

The University of Messina Targeted by the Regime

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Abstract. One text that more than any other is quoted when trying to get an idea of the impact of Fascist state anti-Semitism on Sicilian universities, *Repulisti ebraico* by Mario Genco, a journalist who precociously published an – albeit incomplete – critical and perceptive picture of the 1938 persecution in Sicily.

Keywords: University; Jews; Reintegration

Jews in the University of Messina?

One text that more than any other is quoted when trying to get an idea of the impact of Fascist state anti-Semitism on Sicilian universities, *Repulisti ebraico* by Mario Genco, a journalist who precociously published an – albeit incomplete – critical and perceptive picture of the 1938 persecution in Sicily¹. His study has in particular been used as the source of information regarding the census of the Jews of 22 August 1938, as reported by the Sicilian press in October 1938. The detail of the month of publication is relevant, as will be explained shortly.

The author wrote:

In Sicily, application of the racial laws enacted by the Fascist government in September and November 1938 had been quantitatively irrelevant: not so much due to a lack of will, but to a lack of people affected. The census published in October in the newspapers had revealed the presence of 202 citizens of Jewish origin on the island. A drop in the ocean, considering [Sicily's] almost four and a half million inhabitants, divided into small groups, living in only six provinces. In Palermo, 96 were recorded; 75 in Catania; 21 in Messina; 4 in Agrigento; and 3 in Siracusa and Enna. There was also a fluctuating group of refugees from other European nations where discrimination and persecution were already underway [...]².

Until today, with the sole exception of the observations made by Alessandro Hoffmann, which however in the absence of detailed explanations cannot be adopted wholesale³, the picture of the Sicilian census provided by Genco has been accepted by historians and broader public opinion almost unfiltered. Already Giorgio Israel and Pietro Nastasi, in their *Scienza e razza nell'Italia fascista*, referring to an article by the Sicilian journalist, back in 1998 observed⁴: “Across the island, the census published in the newspapers in October 1938 revealed the presence of only 202 citizens of Jewish

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¹ Cf. his *Repulisti ebraico. Le leggi razziali in Sicilia: 1938-1943*, Istituto Gramsci Siciliano, Palermo, 2000.

² Ivi, p. 35.

³ Hoffmann, on p. 20 of his *Storia di una famiglia di origine ebrea a Palermo*, Qanat, Palermo, 2017, in fact writes that according to the only census of Italian Jews of 1938, Sicilians numbered 330, of whom 202 were Italian and 128 foreign, “divided as follows: Palermo 96+59 = 155; Catania, 75+38 = 113; Messina, 21+21 = 42; Agrigento, 4+4 = 8; Siracusa, 3+3 = 6; Enna, 3+3 = 6; while there were none in Trapani, Ragusa or Caltanissetta”. However, the author failed to clarify where he had obtained this data.

⁴The article in question is *Ebrei, dalla Sicilia il primo passo per cancellare l'infamia antisemita*, in “Giornale di Sicilia”, 15 April 1997.

origin. ‘A drop in the ocean’, said Mario Genco, compared to the island’s four and a half million inhabitants, and divided into very small groups distributed in only six provinces”⁵.

They went on to report the data already quoted from the Sicilian census⁶.

More recently, the exhibition entitled *La persecuzione degli ebrei in Italia. “Documenti per una storia”*, inaugurated on 25 January 2016 and organized jointly by the Ministry of the Interior, the CDEC, the Prefecture and the University of Catania, in the panels recounting stories of Sicilian Jews, also presented the data already published by Genco on the census of the island⁷.

However, an analysis of the paper documentation kept at the Central State Archives and the State Archives in Messina and Palermo gives a more blurred picture. In particular, in the case of Messina we can observe that from August 1938 to the following October the number of Jews recorded had gone from the original 25 to 21⁸, a fact that cannot be ignored if we want to clarify the question of the expulsion of the Jews from the University of Messina, also because the four cancelled from the original list were, as we shall see, university teachers. Indeed, on 17 August 1938 the police chief of Messina, stressing that “there is no Israelite community in this provincial capital”, sent the local prefect “an initial list of names of those resident in this city, of Jewish race, divided by nationality (Italian and foreign)”. Among the five Jews of Italian nationality recorded, four were referred to as professors: “Dr. Prof. Stefano Puglisi Allegra, son of the late Francesco”, “Prof. Vittorio Siracusa, son of the late Giuseppe”, “Isaya Dr. Prof. Angelo Isaya, son of the late Francesco”, “Dr. Prof. Guido Izar, son of Antonio”⁹. And these were, as has been said, teachers engaged in various capacities at the University of Messina. However, in the following days the police chief of Messina rectified the personal details of three of the four professors previously designated as “Jews”, without explaining in detail the reason for this amendment. On 23 August, he wrote to the prefect that “With reference to my note of 17 August, I report that Prof. Guido Izar, son of the late Antonio, on the basis of information provided by the Milan Police Headquarters, is of Italian origin and consequently must be removed from the list submitted”. The next day he asked the *podestà* and the prefect to “return to this office the files of Prof. Siracusa Dr. Liborio [*recte* Vittorio] and Puglisi Stefano Allegra, since [*they*], following further checks, were found not to belong to the Jewish race”¹⁰.

Unfortunately, investigations carried out at the Messina registry office and at the national and local state archives did not provide further details on the reasons for this cancellation. The documentary

⁵ *Scienza e razza nell’Italia fascista*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 1998, p. 241.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁷ The exhibition, which I took part in by producing panels on Sicilian deportees to the Nazi concentration and death camps, was coordinated by Giuseppe Speciale. For an account of this, see *Tullia Giardina, 1938-1945. La persecuzione degli Ebrei in Italia. Documenti per una storia*, in “Giornale di Storia Contemporanea”, 1/2016, pp. 199-201. The exhibition can be viewed online at: www.lex.unict.it/sites/default/files/allegati/.../files/pannelli_mostra.pdf (consulted on 3 June 2019).

⁸ Information on the numbers of Italian and foreign Jews distinguished by province is available at the Archivio centrale dello Stato (henceforth ACS), Ministero degli Interni, Direzione generale demografia e razza (1938-1943), Busta 4, *Fascicolo Situazione generale degli ebrei in Italia*, documento *Censimento ebrei italiani e stranieri (agosto 1938)*. For the province of Messina there are 25, of whom 21 are present and 4 temporarily absent; for the province of Palermo there are 126, of whom 114 present and 12 temporarily absent. The 25 Messinese Jews mentioned above coincide numerically with the list of names sent on 17 August 1938 by the police chief of Messina to the local prefect, regarding which I refer to the text.

⁹ Cf. Archivio di Stato di Messina (henceforth ASME), Prefettura, Gabinetto I versamento, Busta 80. The other Jew of Italian nationality registered was Massimiliano Morpurgo. Then there were foreign Jews: Gustavo Hochfeld, son of the late Isacco (head of the family), Geltrude Sinomohn Hochfeld, daughter of the late Ially (wife), Ursula Hochfeld, daughter of Gustavo (daughter), Kurt Walter Hochfeld, son of the late Giulio (head of the family), Ioplin Minden, daughter of the late Ivan (wife), Gerland Hochfeld, son of Kurt (son), Charlotte Meiurath, daughter of the late Leopoldo (guest), Ludwig Rotschhold, son of the late Alberto (head of the family), Oskar Benndorf, son of the late Walter (head of the family), Elly Benndorf, daughter of Richard (wife), Simone Wasserlanf, son of Isacco (alone), Egon Sürth, son of the late Adolfo (alone), Leon Weissenberg, son of the late Alessandro (head of the family), Fanny Iancovici, daughter of the late Sigmund (wife), Carolina Vexler, daughter of the late Lupu (mother-in-law), Better Iancovici, daughter of the late Sigmund (sister-in-law), Ernesto Godfinger, son of the late Ella (head of the family), Friedal Plier, daughter of Giuseppe (wife), Emilia Weissenberg, daughter of the late Sigismondo (alone), Gerd Hleinz Katz, son of the late Alberto (alone).

¹⁰ Missives in ivi.

disorder of the University of Messina Archives also currently make it not possible to obtain further information¹¹. However, a systematic examination of the Yearbooks of the University of Messina from the advent of Fascism to the immediate post-war period, shows that these people basically remained in the university¹².

Guido Izar, son of the late Antonio and of Adele Bellani, was born in Milan on 8 November 1883¹³. He qualified as an untenured lecturer in Special Medical Pathology by decree of the Minister of Public Education of 27 July 1911, at the University of Catania: his teacher, Maurizio Ascoli, was dismissed in Palermo in 1938 under the anti-Semitic laws¹⁴.

He had been a member of the National Fascist Party (henceforth, PNF) since 1925 and entered service at the university on 16 March 1926, as a teacher of General Medical Clinical Medicine and Medical Therapy. On 16 March 1929 he was promoted to full professor. In the 1939-1940 academic year he would be transferred to Siena, as professor of General Clinical Medicine and Medical Therapy at the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery. He would conclude his career there, retiring on 1 November 1959 after reaching the age limit¹⁵.

Stefano Allegra Puglisi, son of Giovanni and of Rosa Grioli, born in Messina on 19 January 1889¹⁶, however, already in the 1924-1925 academic year was recorded as an untenured lecturer in Special Surgical Pathology and was assigned teaching duties in Dentistry and Surgical Medicine at the University of Messina. After disappearing from the yearbooks between 1935 and 1941, which therefore does not seem to be for “racial” reasons, he reappears in the 1943-1944 academic year as an untenured lecturer in Special Medical Pathology, and then disappears for good after 1944-1945¹⁷.

In 1925-1926 Vittorio Siracusa, son of Giuseppe and of Grazia Pulejo, born in Messina on 10 November 1896¹⁸, was instead assistant professor of Forensic Medicine at the university. In the 1930-1931 academic year he would hold the position of untenured lecturer in Forensic Medicine, and on 1 December 1940 would become a full professor in the subject. He continued his career in Messina, where there is evidence of him until 1945-1946¹⁹.

¹¹ In fact, at the State Archives of Messina, no detailed material on the subject was found, and the papers filed at the ACS also appear to be inadequate: here, in fact, as will be explained in greater detail below, only material regarding Guido Izar and Angelo Isya was found, but in neither case in connection with the dramatic turn of events in 1938 linked to State anti-Semitism. As for the historical archive of the University of Messina, I requested access, and despite having received positive feedback from the vice-chancellor, Prof. Giovanni Moschella, have not yet been able to access it due to the state of disorder of the records and the unsafe conditions of the place where they are stored, as was explained to me by my colleague Luigi Chiara. Regarding the Messina registry office, I obtained the family status certificate of Massimiliano Morpurgo, the birth certificate of Vittorio Siracusa and the birth certificate of Allegra Stefano Puglisi, but no other information.

¹² On the University of Messina, see Andrea Romano, *L'Università degli Studi di Messina, negli anni Venti e Trenta del Novecento*, in Rosario Battaglia, Michela D'Angelo, Santi Fedele, Massimo Lo Curzio (eds.), *Messina negli anni Venti e Trenta, Una città meridionale tra stagnazione e fermenti culturali*, Atti del Convegno di Studi promosso dall'Istituto di Studi Storici Gaetano Salvemini (Messina 3-5 ottobre 1996), Messina, 1997.

¹³ Cf. birth certificate in ACS, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Direzione generale dell'istruzione universitaria. Divisione prima, *Fascicoli personali dei professori ordinari*, III versamento 1940 – 1970, Busta 253.

¹⁴ ACS, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Fascicoli personali dei liberi docenti, I versamento, 1 serie, Busta 215. In the 1925-1926 academic year his name appears in the yearbook of the University of Messina, where he appears, as a “temporary” teacher of Medical Pathology, assigned with the teaching post for Clinical Medicine: cf. *Annuario della R. Università di Messina 1925-1926 (Anno CCCLXXVI dalla Fondazione)*, Industrie Grafiche Meridionali, S. A., Messina, 1927, p. 47.

¹⁵ In ACS, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Direzione generale dell'istruzione universitaria. Divisione prima. Fascicoli personali dei professori ordinari, III versamento 1940 – 1970, Busta 253.

¹⁶ Cf. his birth certificate, kept at the Messina registry office.

¹⁷ Cf. the *Annuari della R. Università di Messina* for the academic years 1924-1925 (pp. 72-73), 1925-1926 (pp. 47-48), 1926-1927 (pp. 69-70), 1928-1929 (p. 120), 1930-1931 (p. 123), 1931-1932 (pp. 105, 107), 1932-1933 (pp. 93, 95), 1933-1934 (p. 85), 1934-1935 (p. 85), 1943-1944.

¹⁸ See his birth certificate kept at the Messina registry office.

¹⁹ Cf. *Annuari della Regia Università di Messina* for the years 1925-1926, (p. 81), 1926-1927 (p. 73), 1928-1929 (p. 125), 1930-1931 (p. 125), 1931-1932 (p. 107), 1932-1933 (p. 96), 1933-1934 (p. 80), 1934-1935 (p. 88), 1935-1936 (p. 123), 1936-1937 (p. 117), 1937-1938 (p. 95), 1938-1939, 1939-1940, 1940-1941.

The name of Angelo Isaia, son of Francesco and of Santa Interdonato, born in Nizza di Sicilia (province of Messina), appears in the 1925-1926 academic year as an unpaid lecturer in Traumatology at the University of Messina. From 1930-1931 he was a untenured lecturer in Surgical Pathology, and remained so almost continuously until 1945-1946²⁰. On 30 June 1909 the Minister of Education had in fact approved his qualification as a lecturer in Special Surgical Pathology, at the University of Rome, following his request on 29 January 1909. Subsequently, in 1917 Isaia requested a transfer to the University of Messina, which was granted.²¹ On 14 December 1945, by decree of the headquarters of the Allied military government, he would be one of the members expelled from the Accademia Peloritana “for political reasons and for his activity in favour of the previous Fascist regime”²².

Anti-Semitism in Messina

The absence of expulsions of Jews from the University, according to the documentation examined so far, should not lead us to believe that the Fascist regime and the rampant anti-Semitism of 1938 had not taken root in Messina. On the contrary, research shows both the inclusion of anti-Semitic rhetoric in the speeches and conduct of some of the local university chancellors, and an attitude that is no less accommodating towards political opponents, so much so that as emerges from the capillary research of Enza Pelleriti, also Messina university staff were subjected to a purge in the post-war period.

In the inaugural speech of the 1938-1939 academic year, the chancellor of the University of Messina, Gaetano Vinci, observed:

This University of ours – which has the privilege of being among the purest [*my emphasis*] in Italy – is therefore right to be proud of its Students, and it is for this reason that the brief report which, as is my duty, I am about to give you on the progress of the studies and the accomplishments implemented during year XVI, albeit based on arid figures and the schematic exposition of the facts, cannot but be pervaded by the palpitating breath of poetry that arises from the perennial flow of young sap, every year infused into its old, yet flourishing trunk²³.

On 29 October 1939 Salvatore Maggiore took over from Vinci, and in his inaugural speech in the 1939-1940 academic year, showed his strong attachment to the Fascist regime and a sympathetic attitude to the racial question:

The Fascist regime – of which I would almost say students represent the vanguard, through a continuous process of selection, under vigilant, rigorous monitoring, with the formation of the Militia, which gathers in its ranks and educates our university students in the virtues of discipline and sacrifice through the multiple organizations that are part of the University Fascist Groups – has so changed the moral structure of the universities, has so transformed the mindset of the young, with regard to their position and responsibility in the various social sectors, that it is no exaggeration to say that little is left of the ancient university tradition, a legacy of times past (Toga included). This selection process, which began with the rise of Fascism to power, developed with its evolution, and culminated with the removal from the School of those of undesirable race who believed they could turn the Italian universities into nothing short of a personal fiefdom. With this wise and timely provision, the Italian universities have been reconquered for the Nation and their fascistization may be considered complete²⁴.

²⁰ Cf. the *Annuari della Regia Università di Messina* for the academic years 1925-1926 (p. 47), 1930-1931 (p. 124), 1931-1932 (p. 106), 1932-1933 (p. 95), 1933-1934 (p. 87), 1934-1935 (p. 86), 1935-1936 (p. 122), 1936-1937 (p. 116), 1937-1938 (p. 103), 1938-1939 (p. 85), 1939-1940 (p. 88), 1940-1941 (p. 72), 1943-1944 (p. 79), 1944-1945 (p. 94), 1945-1946 (p. 136).

²¹ ACS, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione- Direzione generale istruzione superiore- Divisione prima- Fascicoli personali dei liberi docenti, 1° versamento 1910-1950. Prima serie 1910-1930, Busta 215.

²² Cf. Enza Pelleriti, “*Italy in Transition*”. *La vicenda degli Allied Military Professors negli Atenei siciliani fra emergenza e defascistizzazione*, Bonanno, Acireale-Roma, 2013, pp. 96-337. In the text he is referred to as Angelo Isaia.

²³ *Annuario della Regia Università degli Studi di Messina*, Anno accademico 1938-1939, cit., p. 8.

²⁴ *Annuario della Regia Università degli Studi di Messina*, Anno accademico 1939-1940, cit., pp. 9-10.

An indicator of the pervasive climate of hostility towards the Jews and political opponents inherent in the Fascist regime can be seen in the university at the time of the assignment of courses to teachers. For example, in the 1939-1940 academic year at least two people appeared to be under scrutiny: one was Nicola Putorì, whose assignment to the course in Legal Papyrology was not confirmed by decision of the chancellor, since his membership of the PNF had been cancelled. The previous year it had been the turn of Girolamo Penso, an untenured lecturer in Criminal Law and Procedure, subject of a negative report from the provincial party secretary in Messina, who had moreover observed that he was “unpleasant”, not least due to the rumoured Jewish ancestry of his family²⁵.

On 8 August 1939 the chancellor Gaetano Vinci informed the Minister of Education that the PNF Federation of the province of Messina, in a letter dated 4 August 1939, had written to the chancellor that the secretary of the PNF considered the inclusion of Professor Nicola Putorì to be null and void, due to “political precedents which have emerged”:

As a result of this, since the aforementioned professor had failed to enrol in the PNF, I kindly ask this Honourable Ministry to deem the proposal of entrusting the course on Legal Papyrology to Prof. Nicola Putorti (no. 14 in the summary list of proposals for the assignment of teaching posts for the Faculty of Law, submitted with the above-mentioned chancellor’s letter) to have never been made²⁶.

Regarding Girolamo Penso, on 11 October of that same year, the minister Bottai had written to the chancellor of Messina, asking him not to accept the proposal to assign to Penso the course in Italian and Comparative Constitutional Law for the 1939-1940 academic year. On 22 August 1938 the Messina provincial party secretary had in fact informed the Minister of Education that Girolamo Penso, born in 1906, and a member of the PNF since 29 July 1925, was still a member of the provincial rectorate, but would not be reconfirmed in this post:

“He has distinct faults from a Fascist point of view. With a constancy worthy of a better cause, he has continually importuned all the organs of the Party, Ministry, etc., exploiting casual acquaintances with well-known figures, firmly intent on obtaining any position which can give him the two advantages of financial profit and the dignity of “authority”. He tries to make it clear at any cost that he is not destined to remain in the background. He has turned hierarchies and authorities upside down in order to have honours conferred on him, and a few years ago the Ministry of the Interior, in order to be appointed dean of the provincial administration. Locally, this led to ironic comments and heartfelt hilarity. Of poor intelligence, he possesses a mediocre level of learning that he has tried to pass off as genuine and brilliant using the method of unbridled self propaganda, charlatanism, and conduct that clearly shows a self-aggrandizing intent. He is widely disliked, perhaps also due to the rumours regarding the Jewish ancestry of his family, which for some generations has been in business in Messina [...]. I express a negative opinion on his suitability to hold the position he asked and certainly pressed you for”²⁷.

Nevertheless, in the 1940-1941 academic year both Penso and Putorì would be assigned teaching duties for the respective subjects attributed to them²⁸. However, in the immediate post-war period, Girolamo Penso would be among those expelled from the Accademia Peloritana “for activities carried out in favour of the former Fascist regime”²⁹.

²⁵ Cf. the document *Incarichi di insegnamento* dated 6 October 1939; in ACS, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Direzione Generale Istruzione Superiore (1908-1961). *Incarichi di insegnamento, commissioni, libere docenze, corsi di cultura, Messina 1939-1940*, Busta 19. Moreover, on 14 July 1939 the chancellor of the University of Messina, Gaetano Vinci, had written to the Minister of Education, enclosing copies of the minutes of the meetings of the various faculties of the University of Messina, for the assignment of the teaching posts for the 1939-1940 academic year. The proposals had been made by the Academic Senate at the 26 June meeting, and were accompanied by a request to the minister to approve them. “I am pleased to assure you that all the persons designated for the assignment of teaching posts belong to the Italian race,” he wrote.

²⁶ Cf. Ivi.

²⁷ Ivi.

²⁸ Ivi, Buste 23 and 25.

²⁹ Cf. in this regard Enza Pelleriti, “*Italy in Transition*”, cit., pp. 96, 337. Quotation on p. 337.

Persecutions of anti-fascists

To complete the picture of the persecutory activities also involving the University of Messina, it is worth mentioning two important examples of people not called to take up their posts by the Minister of Education Fedele because they diverged from the *Weltanschauung* of the Fascist regime: These were Arturo Labriola and Gustavo Ingresso³⁰.

Arturo Labriola was born in Naples on 21 January 1873. In 1926 he would be first in the shortlist of three possible candidates for the chair of Political Economics in Messina. On 9 December that same year, the Minister of Education, Fedele, approved the documents regarding the selection procedure. The members of the Messina Law Faculty would meet on 30 December, proposing his appointment for the chair he had been selected for: if he failed to accept, it would go to Roberto Michels. However, on 15 February 1927 Fedele suddenly refused the appointment of Labriola, since he was “morally and politically unworthy” and designated Giuseppe Ugo Papi in his place, since Michels had turned the job down³¹.

Gustavo Ingresso, for his part, was born in Gallipoli (province of Lecce) on 2 May 1877. In 1926 he would be one of the three shortlisted candidates for the chair of Administrative Law and Administrative Science at the University of Messina, but would not be appointed by the Minister of Education for political reasons. In fact, a note from the Directorate-General for Education stated that Ingresso had not been appointed because according to the High Commissioner he had belonged to the Freemasons, had been associated with Nitti in his professional practice and in 1925 had published an anti-fascist book, entitled *La crisi dello Stato*. In order to re-examine the question of his failure to be appointed, his moral and political conduct would need to be thoroughly assessed. On 16 February 1927, in a penned note, Ingresso wrote: “I hope that this time at least my prayers will be answered. A further refusal would definitively close for me the doors of an academic career, *because the two years since the selection procedure are almost up*”. On the 22nd, in a letter to the Minister of Education, he observed that since he had been shortlisted in the selection procedure for Messina by the law faculty of that same university, he could have been appointed professor of the chair, but the minister had not followed up on that possibility for political reasons. Now he was presented with a new opportunity: on 15 February the Faculty of Law of the University of Bari, since the holder of the chair of Messina had been appointed, would appoint Ingresso for the chair of Administrative Law. The interested party thus requested a new decision from the minister.

On 15 December 1927 he would send him another letter, summarizing his story once again and reminding him that he had not actually been appointed even after being designated by the University of Bari. Now, at the beginning of the academic year, the chair of Administrative Law still remained empty in Bari, and had also become vacant in Messina. Ingresso in fact wrote: “I humbly ask Your Excellency to review my position”.

Consequently, on 9 November 1928, the minister, Belluzzo, asked the High Commissioner for the Province of Naples to re-examine Ingresso’s situation and assess whether or not he could be given tenure. In his reply of 27 November, the High Commissioner underlined that he had previously informed the Ministry of Education of Ingresso’s moral and political conduct, on 23 April 1927 and 4 December. He added that “even recently” an article had appeared in the “*Mezzogiorno*” on the 14th day “of this month”, in which the name of the scholar appeared among those who in 1924 had signed “the famous manifesto of anti-fascist intellectuals”. However, he believed that in the last few years Ingresso seemed to have behaved in a politically and morally correct manner.

³⁰ On Arturo Labriola, see at least the entry in the *Dizionario bibliografico degli italiani*, Vol. 62, by Fulvio Conti, also available online at: www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/arturo-labriola_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/.

³¹ ACS, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Direzione generale dell'istruzione universitaria. Divisione prima. Fascicoli personali dei professori ordinari. III versamento 1940 – 1970, Busta 256.

In the previous report of 23 April 1927, the High Commissioner for the province of Naples had instead written to the Minister of Education that Ingresso was an anti-fascist, quoting in his letter passages from the latter's *La crisi dello Stato*, such as³²:

They are traces of writings I published in the daily press over the course of two years, in which, as best I could, or rather as far as the external circumstances allowed me, I criticized a regime that in my conscience as an Italian, since its first advent, indeed, in its warning signs, I have always judged a terrible parenthesis in our people's political and moral history³³.

He then concluded: "Now a single anxiety presses and pursues us: liberation from the dictatorship and the rehabilitation of the Italian name before the judgment of civilized peoples and history". Ingresso had been a councillor on Naples city council during the administration of the demo-social-Masonic coalition, and was one of the most faithful followers of Nitti and a candidate, albeit unsuccessful, in the general elections.

On 10 December 1928 Belluzzo wrote to Frignani, who having re-examined the position of Gustavo Ingresso, considered that he should not proceed with his appointment as a professor³⁴.

Then there is the case of Salvatore Barbieri, a tenured assistant at the paediatric clinic of the University of Messina, who came first in the selection procedure for that chair, "illegally" cancelled by the Fascist government. After World War II he was appointed by the AMGOT as a temporary professor, in a provision dated 1 December 1943. Only in 1947, however, would the selection procedure documents be accepted and approved by the Higher Council of Education. It does not however seem possible to view this as a case of anti-Fascism, since on the contrary, his Fascist past was subjected to the scrutiny of the Italian Government after the Second World War³⁵.

The post-war period and the reinstatement of Labriola and Ingresso

The first paragraph of Article 19 of Legislative Decree no. 238 of 5 April 1945 established that:

University professors who have been or will be re-admitted to service in the cases provided for under Royal Decree-Laws no. 9 of 6 January 1944, and no. 25 of 20 January 1944, and by Lieutenant Legislative Decrees no. 255, and no. 264 (art. 5) of 7 September 1944, will retire at the end of the academic year during which they reach the age of 75 years. To this end, they may be re-employed even if they have reached the age of 70. This paragraph also applies in the case of professors appointed according to art. 6 of Lieutenant Legislative Decree no. 264 of 7 September 1944³⁶.

If this rule had not been issued, Arturo Labriola, born in Naples on 21 January 1873, would probably never have been reinstated. In 1944 he in fact could not be appointed, having passed his 70th birthday. Reinstated as a temporary professor of Political Economics at the University of Messina from 1 November 1945³⁷, after regulation 1945/238 had raised the limits of continuance and reinstatement in service of the persecuted, he would retire on 1 November 1948, at the age of 75, with

³² ACS, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Direzione generale dell'istruzione universitaria. Divisione prima. Fascicoli personali dei professori ordinari. III versamento 1940 – 1970, Busta 249.

³³ Ivi.

³⁴ Ivi.

³⁵ On his story cf. Enza Pelleriti, «*Italy in transition*», cit., pp. 184-185 and p. 195.

³⁶ The text of the law, which I consulted on 6 June 2019, is available at <https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/eli/id/1945/05/26/045U0238/sg>. On the rules of reinstatement, see my *Quando l'eccezione diventa norma. La reintegrazione degli ebrei nell'Italia post-fascista*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino, 2006. See also Mario Toscano, *L'abrogazione delle leggi razziali in Italia 1943-1987. Reintegrazione dei diritti dei cittadini e ritorno ai valori del Risorgimento*, G. Bardi, Roma, 1988.

³⁷ The news of his reinstatement is also to be found in the *Relazione del Magnifico Rettore Prof. Gaetano Martino per l'inaugurazione dell'Anno Accademico 1945-1946*, in "Annuario della Università degli Studi di Messina", Anno Accademico 1945-1946, cit., p. 8.

only three years of service in the post, and therefore without the right to a pension³⁸. For over a decade, he would continue to ask the Italian state to acknowledge his years of service retroactively, running from 1 November 1926, the date when he should have taken service.

In a letter to the Minister of Education of 14 December 1944, Labriola reminded him of his “university case” and of the letter from De Ruggiero dated 17 November, which stated that the order for his appointment was ready to be sent to Naples. In order for his appointment to be finalized, a call was required from the university’s Faculty of Law, which he had personally requested. In another undated, but surely earlier letter, the Minister of Education had written that he had been examining his case for some time, and that finding a solution would be a lengthy matter, since he had reached the age limit for reinstatement; the only way round it was an ad hoc regulation.

The question of “reconstructing” his career would arise once the problem of reinstatement and choice of place of work had been resolved, since Labriola had initially asked to remain in Naples. On 6 April 1944 he had in fact written that “at my age I no longer have a ‘career’ to pursue, and for me returning to teaching merely satisfies a feeling of nostalgia”: being far from Naples would have been “simply impossible” for him. Then he reconsidered³⁹.

The battle to reconstruct his career would turn out to be a tough one, fought above all between the Ministry of Education and the Court of Auditors, with the latter maintaining it could not be done. The matter would not be resolved until the mid-fifties, coinciding with the issue of the so-called “Terracini law” (Law no. 96 of 1955). This law in fact provided for the granting of a minimum pension to those who had come first in a selection procedure but were then not appointed for political or racial reasons, where current legislation did not offer more advantageous conditions. This brought an end to the conundrum of how to reconcile Legislative Decree 301/1944, which introduced career reconstruction for the politically and racially persecuted who had been reinstated, with article 6 of Legislative Decree no. 264 of 7 September 1944⁴⁰, which provided for the reinstatement of those like Arturo Labriola and Gustavo Ingrosso who had not been appointed on account of their political opposition to Fascism, but did not envisage such reconstruction. The Court of Auditors emphasized the discrepancy between the two regulations, while the Ministry of Education tended to mitigate it, arguing that all laws in favour of the politically and racially persecuted pursued the spirit of career reconstruction, even if controversial, for the purposes of retirement, and that moreover a failure to take this approach would result in a deep disparity of treatment between Arturo Labriola and Gustavo Ingrosso⁴¹. Ingrosso, the younger of the two, as said, was born in Gallipoli on 2 May 1877 and therefore could have been reinstated, as an supernumerary member of staff, under the Allied ordinance of 18 February 1944, with effect from 1 November 1943. His career had therefore been acknowledged until the 3rd grade⁴².

On 17 May 1955 Labriola wrote to the Ministry of Education again for information about his pension, “which the Ministry should have assigned to me some time ago. I think you know that I am 82 years old, unwell and have a very limited capacity for work,” he wrote, judging the fact that he had not yet been given a pension as “cruel” and “irregular”. Only with the Ministerial Decree of 10 August 1954, registered at the Court of Auditors on 25 August 1955, would he finally acquire the right to a pension, with the recognition of twenty-two years of service⁴³.

³⁸ See the retirement order signed by the Minister of Education Guido Gonella dated 10 January 1949; in ACS, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Direzione generale dell’istruzione universitaria. Divisione prima. Fascicoli personali dei professori ordinari. III versamento 1940 – 1970, Busta 256.

³⁹ All the documentation can be found in *ivi*.

⁴⁰ A copy of the order is in *ivi*.

⁴¹ By way of example, see the response of the Ministry of Education to the observations of the Court of Auditors: *Rilievo della Corte dei Conti. Ufficio di controllo per le Pensioni Civili n. 1005 del 7 dicembre 1954*; in *ivi*.

⁴² In ACS, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Direzione generale dell’istruzione universitaria. Divisione prima. Fascicoli personali dei professori ordinari. III versamento 1940 – 1970, Busta 249.

⁴³ Cf. his request for retirement benefits addressed to the Ente nazionale di previdenza e assistenza per i dipendenti statali (National Social Security and Assistance Agency for State Employees), undated. In ACS, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Direzione generale dell’istruzione universitaria. Divisione prima. Fascicoli personali dei professori ordinari. III versamento 1940 – 1970, Busta 256.

The purge

Enza Pelleriti dedicated a detailed study to the event of the purge of teachers in the three Sicilian universities in the post-war period. Once Sicily was freed from the Fascist and Nazi presence in October 1943, the newly-formed AMGOT would implement its “intention to reform” the island⁴⁴: “The defascistization of the Universities would be carried out with the removal of the chancellors of the three universities and the appointment of new ones, with the replacement of most of the faculty deans, with the removal of some teachers, and the abolition of ‘Fascist’ courses with the introduction of new subjects”⁴⁵.

For example, at the University of Messina, in the Faculty of Law, the subject *General Demographics and Comparative Racial Demographics* had been taught during the years of the regime. At the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery, meanwhile, *Racial Genetics and Biology* was introduced under Fascism⁴⁶. It seems that within the national scenario the University of Messina also distinguished itself for the assignment of degree dissertations largely in keeping with the racist and anti-Semitic climate of the times: “In the 1938-1939 academic year Giovanni Battista Minicucci entitled his work *The Politics of Race in the Fascist Regime*, which was supervised by Gennaro Vilelli, “teacher of the History and Doctrine of Fascism”. The following year two further graduation dissertations of a racist nature were produced: *Race and Legal Personality* by Alberto Buggé, supervised by the private law scholar Francesco Degni, and the *Crossing of Human Races According to the Doctrine of Fascism* by Felice Siracusano, supervised by Gennaro Vilelli⁴⁷.

The latter would be among those expelled from the Accademia Peloritana with an Allied proclamation of 14 December 1945⁴⁸.

Pelleriti’s attention focuses particularly on two chancellors of the University of Messina, both victims of the purge: Salvatore Maggiore, chancellor in the 1939-1940 academic year, and Salvatore Sgroso, from 1940 to 1943.

Maggiore, accused of being the *longa manus* of provincial party secretary Saro Scaglione, had been removed from his university teaching post by the Allied military government on 14 December 1943. However, in a resolution dated 9 January 1944, the *commissione per l’epurazione del personale universitario* cleared him of the charge of actively participating in the political life of Fascism as a member of the federal directorate of Messina. It was in fact noted that he only remained in the post for a short time and did not play a significant role there. Maggiore’s reinstatement involved splitting the chair of Paediatric Clinical Medicine into two, with one of the two courses remaining assigned to Michele Gerbasi, who had replaced him at the time of his removal. In a measure dated 7 September 1945 the Minister of Education, Arangio Ruiz, provided for this duplication of the course.

However, the High Commissioner appealed against the *commissione di I grado*’s decision, since new documentation had arrived from Palermo, including a report from the *Centro Antifascista Italiano*.

On 23 May 1945, the *commissione centrale* rejected the appeal, which was fundamentally based on a report by the chancellor of the University of Messina and on the fact that Maggiore’s links to Fascism had significant consequences. In a report dated 31 January of the same year, the chancellor

⁴⁴ Cf. Enza Pelleriti, “*Italy in transition*”, cit., p. 19. On the allied occupation in Sicily, cf. Rosario Mangiameli, *La regione in guerra (1943-1945)*, in Maurice Aymard and Giuseppe Giarrizzo (ed.), *La Sicilia*, Einaudi, Torino, 1987, pp. 486-600. See also the recent volume by Manoela Patti, *La Sicilia e gli alleati. Tra occupazione e liberazione*, Donzelli, Roma, 2013.

⁴⁵ Enza Pelleriti, “*Italy in transition*”, cit., p. 85.

⁴⁶ Ivi, p. 58.

⁴⁷ Cf. in this regard Saverio Gentile, *La legalità del male. L’offensiva mussoliniana contro gli ebrei nella prospettiva storico-giuridica (1938-1945)*, Giappichelli, Torino, 2013, p., 27.

⁴⁸ Enza Pelleriti, “*Italy in transition*”, cit., pp. 96, 337.

noted that Maggiore had shown his attachment to the regime “*and complete dedication to the local hierarchies of the party*”. Being thus unable to rule out Maggiore’s “active participation and apology”, he asked the central commission to rule for his dismissal⁴⁹.

The commission objected that the chancellor of Palermo, Giovanni Baviera, on the other hand, had praised the work of Maggiore, noting that the only apology of Fascism he was guilty of was his inaugural speech for the 1939-1940 academic year, at the University of Messina.⁵⁰

On 31 March the following year, Maggiore himself submitted his defence memorandum to the central purge commission, emphasizing that within the federal executive of Messina he had only worked as a paediatrician, with the task of carrying out health checks at summer camps, an appointment he had received on the basis of his professional skills. Moreover, he claimed that during the period when he was chancellor he never wrote anything in favour of Fascism, nor had he used his position to advance friends or relatives.

As for the accusations made against him by the Centro Antifascista Italiano in Palermo, he was accused of having been appointed chancellor at the request of the provincial party secretary Scaglione, and that he had used his position to impose appointments and decisions on the teaching staff that they would otherwise never have made. For example, he allegedly forced the University to appoint Professor Vito Catania, who was disliked by his colleagues because he often failed to turn up for lessons. Likewise, the reports mentioned pressure exercised on the faculties to impose appointments of new staff.

In Palermo, where he moved in 1940, he allegedly engaged in similar conduct, as can be seen in his speech of 23 November 1940⁵¹.

However, having rejected any charges by the competent bodies, Maggiore remained firmly in place.

The connection between Maggiore and Palermo was not only geographical, but also familial and physical, since he was the brother of Giuseppe Maggiore, who was chancellor of the University of Palermo when the anti-Semitic laws were passed, in the 1938-1939 academic year. It is no coincidence that he too would be subject to the purge, and was retired, although later reinstated⁵².

Salvatore Sgroso, for his part, a full professor of Ophthalmology, would be removed from his teaching post, with a reduction in salary, by order of the Allied Government, with effect from 1 February 1944. Subsequently, he was also subject to the purge by the commissione ministeriale di primo grado, which did not consider as particularly serious his comments praising the Duce and Fascism, and merely proposed that he had to be suspended just for three months. Following his appeal, the purge commission decided to reinstate him⁵³.

[Translated by Simon Michael Tanner]

⁴⁹ With regard to Gaetano Martino, the chancellor referred to, important works have been written; cf. Andrea Romano, *L'Università di Messina al tempo di Gaetano Martino*, presented at the conference *Gaetano Martino, scienziato, Rettore, Statista (1900-1967)*, Messina, 24-26 novembre 2000 (unpublished). See also Marcello Saija (ed.), *Gaetano Martino, scienziato, Rettore, Statista (1900-1967)*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi (Messina 24-26 novembre 2000), Trisform, Messina, 2003, and Marcello Saija, Angela Villani, *Gaetano Martino 1900-1967*, Rubettino, Soveria Mannelli, 2011.

⁵⁰ ACS, Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Direzione generale dell'istruzione universitaria. Divisione prima. Fascicoli personali dei professori ordinari. III versamento 1940 – 1970, Busta 282.

⁵¹ His transfer was approved unanimously by the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery of the local University, in the meeting of 25 January 1940. Cf. ACS, ministero della Pubblica Istruzione, Professori universitari epurazione 1945-1947, Busta 19. See also, *ivi*, ministero della Pubblica Istruzione. Direzione generale dell'istruzione universitaria. Divisione prima. Fascicoli personali dei professori ordinari. III versamento 1940 – 1970, Busta 282.

⁵² On the subject of Salvatore Maggiore, a brief discussion can also be found in Enza Pelleriti, *«Italy in transition»*, cit., pp. 205-208.

⁵³ Cf. Enza Pelleriti, *“Italy in transition”*, cit., p. 209.

Census of the Jews of Messina

**(Palermo National Archive, Cabinet of the Prefecture of Messina,
“I versamento”, Envelope 80)**

Communication of the Superintendent of Messina to the Prefect, August 17, 1938

Censimento degli ebrei di Messina

(ASME, Gabinetto di Prefettura di Messina, I versamento, Busta 80)

Comunicazione del questore di Messina al prefetto del 17 agosto 1938

Italians:

- 1) Puglisi Dr. Prof. Allegra Stefano fu Francesco
- 2) Siracusa Prof. Vittorio fu Giuseppe
- 3) Isaya Dr. Prof. Angelo fu Francesco
- 4) Izar Dr. Prof. Guido di Antonio, in atto in gita per il Continente con la famiglia
- 5) Morpurgo Massimiliano di Michele

Foreigners

- 1) Gustavo Hochfeld fu Isacco- Capo famiglia
- 2) Simomohn Hochfeld Geltrude fu Ially, moglie
- 3) Hochfeld Ursula di Gustavo, figlia
- 4) Hochfeld Kurt Walter fu Giulio, Capo famiglia
- 5) Minden Ioplin fu Ivan, moglie
- 6) Hochfeld Gerland di Kurt, figlio
- 7) Meiurath Charlotte fu Leopoldo, ospite
- 8) Rothschild Ludwig fu Alberto, Capo famiglia
- 9) Benndorf Oskar fu Walter, Capo famiglia
- 10) Benndorf Elly di Richard, moglie
- 11) Wasserlanf Simone di Isacco, solo
- 12) Sürth Egon fu Adolfo, solo
- 13) Weissenberg Leon fu Alessandro, Capo famiglia
- 14) Iancovici Fanny fu Sigmond, moglie
- 15) Vexler Carolina fu Lupu, suocera
- 16) Iancovici Betty fu Sigmond, cognata
- 17) Godfinger Ernesto fu Elia, Capo famiglia
- 18) Plier Friedal di Giuseppe, moglie
- 19) Weissenberg Emilia fu Sigismondo, sola
- 20) Katz Gerd Eleinz fu Alberto, solo