I refer to his distinction between “homeland groups” and “immigrant groups.” Homeland groups, according to Gans, have privileges that immigrant groups, living in the same country, do not. In Canada,

he explains “Anglophones, the francophones, and the First Nations enjoy self-government rights.” They are each “homeland groups.” But “Jewish, Sikh, or Ukrainian immigrants who live in Canada” do not have such rights. For his egalitarian principle to work in Palestine/the Land of Israel, so that Jews have the same rights to self-determination as Arabs living there, he must classify them both as “homeland groups.” And he does. Gans argues that since Jews did at one time experience the country as their homeland, and have maintained an attachment to it, their migration to the country in the 19th and 20th centuries did not make them “immigrants.” Instead, Jews deserve, along with Palestinians, “to be granted the privileges of self-determination within this country because both are homeland groups in it, each in its own way.” (87)

The moral solution to the problem that Gans proceeds to imagine under the rubric of Egalitarian Zionism is familiar in most respects. Israel, a state with a majority of Jews, deserved to exist, and can still deserve to exist, within the 1949 armistice lines. Palestine, a state with a majority of Arabs, can and should be located within the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. There are two aspects to Gans’s vision, however, that are somewhat unusual. First, although he says nothing about the “Arab” character of Palestine, he does suggest that Israel will not be a “Jewish state,” per se, but a state marked by the demographic and therefore political predominance of Jews, but with equal rights and equal access to all resources. In other words, the State of Israel will be a state with a Jewish majority, but not a “Jewish state.”² Second, Gans emphasizes that the Arab minority in Israel, since it is a part of a homeland people, must be granted the right to exercise national self-determination. In other words, in ways not clearly explained, each of the two national communities in the State of Israel will enjoy the country as their homeland and experience the state as their framework for national self-determination. Though Gans does not call the state “binational”--a term he seems to reserve for a “joint” Jewish-Palestinian Arab state in all the area between the river and the sea (87; 144)--he does not explicitly reject that label for the state within the 1949 lines that he advocates, and it is hard not to view it that way.

From a practical point of view these sorts of positions are very close to those advocated by the version of post-Zionism that imagines the present and future of Israel and its populations to be governed by their current needs and felt

² In seeming contradiction to this principle, Gans allows that should the Jewish (super) majority be threatened the state would be empowered to adjust immigration laws so as to bolster it. (217)

imperatives rather than by some combination of 19th or 20th century Zionist ideological shibboleths. But in line with the entire point of the book, Gans insists his vision is a Zionist one. “Unlike the post-Zionist writers, I believe the Zionist baby need not be thrown out along with the bathwater containing the metaphysical, historiographical, moral, constitutional, and legal filth added to it by the mainstream versions of Zionism.” (13)

Despite such protestations, Gans’s commitment to liberal moral principles makes it impossible to separate himself as categorically as he would like from the post-Zionists. That is because his ability to distinguish himself from the post-Zionists, whose views he takes to be a rejection of Israel’s right to exist, rests upon highly problematic *empirical* judgments. The book, as I have said, is presented as an exercise in moral philosophy, and Gans is meticulous in the reasoning he uses to move from the requirements of justice to the judgment that outcomes consistent with Rawlsian liberalism were and are plausible enough that the basic moral foundation of the Zionist movement, and of the State of Israel, can be defended, despite the horrors that have been associated with them. However, a careful reading of the book reveals that he cannot establish this claim without asserting other claims about the world that do not and cannot stem from moral reasoning, or from any deductive logic. These *empirical* claims can only be defended on the basis of data combined with the validity of the theories used to extrapolate the past into the present or the present into the future.

A key element in his argument is that the “two state solution” still is feasible. It is the basic framework for the egalitarian Zionism that passes the Rawlsian test. But well-informed and sophisticated analysts of the current state of affairs with respect to the two state solution’s prospects disagree as to whether that outcome is still plausible, or even possible. So when Gans rejects the “irreversibility” argument—that Israel can and will never withdraw from enough of the West Bank to allow for the establishment of a real Palestinian state—he can only do so by making a dramatic, problematic, and explicitly empirical claim.

The concept of irreversibility in this context is not a natural or logical one but is rather a function of social, political, and moral cost. A computation of the political, social, and moral costs of accepting a single state in the current demographic situation, versus those of changing the demographic facts by establishing boundaries that will enable two states to exist, will, I am fairly

sure, show that it will be a long time before the costs of establishing two states exceed those of a single state.³ (137)

Just as significant, epistemologically, is Gans's implicit endorsement of a theory of politics whose credibility is unsupported and yet whose validity is crucial to the integrity of his argument. According to Gans, political change can be relied upon to be an "efficient" reflection of changing costs and benefits. (137; 264n) More grandiosely, Gans commits himself to highly problematic functionalist theories of state and national development that imagine the degree of justice present in a political system as determining its likely stability.(163) More generally, Gans's theory of politics imagines "[T]he life span of various social entities (as) determined by the degree of constancy of the values and needs they serve."(126)

Endorsement of this kind of *empirical* theory is important for Gans's argument because it allows him to assert that since a Jewish national state has secured its existence in the Land of Israel it must reflect genuine needs and a constant commitment to fulfilling those needs. The problem is that by relying on such far-reaching and highly disputable empirical claims Gans forces the reader who wishes to be persuaded by his argument, not only to accept Rawlsian moral principles, but also Gans's particular claims about how the social and political world operates.

At one point in his argument, at least, Gans acknowledges the dangerous implications of his reliance on these particular empirical theories. As noted, it is crucial for Gans that Zionism can be imagined to have acted in a way that would have met liberal criteria as "just." This entails a calculation of "harms," including those suffered by Palestinians, against the "benefits" accruing to Jews. Indeed Gans contends that, all things considered, the uprooting of 7/8ths of the pre-existing Arab population in the course of the establishment of the State of Israel, however, inefficient and sloppy it might have been, did result in a net positive because of the benefits to Jews. Such a calculation entails believing one can translate various kinds of psychological, material, physical, and economic trauma into a cardinal utility function. It also entails belief that one can accurately assess the likelihood of various counterfactual outcomes for Jews and Arabs had the war not occurred, or had it not unfolded with as drastic an outcome for the Arabs of Palestine. Such beliefs themselves can only be grounded on strong

³ Emphasis added. Gans presents no data to support this claim, aside from citing an article by two well-known advocates of the two-state solution who say it is true. (264n)

convictions of the validity of the theories of war, psychology, politics, economics, and sociology that Gans used to make these calculations.

Gans admits that this part of his argument—the “argument from necessity...still requires much elaboration.” (228) Admirably, he also notes the risk he takes by making it. For if the justness of Zionism must rely on a calculation of harms vs. goods, that means that by continuing or intensifying unjust policies Israel could come to have committed such a massive accumulation of injustices as to outweigh the all benefits attendant upon them. As Gans recognizes, according to the central logic of his argument, this would not only deprive contemporary Israel of its moral warrant, it would also make it impossible to treat Zionism itself as ever having been morally justified. As Gans puts it: “[S]ome decades ago Israel began pursuing a policy that corrupts not only the justice of its present and future but also the justice of its past.”(222)

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Chaim Gans, *A Political Theory for the Jewish People* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp. 272

by Sam Hayim Brody

Reading Chaim Gans is like having a conversation with a friend who loves intellectual debate and tries to be fair to every opposing view, presenting it in its best light and at its strongest, in order for disagreement to be all the more persuasive. If such a friend is occasionally long-winded, or repetitive, one is inclined to forgive them, since they seem driven by a deep desire simply to *get it right*. As such, Gans's new book *A Political Theory for the Jewish People* can be recommended to anyone who spends a fair amount of time and mental energy on Israel-Palestine questions, where argument in good faith is in woefully short supply. Many of us are familiar with the acrimony that accompanies even the most basic attempts to articulate one's position, as distortions and epithets fly as soon as an interlocutor decides they recognize something they have seen before and rush to the well of worn-out counter-arguments. Perhaps because Gans's own position is so idiosyncratic and unusual, he confronts all comers with more than the ordinary amount of generosity, and I might go so far as to suggest that his book could be used as an educational resource for teachers trying to quickly present the strengths and weaknesses of various arguments.

In *A Political Theory for the Jewish People*, Gans develops the case he began to make in his 2008 book, *A Just Zionism*. He defends a version of Zionism he calls "egalitarian Zionism" against a wide variety of opponents, focusing primarily on what he sees as the two predominant interpretations of Zionism in Israel today, but also including a number of post-Zionist stances. The terrain of the polemic is broad, as Gans systematically interrogates the positions taken by each of these ideological orientations on fundamental issues such as whether and in what way the Jews constitute a nation and on what is necessary for a nation to have self-determination, as well as on practical political questions such as potential reforms of the Law of Return and the Citizenship Law. Historiographical, philosophical, and empirical questions are all woven into the discussion, although for the most part Gans is concerned with theory. The thrust of the book is that theoretical problems in Zionism must be confronted and resolved before the practical problems, which issue from the theoretical ones, can be fixed. As such, he tries to define egalitarian Zionism in such a way that it won't be tripped up by differences on practical questions. The foremost example of this is probably his claim that egalitarian Zionism is compatible with both a two-state

and a bi-national resolution to the conflict with the Palestinians, although he prefers the former for practical reasons based on empirical judgments not required by the general theory (168).

In order to understand Gans's idea of egalitarian Zionism, it helps to examine the positions against which he defines it. Gans argues that egalitarian Zionism is superior to two other forms of Zionism and to three forms of post-Zionism. He calls the other two interpretations of Zionism "proprietary" and "hierarchical." The proprietary interpretation, which Gans associates with the ordinary man on the street and with major Zionist leaders of the past as well as the Israeli governments of the past few decades, is the dominant one. It asserts, plainly and simply, that the Land of Israel belongs to the Jewish nation, and that Jews are defined essentially by their being a nation and owning this land. For Gans, this form of Zionism is not only illiberal, since it sees one's belonging to a nation as a primary fact about oneself that precedes any individual rights, but it is anti-democratic, since it subordinates individuals to the perceived needs of a trans-historical collective. Being illiberal and anti-democratic, it must necessarily and continually violate the rights of non-Jews living under Jewish sovereignty, and Gans therefore assigns it the lion's share of the blame for what he considers "an ongoing and burgeoning catastrophe" (221) caused by Israel's post-1967 settlement policies. This characterization of the proprietary interpretation can be found borne out in many examples, with the most recent perhaps being the statements of Israeli Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked to the Israel Bar Association to the effect that the Supreme Court of Israel wrongly prioritizes individual rights over national needs, and that "Zionism will not continue to bow down to the system of individual rights interpreted in a universal way that divorces them from the history of the Knesset and the history of legislation that we all know" (Revital Hovel, "Justice Minister Slams Israel's Top Court, Says It Disregards Zionism and Upholding Jewish Majority," *Haaretz*, August 29, 2017).

The hierarchical interpretation is one that Gans associates with the Israeli academic policy elite, naming such figures as Ruth Gavison and Amnon Rubinstein. This interpretation is less dangerous than the proprietary one, since it bases itself on a liberal conception of justice, and derives from this conception its view that political power ought to be distributed across the globe to national groups, each of which realizes its right to self-determination within a certain territory. As a corollary to this view, however, it maintains that each national group has a right to hegemony within its territory. This hegemony is constrained by considerations of human rights (so that, for example, policies such as forced

sterilization or expulsion are forbidden), but nonetheless allows for the perpetuation of what it views as justified inequalities, especially with regard to the public and symbolic space of the state (flags, national anthems, national languages, etc.). Gans thinks hierarchical Zionists fail to offer sufficient justifications for even this type of hegemony; moreover, their view suffers from other flaws, such as not being able to explain why the Land of Israel specifically should have been chosen as the site for the realization of the Jewish right to national self-determination.

Against both proprietary and hierarchical Zionism, Gans offers his vision of egalitarian Zionism, which he thinks can avoid the theoretical and practical drawbacks suffered by the other forms. Egalitarian Zionism argues that the right of the Jewish nation to self-determination, held in common with all other nations who each possess a similar right, is the fundamental ground of the justice of Zionism, a movement that seeks to actualize this right in reality. It is not, as argued by proprietary Zionism, the special relationship of the Jews either to God or the land of Israel, neither of which can be argued for in liberal terms (which Gans takes for granted are the only terms on which the conversation about the justice of Zionism ought to be conducted; it is unclear whether he also thinks they are the only terms on which rational argument is possible). The historical ties of the Jews to the land of Israel may be brought in secondarily, in order to explain why this particular land should be the site of the realization of the general Jewish right to self-determination, but such ties cannot ground the right itself or the actions taken in order to exercise the right. This right to self-determination must in turn be interpreted and understood in an egalitarian, rather than a hierarchical way. This means that while one national group may be predominant in the state, it has no right to hegemony over other “homeland groups,” i.e. national groups that originate within the country (even if it does have such rights over immigrant groups). Gans argues forcefully that egalitarian Zionism is not only ethically superior to its proprietary and hierarchical rivals, but that it has numerous other advantages, including absolving its adherents of the need to falsify or simplify the history of Zionism.

Gans also hopes to persuade us that egalitarian Zionism, unlike the others, can present the emergence of the Israeli state as historically just, and furthermore that it will not generate persistent violations of Palestinian rights. This is one major reason he sees it as better able than the other types of Zionism to resist the critiques of the three types of *post-Zionism*, which he calls civic, post-colonial,

and neo-diasporic. Civic post-Zionism, as represented by Uri Ram and others, demands, in the name of liberalism, that ethno-national identities be dissolved and replaced with an exclusively civic loyalty; in the case of Israel, that means transforming Israel into “a state of all its citizens” and replacing the Jewish and Arab nationalities with a single, Israeli nationality on the model of the U.S. Post-colonial post-Zionism, as Gans finds it in the work of Yehouda Shenhav and Yossi Yonah, among others, seeks to maintain the recognition of ethno-national groups for the purpose of compensating them for past wrongs; however, it makes the mistake of seeing this project as incompatible with national self-determination for the Jewish people. Finally, neo-Diasporic post-Zionism, as represented by Judith Butler, Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin, and Amnon Raz-Krakotzin, seeks to replace the goal of self-determination with a valorization of classical Jewish diasporic existence and its values, holding that Zionism’s negation of the exile and warrior ethos amount to a built-in rights-violating machine. For Gans, all three of these types of post-Zionism make the mistake of conflating Zionism as a political idea with Zionism as a historical movement. He uses the analogy of the French Revolution and the Terror, arguing that liberals do not throw away the values of freedom and equality just because they led to horrible consequences in one particular historical movement’s interpretation of them. If, as he holds, egalitarian Zionism is able to present the Zionist goal as just, then this goal may not be invalidated by injustices perpetrated by those who hold other interpretations of Zionism, and the post-Zionist critics are sent back to the drawing board to start their arguments over from a more fundamental point.

Finally, there is a type of opponent whose critique is based less on theoretical claims and more on an interpretation of the empirical reality of the present and of recent history. Gans includes Ian Lustick, together with Tony Judt and others, among an “increasing number of prominent Anglo-American Jewish intellectuals who, while not post-Zionists in the terms [just laid out], have over the last decade given up on Zionism...they argue that Zionism is committed *in principle* to inequality between Jews and Arabs and to violations of human rights, and that for this reason it should be discarded. They make this claim, however, on the assumptions that a two-state solution to the Jewish-Palestinian conflict ceased to be a viable option at the beginning of the 2000s and that Jews will not, demographically, constitute a majority in a single state comprising all of historic Palestine. Under these circumstances, Jewish sovereignty will involve ongoing violation of human rights” (136). There is an interesting interplay here between an interpretation of the empirical reality, including different possible understandings of what counts as a plausible vs. an implausible near-term

settlement of the conflict, and the theoretical justice or injustice of Zionism as a political theory *per se*. In other words, according to these thinkers, the two-state solution in the form under discussion in the 1990s and early 2000s was the last gasp for any liberal or egalitarian Zionism; if, as seems the case today, it is no longer possible, then liberal Zionism itself is no longer possible. Zionism and liberalism must go two separate ways, and we are all forced to choose between them. If this is true, then the elaboration of an egalitarian Zionism is an exercise in futility. If one's inclinations are predominantly nationalistic, such a conclusion can then lead us to agree with Shaked that it is better to ignore liberal qualms and take straightforward actions to protect hegemonic national groups. If one's inclinations are predominantly liberal, such a conclusion can then lead on in the direction of civic post-Zionism, suggesting that liberal nationalisms in general are impossible and that we are therefore better off relegating nationalism itself to the nineteenth century where it originated.

Gans's general mode of proceeding suggests that political theory can and should be articulated in a philosophical mode, with rigorous interrogations of first principles. Reference to empirical reality, however, no matter how messy, is necessary as well, in the first place because nationalism requires one to point to the historical existence of a nation in order to justify its claims. The crux comes at the point of asking whether historical developments and contingent empirical facts can actually possess the power to invalidate an otherwise valid political theory. Both Gans and Lustick seem to answer "yes" to this question, but with different prescriptions for the aftermath: Gans thinks that one is merely required to revise the theory and re-articulate it in order to account for the new situation (saving the egalitarian-Zionist baby from the two-state bathwater), whereas Lustick thinks it best to admit that the whole endeavor is a failure even if there is some hypothetical point in the past where it might have had a chance.

This difference can illuminate a number of the most thorny, contested issues in Israel-Palestine discourse, while also raising some difficulties for Gans's arguments, which are at their clearest and most persuasive on the theoretical level, and lose some of their force as they move into empirical territory. For example, it is characteristic of all forms of liberal Zionism, no matter what their differing philosophical grounds may be, to distinguish between the legitimacy of the Israeli state within the borders attained at the time of the 1949 armistice agreement, and those attained following the conclusion of the 1967 Six-Day War. It is just as characteristic of all forms of post-Zionism (and perhaps ironically, of proprietary Zionism as well) to claim that this distinction lacks a fundamental

basis – that there are no premises which can render the former borders just while dismissing the latter, or invalidate the latter without also invalidating the former. As Lustick has pointed out in his article “Making Sense of the Nakba,” this trope has also become an increasingly common weapon in the hands of right-wing settlers and their supporters, who seek to corner their liberal opponents by forcing them to concede the essential similarity between the settlement of Tel Aviv and that of Hebron. For his part, Gans thinks that the 1949 borders are defensible as necessary for the achievement of the just goals of any possible Zionism (N.B. that this is not apparently true of the 1947 borders offered by the UN), whereas the post-1967 settlements are *only possibly interpretable* as illegitimate expressions of proprietary Zionism. Thus, the difference turns on one’s empirical judgments about claims made by Israeli military leaders about defensible borders, with the post-’67 claims being untrue and unnecessary, but the post-’49 claims being true and necessary.

Or consider another example, pertaining to Gans’s critique of hierarchical Zionism. Maintaining a two-state solution, even if only for practical reasons, seems to require: 1) refusing a Palestinian right of return to the territories allotted to the State of Israel, and 2) maintaining a Jewish demographic majority within the Jewish state territories. Gans alludes in several places to constraints on permissible policies intended to do the latter, which he says are insufficiently respected by hierarchical Zionism and are one reason to prefer egalitarian Zionism. But this is difficult for him to maintain: how can we consider *any* governmental policies intended to exercise demographic control in favor of one population and against another as ever being just, without thereby slipping back into hierarchical Zionism? And does not the rejection of the right of return perpetuate a status quo that his theory attributes to contingency and accident (the historical outcome of the ’48 war) rather than to Zionist theory itself? Gans claims that “Recognition that the Palestinian refugees were expelled does not really risk impairing the justice of Zionism as a whole” (150), because that “atrocious expulsion” (146) was a contingent fact about the conduct of the war and not something fundamentally required by any *possible* Zionist theory. Yet does this position not commit his just, egalitarian Zionism to undoing this injustice, just as it undoes all the others? In other words, the expulsion of the Palestinians was not just a one-time event, but something that is ongoing, as the demand for the right of return insists. A theory that seeks to deny complicity in injustice, and to avoid trafficking in ideas like “tragic necessity,” has to address the contemporary aspect of the refugee issue, rather than confine it to the (not-so) distant past.

There is much, much more that could be said about specific arguments in Gans's book. My own copy is marked up on almost every page, and only space constraints prevent me from discussing many more individual themes. I have tried to confine myself to its central arguments and to highlight the points that will be of widest interest. It deserves to be reviewed many times, to be the subject of academic symposia, and to have its arguments considered in the opinion pages of newspapers around the world. Every critique of liberal Zionism should address itself to Gans as foremost representative of that tendency, however fading it may be, and by the same token those who think of themselves as liberal Zionists should keep their eyes on the fate of Gans's book as predictive of the likely fate of their own arguments. Having said all that, I would like to conclude with a consideration of one of its central ambivalences, simultaneously a strength and a weakness: the issue of religion. The general discourse within which Gans situates his argument is a Rawlsian liberal discourse incorporating theories of justice, rights, etc. He states explicitly that he intends to offer "a theory of the right," not "a theory of the good," and stops short even of arguing that Jews *should* invoke the right that he so strenuously argues they possess: "In the view of this book, people who were born or grew up as Jews are not required to attach central importance to this fact, and people who ascribe to it central importance need not interpret their Jewishness in terms of nationhood" (7). At a stroke, this separates Gans from the vast majority of books on Zionism by Jewish thinkers who seek to persuade Jews to adopt a certain position presented as attendant upon their very identities as Jews, whether that position is a hard-right religious-Zionist position or a far-left neo-Diasporic non-Zionist or anti-Zionist position. It also makes Gans's book more accessible to non-Jews, in the manner of a Rawlsian overlapping consensus. However, it also leaves open several difficult gaps and cruxes in his argument, to which I will briefly turn.

Atalia Omer has argued that "Liberal discourse enables delinking the discussion of Judaism as 'belief' from the framing of Jewish identity as 'ethnicity,' 'nationality,' and 'history.' Because these identity constructs reside at the root of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," liberal discourse "precludes the possibility of a substantive transformation of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict."¹ In other words, liberalism is based upon a strict categorical distinction between "religion" and "ethnicity," and as a result it has trouble accounting for Judaism, which

¹ Atalia Omer, *When Peace is Not Enough: How the Israeli Peace Camp Thinks about Religion, Nationalism, and Justice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 19.

traditionally resisted interpreting itself in terms of this distinction. Cynthia Baker has recently taken the argument beyond liberalism, rooting the categories themselves in a long and specifically Christian history: “our modern sociological/anthropological dualism *ethnic* versus *religious*, which is commonly presented as objective, neutral, and rationally secular description when invoked in social-scientific analyses, may nonetheless be as deeply rooted in a Christian Western worldview as are the more theologically explicit dualisms to which it so closely conforms.”² In chapter 2 of his book, Gans addresses concerns related to these, which he calls “ontological” and reads primarily in terms of “the assumptions concerning the unity and nationhood of the Jewish collective” as it functions as the protagonist of a historical narrative adopted by Zionism (21). His move here is an interesting one, which parallels the later Rawls of *Political Liberalism*, who sought to deflect critiques that his liberalism was itself a “comprehensive conception of the good” by arguing that in fact it was only “political, not metaphysical.”³ Gans argues that the “essence of the Jewish collective,” even including the assumption that it must have an essence, is not necessary to establish before assuming its unity. Rather, its unity can be assumed as the very starting point that makes questions about its essence possible. He argues further that anti-essentialism, for example of the type purveyed by the civic post-Zionists, does not furnish grounds for treating nations as easily dismissible or replaceable “both practically and morally,” and concludes with a pragmatic flourish that “the claim that the Jewish collective is in essence a nation, an ancient collective that never ceased to be a nation, is superfluous from the point of view of Zionist ideology, which can manage without it” (28).

Thus Gans is able to acknowledge the fact that both Orthodox and Reform Jews initially opposed the Zionist definition of Jews as essentially a nation, and that ultra-Orthodox Jews still do, while simultaneously claiming that “it was *desirable* and *justified*, and that it still is desirable and justified, for the Jewish collective *to view itself, or to interpret itself as a nation, even if it was not and is not a nation in the full sense of the word*” (29). This is how Gans can argue that he is not prescribing to Jews how they should live, offering a comprehensive conception of the good, but instead merely a liberal theory of right, should they choose to exercise it along the lines he describes. But this stops short, I suspect, of confronting the issue raised by Omer and Baker, namely that the social ontology that distinguishes “religion” from “ethnicity” or “nation” is inherited from

² Cynthia Baker, *Jew* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017), 25.

³ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), xiv, 10.

Christianity via liberalism, and potentially still carries this baggage along with it. I lack space here to explore all the ways this issue bubbles up throughout Gans's argument, but one may wonder, given his pragmatism and skepticism regarding the essentialist interpretation of Jewish identity, what work the romantic phraseology of nationalism does for him, especially when he discusses nebulous issues of how Jews and Arabs "experience their identity" or "give expression to [their ethno-national] belonging" (158).

To conclude, Gans has written a good book to think with. Although almost no one will agree with everything in it, it deserves to be treated as generously as it treats its own interlocutors. I offer no prediction about its possible effects or impact, although given the temper of our times it would not surprise me if it were found unconvincing by the left and altogether ignored (if not vilified) by the right. Nonetheless, it stands as an example of honest humanism in a moment of widespread division, and an effort at rigorous thinking on a difficult political conflict at a moment when many find it hard to assume their opponents argue in good faith. If nothing else, *A Political Theory for the Jewish People* can model these virtues for us, now and in the times to come.

Samuel Hayim Brody, University of Kansas

Menahem Klein, *Lives in Common: Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem, Jaffa and Hebron* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 256.

by Marion Lecoquierre

Lives in Common offers a fascinating and thought-provoking insight into the past of Israel and Palestine – that of the late Ottoman rule over Palestine, of the British Mandate and the more recent past that followed the creation of the State of Israel. The book looks at the cohabitation of the Arab and Jewish population on a same territory and more specifically in the urban settings of Jerusalem, Jaffa and Hebron.

Klein insists on the existence of a common Arab-Jewish Palestinian identity, formed at the end of the nineteenth century around bridges incarnated by common courtyards, shared meals and holidays, but also languages learnt beyond ethnic borders, like Arabic and Ladino. The author shows that this life “in common” took different forms: after a period of actual coexistence it became, little by little, more of a forced cohabitation. This capacity to live together, entwining daily habits, cultures and traditions is shown to have slowly faded with the passing of the twentieth century, undermined by the massive influx of new Jewish immigrants of Ashkenazi origin who wished to recreate a European setting in this new land, but also by the rise of the Zionist and Palestinian nationalist ideologies. All this represented strong dividing forces that, once widely adopted by the population, separated even those who were previously sharing that common Palestinian identity. In the end, this book recounts more a story of slow division and separation, both physical and at the level of representations, than that of lives lived in common.

Published in 2014, the book offers a fascinating description of unfolding and shifting identities, always in the making, in negotiation, hinting at paths and solutions that were considered, discussed, that could have been – but never were – followed. It is a history of daily lives, cohabitation, conflicts, alliances and interests, but also of numerous political choices and strategies that made the region as it is today. Undoubtedly a remarkable piece of scholarship, the writing mixes styles and timelines in a way that can be unsettling, associating a very personal and sometimes autobiographical touch to archives, people’s memoirs, very precise anecdotes, traveling through time often in a non-linear way. At times confusing, this choice gives the book a novelistic touch that makes it not only an interesting but also an enjoyable reading.

The first part of the book, looking at past coexistence between the end of the nineteenth century and 1948 recreates the atmosphere, the “texture of life” in the three cities considered, bringing in different voices: writers, intellectuals, actors of the Jewish and Palestinian political life, weaving feelings, emotions, perceptions and historical events. These voices also introduce in a very personal, sometimes intimate way, how the rising nationalist feelings and ethnic tensions slowly imposed narratives and facts on the ground that refuted and erased this era of coexistence. The shift in the categories used by the actors themselves to represent and conceptualize their own situation and relate to each other is captivating, as are the personal and political negotiations that were involved in this evolution from an integrated Arab Palestinian identity to ethnic and religious exclusive collective consciousness.

The second part, looking at interactions between Palestinians and Israelis after 1948, gives more space to political interactions and negotiations at different scales, showing how they were also conducted locally through existing interpersonal contacts. Less grounded on the daily life and perception of the residents, it revolves mostly around the two dates that brought about drastic political changes, 1948 and 1967, concentrating on the relations of power thus created and the assertion of a strict social hierarchy between conquerors and conquered, occupier and occupied. The relations of domination, mostly in the subtext and in the making in the first part of the book, here come vividly to the fore.

One could regret that the implications of these accounts – as well as of the minor place given to Palestinian voices, justified in the prologue of the book – are not more thoroughly scrutinized. The contribution of the book could be put forth with more clarity: a discussion around the notion of “force” as a connecting factor could have been interesting, as well as a more explicit reflection around the omnipresent ideas of mixed/common space, power and separation.

The organization of the book around the two notions of place and force is indeed interesting in that it strongly resonates with the present. The central role of place (intended as the local scale, the village or the neighborhood) and the structuring role of constraint and threat, the resorting to force, remain two major axes through which one can still analyze the present interactions between Jews and Arab in the region, be it in the Occupied Palestinian Territories or within Israel proper.

It is interesting to see the impact or remanence that events and interactions evoked in these pages have today in the three cities. In Jerusalem, a city where history is seemingly everywhere, this recent past does not seem to have a major impact on the present experience of the city: the common courtyards and shared neighborhoods, the “cosmopolitan” mixed cafes, of which one of the relic is the American Colony, have largely disappeared and have been forgotten. The physical separation of the city between Israeli and Jordanian sides has been erased, with the careful unification of the “liberated” city under a unique municipality. In Hebron, on the contrary, the Jewish-Arab interactions that marked the twentieth century still shape the city, physically and symbolically: the bloodshed of 1929 and 1994 continue to be structuring events for the local communities. For some, the not so distant past when the city could be shared remains a vivid memory. In Jaffa, large parts of the old town were razed: the old city one can see today has been emptied of its Arab inhabitants and of all trace of past cohabitation, leaving a charming yet sterile scenery for tourists and art venues.

Marion Lecoquierre, independent scholar

Debarati Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity. Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), pp. 341.

by Martina Mengoni

“What are the risks and benefits of invoking the memory of one historical atrocity in relation to another?”¹ Since “memory is the present past,” as stated by Richard Terdiman,² past and present by definition are bound together tightly throughout memory. Any testimony of a traumatic historical event demands specificity; nevertheless, the memory of such events permits different histories to be brought together (within their disparate times, subjects and bodies), on the ground of shared experiences: trauma, violence, shame, melancholy and complicity.

This phenomenon happens mostly within literature and movies. Why? “What are the political stakes of bringing together seemingly disparate memories of violence within an artwork?”³ In *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance*, Debarati Sanyal tries to explore and answer these ambitious and inconvenient questions with great awareness of the ongoing philosophical debates. The book is shaped by case studies: each chapter concentrates on specific literary and cinematic works as powerful vehicles of this back-and-forth use of memory. It becomes clear that confluences of memories can be dangerous as well as productive of new meanings.

Sanyal’s main thesis is that “aesthetic figures such as allegory [...] and irony function as ‘vectors of memory’”⁴ (borrowing this concept from Nancy Wood’s book of the same name⁵). Moving from these premises, Sanyal explores the distinguishing use of Holocaust memory in French and Francophone postwar culture, “a significant locus for the exploration of complicitous memory.”⁶ Complicity is indeed the second main focus of the book. While, as Sanyal herself

¹ Debarati Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 3.

² Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), 5.

³ Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity*, 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵ Nancy Wood, *Vectors of Memory* (Oxford: Berg, 1999).

⁶ Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity*, 10.

states, the emergence of Holocaust specificity encouraged our collective tendency to identify with the victims' trauma, the book aims to prove that, especially within literature, "a sustained reflection on complicity"⁷ opens up to a new ethical engagement. Here Sanyal addresses two complementary questions: "how does complicity, rather than affect-based discourse of trauma, shame and melancholy, open a critical engagement with the violence of history?"⁸ On the other side, "what does it mean to invoke such forms of complicity in the realm of memory, where harm has occurred in the past and can no longer be repaired?"⁹

Chapter one especially defines the conceptual boundaries of Sanyal's research, starting with a critique of Giorgio Agamben's work. According to Sanyal, Agamben's appropriation of Levi's grey zone is the best example of "a broader tendency to freeze the energy of figures into fixed paradigms"¹⁰: when Agamben claims that Auschwitz "has never ceased to take place," or that Auschwitz "is always repeating itself,"¹¹ he is, in fact, derealising the historical fact, treating it as a paradigm, as an "emblem for a recurrent, unlocatable and transhistorical violence"¹². In a very persuasive way, Sanyal illustrates the ethical and philosophical consequences of this process: the idea of the impossibility of representing a historical trauma; the blurring of the subject position; a fetishism of trauma and complicity – all of them impressively represented by the exhibit *Mirroring Evil* that took place after September 11 at the Jewish Museum of New York.¹³

Sanyal claims that literature and art represent a powerful alternative to Agamben's approach: rather than being used as a static paradigm, the Holocaust – as well as other historical traumas – should be deployed as a *figure*: "Figures need not immobilize or dematerialize – they need not freeze into paradigm or convert suffering into beauty. Instead, figures and the aesthetic realm more generally produce mobile and asymmetrical proximities between events, subjects and histories. Not only do such proximities enable comparative analysis of violence and the political work of memory, but they can also foster non-

⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. D. Heller-Roazen (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 101.

¹² Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity*, 32.

¹³ *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*, ed. Norman K. Kleeblatt (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2001).

redemptive forms of connection, solidarity and consolation.”¹⁴ The ambiguity, indeterminacy and therefore adaptability of figures prevents a total identification between disparate historical events.

Chapters two, three and four focus on specific uses of Holocaust allegories in postwar French literature and cinema, and trace the way they mobilise the memory of the Holocaust in relation to the war of Algerian independence. Sanyal argues that the figural register of the plague, the camp, the intersection, the gray zone, the cry in Albert Camus’ novels (especially *The Plague* and *The Fall*), as well as in Alain Resnais’s documentary *Night and Fog* (1955), is used to intersect two histories of persecution (Auschwitz and Algeria). It improves cross-memorial migrations and creates a *noeud de mémoire* (an expression that relies on Paul Gilroy conception of “knotted intersections of histories,”¹⁵ both meaningful and dangerous). Specifically within Camus’ work, the tendency to give mutually exclusive readings (that is reading the allegories throughout the Holocaust or colonialism) should be replaced by the awareness that allegories are by definition flexible, they allude “to multiple – if not contradictory – legacies of violence,”¹⁶ especially in the realm of complicity. In *Night and Fog*, the juxtaposition of silent different scenes – such as the sequences that show the sections of tattooed human skin, stripped from Auschwitz victims and displayed as artifacts, in silence, with no explanation – forces the viewer to find himself an accomplice in an *aesthetic of horror* that embraces present times: the result is “one of the earliest intellectual mobilizations against the Algerian war.”¹⁷ This narrative displacement allows explicit reprises in colonial counter-memories such as *Camp de Thiaroye* (1988) by the Senegalese director Ousmane Sembène. Of course, the allegory’s potentially limitless correspondences can be problematic, as demonstrated by Sanyal’s analysis of *The Fall*, and by her comparison between *Night and Fog* and the imagery of the documentary *The Road of Guantanamo* (2006) by Michael Winterbottom and Mat Whitecross. While she succeeds in the first, she is less convincing in the second.

Chapter four presents a new set of problems, since it deals with the displacement of allegory and figures related to torture. Torture is the locus of a contradiction: from one side “there exists a disquieting kinship or complicity between torture

¹⁴ Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity*, 49.

¹⁵ Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), 78.

¹⁶ Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity*, 59.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 128.

and allegory, for if torture [...] is a process that twists and turns the body and the psyche of its victims into signification, allegory is a rhetorical figure that similarly distorts or twists bodies and objects into emblems”¹⁸; at the same time, “yet ‘speaking otherwise’ about torture may be the only way to speak of it at all under regimes of censorship.”¹⁹ Figurative displacement is also a way to make torture communicable, legible. Here Sanyal moves from Jean Paul Sartre’s *The Condemned of Altona* tropology of torture, and relates it to contemporaneous reflections on the relation between the Nazi genocide and torture in late colonial France.

Chapters five and six explore the shift in memory and the representations of the Holocaust that became dominant since the 1980s. Sanyal enucleates four major differences between postwar and contemporary culture: (1) the specificity of the Holocaust; (2) the ethical and historical centrality of victims; (3) the privilege of memory over history; (4) the emergence of *trauma* as “a platform for political claims”²⁰ in the social domain. While, in postwar France, philosophers, writers and directors focused on readers as “potential agents of [...] future-oriented changes,”²¹ thus addressing them with ambiguous allegories, the collective *devoir de mémoire* that followed the *era of the witness* (particularly spread in the last three decades) entailed a rigid identification with the victims’ history.

In such climate, Sanyal tries to demonstrate that Jonathan Littell’s *The Kindly Ones*, throughout its protagonist Maximilien Aue, “is the first novel to engage the Nazi genocide in a non-allegorical mode.”²² It rather uses *irony* (in Paul De Man’s definition as “the reversed mirror-image” of allegorical form²³), as a specific reading contract: since the very incipit (“Oh my human brother, let me tell you what happened”²⁴), the attitude towards the reader oscillates between proximity and difference. Sanyal calls it ‘ironic complicity,’ which is a key concept for the entire book: “a strategy that simultaneously beckons and suspends our identification (whether textual, visual, or cinematic) with the

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 184.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, 190.

²³ Paul de Man, “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 225–26.

²⁴ Jonathan Littell, *The Kindly Ones*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 3.

violence that we, as readers, viewers, and secondary witnesses, are called to witness.”²⁵

What is at stake in Sanyal’s whole argument is indeed the attitude of the literary author and the movie director towards the reader/viewer: if being complicit is, by definition, sharing an awareness, being involved, being ethically attuned, then allegory (in postwar Europe) and irony (in present times) are the rhetorical means by which the reader is able to reimagine, and politically reactivate, memory. This can happen even when Holocaust memory is connected to a problematic ideological field, as the analysis (in chapter six) of the novel *The German Mujihad* by Boualem Sansal proves.

Memory and Complicity is a must-read for Holocaust scholars. It provides literary criticism and comparative studies with some key concepts – not only *ironic complicity*, but also a new and illuminating definition of allegory and metaphor in relation to representations of mass violence – that can have a broad and useful implementation. For instance, a book like *The Holocaust in Italian Culture* by Robert S. C. Gordon could have a significant dialogue with Sanyal’s theoretical framework. At the same time, Sanyal’s claim that “aesthetic form becomes a laboratory for experimenting with practices of memories and representations”²⁶ should encourage contemporary historians to use these itineraries of imagination as tools, proofs and case studies for their own research.

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²⁵ Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity*, 54.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 265.

Matthias B. Lehmann, *Emissaries from the Holy Land. The Sephardic Diaspora and the Practice of Pan-Judaism in the Eighteenth Century* (Stanford: Stanford University Press 2014), pp. 352.

by Roni Weinstein

From the 1720s to the 1820s, a Jewish institution located in Istanbul, the capital of the Ottoman Empire, oversaw an international fundraising activity for the poor of the Holy Land. Matthias Lehmann's fascinating book is dedicated to the analysis of this institution, and the human and communication networks enabling its activities. No less important and interesting are his observations on major characteristics of Jewish culture from the late sixteenth up to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and their contributions to modernization processes within the Jewish world. The Ottoman context seems to play a major role in this regard.

The institution in charge of raising charity for the poor Jews of the Holy Land, of transferring it and organizing the work of rabbinic emissaries, was established in 1720, following an unexpected crisis in Jerusalem. A significant group of Ashkenazi immigrants without economic backing had arrived to Jerusalem in the previous years, headed by Judah HeHasid. The growing debts they incurred led to the destruction of the Ashkenazi synagogue of Jerusalem and of its courtyard (see Lehmann, p. 27). Since the Ottomans referred to minority groups as 'collectives,' the debts were to be paid by the entire Jewish community of Jerusalem. So, the Jewish leaders in Istanbul intervened and negotiated a payment arrangement with the Sultan.

Naturally, this was not the first case of charity raising for the Holy Land, or for a community in the Mediterranean basin. Precedents could be found in community networks for ransoming Jewish captives, or for other cases mentioned in testimonies from the Cairo *genizah*.¹ The innovation in the case discussed here lies in the amount of money transferred, the solid institutional mechanisms – that went on for an entire century – the geographical range, the number of emissaries involved and the sophisticated network employed for the

¹ See Eliezer Bashan, *Captivity and Ransoming in Jewish Society in Mediterranean Lands: 1391-1830* (in Hebrew), (Ramat-Gan: Bar Ilan UP 1980), (which Lehmann fails to mention); Shlomo D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, 5 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press 1967-1993).

money transfer. So, Lehmann is completely justified in considering the institution headed by the ‘Istanbul Officials’ as a sign of Jewish modernity.

The primary sources Lehmann utilizes are diverse and contribute to the wide perspective of his book (see p. 9). They range from hundreds of letters sent by the Istanbul officials, sermons, literature in praise of *Eretz Israel* (the Holy Land), rabbinical responsa and travelogues – mainly the famous one by Rabbi Haim Yosef Azulai (known under the acronym *HaChidah*). This variety of sources enables Lehmann to confront various testimonies. Here again, there are precedents of historical research on rabbinical emissaries from the Holy Land, especially the comprehensive work of Yaari. As regards this, Lehmann’s description of Yaari’s work as biased by the author’s presumed Zionist leanings, and by his being one of the Israeli ‘national historians,’ seems ungrounded.

Part of the discussion of *Emissaries from the Holy Land* is dedicated to the analysis of the institutional and financial mechanisms for fundraising and money transfer. This is indeed an important theme, which was already debated by several historians that dealt with Sephardic international networks.² What makes the reading of this book enjoyable and worthwhile is Lehmann’s choice not to confine himself to this issue, broadening the perspective to dedicate most of the book to the way this institution and its functioning reflected important processes of change in the Jewish world on its way to modernity. The sub-title already declares it: ‘The Sephardic Diaspora and the Practice of Pan-Judaism’.

The Sephardic diaspora, with its widest geographical setting extending from Europe and the Mediterranean basin to the Ottoman world, and even ‘the New World,’ stood at the basis of international charity raising. Its main communities were located in major cities of the Ottoman Empire – such as Istanbul, Edirne, Salonika and Damascus – from where the same networks of commerce, rabbinical learning, book printing and family ties were activated. Sephardic elite families of these major communities and cities were well acquainted with one another and could rely on personal ties of trust in case of fundraising for the poor of the Holy Land. In this wide and extensive mechanism, the Ottoman

² Francesca Trivellato, *The Familiarity of Strangers: The Sephardic Diaspora, Livorno, and Cross-Cultural Trade in the Early Modern Period*, (New Haven: Yale UP, 2009); Jonathan I. Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism, 1550-1750*, (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1998); *Atlantic Diasporas: Jews, Conversos, and Crypto-Jews in the Age of Mercantilism, 1500-1800*, eds. Richard L. Kagan and Philip D. Morgan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2009).

Empire played a dominant role. It was not a coincidence that the center of the activity relied on the Ottoman capital, and on the political connections with the Sultan's court. Furthermore, it seems that the methods for raising money adopted in the Jewish context followed those that the Empire applied when raising taxes in its provinces.

The impressive extent of the activity – what the author aptly characterizes as *pan-Judaism* – almost entices a discussion on the global aspects of Jewish history during the early modern period.³ Lehmann is naturally aware of this but unfortunately avoids further elaboration. Perhaps, some parameters of Jewish activity would be better understood by a comparative discussion of, for instance, the activity and solidarity that existed in other minorities too, such as the Greeks and the Armenians.

One of the fascinating aspects of fundraising and the emissaries' activity is the Pan-Judaism perspective. Unlike the fragmentary and localistic attitude, practiced for several centuries by medieval Jewish communities, here one can see that a change is starting to take place in several Jewish diasporas, leading to collective activity on regional basis, shared by communities with common cultural characteristics (such as language, or Halakhic heritage).⁴ It is an extension and enlargement of the loyalty on ethnic basis (Italian, Ashkenazi, Sephardic, Maghrebi). The activity of the Istanbul Officials takes this process one step further and, according to Lehmann, attempts to create a Pan-Jewish solidarity and activity that transcended ethnic identities.

Such an innovative concept redefines the patterns of Jewish solidarity and the linkage to past traditions (which set the previous loyalty to Halakhic lore on an ethnic basis). Solidarity is defined mostly as relating to a collective that shares the same destiny, rather than the acceptance of Halakhic and rabbinical authority: "Thus communities like Bayonne and Bordeaux [constituted by former Iberian *conversos*, whose adherence to Halakhic mode of life was partial at best – R.W.]

³ See Lehmann, p. 31, where he indicates a similar and contemporary crisis among the Jewish and Armenian communities in Jerusalem.

⁴ Roni Weinstein, *Kabbalah and Jewish Modernity* (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization 2016); David Sorotzkin, *Orthodoxy and Modern Disciplinary: The Production of the Jewish Tradition in Europe on Modern Times* (Heb.), (Tel-Aviv: Kibutz Ha-Meuhad 2011); Elchanan Reiner, "On the Roots of the Urban Jewish Community in Poland in the Early Modern Period," *Gal-Ed. On the History and Culture of Polish Jewry* 20 (2006): 13-37; Joseph M. Davis, "The Reception of the "Shulhan 'Arukh" and the Formation of Ashkenazic Jewish Identity," *AJS Review* 26/2 (2002): 251-276; Dean Ph. Bell, *Jewish Identity in Early Modern Germany: Memory, Power and Community*, (Aldershot Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007).

continued to be part of the regular circuit of rabbinic emissaries traveling to Western Europe even though some of their leaders openly defied rabbinic authority. In fact, they sometimes exceeded the expectations of the emissaries and showered them with great honor, even though, it would seem the *sheluhim* [Hebrew for ‘rabbinical emissaries’ – R.W.] represented a rather different world: the world of rabbinic traditions” (p. 139). In this sense, it presents a proto-national notion of identity related to shared collective experiences and expectations, rather than the adherence to a divine choice (‘the chosen people’) or religious sanctity. Here as well, it points to the sixteenth century as the epoch when these processes of change started to take place, thanks to the codification project of Rabbi Joseph Karo that compiled (alongside the glosses of Rabbi Moses Isserles) what was intended to be a book of law for the entire Jewish people.⁵

The wide horizon of this Sephardic world stands in sharp contrast to the Ashkenazi patterns, that instead disregard ethnic solidarity and the Pan-Jewish perspective. The money raised in Ashkenazi communities in Poland and Eastern Europe continued to be directed only to the Ashkenazi poor of the Holy Land. Their financial network was distinct, and they tended not to accept the Sephardic emissaries (even though these emissaries had helped the Ashkenazi community in Jerusalem during its 1720 crisis).

The emissaries were not involved only in financial activity. In their passages from various geographical and cultural milieus they served as presenters of rabbinical authority. This perspective is widely discussed in the writings of Rabbi Moshe Hagiz, one of the major examples of a new and more authoritative rabbinical figure. The question of the role and authority of rabbis unavoidably leads Lehmann to further discuss Orthodoxy and the place of religious tradition in a changing society, after the crisis caused by the Sabbatean movement (see for instance p. 143). The wide literature composed in the Iberian Diaspora in this period testifies to the urgent need for reorientation in religious practice, and not less so to create theological distinctions. The emissaries would play an important role in this respect, as agents and carriers of diverse cultural traditions: “As rabbinic emissaries traversed various lands and continents representing the putative center of the Jewish world, their travels delineated a shared space that

⁵ Roni Weinstein, “Research of Jewish Law (Halakhah) between Yeshiva and Academy – The Case-Study of Rabbi Joseph Karo” (in Hebrew), in *Migrating Knowledge: Selected Articles*, eds. Rivka Feldahi and Gal Hertz (forthcoming).

transcended geographic distance and tied Jewish communities in different places to one another and to the Land of Israel. At the same time, their extensive journeys also made the emissaries into agent of cultural change, mediating between different cultural practices and set of cultural knowledge that they encountered as they interacted with Jews and non-Jews in a myriad of different contexts. Thus, the emissaries played an important role in facilitating the exchange in information and knowledge in what we might call the “contact zone” between different Jewish cultures and, indeed, between the Jewish and non-Jewish worlds” (p. 108).

In their activity, the Istanbul Officials refused to accept rabbinical interference or to acknowledge the Halakhic instructions as binding. This aspect paves the way to a larger discussion on the place of the Jewish Law (*Halakhah*) in the early modern world. It certainly suggests an alternative reading of the marginality of the Halakhah in directing Jewish life, different from the one common among academics and in the Orthodox milieu.

Lehmann’s book is a substantial contribution to our understanding of the deep yet gradual processes of change that the Jewish world underwent in the early modern period. It is supported by a diverse range of documents, succeeding in opening a wide perspective and discussing different Jewish diasporas. Moreover, the emissaries and their activity provide the starting point for a meta-narrative on the Jewish society of the early modern period. One may argue that Lehmann’s work would have benefitted from a deeper discussion of parallel changes in the non-Jewish context (especially in the Ottoman world) and during the sixteenth century more generally. This said, the book is well-written and constitutes a highly recommended reading.

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Yonatan Mendel and Ronald Ranta, *From the Arab Other to the Israeli Self: Palestinian Culture in the Making of Israeli National Identity* (London: Ashgate, 2016), pp. 165.

by Guy Ben-Porat

Zionist and contemporary Israeli leaders have often made clear that the Jewish state would or should distance itself from its Arab surrounding and maintain a western character against the perceived backwardness of the region, a “villa in the jungle,” in Ehud Barak’s often-quoted metaphor. Years ago, it was Ben-Gurion statement, referring to Jewish immigrants from Muslim countries whose presence threatened to blur the imagined boundaries constructed, “we do not want Israelis to become Arabs. We are in duty bound to fight against the spirit of the Levant.”¹ Disdain of and distancing from Arab culture, however, were only part of the Zionist experience, often coupled with settlers’ fascination and attraction with the local or “native” culture in their quest to make themselves at home in the new country. The question “what it means to be Israeli?”, including Israel’s place in the region, has yet to be resolved as Israelis still debate their identity and its boundaries. In this concise and interesting book, Mendel and Ranta explore the complex relations and demonstrate in its four chapters how “many of the cultural, social and gastronomical, items and norms that were labeled as ‘Israeli’ were in fact connected to the Arab world and culture” (p. x).

The Zionist project required not only territory to establish a state but also the cultural components for a modern nation, providing for communal bonds and demarcating boundaries. For Zionists the immigration to Palestine would normalize Jewish existence and create the “New Jew,” proud and self-reliant, attached to the land and masculine. Palestine, the old-new land, was to combine the proud inheritance of biblical times with modern European culture, transforming both the land and the Jewish settler. The relation of the Zionists to the native population echoed European sentiments, describing “a land with no people to people with no land,” or the benefits that Jewish settlement would bestow upon the natives. The actual encounter, however, between European Jewish settlers and Arab inhabitants of the land shattered many of these illusions. While Arabs were viewed with disdain, for their “backward” culture and

¹ David Ben-Gurion cited in Sami Smooha, *Israel: Pluralism and Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 88.

resistance, Mendel and Ranta claim, they were also admired and envied for being a “natural” part of the landscape, so that newcomers wished to imitate in order to replace. Thus, “adoption through erasure has been a central element in the creation of Jewish-Israeli identity and national culture” (p. xiii).

The desire of the Jewish settlers in Palestine to create for themselves a new identity, replacing the weak diasporic Jewish identity with the “New Jew”, self-reliant and proud, left them ambiguous towards both Europe and the Middle East. The diasporic Jew, the Palestinian native and, soon, the Jew from the Muslim world, were all images and real persons, against which the Zionist movement forged a new identity, in what the authors describe as a “tragic process of internalizing the other through its marginalization and elimination” (p.7). The desire of the settlers to root themselves in their old-new homeland has led them to different attempts of emulation and appropriation that would eventually (so it was hoped) allow them to claim presence and ownership. In the four chapters, the authors trace the presence of Arab culture, resisted or appropriated, in language, symbols and food. The attempt to transform settlers into natives – Arab local *fellahin* (peasants) able to live of the land – included the adoption of lifestyles, culture and symbols, that “once adopted...took a life of their own and were constantly reinterpreted, transformed and re-evaluated by Zionist and Jewish-Israeli society” (p. 22).

Discussing the place of the Arabic language, first among the Zionist settlers and later in the State of Israel, the authors demonstrate not only the ambivalence towards local culture but also how it translated into actual policies. In the pre-Zionist period Arabic was a *lingua franca* of the region, used by both Sephardis and reluctantly by Ashkenazi Jews in Palestine. Initially, Zionists romanticized the Arabic language, much like the Arab way of life – “a romantic reflection of the ancient biblical Jewish self” (30) – and the study of Arabic was part of learning and becoming local. The romantic however has soon given way to the desire to maintain boundaries, especially when Arabic-speaking Jewish immigrants from Muslim countries arrived. A gradual shift towards Arabic and its study took place as relationships became tenser and the general attitude shifted from viewing Arabic as a source for humanistic knowledge and the highlighting of shared history and ancestry, to a more instrumental view (41). The demotion of the Arabic language continued after statehood, becoming a low-status language in Israel. its entry into Israeli vocabulary was mainly from the world of “slang” and includes mostly swear words and daily expressions. The

majority of high school students that matriculated in Arabic reported that they do so in order to serve in the military intelligence.

Discussing the concept of “Israeli food” provides another good example for the contradictions and ironies that national cultures often, knowingly or unknowingly, carry. Eating habits delineate the boundaries that impart a sense of consistency and stability that people use to define their group and distinguish it from others. But, in many cases foods travel, are adopted and appropriated whether it is pizza in America or falafel in Israel. Creating a food tradition in Israel included the adoption of local dishes, often describing them as *Mizrahi* (associated with Middle Eastern Jewish immigrants) or Middle Eastern food, and concepts like “Israeli breakfast” or “Israeli salad” whose relation to local cuisine were omitted. While this chapter is especially interesting and well written it also raises questions about “appropriation”, especially in the contemporary era of global capitalism. The authors seem to ignore the wider changes in Israeli food culture that took place in the past two decades. On the one hand, everything is commodified, repackaged and branded (and the Israeli case is not exceptional) and, on the other hand, originality carries its own value (as the growing interest in “real” Arab restaurants demonstrate).

To demonstrate the process of emulation and appropriation the authors use many examples that are anecdotal rather than systematic. Combined, they provide for an interesting and thought-provoking story of culture and identity. The Jaffa orange, part of the landscape of Palestine, became a symbol of Jewish (Israeli) presence and agriculture a proof of transformation and connection to the land. Zionist settlers claimed the land also by transforming themselves in order to prove their inheritance by identifying themselves with landscape. Walking the land in “biblical” sandals, giving Hebrew names to the plants and flowers, drinking black (“Arab”) coffee and wearing the traditional *kefiyah*, were all part of the process. Unlike material elements, however, symbols are not easily appropriated, as they constantly change and remain open for reappropriation. Biblical sandals, for example, are nowadays proudly worn by religious settlers – who claim to be the heirs of Zionism. The *kefiyah*, conversely, has been for decades the symbol of Palestinian nationhood and resistance.

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Bruno Pischedda, *L'idioma molesto. Cecchi e la letteratura novecentesca a sfondo razziale* (Turin: Aragno 2015), pp. 313.

by Raffaella Perin

A cultural idiom, as the author explains in the Introduction, is “a set of beliefs, stereotyped images, states of mind to which one confers a certain varying grade of awareness” (p. IX). Anti-Semitic rhetoric, which grew up next to anti-Semitic ideology and was fed by it, is one of these “vexatious” cultural idioms. At the beginning of the twentieth century, anti-Semitism in Italy was based on a traditional Catholic anti-Judaism and on a popular xenophobic sentiment, corroborated by a secularized racist perspective that gradually gained ground in Italian culture. In this context an abundant literature proliferated, made up of novels, short stories, newspaper articles, the amount of which conveys the deep roots of the racist prejudice.

Pischedda's book deals with the figure of the literary critic Emilio Cecchi (Florence 1884 - Rome 1966), who “was engaged in an absolutely not minor match in the ethnic and religious conflicts raised in the first forty years of the century” (p. XII). The sources collected by the author are copious and various: private correspondences, reviews, travel reports, notebooks etc. His acute analysis of published texts, critically put in connection with archival documents, retraces the numerous relationships maintained by Cecchi during his career and frames the intellectual climate in which he operated.

Cecchi was an eclectic, prolific writer, who could count on the friendship of quite some personalities such as Giovanni Papini and Giuseppe Prezzolini, and on a close contact with *monsignor* Umberto Benigni. Among his collaborations it is worth to mention at least newspapers like “La Tribuna,” “Il Corriere della Sera,” “The Manchester Guardian,” and cultural journals like “La Voce” and “La Ronda”. The meticulous investigation on Cecchi's rich production carried out by Pischedda highlights an untimely and persistent presence of anti-Semitic and anti-negro prejudice in the mentality of the Florentine critic. The clues of a hostile attitude towards the Jews emerge in Cecchi's first review essays of Israel Zangwill's *Italian fantasies* for “La Tribuna,” on 7 December 1910, and in his private notebooks at the end of 1912 while commenting Zangwill's novel *Chad Gadya*. The abstract lemmas employed in the initial phase of his career – Jewish “race” and “temperament” (p. 42-43) – led soon to stauncher statements ascribable to Christian anti-Judaism. In 1918, the reading of the book *Voci*

d'Oriente by Raffaele Ottolenghi evokes in Cecchi's annotations the most common anti-Semitic stereotypes abundantly spread by nineteenth-century press (i.e. the collusion with the freemasonry and the Enlightenment).

In 1920 Cecchi let himself go to a public anti-Semitic outburst while defending his friend Riccardo Bacchelli in a *querelle* with Giuseppe Antonio Borgese concerning the latest book of the Jewish writer Guido da Verona, *Sciogli la treccia, Maria Maddalena*. Although this episode was already well-known, as was the role of Benigni as a "solid but very discreet guide" to Cecchi (p. 131), the discussion of his experience at "La Ronda" is enriched with many details by Pischedda's research.¹

Anti-Semitic discourse provided a certain amount of discriminatory assertions that Cecchi could use "depending on the needs" (p. 175). The image of the "Jew" that arises from his writings is one of an ambitious, avid, and immoral man, protagonist of international plots. What is typical of Cecchi is that as his anti-Semitism started to take a more definitive shape, its Christian roots quit to surface: "a traditional religious hostility slowly turns into an *a priori* racial rebuff" (p. 177). Beside the specificities of Cecchi's anti-Semitism, his prejudice towards the Jews is something that he has in common with a "non-exiguous area of men of Letters at the beginning of the twentieth century [...] that, in the Thirties, converges in a subsidiary spirit towards the racist and colonial ideology by now sanctioned by the law" (p. 192). Racism invaded common sense through high-end as well as commercial literature.²

In the summer of 1938, during Cecchi's eight-month trip in the United States, the director of the "Corriere della Sera" commissioned him a series of articles on "America race issue," as Aldo Borelli wrote in a telegram (p. 12). Cecchi's articles were published in the Milanese newspaper between the summer and autumn of 1938, namely during the acme of Fascist racist propaganda leading to the promulgation of the racial laws. He concentrated his attention to the question of "negros," in order to demonstrate that racism was present in American society notwithstanding its declarations of democracy and liberalism.³ The reportages

¹ Gabriele Rigano, "Note sull'antisemitismo in Italia prima del 1938," *Storiografia*, 12 (2008): 215-267.

² See Riccardo Bonavita, *Spettri dell'altro. Letteratura e razzismo nell'Italia contemporanea* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009).

³ See also Pierluigi Allotti, *Giornalisti di regime. La stampa italiana tra fascismo e antifascismo (1922-1948)*, (Rome: Carocci, 2012).

from Libya – where he accompanied Mussolini in 1937 – from the United States and lastly from the Portuguese colonies in Africa, convey the figure of a service-minded “polygraph” for whom prejudice had turned into certainty.

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Darius Staliūnas, *Enemies for a Day: Antisemitism and Anti-Jewish Violence in Lithuania under the Tsars* (Budapest-New York: CEU Press, 2015), pp. 296.

by Marina Mogilner

Darius Staliūnas's book stands apart from most studies dealing with pogrom violence and its discursive representations, even though its subtitle contains references to "antisemitism and anti-Jewish Violence." *Enemies for a Day* raises the question of why in one particular part of the Russian Empire, which the author somewhat problematically calls "Lithuania" and includes in it the imperial provinces of Vilna/Vilnius, Kovno, and Suvalki,¹ Jewish pogroms were rare (no more than ten pogroms during the long nineteenth century) and the "pogrom paradigm" failed to become a universal scenario inevitably leading to the outbreak of anti-Jewish violence. The influence of John Klier, who did much to de-familiarize the pogrom and reframe it as a *problem* of mass violence, is felt throughout the book. It is evident not just in the number of works of the late historian cited by Staliūnas, but in the very logic of his analysis, which seems to be inspired by Klier's line: "To determine what pogroms were, it is essential to consider what they were not."²

Staliūnas begins with defining the pogrom, borrowing his definition from Werner Bergmann: "A one-sided and non-governmental form of social control, as 'self-help by a group' that occurs when no remedy from the state against the threat which another ethnic group poses can be expected... The participants in a pogrom... act against the group as a whole." To this Staliūnas adds the dimensions of time and space: a pogrom is supposed to last at least a few hours, have at least a few dozen participants, and occur in a place of mass congregation (6). He consistently applies this definition to differentiate pogroms from casual violence and confrontation. However, it is not this abstract and somewhat mechanical exercise that makes the book a necessary read for all those interested in interethnic and interconfessional dynamics and anti-Jewish violence in

¹ The definition of "Lithuania" in relation to the tsarist period may seem retrospectively nationalizing, as there was no Lithuania at the time. Staliūnas writes about provinces where Lithuanians formed a sizable part or a slight majority (up to 52 percent) of the local population (except for Vilna). At the same time, he admits that an ethnolinguistic criterion is far from self-evident due to the unstable and porous borders of Lithuanian identity that were only beginning to form in the nineteenth century and the key role played by confessional identities and alliances in regional politics. In the three selected "Lithuanian" provinces, Catholics made up more than half of the population, while Russian Orthodoxy prevailed in the rest.

² John Klier, *Russians, Jews and the Pogroms of 1881–1882* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2011), 59.

“Lithuania.” The real value of Staliūnas’s book is its anthropology of the imperial situation, in which ethnic violence was an important factor.

In Staliūnas’s “Lithuania,” Jewishness, Polishness, or Lithuanian identification appear to be conditioned by multiple factors, ranging from economic to confessional to political. The region’s inhabitants could perceive the political regime as the mob’s sponsor (for Jews could not expect a “remedy from the state”), but at other times, as an ally of Jews against local Catholics. The dynamics on the ground often contradicted the official policies of administrators, who usually wanted to prevent pogroms, which locals interpreted as a betrayal of popular interests. Modern mass party politics became a hostage to competing principles of socialists’ ideological universalism and popular (or elite) nationalism. At the same time, discourses rarely reflected or adequately represented the actions of the non-discursive majority of the Lithuanian-speaking population of villages and small market towns. Nevertheless, by the early twentieth century, each group had learned to manipulate the power of discourses to their advantage.

Thus, Staliūnas shows that pogroms or their absence cannot be explained from any single perspective associated with fixed identities (solely Jewish or purely Lithuanian) and in simple binaries such as the “antisemitic state vs. Jews,” “Christians vs. Jews,” “Lithuanians vs. Jews,” or the generic “perpetrators vs. victims.” Instead, we are offered a complex model embedded in the imperial situation of multiple actors whose identities, group alliances, and choices evolved from one concrete situation to another, and were conditioned by various factors. Therefore, only “microanalysis... in a specific place and time” (10–11) can reveal how and why habitual tensions and conflicts escalated (or did not escalate) to violence; how and why a specific encounter of concrete individuals, Jews and Gentiles, evolved (or did not evolve) into aggression against Jews as a group; how hatred or distrust turned (or did not turn) into violence. In the end, Staliūnas establishes structural regularities behind the specific cases and contexts that he analyses, but to present his findings as a coherent explanation of why there were so few pogroms in Lithuania, he resorts to a comparative perspective. This is a truly pan-imperial comparison in which the situation in the Lithuanian lands is compared to other imperial borderlands such as the Belarusian provinces (Grodno, Minsk, Vitebsk, and Mogilev) or Galicia in Austro-Hungary. Moreover, Staliūnas adds a non-territorial comparable by discussing physical clashes between Lithuanians and Poles in Catholic churches over the language of supplementary church services. His multidimensional comparison shows how a specific configuration of the imperial situation—a combination of often

structurally incompatible factors (apples and oranges growing on the same tree of some hybrid breed)—produces different dynamics of group conflicts.

The first five chapters of the book cover the anthropology of local conflicts as well as their discursive and political reality in minute detail. While the narrative may seem somewhat slow and even repetitive, the last, sixth chapter, “Comparative Perspective,” moves along quickly and is intellectually the most exciting. It sets a challenging benchmark for future scholarship that will be hard to reach. Staliūnas demonstrates a most impressive command of international historiographies, multilingualism (he engages primary sources in at least five different languages), and a deep knowledge of multiple archives in several countries. Moreover, his analysis is based on a profound understanding of the multidimensional reality of imperial societies and the logics of their *modi operandi*.

Empire as a composite and entangled space functions in the book as a context-setting category, a specific medium for the circulation of information and experiences. Thus, Staliūnas identifies news of pogroms that happened in other parts of the empire among the reasons for the rise of Judeophobic sentiment in Lithuanian lands. However, the effect of such news inversely correlated with a region’s degree of economic and social integration (see the comparison of “Lithuania” to the southern regions of Belarus, which bordered on Ukrainian Kiev and Chernigov provinces and accommodated more economic migrants). Among other factors that reduced the intensity of anti-Jewish violence in “Lithuania” were tensions between the higher echelons of imperial authorities in the region and the lower strata of officials and civil servants embedded in their local societies. Religious Judeophobia was always present in the Lithuanian countryside; however, as the book shows, it required the reinforcement of other factors to fuel modern pogroms. Economic transition at the turn of the century, when some Christians attempted to enter traditional Jewish commercial niches, contributed to the rise of mutual animosity and competition. However, general economic development or rather the underdevelopment of the Lithuanian lands (compared to other regions with Jewish populations) halted the influence of economic competition that in other settings would have generated deadly national confrontations. In “Lithuania,” there were no swiftly growing industrial towns swelled by an uprooted migrant workforce. Staliūnas also shows that the influence of modern nationalisms, Lithuanian in particular, on the rise of collective violence was minimal. The local imperial situation encouraged a search for collective allies, as there were always more than two competing ethno-confessional groups, equally alienated from Russian officialdom. The competition with Poles and Russians sometimes encouraged Lithuanians to find

allies in Jews (as during elections to the imperial Dumas). Staliūnas points to a similar dynamic in Eastern Galicia, where there were also very few pogroms and where Ruthenians identified Poles rather than Jews as their principal adversary. These structural arrangements are contextualized in the book in the thick description of specific circumstances of particular conflicts. Staliūnas characterizes most of them as small-town violence or “shtetl-type pogroms,” which were rooted in domestic disagreements and long histories of neighborly relations. As a rule, it was not possible for these conflicts to continue for several days because villagers gathered for a religious festivity or on market day had to go home to resume their daily business. Local Jews well understood the “rules of the game” and rarely politicized it, including in the form of armed self-defense, while their neighbors were more interested in re-establishing ethnic, confessional, and economic hierarchy (“to put Jews in their place”) rather than in a genocidal solution.

Staliūnas’s answer to the question of why there were so few pogroms in “Lithuania” is as complex as was the society that he studies, which is the best confirmation of the author’s historical and analytical accuracy.

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Jonathan Goldstein, *Jewish Identities in East and Southeast Asia* (Oldenbourg: De Gruyter, 2015) pp. xxii-243.

by Marcella Simoni

This volume is a most interesting collection of essays on the history of seven distinct Jewish communities in East and Southeast Asia: Singapore, Manila, Taiwan, Rangoon, Surabaya, Harbin and Shanghai. Hong Kong has not been included here mainly because it remains the “most intensely studied of any modern East Asian Jewish community” (p. 11). The A. adopted a transnational framework for each case, thus expanding on these communities both geographically and chronologically. In the broadest sense, all of them were located “around the China Sea basin” (p. 5), and the timeframe of the A.’s analysis spans from the late 18th century to the present. Some of these histories overlap chronologically, intertwine through the whereabouts of the Baghdadi Diaspora or present some shared traits, but every case is different. The sources of this multi-vocal volume are numerous and varied: archival collections in Europe (Alliance Israelite Universelle in Paris and the Hartley Library in Southampton), Israel (at least Central Zionist Archives, Jabotinsky Institute, Igud Yotzei Sin, Yad Vashem) the US (at least American Joint Distribution Committee, Harvard, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research). Thirty-eight oral history interviews with Jews from all walks of life that have been involved in East and Southeast Asia integrate the written sources and so does a very rich bibliography that also includes unpublished reports, memoirs etc. Considering these first elements, this volume appears precious for the wealth of knowledge it displays, for the published and unpublished bibliography and for the perspectives it opens; at the same time, the idea of studying “East and Southeast Asian Jewish identity in terms of (...) memory, colonialism/imperialism, regional nationalism, socialism and Zionism” is necessarily too broad to offer a coherent picture throughout the volume.

There are some common founding factors that make these different Jewish histories compatible and connected: for instance, their establishment as “seaport cities” and trading centers of the East and Southeast Asian commerce, a situation that David Sorkin and Lois Dubin studied for different contexts (p. 5)¹; the

¹ Of the various works by David Sorkin and Lois Dubin on seaport cities, the A. quotes here two. David Sorkin, “Port Jews in three regions of Emancipation” in *Port Jews: Jewish Communities in Cosmopolitan Maritime Trading Centres 1550-1950*, ed. David Cesarani (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 31-46 and Lois Dubin, “Researching Port Jews and Port Jewries: Trieste and Beyond” in

condition of being expatriates and refugees in different historical moments and to different degrees, that most of the Jews who inhabited these places shared; the memorialization rituals, whether ‘root’ trips, reunions, websites, multilingual periodicals etc. (p. 8; p. 195) that many Jews from East and Southeast Asia have created. Support for the Zionist call represented another unifying factor for these communities, though the times and means of such support differed greatly from place to place: from the proto-Zionist Baghdadi rabbi Yosef Hayyim Ben Elijah (Ben Ish Hai, 1835-1909), to the first Zionist society among Baghdadi Jews, established in Burma in 1903 and in China in 1904 (p. 25); from the publication of «The Israelight» magazine in Singapore (1934-37) to the foundation of the labor HaShomer HaTzair and HaBonim youth movements in Harbin, Singapore and Shanghai (p. 11); from the spread of Revisionist Zionism in Harbin and the involvement of the Olmert family (p. 113) up to the long history of Zionism in Shanghai and the later establishment of the *Igud Yotzei Sin*, the organization that reunites in Israel today the Jews who have left China, and in part shelters their official memory.

At the same time, the tumultuous political history and changes that invested some of these sites during the twentieth century – Russia and China, just to mention two obvious examples – does not help the coherence of the volume. Indeed the A. remarks how, as in the case of other Jewish historical experiences elsewhere, here too one should use the term Diaspora in its plural form, remembering the multiplicity, variety and diversity of the Jewish historical experience. Such diversity is addressed here for example by emphasizing the diverse political attitudes of the Jews residing in one or the other community: the Bundists of Harbin and the Jewish supporters of Leninism and the Third International in the Philippines and in various Chinese cities in the 1930s; the adherents to the Trotskyist Fourth International in Shanghai and those who supported Mao Zedong’s first socialist enclaves in the 1940s. The variety of the Jewish religious experience also remains a sign of their diversity, ranging from the Orthodox Baghdadi historical community of Singapore (p. 17) and Shanghai (p. 137) to that of ultra-Orthodox refugees in Shanghai during World War II (p. 196) from the to the secular and multi-ethnic post-war Jewish community of Manila (p. 76) to the presence of Chabad in Taiwan from the mid 1990s (p. 100). Equally diverse were the various modes of philanthropy and of associationism that East and Southeast Asian Jews adopted.

ivi, 47-58. In the same volume the A. reflects on “The Sorkin and Golab theses and their applicability to South, Southeast and East Asian Port Jewry,” in *Ivi*, 179-196.

In a sense, the eight chapters of this volume recall the image of a multi-vocal choir. Chapter one and eight function respectively as introduction and conclusions while chapters two, five, six and seven echo one another, representing the core of this volume. They share broad compatible timeframes (1795- 2015), the Baghdadi identity and provenance of the Jews who inhabited them, the relevance in terms of size of the community throughout this long period, and they all suffered the Japanese occupation. Chapters three and four discuss two other different variants of “multicultural, multiethnic and transnational Jewish identity in East and Southeast Asian soil” (p. 45), i.e. a long-term perspective on the Jewish community of the Philippines, and Manila in particular (ch.3) and the case of Taipei (ch.4).

Chapter two is intended to set the tone of the volume, looking at the Baghdadi Jewish Diaspora, a topic which has been examined extensively. However, while the history of the Baghdadi Jews is usually told through their commercial and philanthropic involvement in Bombay, Calcutta, Shanghai and/or Hong Kong (according to the period under examination), the focus is here on Singapore. As the A. writes, this Jewish community “proved to be the most enduring in terms of its retention of traditional Judaism, the magnitude of its Baghdadi-related Judaic institutions, and the endurance of its pre- and post-World-War II Jewish population” (p. 16). From 1795 to 2015 this history intertwines with that of the opium trade and colonialism, with Zionism, with the question of Jewish refugees during World War II, with the Japanese occupation, with anti-colonial struggles and, after 1948, with the role played by the Jews in Singapore in helping (and then cultivating) a relationship with the State of Israel. Chapter five delves with the history of the Jews in Harbin, between Russia, China, Japan (and later Israel). The long history of this extraordinary community is well known and, in general, so are the multiple influences that shaped its cultural and political life for Jews and non-Jews alike, as the vast bibliography that the A. quotes shows: a multicultural population composed by at least 120,000 Russians until the mid-1930s, by Chinese (300,000) and Koreans (34,000) and by a tripling Japanese population (15,000 in 1932); the momentous events of the first half of the 20th century (two world wars, two major local wars, two revolutions involving civil wars); the shifting of at least five political authorities (Czarist Russia until 1917, local warlord Chang Tsolin (Zhang Zuolin) until 1931, the Japanese puppet regime of Manchukuo until 1945, the Red Army until 1946 and the Chinese Communist Party afterwards). As the A. writes, all these conditions caused a “constant inflow and outflow of individuals (...) that created an environment

with a wide range of political, economic, and religious thought”. In this conditions “Harbin’s Jewish community flourished” (p. 108). It hosted a minority of Karaites, Orthodox Judaism, and a *maskil* rabbi, a Komsomol youth organization and a Third International communist party in which some Jews were active; it also hosted an important branch of the Zionist Revisionist Betar youth movement, which counted among its most active members the whole Olmert family, and thus the father of future Israeli Likud Prime Minister. A large section of this chapter is indeed devoted to “The Olmert family as a case study of Transnational Identity” (pp.113-128). Chapter six focuses on the long and fascinating history of Shanghai and on how successive waves of Jewish immigration had created by the early 1940s “a microcosm and mosaic of Eurasian-Jewish identities. (...) American Jews and Baghdadis came first, then Russians, and finally Central and Eastern Europeans fleeing Hitler” (p. 137). A large part of this chapter is dedicated to Shanghai as a center of Jewish refuge during World War II, to the cultural activities of central European provenance and to the clandestine political activity that took place there. As the impressive bibliography listed in these pages show, this subject has been investigated from multiple angles and a good synthesis is offered here. Finally, chapter seven takes two different Southeast Asian cities (Rangoon, today Yangon) and Surabaya (Java, Indonesia) to study how “a multicultural, multiethnic and transnational Jewish identity” was formed here (p.177). The histories of Jewish settlement here differ, but both present a very strong connection to respectively British and Dutch colonial expansion, a strong component of Baghdadi Jews, a very early start in Zionist organizations, the Japanese (and Nazi in Surabaya) presence and internment and post-World War Two anti-colonial struggle for independence.

The last two chapters (ch. 3 and 4) appear less well integrated with the others. The former focuses on Manila’s long-term historical engagement with Jews from the first possible arrivals in 1590s as “new Christians”, to the more plausible landings of a small group of Jews trading in diamonds and precious stones after the Franco-Prussian war (1870). When Spain ceded the Philippines to the US after the Spanish-American War (1898), another component of this Jewish community arrived, i.e. the American military personnel. Manila then welcomed Egyptian, Turkish, Syrian Jews on the one hand and Jews fleeing after the Bolshevik revolution on the other. By 1918, Manila had about 150 Jews mainly engaged in trade; unlike the Baghdadis examined above, they did not follow ethnic networking for their commerce (p. 47). A large part of this chapter is devoted to the question of the Philippine’s attitude towards Holocaust refugees, which was an example of selective rather than open Jewish immigration (p. 49)

and to the fate of Jews and non-Jews alike during the Japanese occupation (1941-45). Despite their marginality on East and Southeast Asian scene, this chapter closes with a contemporary description of the so-called “Bagel Boys”, i.e. a new wealthy class of Jewish American or Israeli males married to women from the Philippines, often living in gated communities with servants, worshipping in each other’s homes according to an Ashkenazi *minhag*, thus setting themselves out of the mainstream Sephardic orthodox synagogue of Manila (which follows the tradition from Aleppo), and of its multi-layered though small traditional community. Finally, chapter four focuses on Taiwan, where a Jewish community existed in Taipei since the 1950s to whom this volume is dedicated. Given the complex role of Taiwan in the post-war East and Southeast Asian scenario - from the Korean to the Vietnam wars to the US economic, political and military involvement – the small Jewish community initially consisted mainly of US military personnel, US and Israeli citizens employed by private companies and it then grew to include Israeli dealers in arms and electronics (p. 84). In 1972 it consisted of twenty families which had grown to fifty in 1980 and now maintains an average of thirty. The path of the Jewish community of Taiwan has been one marked by a religious factionalism that has recently come to include a Chabad presence. This chapter is the least historical in the volume, not only for the recent foundation of the Jewish community, but because of the A.’s personal involvement with this community. The personal perspective is often introduced *en lieu* of the documentary source. And while the A.’s testimony can be considered as valid as any other testimony that he himself collected (for example the oral history interviews), this chapter signals a lack of distance from the subject under examination.

Despite this last point, this remains an altogether useful volume that brings together compatible and fascinating histories and opens the way to new avenues of research.

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