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"Our Life Was Divided in Many Facets"¹: Anna Foa Yona, an Anti-Fascist Jewish Refugee in Wartime United States

Stefano Luconi

Introduction

- 1 Migration studies have dismissed the somewhat uncritical and romantic celebration of the heroic saga of the political expatriates as professional revolutionaries who traveled the world to spread the "Idea" and allegedly lived adventurously on the run. This vision used to draw in part upon the theoretical distinction between political exile and economic migration. Yet scholarship now emphasizes how thin the line between these two categories is (Témine, 1991, 57-72).² Not only do lack of freedom and police repression, on one side, and shrinking means of subsistence, on the other, quite often intertwine in causing people to depart from their motherlands. Refugees for political reasons also have to make a living abroad. For example, in the recollections of his own son, after seeking sanctuary in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Michele Salerno – a Communist Jew from Calabria (Paparazzo, 2004, 38-40) – "sweated for more than eight hours per day, toiling at a burning machinery of the Cleaning and Dyeing Company" (Salerno, 2001, 26).
- 2 As for the fluxes from the Italian peninsula in the interwar years, many Italian anti-Fascists ran away from both Benito Mussolini's dictatorship and the forced unemployment that usually resulted from open criticism of the regime. Indeed, dismissals and transfers to low-paying jobs were among the standard instruments to which the *Duce* resorted in order to punish opponents and dissenters (Audenino and

Tirabassi, 2008, 107-8). The double burden of political and economic hardships affected especially – though not exclusively – the anti-Fascist Jews who escaped from their native country in the wake of the 1938 Fascist anti-Semitic legislation. These measures drew upon the idea that the Jews were not part of the Italian people. As a result, despite several and confusing exceptions, Mussolini's racial laws expelled the Jews from the Fascist party, the army, public schools and universities, excluded them from holding jobs with the state and local administrations, and prohibited them from working in banks as well as for insurance companies. These provisions further restricted economic, commercial and professional activities to the effect that the Jews were not entitled to possess real estate that exceeded a certain assessed value nor could they own or manage companies involved in military production or plants that employed more than one hundred workers. Such Jewish-owned properties were expropriated by the State (Sarfatti, 1994).

- 3 As making a living became quite difficult in the wake of the enactment of these measures, almost 6,000 Jews – namely about 12.6 percent of the country's total Jewish population – fled Italy by late October 1941 (Zevi, 1984; Toscano, 2003, 185; Avagliano and Palmieri, 2011, xxxii-xxxiv). They left the country not only for their political ideas, but also because they had become the target of unrestrained economic discrimination and social hostility following Mussolini's racial legislation (Levi, 1972, 85-86, 103 ; De Felice, 1993, 334-35, 436-38). Indeed, as Michele Sarfatti has pointed out, the ultimate, though undeclared, purpose of Fascist anti-Semitism was to force all Italian and foreign Jews to depart from the country for good (Sarfatti, 2000, 176-77). Roman history scholar Arnaldo Momigliano's experience was a case in point. His attempt at securing an immigration visa for the United States – albeit unsuccessful – resulted both from his dismissal from a full professorship of Ancient history at the university of Turin and from the fact that he was the only breadwinner in a family of six people that included, besides him, his wife, their daughter, his parents and a sister of his (Capristo, 2006). After all, before eventually moving to England following the enactment of the 1938 racial legislation, Momigliano had not refrained from swearing his own loyalty to the Fascist regime in 1931 in order to retain his academic position. As Carlo Dionisotti has put it, facing unemployment Momigliano chose to "eat the soup" of Mussolini until the implementation of the anti-Jewish measures in Italian universities caused the demise of this opportunity (Dionisotti, 1989, 18). Likewise, Max Ascoli an early anti-fascist exile who landed in the United States with a fellowship of the Rockefeller Foundation in 1931, fled Italy not only because he had been briefly arrested and harassed by Mussolini's police for his alleged contacts with the underground anti-Fascist group *Giovane Italia* (Grippa, 2009, 73-74).³ He also left the country for economic reasons. On the one hand, he was unable to secure tenure at the University of Catania, where he had initially hoped to launch his academic career. On the other, the bankruptcy of his father's commercial firm had put his own affluence at risk (Taiuti, 2007, 148; Grippa, 2009, 81, 83).
- 4 Between 600 and 2,000 Jewish migrants, according to different assessments, followed in Ascoli's footsteps and made their way to the United States (Prezzolini, 2002, 246). Their number would have been higher if the U.S. nativist quota legislation of the 1920s had not significantly restricted fluxes from eastern- and southern-European countries, such as Italy, without making any distinction between "immigrants" and "refugees" (Daniels, 2002, 282-83). Some of these Jewish exiles – primarily intellectuals and scientists – benefited from the policy of brain gain that a few U.S. universities, other

academic institutions such as the New School for Social Research, and organizations like the Rockefeller Foundation had already established within larger programs to assist scholars whom Nazi political repression and anti-Semitism had forced to leave Germany since Adolf Hitler's rise to power (Ascoli, 1936; Kent, 1953; Krohn, 1993; Gemelli, 2012). For instance, the Aid Program for Displaced Scholars of the Rockefeller Foundation helped 191 German, thirty Austrian, and twelve Italian refugees (Fermi, 1971, spec. 117, 120-23; Capristo, 2005, 93-94; Gissi, 2008; Camurri, 2009, 57-62). In particular, key to the expatriates from Italy were the connections that Max Ascoli had developed with the State Department in Washington and exploited to accommodate additional refugees (Tosiello, 2000, 107-29; Audenino and Bechelloni, 2009, 362; Grippa, 2009, 85-86; Lagi, 2012). Ascoli thought that the United States was the ideal sanctuary for the exiles because "we cannot serve our democracy better than by living democracy as much as possible in the countries where democracy is still alive" (Ascoli, 1931, 211).

- 5 Other Italian Jews relied on family and personal networks to emigrate to the United States (Ginzburg Migliorino, 2004). They included Anna Foa Yona, her husband Davide Yona, as well as their daughters Eva and Manuela. The four were a bourgeois and assimilated household of Sephardic Jews from Turin and arrived in the United States in May 1940 after securing their immigration visas thanks to an affidavit from Anna's cousins – the Fubini Ghirons – who had already settled overseas the previous year (Jona and Foa, 1997, 198). Anna Foa Yona's experience offers an enlightening case study for the overlapping of the political and economic dimension of migration that this article intends to investigate, besides offering some insights into the transformation of Jewish identity on exile.

Anti-Fascism at Home and the Impact of the 1938 Anti-Semitic Decrees

- 6 Some Italian Jews who became anti-Fascist following the enforcement of the 1938 anti-Semitic legislation had stuck to Mussolini almost until the passing of the racial laws. For instance, as late as 1937, the future Nobel laureate in economics Franco Modigliani, took part in the *littoriali* – a cultural competition for the best and the brightest Italian minds under the Fascist regime – and won the first prize in the section of economic corporativism with an essay on the stabilization of prices (Modigliani, 1999, 13-14; Camurri, 2010, XVII-XVIII). A few other Jews, as in the case of the Turin circle that published the pro-Fascist magazine *La Nostra Bandiera*, continued to support the *Duce* even at the time of the passing of the 1938 laws, in the fruitless hope that their loyalty would be rewarded with a lenient enforcement of the anti-Semitic provisions (Ventura, 2002).
- 7 Conversely, Anna Foa Yona's opposition to Mussolini emerged a few years before the *Duce's* racial turn, unrelated to Fascist anti-Semitism, had political motivations, and resulted from the liberal tradition of her own family. Anna's older brother, Vittorio, was a member of the anti-Fascist but non-Communist organization *Giustizia e Libertà*, which aimed at overthrowing Mussolini and establishing a social democracy under a republican regime.⁴ Specifically, Vittorio wrote articles for the underground mouthpiece of this group. He was sentenced to fifteen years in jail on subversion charges in 1935 because of his political activities in Turin, where Jews had been a target of Mussolini's police since the previous year because they were disproportionately

represented in the membership of *Giustizia e Libertà* (Blatt, 1995). Her younger brother, Giuseppe, was also arrested by the Fascist police along with Vittorio, but remained in jail only for six months. Her father, too, spent a week in prison (Jona and Foa, 1997, 177-79, 184-85, 187; Foa, 1991, 37-45).

- 8 While Vittorio and his primarily Jewish comrades in *Giustizia e Libertà* were serving their jail terms, Anna's initial anti-fascism was confined mainly to symbolic gestures. Her response to the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 offered an example. At that time, hundreds of thousands of Italian women donated their gold wedding rings to the Fascist government in order to support Mussolini's war machinery financially and to challenge the economic sanctions that the League of Nations had passed against the regime for the latter's unprovoked attack on the African country. The iron surrogates that replaced the gold rings became a visual demonstration of allegiance to fascism (De Grazia, 1992, 77-78). Yet, Anna not only kept her gold ring, but also made a point of wearing it in public, to the astonishment of her friends who thought that "she was crazy and would be arrested" (Stille, 1991, 137; Negri, 2006). She later began to collect funds for the volunteers who were fighting in the Spanish Civil War on behalf of the legitimate Republican government against Francisco Franco's Fascist insurgents (Foa Yona, 1978, 111).
- 9 Although Anna's anti-fascism foreran the 1938 racial legislation, these provisions obviously strengthened her resentment toward Mussolini's regime. The Jewish dimension of her political opposition is suggested by the fact that, even before 1938, her memoirs usually recollect incidents involving anti-Fascist activities by placing them against the backdrop of apparently irrelevant events that were somehow related to her religion, as if Anna wanted to construct her narratives retrospectively so as to stress the contrast between fascism and Jewishness. She, for instance, contends that her own father and uncle learned of the 1934 mass roundup of the Turin members of *Giustizia e Libertà* while they were reading the Passover *Haggadah*, the book of texts for the Seder service (Jona and Foa, 1997, 173). One could reasonably suggest that Anna's harsh stigmatization of *La Nostra Bandiera* occurred in hindsight, too. In her memoirs she called the editorial staff "a group of half morons" and added that "we were shocked by the publication of that paper" (Jona and Foa, 1997, 191). Yet, as Alexander Stille has maintained, "the idea of a Jewish-Fascist magazine may sound like an oxymoron to contemporary ears, but was hardly so in the context of the Italy of the late 1930s" (Stille, 2003, 317).
- 10 Anna's hatred of nazi-fascism for its persecution of Jews was literally visceral. Remarkably, she reported feeling sick to her stomach while passing by the German pavilion at the 1937 World Fair in Paris (Jona and Foa, 1997, 191). However, the impact of Mussolini's anti-Semitism on Anna's life was primarily economic. Her husband was dismissed from his job as an architect for Turin's municipal administration and had to find a temporary alternative occupation as an employee in the metallurgical plant of one of his brothers, Raffaele. The firm, in which Davide Yona had invested all his savings, continued to operate under the formal ownership of a gentile partner who had legally taken it over from its former Jewish associates for a nominal disbursement. This, however, was only a short-lived solution. The purchase had been intended to be fictitious with the only purpose of placing the ownership in the name of the non-Jewish partner and, thereby, dodging Italy's racial measures that, as the regime put it, aimed to "arianize Jewish firms" ("Per l'arianizzazione delle ditte ebraiche," 1938, as quoted

in Sarfatti, 2002, 54). Yet the gentile owner soon betrayed the trust and turned his back on the Yona brothers. He fired them and kept the company for himself (Stille, 1991, 146; Jona and Foa, 1997, 193). Actually, both the Yonas' strategy to cope with the Fascist anti-Semitic legislation and its unfortunate outcome were quite frequent among Jewish entrepreneurs in Italy (Levi, 1998, 84-85)

- 11 At that time, Anna and her husband had two young children to provide for. Davide was unemployed. Anna had received no formal professional education except for a course in nursing, but she was unable to get a job as a nurse because she was Jewish and did not hold membership in the Fascist Party (Jona and Foa, 1997, 195). Historian Ilaria Pavan has remarked that, in the aftermath of the 1938 legislation, for many Italian Jews "unemployment was the first step towards a personal catastrophe" (Pavan, 2007, 173). Indeed, Anna Yona hardly managed to make ends meet by weaving cloths at home and selling them to acquaintances (Jona and Foa, 1997, 196). As she put it, "the government took away our livelihood and the only thing was to emigrate" (Jona and Foa, 1997, 193). From his prison cell in Rome, Vittorio Foa, too, encouraged the couple to move abroad, notwithstanding the problems they were likely to face in a foreign country. "I'd rather know that you are living on an empty stomach," he wrote to his sister on November 17, 1938, "than fearing that you are subjected to pogroms" (Foa, 1998, 517).
- 12 Anna and her husband initially thought of moving to France. But World War II broke out before they could manage to reach this country. The United States, therefore, became their second choice. However, leaving Italy was no simple matter and, as in the case of other prospective Jewish refugees,⁵ the U.S. immigration procedures posed bureaucratic obstacles. The couple had to bribe a police officer to obtain the passports for the United States and, then, made its way to Zurich, in Switzerland, to find a U.S. consul who accepted to issues the visas after his counterpart in Naples had refused (Foa Yona, 1978, 114; Jona and Foa, 1997, 198-201; Parussa, 2005). The Yonas, therefore, eventually succeeded in dodging a common bureaucratic practice that usually turned into an insurmountable barrier for Italian prospective expatriates: U.S. consuls granted visas only if Italian passports were already valid to travel to the United States, while the Italian Ministry of the Interior did not extend the validity of passports for the United States unless they already bore a U.S. visa (Segrè, 1995, 168).

Exile and Emigrant

- 13 The Yonas' initial stay in the United States was not easy. In America the members of Anna's family had to adapt to a much lower standard of living than that they had been used to even after the enforcement of the racial legislation. As in the case of many middle-class anti-Fascist exiles who underwent a process of proletarianization abroad and took jobs below their qualifications (Audenino and Bechelloni, 2009, 355; Avagliano and Palmieri, 2011, 123-24), surviving was the main – if not the exclusive – concern. To save on the rent, in New York City the couple and their two daughters had to squeeze in a single room in the apartment of Anna's brother in law. Davide went to a poultry training camp in New Jersey where a Jewish benevolent association struggled to turn refugees from Europe into farmers to get them work. He was subsequently hired as a metal sorter in a junkyard. Anna sold the furniture and the lingerie she had carried on purpose from Italy, as Jews were not allowed to bring money or jewels out of the country. Then she resumed working as a weaver at home for a department store and

did other odd jobs because her faulty knowledge of the English language excluded her from most employment opportunities (Jona and Foa, 1997, 204-10 ; Foa, 1991, 21).

- 14 The language barrier may have also contributed to Anna's sense of social isolation and helped strengthen her Jewish identity. Indeed, it seems that, at least during her early months in New York City, she mixed primarily with Italian Jewish expatriates such as journalist Tullia Zevi, theater reviewer Paolo Milano, and law scholar Paolo Contini, who routinely met on Sundays at a restaurant that was operated by an Irish woman on the 72nd Street (Zevi and Zevi, 2007, 41). Later on, when she first met Gaetano Salvemini, the prominent Italian anti-Fascist made an "unpleasant" impression on her because, as she subsequently observed, he "started to talk about the priests, the ministers and the rabbis of the world and he put all of three categories in the same platform. All three were corrupted, false and almost criminal in his point of view because they brainwashed the people who blindly believed in them" (Anna Yona as quoted in Cerqueti, 2007, 45).⁶
- 15 Anna's political commitment was strong to the point of intransigence. While the United States was still neutral in World War II, she took issue with friends who preferred a quick end of the military conflict, regardless of the winner, to the defeat of nazi-fascism (Jona and Foa, 1997, 204). Moreover, she refused to have contacts with the Communist refugees who, in her eyes, shared the responsibility for the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact that had enabled the Nazi regime to start World War II. This was an attitude she shared with Italian anarchists in the United States (Tresca, 1941, 1). She patched it up with Stalin's supporters only after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, when – so to speak – the foes of her enemies became her own allies. Following her family liberal tradition, she remained an anti-Communist at heart, but she could not accept the idea of a defeat of the Soviet Union at the hands of Nazi Germany (Jona and Foa, 1997, 213, 220).
- 16 Nevertheless economic constraints affected Anna's political militancy and initially limited her contributions to the struggle against nazi-fascism. Although she wished she could have done more, she had to confine herself to donating blood and the little money she managed to save for the relief of the Russian people (Jona and Foa, 1997, 213).
- 17 Anna's separation from her parents, who had refused to leave Italy while Vittorio was still in prison (Foa, 1991, 21-22), and the difficulties of communicating with them were a continuous source of anxiety that added to her unfortunate plight (Jona and Foa, 1997, 218-19). Discrimination further increased Anna's hardships.
- 18 On the one hand, she faced unexpected anti-Jewish feelings in the United States. Indeed, anti-Semitism and discrimination against Jews in employment and higher education paradoxically underwent a significant increase at wartime (Shapiro, 1990, 68-69). Opinion polls also revealed that the share of Americans who thought that Jews wielded excessive power in the country rose from 43 percent in April 1940 to 56 percent in May 1944 (Collomp, 2011, 431). Anti-Semitic sentiments surfaced even within the universities that hosted Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy (Lamberti, 2006, 159). The Yonas were not unaffected by such feelings. For instance, when Anna moved to Cambridge with her children in 1942 to join her husband, who had found a new job as a draftsman in Boston, she had trouble in renting an apartment because several owners she had initially contacted did not want Jewish tenants (Jona and Foa, 1997, 217). Actually, the Boston area was a stronghold of anti-Semitism. In the

1930s Catholic priest Charles E. Coughlin fueled the flames of anti-Jewish feelings among numerous Irish Americans and Italian Americans by means of his anti-Semitic radio broadcasts and the circulation of his weekly mouthpiece *Social Justice* (Warren, 1996, 129-60; Cremonesi, 1998). This newspaper had a broad readership in Boston's Little Italy in the prewar years and Coughlin's presidential candidate, William Lemke of the Union Party, polled 12.4 percent of the Italian-American vote there, as opposed to the less than 2 percent he received nationwide (Betty, 1992, 450; Trout, 1977, 292.). Furthermore, the local Italian-language press usually indulged in anti-Jewish slurs (Stack, 1979, 150). As late as 1944, a prominent leader of the community, Luigi Criscuolo (Flamma, 1936, 101), contended that Max Ascoli "is not an Italian at all but a Jew who happens to have been born in Italy" (Criscuolo, 1944). Anna recalled that relations between Jews and Italian Americans were strained in the Boston neighborhood where both groups lived side by side: "the North End at that time was half Italian and half Jewish. The Italians were against the Jews and the Jews were against the Italians" (Foa Yona, 1978, 115).

- 19 On the other hand, since she was an Italian citizen, Anna also had to endure restrictions in everyday life, resulting from the designation of the unnaturalized immigrants from Italy as enemy aliens between Italy's declaration of war on the United States on December 11, 1941 and the repeal of this provision in October 1942 (Blum, 1976, 151-54; Tintori, 2004; Puleo, 2007, 209-12). She and her husband even feared that they would be placed in an internment camp, as happened to most Japanese Americans but very few Italians (Jona and Foa, 1997, 211).
- 20 On the other hand, notwithstanding a few forms of prejudice and discrimination, in Anna's eyes, the United States was not Italy. In the latter, as she argued, "it was not possible to express our feelings and opinions about the world's events." On the contrary, to Anna the United States meant "a sense of fresh air, a feeling of freedom never felt before" (as quoted in Cerqueti, 2007, 46). The epitome of such liberty and the means of expressing it became *La Controcorrente*, an anti-Fascist monthly that an anarchist of Italian origin, Aldino Feliciani (Confortini, 2005), had published in Boston under the editorship of Anita Paolini since 1938 (Townsend et al., 1943 ; Dadà, 1984, 354-55 ; Calandri, 1984, 379-80 ; Tasca, 1987, III, 53 ; Durante, 2005, 514 ; Cerqueti, 2007).
- 21 Anna met Feliciani, "a revered presence on the non-Stalinist left" (Hentoff, 2001, 85), at the house of Enzo Tagliacozzo (Iaccio, 1992, 214), a mutual friend in Boston's anti-fascist circles who had similarly fled Italy in the aftermath of the anti-Semitic legislation (Jona and Foa, 1997, 212). Once they got acquainted, she began to write short articles for *La Controcorrente*, to which her husband also became a regular contributor (see, e.g., Jona, 1942). Until then Anna's anti-fascism had hardly gone beyond the sphere of her private behavior. It can be easily suggested that wearing her gold wedding ring during the Italo-Ethiopian War had an impact almost exclusively on her friends and acquaintances. But Feliciani offered Anna an opportunity to go public and to reach a much larger group of people. At that time, women were usually denied visible political role in the Little Italies because patriarchal attitudes were widespread among Italian immigrants. As historian Stephen Puleo has remarked, in Boston's community "the Italian husband and father was the 'political' head of the household" (Puleo, 2007, 71). Yet, a consolidated tradition of female activism and militancy within Italian-American radical circles (Ventresca and Jacovetta, 2002; Guglielmo, 2010), especially among the anarchists to whom Feliciani belonged, can reasonably account

for his willingness to give Anna a chance. However, the fact that, unlike her husband who spelled his last name in the byline, she signed her articles for *La Controcorrente* with either "A." or "Anna" may indicate some difficulties in having her political status acknowledged in full (Jona and Foa, 1997, 219).

- 22 *La Controcorrente* aimed at promoting the union of all anti-Fascist forces in the struggle against Mussolini's regime both in Italy and in the United States. It also advocated the restoration of Italy's full sovereignty and its transformation into a republic after the end of World War II. Besides countering Nazi-fascism in Europe, *La Controcorrente* made a point of denouncing those former followers of Mussolini who were still active in the public life of Boston's Italian-American community and revealed some surviving pro-Fascist leaning because they also wished that the government of postwar Italy would be entrusted to the monarchy and conservative forces (Thomson, 1942 ; Cato, 1942 ; Dadà, 1984, 357-59, 364-66).
- 23 This stand was the dimension that appealed most to Anna, as anti-Jewish feelings were indeed the backbone of the lingering Fascist sentiments within the local Little Italy. Furthermore, since 1938 *La Controcorrente* had launched a campaign against Coughlin and his followers that undoubtedly pleased Anna because the hatred of the Jews was still alive in the Boston area even at wartime (Cerquetti, 2007, 50-56). In particular, anti-Semitism was so strong among Mussolini's former supporters within the city's Italian-American community that an anonymous letter went so far as to call *La Controcorrente* a "den of Jews" as late as the Summer of 1945 ("Lettera senza firma," 1945). However, as Anna recalled, Felicani and *La Controcorrente* gave her and Davide "a reason for living. To fight for equality and justice" (as quoted in Cerquetti, 2007, 46).
- 24 Following the republican stand of *La Controcorrente*, in her articles Anna stigmatized the remarks of Prince Umberto of Savoy, the heir to the Italian throne, who had argued that the United States had the moral duty to reconstruct Italy, as if the Italian government, with the consent of the Italian monarch, had not declared war on the United States after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (A., 1944b). She, therefore, implied that the prospective successor to King Victor Emmanuel III and the whole House of Savoy were unfit to rule the country. She also harshly criticized such former Fascist leaders as Alfredo De Marsico – Italy's last minister of Justice before the fall of the Fascist regime – who tended to separate their own responsibilities from those of Mussolini and to blame only the *Duce* for the war (A., 1944a). She contrasted them with anti-Fascists such as Leone Ginzburg and Giacomo Matteotti, who had sacrificed their lives to free the Italian people from the yoke of the dictatorship (A., 1944c; A., 1944d).⁷ Furthermore, Anna stigmatized the delay in the enactment of a much welcome purge of former Fascists and other "traitors" from public offices after the liberation of Italy by the Allies (A., 1945).
- 25 Yet, she did not advocate a punitive peace for her mother country that would bar Italy from the international community and thwart the Italian people's aspirations to reshape their own institutions after the fall of the *Duce*'s dictatorship. Rather she hoped that Italy would be admitted into the United Nations in recognition of its contribution to the fight against Fascism and Nazism after the overthrow of Mussolini's regime (Anna, 1945). In particular, she took issue with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who opposed the recognition of Italy as an ally, as if all the Italians had been responsible for fascism notwithstanding the activities of Mussolini's opponents since the *Duce*'s rise to power in 1922 and the partisans' more recent contribution to the

Allies' military operations in the peninsula since the Summer of 1943 (Anna, 1944). Like her husband (Jona, 1944), she also accused Churchill of appeasing the House of Savoy. In her view, Churchill endeavored to prevent the Italian people from choosing their own government after the end of the war in order to preserve the monarchic regime as a bulwark against significant social changes in Italy (Anna, 1944). Anna, therefore, reiterated the criticism of Churchill's lenient attitude toward the Italian dynasty that characterized the editorial policy of *La Controcorrente* ("Il discorso di Churchill," 1944).

- 26 In addition to the pieces Anna published in *La Controcorrente*, she took her anti-fascism to the airwaves. After moving to the Boston area, she wove models for a local department store and worked as a shop assistant in the North End because she could speak the native language of the local Italian-American customers (Foa Yona, 1978, 115). However, her fluency in Italian soon provided new employment opportunities. She got a job with WCOP, a Boston-based radio station that had Italian-language broadcasts. With the seventh largest Italian-American audience in the United States and thirteen hours and forty-five minutes of programs in Italian a week, WCOP had long operated as a mouthpiece for Mussolini's regime before the outbreak of World War II (Brumer and Sayre, 1941, 641; U.S. House of Representatives, 1943, 2682). For instance, Ubaldo Guidi, a Fascist activist, spoke on WCOP three times per day during working days and once on Saturdays (Salvemini, 1977, 95). But, at wartime, after finding itself under investigation by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the management of the Italian programs wanted to demonstrate its loyalty to the United States and selected its own staff among those anti-Fascists who, as in the case of the contributors to *La Controcorrente*, had criticized the previous Fascist alignment of WCOP ("Continuano le proteste contro gli agenti fascisti," 1938).⁸ The FCC itself encouraged radio stations broadcasting German-language and Italian-language programs to hire anti-Nazi and anti-Fascist refugees (Horten, 2002, 80).
- 27 Anna had come to master enough English by then.⁹ Her initial task was to translate news from the United Press International and Associated Press services. At the beginning it was a hard and often unrewarding toil with a workweek of forty-four to fifty hours. But, when the host of the Italian-language program, Livio Stecchini, was enlisted in the army in early 1943, Anna was offered his position as the commentator on current affairs (Jona and Foa, 1997, 216, 220). However, as in the case of many American women who – in the wake of the manpower shortage at wartime – managed to do jobs that they had never performed before (Kennedy, 1999, 779), Anna had trouble to win her male coworkers' trust. While translating off the air usually became a woman's traditional role, going on the airwaves for political commentaries did not. As she later recalled in her memoirs, her colleagues "were all young men, who were maybe a little suspicious of me" (Jona and Foa, 1997, 221).
- 28 After replacing Stecchini, Anna used her broadcasts to spread democratic values and ideals within Boston's Little Italy, thereby antagonizing the widespread pro-Fascist feelings that many Italian Americans had revealed before the outbreak of World War II. Her criticism of Mussolini's prewar Italian-American fellow travelers on the radio was so vitriolic that she received hate mail and threatening messages within a broader campaign targeting other vocal anti-Fascists such as Tagliacozzo (Jona and Foa, 1997, 221; Sereno 1943). A 1944 letter to the *Gazzetta del Massachusetts*, the most authoritative Italian-language newspaper in the Boston area, outspokenly called Anna "a renegade, a mercenary woman paid by the enemies of Italy, who spits out all the venom and

rubbish dishonoring Italians' reputation from her fetid mouth every morning on the radio" (Miceli, 1944).¹⁰ Some threatening pieces of correspondence Anna received also contained "the most revolting obscene drawings" (Jona and Foa, 1997, 221). The sexually explicit contents of such letters, namely the attacks on her as a woman, were likely to suggest that her unusual position as a public voice about politics and the ensuing violation of traditional gender roles within the Italian-American community were blamed, too.

- 29 Although the few die-hard Fascist sympathizers in Boston's community perceived Anna as a menace and sought to intimidate her, since she was a woman she received little credit for her political activities among Mussolini's Italian-American opponents. The day after the *Duce's* fall on July 25, 1943, she was invited to make a speech in New York City. She accepted with enthusiasm. Yet she soon realized that she had been asked to participate in the event not as the WCOP radio host who had fought the *Duce* on Boston's airwaves but because she was Vittorio Foa's sister (Jona and Foa, 1997, 222). Contrary to Feliciani, other Italian-American anti-Fascists were not yet ready to acknowledge women's political standing and militancy. Remarkably enough, a recent study has listed Anna among the "wives of political refugees," as if she were not an anti-Fascist in her own right (Serra, 2007, 116).

Conclusion

- 30 Anna Foa Yona's experience offers an illuminating example of how the decision to expatriate was taken under the dual stimuli of political and economic motivations. Moreover, it demonstrates that these two dimensions continued to overlap because, after the exiles had settled in their adoptive land, anti-Fascist militancy had to coexist with the necessity to provide for themselves and their own families. As Anna would later admit, "it was not only a principle, it was a challenge to be antifascist" (Jona and Foa, 1997, 172). The trial was not only ideological and political, but it also involved everyday life. Likewise, Anna Yona's emigration was both a political exile and a personal displacement.
- 31 The latter affected her identity, too. Confronted by anti-Semitism in her adoptive society, she strengthened her Jewish sense of affiliation out of reaction to the hostility she and her close relatives had to endure in their new milieu, notwithstanding the official image of the United States as the defender of the "freedom of every person to worship God in his own way" and the "freedom from fear" resulting from wartime propaganda such as President Franklin D. Roosevelt's 1941 state of the Union address (Roosevelt, 1941, 672). Anna, for instance, came to feel that "as Jews we had more duties than others who were not Jewish. [...] we had to be better in intellectual and moral standards maybe just as a defense against possible anti-Semitism" (Jona and Foa, 1997, 220). The intensification of her Jewish self-concept of belonging did not fade away after the end of World War II. For instance, when she became a teacher of Italian at the Center for Adult Education in Cambridge in the postwar years, she made a point of including Primo Levi's memoirs – *Se questo è un uomo* (*Survival in Auschwitz*) and *La tregua* (*The Reawakening*) – in the required readings for her students (Feldman, 1989, 207). Remarkably, her focus on Levi preceded the writer's emergence as a towering figure into the U.S. public discourse on the Shoah, which would occur as late as the mid 1980s (Rothberg and Druker, 2009). For the elaboration of Anna's syllabus and canon of Italian

literature, the fact that Levi was a cousin of hers (Thomson, 2004, 155) was of less importance than the fact that he was a Jewish writer and an Auschwitz survivor who had denounced the depravity of Nazi anti-Semitism in his works. Therefore, Anna's Jewish attachment gained momentum as she and her family resettled from Italy to the United States, contributing to show that exile is a process through which identities are also transformed.

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NOTES

1. Jona and Foa, 1997, 218. While referring to this volume, the English-language quotations from Anna Yona's recollections throughout the text of this article draw upon the unpublished English-language original typescript: "The Memoirs of Anna Yona," Anna (Foa) Yona Papers, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN. Anna spelt her husband's last name "Jona" in Italian-language writings and "Yona" in English-language works as she changed her last name into "Yona" after settling in the United States (Belpoliti, 1997, 1381). This article uses the latter spelling.
2. Studies have acknowledged such fuzziness not only in contemporary but in modern history as well (Jackson and Moch, 1989). For the specific case of Italian emigration, see Degl'Innocenti, 1992, 16-17 ; Sanfilippo, 2002, 111-20 ; Corti, 2001.
3. For the *Giovane Italia*, see Sedita, 2006.
4. For *Giustizia e Libertà*, see Giovana, 2005.
5. See, e.g., the experience of the Russian-born Italian-American journalist Mikhail Kamenetzky, alias Ugo Stille, as reconstructed by his son (Stille, 2013, 157-63, 178, 182-83).
6. For Salvemini's anti-Fascist activities in the United States, see Killinger, 2002, 267-99.
7. It was Ginzburg who persuaded Vittorio Foa to join *Giustizia e Libertà*. See Foa, 1991, 37.
8. For the echo of the denunciations by *La Controcorrente*, see U.S. House of Representatives, 1943, 2753, 2998.
9. In 1946 Anna translated a sample chapter of Primo Levi's *Se questo è un uomo* (*Survival in Auschwitz*) into English for Boston's publisher Little, Brown, which eventually declined to publish the book (Thomson, 2004, 155).
10. For the *Gazzetta del Massachusetts* and its owner, James V. Donnaruma, see Deschamps and Luconi, 2002.

ABSTRACTS

This article reconstructs the plight of Anna Foa Yona, a Jewish expatriate who escaped from Italy, along with her family, in the wake of the Fascist 1938 anti-Semitic measures. She had opposed Benito Mussolini's regime before fleeing the country and, notwithstanding the hardships of making a living in her adoptive society, continued to get engaged in anti-Fascist activities after moving to the United States. The article uses her experience as a case study for the intertwinement between political exile and economic migration, in addition to shedding light on Jewish identity in exile.

Cet article présente l'histoire d'Anna Foa Yona, italienne juive, réfugiée aux États-Unis avec sa famille qui avait quitté son pays après les lois antisémites du gouvernement de Mussolini en 1938.

Militante antifasciste avant son départ, elle poursuit cet engagement aux Etats-Unis malgré la difficulté de gagner sa vie dans ce pays d'adoption. A propos de ce cas l'article explore l'imbrication entre exil politique et migration économique, de plus il met en lumière l'identité des Juifs en exil.

INDEX

Mots-clés: Antisémitisme, fascisme, immigration juive, Italiens-Américains, Boston

Keywords: Anti-Semitism, fascism, Jewish immigration, Italian Americans, Boston