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Recalling Tomorrow: A Sociological Exploration of Past Futures[*]

Paolo Jedlowski[**]

Abstract. This paper develops a sociological reflection on the 'memory of the future', understood as the recollection of futures imagined in the past. Moving between memory studies and future studies, it argues that social action is shaped by horizons of expectation that are both historically situated and socially constructed. By revisiting past futures, the article highlights their role in interpreting meaning, identity, and generational dynamics. Drawing on authors such as Koselleck, Luhmann, and Benjamin, it shows how these memories function not only as historiographical tools but also as critical resources, preserving unrealized possibilities and 'betrayed promises'. The paper ultimately suggests that recalling past futures can reactivate imagination and responsibility, opening alternative horizons in a time marked by a perceived crisis of the future.

***Keywords*:** Memory of the future; Past futures; Horizons of expectation; Collective memory; Future studies; Social theory; Generational dynamics; Critical memory.

Abstract. Questo contributo propone una riflessione sociologica sulla "memoria del futuro", intesa come ricordo dei futuri immaginati nel passato. Collocandosi tra *memory studies* e *future studies*, l'articolo sostiene che l'azione sociale è orientata da orizzonti di aspettativa storicamente situati e socialmente costruiti. Il recupero dei futuri passati consente di comprendere il senso dell'azione, le dinamiche identitarie e i rapporti generazionali. Attraverso il confronto con autori come Koselleck, Luhmann e Benjamin, si evidenzia come tali memorie non siano solo strumenti storiografici, ma anche risorse critiche, capaci di conservare possibilità inespresse e "promesse tradite". L'articolo conclude che il richiamo ai futuri del passato può riattivare immaginazione e responsabilità, riaprendo il campo delle possibilità in una fase segnata dalla crisi del futuro.

***Parole chiave*:** Memoria del futuro; Futuri passati; Orizzonti di aspettativa; Memoria collettiva; Studi sul futuro; Teoria sociale; Dinamiche generazionali; Memoria critica.

1. Introduction

In recent years, in Italy and Europe, it has become common to talk about a "crisis of the future". In reality, this expression refers to several things: alongside the denunciation of an atrophy of utopian visions – or at least of large collective projects – there is a criticism of the results of current political, economic or technological trends. Although these discussions form the backdrop to what I am about to talk about, they are not my main focus. What we call the crisis of the future can only be fully understood when compared with other futures, those we imagined in the past. And this is precisely my argument: the memory of futures imagined in the past.

This is a topic that, until now, has only been addressed sporadically and in a non-systematic way. What I will present here is what I would call a preliminary survey: a definition of the field and the concepts involved, together with some indications of possible problems and research prospects. To start the discussion, I will begin with a figure from cinematic narrative: Lulu, the last character in

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Heimat, Edgar Reitz's monumental work dedicated to the history of a German family throughout the 20th century[1].

The three cycles of *Heimat* recount the lives of those who were unable, or chose not to tell the story they had lived. It is a story of recurrent aphasia towards the past, of an inability to process and articulate it: a gap that the work itself seeks to fill. At the end of the saga, however, it is no longer the past that resists narration, but the future that vanishes. It is at this moment that Lulu appears, the last descendant of the family whose story Reitz has told.

We are in the third cycle of *Heimat*, entitled *Chronicle of an Epochal Change*, completed in 2004. In the penultimate scene of the final episode, Lulu is shown at the dawn of the new millennium, on New Year's Eve between 1999 and 2000. The dawn is cold, with an ashen light; the camera frames her and two friends standing near a river, against the hostile backdrop of steel and concrete skyscrapers. The three young people talk about the future. As she opens a bottle, Lulu observes that she is starting the new millennium "without a job and without a plan, without money and without help". The viewer is struck by a sense of menace, by a world that is difficult to decipher. One remains silent, disoriented.

The trilogy ends on this note of disorientation. Not quite, however: in 2006 Reitz presented an additional chapter, entitled *Heimat-Fragmente*. These are materials recovered from the earlier films – sometimes scenes cut from the final versions, sometimes further elaborations of episodes in the lives of certain characters. The editing follows Lulu's own point of view: the *Fragmente* are photographs and stories she retrieves and around which her questioning revolves.

Lulu calls herself an "archaeologist of the future". After the impasse in which we left her at the close of the third cycle of *Heimat*, she seems to be seeking the energy to move forward by excavating the past that preceded her. But is it possible to search in the past for a future? Reitz thinks so – not because the past is the site of predestination, but because it is a repository of unfinished projects. His is a perspective that "denies the idea of a linear flow, a triumphant march forward that erases the past as a no-longer […]. The past can be laden with future, with not-yet" (Farinotti, 2007, p. 83)[2]. To return to the past in this sense means – however oxymoronic it may first appear – to remember the future.

2. Between Memory and Future Studies

The memory of the future is the memory of the futures we imagined in the past. As Barbara Adam and Chris Groves have written in a book significantly entitled *Future Matters*, it is

«a perspective on the past that views it not as a collection of historical facts but rather as predecessors' images, plans, visions, ambitions and concerns for the future, which either came to fruition or remained unrealized» (Adam & Groves, 2007, p. 217).

Images of the future are projections: we cannot know in advance what will happen. Memory, in turn, is selection, interpretation, a construction of the past illuminated by the light that the present casts upon it. The memory of the future is therefore a crossing point of projections. It is a complex object. To address it requires the combined consideration of two fields of inquiry: those concerned with memory and those concerned with the future.

[1] The entire work is composed of *Heimat* (*Heimat – Eine Chronik in elf Teilen*, Germany, 1984); *Heimat 2* (*Die zweite Heimat – Chronik einer Jugend*, Germany, 1992); *Heimat 3 – Chronicle of an Epochal Turn* (*Heimat 3 – Chronik einer Zeitenwende*, Germany, 2004). For an introduction, see Galli (2005); for a discussion, see Jedlowski (2009).

[2] Unless otherwise indicated in the bibliography, translations are by the author.

As far as memory is concerned, the scholarly literature is vast[3]. Today we know that what we call memory is in fact a set of multiple functions. Short-term and long-term memory, semantic memory, memories embedded in motor behaviors, and so forth are terms that refer to different yet interconnected physiological and psychological processes. When it comes to the life of groups, notions such as collective memory, social memory, cultural memory, public memory and others are less sharply distinguished, yet still refer to analytically distinct processes.

In all cases, we know that every preservation of the past is an act of selection, interpretation, and continual reconstruction. Such reconstruction depends each time on the present and on social frameworks – essentially communicative in nature – which determine for each person what is plausible, relevant, or obligatory to remember. What we call memory, in short, now appears as the field of a complex temporal dialectic: the flow of life through time produces effects whereby the past shapes the future; yet it is the present that, time after time, gives form to the past by ordering, reconstructing, and interpreting its legacies.

As for the future, the scholarly literature is less abundant. I am not referring here to "futurology" studies: these are probabilistic investigations aimed at predicting what, given certain trends and processes under way, is likely to come about in the future – an area to which economics and other sciences devote considerable attention[4]. I mean instead studies concerned with how the future is experienced, imagined, and produced. Prior to the book by Adam and Groves mentioned above, we had the classic contributions of Luhmann (1976), Merton (1984), and, in Italy, Mongardini (1984), but not much else[5].

What we know is that there is a circular relationship between the future and the present: the present produces the future through the actions we take, through the choices that gradually narrow the range of possibilities before us; but the future, as anticipated in the imagination, in turn produces the present, because "the way in which we act is determined by our anticipation of the future and by the reaction we have in the face of this anticipation" (Bosi, Deriu and Pellegrino 2009, 18).

Using a term from phenomenology, we can call the futures we anticipate the *horizon of expectations* present at any given moment. In his celebrated *Futures Past,* Reinhart Koselleck (1979) explains the concept by relating it to that of the "space of experience." "There is no history," he writes, "that has not been constituted by experiences and expectations" (ibid., 301). Yet the two expressions are not exactly symmetrical. As for experience, it is

«present past, whose events have been incorporated and can be remembered. Within experience a rational reworking is included, together with unconscious modes of conduct which do not have to be present in awareness. There, is also an element of alien experience contained and preserved in experience conveyed by generations or institutions» (Koselleck, 2004, p. 259).

Expectation is in some respects analogous:

«Similarly with expectation: at once person-specific and interpersonal, expectation also takes place in the today; it is the future made present; it directs itself to the not-yet, to the nonexperienced, to that which is to be revealed. Hope and fear, wishes and desires, cares and rational analysis, receptive display and curiosity: all enter into expectation and constitute it» (Koselleck, 2004, p. 259).

But here the analogies end, because the presence of the past is different from that of the future: "despite the possibility of prognosis, the accessibility of the future encounters an absolute limit, since

[3] For an extensive survey in Italian, see Agazzi and Fortunati (2007); with regard to social theory, see Grande and Affuso (2012).

[4] For a review on the subject, see Bell (2003). An interesting analysis of the social construction of scientific forecasts can be found in Fine (2006).

[5] For the beginnings of a sociology of the future in Italy, see, however, Leccardi (2009); Mandich (2010); De Leonardis and Deriu (2012).

it cannot be the object of experience" (*ibidem*, p. 306). We can experience our tension towards the future, but the future itself is, by definition, that of which we have not yet had experience.

From these definitions we can draw at least two elements useful to our discussion. First, the emphasis on the fact that the horizon of expectation refers to what is not yet, but, in so far as it is perceived, is part of the now. The metaphor of the horizon should be taken literally. As Niklas Luhmann (1976) wrote, "the characteristic of every horizon is that we can never touch it, reach it, surpass it; but, despite this, it contributes to the definition of the situation in which we find ourselves" (p. 140).

Such a horizon is not necessarily a coherent set of expectations; it may simultaneously encompass different temporal spans, and it is anything but stable. It differs across social groups. Moreover, it is made up of heterogeneous elements: forecasts, projects, ambitions, aspirations, commitments, hopes, and fears. It is shaped by stimuli and opportunities offered by the real world, but it also depends on the ability of individuals to interpret them. It includes expectations embedded in institutions, as well as visions of the future evoked in political manifestos, in fiction, in advertising, and in the arts. Public discourse and private discourse both contribute to it. Everyday life is immersed in it[6].

But this horizon is never purely individual. This is the second point to underline. As Arjun Appadurai has observed, in discussing the social nature of something that appears so subjective as aspirations, these too "always take shape in close connection with social life" (Appadurai, 2004, p. 19). In other words, it is not possible to aspire to something in isolation from how the future around us is conceived – from the forecasts that make our goal appear plausible and from the very ideas of what it is considered reasonable to aspire to. The same holds true for every other element that constitutes the horizon of expectations. Every society, every group, every generation possesses and constructs different horizons of expectation. The social sciences have long recognized that there are social frameworks of memory (Halbwachs, 1924), but there are also social frameworks for the future.

3. The Memory of Expected Futures

At every moment we are immersed in a horizon of expectations, whether explicit or implicit, as we act. In relation to the discussion on memories of the future, the key point is this: when we remember moments from the past, we also evoke that horizon – the one we contemplated at the time or took for granted.

As far as I know, it was Edmund Husserl who first observed this: every memory contains within itself the trace of the horizons of expectation within which past events took place. In truth, this is only a brief observation. As he wrote:

«Thus there are already difficulties of intentional analysis here for the event considered separately, and then in a new way for the expectations that concern the succession of events up to the present: Recollection is not expectation, but it does have a horizon directed towards the future, specifically, towards the future of what is recollected; and this horizon is fixed» (Husserl, 1991 [1928], p. 55).

Here Husserl had in mind above all the reconstructive nature of the mnemonic process: what we know now influences the image of the event we remember. This is an important element for our discussion, because retrospection does not leave the inheritance that time has given us unchanged.

[6] On the relationship between everyday life and the horizon of expectations, see Mandich (2012). This relationship manifests itself largely in the form of the practical anticipations implicit in our behaviour: expectations taken for granted, which recursively reaffirm the images of the future that make our actions plausible. In examining everyday behavior, it should also be noted that the expression "memories of the future" can take on a slightly different meaning from the one I will mainly refer to in this essay: it can, in fact, denote the ability to keep commitments in mind. This is a crucial capacity: if we were unable to remember past commitments for our future (appointments, promises, contracts, and so on), social life would become impossible (cf. Simmel, 1908).

However, some horizon of expectation was present in every past moment, and it is with this horizon, albeit in a mediated way, that memory allows us to engage.

We can call this relationship the memory of a past future: of the future – or more than one – that was embedded in past events and contributed to their meaning.

In his essay on the subject, Luhmann (1976) defined the "present future" as the future we contemplate at a given moment, that is, the range of possibilities that appear open to us, and the "present future" as the states of affairs that do not yet exist. The "future past" completes the picture: it is the range of possibilities that we have contemplated in the past. History has meant that some of these possibilities have been realized and others have not; expectations may have been disproved, but in memory the possibilities and expectations envisaged in the past remain potentially accessible, open to questioning, interpretation and even resumption, if the present suggests.

Whether the memory of these possibilities is actually activated is by no means certain. When Reinhart Koselleck devoted his book to the "future past", it was in order to argue that, for moderns, it is almost mute: in the course of modernity, past horizons of expectation gradually tend to lose their relevance, because it is characteristic of modernity itself to set aside all previously acquired experience. His thesis was that

«in the modern age, the gap between experience and expectation progressively widens; or, more precisely, the modern age can only be conceived as a new time from the moment when expectations have progressively moved away from all experience up to that point» (Koselleck, 1979, p. 309).

In modernity, the space of experience and the horizon of expectation tend to diverge (to no longer be "coordinated", as Koselleck says elsewhere). This is difficult to deny. But it does not follow that all traces of past horizons of expectation have been lost. The question, rather, is whether we want to bring them to light, whether we feel the curiosity, the urgency or the need to do so.

4. Past futures

I think I have sufficiently outlined the key terms: horizon of expectation, past future, memories of the future. What use can they be?

Since the futures we imagined in the past were supported by specific social frameworks, attention to past futures is a tool that can serve the history of cultures, imaginaries and mentalities. One can write the history of past futures and this in turn enriches historiography as a whole.

Take for example the characters in Heimat, the work by Reitz that I mentioned at the beginning. They are fictional characters, but the example may serve to illustrate the point.

The first episode shows us a young man, Paul Simon, returning to his village from the trenches of the First World War[7]. He rediscovers his parents and their horizons of expectation: they are those of a rural, artisanal world (Koselleck [1979] describes them as sustained "by the experiences of the ancestors that have become those of their descendants" [p. 310]). But Paul was swept by the war into the vortex of modernity. His horizon of expectations is nourished by different experiences; it departs from those of his parents and is different, incomparable: it contains fantasies of change, escape and even self-realization. After a short period in which he tries to fit into his previous horizons (and even gets married), Paul leaves everyone behind and emigrates.

Meanwhile, his father-in-law Wiegand has also entered a modern horizon, albeit by other means. Belonging to the landowning class, his aspirations are shaped by the fascination of technological novelties: he buys a motorbike, a radio and finally a car. When the National Socialist movement appears (with its horizon of expectations at first vindictive, aimed at avenging the affronts suffered

[7] For a complete summary of the complex plot of *Heimat*, see Galli (2005).

in the peace treaty, and then increasingly triumphalist), he faces it with enthusiasm, seeing in it career opportunities for himself and his son.

After the Second World War, one of Paul's sons becomes an entrepreneur. The horizon of expectations within which his actions take shape is again another: that of post-war "reconstruction". If he inherits, however indirectly, a certain sense of self-fulfilment from his father, the historical context offers him the opportunity to develop new aspirations.

Hermann, the younger half-brother, however, has different expectations. Other conversations are also in the air. Hermann goes to Munich to study music and gets caught up in the counterculture of the 1960s - this is the focus of *Heimat 2*. With his new friends, he recognizes that the future envisaged by National Socialism is not just in the past: it has been repressed, something his older half-brother would never have thought to consider. From this alternative horizon of expectations, and from memories begging to be processed, will be born what will later be known as "Sixty-Eight".

Later, in the third cycle of Heimat, we meet the Germans of the defunct GDR after 1989. For them, there is a sudden transformation of every expectation horizon: from the state-supported economy of a totalitarian regime to the unpredictability of the market. For all of them, the threat of nuclear accidents looms (demonstrations break out near the Simon family's village). For Paul Simon's descendants, the new forms of globalized economy in turn threaten their acquired security.

These are only brief sketches. They show that the futures of the past vary from generation to generation, that within each age cohort they can be formulated in different ways and that sometimes they are remembered while at other times they are forgotten. They lie at the intersection of social memory and the processing of the stimuli and opportunities offered by the historical context. The history of any country could be told in this way; I think these few indications are enough to suggest how "future pasts" are part of history and how their attention can enrich historiography.

Paying attention to the futures of the past helps us understand the meaning that actions had for those who performed them, the background that made them plausible. It is not only historians who are interested. For those who practice sociology in the tradition of Max Weber, the question of the meaning each person attaches to their actions is inescapable; but part of the meaning each action possesses relates to the futures the subject imagines.

Indeed, the whole of social theory can benefit from what our theme teaches. Human action is, by its very nature, oriented towards the "not yet". As Barbara Adam has noted, studying it can present particular difficulties, but these "are no reason to keep the future out of social theory and mainstream research" (Adam, 2010, p. 48). Such difficulties seem to stem from the fact that the future lacks "the tangible materiality that empirical research requires" (*ibid*.); yet it is precisely here that consideration of past futures reveals its usefulness. Since they belong to the past, we have multiple traces of them (historical documents, testimonies, written projects, artistic products), from which we can extract useful material to refine theory.

The focus on past futures also makes it possible to reformulate a particularly important issue: that of relations between generations. These consist, at least in part, precisely in a recurring confrontation of expectations.

For the children, those of the parents sometimes weigh like boulders; or, more simply, they take the form of "family mandates", a charge to redeem past failings (such as a father's desire to see his children educated, for example, to compensate for what he perceived as a deficiency, a form of social disability. To liken Heimat to an Italian novel, one might think of the protagonist of Vincenzo Rabito's *Terra matta*)[8]. In other cases, what emerges is opposition and conflict: as in the refusal of young people to conform to their parents' expectations in the years around "Sixty-eight", for example.

[8] Rabito (2007); the book was later adapted into a film of the same name (*Terramatta; Il Novecento italiano di Vincenzo Rabito analfabeta siciliano*, Italy, 2012).

In any case, the memory of the futures imagined by fathers and mothers is an element of the subjectivity of sons and daughters: taking this into account enriches the understanding of what the relationship between generations consists of. This is a point implicit in Karl Mannheim's (1927) classic definition of generation, but making it explicit is useful. A generation is not just a set of socialization experiences: it is formed in the perceived deviation from the horizon of expectations of the previous generation (which, in turn, defines itself as a distinct generation precisely on the basis of this perception).

The theoretical problem here is how these changes in the horizons of expectation come about. We have already mentioned some of the factors: from the appearance of certain technological innovations to the spread of new cultural offerings; from economic changes to the formation of new constellations of class relations; from the possibility of new sensory experiences to the legitimization of new moral norms. Discussing changes in the horizon of readers' expectations within literary history, Hans Robert Jauss observed that these can take hold "because of the denial of familiar experiences or the awareness of experiences never before expressed" (Jauss, 1967, p. 45). I do not think the case is much different in social history. This is not the place for an in-depth examination (as I said, this is a preliminary investigation); but, even with respect to a topic like this, it seems that the development of our theme is quite promising.

Each of us inherits the horizons of expectations that our predecessors have cultivated in the past but, of course, also the expectations that we ourselves have nurtured. Autobiographical narratives carry traces of both. Since autobiographical narratives are an important subject of methodologies and theories throughout the contemporary social sciences[9], it is worth emphasizing this aspect as well.

In these narratives, the future appears twice. On the one hand, the story we tell about ourselves is linked to what we still expect from life (and on which we perhaps intend to act precisely through narration). But on the other hand, they also contain images of the future that we expected in the past.

Any retrospective definition of our identity normally includes questions and statements about futures that, over time, we have considered possible. It is in the comparison between these and realized futures that lies the work of reconciliation with one's own history, which corresponds to the deeper meaning of autobiographical discourse. But identity and future past can also have less conscious relations. I could give endless examples: I will choose the figure of Mrs. Pocket, a character from Charles Dickens' Great Expectations (1861). Her identity, in her speeches and in those of all who know her, is repeatedly defined by "the position her poor grandfather might have had". The grandfather in question had not been a nobleman, but could have been. And so, too, could she have been. The fact that in the end she did not become one matters only marginally: Dickens' irony aside, the point is that the field of possibilities experienced in the past (expressed in the conditional past tense) is an established element of her identity. And this may be the same for many others.

The same happens with collective identities. Ever since Maurice Halbwachs (1950), we have known how collective memory is an element of any group's identity; but often it is specifically the memory of past futures – that is, references to visions, aspirations or programs of predecessors or those whose heirs the group claims to be. Regret for a future that could have been sometimes converges in the political use of nostalgia[10]. Conversely, the revolutionary projects cultivated in the past are recalled in the discourses that forge the identity of each new movement. Walter Benjamin stated that every revolution is the heir of all the oppressed in history: it remembers the violence they have suffered and proposes their redemption. It is a memory of the future denied to the victims: a memory of what could have been but was not.

[9] The literature is vast: for a recent review in Italian, see Merrill and West (2009), with a useful preface by Laura Formenti.

[10] See Petri (2010). Note that nostalgia, however, can also lend itself to critical uses: see Atia and Davies (2010); see also Affuso (2012).

5. The memory of the future as a reservoir of betrayed promises and potentialities

But this last reference to Benjamin invites us to shift the level of the discussion. In Benjamin, in fact, the memory of past futures corresponds to the reactivation of a messianic impulse (however secular and historicized). As he wrote in Theses on the Philosophy of History: "The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption" (Benjamin, 1940, p. 63).

It is therefore not merely a matter of historiographical curiosity, nor of the recognition of certain elements of meaning in action or of certain identity functions that the memory of the future can perform. Here we enter into a different kind of reflection, a different kind of interest in our theme. What matters is not so much the history of past futures as their living memory.

In order to understand what may be at stake, it is useful to return to what we noted at the beginning regarding Edgar Reitz's intentions: the past can sometimes be perceived as laden with a "not yet" that awaits something.

Vladimir Jankélévitch (1974) wrote: "The past [...] does not only ask to be sought, but to be completed" (p. 302). This is not just a cognitive completion, a purely hermeneutic task.

The past can be seen as a repertoire of unrealized possibilities from which to draw inspiration for the present and for action.

This idea is at the origins of British cultural studies. As Antonis Liakos has noted in reflecting on the work of E.P. Thompson, according to the latter's ideas, "the past was to be redeemed as a repository of diverse potentialities, unrealized but capable of possible future realization" (Liakos, 2010, p. 68). From this perspective, the memory of past futures is a tool to promote sensitivity to the difference between what is and what should or could be. It is a perspective in which the consideration of the past becomes capable of 'unleashing, under certain conditions, subversive dynamics' (*ibid*., p. 70).

Before it appeared in cultural studies, the theme of the subversive power of memory was present in Herbert Marcuse. As he wrote, the deeper truth of memory lies "in its specific function of preserving promises and potentialities that have been betrayed" (Marcuse 1955, 65). As with all Frankfurt School authors, there is a reference to Freud here. Memory has a therapeutic function, particularly the memory of childhood: where the memory of having desired happiness remains, however nebulous. A desire whose expectation is denied by that to which the mature, "civilized" individual must conform, but which remains the source of all criticism of the current state of things.

Revisiting the promises and potentialities contained in the past corresponds to the reactivation of the desire that animated them. And perhaps it is precisely the ability to charge the future with desire that is felt most urgently today, at least in countries that we still call "advanced". Our drve towards the future seems weakened. It is in this perspective, then, that probably lies the greatest interest in the theme we are exploring. From the memory of once expected futures, we can ask to reactivate this drive.

6. Critical memories

Memory, however, should not be considered in a one-sided way. The memory of past futures - especially that of plans, desires and dreams - can be misleading if its other competence is not also brought into play: the knowledge of how things actually turned out. It is true that memory retains traces of "betrayed promises and potentialities", but what, how and why they were betrayed is something that the present can and must assess.

Not all futures imagined in the past are worth recalling; and even for those that are, the present cannot forget what it knows about what the visions of the past may have caused and the unintended outcomes that resulted. Memories of the future are not only useful to redeem unrealized potential:

they also serve to acknowledge mistakes made and responsibilities. A memory that neglects to consider the heterogenesis of ends it invokes is missing an essential part of itself.

This also applies to the memory of the futures imagined in movements such as those of the so-called "Sixty-eight". It is the memory of the last collective impulse of a utopian nature known in the West: if we speak of a renewal of the drive towards the future, it is certainly a relevant memory. But even this memory must include some self-critical elements. As for the analytical errors and practical perversions into which, in countries like Italy or Germany, some armed fringes born from those movements have fallen, there is no need to dwell: they are obvious. But, more generally, the memory of those movements must question the role of utopia in history: utopia is a critical imagination with respect to the existing, and as such inspires and guides action, but taken literally it is counterproductive[11].

I would also not overlook another observation. The anti-authoritarian movements of the "Sixty-Eight" created an unprecedented and well-defined space of freedom for their members. But this contained ambivalent aspects. I am not so much referring to the fact that once the support provided to individuals by a collective movement has disappeared, the freedom experienced can turn into bitter disillusionment. Rather, I am thinking of the fact that those who seek to be free generate resentment in those who are not free or do not feel free. In many people who were excluded or who excluded themselves from the movements of the time, a lasting resentment was generated: those who recognize their desires arouse in those who do not allow themselves to do so a hatred equal to the violence with which the latter represses themselves. Exemplary 1968 films such as *Easy Rider* (USA, 1969) and *Zabriskie Point* (Italy, 1970) were aware of this: in both cases, the protagonists end up being shot dead. Disregarding the aversion generated was, in the end, a mistake, the recognition of which could be instructive.

Past futures need not be taken back: they are often to be criticized – with irony, if desired. As in Daniel Pennac's latest play, The Sixth Continent, where a family of soap manufacturers, obsessed with spreading hygiene around the world, ends up contributing to pollution by scattering waste, packaging and their own detergents into the sea from washing machines around the world. The "sixth continent" of the title evokes the double island - with a total area of more than one million square kilometres - recently discovered by a sailor and brought to the attention of the international community by Greenpeace, floating in the North Pacific Ocean, consisting of an immense amount of waste.

Here the future recalled is the one envisaged by the mainstream culture of modernity: a future imagined as ever greater wealth, well-being, and consumption. Pennac's work is a powerful metaphor for the contradictions inherent in the visions that animated modernity, and for the critical tasks that await our memories of past futures. The futures we once imagined can be summed up in a single word, *development*: to recall them also means to ask what that word signifies.

As with every other theme I have touched upon, I cannot here retrace the critical debate which, for decades, has accompanied the notion of development[12]. Yet on closer inspection, that very debate is itself a memory of the future: a revisiting of the projects, dreams, and aspirations – in a word, the visions of the future – that sustained modernity and legitimized it in the eyes of those who acted in its name. One cannot deny the passion (not only for economic development, indeed, but also for emancipation, participation, and individuation) that underpinned modernity; what can be observed, however, are the effects that were produced. This is precisely what the memory of the future entails: a recognition of the horizons of expectation of the past, and an interrogation of them in the light of

[11] The function of utopia is exquisitely critical: it is an elsewhere that, strictly speaking, has nothing to do with the future; but since the imagination of an elsewhere serves to criticize the here and now, it becomes a point of reference for projects aimed at transforming the present. On the difficulties generated by this transformation, i.e. the relationship between utopian imagination and political praxis, I refer to Jameson (2005).

[12] For an overview, see Di Meglio (1997).

the questions that the present – generated at least in part by those expectations – now compels us to ask.

As for development, one must not forget the ways in which it established itself outside the West – desired, yet also, and in many respects, imposed. The memory of Western futures is also the memory of colonialisms (or at least it should be; in reality, it is more often a matter of forgetting). In the areas subjected to colonization, the futures anticipated by oppressed populations were, to put it briefly (and somewhat euphemistically), overlaid by a future imagined for them.

This imposition has continued into the post-colonial period. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has observed, the policies still today sought to be imposed internationally on so-called "developing" countries all have this in common: that their future is conceived as a repetition of what the West has already achieved. It is "something that has already happened elsewhere" (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 60): it is already known, in other words. The open character of the future, the "disruption" of which it consists (to use an expression of Jürgen Habermas [1985]), is thereby confiscated.

But resistance to this logic, too, is bound up with certain memories of the future: in the precolonial past, or in the more or less explicit movements of resistance to colonialism, one can discern traces or fragments of other imagined futures, to which it is possible to reconnect. Not that there are original projects ready to be simply patched back together—that would mean falling into misleading identity myths. The visions of the future possible today are in any case the product of responses to encounters, hybrid and mixed constructions. The future that is now concretely imagined and built outside the West resembles none of the futures once envisaged, whether by the former colonizers or by the former colonized. Yet it remains true that, for the purposes of our theme, a discussion of memories of the future finds here too abundant material.

7. Estrangements

What memories of the future teach us, after all, is that the future has never been just one. And, by showing that the past is a reservoir of possibilities, they tell us the same about the present.

To borrow a phrase from Svetlana Boym, I would say that memories of the future are able retrospectively to recognize and reactivate certain "detours into the unexplored possibilities of the modern project" (Boym, 2010, p. 85). They possess a power of estrangement: they allow us to imagine the future beyond the ways in which it is usually anticipated, according to dominant ideologies and common sense.

It was precisely this estrangement that Lulu – the young woman with whose evocation I began – was in need of. For her, the recollection of past futures is essential: a memory that "flashes up at a moment of danger" (Benjamin, 1940, p. 74). What she must find is a way of escaping the idea that the future is already written, for, as it appears inscribed in the present situation, for people like her it is a "non-future."

The crisis of the future in which Lulu – and we along with her – struggles has many layers. It is not the same in every part of the world: to speak of it in Asia, South America or Africa would in some cases make no sense, and in others a different kind of sense altogether. In certain respects, it is a crisis that calls into question the entire model of development to which modernity has been committed. It demands a critical re-examination of ideas such as development and even "progress"[13], and perhaps requires a rethinking of the very notion of the future itself: the abstract, measurable, empty future conceived by modern economic and scientific thought ought to be replaced with a more concrete, plural idea of the future – one attuned to the consequences of actions and projects, and imbued with a sense of responsibility.

[13] On the centrality of a re-examination of the notion of progress for any discussion concerning the ways in which we have imagined the future, I would refer the reader to Jedlowski (2012). Among the various reflections on this topic, I would highlight in particular Taguieff (2004).

On this word, *responsibility*, Adam and Groves conclude the book I cited at the beginning, *Future Matters*, whose subtitle, not by chance, includes the word *ethics*. To be responsible means both to answer for the consequences of what has been done in the past and to take into account the consequences, in the future, of our present actions. On both fronts, there is an interweaving of memory and anticipation (see Barazzetti & Leccardi, 1997). In this respect, the memories of the future we have been discussing are particularly instructive: by prompting us to evaluate the consequences of past actions and projects, they train us to be responsible for the consequences that present actions and projects will have tomorrow.

As far as Europe is concerned, the crisis of the future that we now perceive is perhaps less the necessary outcome of the developments and contradictions of modernity than the result of social conflict and the actions of elites intent on creating new inequalities (Gallino, 2012). In this conflict, the definition of possible futures is both an instrument and a stake. In any case, the future is the result of systemic relations among an infinite set of factors; what in the future is possible, probable, or impossible is anything but an incontrovertible given: statements on the matter are ways of interpreting what lies before us. Since such interpretation will influence courses of action, and thus the actual presents to come, everyone struggles to disseminate the interpretation most advantageous to them.

Catastrophic interpretations are probably closest to the truth, and in any case have the merit of prompting actions capable of averting the worst. Yet they must be accompanied by a renewed capacity to produce images of desirable futures. As Bosi, Deriu & Pellegrino (2009) observe:

«We must remember the catastrophe that awaits us so that it does not occur in reality, but at the same time we must continue to imagine "a sweet future" that no one any longer believes possible, so that it may become realizable» (p. 19).

Hannah Arendt wrote that the fact human beings are capable of acting means that "the unexpected can be expected from them" (Arendt, 1958, p. 129). The forgetting of possibilities glimpsed in the past is part of the struggle of those who seek to deny this capacity: to discredit the futures that were once possible is to suggest that the future can only ever be one. This is made easier by the widespread tendency in our countries today to focus solely on the nearest memories and futures, relinquishing broader perspectives (Leccardi, 2009). Yet there is no reason why this tendency should necessarily continue.

And here I could conclude, for now. The inquiry into memories of the future interweaves fields of study otherwise separate: memory studies and future studies, but others as well. I believe it can generate fertile insights. It belongs to the study of the experience of time, and it is essential to a theory of action. But it also has political implications: recalling futures once anticipated reopens the range of possibilities, lends impetus, and at the same time provides both critical and self-critical tools.

Of course, for some, the recollection of unfulfilled hopes may suggest a melancholic attitude. Melancholy is a form of memory that holds the future in check: it is the stance of those who reject the present while at the same time believing that nothing could have been, nor therefore can ever be, different. For the melancholic, the future has lost all relevance: it "crouches in an indifferent present" (Said, 2004, p. 118). But for those who do not share this attitude, the memory of the future is an invitation to act.

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Toward a Pedagogy of History as a Practice of Memory. When History Becomes a Factor of Community Polarization

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Abstract. Community polarization is caused by several factors, eight of which were identified in the author's 2025 research, but the factor called History, within the study, appears to be the one that most actively maintains the ethno-linguistic division between a majority and a minority group. The historical narrative based on memories of family and personal traumas caused by the Second World War is still a source of heated disagreements. Although these have never erupted into violent behaviors, since the post-war period, they have prevented a complete rapprochement between the two factions, despite a constant and progressive process of reconciliation having been underway for eighty years. The article describes the elements included in the History factor that underlie this community division.

Keywords: Community polarization, Political polarization, Historical narrative, Historical memory and trauma.

Abstract La polarizzazione della comunità è causata da diversi fattori, otto dei quali sono stati individuati nella ricerca condotta dall'autrice nel 2025; tuttavia, il fattore denominato "storia" all'interno dello studio sembra essere quello che contribuisce maggiormente a mantenere la divisione etnico-linguistica tra un gruppo maggioritario e uno minoritario. La narrazione storica basata sui ricordi dei traumi familiari e personali causati dalla Seconda Guerra Mondiale è ancora fonte di accesi dissidi. Sebbene questi non siano mai sfociati in comportamenti violenti, sin dal dopoguerra hanno impedito un completo riavvicinamento tra le due fazioni, nonostante sia in atto da ottant'anni un processo di riconciliazione costante e progressivo. L'articolo descrive gli elementi inclusi nel fattore Storia che sono alla base di questa divisione comunitaria.

Parole chiave: Polarizzazione comunitaria; polarizzazione politica, narrazione storica, memoria storica e trauma.

Introduction

Community polarization, understood as the persistent division of a community into opposing and difficult-to- reconcile groups, is a complex phenomenon that can be fueled by multiple factors. An Italian qualitative study conducted in 2025, titled "Qualitative Research on Informal Social Learning that Generates and/or Reduces Polarized Thinking," identified eight main elements underlying this process. Among these, History proved to be the most influential factor in maintaining the ethno-linguistic divide between a majority and a minority group. The case study analyzed concerns the polarization between the Italian majority and the Slovenian minority in the region, a historically rooted dynamic that remains relevant in citizens' perceptions and narratives.

The historical narrative of twentieth-century events, grounded in family memories and intergenerational traumas linked to the twenty-year fascist period and the Second World War, continues to represent a site of intense symbolic conflict. Despite eighty years of progressive attempts at reconciliation, these memories remain a sensitive point, capable of reactivating latent tensions and preventing a full rapprochement between the two communities.

The 2025 research aimed to explore how everyday community processes generate informal learning that can fuel or, conversely, reduce this type of polarization. It emerged that the division between groups is not merely the result of political or linguistic differences, but is rooted in a polarized and ethnocentric form of thought that leads each side to perceive itself as different from

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the other, and, in the case of the Italian group, even morally superior due to its culture, traditions, historical truth, and values. This dynamic, widely described in the literature on ethnocentrism (Taguieff, 1999), is intertwined with processes of affective polarization (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015), in which political affiliation and identity take on an emotional and moral dimension, contributing to further hardening positions.

In the case study analyzed, polarization developed primarily around linguistic diversity, recognized by both sides as an obstacle to full reconciliation. However, it was also fueled by two additional factors: the persistence of a politically motivated affective polarization, rooted in the ideological conflicts of the twentieth century; and the divergent interpretation of historical events, supported by public narratives often exploited for political purposes.

Local history, in fact, continues to be the subject of conflicting readings, selective revisionisms, and symbolic appropriations that reinforce identity boundaries and impede the construction of a shared memory.

This article therefore focuses on the historical factor that emerged from the research, analyzing how traumatic memories, family narratives, public commemorations, and collective symbols contribute to generating informal learning that maintains community polarization. Through analysis of the interviews collected, we will highlight how such learning influences mutual perceptions, collective identities, and relational dynamics between groups.

The goal is to understand which elements of the historical narrative continue to hinder reconciliation and which, instead, can form the basis for building educational pathways aimed at reducing polarization, such as the development of a new European model of Pedagogy of History.

Theoretical Framework

Community polarization is a multidimensional phenomenon that develops through the intertwining of historical, political, identity, and relational dynamics. To understand its persistence in the case study analyzed, it is necessary to place it within a theoretical framework that integrates contributions from the sociology of memory, studies on political polarization, situated learning theories, and cognitive sciences.

Collective memory and historical narratives

Historical memory is not a simple repository of facts, but a social process through which communities select, interpret, and transmit past events, constructing and negotiating their own identity.

M. Halbwachs (1950) defines collective memory as the result of a social construction that reflects the identity needs of the group, which guides what is remembered, what is forgotten and the way in which events are interpreted.

J. Assmann (1977) further developed this perspective by introducing the concept of cultural memory, which includes symbols, rituals, commemorations, and institutions that stabilize, over time, specific interpretations of the past. Monuments, public ceremonies, and toponymy are not simple representations, but devices that shape the collective perception of history, institutionalized through rituals and monuments, distinguishing it from communicative memory, transmitted orally within families and social networks. Both forms of memory are central to the case analyzed, where the traumas of the twentieth century continue to be reworked through family stories, public celebrations, and territorial symbols.

E. Zerubavel (2003) highlights how communities construct temporal maps that select some events as foundational and obscure others, creating actual symbolic boundaries that morally and culturally distinguish "us" from "them." In the studied context, these boundaries manifest

themselves in the contrast between Italian and Slovenian memories, often irreconcilable, which fuel divergent perceptions of victimization, guilt, and injustice. In the studied context, public and family memories of twentieth-century violence fuel opposing narratives that reinforce these boundaries, making interpretative convergence difficult.

Cultural Trauma and Intergenerational Transmission Cultural

Trauma Theory (Alexander et al., 2004) offers a useful interpretative framework for understanding the persistence of conflicting narratives. According to this perspective, trauma lies not in the event itself, but in its symbolic elaboration by the community. Cultural trauma occurs when a group attributes a profound, enduring identity-building significance to a past, traumatic event, perceiving it as a wound that continues to define the present.

In the case analyzed, the deportations of Slovenians to fascist camps, the foibas, the post-war violence, and the division of the territory generated traumas that continue to be transmitted intergenerationally, influencing mutual perceptions and group identities.

The intergenerational transmission of trauma occurs through family stories, commemorative rituals, public symbols, and institutional narratives. The groups that carry these narratives—so-called carrier groups—play a central role in keeping the trauma alive and reproducing the interpretive categories that derive from it. In the case study, carrier groups include families that transmit memories of violence, persecution, foibas, and deportations; associations and institutions that selectively commemorate the past; political groups that mobilize memory to define opposing identities; linguistic or national communities that maintain divergent narratives; and minority cultural circles. These groups contribute to reproducing opposing interpretive categories, hindering narrative convergence and fueling polarization. Family memories of violence, deportations, and foibas also constitute a traumatic nucleus that continues to shape perceptions of the past and influence intergroup relations. Trauma is transmitted through family narratives, commemorative rituals, and public symbols, which help maintain a sense of injustice and belonging to a damaged community. This produces informal learning that reinforces polarization, especially because these memories are not integrated into a shared historical narrative.

Polarized thinking as a cognitive distortion (Ellis, Beck)

Polarized thinking is an interpretative modality that tends to divide reality into absolute and opposing categories ("us/them," "victims/perpetrators," "right/wrong"). In psychological literature, this modality is defined as a cognitive distortion (Ellis, 1962; Beck, 1976), characterized by the extreme simplification of complex events and the difficulty in recognizing nuances, ambivalences, and alternative perspectives.

In the context analyzed, however, polarized thinking cannot be interpreted as an individual trait but rather as a cognitive mode of interpreting reality that has spread among individuals due to the complex events they have experienced: it emerges as the result of situated learning processes and the traumatic narratives that structure public and family memory. Rigid dichotomies are learned and reinforced through participation in the community's discursive practices, subsequently becoming an integral part of its collective identity.

History, politically exploited for electoral rather than ideological reasons, thus becomes an identity-building device: what is remembered, forgotten, or reinterpreted helps define who belongs to the community and who is excluded, activating both conscious and unconscious mechanisms of self-defense against the opposing party, considered the enemy or invader.

The literature on affective polarization highlights how division between groups depends not only on ideological differences but also on deep-rooted feelings of hostility and mistrust. Iyengar and Westwood (2015) show that such feelings become automatic and deeply internalized, influencing

moral judgments, social assessments, and daily behaviors. Signals of belonging to the opposing group trigger negative reactions even in non-political contexts, generating forms of discrimination that contribute to maintaining and hardening community divisions. In contexts marked by historical conflict, this dynamic is intertwined with traumatic memories and antagonistic narratives, contributing to the persistence of division. Polarization is not just about differences of opinion but also takes on an emotional and moral dimension. Studies on affective polarization (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015) show how political or identity groups tend to perceive out-group members negatively and in-group members positively, regardless of ideological content. Affective polarization describes the tendency of groups to perceive each other as morally distant, hostile, and threatening. Iyengar and Westwood (2015) have highlighted how this form of polarization not only concerns political opinions but also involves emotions, perceptions, and moral judgments.

Iyengar and Westwood (2015) show, therefore, that affective polarization arises when identification with one's own political group translates into automatic and ingrained hostility toward the opposing group. Their findings demonstrate that negative feelings toward the out-group become so profound that they influence not only political opinions but also moral judgments, social assessments, and everyday behaviors, to the point of generating forms of discrimination that can surpass those based on categories such as ethnicity.

A particularly significant finding is that party cues also influence non-political spheres: people tend to trust less, evaluate less, or penalize individuals perceived as belonging to the opposing group, even in neutral or cooperative situations.

These mechanisms demonstrate how affective polarization can crystallize social divisions, transforming political difference into an identity fracture that permeates interpersonal relationships, reduces the willingness to engage in dialogue, and reinforces perceptions of moral and social distance.

In the case study, this dynamic manifested itself in two distinct ways: the polarizing divide between Slovenian Catholic and Communist minorities and between right-wing and left-wing parties in the Italian majority. The former base their divergence on the historical antagonism between Catholic believers and Communist atheists, organized into two opposing cultural and political associations. The latter differ in their political approaches to the Slovenian minority: conciliation and inclusion for the left, reservation and ethno-linguistic differentiation for the right.

Emotional polarization intertwines with ethno-linguistic polarization and traumatic memories, generating a system of symbolic boundaries (Lamont & Molnár, 2002) that separate "us" and "them" not only linguistically but also morally and historically.

History thus becomes an identity-building device: what is remembered, forgotten, or reinterpreted helps define who belongs to the community and who is excluded. Understanding how identity boundaries are rooted in both cognitive processes and affective dynamics paves the way for analyzing the ways in which these boundaries are reproduced, negotiated, or contested in social practices and everyday interactions. It is in ordinary interactions, informal contexts, and shared learning situations that these boundaries are confirmed, negotiated, or sometimes transformed. This perspective raises the need to analyze how groups learn, transmit, and incorporate these interpretative frameworks through forms of situated learning and informal learning processes.

Affective polarization and identity boundaries

The transition from the cognitive to the relational level allows us to understand how the dichotomies produced by polarized thinking are not confined to the interpretative sphere but translate into emotional orientations that structure the perception of others. Identity boundaries constructed through processes of social categorization and shared historical narratives become affective devices that regulate feelings of trust, mistrust, or hostility toward external groups. From this perspective, affective polarization represents the emotional outcome of the cognitive and memory dynamics described above, rendering the symbolic boundaries between "us" and "them" not only thought but also deeply internalized and experienced.

Polarization is not just about differences of opinion but also takes on an emotional and moral dimension. Studies on affective polarization (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015) show how political or identity groups tend to perceive out-group members negatively and in-group members positively, regardless of ideological content. In the case study, this dynamic is intertwined with ethnolinguistic polarization and traumatic memories, generating a system of symbolic boundaries (Lamont & Molnár, 2002) that separate "us" and "them," not only linguistically but also morally and historically. History, politically exploited for electoral rather than ideological reasons, thus becomes an identity-building device: what is remembered, forgotten, or reinterpreted helps define who belongs to the community and who is excluded, activating both conscious and unconscious mechanisms of self-defense against the opposing party, considered the enemy or the invader.

Literature on affective polarization highlights how intergroup divisions are not only based on ideological differences but also on deep-seated feelings of hostility and mistrust. Iyengar and Westwood (2015) show that such feelings become automatic and deeply internalized, influencing moral judgments, social evaluations, and daily behaviors. Signals of belonging to the opposing group trigger negative reactions even in non-political contexts, generating forms of discrimination that contribute to maintaining and hardening community divisions. In contexts marked by historical conflict, this dynamic is intertwined with traumatic memories and antagonistic narratives, contributing to the persistence of divisions.

Polarization is not only about differences of opinion but also takes on an emotional and moral dimension. Studies on affective polarization (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015) show how political or identity groups tend to perceive out-group members negatively and in-group members positively, regardless of ideological content. Affective polarization describes the tendency of groups to perceive one another as morally distant, hostile, and threatening. Iyengar and Westwood (2015) have highlighted how this form of polarization does not only concern political opinions, but also involves emotions, perceptions, and moral judgments.

Iyengar and Westwood (2015) show, therefore, that affective polarization arises when identification with one's own political group translates into automatic and deep-seated hostility toward the opposing group. Their findings demonstrate that negative feelings toward the out-group become so profound that they influence not only political opinions but also moral judgments, social assessments, and everyday behaviors, to the point of generating forms of discrimination that can surpass those based on categories such as ethnicity.

A particularly relevant finding is that party cues also influence non-political domains: people tend to trust less, evaluate worse, or penalize individuals perceived as belonging to the opposite group, even in neutral or cooperative situations.

These mechanisms demonstrate how affective polarization can crystallize social divisions, transforming political difference into an identity fracture that permeates interpersonal relationships, reduces the willingness to engage in dialogue, and reinforces perceptions of moral and social distance.

In the case study, this dynamic manifested itself in two distinct ways: the polarizing divide between the Catholic and Communist Slovenian minorities and between right-wing and left-wing parties within the Italian majority. The former base their divergence on the historical antagonism between Catholic believers and Communist atheists, organized into two opposing cultural and political associations; the latter differ in their political approach to the Slovenian minority: conciliation and inclusion for the left, reservation and ethno-linguistic differentiation for the right.

Affective polarization intertwines with ethnolinguistic polarization and traumatic memories, generating a system of symbolic boundaries (Lamont & Molnár, 2002) that separate "us" and "them" not only linguistically but also morally and historically.

History thus becomes an identity-building device: what is remembered, forgotten, or reinterpreted helps define who belongs to the community and who is excluded. Understanding how identity boundaries are rooted, both in cognitive processes and affective dynamics, paves the way for analyzing the ways in which these boundaries are reproduced, negotiated, or contested in social practices and

everyday interactions. It is in ordinary interactions, informal contexts, and shared learning situations that these boundaries are confirmed, negotiated, or sometimes transformed. This perspective raises the need to analyze how groups learn, transmit, and incorporate these interpretative schemes through forms of situated learning and informal learning processes.

Situated learning and informal learning

Attention to situated learning processes allows us to understand how affective polarization and identity boundaries are not formed exclusively through historical narratives or collective representations but are continuously reproduced in everyday social practices. Following Lave and Wenger's (1991) perspective, learning is an intrinsically situated phenomenon that emerges from participation in communities of practice and interaction with shared cultural repertoire. In other words, it is not an individual and abstract process, but a social phenomenon that occurs through participation in a community's shared practices. In this sense, informal learning -conversations, rituals, intergenerational exchanges, commemorative practices -constitute privileged spaces in which "us/them" categories are learned,

reinforced, or contested. Analyzing these processes allows us to grasp how polarization is not merely a cognitive or affective product, but an outcome embedded in the social routines that structure community life.

The 2025 research confirmed precisely how polarization is influenced not only by macroscopic historical events - the two world wars experienced on the front lines, on the ground - but also by informal learning generated in everyday life. People learn how to interpret the world by observing, imitating, and participating in everyday interactions that define what is considered legitimate, true, morally acceptable, or unacceptable within the group. Applied to the context studied, this perspective allows us to understand how historical narratives, family memories, and public rituals not simply transmitted content are, but social practices that shape shared interpretative frameworks. It is within these practices that polarized thinking develops and consolidates, emerging from research as one of the primary ways in which the community interprets the past and present. In this sense, polarized thinking—despite being defined in psychological literature as a cognitive distortion (Ellis, 1962; Beck, 1976)—takes on an eminently social dimension here: it is not an individual trait, but a product of situated learning. Rigid dichotomies ("us/them," "victims/perpetrators") are learned and reinforced through participation in the community's discursive practices, becoming an integral part of its collective identity.

The informal, situated learning processes addressed in this research are not limited to a simple transfer of knowledge between an expert and a novice, but occur through direct participation, activating concrete and meaningful social practices. In other words, learning occurs not only through the transmission of information but also through interaction with other individuals who share a common interest and specific social practice. This informal learning therefore arises from the manifestation of certain community processes that can generate or reduce polarized thinking, favoring or diminishing community polarization. These processes are nothing more than everyday events shared by citizens, at school, on the street, in the workplace, in cultural associations, and at commemorative or religious ceremonies. The analysis of situated learning processes and informal learning shows how identity categories and polarizing narratives are not simply transmitted but incorporated through daily participation in community social practices. It is in these spaces of interaction - often tacit, informal, and deeply contextual - that individuals learn to recognize, reproduce, or sometimes question the symbolic boundaries that structure collective life.

Precisely for this reason, understanding how such learning manifests itself in lived experiences becomes essential to guide the methodological choices of research, which in the specific section are presented in such a way as to capture the situated, relational, and processual dimensions of the phenomena investigated.

Case Study Context: The case

Study is in a border area characterized by a complex history, marked by violence, deportations, shifts in sovereignty, and ethno-linguistic conflicts. Before explicitly naming the city under investigation, methodological consideration is necessary: in highly memorialized contexts, the mere mention of a place can trigger immediate interpretations, influenced in some cases by partial knowledge, in others by personal visions of history, selective memories, and inherited narratives that shape how events are understood. To prevent such preconceptions from guiding the reading even before the data are presented, it is appropriate to temporarily suspend the automatic association between the name of the place and its public representations. Considering this clarification, the case study concerns Gorizia, a border city between Italy and Slovenia, where traumatic memories of the twentieth century constitute the core of the antagonistic narratives that still influence relations between the Italian majority and the Slovenian minority today. As discussed in the section on cultural trauma, such memories do not operate as simple reminders of the past, but as active interpretive frames, continually reproduced by families, institutions, and other carrier groups that stabilize their meaning in the present.

While maintaining an exploratory approach, the analysis of Gorizia allows us to observe dynamics that are particularly relevant to contemporary Europe, marked by historical borders, multiple affiliations, and processes of division between groups and states. The city represents an emblematic case not because it can be generalized, but because it condenses within a limited space tensions, memories, and identities that elsewhere may manifest in more diffuse and less visible forms. This specificity necessitates a methodological approach attentive to local narratives, commemorative practices, and processes of intergenerational transmission, elements that will be explored in greater depth in the section dedicated to research design.

The 2025 study focused on the relationship between the city's Italian majority and Slovenian minority, two communities that share the same urban space but bring with them profoundly different historical memories, linguistic identities, and narratives of the recent past.

The end of the First World War and the territory's annexation to the Kingdom of Italy marked a profound fracture in the previous multi-ethnic balance. Nationalist policies, introduced in the 1920s and subsequently radicalized by the Fascist regime, led to a progressive forced homogenization, with the closure of Slovenian schools and cultural institutions, pressure to Italianize surnames, and the imposition of Italian as the sole public language. Added to these transformations was another decisive phenomenon: after a thousand years of rootedness in the territory, most of the German-speaking population left the city, fearing reprisals from the new Italian authorities. This was not a conflict with the local Italian and Slovenian population - who never expressed hostility toward German- speakers - but rather the latter's perception of having suddenly become vulnerable in a changed political context, where their membership in the former Austro-Hungarian administrative elite could expose them to discrimination or institutional pressure. This exodus contributed to rapidly changing the ethnic composition of the city, drastically reducing the German-speaking presence and accentuating the opposition between the Italian community and the remaining Slovenian one.

Methodology

The theoretical framework outlined in the previous sections has shown how cognitive, affective, and identity polarization is rooted in situated, everyday processes deeply embedded in the social practices of communities. To grasp these dynamics in their complexity, the methodology adopted allowed us to approach the lived experiences, contexts of interaction, and informal learning through which polarizing narratives were learned, reproduced, or transformed. From this perspective, the

methodological approach presented here leans toward qualitative tools capable of capturing the situated, relational, and processual dimensions of the phenomena investigated, prioritizing listening to participants' voices and analyzing the practices through which identity boundaries are shaped in everyday life.

Research design

The research adopted a qualitative approach, aimed at exploring in depth the processes through which communities construct, transmit, and transform their social, familial, and historical narratives, as well as their interpretative frameworks. The aim of the research was to develop knowledge about the mechanisms of community polarization, arriving at a description of the construction of community polarization and polarized communities. This began with an analysis of social relations that are not yet conflictual but simply divisive, to understand their causes, dynamics, and developments. The research design is based on an interpretative analysis of interviews, focus groups, and informal discussions, complemented by a specific focus on informal learning processes and the discursive practices that emerge within the community context.

The aim of this article, however, is not to produce statistical generalizations, but to understand the meanings attributed to past events and the ways in which these meanings influence contemporary polarization. The focus is on history and its influence on the maintenance of community polarization.

Sampling

The sample was constructed through purposeful sampling, a strategy particularly suited to the study of complex and situated phenomena, where the goal is not statistical representativeness, but rather the ability to access diverse and theoretically relevant perspectives. Following this approach, only participants who possessing characteristics considered crucial to understanding the phenomenon under study were selected, while those who did not meet these criteria were excluded. In this case, the primary inclusion criterion was being Italian or Slovenian, born and raised in Gorizia, a condition deemed necessary to access family memories, intergenerational narratives, and perceptions rooted in the local context.

In the preliminary phase of the research, an exception to the inclusion criteria was introduced: three people were interviewed who were neither born nor raised in Gorizia but came from two of the Italian French borders and one was Italian Croatian, thus bilingual, having moved to Gorizia during her university studies. They all had extensive experience living in border contexts and were bilingual in Italian French or Italian Croatian. These key witnesses were involved not as part of the sample analyzed but as experts in community polarization. They contributed to the development of the interview and focus group outline, offering an external perspective useful for highlighting issues, sensitivities, and critiques typical of border life. Their testimonies served as an exploratory and preparatory function and were not included in the final analysis.

The purposive sampling was subsequently supplemented by a snowball sampling method, through which the initial participants suggested other people to involve. Since these suggestions came from their social networks, the resulting sample reflects the relationships of the initial participants. This process led to the inclusion of citizens with public roles, teachers, students, members of cultural associations, people involved in commemorative activities, and retirees. However, merchants, entrepreneurs, or freelancers, categories that were not included in the social networks activated during the snowball sampling, were not included.

Conducting the research required careful consideration of the researcher's positionality. Having been a Gorizia resident for generations and belonging to the Italian majority, the researcher shares a local cultural and memorial horizon with many participants. Although she does not speak Slovenian, she has a family genealogy that includes a Slovenian great-grandfather and a line of Slovenian ancestors who have historically resided in Gorizia. This hybrid position - within the Italian community but with family roots that cross the linguistic border - required constant attention to relational dynamics during the interviews, to maintain an objective and neutral approach. In a context

characterized by conflicting memories and deeply rooted affiliations, this awareness guided the conduct of the interviews, fostering a non-judgmental listening attitude and an interpretative vigilance aimed at preventing one's own identity from inappropriately influencing the interpretation of the empirical material. Reflexivity was therefore an essential component of the research process, helping to maintain space for the plurality of memories present in the area.

A total of 57 testimonies were collected, divided between semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and informal discussions.

Sample summary table

Category	Subcategories	Notes
Inclusion criteria	Born and lived in Gorizia.	Initial exemption for three privileged witnesses (not included in the analysis).
Language group	Italian majority; Slovenian minority, bilingual.	To explore intergroup relations.
Generations	Young adults (20–35); Adults (36–60); Older adults (60–98)	To capture differences in the transmission of trauma
Social position/role	Citizens with public roles; Teachers; Students; Members of cultural associations; People involved in commemorative activities; Pensioners.	Absent: Shopkeepers, entrepreneurs, and freelancers (not present in the snowball sampling networks).
	57, divided as follows: ITA - 17 M (including two Istrian exiles and one Friulian), 15 F (including 1 Istrian exile); MIN. SL. - 12 M, 8 F; OTHER - 3 M, 2 F.	The two women included in the other category had been resident in Gorizia since childhood and one belonged to the category of Italian exiles, from Slovenia, and the other was of Prussian origin and a German mother tongue.

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews

The interviews were conducted between July 2022 and June 2024, using a semi-structured approach that allowed for an in-depth exploration of emerging themes while allowing for personal narratives. Each interview lasted between 45 and 150 minutes, with an average of 90 minutes for a total of 179 hours and was conducted in locations chosen by the interviewees to foster a climate of trust and openness. Questions addressed: family memories of historical events; perceptions of public commemorations; narratives transmitted within the community; representations of the other group; daily experiences of coexistence and conflict; and interpretations of the past and present.

Focus group

A 90-minute focus group was also organized with eight participants, five from the Slovenian minority and three from Italy, selected through purposive sampling.

The focus group allowed us to observe how individual narratives unfold in a dialogic context, highlighting dynamics of agreement, disagreement, and negotiation of meaning. The discussions that emerged enriched the interpretation of the data and allowed us to grasp relational elements that are difficult to detect in individual interviews. At the same time, it allowed the two communities, for the first time in eighty years, to sit down at a table to share memories and personal testimonies.

Informal conversations

Alongside the formal interviews and focus groups, informal conversations were also collected, spontaneously occurring during fieldwork with residents - all elderly - who expressed a desire to share their memories of Gorizia. Although unstructured, these conversations were included in the data set and analyzed using the same thematic analysis procedure applied to the interviews and focus groups. Their spontaneous nature allowed us to capture aspects of everyday memory and intergenerational transmission, which are difficult to detect in more structured contexts. Interviews lasted variable amounts, ranging from 10 to 50 minutes, with an average of 25 minutes each. Informal conversations allowed us to access natural and situated narratives, broadening our understanding of the context and enriching the interpretative depth of the entire empirical corpus, allowing room for emotions, which emerged authentically and without prompting from the interviewer.

The diverse set of materials collected - semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and informal discussions - all recorded, fully transcribed, and anonymized, constituted a rich and nuanced corpus, requiring an analytical approach capable of capturing both thematic recurrences and the narrative specificities of the various research tools. The following section details the thematic analysis procedure adopted to interpret these materials.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted through a thematic coding process, inspired by the thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke 2006, 2021) and integrated with the principles of situated learning (Lave & Wenger). The analytical procedure followed the steps suggested by the qualitative literature, particularly J.W. Creswell (2013), and consisted of: data familiarization; initial coding; theme construction; review and refinement; theme definition and naming; and interpretative integration.

The entire data set was analyzed using the same procedure, treating each testimony as a significant contribution to understanding the phenomenon. As Creswell (2013) emphasizes, the inclusion of heterogeneous materials is fully consistent with the qualitative approach, as it allows us to grasp the phenomenon's complexity through diverse and complementary narrative sources.

This allowed us to observe how memories, representations of the other group, and intergenerational narratives emerge in different communicative contexts, enriching the interpretative depth of the analysis. The approach adopted favored a situated reading of the data, recognizing that the collected narratives are rooted in the participants' social practices, linguistic affiliations, and daily experiences. This perspective allowed us to interpret the themes not only as analytical categories, but as expressions of knowledge embedded and shared within the local community.

Thematic analysis allowed us to uncover the meaning of the qualitative data, highlighting the main themes and allowing for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon studied. From the first reading, twenty-eight codes emerged from the corpus. During the second reading of the material, in addition to refining the codes, they were grouped into overarching macro-categories, which constituted the main themes extracted from the data. Themes represent the emerging patterns through which the research findings were elaborated. A theme can be described as a phrase or conceptual core that summarizes the content of multiple data units, linked by semantic or conceptual implications and classified according to the underlying codes.

The analysis identified eight themes, organized into two interpretative areas consistent with the Research questions related to the relationship between community processes and informal learning:

Community Processes (4 topics) “There are informal community processes that foster the Do they polarize or, on the contrary, reduce the polarization of thought? Which are they?”

Informal learning (4 topics) “Furthermore, are there communicative, relational, social, work-related, informal exchanges between people belonging to different ethnic groups that lead to cognitive and emotional enrichment such as to induce mutual learning, capable of generating educational

practices that limit the polarization of thought, also depriving it of any form of ethnocentric reasoning?

In summary, informal learning can generate educational practices capable of preventing or reducing polarized and ethnocentric thinking in a community? What are they?"

The thematic structure identified allowed us to capture both the collective dynamics that characterize border life and the forms of daily and intergenerational learning that emerge from the participants' narratives.

The identified categories were integrated into an interpretative framework consistent with the theoretical framework described above. A summary table was developed representing the main community processes of the 20th century and the forms of informal learning associated with them. Two codes - SOC1 and IF3 - are linked to two themes because they demonstrated similarities with both. The table has no quantitative value but constitutes an interpretative representation of the themes that emerged.

FRAMEWORK	**SITUATED LEARNING**	
CATEGORIES	**COMMUNITY PROCESSES**	**INFORMAL LEARNINGS**
THEMES	**R RELATIONSHIPS**	**A LEARNINGS**
Codes	R1 Relations	L1 School
	R2 Events	L2 Culture/ethnocentrism
	R3 Games	L3 Education
	R4 Music/dance	L4 Habits/customs/practices
		L5 Religion
TEMI	**SOC SOCIETY**	**IF FAMILIAR IDENTITY**
Codes	Soc1 Ideology/Politics/Values	IF1 Identity/roots
	Soc2 Forms of goverment (legislation, administration, economy)	IF2 Relatives/family
	Soc3 Work	IF3 Religion
	Soc4 Public personality	
	Soc5 Privileges/social classes	
THEMES	**H HISTORY**	**PA PERSONAL ATTITUDE**
Codes	H1 History	PA1 Ideology/Politics/Values
	H 2 Monuments/ commemorations	PA2 Emotions/motivations
	H 3 Symbols	AP3 Opening – closing mental
		PA4 Nature
		PA5 Awareness/expectations
THEMES	**T TERRITORY**	**C COMUNICATION**
Codes	T1 Territory	C1 Linguistic codes
	T2 Progetti transfrontalieri	C2 Communication/voice of the people
	T3 Architecture	

Community processes are the source of informal learning, which in turn has determined a more or less polarizing dynamic. Historical and social changes in the region and in peer relationships have, in fact, determined informal learning, which underlies cultural/educational, communication, personal attitude, and family identity changes within the two polarized communities. A direct cause-and-effect relationship between the themes of the two sections, as is typical of statistical-quantitative research, was not found; instead, the phenomenon of community polarization was explored to identify the variables that can generate a certain type of polarized thinking. Co-occurrences of events between community processes and informal learning have been identified, allowing us to describe the

evolution of polarization. In the former, the causes of polarization were identified, while in the latter, the polarizing effects were identified. However, there was no statistical correlation, given the qualitative nature of the research conducted, which was not intended to test hypotheses but simply to explore in depth a phenomenon that is still little studied, laying the foundation for future quantitative studies.

The themes that emerged from the analysis are fully consistent with the theoretical framework adopted, which combines the community processes perspective with the situated learning paradigm (Lave & Wenger).

Consistency with community Processes

Themes related to community processes show how participants' narratives are rooted in shared social practices, commemorative rituals, linguistic affiliations, and intergroup dynamics. This is perfectly in line with the literature on community processes (F. Barth, 1969; M. Lamont, 2000; J. Lave & E. Wenge, 1991; M. Halbwachs, 1950; J.C. Alexander et al., 2004), which emphasizes how collective identities emerge through everyday interactions, shared memories, and forms of social participation and are consolidated through the construction and maintenance of symbolic boundaries (Barth, 1969).

Consistency with situated learning

The themes related to informal learning confirm that knowledge is not transmitted abstractly, but is embedded in everyday life practices, family relationships, and experiences of border crossing. The testimonies show how participants learn by experiencing the community, observing, listening, and participating in its practices: a process that faithfully reflects the idea of legitimate peripheral participation proposed by Lave & Wenger.

Consistency with the Border Context

Finally, the thematic structure reflects the specificity of the Gorizia context: a place where memory, identity, and belonging are constantly negotiated. The themes highlight how boundaries - historical, linguistic, symbolic - continue to shape perceptions of the past and present, confirming the centrality of context in the construction of meaning.

The results section will not present in detail all eight themes that emerged from the thematic analysis. Although each theme contributes to delineating significant aspects of community life and informal learning in the Gorizia context, currently only one of them - the theme of History - maintains a critical and persistent influence in generating and nurturing forms of polarization between the two local communities. In the other themes, predominantly conciliatory and constructive elements emerged, outlining an evolutionary trajectory oriented toward reconciliation and a progressive linguistic, cultural, commercial, and environmental rapprochement. These elements have been transformed into an educational model, based on informal learning, to prevent and reduce polarization. These aspects suggest dynamics of openness and cooperation that, while not eliminating differences, contribute to reducing symbolic distances between groups.

In this article, however, we chose to address the topic of History exclusively because it continues to represent a sensitive and deeply rooted issue, capable of influencing mutual perceptions and maintaining active forms of identity distinction. For this reason, the results section will focus exclusively on this theme, analyzing its articulations, tensions, and implications for contemporary coexistence.

The thematic analysis highlighted how history is the most significant factor in building and maintaining the polarization between the Italian majority and the Slovenian minority in the case study city. The collected narratives demonstrate how twentieth-century events continue to influence mutual perceptions, informal learning, and identity dynamic. These aspects suggest dynamics of openness and cooperation that, while not erasing differences, contribute to reducing symbolic distances between groups.

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Results

The historical theme currently appears to be the one that not only maintains high levels of polarization but fuels it. Divergent interpretations of historical events remain irreconcilable because they are politically exploited, highlighting how historical narrative and political ideology intersect and influence each other. Thus, the need to develop a pedagogy of history that allows for, if not a shared narrative, then an acceptance of divergences that also includes acknowledging the suffering experienced by both sides has emerged.

To fully understand how the same historical event can be remembered and narrated in divergent ways, we will include verbatim, anonymized quotes from the linguistic majority and minority, divided by historical period.

The narrative research was based on interviews with citizens from both sides, comparing their perspectives. For the purposes of this article, which aims to describe how the memory of historical events can, in some cases, generate very acute tensions, attention will be focused exclusively on the factor identified by the label "History," which includes associated second-level codes such as "History," "Monuments/Commemorations," and "Symbols."

To enhance understanding and understanding, several quotes from interviews will be included, some of which are quite extensive. This will engage the reader in everyday social dynamics, helping them to identify with the context. As a reading note, if these quotes are too long, you can skip them and go directly to the relevant commentary below.

Family Memories and Intergenerational Trauma

From the interviews, it clearly emerges that family memories of the traumatic events of the twentieth century - forced Italianization, deportation, violence, foibas, military occupations - constitute a central narrative core in the construction of group identities, which are transmitted through family stories, emotionally charged with hatred and suffering.

Respondents belonging to the generation that directly experienced the events tend to describe the past through detailed accounts, often characterized by strong emotional involvement. Immediately subsequent generations, despite not having direct experience, report narratives passed down within the family, that retain the original emotional charge, albeit to a lesser extent. Later descendants, in some cases, have had the opportunity to receive from their grandparents much more detailed accounts than those received from their parents, while in others the historical memory seems to have been almost entirely lost. The intergenerational transmission of trauma occurs through recurring stories, family rituals, and constant references to emblematic episodes,

which become an integral part of shared interpretative frameworks. These memories, however, do not simply describe historical facts; they also attribute moral and identity-related meanings to the events, contributing to the construction of symbolic boundaries between groups.

The end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the loss of multilingualism, forced Italianization and the construction of "us" and "them"

The end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire marked the beginning of a process of community polarization, as a situation of mutual aid and collaboration, typical of the Habsburg period, shifted to a progressive hardening of social relations. The multiethnic Empire had ensured the perception of equal rights before the law and had allowed for a natural linguistic coexistence, in which families were often quadrilingual: German, Italian, Slovenian, and Friulian. With the transition to the Kingdom of Italy, new social and political pressures emerged, introducing the concept of linguistic minority and initiating a slow process of cultural eradication. The loss of multilingualism gradually deepened, transforming families accustomed to speaking multiple languages into monolingual ones, marking the beginning of an identity divide that would take root throughout the twentieth century, following the atrocities caused by the Second World War and the postwar period.

The case study, however, has not always been characterized by community polarization, between a linguistic majority and a linguistic minority. There was a time when the concept of a linguistic minority simply did not exist, having been artificially created by Italian, nationalist government impositions. The period of the Austro-Hungarian Empire is, in fact, remembered positively by both factions, without any kind of recrimination. Many participants recall - directly or through family narratives - the Austro-Hungarian era as a time of peaceful coexistence and natural multilingualism.

Interview with Rajan, a 48-year-old Slovenian minority politician

This aspect has always amused me, when almost unconsciously and perhaps without even knowing who was saying it, without even knowing what they were saying, I've always been amused to hear: "Ah, things were good when Austria was here, Maria Theresa should come back. Austria and the Austro-Hungarian Empire." It's funny because in the end we know it from books or from the almost borderline testimonies of our elders that we had the pleasure of knowing. But it's funny because in the end that was the city we're talking about now and we want it, we dream of it, we spoke four languages, we got along with everyone and then the war took its toll.

This quote shows how the memory of the Austro-Hungarian Empire functions today as a founding myth of an ideal coexistence, often contrasted with the fractures of the twentieth century, which began with the annexation of the territory to Italy at the end of the First World War, as also expressed in the following interview excerpt, reported in full to allow a complete immersion in the atmosphere of the era.

Interview with Edoardo, a 61-year-old Italian top public administrator.

In Gorizia there was a strong sense of unity before the wars, and this was true for all communities. If you look at a big city, even in an apartment building you don’t know - if you live on the third floor - who lives on the first. This was a village that became a bit larger, but it kept that village culture. Among other things, there were never any tensions, not even during the First World War, because Gorizia had not yet been divided. Gorizia was not divided under the Habsburgs: a kitchen table belonged to an extended family, as they always were, where you had the grandfather, the uncles—not the kitchen table of today with just mother, father, and one child. Back then you had those big tables where breakfast began with one person helping another. When these extended families came together, speaking and understanding different languages was something natural, not forced. It was completely normal for someone to address another in Friulian, and the other - even if they didn’t speak Friulian - would understand it and then reply to them and to the others in German or Slovene.

Community polarization began at the end of the First World War, when the first waves of Italians migrated from the rest of the peninsula to colonize the newly conquered lands of the Habsburgs. Added to this was the emigration of Germans no longer welcome in the new Kingdom and the push

to Italianize the names and surnames of Slovenians. The Slovenian community thus found itself an increasingly large minority, given the arrival of new Italians and the departure of the Germans. The following testimonies indicate the influence of political and administrative choices in segmenting the population ethnocentrically, which effectively initiated the process of polarization because the previously unknown belief that citizens were better than others began to spread.

Interview with Giorgina, a 66-year-old Italian public institution press officer

Fascism destroyed everything that existed in these lands. But already with the arrival of the Savoy family and its annexation to the Kingdom of Italy, problems began in Gorizia. Austrian citizens decided to abandon the city because royal officials took over the municipal registry and began sorting people based on their Italian origins. Germans had to prove they were Italian by speaking the language, or they had to be wealthy, in which case their lack of knowledge of Italian would be excused. Many Germans, therefore, left, abandoning their lands and homes.

The erasure of traces of a certain people's presence, along with the strong political and social pressure to leave those who did not identify as Italian, was effective against the Germans but not against the Slovenes. The former abandoned the territory, while the latter clung even more firmly to it, developing the resilience in the face of adversity that would allow them to withstand the oppression they would endure during the subsequent twenty years of fascism and during the Second World War.

The informal learning that emerges is that having a strong connection to one's native land prevents any attempt to erase one's culture because one has a deeply rooted and unassailable sense of identity.

The irremediable sociopolitical implications began precisely with the conquest of the city by the Italians, who, in effect, interfered in a territory that, until then, had been inhabited by ethnically diverse peoples capable of collaborating and getting along. The arrival of the Italians generated numerous historical, social, and cultural contradictions, which impacted the multiethnic population, which from then on, instead, became divided, no longer able to feel like an organic, integrated whole of diverse yet united peoples. What emerges from these historical vicissitudes was the development, following the Second World War of an ability to mediate between real-life contradictions, finding a balance that allowed people to live with dignity, despite the impossibility of resolving them. In this case, family education and personal attitude seem to be the most important components for this type of learning.

Interview with Giorgina, a 66-year-old Italian public institution press officer.

Our city was the first to be bombed by the Italians during the First World War. They bombed other cities in Europe as well, but we were the first city with civilian inhabitants to be bombed. Who knows this? I recently read this in a history book: to liberate us, they bombed us.

I found a little box that has done all the moves in the world, and it was a box from my grandmother. It came from my maternal grandmother's house, and inside were two war medals, both bearing the inscription "Forged in the enemy's bronze," a medal registered to my grandfather. My grandfather immediately threw them in the cellar. Evidently, since they still had their ribbons intact, he must never have pinned them anywhere because my grandfather married a half-Cröck (Austrian). So, he had medals forged with the enemy's bronze, which were his future wife's people. Obviously, you must put them in the cellar, because how else would you manage? And that's what we did: we put them in the cellar along with the medals forged with Grandfather Giovanni's enemy's bronze, a whole bunch of other things, because it was the only way we could overcome irreconcilable contradictions. So, I left them there. I don't care about medals forged with the enemy's bronze, not even as historical relics. My grandfather, a Knight of Vittorio Veneto, was Italian, in the army that attacked our city. This is why his medals are forged in Austrian bronze, and it was felt necessary to point this out. Then the conqueror married the conquered, but he had to throw the medals in the cellar because, after all, my grandmother wasn't the type to not say what she thought.

The dissolution of multiculturalism and multilingualism was not something the Austrian monarchy wanted. My grandmother, in a school essay about the war, which strangely didn't result in her expulsion, said that the Savoy kings fulfilled their ambition to conquer these lands by taking our city.

The sentence wasn't marked, the notebook wasn't torn up; there was a check, there was a correction, obviously, for an incorrect tense, and nothing else. So, a teacher who accepted this opinion. However, it was clearly the opinion of a conquered woman, albeit a young girl. But it evidently reflected the soul and feelings of her family.

The defining characteristic of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, of which the city was a part, was the unity of all its communities, without legislative or social differences of any kind, at least until each linguistic community began to awaken a nationalist spirit within itself, opposed to that of the other communities. The nationalist polarization among the different peoples of the Austro-Hungarian Empire marked its end and effectively sanctioned the birth of linguistic and ethnic divisions between communities.

The uninterrupted influx of Italians from the end of the First World War, when Austro-Hungarian citizens, Italians, were forced to flee their territory on charges of Austrianism - espionage for Austria - to the present day has profoundly altered social structures and relationships between citizens, not only between the Italian and Slovenian linguistic communities, but also between the Italian and Slovenian linguistic communities. There has been a gradual shift from a situation of mutual aid and collaboration, typical of the Habsburg period, which persisted until after the Second World War, to a heightened individualism, characterized by critical attitudes toward others, poorly tolerated and judged inadequate from every perspective: social, linguistic, cultural, value- based, and educational, but not religious, given that they all adhered to the same Christian – Catholic - faith.

The nationalist policies of the Kingdom of Italy and, subsequently, the Fascist regime emerge as one of the most traumatic factors for the Slovenian minority. Forced Italianization represented one of the most impactful processes in the construction of the "us" and "them" distinctions, as it introduced an ideological divide that overlapped with ethnic and linguistic affiliation. The political and cultural indoctrination of the fascist period imposed the exclusive use of Italian, generating a sense of cultural eradication and pushing many Slovenians to assimilate to avoid conflict with the majority. Some decided to abandon their language, name, and culture to declare themselves Italian, while others faced social and political pressure that led them to perceive themselves as a linguistic minority. This process helped create a deep rift between communities, fueling polarized thinking that continued to influence interethnic relations in the decades that followed.

Immediately, therefore, with the annexation to Italy, the perception spread that there were citizens different in language and culture, though not in history, identified as the Slovenian minority, who needed to be homogenized under the only possible civilization, the Italian one, to which everyone had to declare their belonging. Those who did not do so, even before the arrival of fascism, faced greater difficulties in obtaining financial, educational, and housing assistance. Then, with the advent of Mussolini, the situation worsened into even greater problems for the Slovenian community. Slovenian schools, cultural centers, and libraries were closed, and a law was imposed on speaking Slovenian in public. Extreme economic and social pressure was maintained on the Slovenian population to Italianize their names and surnames, although no legal obligation to do so was ever enacted. There were, however, cases of Slovenes, members of the minority, who found their surnames changed by order of the prefect, without even being informed (informal conversation with Igor, a 54-year-old minority politician). The goal was to Italianize the area, which had a strong Slovene presence, wiping out its culture, historical memory, language, and documented traces. This situation fostered a sense of resentment and hatred toward the Italian community, which continued to grow until after the Second World War, generating the polarized social divide that has only recently begun to narrow.

The erasure of the various languages was intended to continue the process of Italianization, but it clashed with the iron will of the linguistic minorities - Slovenes and Friulians - to resist, thanks to their sense of identity, rooted in the land where they, unlike the new Italians arriving from the rest of the peninsula, had lived for centuries. Once again, resilience in the face of adversity was overwhelming.

The region's multilingual heritage, therefore, began to decline as the Germans left, and Friulian and Slovenian were boycotted by the fascist regime, in the name of exclusive learning of the Italian language, although they never completely disappeared. Initially, the forced Italianization process took

root mainly among Italian-speaking people, who gradually abandoned the use of other languages, but not among Slovenians and Friulians. Language proved to be a very strong identity factor, maintaining awareness of one's own culture as distinct from others.

Interview with Giorgina, a 66-year-old Italian public institution press officer.

The fascist imposition of a ban on the use of other languages was a huge cultural loss. It was a brainwashing of the entire population because even my parents, who had a medium-high education because my father was the manager of the hospital's chemical analysis laboratory, were unable to escape this ideology that imposed the exclusive use of Italian and conditioned you to believe that, if you spoke in public, for example, in Slovenian, you would have problems. So, from having trilingual families we have moved on to monolingual families.

However, the process of Slovenian assimilation also began when some decided, pushed by the regime, to avoid incurring problems of various kinds and to be able to find work, to abandon their own language, name and culture, declaring themselves to be Italian in all respects.

Interview with Rafel, a 57-year-old journalist from the Slovenian minority.

There was the phenomenon between the two wars of assimilation to Italian culture whereby some Slovenians they chose the city life of the Italian bourgeoisie over that of the Slovenian countryside.

The wounds of the Second World War and the post-war period

The outbreak of World War II led to the deportation of many non-Italian citizens to fascist concentration camps in Italy, such as Gonars (UD) and the one on the Croatian island of Rab, where they were tortured or killed. These events, along with the subsequent deportations of Italians to the foibas during the final years of World War II and the immediate post-war period, remain indelible memories, which form the foundation of the entire process of community polarization.

Interview with Paola, 37-year-old secretary of the Slovenian minorities.

I don't know if we talked much about the history of our city at school. It was mostly about the Slovenian minority and what it suffered, especially during the Second World War. They talked to us about the deportees. My grandparents talked about the people deported here from SA (an exclusively Slovenian district of the city during the Second World War), and so did my dad. They were just as insane. Just as the Jewish Holocaust happened, the way it was presented to us, both at home and at school, the situation was the same for Slovenians. It's basically the same as what happened here, with the deported minority populations. Here, it's rare for a family to have someone deported in the home.

Mutual recrimination is still active, and there appears to be no viable way to resolve them. The inconsolable suffering of losing family members or loved ones, coupled with the perception of the injustice experienced, are feelings too intense to be forgotten or even minimized. Even in this case, however, the trend is toward a slow and progressive distancing of the new generations from excessively heated mutual recriminations and hatreds, which are giving way to a coexistence based once again on frequenting common places and engaging in collaborative activities.

The memory of the past, however, has not yet been erased; it lingers in certain families who pass it on to their children with enough emotional intensity to make it assimilate into the new generations as well. Therefore, in this case, they tend to take sides, based on their family's cultural heritage. The memory of fascism is, therefore, still alive. When Mussolini visited Gorizia in 1938, as a martyred city of the First World War, he made it the target of his nationalist propaganda, which targeted all non-Italians. On that occasion, for example, all citizens, including Jews, were forced to participate in the parade and official speech in the city's main square, to support his nationalist ideas. Subsequently, however, on September 10, 1943, following the collapse of the Fascist regime in Italy, the same city was annexed by the Third Reich. Shortly thereafter, on November 23, the entire Jewish community of 500 people was deported to Auschwitz, including the youngest citizen deportee, the infant Bruno

Faber, who was killed at the age of three months and nineteen days. Only two men managed to survive and return home after the war.

After the fall of fascism and the signing of armistice with the Allies, the situation became increasingly confused. The territory was, in fact, occupied by the Nazis, who continued, in an even more serious manner, the policy of uniformity of the territory and population. Fascist concentration camps such as that of Gonars (Udine) began to be managed by the Germans, who used them as sorting centers for the concentration camps, where all those considered enemies of the regime were deported, regardless of their religious beliefs. The oppression suffered throughout this period only fueled hatred and resentment toward Germans and Italians among the indigenous Slavic populations, which culminated in revenge whenever the opportunity arose. The informal lesson that emerged from this sad moment was that one could no longer trust those different from oneself, a concept that underpinned the polarized thinking that divides one from another, a concept extremely difficult to eradicate. The city's Jewish community no longer exists, although memories of its past presence linger around the Jewish ghetto, active from 1698 to 1797. The site includes the home of the Jewish glottologist Graziadio Isaia Ascoli and the synagogue, which began operating as an oratory in 1699 and has now been renovated by the municipality as a museum and cultural center, hosting events but no longer used as a place of worship. During the Habsburg period, the city was known as the “little Jerusalem on the Isonzo” due to the presence of many high-level Jewish writers and scholars, but in 1969 the Jewish community, of Ashkenazi rite, ceased to be active.

Unlike the Jews of the other territories of the Austrian Empire, who were loyal to the ruling house, the Jews of the city almost all adhered to the Italian ideas of the Risorgimento, participating in irredentist circles, together with the secular and liberal bourgeoisie of the city, by which they were soon Many Jews from the area also held high positions within the Italian army itself. This relationship continued until the promulgation of the racial laws in 1938, when the collaborative relations were terminated and the Jews deported.

The Second World War thus represented a profound watershed in the city's collective memory, introducing a level of violence and suffering that indelibly marked subsequent generations. Deportations, vendettas, reprisals, and tensions between Italians and Slovenians fueled a climate of fear that was transmitted within families and affected interethnic relations for decades. Narratives of the war remain divergent, rooted in painful family experiences that continue to influence how communities perceive one another. Memories linked to the Second World War constitute a deeply painful and polarizing core of events. The narratives include deportations to fascist concentration camps (Gonars, Rab); Nazi violence; postwar Yugoslav revenge; foibas; and intra-community persecution between "white" Catholic Slovenians and "red" Communists.

The other great totalitarianism of the 20th century, communism, although to a lesser extent, still retains some theoretical and philosophical foundations in the historical vision of events in the area studied. This political vision has created a dual polarization: the first ethno-linguistic between majority and minority, and the second internal to the two ethnic groups. Indeed, both within the majority and the minority, there are supporters and detractors of the communist regime who consolidate their ideological views by considering, to support their positions, different or even similar historical facts, but offering divergent interpretations.

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With the fall of fascism, the situation turned to the detriment of the Italians.

Interview with Pierpaolo, a 75-year-old former Italian teacher and Istrian exile.

"In 1943, when September 8th came around, the armistice was declared and, in a sense, Italy as an institution collapsed; whether fascist or not, it collapsed, and that's where everything began. Naturally, since they had offended the Slovenes and Croats, the latter took revenge, to put it very simply. Then, here in our city, the first to arrive — to 'liberate' it — were the *domobranci*, the Slovene Home Guard, a collaborationist militia under German command."

The end of World War II marked the beginning of the forty-day occupation of the city by Tito, which Marshal Tito wanted to include among the territories annexed to Yugoslavia. It was a period of further ethnic tensions, this time in reverse, with Italians deported and then killed in the foibas. This issue remains deeply divisive and unresolved in the collective memory of the city, both among Italians and among the Catholic Slovenes, on the White side, who were massacred like the Italians because they were considered enemies of the communist Yugoslav state.

Interview with Gianna, an 88-year-old former Italian midwife.

The so-called Titoists occupied Gorizia for forty days, wreaking havoc, wreaking havoc. We lived on Via A., in Isaia Ascoli's building. We even had our own apartment in 1945. I was ten years old, and I remember everything. The Guardia di Finanza barrack was there, and the boys were there, the finance police. When the Titoists entered, the first thing they did was come and take away all the finance officers at 5:00 PM. They entered in the afternoon and took away all the boys, who were then killed, thrown into sinkholes.

Interview with Francesco, a 56-year-old Italian television journalist.

I'm working to uncover one of the major problems we have in this city: our blessed foibas victims. Truth be told, for every Italian thrown into the foiba, there are on average ten Slovenians, twenty Croats, and thirty Serbs. Josip Broz Tito, from May 1st to July 25th, August 1st, because the carnage lasted three months, gave orders to his three deputies - Rankovic, Dilas, and Kardelj Glas - I never remember the last one, I always mistake him as plenipotentiaries for Slovenia. Kardelj, Rankovic, and Dilas for Serbia, Rankovic for Croatia, Kardelj for Slovenia - to clear out all political enemies. This was confirmed to me by Pirjevec (a contemporary historian of the Slovenian minorities of Trieste, specialized in the History of Eastern Europe and the Balkans). Yugoslavia turned into an open-air slaughterhouse. They killed everyone at the back, at the top, on the left, six or seven thousand Italians. And these, in my opinion, are the most reliable numbers. But we're talking about one hundred thousand Slovenians versus seven thousand Italians.

Let's start by saying that we are all in the foibas, let's start by saying that the foibas, which is a generic thing, is not a small Italian tragedy, but an enormous European tragedy.

On November 2nd, the Feast of the Dead, go to the Trnovo Forest and see where the candles are. Because the people of Trnovo good people, know where the dead are underground, in the holes. And since our people are there and they put candles for everyone, and then we call them ours there too, what does "our" mean and what does "theirs" mean? Because a thirty-year-old farmer from Trnovo who was thrown into the sinkhole was an Italian citizen, born in Italy, educated in Italy, and served in the military in Italy. His name was Stoico Boikovic, and his first language was Slovenian, but he also spoke perfect Italian. They caught him because he was Catholic, because he had served in the military with Italy, or maybe because he had married the woman the commander of the local IX Corpus liked, and they threw him into a hole. Was he Italian, or Slovenian? I went down this year with a Slovenian speleologist.

We went down into a sinkhole, showed him the things we found, and when I asked him, "Excuse me, were there Italians or Slovenians in here?" he replied, "I'd say human beings." And he's been searching all his life. We all know where the foibas are, we gave him the paperwork. The new places are there.

Tito's persecution, including of his own countrymen, already during the conflict sparked a division between White-Catholic and Red-pro-Communist Slovenes, which resulted in persecution and

killings by the latter of the former. This intra-ethnic polarization persists, albeit to a lesser extent, even today. Observing this phenomenon from the outside, one can see that, in this case, belonging to the same ethnicity, culture, and language were not enough to ensure unity between the two factions, divided along political and religious lines, no longer merely polarized but radicalized. Actual crimes were perpetrated against their own countrymen, motivated by the political ideology of protecting communism and the power of the Catholic Church.

The other great totalitarianism of the 20th century, communism, although to a lesser extent, still retains some theoretical and philosophical foundations in the historical vision of events that occurred in the area studied.

Compared to this political vision, dual polarization has developed: the first ethno-linguistic between majority and minority, and the second internal to the two ethnic groups.

Indeed, both within the majority and the minority, there are supporters and detractors of the communist regime who consolidate their ideological views by considering, to support their positions, different or even similar historical facts, but offering divergent interpretations. Memories are often transmitted with strong emotional charge, generating informal learning, even during historical conferences or in the rare instances of interethnic dialogue on this specific topic, which reinforce polarized thinking in both communities: we are the victims, they are the executioners.

The 1947 border and the symbolic division of the territory

The drawing of the border in 1947 shattered a social fabric that had until then maintained continuity, disrupting family, economic, and emotional relationships. The separation affected not only urban space but also identities, which were redefined in relation to a border that had suddenly become impassable. Memories of that period evoke a sense of profound loss and disorientation. The creation of the border between Italy and Yugoslavia in 1947 is perceived as a traumatic event that divided families, communities, and identities. Testimonies describe: the complete closure of the border; the perception of isolation; the stigmatization of Slovenians who remained in Italy as traitors; the economic disparity between the two sides of the border; and smuggling as a form of cross- border solidarity.

The border remained closed until 1955, when a special type of permit, the Propustnica (a type of movement pass used at the time), was introduced to allow crossing. It was issued primarily by the Yugoslav authorities to Italian-Yugoslav residents within ten kilometers of the border, allowing them to shop and reunite with relatives. This introduction followed the so-called Broom Sunday, May 13, 1955, the day when Yugoslavs gathered at the border and forced the blockade to return to their old town, which remained in Italy, to buy essential supplies, including brooms made of sorghum, which were unavailable there, hence the day's name. In this case, the lesson learned by the people involved is that organizing themselves in a cohesive way to meet a primary need (food, water, necessities) can generate very strong social changes. Furthermore, it allowed us to experience that the border is only a line on the ground and can be overcome, by the will to help each other, at least until that line on the ground is also marked in the way of thinking.

Interview with Paola, 37-year-old secretary of the Slovenian minorities.

It was the population, however, who started Broom Sunday, in short, they made it clear that people wanted to see each other, to be together.

The creation of the border also created a physical, emotional, social, and cultural rift between the Slovenes of Yugoslavia and the Slovene minorities in Italy, which gradually deepened. The lesson learned is that material tools such as military barracks on the border, barriers, wire fences, and passes fostered a sense of border, which was then supported by the differing political ideologies that characterized both sides.

Interview with Rjan, a 47-year-old Slovenian minority politician.

But it's a very strong and depressing psychological aspect, that is, negative for us minorities, in the sense that we lived through the years in Yugoslavia, and later in Slovenia, but especially in Yugoslavia, when we were seen as traitorous Slovenians who remained in Italy, whether some chose to stay or simply stayed because they found a home. Because we had a car that was different from the Jugo 45, and even if it was a small machine, it was still Western. Sure, we had coffee, we were free to move. So, in any case, we were not welcome, and here, in Italy, you don't accept us because we are Slovenians and therefore pro-Yugoslav. This was very difficult.

The Italian-Yugoslav border, although less rigid than the one between East and West Berlin, effectively represented the division between the Western and Communist worlds. What made this border less inflexible was the smuggling activity that took place immediately after its establishment. It was precisely smuggling, a form of assistance to relatives and friends in Yugoslavia, that kept alive a bond of affection and solidarity, one that prevented the establishment of a Communist regime, completely closed to Italian and Western influence.

Interview with Peter, a 47-year-old high school computer science teacher from the Slovenian minority

There was a period right before the border was closed when these confessionals were being talked about, where people would go and talk about what they were doing and what they were smuggling. There was a term called *sférzati*, which isn't Slovenian; I think it's of German origin, meaning to carry something on one's person. Let's call it this practice of carrying anything without declaring it. The Slovenian police turned a blind eye, in my opinion; they were aware, and they were also quite lenient, more so than one might think. It was like that because, in my opinion, they were ordinary people like us, who were aware of the problems of the population.

Helping others was a very powerful form of informal learning because it allowed us to overcome fears and legislative impediments, generating, instead, a bond of emotional closeness and solidarity. However, for years after Slovenia's entry into Europe, Italians had, equally, a certain fear of crossing the border, especially the older generations, who had within them all the historical memory of the war and post-war events.

Interview with Giorgina, a 66-year-old Italian public institution press officer.

Even back in 2007, my mother-in-law was extremely worried about us going on vacation to Croatia with our daughters because they might harm us. We tried to make her understand that it was absurd, but we couldn't.

The history of war did not end, therefore, at the end of the Second World War but continued with the Cold War, at least until the fall of the Berlin Wall and, probably, until the fall of Yugoslavia in 1991. The climate in the city was not yet relaxed between the members of the two communities at that time because a certain fear of each other was maintained, instrumentally by politics, because politically they belonged to opposing sides, due to an extreme generalization of ethnic stereotypes: Italian-Fascist, Yugoslav-Communist.

Public narratives, symbols and commemorative rituals

The remnants of Italian Slovenian polarization persist, even among young people, the result of informal learning at home, among peers, and at school. Even symbols and commemorations remain divisive, though not for everyone.

Alongside family memories, public narratives and symbols present in urban spaces play a crucial role. Monuments, gravestones, commemorative ceremonies, and toponymy represent memory devices that stabilize, over time, specific interpretations of the past. Interviewees acknowledge that these devices are not neutral: they convey often divergent narratives, which reinforce group affiliations and fuel the perception of an identity gap that is difficult to bridge. Symbols represent one of the most sensitive areas of community polarization, because they condense memories, wounds, and

affiliations that often find no space in everyday dialogue. Monuments, toponyms, flags, and public rituals become sites of conflict, where each community projects its own historical narrative.

A prime example of everyday divergence is offered by toponymy: in Gorizia, street names almost exclusively recall the First World War, celebrated as a national, Italian victory, while in neighboring Nova Gorica, street names predominantly refer to the Second World War and the Yugoslav victory. This symbolic asymmetry highlights, within the urban space itself, the persistence of different and difficult-to-reconcile memorial frames.

These elements confirm what the literature on cultural memory has highlighted: public symbols do not simply represent the past but actively contribute to its interpretation and transmission. Monuments, rituals, and commemorations stabilize competing narratives that reinforce symbolic boundaries. However, moments of shared commemoration of events dating back to the Second World War, demonstrating sensitivity and respect for the dead on both sides, have been recognized as necessary, albeit insufficient, moments for improving intercommunity and cross-border relations.

Interview with Ilario, a 51-year-old Italian Croatian researcher.

Politics is made of symbols, and history is essentially symbolic history. It makes me laugh when, on one side of the border, some Slovenes say: "Well, the city is a city rebuilt by the fascists. You still have all those buildings that evoke the fascist truth." Yes, but I say that even that is part of the city's history. It should be valued. On the other side, Italian people, scandalized, come to me saying: "But look at the houses, no one bothers to erase them, because you can still see, in the right light, the inscriptions 'Yugoslavia', 'Long live Tito', on both sides of the border." But that too is part of history, for me. The issue of the Tito inscription on Mount Sabotin is also not necessarily something negative—divisive, yes, but still part of the city's history. Just as one might disagree with it, just as I myself do not agree with it ideologically, I don't see why I should prevent that handful of people from the Decima Mas from marching with their insignia once a year, nor do I see why I should prevent a group of elderly partisans from restoring their monuments. Of course, it is a message—let's be clear—it is not something neutral; it is something to discuss and talk about. History is, essentially, also symbol. So, if we reason in this way, we will have to erase everything that bothers us, everything we disagree with in each historical or historiographical narrative, simply because it doesn't belong to us.

Focus group with Giorgio, a 56-year-old Italian traffic policeman.

So why do we still have honorary citizenship for Mussolini in our city? Slovenians are proud of the leader of the Yugoslav Liberation Army, who single-handedly liberated them from Nazism, and so they placed the Tito inscription on the hill. In my opinion, it's perfectly legitimate. However, regarding honorary citizenship, I'm not entirely in agreement.

Interview with Igor, a 54-year-old Slovenian minority politician.

The writing Tito on Mount Sabotin makes me nervous too, the white part - Catholic, yes, doesn't like it for nothing, it bothers us more than it does you, but since you have some crazy people around, the less you talk, the better.

Official commemorations in local locations, symbolic of the history of the Second World War, have, however, been viewed positively by both Italians and minorities, though not unanimously and with slight variations by age group. Younger people rate them as less significant, at least for them. Joint commemorations, such as that of the Italian and Slovenian presidents Mattarella and Pahor at the Basovizza Foiba (sinkhole), are perceived as tools for reconciliation, although their impact is limited by the age of the target population.

Interview with Alex, a 62-year-old agricultural trader from the Slovenian minority.

Mattarella and Pahor at the Foiba di B. can help to better understand the territory and its historical problems, probably for ordinary people yes, for extremists no, it didn't go well for either our left-wing or right-wing extremists. Our left-wingers are still pointing their finger at Pahor as a traitor, for having done so.

Interview with Igor, a 54-year-old Slovenian minority politician.

The importance of Mattarella and Pahor in B... I went too, and we bowed both before the foiba and the tomb of the three partisans. The president of the Red Slovenians Association didn't bow. She was strongly criticized, even by the Slovenians.

Interview with Beatrice, a 25-year-old Italian university student.

Pahor and Mattarella in B., personally, didn't, let's say, touch me that much. I thought this image was right, but it went a bit unnoticed because they are symbolic gestures, and I no longer need that symbolic gesture. I think I've moved on in processing my thoughts. But I believe that at the same time, for those segments of the population in which the word "foiba" triggers anger, sadness, and misunderstanding, it's certainly essential that two great institutions of these two states find peace, obviously. And thus, send signals of peace and continuation, of moving forward, of evolution. So, I think it makes sense for them to happen, perhaps not for me, but for other people, certainly.

One step forward to reducing polarization would be to find new common symbols in which identify everyone.

Interview with Alvise, a 78-year-old retired Italian truck driver.

The Italian army had definitively withdrawn in 1964. However, I don't remember if the "Viva l'Italia" (an Italian patriotic slogan) sign on the mountain where the barracks were located had already faded. So, when Slovenia joined Europe, I said to someone I know, but why do they keep cleaning up over there and clearing away the writing Nas Tito (our Tito) and we don't? I said, on one side we write Italy, on the other they write Slovenia and we put Europe in the center, it doesn't get any better than that.

Interview with Francesco, a 56-year-old Italian television journalist.

The best way is to share the pain. I had proposed: let's transform the R. park into a city park, a Memorial Park for all of us, let's put up a statue of a Slovenian, Loize Bratus, the most suitable. Poor guy, his only crime was playing in church. But if we must make everyone who sings in church, in Slovenian, drink machine oil with broken glass, I see it as tough. Let's take a person deported to concentration camps by the Germans, who could be the mother of the Jewish philosopher Michelstaedter or his sister, and let's take a victim of a foiba, with any name, and put them there. There are six hundred citizens who were thrown into the foiba, or even more, and let's put them there. One next to the other, and we share a symbol. Let's remove that disgrace of the second monument to the foiba victims, that disgrace that U. made, but do you realize we have two monuments to the foiba victims? And one with a dedicated phrase. With commendable effort, the association of the Foiba victims had found the names to erect the first monument, because there's always controversy surrounding this Foiba victim thing. The lists were poorly compiled, but they were still poorly compiled in '45, because how were they compiled? The relatives of these missing people asked the Americans for a list of the missing, but many people returned, and it wasn't like they were going to say, "I returned because I had other problems." The lists were somehow solidified as they were in '45; when they ended up in the lapidary The association of relatives of those killed in the sinkholes, led by S., a normal, reasonable person, did a job. They correctly identified, probably because he did a serious job, another two or three hundred names. So, what was the idea? Put them in the existing memorial stone, since the architect Paolo Caccia Dominione, a truly great architect who designed this project, had foreseen that more names could be added. There's a gap that seems to have been made on purpose. Let's change a gravestone, add the names underneath, and, taking this opportunity, change the incorrect names, remove them. They're duplicate names, with first and last names reversed. Let's cut these names, and that's how we solved the problem. U. wanted to start a political battle because he wanted to run for mayor or something else. He said, "I want to build a monument with an

abomination." I wrote to him, "You're crazy." S. from the deportees' association, who is responsible, said, "But I won't let you write this stuff." The monument is like this, and it stays like that. Just add the names and that's it. So, since U. wanted his monument, with his phrase "he built his own monument," he promised the mayor a package of extreme nationalist votes for his election campaign. The mayor needed to collect as many votes as possible, so he took them and then paid the price by having to grant permission for the construction of the second monument.

This latest interview demonstrates with extreme intensity how the mix of political games, historical memory, and the associated popular suffering are a mixture of factors harmful to unity and are, instead, a vehicle for discord and polarization, difficult to heal.

Divergent historical narratives and symbolic conflicts

The previous testimonies describe historical events in a similar way, regardless of the ethnic background of the interviewees. Below, however, we will highlight the aspects that generate tension and division between the parties, who are nevertheless aware of the underlying problem that keeps them active. Among the factors generating discord is the teaching of history, which has been a highly divisive element, still not free from ideological exploitation by both political parties. Depending on who's dealing with the issues, the interpretation is aimed at confirming one's own interpretation, omitting information that might call it into question. This is the element that still fuels the polarized thinking of individual citizens who then tend to side with one side or the other, without being able to effectively dialogue with one another. What remains irreconcilable positions on: foibas, deportations; liberation of the city; role of the partisans; public symbols (the inscription "TITO," honorary citizenship for Mussolini); official commemorations.

Focus group with Albina, a 75-year-old former Slovenian minority interpreter for the Province of Gorizia

History is still divisive. I've always been struck by a phrase an old partisan from Gorizia used, and it's somewhat true even with what's happening today, with other wars: "Until old people like me die, nothing will be done." Because each of these people carried the story of their own family, and if the family has had deaths, losses, they don't forget, they can't forget, they carry these burdens.

One of the most divisive topics, capable of generating a double polarization both between linguistic majority and minority both within the two factions, is the narrative of the foibas.

Interview with Francesco, a 56-year-old Italian television journalist.

When the war ends, there are no more friends or enemies. So, let's explain to the DG that just because someone fought against the Social Republic, you can't kill them at the end of the war; you can't do that. It simply can't be done. Of course, it's a crime, it's called murder. The partisans were on the right side, fascism was on the wrong side, Nazism was the wrong side, and then there were the men of the resistance, and the resistance was made up of many things. It was made up of Paola del Din and the Osovani[1]. I'm a member of the Osoppo Partisans' association*, but I wouldn't join the ANPI because the Garibaldi-Natisone did other things, but not all Garibaldians were like that; there were plenty of good Garibaldians. Let's remember that the foibas in our city were committed by the Garibaldi-Natisone partisans; they were the ones who went to get people.

[1] The Osovani were members of the Osoppo Brigade, an Italian partisan formation created in 1944 in the Friuli–Venezia Giulia region. Composed of Catholic, liberal, and socialist anti-fascists, the brigade operated autonomously from Yugoslav partisan command and focused on protecting the Italian civilian population in the borderlands. Their activity combined military resistance against Nazi-Fascist forces with the defense of local communities in an area marked by ethnic and political tensions.

Interview with Patrick, a 48-year-old Italian sociologist and video maker.

The foibas happened, there's no denying it, but they're exploiting Remembrance Day for political and propaganda purposes. When you say these people died only because they were Italian, you're manipulating history for purely political, electoral reasons, and you're also distorting and insulting those who died. They didn't die because they were Italian; they died because they were colluding with fascists, or relatives of fascists, or fascists. Or it was settling scores. That has nothing to do with being Italian; they were informers who accused other people so they could take over the camps of those arrested, and it was Italians who did it, not even Slovenians who did this. It's a mess we can't get out of. When M. brought up this idea of Remembrance Day to counter Remembrance Day, we were equating two thousand people with six million, and it's not true that it's not a question of numbers. It's a question of numbers, because otherwise you wouldn't tell me every time there were twenty thousand victims of the foibas when there were two thousand, from two thousand to five thousand confirmed, no more. This whole thing has no historical basis, it's all hearsay.

Interview with Cecilja, 47-year-old administrative secretary of the Slovenian minorities.

The lack of acceptance between the two factions, Italian and Slovenian, of the past, let's say what's missing is an act of conscience, even on the part of the Italian government, of Italy itself, for what was done to the Slovenians. This is not the case, as if it were just the way it was. Instead, what's so much insistent now is the foiba massacres. Well, they happened, not at the level they say, but it's something that happened. What's missing is that Germany admitted its guilt, Italy didn't. This, in short, is something that's missing not only on a political level, but also on a moral level - this admission of guilt, this lack of apology. These are serious things that happened here. On the one hand, we need to move forward and not dwell on the past and carry them in our hearts, that's true. But on the other hand, they happened, and we can't pretend it didn't happen.

The lack of clear, reliable, and shared historical information, even among members of the same faction, regarding the period of the Second World War and the post-war period emerged clearly during the interviews, when the question of who liberated the city at the end of the Second World War was answered in different ways.

Interview with Luca, a 64-year-old Italian public administrator.

The first patrol to enter the city was New Zealander. The partisans had nothing to do with it, because there had been prior agreements that Tito was supposed to enter first, but the New Zealanders had already entered. Because there's a photo of two New Zealanders taking a picture, and they entered calmly, without fighting, and then, if I'm not mistaken, they were killed or something along those lines, near the Gorizia airport. Because they weren't supposed to enter first, but they took the wrong turn, and they didn't know the city was already free. So, this is the true story told by the locals at the time, not the one written in books.

Interview with Pierpaolo, a 75-year-old former teacher and Istrian exile.

The *Domobranci* (Slovene Home Guard) arrived and opened fire with machine guns on those houses, thinking they were partisans, and they were the first to enter. And besides the *Domobranci*, there were also Chetniks, Serbs who called themselves their liberators, but they weren't liberators. Then came Tito's partisans, and then the Anglo-Americans, and finally the Italians. Who liberated it?

Interview with Patrick, a 48-year-old Italian sociologist and video maker.

At the end of World War II, the city was liberated by a mix of local and Tito's partisans. They waited for Tito's troops because they had a stronghold there. Also, because, for example, my Slovenian grandfather, who was in the Garibaldi Brigade, didn't have the strength to descend on the city en masse. Also, because, when the time came, the Germans left and left the *Ustasha* (a Croatian ultranationalist and fascist movement). The defense of the cotton mill, the four dead we go to commemorate every year, are workers who barricaded themselves inside because the Nazis told the *Ustasha* - were they *Ustasha*? Yes, they said go and do whatever the fuck you want! I mean, free for all to see.

Interview with Edoardo, a 61-year-old Italian public administrator.

The Germans had already left. It's no coincidence that April 25th, the day of Milan's liberation, is celebrated as the day of liberation throughout Italy. As you know, this wasn't the case, because May 1st marked the beginning of the forty days of Tito's occupation. The New Zealanders reached as far as L. (a southwest neighborhood of the city) because Tito was an ally.

Interview with Giorgina, a 66-year-old Italian administrative spokesperson.

Gorizia was liberated by the great Allied coalition: first the Yugoslavs, then the Americans, with the support of two different partisan organizations in the war of liberation, the two different partisan organizations of the Reds and the Whites.

Citizens feel the need for historical clarity, but an effective tool to achieve it has yet to be found. To address this conflicting knowledge of history, it would therefore be desirable, as previously mentioned, to develop a new pedagogy of history based on reliable, documented, and shared sources, free from partisan speculation. This topic was not addressed in the 2025 study because it was outside the scope of the research, but it could become a topic to explore further, at a European level, to address the polarization between member states, fostering greater mutual understanding through a new vision of history. This vision should no longer be approached simply as a narrative of war events, with their respective leaders and kings, but should become a tool for developing everyone's historical consciousness as the foundation of their sense of personal identity, in dialogue with those who are different from themselves.

Interview with Francesco, a 56-year-old Italian television journalist.

The pedagogy of history is fundamental. The main problem underlying many conflicts is the persistence of memory, which, among other things, is specific to Slavic peoples. A distinction must be made between history and memory. Memories cannot be shared. Memories are always personal, and therefore we must understand that every community, every family has its own memory and that you cannot change it, but as my friend Gianni Oliva (an Italian historian and politician) says, it is possible to have an accepted memory. When we teach history, we should approach it by seeking the ultimate truth, without compromising on the idea that the three great totalitarianisms of the twentieth century - Nazism, Fascism, and Communism - came here to annoy us. Before these people came along, we were fine, at peace. Nazis, fascists, and communists did the same things with different shirts.

Informal Learning Processes in Community Practices

One of the most original contributions of the study concerns the role of informal learning in building and reducing polarization.

Scribner & Cole's (1981) studies offer a fundamental contribution to the understanding of informal learning as culturally situated processes. Their ethnographic research shows that skills do not emerge from formal education, but from participation in meaningful social practices, mediated by cultural tools and rooted in the daily life of communities.

This perspective integrates naturally with the situated learning approach (Lave & Wenger, 1991), as both models conceive of learning as a relational, contextual, and practice- embedded process. Specifically, for Scribner & Cole, learning depends on the social function of activities and the cultural artifacts that mediate them, while for Lave & Wenger, learning occurs through legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice, where meanings are co-constructed and negotiated.

When this conceptual framework is interpreted through the lens of collective memory, informal learning takes on a further dimension. The daily practices described by Scribner & Cole are not only places for skill acquisition, but also spaces for memory transmission, where narratives, values, and community identities are consolidated and renewed. In this sense, cultural artifacts function as carriers

of memory, embodying shared stories, norms, and habits. Participation in community practices thus becomes a way to engage with a memory heritage that precedes the individual and situates them within a collective history. Situated learning is intertwined with the construction of identity, since what is learned is inseparable from who one becomes within the community.

The data show that such learning emerges: in families, through traumatic memories; in everyday relationships, through stereotypes and symbolic boundaries; in public commemorations, through identity rituals; and in local media, through polarizing political discourse.

The analysis of the interviews shows that polarization is reproduced not only through explicit narratives, but also through everyday practices that constitute forms of informal learning. Therefore, following the situated learning perspective (Lave & Wenger, 1991), these practices can be interpreted as ways in which the community transmits and consolidates its own interpretative frameworks. In this field of study, knowledge is not an abstract entity transferable between individuals, but a process that emerges from participation in historically and culturally rooted social practices. Lave and Wenger show how learning occurs through legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice, where newcomers acquire shared skills and meanings by interacting with specific people, tools, and environments, as occurs, for example, in the cultural circles of Slovenian minorities. Legitimate peripheral participation is the process through which new members of a community of practice begin to take part in collective activities from positions that are initially marginal but nonetheless recognized as valid by the community. They engage in tasks that are not yet strategic or crucial for the group, but that allow them—through observation and interaction with other members—to acquire the experience that will later enable them to advance within the group's hierarchy and eventually assume more central roles.

When this framework is applied to contexts characterized by layered collective memories, plural identities, or intergenerational community practices, situated learning takes on an additional meaning. In such contexts, participation in practices not only transmits operational skills, but also incorporates and renews shared memory repertoires, contributing to the continuity or transformation of collective memory. Learning becomes a site where belonging, symbolic boundaries, and identity positioning are negotiated, as meanings emerge from interaction with narratives, rituals, and community norms. Everyday practices function as memory devices, where what is learned is inseparable from the way a community remembers, interprets, and transmits its past. Knowledge is distributed among people, places, and objects that bear the material and symbolic traces of collective history, thus making learning a process profoundly situated in time as well as space.

From this perspective, learning therefore means entering a relationship with an ecosystem of sedimented meanings, contributing to their maintenance or re-elaboration. Situated learning thus becomes a meeting point between practice, memory, and identity: a process in which individuals not only acquire skills, but also situate themselves within a shared history, participate in its reproduction, and sometimes transform its contours.

Interviewees describe everyday incidents - family conversations, comments at commemorations, discussions in bars, references in local media - that help define what is considered normal, true, or acceptable within the group.

These processes, often implicitly, play a fundamental role in the reproduction of opposing narratives and the construction of opposing identities but also, from a positive perspective, in the development of new interpretative frameworks capable of bringing communities closer together.

Everyday practice - conversations, rituals, local media - convey interpretative frameworks that have fueled polarization for a long time, but for the past twenty years or so, the phenomenon has been changing its evolutionary trajectory, gradually diminishing. In recent decades, the city has seen a gradual rapprochement between communities, fostered by the opening of the border, cross-border cooperation, and a new generation experiencing urban space without the rigidities of the past, thanks to the removal of the physical border after Slovenia's accession to Europe in 2004. Reconciliation emerges through small gestures, institutional collaboration, and a growing

desire to build a shared future. Despite the persistence of traumatic memories, signs of change are emerging, and, above all, the younger generations are demonstrating greater openness and flexibility. Indeed, there are variables that seem to naturally favor gradual, slow but steady reconciliation, such as the passage of time, the removal of the physical border, the organization of joint cultural events open to both ethnic groups or cross-border events, and the majority's openness to learning the minority's language.

Also significant were mixed marriages, the greater mental flexibility demonstrated by the younger generations in accepting those who are different from themselves, and the ever-present mix of school and sport among young people.

Interview with Alessandro, a 72-year-old Italian former private employee.

A gradual distancing from a historical memory that is still painful for both sides, in short. So, as we move away from the years not only of the Iron War, but also from the preceding years, when there was a civil strife that was fratricidal for both sides. Because there were Italians against Italians and Slovenes against Slovenes, not just Italians, against Slovenes, Slovenes, against Croats, and so on. Little by little, this is being left behind, and a discomfort remains that will probably gradually become more contained; I don't know what the future will tell.

My mother risked being killed by the Slovenians, I remember it, I talk about it to my daughters, but clearly one thing is the first-hand experience, my mother took the fear and hatred towards the Slovenians to the grave but it is another thing to tell my mother it happened and another thing to tell my Grandma, it happened. So, these factors will increase less. The dynamics have changed, in short.

Interview with Rjan, a 48-year-old minority politician

Mixed marriages have increased. They used to be rarer in the 1980s. When I was little, they were very rare.

As a child, all my parents' friends - who would be like they were when my parents were my age - were surrounded by friends, all Slovenians, married to Slovenians.

So, if I look at myself now, many of my friends have girlfriends, have Italian partners, husbands, or wives. Whether they're from the South or not is highly relative. Gorizia has also changed because of this trend of mixed marriages. Mixed marriages have increased since the 1980s, and now it's become normal. There will be exceptions, but few.

Interview with Beatrice, a 25-year-old Italian university student

There is also the *Mlaj* (like the greasy pole, although you don’t climb it). It came to my mind just now as I was walking through S. A. and I pictured again the moment when they raise the pole. I personally took part in the *Mlaj* of other small towns nearby. But I know that many Italians go as well, because it’s a moment of celebration. A celebration together, with lots of young people and so on. But there is a meaning beyond just eating and drinking, right? Usually, it takes place around the eighteenth birthday, so all the eighteen-year-olds work on it, preparing everything, and that is probably another moment of public gathering. Then, the Carnival of S. truly becomes a moment of encounter between the Slovene minority community - who carry on this tradition with dedication and joy - and the Italian community, for whom it is also a shared tradition.

These shared practices demonstrate how participation in community rituals can foster informal learning oriented toward collaboration, mutual familiarity, and the blurring of symbolic boundaries. Meanwhile, the impact of schooling appears to be less significant.

Focus group with Anton, a 21-year-old minority college student.

There are ethnic groups, but there hasn't been, or isn't, any sharing, any unity. At school, you're forced to live together. You're put in a class, so to speak, you're forced to be all together, and you manage to survive. But outside, as I see it, as I perceive it, there's still this division. I'm of Bosnian ethnicity, I come from the Balkans, so I hang out with friends there. I'm Slovenian, and I hang out

with those people. There's no exchange. It's a broader problem, in my opinion, on a global sociological level: there hasn't been a reunion, a sharing of cultures. We were forced to live together in the same place, but the culture hasn't been able to, hasn't been sufficiently integrated. It hasn't been integrated because there are different cultures.

The contemporary city is pervaded by daily practices that demonstrate how communities are progressively overcoming the fractures of the past. The opening of borders, cross-border cooperation, and increasing mobility between the two sides have fostered a normalization of relationships, making increasingly frequent forms of collaboration that would have been unthinkable just a few decades ago. New generations experience urban space without the symbolic rigidities that characterized the twentieth century, moving freely between languages, schools, social networks, and cultural references. Coexistence is not without tensions, but is constructed through daily gestures, individual choices, and relationships that challenge polarized narratives. The testimonies collected demonstrate how the city is becoming a laboratory of cross-border coexistence, where, however, the memory of the past heavily influences real and complete reunification.

Interview with Marina, a 39-year-old psychologist and minority teacher

It should be noted that in my time, elementary school in the 1990s, classes were usually attended by children from minority families, and there was still little intermingling. Like my mother, who was Italian, and my father, who was Slovenian, there were few families, and so we were already seen as strange, because we weren't pure and therefore from purely Slovenian families. When I was in school, there weren't any purely Italian families, whereas now there are many, and you find them very often.

There are still people who live by the old mold, I don't know, people who are forty-five, not that old, maybe ten years older than me. It's a mentality that simply can't survive, regardless of Europe, it's a completely different feeling. I see in the new generations, like my 21-year-old cousin, so in this age group, these kids are more flexible, or even more open to these exchanges, precisely with kids from Italian high schools, for example, or from Italian associations. There's greater openness, and I don't think there's any reason to say I vs. you.

Polarized Thinking as a Dominant Interpretive Mechanism

One of the most significant findings of the research is the emergence of polarized thinking as a recurring interpretative pattern in the interviewees' narratives. This modality, defined in psychological literature as a cognitive distortion (Ellis, 1962; Beck, 1976), manifests itself through the tendency to interpret the past and present in dichotomous and morally absolute terms. Three main forms of polarized thinking emerge from the interviews.

Unilateral attribution of blame Many

Many interviewees attribute the responsibility for traumatic events exclusively to the other group, without recognizing the historical complexity or the plurality of experiences.

Construction of opposing moral identities

One's group is portrayed as victimized, morally legitimate, or historically justified, while the other is represented as an aggressor, a traitor or morally inferior.

Rejection of alternative narratives

Versions of events that do not coincide with the dominant narrative of one's group are perceived as false, manipulated, or ideologically oriented.

These elements confirm that polarized thinking is not an individual trait, but a product of the discursive practices and traumatic narratives that characterize the community. It represents a cognitive and symbolic device that simplifies historical complexity and reinforces identity boundaries, contributing to the persistence of polarization. The collected narratives demonstrate how

polarized thinking is a central element in the construction of community polarization. Historical events, in fact, are often interpreted through dichotomous categories: good vs. bad; victims vs. executioners; liberators vs. oppressors. This simplification reduces the complexity of the past and impedes the construction of a more nuanced memory. In this sense, social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) offers a useful interpretative key: individuals define part of their identity through membership in social groups, which become sources of value, security, and recognition. The dichotomies of polarized thinking thus strengthen internal cohesion, presenting one's group as homogeneous, morally legitimate, and united by a shared destiny. At the same time, the other is portrayed in opposing terms—aggressor, traitor, morally inferior—generating emotional (reduced empathy), cognitive (devaluation of their narratives), and moral (reduced recognized legitimacy) distance. This dual process hardens the boundaries between in-group and out-group, contributing to the persistence of polarization over time.

The historical field is where polarized thinking finds its greatest expression, as different historical events are narrated differently, both based on the community to which they belong and the political current they follow. Conferences on the local history of the twentieth century are themselves a source of polarization, because the institutions and cultural associations that organize them tend to highlight those aspects of historical events that confirm and reinforce their own political and cultural worldview, while minimizing or ridiculing the perspectives of the opposing side and, in some cases, even revisiting or distorting the facts. This is a bipartisan tendency shared by both groups in conflict. Such conferences do not contribute to a genuine enrichment of either individual or collective historical culture and awareness, because the polarized entrenchment in one's own position prevents any real understanding of the other side's reasons, which are perceived as being in bad faith and unreliable in their presentation of historical facts.

Secondly, those who attend these historical conferences are usually citizens aligned with that specific political, ideological, or ethnic orientation, and there is rarely any mixing with other segments of the population. This prevents participants from broadening their knowledge by integrating new perspectives, also because the communicative style adopted in these events—despite attempts to keep it as appropriate as possible—inevitably reveals a critique, not even particularly subtle, of the opposing historical group. This generates feelings of resentment among the few attendees who belong to that group and, consequently, a sense of closure toward the speakers, who are perceived as threatening or aggressive.

Overcoming this historical impasse will require time and the development of new operational and conceptual tools: History Education and the Didactics of History will need to be studied and validated as instruments capable of countering and preventing community polarization. A decisive step toward the ability to welcome and understand the other must be the abandonment of one's own political and ideological schools of thought when the goal is to genuinely engage in dialogue with those who are different from oneself.

Interview with Francesco, a 56-year-old Italian television journalist.

We need a historic pact between the Slovenian and Italian communities because there was a *conventio ad excludendum* (pact aimed at excluding) that was convenient. The Slovenians were showered with money, managed it among themselves in a clientelist manner, and we Italians governed the city. Let's do this together. L. leaves the party; W. leaves the party - let's abandon all our political homes; they need to be left behind because they're trapped in old frameworks. Let's walk away from all that, let's move beyond it. Let's try a political experiment, a national one, something that starts from the bottom, where everyone contributes. Let's leave the extremists and the old politicians at home - let's leave them there with their toys, playing with their little soldiers, fascists against communists, doing their games, or maybe holding conferences where they insult each other. We lock them in there, and we run a city.

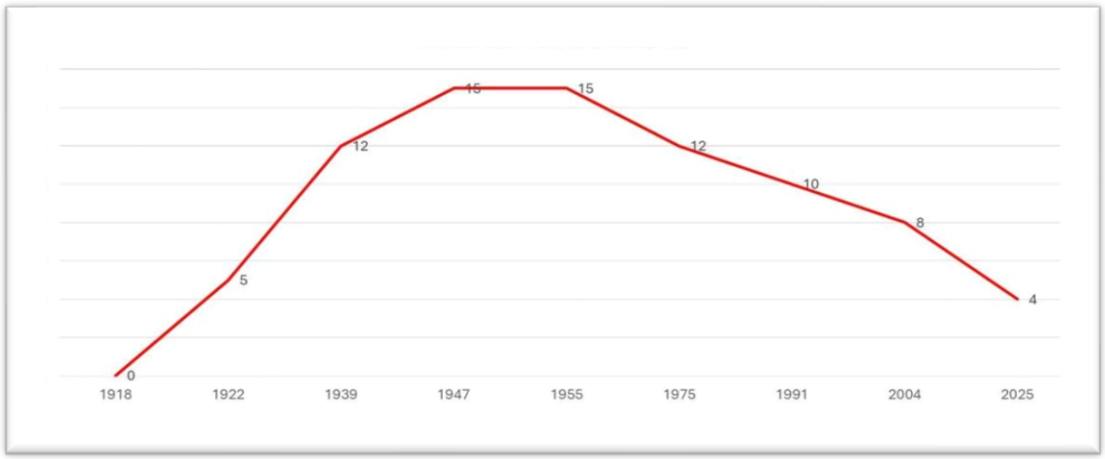
The main 20th-century community processes that have generated forms of informal learning, in a historical context, concern the historical moments that generated traumatic narratives; the community practices that favored their transmission; the interpretive frameworks that derive from them; and the role of polarized thought in their reproduction.

The following table, although not quantitative, constitutes an interpretative representation of the theme of History, highlighting which community processes have generated which type of informal learning, negative or positive, with a view to creating or reducing community polarization.

HISTORY THEME	
COMUNITY PROCESS	**INFORMAL LEARNING**
NEGATIVES	
Nationalist Kingdom (Italy).	Emergence of the concept of linguistic minority.
Social pressures.	Assimilation to avoid conflict with the majority.
Forced Italianization.	Sense of uprooting from one's own culture.
Ideological/political indoctrination.	Division into a "good us" and a "bad them."
Different values.	An ideological divide stronger than ethnic belonging.
Closed physical border.	Impossibility of trade, relational exchange, and a culturally insurmountable barrier.
East/West economic disparity.	Smuggling as a way of maintaining an emotional cross-border bond.
Migrations.	Ethnocentric closure as a form of self-protection.
Survival issues. Well-being.	Mutual assistance. Individualism.
Teaching of history.	Politically instrumentalized reinterpretations on both sides, and the need for a pedagogy of history.
Partisan political-administrative decisions.	Protection of one community over another, with associated feelings of anger and a protective instinct towards favoured ones.
POSITIVES	
Multiethnic empire.	Perception of being equal before the law.
Fall of the physical border.	Perception of territorial unity and of cultural contact based on free exchange.
Shared participation in events.	Mutual understanding.
Popular union.	Sociopolitical changes linked to the "Broom Sunday."
Economic needs.	Possibility of work and residence also across the border.

The evolution of polarization over time can be more easily understood by transforming the interviewees' perceptions and the thematic recurrences that emerged from the analysis into a graph that is not intended to be measurable, but rather to be synthetic and interpretative. It was constructed based on the perceptions expressed by the interviewees; the thematic recurrences identified in the coding; the intensity attributed to traumatic memories across generations; and the transformations in commemorative practices and public narratives. The graph should therefore be interpreted as a

dynamic conceptual map, consistent with the qualitative design of the research, whose sole purpose is to provide a clarifying image of the evolution of polarization over time for those unfamiliar with local history.



The graph provides a visual indication of its evolution over time, broken down by critical events. The vertices of the broken line represent territorial changes, changes in jurisdiction and nationality, and trend reversals:

1918: Fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but the Gorizia area remains united under the new Kingdom of Italy.
1947: End of World War II, and the territory is divided first into Zone A and Zone B, under Allied control, and then nationally, between Italy and Yugoslavia, with the border closed and becoming impassable, at least legally.
1955: Reopening of the border, followed by a slow decline in the polarization curve, which reached its lowest point in 2025 with the inauguration of the first cross-border European Capital of Culture, Nova Gorica–Gorizia.
1991: Slovenian independence.
2004: Slovenia's accession to the European Union; 2025: Nova Gorica–Gorizia co-capital of European culture.

The values are purely indicative and not objective estimates since they serve exclusively to provide a graphic image that allows us to understand the trend of polarization over time, based on what was expressed by the participants.

Discussion

It can be concluded that polarization is sustained by a self-reinforcing cycle between traumatic memories, community practices, and polarized thinking. Traumatic memories define symbolic boundaries; community practices transmit these boundaries through situated learning; polarized thinking simplifies complexity and rigidifies affiliations. Polarization, therefore, appears to be a historical, symbolic, and cognitive process that can only be transformed through multilevel interventions. What emerged from the research, however, was that while there have been concrete social, relational, and commercial improvements between the two communities, there is an urgent need to develop a cross-border methodological, pedagogical, and communicative tool that allows people to learn to manage historical narratives, dividing them between their own and others' history and memory. The tool identified for this purpose is the development of the Pedagogy of History as a field of inquiry distinct from the Didactics of History. The goal of this field of study should be to foster historical awareness in people, grounded in a historical culture that allows them to develop their own sense of personal identity, as a natural consequence of the events that have shaped their homeland. This enables them to understand their complexity and the interchangeability of the actors involved, with the aim of opening themselves to interpretations different from their own. The research referenced in this article underscores this need, although it has not delved into this area of study, which will need to be explored in future

research. However, although the educational model based on informal learning developed in the research addressed all eight of the themes that emerged, this article has sought to give space to the indications emerged specifically regarding the management of polarizing views in the historical context, with the aim of providing some indications on what has emerged as a factor capable of bringing the two communities closer together even on such a delicate and controversial topic as history.

The research findings showed how history is the main modern driver of polarization between the Italian majority and the Slovenian minority in the case study city. The collected narratives highlight that the memory of twentieth- century events is not a bygone era, but a living component of collective identity, capable of influencing perceptions, relationships, and informal learning. These findings confirm and expand on the findings in the literature on collective memory, cultural trauma, and affective polarization.

Collective memory and the construction of identity boundaries

The testimonies show how family and community memories constitute a powerful identity-building device. In line with Halbwachs (1992) and Assmann (2010), memory is not a neutral archive, but a selective process that responds to the needs of the group. In the case analyzed, memory defines who belongs to the "us" and who to the "them"; it establishes moral hierarchies (victims vs. executioners); it guides interpretations of the present as responses to past events; and it influences intergroup relations.

Italian and Slovenian narratives construct different temporal maps (Zerubavel, 2003), which rarely overlap. For Italians, the central trauma is that of the foibas and the Yugoslav occupation; for Slovenians, that of forced Italianization and deportations to fascist camps. Both groups perceive themselves as injured parties, confirming the tendency towards competitive victimization typical of post-conflict contexts.

Cultural Trauma and Intergenerational Transmission

Data clearly demonstrate that the traumatic events of the twentieth century have been internalized as cultural traumas (Alexander et al., 2004), collective wounds that continue to be reworked and transmitted across generations, albeit with a partial reduction in their emotional impact. Family narratives, often charged with emotion, nevertheless constitute a privileged channel for the transmission of trauma, especially in families who have directly experienced deportation, violence, or loss. Intergenerational transmission produces informal learning that reinforces polarized thinking, characterized by distrust of the other group, the perception of unacknowledged injustice, the need to protect one's identity, and a dichotomous interpretation of historical events. These learnings are embedded in everyday life and influence intercommunal relations even in the absence of current conflict.

Affective polarization and divergent historical narratives

The results confirm the presence of a strong affective polarization (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015), which manifests itself not only on a political level, but also on a historical and identity level. Divergent narratives of twentieth-century events fuel negative emotions toward the out-group and strengthen the internal cohesion of the in-group. Public commemorations, monuments, and territorial symbols thus become identity markers, tools for legitimizing one's memory, and, simultaneously, objects of symbolic conflict.

The inscription "TITO" on Mount Sabotin above the city, the maintenance of honorary citizenship for Mussolini, the monuments to the foiba victims, and the partisan celebrations are perceived in opposing ways by the two communities, confirming that history is not just a set of facts, but a symbolic battlefield.

The political exploitation of revisited historical memories for electoral purposes, based on the interests to be protected, turns historical issues into veritable minefields, filled with mutual accusations, failure to recognize the motivations of others, and speculation about the intentions of the opposing side.

Polarized Thinking and Dichotomous Simplification

The collected narratives demonstrate how polarized thinking (Ellis, 1962; Beck, 1976) is a central element in building community polarization. Historical events are often interpreted through dichotomous categories: good vs. bad; victims vs. executioners; liberators vs. oppressors.

This simplification reduces the complexity of the past and prevents the construction of a more nuanced memory. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) helps us understand how such dichotomies strengthen internal group cohesion and foster distance from others.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) offers a key interpretative framework for understanding how communities process the past, through dichotomous patterns that fuel polarization. According to this approach, individuals construct a significant part of their identity through membership in groups, which provide interpretative categories useful for organizing social reality. This membership is not merely descriptive but takes on a normative and evaluative function: the group becomes the primary reference for defining what is right, legitimate, and morally acceptable.

The theory identifies three fundamental processes - categorization, identification, and social comparison - which, when applied to historical memory, contribute to the production of polarized narratives. Categorization simplifies the complexity of the past through clear-cut oppositions ("us" vs. "them"), while identification with the group makes such narratives emotionally charged, as the collective history is internalized as part of the self. Finally, social comparison guides the reinterpretation of the past in a way that preserves a positive image of one's own group, often by selecting or emphasizing episodes that confirm its moral superiority or its position as a victim.

These psychological mechanisms find fertile ground in the dynamics of collective memory, as theorized by Halbwachs, Assmann, and Zerubavel. Halbwachs (1950) emphasizes how memory is not an individual process, but a socially situated phenomenon: groups define what must be remembered and what can be forgotten, orienting the perception of the past according to the identity needs of the present. Assmann (1992) distinguishes between communicative memory and cultural memory, showing how the latter—institutionalized, ritualized, transmitted through symbols and narratives—contributes to stabilizing dichotomous representations of historical events over time. Finally, Zerubavel (1996) highlights how social groups construct "temporal maps" that select and organize events to reinforce symbolic boundaries and affiliations, transforming the past into a repertoire of meanings useful for defining collective identity.

The integration of Social Identity Theory and studies on collective memory thus allows us to understand how polarized narratives not simple cognitive distortions are, but social devices that function to foster internal group cohesion. The moral dichotomies that emerge in historical narratives—good vs. bad, victims vs. executioners, liberators vs. oppressors—respond to profound identity needs: they simplify the complexity of the past, protect the group's positive image, and help maintain clear symbolic boundaries between "us" and "them." In this sense, polarization is not a side effect of memory, but one of its structural modes of functioning.

Furthermore, the integration of the cognitive theory of polarized thinking and Cultural Trauma Theory (Alexander, 2004) allows us to understand both the dichotomous structure of thought and the reasons for its persistence. This type of integration allows us to understand not only how dichotomous thinking is structured, but above all why it continues to organize perceptions and narratives in border communities.

Cognitive theory shows that the human mind tends to reduce complexity through binary categories and oppositional schemas, which in ambivalent contexts like Gorizia offer a reassuring interpretive shortcut. Cultural Trauma Theory, on the other hand, clarifies how these schemas are progressively saturated with emotional and historical content, through processes of public narration, institutionalization of trauma, and intergenerational transmission of memory. When a cognitive

predisposition to categorization encounters consolidated traumatic narratives, the dichotomy no longer remains a simple mental device: it becomes an identity lens resistant to change, emotionally charged and socially reinforced. This integrated perspective helps explain why, in the corpus of research, History remains the only domain and still completely polarized. Informal learning fosters practices of rapprochement in the context of mutual social knowledge, in the development of a more nuanced sense of family identity capable of opening to the other party's families, in a more understanding and tolerant personal attitude, as well as in a more polite and respectful communication style. However, traumatic memories continue to fuel deeply rooted dichotomous patterns, which keep the us/them distinction alive even in a present characterized by increasingly cooperative daily relationships.

Cognitive theory, therefore, explains how dichotomy arises, showing that the human mind tends, spontaneously, to simplify complexity through binary categories; organize experience into oppositional patterns (us/them, victim/perpetrator, right/wrong); and finally, establish symbolic boundaries to orient oneself in the social world. This tendency is not pathological: it is a basic cognitive mechanism that allows us to reduce ambiguity and give coherence to experiences.

In a border context like Gorizia, where identities are historically stratified and ambivalent, the dichotomy becomes a reassuring cognitive shortcut.

Cognitive theory, therefore, explains the form of the dichotomy, while Cultural Trauma Theory (Alexander) explains why the dichotomy persists. It shows that when a community experiences collective trauma, it constructs public narratives that define who is the victim and who is responsible, institutionalizes these narratives through rituals, commemorations, and political discourse, and transmits them to subsequent generations as part of the collective identity. Integrating the two perspectives clarifies the complete mechanism. In other words, Cognitive Theory explains the form of the dichotomy, while Cultural Trauma Theory explains its strength and longevity.

When cultural trauma is grafted onto a natural cognitive tendency toward binary categorization, the dichotomy isn't just a way of thinking; it becomes a way of feeling, remembering, and belonging. The cognitive structure (us/them) is filled with emotional and historical content (victims/perpetrators), making the dichotomy resistant to change, emotionally charged, socially reinforced, and transmitted intergenerationally.

In the case of Gorizia, the opposing memories of the twentieth century - the exodus, the foibas, fascism, the resistance, border violence - have become stable interpretative frameworks, which continue to influence the perception of the other group even when current social conditions are much more. In the body of research, all themes show signs of reconciliation, except History. This occurs precisely because informal learning and community processes foster rapprochement, but traumatic memory maintains active dichotomous patterns, and these patterns are cognitively economic and culturally reinforced. Theoretical integration therefore allows us to explain why History remains the only polarizing theme, while the others show evolutionary, conciliatory trajectories.

The role of informal learning

In the case analyzed, informal learning emerges: in families, through the transmission of traumatic memories; in schools, through divergent historical narratives, subsequently brought back to one's family and friends; in everyday relationships, through stereotypes and symbolic boundaries; in public commemorations, through rituals that reinforce opposing identities; and in local media, through polarizing political discourse. This learning contributes to maintaining polarized thinking but can also foster processes of reconciliation when it occurs in contexts of positive contact (Allport, 1973) and cross-border collaboration, which, however, must be specifically designed and organized.

The research has highlighted many of the situations that favored multiethnic contact during the Austro-Hungarian Empire, such as freely carrying out work together or attending schools common activities, working collectively, working in the fields, and participating in church and parish activities,

are simply no longer available or have drastically diminished, effectively reducing the opportunity for informal learning that would further reduce residual polarization. For this reason, the research discussed in this article has developed an educational model that involves organizing a mixed after-school program where both polarized communities, as well as the diverse ethnic communities living in the city, can find a shared space and time for shared activities, coordinated by specialized educational staff, with the aim of creating cohesive and inclusive groups. The entire model will not be discussed in detail because it is beyond the scope of this article; however, we would like to outline the experiences recounted by the interviewees that led to its development, for example, highlighting the elements that favor reducing polarization.

Despite the persistence of traumatic memories, signs of change have emerged. The greater openness and flexibility displayed by younger generations has also developed through participation in popular, shared events that have strong ties to their local area.

Shared cultural events, such as *Mlaj* or Carnival, have become spaces for encounters and mixed participation. These shared practices demonstrate how participation in community rituals can generate informal learning, oriented towards collaboration, mutual familiarity, and the blurring of symbolic boundaries.

The pedagogical proposal that emerged from the research is based on the idea that any intervention aimed at reducing polarization must act simultaneously at the level of historical narratives, which provide interpretive frameworks, community practices, which transmit these frameworks through situated learning, and cognitive schemas, particularly polarized thinking, which simplifies complexity and rigidifies affiliations. This resulted in a pedagogical proposal in the form of a blended and multilevel educational model, aimed at transforming interpretive frameworks and promoting learning methods capable of fostering complexity, plurality, and dialogue. The proposal is based on three main theoretical axes: Situated Learning (Lave & Wenger), Cultural Trauma Theory (Alexander et al.), and the cognitive theory of polarized thinking as cognitive distortion.

Communities learn, in fact, through participation in social practices. To change interpretative frameworks, it is necessary to intervene in the practices themselves, creating contexts in which it is possible to learn new ways of interpreting the past and present. Traumatic narratives, however, cannot simply be corrected or replaced: they must be recognized, elaborated, and integrated into forms of plural memory. Pedagogy must therefore foster processes of mutual recognition and shared reworking. Finally, polarized thinking is not an individual trait, but a product of community practices. Pedagogy must also promote cognitive and symbolic tools that allow us to overcome rigid dichotomies and access more complex interpretations.

The overall goal of the educational model was to promote interpretative complexity, countering dichotomous simplifications; to foster a plurality of narratives, integrating diverse memories without denying them; to create shared learning spaces where community practices can be rethought; to reduce the symbolic distance between groups through activities that foster mutual recognition; and to develop critical skills, useful for deconstructing polarized thinking.

The model's intended audience includes middle and high schools and educational institutions; cultural and civic associations; intergenerational groups; local communities involved in public memory processes; and municipal administrations interested in rethinking commemorative practices. The model can be adapted to different contexts, while maintaining its core principles: plurality, complexity, dialogue, and mutual recognition. However, its implementation may be lengthy, and it may be difficult to maintain on an ongoing basis, requiring strong institutional support and encountering resistance from those groups most closely tied to traumatic narratives.

Instead, keeping the focus exclusively on the historical component, as it is still critical, although research has not addressed the topic in detail, the components of a new educational model, to be developed to resolve differences of historical opinion, should move in the direction of developing a

plural memory, through truly mixed workshops, referring to the mixed historical study groups conceived by A. Langer (1995). These are guided courses in which intergenerational and interethnic groups work together on: family narratives; historical documents; oral testimonies; and public symbols and rituals.

The goal would not be to achieve a single narrative, but to recognize the legitimacy and complexity of multiple memories, for example through a critical analysis of commemorative practices, to delve deeper into the meaning of monuments, the forms of public rituals, and the implicit messages of commemorations.

This analysis would make symbolic boundaries visible and allow us to imagine more inclusive forms of public memory, simultaneously educating about complexity and deconstructing polarized thinking. We would work in a participatory manner to recognize rigid dichotomies, analyze their historical and symbolic origins, and develop cognitive tools to overcome them, through multiple perspective exercises; analysis of complex historical cases; cross-narratives; and guided reflections on moral categories.

Such a participatory system requires specifically created spaces for community dialogue, where trained mediators can facilitate the sharing of experiences and the comparison of narratives and counter-narratives, thus explore ambivalences and build new forms of mutual recognition.

The proposal to develop a new Pedagogy of History, outlined in this article, does not intend to offer an immediate solution to community polarization, but rather an educational path capable of gradually transforming the interpretative frameworks that sustain it, acting on narratives, practices, and cognitive patterns, in order to create the conditions for a more dialogical, complex, and inclusive coexistence.

Conclusions

The testimonies collected demonstrate how the history of the city of Gorizia is marked by fractures that do not end with major political events, but are embedded in families, languages, and everyday memories. The end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire forced Italianization, the violence of the Second World War, the partition of 1947, and the conflicting narratives that ensued have produced a complex legacy, made up of contradictions, repressions, and wounds that continue to influence the way people perceive themselves and others. The community polarization between the Italian majority and the Slovenian minorities arose from two major critical events - the two world wars - and has continued to stratify, through a sequence of processes that have progressively transformed a multilingual and multicultural city into a space traversed by symbolic and material boundaries.

At the same time, ethnographic material highlights how the city is undergoing a profound transformation. The opening of the border, cross-border cooperation, and shared daily life have enabled a normalization of relations unthinkable just a few decades ago, to the point of enabling the joint candidacy of the two neighboring cities of Nova Gorica and Gorizia for European Capital of Culture 2025, which ultimately led to their winning the title.

Conflicting historical memories, however, have not disappeared; rather, they have simply been complemented by daily practices of dialogue. The recognition of the suffering of others, the awareness that different narratives exist, and the ability to listen to them without feeling threatened emerge as central elements of a process of reconciliation that is not linear, but is built through ordinary gestures, personal relationships, and institutional collaborations.

For many young people, the border is no longer a point of division, but a nearly invisible element of urban geography, crossed as if from one neighborhood to another of the same city. This city,

however, is effectively spread across two states, even though it is experienced as a single space, no longer as two separate worlds. Indeed, the new cross-border generations have grown up speaking English as their common language, which has allowed them to avoid attaching a rigid identity value to their respective languages. The increase in Italian enrollments in schools of the Slovene minority in Italy, where Slovene is the primary language of instruction, indicates a renewed willingness to approach the culture and language of the other ethnic group, to overcome old divisions.

The city thus appears as a laboratory of coexistence where the past is not denied, but rather attempts are made to rework it, albeit without significant results, even though the path to historical reconciliation has been undertaken. Contradictions, wounds, and divergent memories do not impede the construction of a shared future; on the contrary, they become part of a journey that allows us to imagine new forms of community. In this sense, coexistence is not the result of overcoming differences but of their integration into a common horizon, where the plurality of histories becomes a resource, not an obstacle. In this regard, research has highlighted the need to develop a tool that can effectively manage historical divergences, through interventions that address the root causes of the problem—in other words, that allow us to approach history in a balanced and respectful manner. This tool is the Pedagogy of History, a new line of study that focuses on developing an educational approach aimed at telling history with the goal of fostering the growth of a culture and, therefore, a historical consciousness as the basis for a solid sense of personal identity, capable of accepting that the complexity of documented events can impact the various populations involved differently, who will have specific and potentially divergent memories of them. This topic was not addressed in the study to which this article refers because it was outside the scope of the research, but at the same time, it laid the foundation for its development in future studies. It emerged, in fact, that people, although not yet capable of addressing controversial historical issues in a coherent and collaborative manner, would like to engage with their counterparts on these very topics but lack the methods, space, or tools to do so.

In the research discussed in this article, the findings were shared with participants in the form of a roundtable discussion, with the researcher serving as speaker and moderator. This discussion explored the findings in greater depth, particularly regarding the topic of history, which was the most controversial and divisive. Entire excerpts of interviews were shared, from both sides, addressing the suffering experienced because of the war. This format allowed, for the first time since the end of World War II, the two opposing sides to sit down at a table and listen to each other's memories in a balanced and respectful manner. In this regard, we present an excerpt from an interview with a Slovenian minority woman who participated.

Marina, a 39-year-old psychologist and teacher of Slovenian minorities

I wanted to thank you once again for the wonderful Saturday morning. I could have listened for hours. It was all very interesting. It was very interesting to understand how the research was structured and how the collected data was used. As you said, we need to start with the facts, from things that can be studied scientifically, respecting both the historical, official memory and the sometimes more powerful memory linked to family memories. It was very stimulating to see how thoughts and feelings, tied to a territory, can evolve over time, but above all, what all this brings, both good and bad (learning). You were able to bring together (metaphorically and literally) so many different points of view, all on the same level. For me, it was an enriching morning. We need to be able to compare ourselves much more in this way! Even comparing generations. Understanding what older generations have gone through and what we are experiencing Daniela's example, when she recounted how her father or grandfather didn't want to go to Germany, perhaps tied to the memory of German uniforms, doesn't speak to us of hatred, but of a post-traumatic situation, of trauma, something entirely different! I felt you handled everything very professionally and seeing how our

testimonies were used was a great reward/reminder for us! It was important! Within minority circles, people probably don't talk to each other this way. Not in such a calm manner, with active listening. Leaders very often impose policies and visions tied to their own point of view and don't consider whether the younger generations feel different. It doesn't always lead to dialogue. Perhaps your role as "director" of the discussion also allowed the discussion to be more cooperative.

Research has shown that community polarization is neither a contingent nor exclusively political phenomenon, but the result of a complex intertwining of traumatic memories, competing historical narratives, community practices, and shared cognitive patterns.

Qualitative analysis of the interviews highlighted that the persistence of polarization is supported by informal learning processes, rooted in the community's daily life, through which interpretative frameworks are transmitted that define belonging, symbolic boundaries, and perceptions of others, in a historical context, where polarized thinking is the dominant interpretative mechanism. Although defined in psychological literature as an individual cognitive distortion, in the analyzed context it takes on a subsequent collective dimension: it emerges within the individual, as a product of the traumatic narratives and discursive practices that characterize the community, and is learned through participation in social practices, in line with situated learning theory. This reinterpretation allows us to understand polarization not only as a conflict between groups but as a shared way of interpreting the world, which simplifies historical complexity and rigidifies affiliations.

The research also highlighted the central role of family memories and public memory devices - monuments, rituals, commemorations - in the construction and transmission of opposing narratives. These devices not only represent the past, but actively contribute to its interpretation, reinforcing symbolic boundaries and fueling the distance between groups. The triangulation of memory, learning, and cognition further demonstrated how polarization is a self-reinforcing process, sustained by dynamics that operate simultaneously on the symbolic, social, and cognitive levels.

Based on these findings, the research proposes a multilevel educational model aimed at transforming the interpretative frameworks that sustain polarization. The model integrates three dimensions: the promotion of plural and dialogical memory; the critical reworking of community practices; and the deconstruction of polarized thought, through cognitive and symbolic tools geared toward managing social complexity. This proposal does not aim to offer immediate solutions, but rather to outline an educational path capable of fostering more inclusive, dialogical, and informed forms of coexistence.

The research has some limitations, primarily related to the qualitative nature of the sample and the specificity of the context analyzed. However, the depth of the narratives collected, and the richness of the practices observed suggest that the developed interpretative model could provide a basis for comparative studies in other contexts characterized by traumatic memories and community divisions. Further research could explore the model's applicability in different contexts, evaluate the effectiveness of the pedagogical proposals, and explore the role of younger generations in the transformation of historical. In conclusion, the study showed that community polarization is not an inevitable fate, but a process that can be understood, analyzed and transformed through interventions targeted educational programs, capable of addressing the narratives, practices, and interpretive frameworks that underpin it. Research has found that community polarization is the result of an intertwining of traumatic memories, conflicting narratives, community practices, and shar Despite the limitations indicated, the study offers a contribution to understanding and addressing polarization in contexts marked by historical conflict, indicating a viable development path in the design of a new European model of Pedagogy of History.

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Narrative of Justification and the Politics of Memory: Rainer Forst Legitimacy, and the Transformation of Postwar Identity

Marco Santalucia[*]

Abstract. This article examines the relationship between political legitimacy, collective identity, and public memory through Rainer Forst's theory of justification. Starting from the idea that modern political orders do not legitimate themselves solely through abstract principles, but also through narratives capable of translating historical experiences into normative claims, the article proposes the concept of "narratives of justification" as an interpretive key for understanding the nexus between reason, history, and power. Such narratives do not merely explain the origins of institutions, norms, and collective identities; they also help define the space of reasons within which they may be accepted, contested, or transformed. Drawing on the right to justification, understood by Forst as the principle according to which every binding norm must be justifiable in reciprocal and general terms to all those subject to it, the article highlights the constitutive ambivalence of public memory. On the one hand, it operates as a normative device capable of transforming traumas, suffering, and processes of emancipation into reasons for solidarity, rights, and democratic institutions. On the other hand, it may harden into ideological forms when it sacralizes certain historical narratives, thereby narrowing the space for critique and marginalizing alternative voices. The case of postwar Germany makes it possible to observe this dynamic concretely. From the repressions and silences of the 1950s, grounded in the narrative of German suffering and in the imperatives of reconstruction, one moves to the critical ruptures of the 1960s and 1970s, marked by the Eichmann and Auschwitz trials, the student movement, and Willy Brandt's symbolic gesture in Warsaw. Subsequently, the memory of the Holocaust was progressively universalized, becoming a central element of German constitutional patriotism, educational policies, commemorative practices, and the democratic identity of the Federal Republic. The article argues, however, that this transformation should not be understood as linear progress, but rather as a succession of regimes of justification, each of which produced political stability but also exclusions, silences, and conflicts. Democratic memory remains legitimate only insofar as it keeps open the space for contestation and critical revision. From this perspective, Forst's theory allows us to understand memory not as a mere repository of the past, but as a reflective practice through which a political community continually tests the reasons for its own identity.

Keywords: Rainer Forst; German Identity, Memory, Holocaust.

Riassunto: Il presente contributo analizza il rapporto tra legittimità politica, identità collettiva e memoria pubblica attraverso la teoria della giustificazione di Rainer Forst. Muovendo dall'idea che gli ordini politici moderni non si legittimino soltanto mediante principi astratti, ma anche attraverso narrazioni capaci di tradurre esperienze storiche in rivendicazioni normative, l'articolo propone il concetto di "narrazioni della giustificazione" come chiave interpretativa per comprendere il nesso tra ragione, storia e potere. Tali narrazioni non si limitano a spiegare l'origine di istituzioni, norme e identità collettive, ma contribuiscono a definire lo spazio dei motivi entro cui esse possono essere accettate, contestate o trasformate. A partire dal diritto alla giustificazione, inteso da Forst come principio secondo cui ogni norma vincolante deve poter essere giustificata in modo reciproco e generale a tutti coloro che ne sono soggetti, l'articolo mostra l'ambivalenza costitutiva della memoria pubblica. Da un lato, essa opera come dispositivo normativo capace di trasformare traumi, sofferenze e processi di emancipazione in ragioni per la solidarietà, i diritti e le istituzioni democratiche. Dall'altro, essa può irrigidirsi in forme ideologiche quando sacralizza determinate narrazioni storiche, restringendo lo spazio della critica e marginalizzando voci alternative. Il caso della Germania postbellica consente di osservare concretamente questa dinamica. Dalle rimozioni e dai silenzi degli anni Cinquanta, fondati sulla narrazione della sofferenza tedesca e sulle esigenze della ricostruzione, si passa alle rotture critiche degli anni Sessanta e Settanta, segnate dai processi Eichmann e Auschwitz, dal movimento studentesco e dal gesto simbolico di Willy Brandt a Varsavia. Successivamente, la memoria dell'Olocausto viene progressivamente universalizzata, divenendo elemento centrale del patriottismo costituzionale tedesco, delle politiche educative, delle pratiche commemorative e dell'identità democratica della Repubblica Federale. L'articolo sostiene tuttavia che questa trasformazione non debba essere letta come un progresso lineare, bensì come una successione di regimi di giustificazione, ciascuno dei quali ha prodotto stabilità politica ma anche esclusioni, silenzi e conflitti. La memoria democratica rimane legittima solo nella misura in cui conserva aperto lo spazio della contestazione e della revisione critica. In questa prospettiva, la teoria di Forst permette di comprendere la memoria non come semplice deposito del passato, ma come pratica riflessiva attraverso cui una comunità politica mette continuamente alla prova le ragioni della propria identità.

Parole chiave: Rainer Forst; Identità tedesca; Memoria; Olocausto.

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Introduction

Modern political orders do not legitimize themselves through abstract principles alone. They rely on narratives, stories of origin, suffering, emancipation, or progress, that translate historical experience into claims about why institutions, identities, and norms deserve allegiance. As the first chapter of this study argues, these narratives of justification form the connective tissue between reason and history: they condense events, symbols, and memories into moral and political lessons, offering not only explanations of how a given order arose but also normative claims about its validity. Their power lies in shaping what Rainer Forst calls orders of justification (*Rechtfertigungsordnungen*): discursive frameworks through which societies bind themselves by reasons while simultaneously delimiting the space in which those reasons can be questioned (Forst 2013, 2017).

Rainer Forst; diritto alla giustificazione; politica della memoria; legittimità; identità tedesca; memoria dell'Olocausto; ordini di giustificazione; teoria critica; Germania postbellica; patriottismo costituzionale.

Yet this very binding power discloses an ambivalence at the heart of modern politics. Narratives of justification stabilize social and political orders by structuring collective identities and obligations, but they also exercise what the first chapter terms modalities of power: they shape the space of reasons within which political actors deliberate, contest, and assent. When justificatory narratives foreclose critique, by sanctifying nation, progress, or trauma as unquestionable, they risk turning legitimacy into ideology, collapsing the distinction between persuasion and justification, between normative authority and historical affect. Conversely, when political orders institutionalize the right to justification, Forst's core principle that all norms must be reciprocally and generally acceptable to those affected, they transform narratives from instruments of domination into vehicles of critique and democratic learning (Forst 2012, pp. 13-42).

This theoretical framework enables both a critical description and a deconstructive analysis of modern politics of history and memory. Critical description, as developed in Chapter One, reconstructs how justificatory narratives, contractualist, revolutionary, national, or memorial, have mediated between historical experience and normative principle, translating collective pasts into claims about justice, authority, and identity. Yet Forst's approach also insists on a deconstructive moment: it exposes the limits, exclusions, and silences through which these narratives sustain legitimacy. As Chapter Two shows, public memory exemplifies this tension. It functions as a normative dispositif: commemorations, museums, and rituals bind political communities by turning past suffering into moral lessons, but they also exercise framing power (Frazer 2008, chapters 2 and 6), deciding which voices and traumas become canonical while marginalizing others. Forst's principle of justification requires that such narratives remain open to critique, plurality, and revision; otherwise, memory risks becoming what Nietzsche warned against as monumental history, serving the needs of power rather than the claims of justice.

The analysis of German memory politics in Chapter Three illustrates this double movement. From postwar silences and Cold War pragmatism to the critical confrontations of the 1960s and the universalist memory culture of the present, Germany's shifting narratives disclose successive justification regimes whose legitimacy collapsed when their claims could no longer withstand moral and political critique, from victims, intellectuals, activists, or transnational audiences. What appears as linear progress thus emerges, through Forst's lens, as a series of justificatory struggles in which legitimacy increasingly required giving reasons that all affected, including the dead, the displaced, and the marginalized, could in principle accept.

By linking narrative, power, and legitimacy, Forst's theory illuminates how modern political orders are constituted, stabilized, and contested through historically situated yet normatively ambitious practices of justification. It reveals how memory and history serve both as resources of legitimation

and as sites of ideological closure, demanding continuous scrutiny of the reasons by which political communities bind themselves. The ambition of this study is therefore twofold: to reconstruct the justificatory narratives through which modern politics ties identity to history and to evaluate them by the critical standard Forst articulates, the right to justification as the emancipatory horizon of democratic life.

Chapter 1. Narratives of Justification: Reason, History, and the Power of Legitimation

To understand human beings as *animalia rationalia* is, at bottom, to understand them as justifying beings, agents who guide themselves by reasons and who are answerable for what they do. Reason is not merely a faculty for calculating means; it is the capacity to let justifying reasons orient conduct and to render those reasons in interpersonal space. This practice is irreducibly social and situated: people choose reasons, yet they are also bound by the historically and culturally available reservoirs of reasons that make sense in a given time and place. This is the space of reasons, a space that legitimates not only discrete acts but also complex orders of thought and action, including social relations and political institutions (Sellars 1997, p. 76). Yet human beings justify by telling stories. The space of reasons is never a bare lattice of propositions; it is populated by narratives, patterns of meaning that locate events within trajectories of experience and expectation (Koselleck 1985, pp. 265-270). Agents and collectives understand themselves through stories that link individual happenings to collective orientations, and these stories carry identity: "What is her story?" inquires not just about biography but about the webs of relationship and significance through which a person or a people becomes intelligible 8Arendt, 1958).

The connection between justification and narration is therefore not in question; rather, what is at stake is how they relate. Against a Platonic picture in which narratives would be obstacles on the road to truth, obstacles to be critiqued and overcome in favour of a purified normativity (Forst 2017, p. 55), political life shows that justifications arise from historical constellations and experiences, framed, transmitted, and contested in narrative form. When seeking to explain why a given institution exists, the answers arrive as stories purporting to show how certain conclusions were learned from experience. Narratives thus provide the supporting basis for reasons, while the reasons, if they are to make a general claim, must reach beyond any single story into a shared space of justification. Narratives and justifications are distinct yet internally related: they neither collapse into each other nor float free of each other.

The term *narrative of justification* connects two dimensions: a normative dimension, oriented to reasons that aim at general and reciprocal validity, and a socially effective dimension, oriented to the historical narratives agents recognize as persuasive because they articulate experiences and expectations (Forst & Günther 2011, 11-30). Narratives of justification condense images, episodes, rituals, facts, and myths into grand interpretive frames that make sense of an order and endow it with binding force. When such frames draw on religious theologies (divine right versus natural rights), revolutionary achievements, or collective responses to injustice (e.g., memories of slavery, colonialism, or the Shoah), they acquire both historical depth and affective authority, motivating identification, obligation, and sacrifice, precisely because they narrate who "we" are and how "we" came to be.

Yet narrative alone never settles justificatory questions. The distinction between a story told "the right way" and one told "the wrong way" should not be understood in aesthetic or rhetorical terms, as if persuasive style could by itself generate normative validity. Rather, the relevant difference concerns justificatory articulation. A narrative is told "well," in the sense required here, when it renders explicit the normative claims it implicitly advances—when it clarifies which experiences ground which principles, and which lessons are meant to follow from them. It is told "poorly" when

it remains suggestive but normatively opaque, relying on identification, symbolism, or emotional resonance without specifying the reasons it offers for acceptance.

The argumentative "elevation" of a narrative thus consists in translating its claimed lesson into a reason that others, as free and equal justificatory agents, cannot reasonably reject. This process is not determined by narrative style: a rhetorically powerful story may still fail if the principles it implies cannot be defended under conditions of reciprocity, while a narratively weak or inelegant account may be redeemed if its underlying reasons can be reconstructed and justified in generalizable terms. "Well narrated," therefore, does not duplicate "supported by good reasons"; it names the mediating function of narrative in making reasons intelligible and historically situated. Narratives remain vehicles for justification without being their measure: they anchor reasons in shared histories and identities, but they do not exhaust the critical standards by which those reasons must ultimately be assessed.

Political thought abounds with justificatory narratives. Allegorical-epistemic narratives, as in Plato's cave allegory, render visible the conflict between *doxa* and *epistēmē*, dramatizing the limits of ordinary vision and the tragic fate of the truth-teller. Transcendent–dialectical narratives, such as Augustine's "two cities," distinguish earthly from divine orders, establishing a normative horizon by which the empirical polity is measured and constrained. Justice binds the two, even as it can be realized only imperfectly on earth. Ironic-utopian narratives, like More's *Utopia*, stage a mirror-play that criticizes existing injustice while ironizing the fantasy of perfection, disorienting readers into Nowhere to generate reflective distance from both status quo and imagined negations. Contractualist narratives from Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau displace patriarchal or providential accounts (e.g., Filmer), recasting political authority as the product of free and equal agency; their power lies in re-describing the origins and limits of rule. Pluralist and toleration narratives, as in Bayle, rebut pieties about Christian virtue by depicting atheists as capable of morality, undercutting religiously monopolized justification. Progress narratives in Lessing, Condorcet, Kant, Hegel, or Marx lend an arc to history through teleologies of self-cultivation and emancipation, while their imperial, racial, or developmental distortions later provoke postcolonial counter-narratives (McCarthy 2009; Chakrabarty 2007)- National narratives, famously analyzed by Anderson (1991), forge imagined communities that motivate liberation or domination by narrating distinctiveness, destiny, and self-determination. These forms rarely occur in isolation. In the United States, biblical exceptionalism, contractualist founding, and counter-narratives of dispossession and class conflict overlap and compete (Locke 1989; Dippel 1985; Hartz 1955). Their normative power stems from joining experience to principle, translating lived history into claims of justice, freedom, or collective agency.

Narratives of justification are also modalities of power. Power may be defined, in a neutral sense, as the intentional capacity to shape others' space of reasons so that they think or act as a result of that influence. Coercion replaces power when reasons give way to brute force; domination, by contrast, names an order that asymmetrically restricts the justificatory space by advancing what may be called *illegitimate legitimations* (Forst 2017, ch. 2). The standard for distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate legitimations cannot itself be derived from the mere fact that a narrative is socially binding or widely accepted. Rather, it rests on a normative criterion internal to the practice of justification: whether the reasons offered can be reciprocally and generally justified among those subject to them. A legitimation is legitimate insofar as it can be defended by reasons that no addressee, considered as a free and equal justificatory agent, could reasonably reject; it is illegitimate when it forecloses, distorts, or exempts itself from this standard of reciprocity and generality.

On this view, orders of justification are simultaneously orders of power: social relations stabilize through accepted reasons, and narratives are among the principal carriers of those reasons. They bind because they exhibit historical explanatory power and normative uptake, illuminating origins while grounding principles for the present. Yet bindingness is not rightness. The quality of a justificatory narrative depends on two distinct but related dimensions: its historical adequacy (assessed by the best

available epistemic standards) and its normative acceptability (assessed under conditions of generality and reciprocity). The justificatory standard is thus not an external moral imposition but is implicit in the very claim to legitimacy that such orders advance. Analysis therefore requires reconstructing the discursive space in which narratives operate—who tells which stories, with what authority and uptake—and evaluating those narratives by the criteria of justification that they themselves, at least implicitly, purport to recognize.

An adequate methodology combines internal reconstruction and external critique. Internal reconstruction recovers the first-person perspective of an order, mapping how participants narrate the genesis and point of their norms, institutions, and distributions of goods and chances. It traces the thick vocabularies—religious, revolutionary, memorial—that organize meaning and motivate allegiance. Critical evaluation then subjects those narratives to the principle of justification: norms claiming general and reciprocal validity must be justifiable with reasons that others cannot reasonably reject (Forst 2012, 15-48; 2014, 30-32).

To say that this approach avoids a false dichotomy between immanent and transcendent critique requires clarification. The standard of justification is *immanent* insofar as it is not imposed from an external moral standpoint alien to the order under scrutiny. It is reconstructed from the order's own justificatory self-understanding: whenever an order claims legitimacy, fairness, divine warrant, civilizational progress, or popular sovereignty, it implicitly invokes reasons addressed to subjects as beings capable of justification. In this sense, the critical standard lies latent within the normative grammar of the order itself.

At the same time, the standard is not merely descriptive of prevailing beliefs and practices. It has a *transcending* moment insofar as it subjects those very beliefs and practices to a test of reciprocity and generality that they may fail. The principle of justification can generate conclusions that go beyond, and even contradict, the dominant interpretations within a given order. Transformative challenges—contractualist critiques of patriarchal rule or postcolonial rejections of "civilizing missions"—often begin within inherited vocabularies but radicalize their normative implications. They expose tensions between what an order says about itself and what its structures actually permit.

The overcoming of the dichotomy, therefore, does not consist in collapsing transcendence into immanence, but in showing that critique can be both internally grounded and normatively demanding. The standard is immanent in origin—reconstructed from the justificatory claims agents already recognize—yet transcending in operation, because it authorizes a standpoint from which existing arrangements can be judged inadequate by their own lights. In this way, critique is neither an external moral imposition nor a mere echo of prevailing norms, but a practice of reflexive justification emerging through contestation within the discursive space of the order itself.

Because narratives knit past, present, and future, they mediate historical rupture and learning. Memorial narratives of genocide, colonial violence, or civil war do more than commemorate; they reframe justificatory space by re-describing dignity, rights, and obligations in light of catastrophe and struggle. Such narratives can ground new claims, equality, recognition, reparation, while remaining open to scrutiny, since the lesson drawn must be shown, not merely asserted, to follow. Against linear progressivism, a dialectic of justification emerges: widening demands for reasons meet counter-moves that seal off justificatory space. Progress consists in institutionalizing improved relations of justification, procedures and practices expanding who may question, on what grounds, before which audiences. Regression takes the form of asymmetric narratives that foreclose critique by sanctifying identity or authority.

Two senses of normativity follow: a descriptive sense, referring to the binding force of actually accepted narratives, and a critical sense, measuring the validity of justifications by generality and reciprocity. A narrative can be powerful yet unjustified, compelling yet ideological; conversely, reasons can be valid yet marginal, awaiting uptake. The minimum legitimacy condition for any order of justification is preserving reflexive space, securing the standing of persons as justification

authorities and sustaining practices where claims to general validity can be argued, accepted, or refused.

Narratives of justification thus prove indispensable to political life. They translate experiences into reasons, stitch identities to principles, and bind orders of rule. Precisely for that reason, they must be both reconstructed and judged. The measure is not narrative eloquence or affective resonance, but whether the stories that bind can withstand the scrutiny of those subject to them as free and equal participants in a shared space of reasons. When that standard becomes institutionalized, narrative becomes a medium of learning rather than a mechanism of closure; when it does not, narrative becomes an instrument of domination, sealing off justificatory space in the name of God, nation, history, or progress. The politics of justification is therefore always a politics of narrative, whose emancipatory horizon lies in the right to justification enacted in common.

Chapter 2. Memory as a tool of justification

Public memory can be theorized as a normative dispositif whose primary function lies in the articulation of narratives capable of legitimating social and political orders. It does not merely preserve representations of the past; rather, it transforms heterogeneous materials, events, images, rituals, affects, into configurations of meaning endowed with justificatory force (Assmann 2011, 17-18; Habermas 1987, 7). Memory operates at the intersection of what Koselleck (1985, 267-288) famously called the space of experience and the horizon of expectation: it forges symbolic connections between what has been and what ought to be, thus linking historical consciousness with normative orientation.

This process entails a dual movement. On one side, memory produces normative power: it succeeds in binding identities, obligations, and institutions by means of widely shared narratives that command assent (Forst 2013, 6; Ricœur 2004). On the other, it raises claims to validity: it seeks recognition as offering reasons that aspire to general and reciprocal acceptability (Habermas 1996, 364-365). The tension between these two dimensions, efficacy and validity, persuasion and justification, marks the theoretical locus in which memory as a narrative of legitimation must be situated. A narrative may be normatively powerful yet critically illegitimate when it forecloses contestation; conversely, it may be normatively valid yet socially marginal if it lacks institutional uptake or affective resonance (Fraser, 2008; Forst, 2017, 131-133).

From a genealogical perspective, memory emerges as a technology of orientation operating through narrative emplotment (White 2016, 42-43). By selectively organizing temporal sequences into plots, memory discloses patterns of continuity, rupture, and learning through which historical contingency is rendered normatively salient (Ricœur 2004). Events are not merely recorded; they are narrated as foundational, traumatic, or redemptive, thereby providing symbolic resources for the attribution of responsibility, the projection of futures, and the critique of existing orders (Huyssen 2003, 21-38; Rothberg 2009, 11). In this sense, memory performs what Habermas (1987) called the translation of experiences into publicly redeemable validity claims: it converts the suffering of victims or the achievements of emancipation into reasons for rights, institutions, and moral commitments that demand acknowledgment beyond the boundaries of particular communities.

Yet such translation is never automatic. As Forst (2013; 2017, 55) argues in his theory of the right to justification, claims to normative validity require that reasons be articulated in ways that no one affected could reasonably reject. When memory furnishes the premises of political obligation, its narratives must therefore remain open to critical scrutiny: they cannot merely assert authority by invoking sacred traumas or civilizational missions (Benhabib 2002, 24; Fraser 2008). A memory that appeals to moral emotions without permitting rational interrogation risks sliding into what Nietzsche (1887/1994) warned against as the monumentalization of history: the conversion of the past into a repository of unquestionable exempla serving the needs of power rather than the demands of justice.

Indeed, the moralization of memory constitutes one of the central ambivalences of modern political culture. As Huyssen (2003, 21-22) observes, the contemporary memory boom has elevated Holocaust remembrance, colonial reckoning, and other sites of historical trauma to the status of global moral referents. These memorial constellations often sustain what Habermas (1996, 492-500) calls constitutional patriotism: the idea that collective identity should rest not on ethnic myths but on the normative achievements of democracy and human rights. Yet the very success of such narratives risks solidifying into civic dogmas that conflate historical learning with moral conformism. When the imperative of *never again* becomes the unquestionable foundation of political legitimacy, memory may suppress rather than stimulate the reflexivity that democratic citizenship requires (Assmann 2011; Todorov 2003, 23).

Foucault's (2007, 192-193) concept of governmentality proves illuminating here. It directs attention to the subtle mechanisms through which power operates not primarily by coercion but by shaping the conduct of conduct: the ways in which individuals govern themselves by internalizing norms, expectations, and rationalities (Dean 2010, 18; Rose 1999, 4-5). From this perspective, public memory functions as a technology of government when it configures subjectivities oriented toward particular forms of civic virtue, responsibility, or vigilance. Memorial museums, commemorative rituals, and educational curricula do not simply transmit historical knowledge; they cultivate affective dispositions and ethical sensibilities aligned with liberal-democratic rationalities (Bennett 1995, 20; Levy & Sznaider 2006, 137). They invite subjects to recognize themselves as heirs of traumatic pasts and as guardians of universal lessons, thereby binding political identity to moralized readings of history (Fassin 2012, ix-x).

Such processes involve what Fraser (2008, 24-26) terms *framing power*: the capacity to delineate which voices, events, and interpretations count as part of the public memory canon. Decisions about what to commemorate, how to classify atrocities (e.g., as "genocide"), or which traumas deserve centrality inevitably distribute symbolic recognition and political legitimacy unevenly (Rothberg 2009, 11). Memory thus enacts both *inclusion*, by honoring victims, acknowledging injustices, extending solidarities, and *exclusion*, by marginalizing dissonant experiences, silencing competing narratives, or universalizing particular Western trajectories as paradigms of moral progress (Moyn 2010; Chakrabarty 2007, 1).

This ambivalence calls for a normative criterion distinguishing legitimate from ideological deployments of memory. Following Forst (2013, 6), one may posit the principle of justification: only those norms, and, by extension, those mnemonic narratives, are legitimate that can be reciprocally and generally justified to all affected. Applied to memory politics, this principle requires that commemorative practices remain open to contestation, plurality, and revision. It rejects both positivist objectivism, which treats memory as mere empirical record, and romantic substantialism, which sacralizes memory as bearer of ultimate meaning (Ricœur 2004). Instead, it conceives memory as a discursive practice whose claims must withstand the scrutiny of free and equal participants in processes of public reasoning (Habermas 1996, 492-500; Benhabib 2002).

Such a view also problematizes the frequent conflation of mnemonic legitimacy with emotional authenticity. The fact that a narrative evokes empathy, shame, or moral outrage does not suffice to establish its normative validity (Fassin 2012, 14-15; Feldman & Ticktin 2010, 11-12). Affective intensities may motivate political engagement, yet without discursive accountability they risk lapsing into what Brown (2006) calls moralizing depoliticization: the displacement of structural critique by individualized sentiments of compassion or guilt. When memory politics rely predominantly on emotional interpellation, through immersive museums, testimonial performances, or humanitarian campaigns, they may produce what Boltanski (1999, 1-2) terms spectators of suffering rather than critical citizens capable of interrogating the systemic conditions of injustice.

Conversely, a reflexive politics of memory would institutionalize what Fraser (2008, 21-26) describes as participatory parity: the inclusion of marginalized perspectives, the contestability of

dominant narratives, and the revisability of normative conclusions. Such a politics resists the closure of meaning by affirming what Ricœur (2004) calls the *polyphony of historical voices*. It acknowledges that mnemonic legitimacy arises not from unanimity or moral certainty but from the capacity of commemorative practices to sustain ongoing processes of justification under conditions of pluralism and dissent (Habermas 1996; Forst 2017, 21-25).

Ultimately, theorizing memory as a narrative of justification highlights both its constitutive role in modern political imaginaries and its susceptibility to ideological capture. Memory binds when it transforms past suffering into reasons for solidarity, rights, and democratic institutions; but it emancipates only when those reasons remain subject to the critical interrogation of all concerned (Benhabib 2002; Forst 2013). The task of critical theory, therefore, is not to demythologize memory into mere facticity nor to sacralize it as moral dogma, but to secure the conditions under which its narratives can orient collective life without foreclosing the contestability on which both justice and democracy depend (Fraser 2008; Honneth 2007).

Chapter 3. From Silence to Universal Memory: Justification Regimes and the Transformation of German Memory Politics

The trajectory of German memory politics since 1945 has often been narrated as a moral drama: from silence to confrontation, from denial to responsibility, from parochial victimhood to cosmopolitan human rights. Yet such linear accounts risk missing a crucial dimension: the normative shifts underlying these transformations. Changes in public narratives about the Nazi past were not merely cultural phenomena; they reflected deeper crises of legitimacy in what Rainer Forst calls orders of justification (*Rechtfertigungsordnungen*), the discursive frameworks through which societies seek to legitimize political power, historical interpretation, and collective identity (Forst 2013, 8-11).

Forst's conception of the right to justification posits that legitimate political orders must offer reasons that can be reciprocally and generally accepted; when prevailing justifications lose credibility, normative crises emerge, opening space for emancipatory critique and institutional change (Forst 2017, 136-140). This lens illuminates how the Federal Republic of Germany moved from early narratives minimizing Nazi crimes to later policies embedding Holocaust memory into law, education, and public culture. What appears, at first glance, as a linear moral evolution was in fact a succession of justificatory regimes, defensive, critical, and finally universal, each of which rose to prominence, stabilized political legitimacy for a time, and eventually collapsed under the weight of its own exclusions, silences, and contradictions.

In the immediate postwar period, Germany's public discourse emphasized German suffering, bombings, expulsions, hunger, over Jewish persecution or German responsibility. The notion of *Stunde Null* ("Zero Hour") suggested a clean break with the past, while literary *Trümmerliteratur* ("rubble literature") by writers such as Heinrich Böll or Wolfgang Borchert depicted ruins and disorientation but rarely addressed the Holocaust (Moeller 2001, 78-76; Sebald 2001, 10). Forst's framework clarifies this as a *defensive justification regime*: narratives legitimated the new democratic order by severing ordinary Germans from Nazi crimes, portraying the nation as Hitler's victim rather than his accomplice (Forst 2013, 6). Such justifications deflected moral scrutiny, stabilizing a fragile polity focused on reconstruction rather than reckoning.

The Nuremberg Trials (1945–1946) established crimes against humanity and individual accountability under international law (Weinke 2006, 22-35), yet within Germany they appeared as imposed justice: polls revealed widespread resentment toward *Siegerjustiz* ("victor's justice") (Frei, 1999, 121-146). Nuremberg thus represented an external order of justification lacking internal acceptance: legitimacy rested on Allied authority rather than reciprocal public reasoning. Meanwhile, Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's government prioritized *Westbindung* (Western integration), economic

recovery, and anti-communism over moral reckoning. Amnesty laws in 1951 and 1954 and mass reintegration of former Nazis into civil service reflected Cold War pragmatism (Frei 1996, 7-13). Schools ignored the Holocaust; films portrayed soldiers as apolitical victims; public debate avoided complicity (Assmann 2006). This *Schweigekartell* ("pact of silence") bought political stability at the price of moral evasion. Yet, as Forst (2017, 33) insists, orders of justification contain the seeds of their own delegitimation when those denied a hearing demand reasons in return.

By the 1960s, this defensive regime collapsed under mounting critique. The 1961 Eichmann trial in Jerusalem, broadcast globally, confronted Germans with survivor testimonies and bureaucratic complicity in genocide (Arendt 1964; Friedländer 1997). Unlike Nuremberg, it personalized horror, revealing ordinary administrators enabling extraordinary crimes. Victim voices undermined narratives of ignorance, demanding acknowledgment and moral response rather than silence or self-pity. The Frankfurt Auschwitz Trials (1963–1965) prosecuted mid-level perpetrators, forcing German courts, media, and schools to confront extermination camp realities (Pendas 2006). Though sentences were often lenient, public discourse shifted: responsibility debates entered parliaments, pulpits, and classrooms (Wolfrum 1999).

A new critical justification regime thus emerged: legitimacy now required confronting rather than repressing Nazi crimes. Chancellor Willy Brandt's 1970 *Kniefall* (Warsaw Genuflection) at the Ghetto Uprising Memorial dramatized this shift: without words, a democratic Germany acknowledged historical guilt before its victims (Frei 1996). Habermas (1986) called this the birth of constitutional patriotism: national identity grounded in universal principles rather than ethnic pride. Forst would add that legitimacy now depended on reciprocal justification, open to critique rather than shielding itself behind myths of innocence. The 1968 student movement radicalized this critique: influenced by Adorno, Horkheimer, and Marcuse, it linked Auschwitz, capitalism, and authoritarianism as interconnected systems (Kraushaar 2018). Slogans like *Unter den Talaren – Muff von 1000 Jahren* ("Under the gowns, the mustiness of a thousand years") accused universities of harboring ex-Nazis. For Forst (2017, 153), this exemplifies emancipatory critique: exposing justificatory regimes as morally deficient to demand new normative foundations.

By the late 1970s, German memory politics entered a discursive and universal justification regime. The American miniseries *Holocaust* (1978), broadcast in West Germany to 20 million viewers, triggered emotional debates and memorial initiatives (Diner 1988, 13). Public memory became experiential and dialogical rather than legalistic or abstract, aligning with Forst's claim that legitimacy requires inclusive public justification accessible to all citizens. The 1986 *Historikerstreit* opposed conservative historians seeking to normalize Nazi history and critics like Habermas defending the Holocaust's singularity (Habermas 1987, 1-10). Competing narratives clashed: was the Holocaust one atrocity among many, or the negative foundation of German democracy? The controversy itself signaled a mature discursive regime: legitimacy now required open confrontation among rival interpretations rather than suppression of debate.

By the 1990s, Holocaust remembrance became *Staatsräson*, a reason of state. Germany introduced Holocaust Remembrance Day (1996), criminalized Holocaust denial (1994), funded memorials like Berlin's Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (2005), and embedded Holocaust education into curricula (Assmann 2010). Forst would call this a universal justification regime: legitimacy grounded in human rights, historical responsibility, and transnational moral norms rather than national mythmaking. Recent debates extend this horizon, linking Holocaust memory to colonial genocides (e.g., Herero and Namaqua) and slavery, questioning Eurocentric hierarchies of suffering (Mbembe 2020, 223-230; Moses 2021, 294). Legitimacy increasingly demands global inclusivity, confronting all histories of violence without erasing their differences.

From the silences of the 1950s to today's cosmopolitan memory culture, German politics of remembrance illustrate Forst's thesis: political legitimacy rests on reciprocal justification. Defensive regimes collapsed when their narratives, of victimhood, amnesty, or Cold War pragmatism, could no

longer withstand moral critique from victims, intellectuals, students, or international observers. Critical regimes emerged when acknowledgment, dialogue, and universal principles replaced denial or parochialism. Today's memorial laws, education programs, and human rights commitments thus rest on decades of justificatory struggle. Germany's democratic identity was not built despite confronting its Nazi past but through it: by accepting that legitimacy requires giving reasons all can reciprocally accept, including the dead, the displaced, and the silenced. As Forst (2013) insists, the right to justification is the core of justice itself. Germany's memory politics show what it means to institutionalize that right across law, culture, and collective identity, transforming historical guilt into a foundation for democratic legitimacy in a global age.

A revealing recent example is the statement "Principles of Solidarity" (13/15 November 2023), co-signed by Nicole Deitelhoff, Rainer Forst, Klaus Günther, and Jürgen Habermas. Issued after the Hamas attacks of 7 October 2023, the text condemns antisemitism, affirms solidarity with Israel, and argues that, while criticism of military proportionality is legitimate, it is not justified to attribute genocidal intentions to Israel. In this sense, the statement shows how Holocaust memory continues to shape German public reason and to provide a normative basis for present political commitments. From the perspective of memory as a narrative of justification, however, the statement also reveals a tension. It translates the historical lesson of Auschwitz into a contemporary political orientation, but in doing so it risks narrowing the space of legitimate contestation. This is especially significant from a Forstian perspective: if norms are legitimate only insofar as they can be reciprocally and generally justified to all affected, then even historically powerful narratives of responsibility must remain open to criticism and revision. The statement is therefore important not only for its content, but for its theoretical implications. It shows that public memory can still function as a powerful source of democratic legitimacy in Germany, yet also that mnemonic justification may harden into a civic orthodoxy. The case thus illustrates a broader ambivalence: memory binds democratic communities by transforming past catastrophe into reasons for solidarity and vigilance, but it remains emancipatory only when those reasons stay open to public contestation.

Conclusion

This study has argued that Rainer Forst's theory of justification provides a powerful framework for understanding the constitutive relationship between political legitimacy, collective identity, and historical memory in modern societies. By treating legitimacy as the outcome of orders of justification, discursive frameworks in which reasons must be offered, contested, and accepted, Forst allows us to see that political authority does not rest on coercion alone, nor on moral ideals abstracted from history, but on the narratives through which communities make sense of who they are and why their institutions deserve allegiance. These narratives, as the first chapter showed, translate historical experience into claims of principle, binding political identity to collective memories of origin, trauma, or emancipation. Yet they also exercise power by framing the very space in which reasons can be given, challenged, or refused.

Through this lens, Germany's postwar memory politics emerge not as a linear march toward moral enlightenment but as a sequence of justification regimes whose legitimacy rose, stabilized, and ultimately faltered under the weight of their own exclusions and silences. The early postwar focus on German suffering and Cold War reconstruction, the critical confrontations of the 1960s and 1970s, and the later universalization of Holocaust memory into constitutional and transnational norms each represented distinct ways of binding identity to history. Yet, as Forst's principle of justification insists, legitimacy cannot rest on affective resonance or historical authority alone; it requires that the narratives grounding political identity remain open to all affected as free and equal justificatory agents.

By tracing this movement, from defensive amnesties to critical reckoning and finally to cosmopolitan memory, the analysis revealed how Germany's democratic identity was forged through justificatory struggle. The silences of the 1950s collapsed when victims, intellectuals, students, and international audiences demanded reasons that could no longer be denied. Critical regimes emerged when acknowledgment and dialogue replaced denial and myth, culminating in a universalistic memory culture in which legitimacy increasingly rests on human rights, transnational solidarity, and the institutionalization of remembrance.

Forst's theory thus discloses both the achievement and the ambivalence of Germany's contemporary relationship to identity and memory. On the one hand, the Federal Republic has made the right to justification concrete by embedding Holocaust remembrance, historical responsibility, and democratic values into its laws, education, and political culture. On the other hand, the very universality of these narratives now faces new challenges, from postcolonial critiques questioning Eurocentric hierarchies of suffering to debates over national identity in a global age. The critical lesson of Forst's approach is that legitimacy can never be secured once and for all: it depends on preserving open, contestable spaces of justification in which political identities and historical memories remain subject to the scrutiny of all concerned.

Germany's contemporary memory politics, therefore, exemplify the double insight at the heart of Forst's theory: that political orders are constituted through narratives linking identity to history, and that these narratives achieve legitimacy only when they embody the right to justification as an ongoing, inclusive, and reflexive practice. Far from closing debate, memory must institutionalize the very conditions of its own contestability if it is to remain a resource for democratic identity rather than an instrument of ideological closure.

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Tra antiebraismo e antisemitismo: Contributo all'analisi della dimensione sistemica del pregiudizio cattolico nella nuova documentazione del pontificato di Pio XII (seconda parte)[*]

Between Anti-Judaism and Anti-Semitism: A Contribution to the Analysis of the Systemic Dimension of Catholic Prejudice in the New Documentation of the Pontificate of Pius XII (Part Two)

Tommaso Dell'Era[**]

Riassunto. I documenti presentati in questa seconda parte riguardano in particolare l'atteggiamento della S. Sede e di alcuni dei suoi principali attori e rappresentanti, insieme ad altre figure, rispetto al progetto e alla realizzazione del Comitato irlandese di soccorso ai profughi per le leggi razziste e il comportamento della burocrazia vaticana nei confronti di coloro che inviarono telegrammi di condoglianze per la morte di Pio XI e di felicitazioni per l'elezione di Pio XII nel 1939.

Parole chiave: Pio XI; Pio XII; Montini; Antiebraismo; Antisemitismo; Conversioni; Chiesa cattolica; Irlanda; Tullio Levi-Civita.

Abstract. The documents presented in this second part concern in particular the attitude of the Holy See and some of its main actors and representatives, together with other personalities, with regard to the project and implementation of the Irish Committee for Relief to Refugees from Racist Laws and the behaviour of the Vatican bureaucracy towards those who sent telegrams of condolence for the death of Pius XI and congratulations for the election of Pius XII in 1939.

Keywords: Pius XI; Pius XII; Montini; Anti-Jewish Prejudice; Antisemitism; Conversions; Catholic Church; Ireland; Tullio Levi-Civita.

2. «Tedeschi di nazionalità, ebrei di razza, cattolici per battesimo»

Un secondo gruppo di documenti, questa volta conservati nel fondo dell'Archivio della Nunziatura apostolica in Irlanda presso l'Archivio apostolico vaticano, riguarda più precisamente il fenomeno delle conversioni nel periodo della persecuzione antisemita e la considerazione delle persone convertite da parte della S. Sede. In particolare le carte qui brevemente esaminate si riferiscono alle vicende, che già hanno visto l'attenzione della storiografia, di quella categoria di persone colpite (anche in modo diverso) dalle leggi antisemite emanate da vari paesi europei che, a prescindere dalla loro appartenenza religiosa, furono costrette a tentare di emigrare altrove. Un aspetto interessante di tale questione su cui è stato in parte fatto luce, ma che merita di essere approfondito, è costituito dalle diverse denominazioni con le quali furono individuati questi gruppi di persone (cfr. Kertzer,

[*] Questo lavoro costituisce la seconda parte dello studio in tre parti sulla presenza del pregiudizio antiebraico e i suoi legami con l'antisemitismo nella nuova documentazione del pontificato di Pio XII resa disponibile nel 2020 (in parte, anche in quella proveniente dal pontificato precedente). La prima parte, dal titolo "Tra antiebraismo e antisemitismo: Contributo all'analisi della dimensione sistemica del pregiudizio cattolico nella nuova documentazione del pontificato di Pio XII" ["Between Anti-Judaism and Anti-Semitism: A Contribution to the Analysis of the Systemic Dimension of Catholic Prejudice in the New Documentation of the Pontificate of Pius XII"], è stata pubblicata in *Trauma and Memory*, 2025, volume 13, no. 2, pp. 75-87: http://dx.doi.org/10.12869/TM2025-2-03.

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Benedetti, 2023a; Valbousquet, 2024). Questo caso specifico vide all'opera la Segreteria di Stato, la Nunziatura apostolica in Irlanda e diversi attori intorno al progetto e alla realizzazione del Comitato irlandese[1].

Per quanto riguarda la documentazione conservata in due fascicoli dedicati ai profughi ebrei, a proposito delle carte nel primo di questi bisogna subito sottolineare che nell'ottobre 1938 il nunzio a Dublino Paschal Robinson scrivendo al segretario di Stato utilizzò la formula di «Cattolici discendenti da padre o madre Ebrei» o «cattolici sposati ad Ebrei» a proposito di coloro che cercavano di emigrare dall'Austria[2]; nella risposta Tardini (che aveva riferito sulla questione a Pio XI in assenza di Pacelli) li qualificò come «ebrei convertiti emigrati dall'Austria» ed «ebrei profughi da altri Paesi, come, ad esempio, dall'Italia»[3]. Come si vede, le due diverse denominazioni facevano riferimento a casistiche diverse all'interno di uno stesso gruppo familiare o di gruppi differenti (tenuto anche conto delle differenti legislazioni dei paesi menzionati), ma in ogni caso mentre l'accento del nunzio era sui cattolici figli di un genitore o sposati con un coniuge considerato ebreo, quello di Tardini, segretario della Congregazione per gli Affari ecclesiastici straordinari cadeva sugli ebrei, così definiti anche se convertiti, o semplicemente sugli ebrei profughi (pur essendo molti di loro convertiti al cattolicesimo, per quanto si poteva conoscere dalle richieste che iniziavano a giungere alla S. Sede). Pochi giorni più tardi Robinson, accusando la ricezione del dispaccio di Tardini del 26 ottobre e in qualche modo adeguandosi al suo linguaggio, parlava di «Ebrei convertiti e profughi dall'Austria», riassumendo la situazione poco più avanti come «Profughi dall'Austria e da altri Paesi»[4].

Sempre nel mese di novembre assistiamo a una varietà di formule utilizzate dagli attori in questione per identificare gruppi anche diversi di persone nella stessa condizione di emigrazione forzata. Il 18 novembre 1938 il segretario di Stato Pacelli si rivolgeva a Robinson informandolo che a causa dei «recenti provvedimenti in materia di razzismo, adottati dal Governo Italiano, molte suppliche sono giunte alla Santa Sede, da parte di ebrei convertiti che implorano aiuto e protezione»; chiedeva quindi di essere informato se «l'opportuna e caritatevole iniziativa di Sir Joseph Glynn, Capo delle Conferenze di S. Vincenzo de' Paoli d'Irlanda, a cui Vostra Eccellenza accennava nel pregiato suo Rapporto in data 13 Ottobre p.p., N. 2255, è stata realizzata, per poter segnalare alla Presidenza del Comitato qualche pietoso caso di ebreo convertito residente in Italia veramente degno della nostra benevola considerazione»[5]. Sei giorni dopo Robinson scriveva a Glynn informandolo di aver comunicato a Pacelli i progressi dell'iniziativa assunta dal presidente della Società di S. Vincenzo de' Paoli «in providing for the Catholic Jewish refugees from Germany» e di avergli chiesto dettagli ulteriori riguardo ai «converted Jews in Italy who are in need of similar assistance»[6]; coglieva quindi l'occasione di inviargli in inglese l'estratto della lettera di Tardini del 26 ottobre 1938 in cui

[1] Si trattava in particolare del presidente della Società di S. Vincenzo de' Paoli d'Irlanda Joseph Glynn. Sull'opera della S. Sede e la costituzione dei Comitati nazionali di soccorso ai profughi per le leggi razziste si veda Vian, 2002; sul Comitato irlandese cfr. Valbousquet, 2024, 66-69, 96; sul progetto dei visti per il Brasile Valbousquet, 2022; Santos, 2022.

[2] AAV, Arch. Nunz. Irlanda, b. 49, fasc. 1 Ebrei profughi Opera del Comitato Irlandese, f. 6r copia del rapporto n. 2255 del 13 ottobre 1938 del nunzio a Dublino Pasquale Robinson al segretario di Stato Eugenio Pacelli. Su Robinson cfr. Di Sanzo, 2016.

[3] AAV, Arch. Nunz. Irlanda, b. 49, fasc. 1 Ebrei profughi Opera del Comitato Irlandese, f. 9v dispaccio n. 4089/38 del 26 ottobre 1938 di Domenico Tardini a Robinson.

[4] Ivi, f. 11r copia del rapporto n. 2286 del 1 novembre 1938 di Robinson a Tardini.

[5] Ivi, f. 19r dispaccio n. 4378/38 del 18 novembre 1938 di Pacelli a Robinson. Questo documento rende bene e in maniera sintetica l'atteggiamento della S. Sede rispetto al soccorso fornito ai perseguitati: ricezione delle domande di aiuto («suppliche» in linguaggio ecclesiastico) soprattutto e prioritariamente da parte di convertiti al cattolicesimo, loro esame, analisi ed accoglimento sulla base di criteri prestabiliti che permettevano la selezione delle richieste considerate degne di risposta e di possibile esaudimento (per tali criteri si vedano Coco, 2023b, Kertzer, Benedetti 2023b, Dell'Era 2024, Valbousquet 2024).

[6] AAV, Arch. Nunz. Irlanda, b. 49, fasc. 1 Ebrei profughi Opera del Comitato Irlandese, f. 17r copia della lettera n. 2310 del 24 novembre 1938 di Robinson a Glynn.

l'espressione lì utilizzata dall'alto prelato era tradotta con «*the converted Jewish emigrants from Austria*»[7]. Nella propria risposta a Robinson del 25 novembre 1938 Glynn, a proposito dei contatti avuti per i profughi italiani, parlò di «*Italian Jewish converts*»[8], formula sostanzialmente identica a quella utilizzata da Robinson nel suo rapporto a Pacelli del giorno successivo, in cui appunto si riferiva a «Ebrei convertiti e bisognosi di aiuto e protezione» (circa cento «persone di nazionalità tedesca») e a «qualche pietoso caso di Ebrei convertiti residenti in Italia»[9]. Il segretario di Stato Pacelli, poi, nel suo dispaccio del 29 novembre 1938 a Robinson si esprimeva in maniera diversa e molto significativa nello stesso testo:

«Eccellenza Reverendissima,

Mi reco a premura di trasmettere all'Eccellenza Vostra Rev.ma le accluse lettere del Dott. Errico Gruen e della Signorina Gertrude Bamgarten, tedeschi di nazionalità, ebrei di razza, cattolici per battesimo e anche - secondo buone testimonianze- per esemplarità di vita, i quali si sono rivolti alla Santa Sede chiedendo protezione e aiuto perché in seguito ai recenti provvedimenti del Governo Italiano in materia di razzismo vengono a trovarsi in una triste situazione.

Voglia compiacersi l'Eccellenza Vostra di segnalare e raccomandare i due pietosi casi all'ottimo Signor Joseph Glynn, Presidente delle Conferenze di S. Vincenzo de' Paoli, il quale – come risulta dai pregiati Rapporti di Vostra Eccellenza in data 13 Ottobre u.s. N. 2255 e 1 Novembre p.p. N.P. 2286 – si era proposto di costituire un Comitato per venire in aiuto degli ebrei convertiti profughi»[10].

La prima formula qui utilizzata da Pacelli era ripresa quasi alla lettera all'inizio del mese di dicembre da Tardini il quale portava all'attenzione di Robinson il «pietoso caso degno della nostra benevola considerazione» di «Hans Wolfgang Heydemann», qualificato «tedesco di nazionalità, ebreo di razza, ma convertitosi al cattolicesimo, il quale essendo colpito dai recenti provvedimenti del Governo Italiano in difesa della razza è costretto a lasciare l'Italia entro il prossimo 12 marzo»[11]. Lo stesso Pacelli, se nel periodo successivo fino a quando fu segretario di Stato usò la formula, di fatto divenuta prevalente in questa documentazione, di «ebrei convertiti profughi» insieme alle sue due piccole varianti «ebrei convertiti» e, significativa, «cattolici profughi»[12], in almeno due occasioni nelle carte conservate in questo fascicolo si servì di altre parole. Per la prima, intorno a metà dicembre 1938 a proposito di «Emmy Rosenfeld» egli parlava di «tedesca di nazionalità, ebrea convertita» la quale «in seguito ai recenti provvedimenti del Governo Italiano in materia di difesa della razza, è costretta a lasciare l'Italia»[13]. Per la seconda, invece, all'inizio di febbraio 1939 il segretario di Stato, dopo aver utilizzato le parole «ebrei convertiti» per le persone costrette a lasciare l'Italia raccomandate al Comitato irlandese «di soccorso agli ebrei convertiti profughi», allegava alla comunicazione per Robinson un appunto su Maria Aranka Grumberger aggiungendo che non era riuscita ad avere in Italia «un visto per l'America del Nord, pur avendo colà dei parenti di stirpe ebraica molto ricchi disposti ad offrire tutte quelle garanzie richieste dalle leggi»[14].

[7] Ivi, f. 18r.

[8] Ivi, f. 21r lettera del 25 novembre 1938 di Glynn a Robinson.

[9] Ivi, f. 23r copia del rapporto n. 2311 del 26 novembre 1938 di Robinson a Pacelli.

[10] Ivi, f. 27r-v dispaccio n. 4567/38 del 29 novembre 1938 di Pacelli a Robinson.

[11] Ivi, f. 35r dispaccio n. 4731 del 7 dicembre 1938 di Tardini a Robinson.

[12] Per queste formule si vedano ad es. in Ivi, f. 33r-v dispaccio n. 4671/38 dell'11 dicembre 1938 di Pacelli a Robinson; f. 44r-v dispaccio n. 5043/38 del 30 dicembre 1938 di Pacelli a Robinson; f. 45r-v dispaccio n. 78/39 del 10 gennaio 1939 di Pacelli a Robinson, in cui il segretario di Stato parlava anche di «soccorso dei poveri profughi» (Ivi, f. 45v); f. 52 dispaccio n. 65/39 dell'11 gennaio 1939 di Pacelli a Robinson; f. 66 dispaccio n. 339/39 del 24 gennaio 1939 di Pacelli a Robinson; f. 79r-v dispaccio n. 536/39 dell'8 febbraio 1939, in cui il segretario di Stato parlava anche di «cattolici profughi» (Ivi, f. 79r).

[13] Ivi, f. 39r dispaccio n. 4821/38 del 14 dicembre 1938 di Pacelli a Robinson.

[14] Ivi, f. 78r-v dispaccio n. 479/39 del 2 febbraio 1939 di Pacelli a Robinson.

Per quanto riguarda gli altri attori dal lato della S. Sede, a parte quanto già evidenziato va rilevato che dalla documentazione conservata in questo fascicolo emerge che nei primi mesi del 1939 Tardini sottolineò frequentemente l'origine ebraica dei profughi convertiti, prevalentemente con la formula abituale di «ebrei convertiti profughi»[15]. Circa un anno più tardi, invece, Montini sentì il bisogno di qualificare Enrico Pietro Gruen come «cattolico di razza ebraica»[16]. Ma tre anni dopo Maglione riprese la definizione più diffusa di «Comitato Irlandese per il soccorso agli ebrei convertiti e ai profughi»[17].

Dal lato irlandese, Robinson tendenzialmente si attenne alle formulazioni «Ebrei convertiti» ed «Ebrei convertiti profughi»[18]. In alcuni casi, tuttavia, fece ricorso a parole diverse quali «Catholic Refugees», «Cattolici profughi»[19], «Austrian and German Refugees», «famiglie ebree convertite»[20]. Inoltre, in due dei suoi rapporti compilati nel gennaio e nell'aprile 1939, per spiegare le difficoltà incontrate in Irlanda dall'azione del Comitato e la mancata corrispondenza tra i risultati attesi e quelli ottenuti, egli faceva riferimento ai pregiudizi contro gli ebrei diffusi nel paese, oltre che alla difficile situazione di molte famiglie irlandesi, alle complessità dei contatti con le persone richiedenti aiuto e alla varietà delle loro esigenze[21]. Glynn dal canto suo utilizzò le formule poi in parte riprese da Robinson e viste sopra («Austrian and German Christian Refugees», «Catholic Refugees», «Austrian and German Refugees»)[22]. Ma circa cinque mesi prima di quelle parole, nella propria lettera al primo ministro australiano del novembre 1938, ne aveva utilizzate altre molto differenti per descrivere i rifugiati austriaci («Austrian Refugees»): «a group of Austrian Catholics who have a certain amount of Jewish blood in them and who are not being provided for by any of the existing Charitable

[15] Si veda ad es. in Ivi, f. 93r dispaccio n. 744/39 del 26 febbraio 1939 di Tardini a Robinson, dove egli tuttavia qualificò Irma Gilda Spiro come «ebrea convertita, di nazionalità tedesca» per raccomandarla al «Comitato, che si interessa degli ebrei convertiti»; per la formula «ebrei convertiti profughi» riferita sempre al Comitato si vedano in Ivi, f. 101r dispaccio n. 819/39 dell'11 marzo 1939 di Tardini a Robinson; f. 110r dispaccio n. 849/39 del 15 marzo 1939 di Tardini a Robinson; f. 113r-v dispaccio n. 1219/39 del 25 marzo 1939 di Tardini a Robinson.

[16] Ivi, f. 30r dispaccio n. 10727 del 16 febbraio 1940 del sostituto della Segreteria di Stato Giovanni Battista Montini a Robinson.

[17] Ivi, f. 210r dispaccio n. 4132/43 del 1 luglio 1943 del segretario di Stato Luigi Maglione a Robinson.

[18] Per queste si vedano ad es. Ivi, f. 25r-v copia del rapporto n. 2352 del 24 dicembre 1938 di Robinson a Pacelli; f. 50r copia del rapporto n. 2417 del 25 gennaio 1939 di Robinson a Pacelli; f. 95r copia del rapporto n. 2471 del 1 marzo 1939 di Robinson a Tardini; ff. 119r-121r copia del rapporto n. 2517 del 1 aprile 1939 di Robinson a Tardini. Va considerato che queste formule sono scritte quasi sempre con la maiuscola: ciò non solo perché provenienti da un parlante di lingua inglese, ma, probabilmente, per evidenziare l'origine ebraica di quelle persone.

[19] Anche in questo caso è da notare la maiuscola, utilizzata per le ragioni linguistiche sopra indicate, ma anche, probabilmente, per evidenziare lo status di fedeli cattolici.

[20] Per queste citazioni si vedano in Ivi, ff. 83r-87r copia, in versione inglese e italiana con alcune difformità, del rapporto n. 2447 del 16 febbraio 1939 di Robinson a Pacelli; f. 139r copia della lettera n. 2524 del 5 aprile 1939 di Robinson a Glynn; ff. 169r-170r copia del rapporto n. 2548 del 27 aprile 1939 di Robinson a Tardini, in cui si trovano anche le formule «Ebrei convertiti profughi» (anche al singolare) ed «Ebrei convertiti».

[21] Cfr. Ivi, ff. 46r-49r copia del rapporto n. 2414 del 24 gennaio 1939 di Robinson a Pacelli laddove il nunzio affermava: «Sfortunatamente poi con l'appello lanciato dal Comitato Generale per raccogliere fondi non si ottenne quanto si sperava, a causa, credo, dei crescenti pregiudizi contro quanto può riferirsi agli Ebrei» (f. 47); ff. 153r-155r copia del rapporto n. 2356 del 13 aprile 1939 di Robinson a Tardini, quando egli scriveva: «Le ragioni principali si devono riporre […] soprattutto nel modo sfavorevole con cui questa iniziativa è stata accolta in Irlanda da varie associazioni e dal popolo in genere, il quale, pieno di pregiudizi contro gli Ebrei, non soltanto nega il contributo materiale su cui il Comitato molto contava, ma non comprende come si possa cercare impiego in Irlanda per forestieri mentre sono tanti i disoccupati irlandesi ed è pure tanta la miseria di molte famiglie irlandesi. Così pure il Comitato ha avuto difficoltà più che aiuti ed incoraggiamenti da parte dei Governi, per esempio d'Irlanda e di Australia dei quali ha cercato l'appoggio per poter svolgere la sua opera» (f. 155). Questo documento con l'allegato era già stato pubblicato in precedenza, con l'omissione della conclusione e di alcune parti relative ad alcuni nomi e dettagli personali e con il riferimento a rapporti e dispacci nella raccolta esplicitamente non pubblicati, in Blet, Graham, Martini, Schneider, 6, 1972, 72-74.

[22] Per queste: Ivi, ff. 114r-118r copia della lettera del 31 marzo 1939 di Glynn a Robinson (inviata da Robinson a Tardini con il suo rapporto n. 2517 sopra menzionato); ff. 132r-136r lettera del 4 aprile 1939 di Glynn a Robinson.

Organisations in Austria»[23]. A proposito poi del secondo fascicolo, va detto che nel periodo compreso tra l'aprile 1940 e il febbraio 1941 molto frequente è l'occorrenza della formula «cattolici non ariani»[24], insieme alle sue varianti «Profughi Cattolici non Ariani»[25], utilizzata sia dalla parte della S. Sede (Maglione), sia dalla parte irlandese (con un'eccezione per «Catholic Refugees»)[26].

Ciò che emerge dalla documentazione sopra esaminata è il fatto che veniva dato risalto alla precedente appartenenza religiosa ebraica nonostante la conversione e, come si è visto, s'indicava anche la qualifica razzista ossia l'identità imposta in termini di razza[27]. Costante è in entrambi i casi la sottolineatura di un'appartenenza ebraica non più esistente o non reale, con la differenza che l'evidente pregiudizio antiebraico, condiviso da parte degli attori di queste vicende, si trasforma nel o finisce per convergere con il pregiudizio antisemita. La razza cioè persiste nonostante la conversione. La questione è tanto più evidente quanto più si considera che si tratta di corrispondenza, non pubblica, tra rappresentanti della S. Sede a diversi livelli. Quale era la necessità di continuare a qualificare come ebrei coloro che si erano convertiti e quella di utilizzare la terminologia razzista? Questa documentazione, tra l'altro, consente anche di individuare, almeno a livello molto generale e con necessarie precisazioni da apportare, l'evoluzione delle formule linguistiche utilizzate nell'entourage di Pio XII all'interno della S. Sede (anche in corrispondenza dello sviluppo della legislazione razzista e antisemita del fascismo)[28]: dall'iniziale accostamento, nell'ambito della condizione di profugo, tra conversione ed ebraicità (o tra cattolicesimo ed ebraicità), persistente in questa visione ecclesiastica, alla simultanea sottolineatura e compresenza di nazionalità, razza e religione (peraltro da parte di Pacelli prima e di Tardini poi e con una variante di Montini). Nel caso di Glynn, poi, come si è menzionato, non ci si faceva problemi a riferirsi al sangue ebraico nel proprio contatto epistolare con il primo ministro australiano. La qualifica razzista è attestata anche dalla variante della non arianità pure presente nella documentazione.

Un'altra importante serie di documenti dai quali emerge la consistente presenza del tradizionale pregiudizio antiebraico cattolico è conservata nel fondo della Segreteria di Stato *Morte di Pontefici e Conclavi* relativamente alla serie *Pio XI* per la sezione che riguarda la morte di Ratti e *Pio XII* per le sezioni che riguardano la sede vacante e il conclave, l'elezione e l'incoronazione di Pacelli. Questo esempio illustra bene, a mio parere, l'intreccio tra esigenze, procedure e prassi burocratiche e di archiviazione da una parte e, appunto, pregiudizio antiebraico dall'altra. Il fondo *Morte di Pontefici e Conclavi*, come descritto nel corrispondente Indice realizzato in collaborazione da Alejandro M. Dieguez e Piero Doria[29], contiene documentazione dello stesso genere da Pio IX in avanti, tra le altre

[23] Ivi, f. 140r copia della lettera dell'11 novembre 1938 di Glynn a Joseph Aloysius Lyons (lettera integrale ai ff. 140r-142r).

[24] AAV, Arch. Nunz. Irlanda, b. 49, fasc. 2, Ebrei Profughi in Brasile Comitato Irlandese, ff. 2r-3r la nota lettera circolare di Maglione sulla concessione da parte del governo brasiliano di 3000 visti per «cattolici non ariani, preferibilmente d'origine tedesca»; f. 27r dispaccio n. 10816/40 del 22 dicembre 1940 di Maglione a Robinson in cui il segretario di Stato aggiungeva anche che il governo brasiliano non avrebbe concesso il visto «nei casi di ebrei convertitisi dopo il 1934, anche se membri di famiglie miste» (Ibidem); f. 29r copia del rapporto n. 123/40 del 15 febbraio 1941 di Robinson a Maglione (Cattolici scritto sempre con la maiuscola).

[25] Ivi, f. 17r copia del rapporto n. 109/40 del 6 settembre 1940 di Robinson a Maglione; f. 25r copia del rapporto n. 112/40 del 31 ottobre 1940 di Robinson a Maglione con la traduzione in «Non-Aryan Catholic Refugees» (f. 26r allegato al precedente); ff. 31r-34r copia della lettera con allegati del 21 gennaio 1941 di Robinson a Maud S. Slattery Organising Secretary of the Irish Co-Ordinating Committee for Refugees, in cui egli parlava di «Non-Aryan Catholic Refugees».

[26] Ivi, f. 30r lettera del 27 gennaio 1941 di Maud S. Slattery a Robinson.

[27] Per le considerazioni su questo si vedano le conclusioni che saranno pubblicate nella terza parte, anche in riferimento a una precedente pubblicazione (2019) di chi scrive.

[28] E come vedremo nelle conclusioni finali, pure in comparazione con le formule utilizzate in altri fondi del periodo per chi non era convertito al cattolicesimo.

[29] Cfr. Dieguez, Doria, 2021. Ringrazio Silvia Toppetta, Giuseppe Umberto Maria Lobianco e Gianfranco Armando per i loro preziosi suggerimenti al riguardo.

cose relativa ai telegrammi di condoglianze per la morte di un papa e di congratulazioni o felicitazioni per l'elezione del suo successore inviati da componenti della gerarchia cattolica e degli ordini religiosi, da sacerdoti, politici e governanti, individui illustri e persone comuni ecc. Per la morte di Pio XI il titolario riportava telegrammi di condoglianze suddivisi tra Privati distinti, Privati, Israeliti (Società e privati) e Telegrammi lasciati senza risposta. Ora, se ad alcuni del gruppo degli Israeliti fu effettivamente risposto[30], mentre in altri casi dello stesso gruppo le parole che indicavano l'origine ebraica erano evidenziate o sottolineate in rosso[31], tra i telegrammi rimasti senza risposta diversi (anche se non esclusivamente) erano quelli provenienti da comunità e associazioni ebraiche o anche da singoli ebrei, spesso ugualmente evidenziati in rosso[32]; di alcuni di questi, poi, veniva esplicitamente disposto di non rispondere perché provenienti da ebrei[33] (in un caso almeno la risposta fu preparata dal minutante, ma fu poi disposto di non procedere)[34].

Per l'elezione e l'incoronazione di Pio XII il titolario distingueva tra «Omaggi lasciati senza risposta per ragioni politiche», «Omaggi lasciati senza risposta per ragioni di non convenienza o non opportunità», «Omaggi (lettere o telegrammi) lasciati senza risposta perché mancanti di indirizzo o con indirizzo incompleto» e «Lettere e telegrammi di omaggio lasciati senza risposta perché provenienti da: Ebrei, Protestanti, Dubbi»[35]. Il fatto che nella suddivisione delle categorie di mittenti fossero indicati separatamente israeliti prima (Pio XI), ebrei e protestanti poi (Pio XII, questi ultimi, insieme a coloro sui quali si dubitava di rispondere, nel gruppo degli omaggi ai quali non si rispose e indicandone la motivazione proprio per la loro origine) è rilevante e significativo. Per quanto riguarda gli ebrei, la provenienza degli omaggi a Pio XII era per la gran parte rimarcata apponendo, solitamente al margine inferiore, le parole «Ebreo», «ebrei» o segni di evidenziazione o anche sottolineature a matita rossa[36]. L'elenco delle persone e istituzioni ebraiche che inviarono telegrammi è molto lungo ed esula dal fine di questo lavoro il suo esame e un'attenta analisi delle formule utilizzate dai mittenti. Basti qui solo ricordarne uno: il 5 marzo 1939 il notissimo matematico Tullio Levi-Civita inviava il proprio telegramma per l'elezione di Pio XII, che fu ricevuto in Vaticano e sotto a cui fu apposta a matita la versione romanesca della parola giudeo, dal tono spregiativo, con cui s'identificavano gli ebrei nella capitale:

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[30] Ad es. ai telegrammi provenienti dalla Comunità ebraica di Varsavia (cfr. AAV, Segr. Stato, Morte Pontefici e Conclavi, *Pio XI*, b. 105, fasc. 3 Israeliti (Società e privati), f. 270), dal Gran Rabbino del Belgio (cfr. Ivi, f. 271), dal Gran Rabbino della Comunità di Beirut (f. 272). Va notato che molti dei telegrammi provenienti da personalità ebraiche o singoli individui ebrei presenti nei vari fascicoli della serie ricordavano la presa di posizione di Pio XI nel 1938, spesso interpretata come una difesa dell'ebraismo.

[31] Ad es. i telegrammi del vice rabbino capo di Firenze (cfr. Ivi, f. 281), del rabbino capo della Palestina (f. 282), del Consiglio della Comunità di Gerusalemme (f. 289, dove in fondo al testo del telegramma era apposto: «NB»).

[32] Ad es. la lettera manoscritta in inglese di Annette Freund (cfr. Ivi, fasc. 4 Telegrammi di condoglianze lasciati senza risposta, ff. 304-305) che veniva descritta nel suo contenuto: «L'ebrea Annette Freund esprime il suo profondo cordoglio per la morte del Papa» dove la parola ebrea era evidenziata con una freccia rossa; il telegramma della Comunità israelitica portoghese di Tunisi a nome di tutta la popolazione ebraica, parole queste due ultime sottolineate in rosso (f. 309).

[33] Ad es. i telegrammi di J. Stutz e Herta Glück, dove a matita blu è apposto «Ebrei non rispondere» (Ivi, ff. 345-346); del rabbino del Katanga Moise Levy, su cui a matita rossa è disposto «non si risponda» (f. 347); del rabbino capo di Tel Aviv Moshe Avigdor Amiel, che riporta la stessa disposizione (f. 348).

[34] Si tratta del telegramma dalla Comunidad israelita da Montevideo su cui inizialmente fu apposto l'appunto di rispondere cortesemente con una minuta di risposta, di fatto acclusa, per poi disporre in senso contrario, a matita blu, «non si risponda» (Ivi, f. 349). Per altri esempi analoghi di mancate risposte a israeliti cfr. Ivi, ff. 350-353 e, per un caso differente, ff. 355-356 dove a spedire erano gruppi di cattolici nazionalsocialisti.

[35] Cfr. AAV, Segr. Stato, Morte Pontefici e Conclavi, *Pio XII*, b. 125 (p. 33 dell'Indice). È interessante rilevare che nel gruppo dei Protestanti (cfr. Ivi, fasc. 4, ff. 320-394) sono molte meno le comunicazioni ricevute che presentano segni di classificazione e distinzione, così come le parole utilizzate per l'identificazione dei mittenti (in genere «protestante», «non cattolico», «acattolico»). Sull'antiprotestantesimo cattolico in generale e il suo nesso con l'antisemitismo in particolare cfr. Moro, 1997, 1998, 2003; Perin, 2010, 2011; Zanini, 2019; Berrettini, Castagna, Lesti, Zanini, 2025.

[36] Cfr. diversi esempi in AAV, Segr. Stato, Morte Pontefici e Conclavi, Pio XII, b. 125, fasc. 4, ff. 187-319.

«Sua Eccellenza Monsignore Tardini Segretario Affari Straordinari Citta Vaticano Prego Vostra Eccellenza reverendissimo rendersi benevolo interprete presso Sua Santità Pio XII si faustamente assurto soglio pontificio devoto omaggio ammirazione esultanza anche semplice studioso – Levi Civita accademico pontificio – giudìo» (*sic*)[37].

Nell'archivio del matematico è conservata la minuta del precedente telegramma inviato in febbraio per la morte di Pio XI al cardinale camerlengo ossia Pacelli[38]. Il telegramma originale spedito, che tra l'altro rendeva omaggio al valore morale del pontefice scomparso, è naturalmente in Archivio Apostolico Vaticano[39]. Peraltro questo telegramma per Pio XI era ricompreso tra quelli provenienti da Privati distinti e non tra gli Israeliti, mentre l'altro telegramma successivo per Pio XII dello stesso Levi-Civita, come si è visto, fu messo insieme a quelli degli Ebrei: significativa è quindi la differenza nel passaggio tra i due pontefici. Come per il telegramma di condoglianze per Pio XI di Levi-Civita, anche quello di Vito Volterra, anch'egli accademico pontificio, fu collocato tra i Privati distinti e quindi non identificato come proveniente da un israelita[40]. Nel gruppo dei Privati è invece il telegramma di Gino Arias e della moglie, da tempo convertiti al cattolicesimo[41].

Ciò che è importante sottolineare è il fatto che la prassi abituale di rispondere ai capi di Stato e non rispondere ai privati (se non particolarmente distinti) non fu sempre rispettata, come dimostrano queste carte; è verosimile che ciò sia avvenuto per errore, probabilmente da parte di minutanti non presenti alla scomparsa del pontefice e al conclave precedenti, i quali furono quindi richiamati ricordando loro la disposizione di non scrivere risposte nei casi prestabiliti[42]. Ciò contribuisce a spiegare la differenza di comportamento verso gli ebrei (risposte effettive, risposte preparate e non inviate, disposizione di non rispondere, nessuna risposta) nel breve spazio di tempo intercorso tra la morte di Pio XI e l'elezione di Pio XII. Ma tale spiegazione non copre l'intera vicenda che questi documenti fanno emergere: il solo fatto, come si è notato sopra, che gli ebrei costituissero una categoria a parte nella suddivisione dei mittenti e che venissero evidenziati nei modi che si sono descritti, riportando esplicitamente e a priori la motivazione per cui non si dovesse loro rispondere (proprio perché ebrei, insieme ai protestanti e ai casi dubbi) dimostra in maniera evidente non solo la presenza, ma anche la cristallizzazione del pregiudizio antiebraico nella prassi burocratica di trattazione delle pratiche. Peraltro in un periodo in cui la persecuzione antisemita era già in atto al di fuori e dentro l'Italia. E, va anche segnalato, appare del tutto significativa per il nostro tema la mancata risposta, a quanto risulta, a entrambi i telegrammi di Levi-Civita, cacciato dall'Università di Roma per le leggi razziste e antisemite e accademico pontificio dal 1936, il quale veniva quindi a subire anche questa discriminazione[43].

[37] Cfr. Ivi, f. 215. È da notare l'umiltà intellettuale di Levi-Civita, il quale si definiva «semplice studioso» nonostante la grandezza della propria opera, che fa da contrasto con il disprezzo trasmesso dall'appellativo con cui fu identificato in queste carte. Su Levi-Civita in prima battuta cfr. Dell'Aglio, 2005. Per questo episodio cfr. Dell'Era, 2022.

[38] Cfr. Cagiano de Azavedo, 2017, 71.

[39] Cfr. AAV, Segr. Stato, Morte Pontefici e Conclavi, Pio XI, b. 105, fasc. 1 Privati distinti, f. 103. Sul testo non vi sono segni di risposta.

[40] Cfr. AAV, Segr. Stato, Morte Pontefici e Conclavi, Pio XI, b. 105, fasc. 1 Privati distinti, f. 32.

[41] Cfr. AAV, Segr. Stato, Morte Pontefici e Conclavi, Pio XI, b. 105, fasc. 2 Privati, f. 214.

[42] Per queste considerazioni ringrazio Giovanni Coco.

[43] Del resto, nella documentazione vaticana del periodo di Pio XII sono diversi gli ulteriori esempi di mancate risposte ad ebrei in quanto tali per il sospetto e il pregiudizio nutrito nei loro confronti (in altri casi, invece, la risposta vi fu): si veda ad es. la richiesta di un aiuto straordinario per l'Amicizia cristiano-ebraica avanzata da p. Marie-Benoît nel dicembre 1946 e il parere negativo al riguardo di Antonio Riberi: «dire di non rispondere Sono ebrei che fanno i loro affari con questo schedario mondiale» (AAV, Segr. Stato, Commissione Soccorsi, b. 408, Varia 1577, f. 31). Su Marie-Benoît e i suoi rapporti con la S. Sede e Riberi cfr. Valbousquet, 2024).

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The University of Siena and the Effects of the Anti-Semitic Laws

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Abstract. The essay analyzes the impact of the 1938 antisemitic laws on the University of Siena, reconstructing the institutional, educational, and individual consequences resulting from the implementation of racial legislation. Even at this relatively small university, compliance with the directives of the fascist regime was rapid and largely devoid of resistance. The only Jewish faculty member, Guido Tedeschi, was dismissed from teaching, while foreign Jewish students were subjected to restrictions that limited or interrupted their academic paths. The attitude of the academic authorities was characterized by conformity and obedience; teaching was reoriented in accordance with regime directives, with the introduction of courses inspired by biological racism and fascist propaganda. The Fascist University Group (GUF) contributed to the spread of antisemitism in line with the national context. Particular significance is given to the condition of foreign Jewish students: some managed to graduate in an accelerated timeframe, sometimes thanks to informal support, while others were expelled or interned in concentration camps after 1940. The Sienese case is emblematic of the dynamics of Italian universities under fascism, highlighting the role of academic institutions in implementing racial policy and the need for further research into the experiences of foreign students.

Keywords: Racial Laws; Siena University; GUF (Fascist University Group); Foreign Students.

Riassunto. Il saggio analizza l'impatto delle leggi antisemite del 1938 sull'Università di Siena, ricostruendo le conseguenze istituzionali, didattiche e individuali prodotte dall'applicazione della normativa razziale. Anche in questo ateneo di dimensioni contenute l'adeguamento alle direttive del regime fascista fu rapido e sostanzialmente privo di resistenze. L'unico docente ebreo, Guido Tedeschi, venne espulso dall'insegnamento, mentre gli studenti ebrei stranieri furono sottoposti a restrizioni che ne limitarono o interruppero i percorsi di studio. L'atteggiamento degli organi accademici si caratterizzò per conformismo e obbedienza; la didattica fu riorientata in ossequio alle direttive del regime, con l'introduzione di insegnamenti ispirati al razzismo biologico e alla propaganda fascista; i *Gruppi Universitari Fascisti* (GUF) contribuirono alla diffusione dell'antisemitismo in linea con il quadro nazionale. Particolare rilievo assume la condizione degli studenti ebrei stranieri: alcuni riuscirono a laurearsi in tempi accelerati, talvolta grazie a sostegni informali, mentre altri furono espulsi o internati nei campi di concentramento dopo il 1940. Il caso senese risulta emblematico delle dinamiche dell'università italiana sotto il fascismo, evidenziando il ruolo delle istituzioni accademiche nell'attuazione della politica razziale e la necessità di approfondire ulteriormente le vicende degli studenti stranieri.

Parole chiave: Leggi razziste; Università di Siena; GUF (*Gruppi Universitari Fascisti*); Studenti stranieri.

Introduction

The University of Siena was still a small university during the fascist period, consisting of the Faculty of *Medicina e chirurgia* and the Faculty of *Giurisprudenza*. In addition to these were the degree courses in *Farmacia* (which became a faculty in 1933) and *Scienze politiche* (established in 1938, with 15 students)[1]. The Faculty of *Lettere*, repeatedly called for by the Sienese academics, was only authorised after the war. In Siena too, the impact of the legislation and of the racist climate fostered by government propaganda in the country was certainly significant, not only from a political perspective but also due to the level of administrative work it required. This involved taking a census of the Jewish presence in the University, assessing whether those enrolled in

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[1] This is the total number of enrolled students including *fuori corso* students (students enrolled but who have not yet passed the number of exams expected for that course in the standard period of time): 414 in 1921-22; 254 in 1931-32; and 303 in 1940-41. At the time of the racial laws' promulgation, the 1938-39 Yearbook recorded 275 enrolled students. Cfr. Nino Cordisco, *Università e fascismo. Il caso senese*, Firenze, Firenze Atheneum, 2013, p. 85.

university courses could continue their studies, and preventing Jewish lecturers from teaching. The administrative interventions in the University of Siena followed the procedures set out in the regulations issued by the *Ministero dell'Educazione Nazionale* (Ministry of National Education) and also included bans on enrolment in post-graduate Schools of Specialisation which, for medicine, represented the normal continuation of training for professional purposes[2]. This political and administrative action took place within a communicative framework that presented anti-Jewish racism as an unavoidable national issue. Siena conformed without exception and the newspaper *La Rivoluzione Fascista* ("Fascist Revolution", local organ of the party) provided a snapshot of the Jewish presence in the province in September 1938, following the recent census carried out by both the municipalities and the University:

«In the province of Siena, the Jewish nuclei that have recently immigrated or have resided for a long time have not reached the significant size that, on the contrary, some Italian cities and regions report, from what we read in the newspapers. The figures we have collected, if not 100% accurate, are at least very close, and indicate that out of a population of 268,500 people, there are 81 Jewish families and a total of 269 Jews. That is less than 1 per 1,000 inhabitants. Of these 81 families, 74 are recorded as living in Siena, with a total of 247 Jews. In Chianciano there are 3 Jewish families, in Montepulciano 1, in Monteriggioni 1, in Piancastagnaio 1, and in Rapolano 1. Of course, these are a further few dozen individuals of Jewish race in Siena and in the municipality of Chianciano, who are only temporarily in our region for study or medical reasons. Among the permanent residents, about 80% are merchants with excellent financial standing, apart from a few exceptions. The remaining 20% are university students, professionals, or employees. In our university, only one professor will be leaving his teaching position because he is of Jewish race, and exactly 11 foreign Jewish students cannot be readmitted to study»[3].

The only Jewish professor at the University of Siena was Guido Tedeschi, Professor *ordinario* of *Diritto civile*; there were no Italian Jewish students enrolled, whereas there were twenty foreigners - as we shall see later - all in the degree courses of *Medicina* and *Farmacia*, from Poland, Romania, Germany, Hungary, and the Soviet Union. The absence of Italian Jewish students at the University of Siena should not blind us to the purpose of the legislation introduced in the autumn of 1938, which was to have universities without Jews and thus prevent new enrolments by those who had finished secondary education. So, while the frustrated desires and aspirations of individuals cannot be measured, the existence of "absent students", attributable to the effects of the 1938 laws, should not be overlooked.

Lecturers and teaching

A study of the university and the behaviour of its governing bodies during the racial campaign reveals a variety of stances: from formal obedience, to zeal, to political-ideological conformism, to agreement with the political views behind the measures. In Siena, in addition to the required official position presented by the University leadership for the opening of the 1938-39 Academic year, there is a trace of the "Jewish problem" in the minutes of the Academic Senate[4] and in those of the Faculty Councils of *Medicina/Farmacia* and *Giurisprudenza/Scienze Politiche*. In the Council

[2] The Polish Jew Izydor Steinwurzel, after a degree in *Medicina* from Siena, had completed a three-year internship at the local eye clinic while waiting to enrol in the course of specialisation. In his letter to Mussolini he stated that he had not been able to do so earlier due to lack of funds and now was banned by the Ministry in accordance with the circular of 16.1.1939. The case is recalled in F. Cavarocchi – F. Minerbi, *Politica razziale e persecuzione antiebraica nell'ateneo fiorentino*, in E. Collotti (a cura di), *Razza e fascismo. La persecuzione contro gli ebrei in Toscana (1938-1943)*, Roma, Carocci, 1999, pp. 467-510, to p. 482.

[3] Not signed, *Gli ebrei in provincia di Siena*, in "La Rivoluzione Fascista", 18 September 1938 (48), p. 4.

[4] The Academic Senate minutes from 1938 onwards attest: confirmation of Tedeschi's position before the racial laws and, following their introduction, silence on the fate of the Jewish professor while announcing his replacement; the introduction of race-themed courses; and the exclusion of a Jewish student from being selected for an academic prize. Cfr. *Verbali del Senato Accademico dall'11 luglio 1933 al 5 gennaio 1945* (Minutes of the Academic Senate from 11 July 1933 to 5 January 1945).

minutes there is above all the introduction of "racially motivated" course content and the details of turnover of professors who taught until 1944. The most significant page was written in the minutes of the Faculty of *Giurisprudenza* Council meeting of 10 October 1938, which was largely devoted to the impact of anti-Semitic legislation on the University, with specific reference to the dismissal of Professor Tedeschi[5].

The university complied with the regime's demands with an embarrassed reticence because it was uncomfortable purging parts of itself. Expelling students was easier, whereas an illustrious professor – a "first among equals" - represented a tangible blow to an institution jealous of its own margins of independence from political power. Norberto Bobbio, professor of *Filosofia del diritto* at Siena from 1938 to 1940, reminded me of the atmosphere in the university after the introduction of anti-Jewish measures:

«The opinion of the academics regarding the racial laws was unanimously negative. But this opinion was not matched by active resistance on our part, as has been noted several times. When I arrived in Siena at the end of 1938, Professor Guido Tedeschi, whom I knew as the nephew of the well-known Professor Giorgio Del Vecchio, Rector of the University of Rome, was no longer there»[6].

At the inauguration of the 1938-39 academic year, Rector Alessandro Raselli, professor of *Diritto processuale civile*[7], made only a brief mention of Tedeschi's dismissal:

«An affectionate word of farewell to Prof. Guido Tedeschi, our excellent colleague and esteemed holder of the chair of *Diritto civile*, who is leaving his teaching post as a result of measures introduced by the superior demands of the defence of the race»[8].

It is difficult not to notice the carefully measured words used: rather than "affection", the greeting betrayed embarrassment towards the figure of the "excellent" and "esteemed" Tedeschi, given that the dismissal (redacted to "farewell") was transformed into a euphemistic leaving of the profession, almost as if it were a voluntary choice. But the main dialectical device lay in the reasons given, since the "measures for the defence of the race" were defined with the ambivalent expression of "superior": therefore meaning 'very important' but also independent of the will of the local administrators. Raselli, like other Italian university rectors at the time, was able to present himself as obsequious and aligned with the national political authorities, but also blameless. This episode demonstrates the importance of the Italian university tradition, with its coat of arms as an ancient body of the national ruling class, aware that its actions will make history, inscribed on a path that will transcend all government policies, even fascism. The rector was a faculty colleague of Tedeschi's and the embarrassment of the dismissal of an important figure in Sienese legal culture[9] was made clear in the attempt to make amends by compiling a certificate from the faculty, in which the Dean, Ottorino Vannini, and his colleagues of *Giurisprudenza* highlighted the scholar's scientific acclaim and great merits. This aspect of formal solidarity, which was also produced at Tedeschi's own request, may seem of little substance compared to the humiliation and damage of a dismissal, but within a mechanism of obedience to 'superior' logic, even small acts of human solidarity have significance. This is worth noting especially when comparing the behaviour of the Sienese faculty of *Giurisprudenza* with the experiences of other Italian universities: contempt,

[5] Cfr., Giulio Cianferotti, *Le leggi razziali e i rettori delle Università italiane (con una vicenda senese)*, in "Le Carte e la Storia", 2, December 2004, pp. 15-28.

[6] Letter of 28 September 1997 from Norberto Bobbio to the author.

[7] Raselli remained in his position in the three-year period 1936-39 and was the only Rector of the University of Siena between 1922 and 1943 who was from the Faculty of *Giurisprudenza* rather than the Faculty of *Medicina*.

[8] *Relazione del Rettore Prof. Alessandro Raselli*, in R. Università di Siena, *Annuario per l'anno accademico 1938-39 XVII E. F.*, Siena, 1939.

[9] About the Sienese *Giurisprudenza* academics, see Floriana Colao, *I giuristi universitari a Siena tra diritto e politica (1938-1958)*, in Marco Cavina (a cura di), *Giuristi al bivio. La Facoltà di giurisprudenza tra regime fascista ed età repubblicana*, Bologna, Clueb, 2014, pp. 187-210.

silence and reticence were not infrequent, and even refusal to write letters of appreciation for the work done by the expelled academics[10].

Tedeschi's story has been the subject of various reconstructions[11], most recently with the photographic exhibition dedicated to him by the University of Siena on the eightieth anniversary of the racial laws[12]. In synthesis, here is a brief biography: Guido (Gad) Tedeschi (Rovigo, 17 May 1907 - Jerusalem, 21 November 1992) graduated in *Giurisprudenza* in Rome in 1928. From 1931 he taught *Diritto civile* first in Rome, then in Cagliari and Perugia. Contracted to teach *Diritto civile* and *Istituzioni di diritto privato* at Siena from the 1935-36 academic year (made permanent from the following year), he remained there until his expulsion due to the racial laws. In 1931-32 he spearheaded an initiative under the aegis of the League of Nations to coordinate the International Convention on Anti-Semitism. On 29 October 1932 he joined the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (PNF) (National Fascist Party). In 1937 he was commissioned by the Faculty of *Giurisprudenza* to write a report: "*Relazione sul Secondo Libro del Codice Civile*" (Report on the Second Book of the Civil Code). After losing his teaching post on 14 December 1938 (replaced in *Diritto civile* by Marcello Andreoli and in *Istituzioni di diritto privato* by Carlo Maiorca) he emigrated to Jerusalem in 1939 with his daughter Silvia and his wife Elda Finzi. With the help of Raffaele Cantoni, he obtained an English visa in Switzerland, which he used to travel by ship from Trieste to Haifa on 3 April 1939. Tedeschi's career in Israel was very distinguished: as one of the founders of the Faculty of Law at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem where he taught until 1976, he is considered one of the fathers of Israeli Civil law and was awarded the Israel Prize, the State's highest honour for culture. He was reinstated at the University of Siena in June 1944, remained on leave of absence without ever returning to Italy[13], and was finally retired from the University in 1950. The decisive factor in his decision not to return to Italy was the failure to recognise his status as a full professor (*ordinario*), since at the time of his expulsion from the university he had not yet completed the initial three-year period (as *straordinario*) in that role[14].

Tedeschi left the chair of *Diritto civile* and the teaching of *Istituzioni di diritto privato* on receiving the suspension communicated to him by the Rector on 16 October 1938 and he was replaced by Carlo Maiorca, a professor *straordinario* at the University of Cagliari[15]. At Siena, from 1938 Maiorca[16] taught *Istituzioni di diritto privato* and *Istituzioni di diritto romano* and in the academic years 1940-41 and 1941-42 he was professor *ordinario* of *Diritto privato* and in charge of

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[10] Giulio Cianferotti, *Le leggi razziali*, cit. in particular p. 17 and notes 40 and 41.

[11] Nino Cordisco, *L'Università di Siena e le leggi razziali: l'espulsione del professor Guido Tedeschi*, in "Studi Senesi", CXIII (III serie, L), 3, 2001, pp. 586-606, Id, *Università e fascismo*, cit., Giulio Cianferotti, *Le leggi razziali*, cit., Izhak Englard, *Guido (Gad) Tedeschi at Eighty: a Tribute*, in "Israel Law Review", 21, 3-4 (Summer–Autumn 1986), pp. 247-68.

[12] *Storie di persecuzione a Siena: Guido Tedeschi. Vicende paradigmatiche del Novecento. Le Università di Siena e Gerusalemme attraverso la storia avventurosa di un giurista ebreo,* from 25 October 2018 at the Department of *Giurisprudenza* of the University of Siena.

[13] In the University of Siena's yearbook for 1945-46 the name of Tedeschi reappears as professor *ordinario* of *Diritto civile* (in supernumerary) available for the *Ministero degli Esteri* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs). The 1947-48 yearbook shows him as professor *ordinario* of *Diritto civile.*

[14] On the academic career of Tedeschi in Siena cfr., ACS, Min. Pub. Istr., Direzione Generale Istruzione Universitaria, fascicoli Professori Ordinari III Serie (1940-1970), b. 450, f. "Tedeschi Guido". Tedeschi tried to oppose his dismissal by sending an appeal on the grounds of discrimination on 5 November 1938, in which he highlighted his enrolment in the *Avanguardia Giovanile fascista* (AGF -fascist student youth organisation) even before the march on Rome, and the merits of his father, Attilio Tedeschi, inspector of the *Ministero delle Finanze* (Ministry of Finance). Cfr., ACS, Min. Int., Direzione Generale Demografia e Razza, Divisione Razza, Fascicoli Personali, b. 161, f. 9991.

[15] In the Faculty of *Giurisprudenza* Council meeting's minutes (from here on referred to as FGCM) of 10 October 1938, Tedeschi's responsibility for the *Istituzioni di diritto privato* course was declared forfeited and it was proposed that Maiorca take it over, with subsequent approval on 8 November. The FGCM of 23 November formalised Maiorca's position in charge of *Istituzioni di diritto privato* and *Diritto civile.*

[16] Born in Patti (Messina) on 25 June 1908, enrolled in the PNF from 1925, he obtained the *libera docenza* in *Diritto civile* in 1934, cfr. ACS, Min. Pub. Istr., Direzione Generale istruzione Superiore Divisione I, Liberi Docenti II Serie (1930-1950), b. 293, f. "Maiorca Carlo"

Diritto civile[17], after which he moved to the University of Turin[18]. The *Diritto civile* course, which had been Tedeschi's, was entrusted in July 1939 to Vincenzo Andreoli[19] who, like Maiorca, made a career in Siena, becoming professor *ordinario* of *Istituzioni di diritto privato* in February 1944[20]. In addition to this subject, between 1943 and 1948 Andreoli was also entrusted with *Dottrina dello Stato* and *Diritto agrario*[21].

At the end of fascism, the process of purging within the university concerned only nine teaching staff and *aiuti* who were particularly involved in collusion with Republican Fascism[22]. The fact that they had taken over from a professor expelled for racial reasons was not a factor in the decisions of the Purge Commission set up by the University of Siena. Among its five members were Mario Benazzi and Giuseppe Bianchini, who had taught *Biologia delle razze umane* and *Antropologia criminale* respectively. Professor Andreoli therefore continued his career at the University of Siena as normal, as indeed did all the other lecturers who had responded to the demands of a revised teaching curriculum under the banner of racism. From the 1938-39 academic year onwards, the Faculties of *Diritto* and *Medicina* were expanded with new courses, or existing ones were contorted to Bottai's racist approach. In October the courses of *Scienza dell'ortogenesi* (a third-year elective course) and *Biologia delle razze umane* (a first-year elective course) were introduced in *Medicina*[23].

Scienza dell'ortogenesi was taught by the *libero docente* Giovanni Romaniello[24] from 1938-39 to 1941-42 and later by Giorgio Alberto Chiurco[25]. Romaniello introduced the course by illustrating the differences between orthogenesis, eugenics and puericulture and over the years continued

[17] For the decision taken by the faculty reagrding Maiorca's position as professor *ordinario*, cfr. FGCM of 23 January 1941. For the nomination to professor *ordinario* and relative citation, cfr. FGCM of 24 October 1941.

[18] In the FGCM of 16 May 1942 his transfer as of the 1942-43 academic year was announced, and in the meeting of 19 November 1942 there was a discussion regarding Andreoli as his replacement.

[19] Born in Frascati on 26 October 1903, enrolled in the PNF from 1928, he obtained the *libera docenza* in *Diritto civile* in 1933 and confirmation of a permanent position on 26 July 1939 (Cfr. ACS, Min. Pub. Istr., Direzione Generale Istruzione Superiore, Divisione I, Liberi Docenti II Serie (1930-1950), b. 13, f. "Andreoli Marcello"). In the same month he received the offer from Siena of the chair for *Diritto civile*, cfr., FGCM of 4 July 1939.

[20] Cfr., FGCM of 25 February 1944.

[21] From the yearbooks of the University of Siena.

[22] Three tenured professors: Andrea Rapisardi-Mirabelli *ordinario* of *Diritto internazionale*, Gilberto Manganotti *ordinario* of *Clinica dermosifilopatica*, and Giorgio Alberto Chiurco *straordinario* of *Patologia speciale chirurgica*. Six people, all *incaricati*, *assistenti* or *liberi docenti*: Agostino Battignani, Luigi Bellucci, Giovanni Forconi, Mario Friscelli, Leopoldo Giuntini and Massimo Tramontano. The Purge Commission of the university, set up on 18 September 1944, was comprised of: Mario Bracci, *ordinario* of *Diritto amministrativo*, Bruno Paradisi, *straordinario* of *Storia del diritto italiano*, Giuseppe Bianchini, *ordinario* of *Medicina legale e delle assicurazioni*, Mario Benazzi, *straordinario* of *Biologia e zoologia generale*, Venceslao Cesaris Demel, *straordinario* of *Anatomia e istologia patologica.* Cfr., Mattia Flamigni, *Professori e università di fronte all'epurazione. Dalle ordinanze alleate alla pacificazione (1943-1948)*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2019.

[23] Cfr. Minutes of the Faculty of *Medicina e Chirurgia* Council Meeting (from here on referred to as MFMC): introduction of the new courses (11 October 1938); course assignment to teaching staff (5 November 1938); year when course would be taught (29 December 1938).

[24] Born in Montalbano Jonio (Catanzaro) on 24 February 1905, he enrolled in the PNF from December 1920, took part in the march on Rome, was a *squadrista* (fascist squad member), and had received the *sciarpa littorio* decoration; he was a medical officer during the years in Siena for the Fascist youth organisations the *Balilla* and the *Gioventù Italiana del Littorio* (GIL). He applied for voluntary enlistment in June 1940 but was refused by the Rector of Siena because he was needed for the running of the university. He was confirmed as *libero docente* in *Clinica ostetrica e ginecologica* on 4 December 1942. In Siena, besides *Scienza dell'ortogenesi*, he taught *tecnica operatoria* at the School of Specialisation in *Ostetricia e ginecologia* and he was *libero docente* at the *clinica ostetrico-ginecologica*. Cfr., ACS, Min. Pub. Istr., Direzione Generale Istruzione Superiore, Divisione I, Liberi Docenti III Serie (1930-1950), b. 423, f. "Romaniello Giovanni".

[25] Born in Rovigno d'Istria on 13 October 1895, his whole university career was in *Patologia speciale chirurgica* in Siena. Besides his university career, Chiurco was a fascist squad member and was Member of Parliament from 1929 to 1939; he fought in East Africa and Spain, and was Prefect of Siena during the Italian Social Republic (RSI). The events of his trial after the war were significant. Cfr., Floriana Colao, *Il processo Chiurco. Giustizia e politica a Siena nel dopoguerra*, Siena, Il Leccio, 2013. On the controversial figure of Chiurco as a violent fascist and profiteer, according to part of the same fascist circles, cfr. ACS, Min. Int., Divisione Gen. Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione Polizia Politica, Fascicoli Personali 1927-1944, b. 296, f. "Chiurco prof. On. Giorgio"

according to a specific scheme proposed in 1938, partly borrowed from Pende's studies on orthogenesis[26]. Chiurco's lectures, on the other hand, featured substantial references to hybridisms, the morbidity of blacks, and interbreeding, thus referring to his own studies on the subject[27].

Mario Benazzi[28], professor *incaricato* for *Biologia e zoologia generale* from 1936, taught *Biologia delle razze umane* until the end of 1943. His zeal (he proposed and obtained the teaching of this subject free of charge in 1941-42) earned him the position of professor *straordinario* in *Biologia e zoologia generale* - including genetics and the biology of races; he became director of the *Istituto di biologia e zoologia generale*[29] and in 1944 he was awarded the position of professor *ordinario*[30]. The racist bent of the teaching of *Biologia e zoologia generale* seems to have come to a halt when Giovanni Brugi (*libero docente* in *Anatomia*) was appointed to the post because Benazzi, who was due to teach *Farmacia per la Zoologia generale e per la Fisiologia generale*, was unavailable. A comparison of Benazzi's lecture booklets from 1938-39 to 1942-43 with those of 1943-44 shows - at least formally - that the substitute's approach was unrelated to his predecessor's racial-biology views: although the course officially retained the name of *Biologia delle razze umane*, Brugi's record reverted to the "pre-racist" title[31].

Among the subjects of "racial interest"[32], *Antropologia criminale* (fourth year elective) taught by Giuseppe Bianchini, Professor *ordinario* of *Medicina legale e delle assicurazioni*[33], and *Demografia generale e demografia comparata delle razze* (first year elective) taught by Ernesto D'Albergo[34], were introduced for the degrees in *Giurisprudenza* and *Scienze Politiche*. After four lectures, from 15 March 1939, the *Demografia delle razze* course was handed over to Renato

[26] The *Scienza dell'ortogenesi* curriculum 1938-39: The auxological laws. The hypophyseal-diencephalon regulation of the centre of life. Hypogenitalism of central origin. Eunuchoidism of hypophyseal-diencephalon origin. Infantilism. Premature puberty. Genito-adrenal syndromes. Total and partial intersexuality. Dwarfs. Varicosis and its juvenile symptoms, The thymus lymphatic system. Prophylactic and therapeutic standards of the syndromes and diseases treated. Cfr. Annuario 1938-39, pp. 148-149.

[27] For the lesson summaries in the lecture booklets of Chiurco and Romaniello cfr., AUSi, Facoltà di Medicina e Chirurgia, Libretti delle lezioni, XIII – D, 21 e 22. On the racial subject matter produced by Chiurco, see Simone Duranti, *Un medico al servizio della campagna razziale: Giorgio Alberto Chiurco*, in "Italia contemporanea" n. 219, giugno 2000, pp. 249-262.

[28] Born in Ferrara on 29 August 1902, he qualified as a *libero docente* of *Anatomia e Fisiologia Comparate* in December 1930 in Turin and in March 1936 he was confirmed in the role in *Clinica ostetrico-ginecologica* at the university of Sassari. Cfr. ACS, Min. Pub. Istr., Direzione Generale Istruzione Superiore, Divisione I, Liberi Docenti II Serie (1930-1950), b. 43, f. "Benazzi".

[29] Cfr., MFMC of 22 October 1940. It is worth noting that the proposal to teach the course free of charge was made in the same Council meeting in which he was nominated professor *straordinario*.

[30] Cfr., MFMC del 27 gennaio 1944.

[31] The lecture booklets of Benazzi up to 1943 reflect the framework of the course put forward in the 1938-39 yearbook: "1: Species and race in Zoology and Anthropology. Races, peoples, nations. 2: Main morphological features of human races. 3: Fossil Man. 4: Living human races - classification and distribution. 5: European races. The Italian race. 6: Main physiological characteristics of human races. 7: Normal and pathological inheritance. Interbreeding. 8: Historical background on racist doctrines. Principles of fascist racism". In the Annuario Unisi, 1938-39, p. 148. For the lecture booklets cfr. AUSi, Facoltà di Medicina e Chirurgia, Libretti delle lezioni, XIII – D, 21 e 22.

[32] The ministerial survey of race-related courses offered by Italian universities was dated February 1943 and also includes those subjects that - like *Puericultura* - concern Fascist protection and the improvement of the "Italic race". Cfr. ACS, Min. Pub. Istr., Direzione Generale Istruzione Superiore, Divisione II, Leggi, regolamenti, statuti, esami, corsi, statistiche, tasse, studenti, ecc. 1925-1945, b. 13, f. Insegnamenti razziali.

[33] Born in S. Quirico d'Orcia (Siena) on 20 September 1888, His career in *Medicina legale* was closely linked to the University of Siena, where he graduated in 1912 and obtained his *libera docenza* in 1923. He became a professor *straordinario* in Cagliari in 1926 and then moved to Bari, where he became a professor *ordinario* in 1929. He returned to Siena in 1936 and was Dean of *Medicina e Chirurgia* from 1945 to 1950, Rector from 1956 to 1964 and finally Emeritus professor in June 1965. Cfr., ACS, Min. Pub. Istr., Direzione Generale Istruzione Universitaria, Fascicoli Professori Universitari III Serie (1940-1970), b. 55, f. "Bianchini Giuseppe". For the assignment of *Antropologia* cfr. MFGC of 18 November 1938.

[34] Born in Noto on 1st June 1902, he obtained his *libera docenza* in *Scienza della finanza e diritto finanziario* in March 1930. Cfr. ACS, Min. Pub. Istr., Direzione Generale Istruzione Superiore, Divisione I, Liberi Docenti II Serie (1930-1950), b. 153, f. "D'Albergo". For the assignment of the course cfr., MFGC of 18 November 1938.

Galli[35], *straordinario* in *Economia politica corporativa* and responsible for *Scienza delle finanze e diritto finanziario*, who had just moved to Siena from Messina[36]. Galli dedicated four out of seventeen lectures to the Jewish problem in relation to migratory flows, professions and economic conditions ("Causes of the high social position of the Jewish race")[37]. In 1939, with the arrival in Siena of Vincenzo Castrilli[38], Professor *ordinario* of *Statistica*, he was given permanent responsibility for the course *la Demografia delle razze* from the 1939-40 academic year. His lectures included: "The Demographic Politics of Race; Multiple Meanings of the Word 'Race'; Race Equality and Interbreeding; European Races; Population Flows in the Jewish People"[39].

From 1938 to 1940 Franco Guidotti[40] devoted part of his course in *Diritto corporativo* (fourth year course, only for Law undergraduates) to "Racial Legislation and the Defence and Improvement of Race"[41], while in his course *Storia e dottrina del fascismo* ("History and doctrine of fascism", fourth year, only for Political Science undergraduates) he dealt with "The Problem of Race" and "The Fascist Doctrine of Race". Guidotti was reconfirmed for the following year but was unavailable because he was engaged in the war, so was replaced in the teaching of *Storia e dottrina del fascismo* by Arnaldo Biscardi for 1940-41 and subsequent years[42]. The subjects of the lessons noted in Biscardi's lecture booklets (he taught *Diritto romano* at the Faculty of *Giurisprudenza*) did not refer to racial legislation as his predecessor had done, although the subject would probably have appeared in the lesson "From the Foundation of the Empire to the Present Day"[43].

From June 1944, a number of courses (including *Scienza dell'ortogenesi* and *Biologia delle razze umane*) were temporarily cut, in accordance with the Ministerial Circular recommending savings[44]. This time - despite the fact that the lecturers were allowed to continue these courses free of charge - no one came forward, and by March 1945 it was decided to abolish the elective courses (including the racial ones)[45].

The propaganda of the GUF (*Gruppi Universitari Fascisti* [Fascist University Groups])

At university, the task of political mobilisation and propaganda, which was aggressive and extremist, was the prerogative of students enrolled in the GUF, and at the University of Siena they, like others, excelled in denouncing the Jewish problem. The anti-Semitic polemics took a very general approach, in line with the content transmitted by the Fascist Party (note that the GUF was a

[35] For the assignment to Galli cfr., MFGC of 2 March 1939 and Minutes of the Academic Senate of 14 March 1939.

[36] Cfr., MFGC of 21 December 1938. Galli became *ordinario* in 1940 (cfr., MFGC of 26 January 1940) and transferred the following year to the University of Florence (cfr., MFGC of 24 October 1941).

[37] Cfr., AUSi, Facoltà di Giurisprudenza, Libretti delle lezioni, XIV – C, 15.

[38] For colleagues' welcome and the assignment, cfr., MFGC of 9 November 1939. Born in Campobasso on 11 August 1885, he qualified as *libero docente* of *Statistica* in 1924 and became a professor *ordinario* in Bari in 1927. "From 1929 to 1938 he was a special envoy of the Italian government to the International Institute of European Cooperation; in 1939 he was called to the University of Siena where, having founded the *Istituto di Statistica*, he became its director. After the war he was one of the six experts at the Bureau des Universités attached to UNESCO", in www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/vincenzo-castrilli_(Dizionario-Biografico). With the end of fascism, he was put forward for purging because it was claimed he was a fascist squad member before the march. The trial ended in his exoneration and he returned to teaching in Siena. Cfr., ACS, Min. Pub. Istr., Direzione Generale Istruzione Superiore, Professori universitari epurati (1944-1946), b. 7, f. "Prof. Vincenzo Castrilli".

[39] Cfr., AUSi, Facoltà di Giurisprudenza, Libretti delle lezioni, XIV – C, 15.

[40] Born in Piancastagnaio (Siena) on 21 June 1906, he was a fascist squad member, enrolled in the PNF from 1920, and held positions in the fascist trade union associations, in the corporations and in the party. He graduated from Siena in 1927. From 1937 he was inspector of the Italian *Fasci* abroad. Cfr., ACS, Min. Int., Direzione Generale Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione Polizia Politica, Fascicoli Personali 1927-1944, b. 648, f. "Guidotti dott. Franco".

[41] Teaching Curriculum of the Faculty of *Giurisprudenza* – Degree in *Scienze Politiche*, in the Annuario Università di Siena 1938-1939, pp. 126-129.

[42] Cfr., MFGC of 2 May 1941.

[43] Cfr., AUSi, Facoltà di Giurisprudenza, Libretti delle lezioni, XIV – C, 15.

[44] Cfr., MFMC of 2 June 1944 in which it is specified, in response to the circular, that there were none other than merely economic reasons for cancelling the courses.

[45] Cfr., MFMC of 17 March 1945, in accordance with the Ministerial Circular n. 97 of 4 January 1945.

body belonging to the PNF)[46], and references to the local university situation were minimal. If the students did not undertake dissertations on subjects related to race, those of them who collaborated with the GUF became familiar with anti-Jewish rhetoric and language. In the opening ceremony of the 1938-39 academic year, the boldness and sense of political responsibility regarding race was left entirely to the GUF secretary Andrea Sellari Franceschini. In my decade-long research into the language of GUF members in their writing and lecturing, I found that only the secretary of Siena used the concept of *antisicarismo,* (a neologism literally meaning "anti-killer-ism") to explain the Fascist meaning of "defence of the race". In detail:

«In order not to be misunderstood, I wish to clarify that if this is the work of racism, it must be accompanied by an action of defence on our part: the task of *antisicarismo,* as a legal concept of defence. *Antisicarismo in the sense of annihilation of any obstacle that has arisen or may arise, that has opposed or may oppose the work of enrichment of man-citizen-fascist-soldier material»*[47].

Sellari Franceschini, a student of *Medicina* from Grosseto, who was aware of the importance of the stage he commanded for the opening of the academic years from 1938 onwards, recalled that "we will make all comrades aware of the importance of the problem and make them collaborate". The Sienese university students involved in the anti-Semitic campaign set up a Centre for the Study of Race[48], produced articles for the city's press and educated the other youth through lectures and conversations[49]. This shows how, even in this political initiative of the fascists, the university students were recognised as a vanguard that stood out culturally, indoctrinating the masses. The minority of GUF members who accepted to work for the party and produce political propaganda (either because they shared fascist convictions or because of ambition) were proud of their role. It was a Sienese university student who coined the slogan for the GUF that so appealed to the national leadership that it was frequently used by the deputy secretary Fernando Mezzasoma: we are the "assault troops of fascist racism"[50].

In Siena, the GUF did not print a separate newspaper, but rather its contributers published a page in the federal paper. The articles on the fight against Judaism do not differ from those produced by the other GUFs, pointing to a national alignment or, at least, a reciprocal influence in the forms of expression and themes dealt with. There was hardly any reference to the University of Siena, and the Jews were generally denounced for their excessive presence in the Italian ruling class, which was supposed to be proof of the plan for international domination illustrated in the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The Jew as a foreign body in the nation or as the holder of a double citizenship: a parasite who exploits the country that hosts him and into which he does not want to integrate, out of

[46] On the GUF in general and the GUF as a diligent promoter of the racial campaign, refer to Simone Duranti, *Lo spirito gregario. I gruppi universitari fascisti tra politica e propaganda (1930-1940)*, Roma, Donzelli, 2008.

[47] *Relazione del Segretario del GUF*, in R. Università di Siena, *Annuario per l'anno accademico 1938-39 XVII E. F.*, Siena, 1939.

[48] News of the establishment of the Centre for the Study of Race and the illustration of the activities carried out and of those planned can be found in the "Fascist Revolution", 6 November 1938 (2), p. 3 and 27 November 1938 (5), p. 6

[49] "To date, the work has comprised some articles on biological matters, some lessons in the political preparation course for young people, and a course organised by the Federal Command for primary school teachers. A series of lessons for GIL instructors is also currently being run. The GUF Leadership (*Direttorio* and *Fiduciario*) have finished a work entitled «Racism from its rise to its flowering in the speeches and writing of the Duce»", *Relazione del Segretario del GUF*, in R. Università di Siena, *Annuario per l'anno accademico 1938-39*, cit., p. 20.

[50] A. Della Felice, *Razzismo e GUF*, in "La rivoluzione fascista", 14 August 1938, (43), p. 1. The author defines the GUF as "the vanguard of fascist racism, because it is from the ferment of ideas of the young, from the precise, anti-rhetorical, inspired vision that they have of the things of our time, that the radical revision of old ideas, of a bastard culture, can arise. (...) Far from adopting a purely doctrinaire view of the various aspects of the problem, university fascists must also and above all be the standard-bearers of our racism; they must study and advocate its word and thus demonstrate, once again, how the most generous custodians of the revolution want and know how to respond to the trust of the One who guides them. (...) The GUFs proudly become a stable line of deployment, where the young people, the assault troops of fascist racism, gather and illuminate ideas and faces, in order to give their broader, more invigorating and deeper contribution to the new command of the Leader".

contempt and anti-fascism. Fascist racism was therefore 'defensive' precisely because it exposed the disloyalty of Italian Jews.

If we evaluate the features of the racial campaign conducted through the press by the GUF in Siena compared to the other political messages produced throughout the 1930s, there seems to be a lack of originality and, if anything, simply the zeal of young people eager to commit themselves to the political line of the regime. On comparison, the approach of the Sienese, or at least that small group that embraced this controversy, is qualitatively in line with that of the notoriously bellicose and aggressive GUFs in Turin and Rome (with their periodicals *Il Lambello* and *Roma Fascista*), even if they did not devote any publication to discrediting individual lecturers who were expelled. The topics, it is worth emphasising, remained general: they dealt with Jewish intrusiveness in professions, the eternal international Jew and Judeo-Bolshevism, and with the usual references to the Soviet leadership, defined as mostly Jewish. The articles written by the Sienese GUF therefore mirrored what was happening in the rest of the country and in the universities; an initial stance at the beginning of 1938 made a distinction between cultural and biological racism, recalling how Italy maintained a magnanimous approach, which would take into account the merits of Italian Jews. Mario Verdone[51], an active contributer to university journalism in Siena, penned an article on the problem of dual Jewish affiliation, in which he asked people to reflect and make conscious choices: are Jews, in essence, first Italian or Jewish? And are they not the ones who establish racial differences?[52] These are frequent considerations in the university and national press in 1938-39, which demonstrate more the party's ability to direct propaganda than the originality of the university elite. In the Italian provinces, however, and certainly in 1930s Siena, the lack of originality was compensated for by the authoritativeness of the university coat of arms, and the GUF activists were also protagonists in this fascist battle. This does not detract from the fact that personal relationships were able to lead to circumventions and derogations in matters of race and allow - for example - the well-known artist Piero Sadun (under the pseudonym T. Duna), a Sienese Jew, to illustrate a volume of poems by Verdone published by the local GUF. The episode demonstrates once again how much a personal "floating line" was possible under dictatorships, despite the totalitarian assertions of the system[53]: one writes and discusses about the Jewish threat in public and then makes exceptions for one's friends. All this does not in any way mitigate the moral and practical gravity of fascist anti-Semitism, as demonstrated by the fate of those foreign Jewish students who did not have friends or local protection networks. Their only chance of continuing their studies and graduating was to finish on time, without extending their study duration *fuori corso*, and most managed to do so by 1939.

The students

The *Questura* (Provincial Police Headquarters) identified the 20 foreign Jews enrolled in Siena by contacting the university Administrative Office between November 1938 and February 1939, receiving replies within about a week[54]. An earlier partial list, dated 18 August, contained 12 names (10 enrolled in *Medicina* and 2 in *Farmacia*)[55]. The document shows that it was difficult for the

[51] Verdone returned to these episodes both in an exchange of letters with Nino Cordisco and in an interview with me. Cfr. Nino Cordisco, *Università e fascismo*, cit. and Simone Duranti, *Studiare nella crisi. Interviste a studenti universitari negli anni del fascismo*, Grosseto, Effigi, 2011, pp. 173-181.

[52] Mario Verdone, *Un aspetto particolare della politica razzista*, in "La Rivoluzione Fascista", 8 January 1939, The GUF page.

[53] On the relationship between the possibility of personal choice and dictatorships, see Paul Corner (a cura di), *Il consenso totalitario. Opinione pubblica e opinione popolare sotto fascismo, nazismo e comunismo*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2012.

[54] Of the personal records of the 20 students, only 12 have the letters from the Questura: 6 sent on 17 November 1938, 3 on 18 January 1939 and 2 on 2 February 1939, plus one undated letter but with a reply from the Administrative Office from March 1939.

[55] For *Farmacia*: Chaim Dancygier and Vittorio Hornstein. For *Medicina*: Giulio Langer, Leopold Meylik, Cypa Aleksandrowicz, Hirsz Brodacz, Simon Beer, Jean Theofil Bergovici, David Bornsztejn, Meinhardt Loewenthal,

clerks to establish who was Jewish among the foreign students enrolled, since 'there are some students of Albanian and American nationality whose documents do not show any sign of their professed religion and whose verification will require laborious investigations'. Although the Sienese fascist newspaper suggested that their expulsion was imminent, a study of the personal files of these students reveals a more disparate situation. Of these 20 students (8 Poles, 7 Romanians, 3 Germans, 1 Hungarian, and 1 Russian), 6 ceased their studies before completing them (3 Germans and 3 Romanians) while 14 (all but two of them[56] enrolled in the final year of *Medicina* and *Farmacia* in 1938[57]) managed to graduate: one in the autumn session of 1938, five in July 1939[58] and seven in November of that same year[59].

The history of their stay in Siena is not easy to reconstruct and is reliant on the bureaucratic laconicism of the personal files kept in the university archives, where handwritten letters alternate with curricula, exam records with grades, passport photos, the occasional plea for a review of one's case, and queries from the Administrative Office to the Ministry. The overall impression is that it was a difficult process to uncover the racial information which the Administrative Office staff began to familiarise themselves with in the autumn of 1938. Today, one looks at these papers with empathy, searching for an indication of a stance in the use of language, but the administrative staff limited themselves to applying a steady stream of deliberately unclear rules produced via ministerial circulars. It is well known that after Bottai's first measure of 9 August 1938 forbidding all foreign Jews access to university, on 6 October the continuation of studies was granted to those already enrolled (but not to Germans and ex-Austrians, for whom the ban was confirmed). Historiography attributes this partial softening to the intervention of the *Ministero degli affari esteri* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), which is said to have pointed out the difficulty of modifying existing reciprocity agreements with other states[60]. However, even though the Foreign Office had already announced the relaxation of the measures on 25 August through the embassies, Bottai waited until October to issue the ministerial circular. It is clear that the confusion and the lack of speed in communicating successive regulations put enormous strain on the relationship between students and university administrations[61]. This is one of the odious aspects consciously produced by Bottai's dilatory behaviour, which kept the lives of individuals hanging on a ministerial circular. On 22 August 1938, a worried Leopold Meylik, who had been at the University of Siena since 1934, wrote to the Rector from Lviv to ask for clarification about the possibility of enrolling in the sixth year of *Medicina* and taking part in the autumn session of exams, since unofficial information was

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Samuel Cytron, and Fredi Holzapfel. Cfr., ACS, Min. Int., Dir. Gen. Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione Affari generali e riservati, Archivio generale, categorie permanenti, A 16 stranieri ed ebrei stranieri, 1930-1956, b. 15, f. 75 Siena.

[56] The Polish student Dozia Schimelman (born in Busk on 6 March 1916) graduated from Balfour College High School, Tel Aviv, in 1935 and subsequently enrolled in the University of Pisa in 1936-37; she arrived in Siena in June 1941 and graduated in October 1942. In her Doctor's State Exam certificate awarded in Perugia in February 1943, it states "of Jewish race". The "Palestine Gazette" of 10 October 1946 published news of her medical licence and residence in Tel Aviv (AUS, fMC, b. 115). Haim Figlear (born in Tighina, Romania, on 11 October 1911) enrolled in Siena on 30 January 1939 as a "*fuori corso*" student who came from the University of Bologna (AUSi, fMC, b. 112).

[57]David Bornsztejn (born in Warsaw on 16 July 1914) matriculated in 1936 in Siena, coming from the University of Montpellier and previously (1934-35 academic year) from the third year of the University of Florence. He graduated in *Medicina* on 31 October 1938. Cfr. AUSi, fMC, b. 102.

[58]Haim Figlear, Giulio Langer, Leopold Meylik, Lida Lerner (a Romanian born in Odessa on 10 January 1913 – cfr., AUSi, fMC, b. 98), Jeruchim Fischel (born in Zablotow, Poland, on 5 July 1910, emigrated to New York and changed his name to Ernst Philip), cfr. AUSi, fMC, b. 102.

[59] Besides Samuel Cytron, Marco Serebriischi, Chaim Dancygier, and the married couple Cypa Aleksandrowicz and Hirsz Brodacz, who are mentioned later, on 9 November 1939 the following students graduated in *Medicina*: Eliezer Shinker (born in Kherson, Russia, on 10 November 1912), a Palestinian Jew who graduated from the Herzliya Hebrew Gymnasium, Tel Aviv, in 1931 (AUSi, fMC, b. 113); Boris Reinomen (born in Tighina, Romania, on 18 May 1914), who was registered as a Soviet citizen after the war (AUSi, fMC, b. 113).

[60] Cfr. Michele Sarfatti, *Mussolini contro gli ebrei. Cronaca dell'elaborazione delle leggi del 1938*, Torino, Zamorani, 1994, pp. 32-33 and Annalisa Capristo, *Il Decreto legge del 5 settembre 1938 e le altre norme antiebraiche nelle scuole, nelle università e nelle accademie*, in "La Rassegna Mensile di Israel", v. 73, 2, 2007, pp. 131-167.

[61] The whole matter is reconstructed well, including its vexatious implications, in Francesca Pelini – Ilaria Pavan, *La doppia epurazione. L'Università di Pisa e le leggi razziali tra guerra e dopoguerra*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 2009.

circulating in the Polish press about the impossibility of foreigners continuing their studies in Italy. On 27 August the Administrative Office replied that:

«the restrictive provisions issued by the competent authorities of the Italian government concern only foreign citizens of the Jewish religion. Indeed, these will not be able to begin or continue their university studies as of the 1938-39 academic year»[62].

Of the foreign Jews attending the University of Siena when the racial laws came into force, only three did all their studies there[63]. The others came from other universities: Pisa, Bologna, Modena, Parma, Perugia, Florence, Tours and Montpellier. Two of them spent a year at the university in Turin before returning to Siena in 1938 to graduate. In the 1930s, thousands of Jews from countries that restricted their access to university chose Italy as a favourable location for their education. Many attended *Medicina* courses (60-70%[64]) and the presence of foreign students, professors and professionals from Eastern Europe or Nazi Germany was viewed with concern by those who observed excessive foreign competition in the medical profession:

«I believe it is my duty to make you aware of a danger currently hanging over the medical profession that is far from insignificant. After the expulsion of the Jews from Germany, a considerable number of doctors have been asking to come to Italy. I have received numerous letters (...) They are university professors, illustrious names who would like to come to our institutes in any capacity and they are experienced doctors who are looking for work (...) since the problem is also political, I ask you to seek directives»[65].

Only in a few cases do student files contain personal transcripts, and among those available, the considerable number of exams taken in the final year of enrolment before graduation is striking. There are eight, ten and even fifteen exams in a year, some of them taken on the same day[66]. It is to be assumed that these students were in some way helped by teachers to sit their exams quickly so as not to run the risk of exceeding the course's standard duration (ie., become *fuori corso*), thus jeopardising their university career[67]. If this is true (and not merely the cumulative recording of exams taken previously), one can hypothesise a form of practical solidarity on the part of lecturers who were able to claim as much a professional as a political autonomy within the boundaries of their teaching role.

The situation of the expelled students was particularly harsh, from what little concrete evidence of their lives can be found in the archive papers. Two of the three German Jewish students were expelled and only one of them is known to have survived. Fredi Holzapfel, born in Holzminden in 1911, enrolled in Siena in December 1937, having come from the University of Pisa where he had been enrolled since 1933-34. On 20 October 1938, he applied to discuss his thesis but fell ill and was hospitalised. The following December, he asked to be readmitted to finish his degree, but the Ministry turned him down and he was forced to abandon his studies. In the 1950s, Holzapfel wrote to the Sienese Administrative Office from his hometown in Germany requesting the return of his

[62] Leopold Meylik, a Pole from Lviv (according to the Siena Questura, "Stateless, Jew") matriculated in Siena in February 1934. Cfr. AUSi, fMC, b. 91.

[63]Besides Leopold Meylik, there was Giulio Langer (born in Kemend, Hungary, on 15 October 1913) who enrolled in the first year in 1933 (AUSi, fMC, b. 91) and Chaim Dancygier (born in Lublin on 1 May 1907), who graduated from Siena in *Medicina* in 1936, and enrolled in *Farmacia* at the end of 1937 (AUSi, fF, b. 29).

[64] Cfr. Elisa Signori, *Una peregrinatio academica in età contemporanea: gli studenti ebrei stranieri nelle università italiane tra le due guerre*, in "Annali di storia delle università italiane", 4, 2000, p. 160.

[65] Letter of 1933 from the secretary of the Fascist National Union of Doctors to Emilio Bodrero (the then president of the National Confederation of Fascist Unions), in Renzo De Felice, *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo*, Torino, Einaudi, 1961, pp. 132-133 of the 1993 edition.

[66] In 1939 alone, Chaim Dancygier passed 8 exams (seven of which in the summer session) in *Farmacia*, while in *Medicina* Cypa Aleksandrowicz and her husband Hirsz Brodacz passed 10 exams, and Samuel Cytron passed 15 exams.

[67] The ban on foreign Jewish students being "*fuori corso*" was confirmed in the Circular of the *Ministro dell'Educazione Nazionale* (Ministry of National Education) of 16 January 1939. Despite this provision, the Romanian Haim Figlear enrolled in Siena on 30 January 1939 as a "*fuori corso*" student coming from the University of Bologna, graduating on 15 July of that year. In the 1950s he was recorded as a Soviet citizen. Cfr., AUSi, fMC, b. 112.

academic records[68].

The tragedy of an illness that caused Jews to lose precious time which could not be made up and could ruin their academic career, making the risk of expulsion from Italy real, also affected another student: Jean Theofil Bergovici, a Romanian, born in Iasi on 27 July 1914, who arrived in Siena in 1935-36 (in 1938 he was attending the sixth year of *Medicina*). Illness prevented him from graduating by the end of 1939 and his request (to the *Ministeri dell'Educazione nazionale e degli interni* (Ministries of National Education and the Interior)) to be allowed to finish his studies was rejected, and as a result he was forced to drop out. In 1949, he wrote to Siena from France to retrieve his academic records[69]. There are few traces in the archives of the other German Jew who studied at Siena, Meinhardt Loewenthal (born in Munich, on 3 December 1911). He came from the University of Pisa and enrolled at the end of 1937 in Siena. While still in his fourth year, in September 1938 he applied for admission to sit three exams in *Medicina* but, without further information, on 24 November he declared that he had withdrawn his documents 'due to cessation of studies'[70].

Foreign Jews at university experienced practical difficulties in a state of urgency also involving harassment and bureaucratic difficulties such as finding the money needed to pay university fees, complicated by the limits that various national laws placed on the transfer of foreign currency. Lida Lerner graduated *cum laude* in the summer of 1939 and attended the Clinic of *Ostetrica e ginecologica* but, following the decision of the Academic Senate on 20 March 1940, she was excluded from the selection for the "Prof. Arturo Guzzoni degli Ancarani Prize" awarded to the most diligent student with the best performance in their studies, because she "belonged to the Jewish race"[71]. Studying in Siena posed the further complication of not benefiting from the deferment of military service for those on the compulsory conscription lists in their country of origin[72]. In this scenario it is difficult to imagine how anyone could find the serenity and concentration necessary for study. Victor Hornstein's hopes of completing his degree in *Farmacia* probably foundered on the rocks of legislation designed to make life difficult for Jewish students. Having arrived in Siena in August 1938, after studying in Modena and Parma from 1933, Hornstein, a Romanian citizen born in Negresti on 18 November 1910, managed to pay his tuition fees until June 1939. Although he had taken five exams in October 1938, his ability to keep up with the syllabus clearly suffered. In 1939 he passed only one exam, which was not enough given the various core and elective courses he still needed to pass to graduate[73]. His expulsion appears in red on the cover of the file: "Ceased studies, being a Jew".

It is this human dimension of affliction, but also of great dignity, that emerges from the file of Simon Beer, who was born in Iasi, Romania on 10 August 1913 and arrived in Siena in the 1935-36 academic year, coming from the University of Tours[74]. When the Questura (the police) recorded the presence of foreign Jews at the university in November 1938, Beer was enrolled in the sixth year. However, police officers noticed that he had only applied for the sixth year to begin in November of the following year (i.e., for the 1939-40 academic year) and asked the university for an explanation in April 1940. The Questura wanted to know whether Beer's status was to be considered illegal and if he were therefore liable to be expelled as "*fuori corso*". A few days later the university explained that it had notified Beer that he had been enrolled in the sixth year of the course because he had applied for it and only after he had failed to pay his fees had his enrolment been considered invalid and Beer had therefore been "*fuori corso*" in his fifth year. But the rector added:

[68]AUSi, fMC, b. 111.

[69]AUSi, fMC, b. 102.

[70]AUSi, fMC, b. 110.

[71] Cfr. *Verbali del Senato*, cit., pp. 241-242.

[72] In 1936 the Polish student Moses Safir applied to transfer to the University of Pisa "since in accordance with the law in force in Poland, only the R. Universities of Siena and Parma do not give the benefit of deferring military service until the end of the student's studies". Cfr. AUS, fMC – b. 101.

[73] See the correspondence between the Rectors of Siena and Parma of September 1938 in AUSi, fF, b. 30.

[74] Cfr. AUSi, fMC, b. 102.

«In the current academic year 1939-40, the student in question duly enrolled in the sixth-year course, paying the first instalments of fees and surcharges, and will have to complete his examinations in the current year, since, according to the ministerial provisions in force, Israelite students from the 1939-40 academic year are not allowed to become *fuori corso* students».

The situation seemed to have found a resolution without a catastrophic expulsion of students and with the possibility of them completing their studies, but with Italy joining the war, the arrests began, and they were sent to concentration camps in the south of Italy. The Prefecture of Siena informed the *Ministero degli Interni* (Ministry of the Interior)[75] that on 17 June 1940 the German Heinz Spiegel[76] and four Polish citizens Chaim Dancygier[77], Hirsz Brodacz[78], Izydor Steinwurzel[79] and Salomon Jejcies[80] had been arrested, while Simon Beer[81], the Pole Cypa Aleksandrowicz[82] and the Romanian Marco Serebriischi[83] were still at large, waiting to be interned or deported. Beer was interned in a concentration camp in the municipality of Lama dei Peligni (Chieti). From here, the following October, he applied through the *Podestà* - the appointed municipal authority - to take exams in the autumn session, asking for their dates. The university replied giving the dates for four medical subjects but there is no further information on whether Beer sat them. Simon Beer was only able to graduate from the University of Bari in the summer session of 1946: for this reason, in a dry but touching letter, he asked Siena to promptly provide him with his academic records, pointing out that even a delay of a few months would be significant "after so many years lost in a concentration camp". It is worth noting that Italian bureaucracy did not make any allowances for the concentration camp ex-internees and Beer had to pay all the fees owing in order to graduate[84].

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[75] Recorded delivery letter of 18 June 1940, in ACS, Min. Int., Dir. Gen. Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione Affari generali e riservati, Archivio generale, categorie permanenti, A 16 stranieri ed ebrei stranieri, 1930-1956, b. 15, f. 75 Siena.

[76] Born in Bochum on 3 February 1913, he matriculated at Siena in 1933 and attended until 1935, after which his university file contains the note: "Ceased his studies and withdrew his documents – see note 29-10-1938" (Cfr. AUSi, fMC, b. 91). The prefecture described him as "a former Austrian, tutor to an English family who had lived in Asciano for many years. Converted to Catholicism in 1937, he married the Aryan Vilma Saporetti, of unknown origin, a singer living in Milan. Authorised to reside in the kingdom in 1939 by the *Demorazza* (General Department for Demography and Race)'. For this reason he was released from prison. Cfr., ACS, Min. Int., Dir. Gen. Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione Affari generali e riservati, Archivio generale, categorie permanenti, A 16 stranieri ed ebrei stranieri, 1930-1956, b. 15, f. 75 Siena.

[77] See note n. 63.

[78] See note n. 86.

[79] Born in Monasterzyska on 6 December 1903), he graduated in *Medicina* in the 1934-35 academic year. Cfr., AUSi, fMC, studenti, XII – D – a 91. See note n. 2 for his protest to Mussolini.

[80] Born in Tarnapol on 26 May 1906, he attended the University of Prague from 1928 to 1933. He matriculated at Siena in February 1934, graduating in *Medicina* in the 1936-37 academic year. Cfr., AUSi, fMC, studenti XII – D – a 96.

[81] The Prefect of Siena, in pressing for the ministerial decisions, recalled that Beer, when 'invited to leave the country, cited the difficulties of renewing expired documents and then made the request to complete his studies'. Cfr., ACS, Min. Int., Dir. Gen. Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione Affari generali e riservati, Archivio generale, categorie permanenti, A 16 stranieri ed ebrei stranieri, 1930-1956, b. 15, f. 75 Siena.

[82] See note n. 86.

[83] Born in Odessa on 5 September 1914, he transferred from the University of Bologna to Siena on 28 December 1934, where he graduated in *Medicina* on 29 November 1939 (AUSi, fMC, Studenti, XII – D – a 100). The prefecture states that "having completed his studies, he no longer meets the requirements to stay in Italy and after repeated invitations to leave the country he was issued with a compulsory travel document for expatriation via Postumia, but this was rejected in May 1940 by the Yugoslav border authorities because the transit document had expired (deliberately, it is believed, by the holder). His passport was confiscated. Expulsion by any means is recommended, including boarding a ship destined for Romanian ports, or internment in a concentration camp, as Serebriischi is considered suspicious. Indeed, he asked for a meeting with the Duce to tell him about a fabulous discovery of his that the authorities believe to be a hoax". Cfr., ACS, Min. Int., Dir. Gen. Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione Affari generali e riservati, Archivio generale, categorie permanenti, A 16 stranieri ed ebrei stranieri, 1930-1956, b. 15, f. 75 Siena.

[84] His internment camps are recorded as: Lama dei Peligni (CH) from 14 September 1940; Alberobello (BA) from 15 June 1941; Ferramonti from 14 July 1942. The last trace we have of Simon Beer is in the 1950s, when a letter

All the others arrested and reported by the Prefecture, with the exception of Serebriischi and Spiegel, were interned[85]. While the Academic Senate proposed a more sympathetic attitude towards students on the part of lecturers in times of world war, for foreigners from enemy countries and for Jews the prospect was one of concentration camps. Chaim Dancygier was imprisoned in Lama dei Peligni from 14 September 1940, then in Ferramonti from 17 November 1941, in Corropoli from 23 November 1942 and disappeared from Bagno a Ripoli on 29 September 1943. Cypa Aleksandrowicz and Hirsz Brodacz[86] were married and had studied medicine together in Italy, first in Perugia and from 1934-35 in Siena. They sat many of their examinations together, as well as their dissertations. All that remains of their later experience is their wandering through the camps in Abruzzo: he was in Isola del Gran Sasso from 9 July 1940, while she was sent to Lanciano from 16 July 1940. They were reunited in Atri in October and then moved on to Torricella Sicura on 21 July 1941. The last trace of them was at the Orsogna camp from September 1942 and it was here that Cypa died on 8 January 1944.

Salomon Jejcies was interned in Campagna (Salerno) from 18 June 1940, and then moved to Villanterio (Pavia) from 17 August 1942[87] under the regime of "free internment". Izydor Steinwurzel, arrived at Ferramonti on 14 July 1940, and then moved to Montechiarugolo (Parma) on 14 October 1942 from where he left on 9 September 1943.

In addition to these six internees who had been reported by the Prefecture of Siena as having been arrested in June 1940, there were two others: Dozia Schimelman, in Pollenza (Macerata) from June 1940 to 25 June 1941, then in Siena until 1943 from where she travelled to Palestine[88]; and finally, Samuel Cytron, born in Bialystok, Poland on 10 September 1914, and for whom, besides the modest amount of information contained in the university file[89], there are the memories of his second son, Muni, who I traced thanks to the Web. The Cytron family traded in textiles in Bialystok and of Daniele Cytron's ten (perhaps eleven) children only one daughter survived the Holocaust (she moved to Israel after the war), and a son, Samuel, who attended medical school first in Modena and then in Siena where he graduated in November 1939. Samuel was interned from June 1940 in Campagna (Salerno) and in Ferramonti from the following 29 September. He was in the camp of Mormanno (Cosenza) from October 1942, and with the armistice he entered the service of the British troops as a doctor. After the war, the municipality of Mormanno certified that he had provided medical assistance to 150 refugees in 1944 and he remained there as a general practitioner and married Magda Conte. They had two children, Daniele, born in 1944, and Muni in 1950. After initially moving to Roseto degli Abruzzi, where he began practising as a dentist, he moved to Pescara, where he died in 1999.

Conclusions

In this essay I have reconstructed the impact of the racist legislation on Jewish lecturers and students at the University of Siena and investigated the behaviour of the university leadership in that particular political and cultural climate. The behaviour of the Sienese GUF was similar to that of other groups in Italy: a limited number of collaborators interested in supporting the propaganda, virulent tones, little originality and few references to the local situation. The governing bodies of

containing a transcript of his studies was sent to him from the University of Siena to his address in New York.

[85] For the dates, internment locations and archive references, see the database edited by Anna Pizzuti: http://www.annapizzuti.it

[86] Both Poles, Hirsz was born in Bialystok on 10 September 1914, while Cypa was born in Knyszyn on 2 December 1912. Cfr., AUSi, fMC, b. 99.

[87] Cfr. http://www.luoghidelricordo.it/dettaglio_nome.php?id_nome=627

[88] See above n. 56.

[89] AUSi, fMC, b. 110.

the university expressed themselves on the racial laws with caution and relative reticence: a few mentions in the meetings of the Academic Senate, a Faculty of *Giurisprudenza* Council meeting monopolised by the case of the expulsion of Professor Tedeschi, almost nothing on the part of the rector on occasion of the Academic Year inaugurations. There was no discussion recorded of the fate of the foreign students who had been blacklisted, but a possible substantial form of help to enable them to finish their studies and avoid becoming "*fuori corso*".

The legislation affected the fates of individuals in the following way: the only Jewish lecturer was expelled; no Italian Jewish students were affected (except by barring those who had passed their school-leaving exams from starting university); of the twenty foreign Jews up to date with their studies (plus two graduates), six were expelled and eight were interned in Italian concentration camps from 1940. None of these were subsequently deported, although for one student there is no news after the war.

The relationship between anti-Jewish laws and universities has been given great prominence in recent years, especially as a result of the annual Holocaust Memorial Day celebrations, which have enabled various universities to reflect on their own history. Further effort is still needed to complete the study of the most neglected sector of the persecution: that of the foreigners who attended an academic world traditionally known for its welcome of foreigners, unlike that of their countries of origin. As in the case of Siena, it is generally very difficult to reconstruct individual life paths for subjects who moved around a great deal in the 1930s and who were in danger of expulsion and at risk of deportation. The case of the lecturers is certainly much better known and - in my opinion - less interesting: the reasons for this point of view were set out with remarkable intelligence by Alberto Cavaglion in a note that I think is worth recalling:

«Let us take the case of universities, which has been one of the best investigated (...). Rather than expressions of solidarity with expelled colleagues, all the documentation collected reveals a great appetite for the professorships that become vacant. In truth, no institution is as monotonous as that of the university. From the point of view of university culture, 1938 is of no interest to the researcher. Before, during, and after fascism, the academic world, with few exceptions, remained bound to a logic of "sharing out" posts; anti-Semitism became the key to unlock and feast on the rich pickings of a high number of professorships: a "manna" from heaven, wrote Ernesto Rossi (...). The problem for university professors in Italy is always a question of professorships, and Judaism does not have much sway; it will survive fascism, as shown by the painful history of the rights restored after 1945 with the consequent apotheosis of another national golden rule: "what is done cannot be undone". The chair of Italian literature in Florence, which had been held by Attilio Momigliano and then occupied by Giuseppe De Robertis in 1938, was split in two after the end of the war so that it could be given back to the person who had been expelled, without affecting the person who had taken his place. Clearly, the issue, like any other, should be observed without any false moralism, and therefore without forgetting some of its praiseworthy aspects either (L. Limentani, for example, rejoiced with his best student, Eugenio Garin, who succeeded him in the Florentine chair of Philosophy, seeing in the cruelty of fate at least a sign of continuity of the School[90]). Nor should we forget the less than edifying aspects: seven years before the laws on Race, in the fateful two-year period from 1930 to 1931, university professors were required to take the oath of allegiance to fascism, and one of the few, as we know, not to comply was Giorgio Levi Della Vida. The university world suffered an initial shock, albeit on a smaller scale than that of '38. In 1931 too there was a small amount of "manna", as a dozen or so university positions came onto the market. (...) How is it that Levi Della Vida always made it clear that he did not want his refusal in 1931 to be compared to the expulsions in 1938? His sullen severity could be judged as an act of pride in a person who was usually reluctant to put his own merits on display: "The promulgation of the anti-Jewish laws that had removed a significant number of Jewish professors from teaching in the autumn of 1938," he wrote in his memoirs, "ended up swallowing up my case in theirs, which was all the more notorious and tearful, so that most believed and still believe that I lost my job because of my blood and not

[90] Cfr. E. Garin, *Filosofia e politica. Scritti dedicati a C. Luporini*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, pp. 19-41

because of my ideas. (...) The fact that I am not particularly happy about being grouped together with that company should not appear strange to those who consider that among those who lost their lecture positions for "racial" reasons there was more than one who, from the first to the final hour, had militated with enthusiasm and devotion under the fascist "*littorio*" banner."[91] As the gentleman he was, Della Vida lists Gino Arias, Giorgio Del Vecchio, Carlo Foà and Attilio Levi, but he glosses over his personal case; any researcher of good will be able to verify in the archive files that Della Vida's chair, which became vacant in 1931, was filled, much to his bitter disappointment, by a Jewish lecturer, Umberto Cassuto, once he had quietly sworn the oath»[92].

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