

# **What is an Italian Jew? Italian Jewish Subjectivities and the Jewish Museum of Rome**

## ***1. Introduction***

The Roman Jewish ghetto is no more. Standing in its place is the Tempio Maggiore, or Great Synagogue, a monumental testament to the emancipation of Roman and Italian Jewry in the late nineteenth century. During that era, the Roman Jewish community, along with city planners, raised most of the old ghetto environs to make way for a less crowded, more hygienic, and overtly modern Jewish quarter.<sup>1</sup> Today only one piece of the ghetto wall remains, and the Comunità Ebraica di Roma has dwindled to approximately 15,000 Jews. The ghetto area is home to shops and restaurants that serve a diverse tourist clientele. The Museo Ebraico di Roma, housed, along with the Spanish synagogue, in the basement floor of the Great Synagogue, showcases, with artifacts and art, the long history of Roman Jewry. While visiting, one also notices the video cameras, heavier police presence, and use of security protocol at sites, all of which suggest very real threats to the community and its public spaces.

This essay explores how Rome's Jewish Museum and synagogues complex represent Italian Jewish identity. It uses the complex and its guidebook to investigate how the museum displays multiple, complex, and even contradictory subject-effects. These effects are complicated by the non-homogeneity of the audience the museum seeks to address, an audience that includes both Jews and non-Jews. What can this space and its history tell us about how this particular “contact zone” seeks to actualize subjects? How can attention to these matters stimulate a richer, more complex understanding of Italian Jewish subjectivities and their histories? We will ultimately suggest that, as a result of history, the museum is on some level “caught” between a series of contradictions, wanting on the one hand to demonstrate the Comunità Ebraica di Roma’s twentieth-century commitment to Zionism and on the other to be true to the historical legacy of its millennial-long diasporic origins.

In a now highly cited essay on cultural literacy, Mary Louise Pratt invented the term “contact zones” to refer to those spaces where cultures “meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (34). Pratt employs this term to refer to a variety of sites, from the Spanish Americas to the contemporary, multicultural classroom. Given the institution of the ghetto, the Roman Jewish community’s long historical proximity to the papacy, the 1938 Italian racial laws, and the violence of the Italian Fascist

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assisted Nazi occupation—with its extermination of roughly one quarter of Italy's Jewish population—the Jewish Museum of Rome, as well as the former ghetto in which it is situated, constitute a contemporary contact zone.<sup>2</sup> Today, the former ghetto has become a tourist site, a site of historical memory and mourning (there are several wall plaques reminding us of the violence against Jews committed by the Nazis) and the unwitting beneficiaries of rising property values. Meant to counter the way in which the term “community” homogenizes difference—not only power differentials, but also different semiotic systems—as well as the way it strives to smooth over dissensus, the term contact zone allows us to reframe a “public” space like a museum and the ghetto in such a way as to allow us to attend to the heterogeneity of the subject-effects it both anticipates and provokes.

Museums are not static spaces. While curators attempt to control the flow of bodies through the space, real visitors make their own choices, some of which might encourage curators in turn to revise their expectations and itineraries. As we will see, the current organization of the museum is itself the result of curatorial decisions made in response to the perceived desires and needs of non-Jewish (and non-Italian) visitors in particular. The Jewish Museum of Rome continues to alter and adjust its pedagogical materials, adding recently a video presentation explaining how precious liturgical items are employed during services. While certain areas of the museum remain, in terms of the materials presented, relatively fixed, one room in particular acts as a space for temporary exhibitions, including most recently a show on American artist Larry Rivers' portraits of Primo Levi and another on the contributions of Italian Jews to the First World War. Given that, for reasons of security, one can only visit the synagogue via a guided tour, the majority of visitors interact with museum guides, who themselves alter their presentations in response to the needs and questions of the particular group they are addressing. *Shalom*, the congregation's monthly magazine, is available *gratis* to museum goers, who are encouraged by the tour guides to take a copy. It too can shape the context of one's visit, particularly given that it typically covers museum sponsored exhibits and events. Like the multicultural classroom Pratt describes the Jewish Museum as contact zone is a space of negotiation over issues of national identity and ethnic inclusion and exclusion, including the experience of ghettoization and the trauma of the Holocaust and new claims on Jewishness in Italy vis-à-vis post-1948 Zionist religious and cultural associations.

Another model we might borrow from Pratt is that of the “autoethnographic text.” Responding to the representations Europeans have produced of their colonial others, autoethnographic texts

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are representations that the so-defined others construct in response to or in dialogue with those texts. Autoethnographic texts are not, then, what are usually thought of as *autochthonous* forms of expression or self-representation (as the Andean quipus were). Rather they involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or the conqueror. These are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous idioms to create self-representations intended to intervene in metropolitan modes of understanding. Autoethnographic works are often addressed to both metropolitan audiences and the speakers' own community. Their reception is thus highly indeterminate. (Pratt 35)

The Jewish Museum of Rome constitutes an autoethnographic “text” composed of space, words, images, objects, and the relationships among them.

Of course there are limits to these analogies. On the one hand, there are a variety of ways in which the museum does in fact attempt to respond to anti-Jewish stereotypes, including the Jew as greedy and cheap, the Jew as victim, and Zionism as belligerent, as well as to transate Jewish culture to non-Jews. But notice that even these projects produce contradictions, as it is an arduous task rhetorically to represent accurately the history of a persecuted people without calling up the trope of victimization. On the other hand, European Jewish and non-Jewish cultures have been interacting for hundreds of years, and there were times throughout history when Italy welcomed Jews expelled from other locations<sup>3</sup>; even during the ghetto periods, Jews and non-Jews traveled in and out of these gated communities during daylight—some scholars even suggest that the ghetto periods were marked by more rather than less interaction between the two (Lerner, “Narrating Over” 32n1). As a result, Italian Jews have participated in the formation of European cultural artifacts and institutions, and must not be thought of as monolithically “other.” Nevertheless, the historical traces of the multiple diasporas and the influence of these traces on the present suggest the value of viewing the museum via Pratt’s terms contact zone and autoethnography. As long as the Jewish experience is understood as diasporic, it will produce what can properly be termed autoethnographic texts.

In reading the museum, we will suggest not a way out of the contradictions that arise from its attempts to address its multiple audiences and agendas but instead attend to these contradictions with as much care as possible in an essay of this brevity. Such an attentiveness requires in particular that we think differently about the relationship between community and identity, and that we examine what it means for a historically

oppressed community to explain itself to its “outside.” It also requires us to be mindful of the way in which a nineteenth-century secular institution like the museum brings with it historically a positivism that risks simplifying what is involved in the act of representation. Gayatri Spivak, for example, has noted the way in which, in English, the term representation can refer both to a proxy and a portrait (*Spivak Reader* 6). The Jewish Museum is necessarily both a portrait of a community—which, like all representational strategies, works to foreclose certain interpretations and provoke others—and a proxy for that community, a part that stands in for a whole whose heterogeneity is, for historical reasons, extremely difficult to convey. The position of the tour guide in this kind of museum is particularly fraught, as both guide and audience may be tempted to conflate the narrative presented by the guide as proxy with an accurate and totalizing, or at least disinterested “portrait” of something called Roman Jewish life or identity. The historical link between the museum as an institution and nineteenth-century positivism further exacerbates this risk, given the way this positivism shaped the museum’s understanding of the status of knowledge and what it meant, therefore, to educate the museum-going public.

By reading the museum as both contact zone and autoethnographic text, we attend to its fractures, the multiple, sometimes contradicting, agendas that reveal the complexity of Italian Jewish identity. On the one hand, the rhetoric of “the first,” “the oldest,” “the largest,” “the most visible,” “the most famous,” etc., which the museum complex, synagogue tours, and guidebook all employ in reference to Rome’s Jewish community or the Tempio Maggiore itself does in fact suggest that the complex is trying to establish consensus on a legacy for the Roman Jewish community and this space as testament to that community. On the other, distinguishing between, in Stuart Hall’s terms, “hegemonic” and “oppositional” readings of the museum, is historically dubious. Given the realities of Jewish history and specificity—most pertinently, the various diaspora—Judaism was “hybrid” from its earliest incarnations. Because Judaism lacks a single, central hegemonic authority, any attempt to speak in the name of Judaism will necessarily be an occasion for debate, as the old joke “two Jews, three opinions” suggests. Given the degree of “secularization” of the Italian Jewish community, the museum might also be construed as “oppositional” in the sense of rearticulating an Italian Jewish identity in the face of its feared disappearance. Roman Jewry had faced the potential of a literal historical erasure during the October 1943 arrest and deportation by German police of those living in the former ghetto. The museum seeks to ensure that the *Comunità* survives a potential figurative erasure by time and the fading of historical memory. More to the point, the museum has distinguished Jewish suffering during the war from the general framework of the Italian

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Resistance narrative. The museum's Zionist perspective allows Roman Jewry to take on an explicit and active anti-Fascist political stance while remaining firmly outside and unique from traditional Resistance experiences.

The visitor, however, might find him or herself "torn" between identification and distancing (perhaps analogous to the situation of the secular Italian Jew). The museum provokes empathy for victims of the Roman ghetto's long history of oppression by the papacy, as well as a sense of admiration for the way Italian Jews, despite the violence done to them most recently in the liquidation of Rome's Jewish community in 1943, have sought to use, for example aesthetic practices to fashion for themselves a mode of being in opposition to victimhood and degradation. As for evoking an imaginary Italian Jewishness in the spectator, the museum's own inclusion in the tour of the two "working" synagogues courts this risk, as it literally juxtaposes "reality" with its imaginative re-creation. For male visitors, for example, the act of putting on a yarmulke to enter the synagogue may foster this imaginary identification. That the complex is located in the space of the "real" ghetto—the actual site of so much historical violence—increases this risk, particularly as the ghetto becomes more commodified, draws more visitors, and markets itself to Jewish heritage tourists. The museum is quite unique in this regard. The location of the museum is visible evidence of the remains of the past in the present, that location complicated not only by the ghetto but also by the Augustinian ruins that are part of it. It is this confrontation between these various temporal and spatial locations that makes the museum so potentially "arresting" to the visitor.<sup>4</sup>

Despite whatever critique we may offer, however, it is more than worth saying that the Jewish Museum of Rome is a success in terms of what Stephen Greenblatt has called a "resonant exhibition." Such an exhibition

often pulls the viewer away from the celebration of isolated objects and toward a series of implied, half-visible relationships and questions . . . What were the feelings of those who originally held the objects, cherished them, collected them, possessed them? What is the meaning of the viewer's relationship to those same objects when they are displayed in a specific museum on a specific day? (45)

Missing, here, however, are questions relating to the subject-effects produced by exhibitions, and a contemplation of the numerous and contradictory "I-slots" from which exhibits can be understood and seem to have been produced.<sup>5</sup> Given the historical reality of the Nazi occupation of Rome, the accompanying capture, imprisonment, and deportation of residents of the old ghetto, and the museum's necessary recounting of this dark chapter of history, the emphasis on "feelings" in Greenblatt's account threatens to



produce an imaginary identification with Jewish suffering that is dubious and politically fraught—precisely the point raised by some of the critics of the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC, with its pretensions to offer the spectator the opportunity to “feel like” being in a death camp (Branham 42-45). While the Jewish Museum of Rome is very self-consciously not a Holocaust museum, the magnitude of Nazi atrocities, the presence in the museum of artifacts like a prison camp uniform, and the several historical monuments in the ghetto to victims of the Holocaust all cannot help but remind the museum-goer of the Shoah.

## ***2. The History of Jewish Rome***

Rome’s Jewish community traces its history back to the period of the Roman Republic of the second century BCE, having faced long periods of oscillation between tolerance and violent persecution until the ghetto was officially established in Rome by Pope Paul IV (Giovanni Pietro Carafa) in 1555. In the nineteenth century, Roman Jews, like their co-religionists in other Italian communities, embraced assimilationist opportunities provided by the new Italian state. Jews served in the Roman Republic of 1849 (Rossi 129). They would not receive full emancipation, however, until 1870, when the city and surrounding territories were captured and incorporated into the Italian state. Residency laws were ended, other restrictions abolished, and full citizenship was granted to Rome’s Jews. Aside from brief periods of interruption instigated by the Napoleonic conquest and the Republic of 1849, persecution continued up to emancipation.

The memory that post-emancipation Jews had of the ghetto was one of deep ambivalence. On the one hand, the ghetto had been home to many of them for several centuries. On the other, the ghetto was devised during the counter-Reformation as a space for social engineering. All Italian ghetto systems subjected Jewish charter members to various forms of persecution, from sumptuary laws to outsized taxation, but in the Roman ghetto, authorities regularly humiliated Jews in what Alexander Stille has called “a theatre for the great drama of Christian redemption” (“Double Bind” 24). Among other indignities including kissing the Pope’s feet in front of the Arch of Titus, Roman Jews in the sixteenth century were forced to attend regular sermons where they were encouraged to convert. Roman Jews paid taxes and tributes well beyond those of their co-religionists in other ghettos, while also being banned from traditional Jewish occupations such as moneylending and medicine.

By the time Italy embraced liberal tolerance, Roman Jewry had watched most of Italy’s ghettos be either liberated or ghetto inhabitants be extended civil rights. Roman Jews were also on the whole impoverished.

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When liberation and citizenship came, Roman Jews struggled to strengthen their communities by having the state sanction and fund mutual aid societies, educational institutions, and building projects. As the oldest Italian Jewish community now living in the Italian state's new and permanent capital, Roman Jewry also worked to revitalize the religious and cultural attachments of the community.

In those years, the community produced Jewish public figures like Ernesto Nathan, while also fostering the independence of the various Jewish ethnic groups that inhabited the former ghetto.<sup>6</sup> For instance, Ashkenazi, Sephardi, and Italian Jews all worshiped according to their own rites. But in this cultural milieu, the Tempio Maggiore leaned tall over all other attempts to narrate the community's past by bringing that history forward into the present. As an "emancipation synagogue," the Tempio Maggiore linked Jewish religious identity with secular, assimilationist trends of the nineteenth century through its large, imposing structure and superseding role as official community meeting place. The Tempio Maggiore stood for the homogenization of Italy's Jews as much as it served to remind the Italian public that Jews had been integrated into the national cultural fabric. The community also frayed. An emergent middle class Jewish population left the ghetto environs, and those who stayed mostly did so because they were too poor to leave. Many of those same Jews fought for Italy during the Great War, and some even embraced fascism in its earliest ultra-nationalist forms. In fact, Italy's vicious racial laws came, to paraphrase one historian, as a betrayal to a people who had otherwise been treated with benevolence (Stille, *Benevolence and Betrayal* 38-58). Italian Jews who had been for the previous half century on the rise—politically, economically, and socially in Italy—now lost their citizenship with a stroke of Mussolini's pen. The 1943 German occupation of the Italian peninsula and the deportation of Rome's Jews during this same period compounded Jewish alienation from the Italian nation.

The museum, opened in 1960, provides a bridge between this conflicted history and the memory of the Jewish experience in Italy: explaining Jewish religious and cultural practices to non-Jews; presenting the history of the Roman Jewish community from its founding up until today; preserving artifacts from the previous synagogues; documenting the history of Libyan Jews; offering special exhibits on some aspect of Italian Jewish identity. The museum's narrative includes a post-script to the conclusion of the Holocaust, one that directly connects Roman Jewry with the history of Israel. One of the through lines of the museum is the commitment of the *Comunità Ebraica di Roma* to Zionism.

Walking through the museum and reading the commentary that accompanies the artifacts, one can trace this through line from the museum's

account of biblical times, to the 1948 founding of the state of Israel, to the expulsion of the Jews from Libya, to the particularly traumatic events of the 1980s, when the *Comunità Ebraica di Roma* experienced both what the museum terms “the first, painful division of the community over the subject of Israel,” and a terrorist attack that killed an Italian Jewish boy (di Castro 61; on the attack see also Marzano and Schwartz). Given the complicated relationship of Italian Jews to Mussolini's Italy, the Zionist narrative serves to mark the museum as a symbol of anti-fascism. Linking anti-fascism to the state of Israel, however, brings with it certain contradictions around the question of Roman Jewish identity. These contradictions are not resolvable; they are the product of history, as well as the fact that Israel itself has multiple meanings, only one of which is its status as a modern nation-state whose policies are the object of criticism of some Jews and considered beyond reproach by others. While this may be true of the citizens of any nation-state, Israel is more than simply a nation-state, and, as we will see, given Italy's specific history, what is even meant by Zionism is far from monolithic.

The museum officially belongs to the *Comunità Ebraica di Roma*. It was founded via its generosity, maintained as a result, and accountable to that *Comunità*. And how the *Comunità* operates is itself the product of material history, for Italian Jewish communities were organized in response to changes from a feudal to a capitalist economic system and the development of modern, secular state structures that accompanied this change. The museum struggles to articulate what are political contradictions between the religious and the secular aspects of the community — contradictions that, we must always remember, find their conditions of possibility in a history of anti-Semitism, persecution, and genocide.

### ***3. Post-Emancipation Jewish Rome***

From certain vistas, there are clear sight lines between the dome of the synagogue and that of St. Peter's, a deliberate choice on the part of Rome's post-emancipation *Comunità* to assert its presence and pride (Lerner, “Narrating Architecture” 15). At the time of unification, Pius IX instructed Catholic Italians not to participate in what the Church viewed as an illegitimate national government, one that had effectively usurped the political power of the papacy on the Italian peninsula. Most Italian Jews, in contrast, were supporters of the new Italian state and eager to participate in it (Collier). With unification had come emancipation and citizenship. As for the papacy's attitude toward its former Jewish subjects, as of the 1870s, its response was to portray Jews as active promoters, rather than simply beneficiaries, of the secularization of Italian culture that had been occurring



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since the Enlightenment (Sarfatti 8). The Roman Jewish community became players in a drama about modernity and its relationship to religious association and sentiment. The ghetto was the stage. On it, Roman Jews performed citizenship in a liberal setting.

As emancipated people, Roman Jews made good on their new rights by offering up public figures, creating councils to negotiate the governance of the community, petitioning the state for monies to physically improve environs, and assimilating into the city's majority culture through professional and familial ties. Raising the decrepit ghetto environs and building a temple worthy of St. Peter's Cathedral was but one moment in a long process of integration into modern Italian life. The various Roman Jewish traditions—in Italian, called *Sscole*—with their different languages, different scriptural traditions, different styles of worship, and so forth, would also need updating. Roman Jews created, in the heart of Catholic Italy, a vibrant cultural movement in which young and old sought to maintain elements of religious tradition while also staking new claims on liberal democracy by re-engaging the community in new ways. As Ernesto Nathan, the first Jewish mayor of Rome (1907-1913), wrote in a popular Jewish quarterly from the period, “Jews must find pride in their roots in direct relation to the unjust persecution to which they are subjected” (quoted in Bettin 84).<sup>7</sup> Nathan championed Jewish youth congresses and academic conferences, among other public pursuits. For Nathan, the community could be invigorated by helping Jews become aware of their common culture outside of daily ritual practices of Judaism.

The museum today employs a similar mission. Rome's *Comunità* challenges the museum to collect, archive, and interpret its millennial-old history. Given the more contemporary history of Roman Jewish emancipation, citizenship, and then marginalization and deportation during the Holocaust, the museum has integrated the modern experience into its explanation of Roman and Italian Jewish identity.

Post-Shoah Jewish museums are to some extent an autoethnographic rewriting of the Nazi's plan to construct a “Central Jewish Museum” that would preserve the artifacts of an “extinguished” culture (Holtschnieder 42). The *Tempio Maggiore* was also perceived, at least by some, as an autoethnographic response to Rome's enslavement of the Jews, Rabbi Castiglione suggesting, at the Temple's inauguration, that it constituted what Lerner calls “a reply to Imperial Rome” (“Narrating Architecture” 14). In a similar vein, Lerner argues that President of the *Comunità* Angelo Sereni's speech at this same event mimicked the genre of the epic (“Narrating Over” 16). Parody and mimicry are what Pratt describes as, to quote her title, literate “arts of the contact zone,” employed by subaltern people who appropriate and re-write the cultural idioms of their oppressors.

#### *4. A Walk Through the Museum*

The entrance to the museum is through a gate, where a guard surveys one's bags. The visitor then passes through a courtyard and descends a staircase into the museum. The majority of visitors to the museum are tourists. Signage is in Italian, English, and Hebrew. Guided tours are regularly given in English and Italian. A free map provides a floor plan with a museum itinerary and a brief explanation of the contents of the rooms. Its cover reads, "We have been here for twenty-two centuries. Got stories to tell." As an autoethnographic text, that story mixes general fact-based information with a traditional narrative that emphasizes the longevity of this community and its persistence in the face of adversity. As a text in Room Two, labeled "From Judaei to Jews" on the brochure, states, "No other ancient people survived the loss of political independence" (di Castro 31). The museum rooms are divided into numbered broad topics or themes. Within each room, information plaques on the various displays are also numbered, creating a kind of "outline," with the whole room receiving one main heading and the areas around the room receiving subheadings.

The museum itinerary seeks to explain Jewish life and traditions by framing them within a chronology that shifts between Italian Jewish history and Jewish history. In other words, its broad organization is not chronological but thematic. The first room, for example, houses Torah covers that the brochure states span the time of the ghetto. The next room takes us back in time to the origins of the community, followed by a room that explores Jewish holiday traditions. Subsequent rooms present artifacts from the five synagogues previous to this complex and a modern historical narrative, from Emancipation to the present, including the arrival in Rome, in 1967, of Jews fleeing Libya. The last room, however, turns to daily life in the ghetto of Rome.<sup>8</sup>

Perhaps this tension between historical narrative and rooms whose objects are organized thematically evokes, for some spectators, the complex relationship Jews have to the history of fascism. As theorists of the discipline argue, modern historiography is intimately tied to 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalism (Yerushalmi). The new political unit, the nation-state, needed to argue for its legitimacy by constructing what are always somewhat fictionalized ancient roots. Fascism was an ultra-nationalist ethos whose adherents in Italy forced Jews to side with the Italian state by denying Zionism and a universal Jewish identity. After the Holocaust, the effect of this refusal of temporal continuity in Italy was a collapsing of the past with the present. At the museum, the Roman Jewish community is presented as "always" Zionist, as in commentary such as "It is no accident that one of the first, most active

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sections of the Italian Zionist Federation was founded in Rome, where the group *Avoda* was formed” (di Castro 61)

Kobena Mercer has argued that diasporic people invent aesthetic forms that respond in complicated ways to their historical conditions. Aesthetics become a means of solidifying cultural identity in the face of attack and provide opportunities for creative expression, invention, and innovation. Such aesthetic interventions are not a substitute for politics, but become one of the ways in which people denied access to “official” channels of representation “speak back” to the dominant culture. They are collective expressions of the experience of oppression. While many of the artifacts in this museum were constructed under similar conditions, given the laws that restricted Jews' access to certain professions such as the selling of second-hand clothes (*strazzaria*) these Torah covers are poignant evidence of this historical aesthetic response to oppression.<sup>9</sup>

Some rooms contain a great deal of didactic material. Room Two (“From Judaei to Jews”) ties traditional biblical accounts of Jewish history such as the enslavement of Jews in Egypt to histories that have more obvious ties to the Roman Comunità, such as an account of the ancient Roman army carrying off spoils from the destruction of the Second Temple, pictured on the Arch of Titus still standing in the Roman Forum.<sup>10</sup> The modern end of the time line impresses the visitor with claims that “the State of Israel arises out of the ashes of the Ottoman Empire” and ends with the Six-Day War, as if this is what constitutes the present. This temporal confusion is a result of the fact, however, that the time line is constructed as a narrative of triumph, so that all of Jewish time seems to be moving toward this conclusion. Why the Six-Day War? As the timeline tells us, “At the end of the war, the most sacred place to Judaism, the Western Wall of the original Temple, is once more in Jewish hands” (di Castro 34). But such an emphasis on the Israeli history risks diminishing the accomplishments of Italian Jews who were emancipated and integrated into the nation-state during the Risorgimento and beyond, many of whom had complicated relationships to Judaism, such as Luigi Luzzatti, Natalia Ginzburg, Antonietta Raphael (all of whom lived in Rome during part of the Fascist years), Rita Levi-Montalcini, and the signatories of the 1942 “Seven Point Program” of the anti-Fascist *Partito D'Azione*.<sup>11</sup> There is attention to the Risorgimento in the room “From Emancipation to Present,” but it places a penultimate emphasis on the Shoah, which suggests the room also performs the work of mourning and remembrance.<sup>12</sup> The adjacent room, “Libyan Judaism,” arguably the most politicized, refers most directly to contemporary conflicts between Arabs and Jews, or Islam and Jews (and such conflict is named in both of these ways) having been prepared for the museum's position in Room Two, which argued

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that “the hostility of the surrounding Arab countries threatens the existence of the Jewish state for many years” (di Castro 34).

The rooms titled “Year and Life Cycle Celebrations” introduces the visitor to Jewish holidays from the origins of Chanukah and Purim to community experiences in the 19<sup>th</sup> century demonstrated with a large dinner table set for Shabbat. Again, the universal Jewish story frames the community’s experience, here supplemented by a series of artifacts from “Samuele Alatri, the patriot, politician and president of the Jewish Comunità of Rome, and his wife Rosa Rignani.” The room titled “Treasures of the Cinque Scole” returns to a sensual and spiritual aesthetic, and it includes both photos of the destroyed synagogues, as well as artifacts from them, including Torah crowns, an Aron curtain, Torah pointers, and rimonim. Room Seven, “Life and Synagogues in the Ghetto,” mixes general information about topics such as the Hebrew language with Roman Jewish cuisine, as well as including more artifacts from the Cinque Scole, including the oldest Aron di Scola in Italy (dating from 1523).

If one takes the guided tour of the synagogues, one's progress through the space of the museum is supplemented by more personal stories and connections. Of course, the guide’s tour is largely scripted, but by definition, a “tour guide” mediates one's experience of the museum, while a specific tour group's interactions with the guide also shapes the visit. Rome’s museum guides provide brief histories of the museum’s founding, including its 1904 inauguration and the Tempio’s eclectic style. He or she often follows by repeating the notorious account of how on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 1943, the Nazi's requested 50 kilos of gold to save the Jews. The Comunità, with help from the larger Roman community, gave the Nazis 53 kilos. Two weeks later, in a single day, 1015 Jews were deported. A total of 2091 were ultimately deported; less than 100 survived. Such an account differentiates the Roman Jewish experience of the Nazi occupation from other stories of the Italian Resistance. This focus on Jewish suffering in the modern period is localized by guide accounts of the terrible 9 October 1982 Shabat bombing in Rome, when the Great Synagogue—shortly after Sabbath morning services and the space filled with families—was attacked with explosives and machine gun-wielding terrorists. Without segue, the guide then mentions the 1986 historic meeting between the chief Rabbi of Rome and Pope John Paul II, reminding us that this was the first visit of a pope to a synagogue. The guide also explains that Roman Jews are Orthodox and what this means.

The guidebook identifies the room on Libyan Judaism as new (after the museum’s 2005 renovation) “members of that community being an integral part of the Rome community since they were forced to leave Libya 1967 [sic].” The guidebook notes that tradition locates the Jewish presence in Libya to the destruction of the first Temple, and the corresponding room

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begins by suggesting the long historical presence of Jews in Libya (di Castro 62). Like one of the previous rooms, this room also has a time line that presents a particularly interested view of history. Implicitly challenging the claim that, in the past, Jews and Muslims co-existed peacefully, the timeline states, “During Arab rule, the Jews were granted the status of protected minority (dhimmi) allowing them, upon payment of a tax, to enjoy a few rights and to remain alive.” Particularly troubling is the way it treats the colonial period, portraying it as beneficial to Libya:

During the Italian colonial period (1911-1943), Libya enjoyed rapid economic growth which was highly beneficial to the Jewish communities that initially supported the Italian occupation. Italy conferred Italian-Libyan citizenship on the Jews, albeit with limited rights . . . Italy's colonization of Libya (1911) imported the Italian educational model, making modern instruction available to many Libyan Jews and later making them eligible for jobs in the Libyan government and economic [sic].<sup>13</sup>

This account is parallel to one offered recently in a book on Libyan Jews: “The transition from traditional to modern life among many Libyan Jews was accelerated under Italian rule. The Second World War and the subsequent rise of Arab nationalism halted the process of modernization” (Roumani 5).

As for the Fascist period and beyond, the information provided by the guidebook and museum plaques make Arabs—and Islam—complicit with Italian Fascist atrocities in the region: “When Libya was colonized by Italy (1911-1943), the Libyan Jews shared the same fate of their coreligionists in Italy: the racial laws, the work camps, and murder” (di Castro 62). The museum plaque adds, “an economic crisis, the growth of Arab nationalism, and the indifference of the British authorities all culminated in a pogrom in 1945 that utterly devastated the community of Tripoli.” This interpretation of Arab nationalism is repeated in the guidebook: “After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, during World War II and in 1948 with the creation of the State of Israel, the increasing threat of the tide of nationalism swept over the Arab and Islamic world. These sentiments negated the possibility of the civil coexistence with different ethnic groups, religions and traditions” (di Castro 62). The nationalist narrative of triumph that leads from the “justice of the Zionist cause” to the founding of the state of Israel is contrasted with the devastation wreaked by the destructive flood of pan-Arab nationalism (di Castro 61).

While, as we have seen, the question of the museum's understanding of the relationship between Roman Judaism and Zionism is taken up throughout the guidebook and museum, the most sustained engagement



occurs in the section of the guidebook entitled “Rome and Israel” (di Castro 58-61). In the museum, a wall plaque labeled “Rome and Israel” is present in (what the map labels) Room Five. The English text from the wall plaque is virtually identical to what appears in the catalog. “Rome and Israel” attempts to summarize the history of the Roman Jewish community's relationship to Israel and Zionism, a relationship that was particularly complicated by Italian Fascism and its hyper-nationalism, although post-unification rhetoric similarly revealed tensions and contradictions around whether Italian Jews would see their homeland as Italy or Palestine (Lerner, “Narrating Architecture” 13). As a result of his meeting with Theodor Herzl, for example, Victor Emmanuel III concluded that Zionism was at odds with his version of integrating Jews, as Italians, into the Italian nation (Lerner, “Narrating Over” 30).

“Rome and Israel” specifically cites Dante Lattes as one of the figures responsible for the “spread” to Rome of what it terms political Zionism (di Castro 58). Lattes’ “Ed il libro?” however, had expressed concerns over the way some aspects of post-emancipation Italian national identity seemed to undercut Jewish cultural and religious identity—a point the guidebook does not mention. Also elided are the debates within the Roman Jewish community over Zionism, perhaps most vividly embodied by Felice Momigliano, who, according to Maurizio Molinari, “can be remembered as the most Zionist among the adversaries of Zionism and the most 'assimilated' of the Zionists” (63).<sup>14</sup>

The museum's/guidebook's account of Italian Zionism also neglects a consideration of the historical context in which that phenomenon was initially understood. For, according to Alessandra Tarquini, an interpretation of Zionism widely diffused among socialists at the turn of the century considered it “a movement born in the ambit of the Second International for the emancipation of the Jewish proletariat persecuted by anti-Semitism and exploitation.”

While, in a discussion of Enzo Sereni, the guidebook mentions the “pioneering, Socialist wing of Zionism,” the birth of the state of Israel is constructed as a narrative that leads directly from Socialism to Political Zionism, and that, “led first by Rabbi David Prato, an ardent Zionist . . . the entire community has always stood side by side with the Jewish State” (di Castro 61). Sereni occupies a crucial role in the museum's constructing of the link between Zionism and Roman Jewish anti-fascism, as when the wall text describes him and his wife as “two people destined to make an enormous contribution to the history of the future state of Israel, Enzo to the ultimate sacrifice, in 1944, parachuting beyond German lines in his attempt to save the Jews of Rome from the Nazis.”

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Such a characterization of Italian Zionism also ignores one of the phenomena linked to Tarquini's analysis, a historical tendency that was raised often in post-emancipation defenses of Zionism, particularly when Mussolini made a point of questioning Italian Jews' commitment to their nation.<sup>15</sup> Italians had a long history of sending monetary contributions to poor Jews living in the Middle East. Michele Sarfatti refers to this as “philanthropic Zionism,” which also sought to free Jews from anti-Semitic persecution” (11-12). For at least some Italian Jews, however, this did not translate into support for a nascent Jewish state.

The passage of the guidebook on Zionism is one of the only sections of the text that references Palestinians by name. In fact, the first time the term is used, it is placed in quotes to emphasize that it designates Jews who, prior to the formation of the state of Israel, came from Palestine to Rome to study, and not present-day Palestinians (di Castro 58). In many histories of Renaissance Italian Jews, this population is referred to as Levantine. The second time the word Palestinian is used in the guidebook, it references the 1982 conflict labeled “‘Peace in Galilee’ when the Israeli army was forced to defend the country's northern borders with Lebanon from Palestinian [sic]” (di Castro 61).<sup>16</sup> The error of the missing word reads like a kind of trauma in the catalog, for the comma is immediately followed by “a group strongly critical of Israeli policy arose within the Jewish community of Rome. An appeal published in the Rome daily *La Repubblica* after the widely discussed massacres of Sabra and Shatila, signed by numerous Jewish intellectuals, was the first, painful division of the community over the subject of Israel” (di Castro 61).<sup>17</sup> That this was the first division seems unlikely. But the acknowledgement of lack of consensus over the question of Israel is followed immediately by an attempt to heal the rift: “Soon, however, Rome's Jews were once again united when Palestinian terrorists attacked Tempio Maggiore during the holiday of Sukkoth in 1982. A little boy, Stefano Tachè, was killed and many community members were wounded” (di Castro 61). Immediately preceding are references to the Nazi occupation and “their project to exterminate the Jewish community.” With its placement in the paragraph so as to link Nazi extermination of Roman Jews to Palestinian terrorists, the connection between the two is strengthened—as is the connection between Italian Jewish resistance to fascism and the founding of the state of Israel. The guidebook's way of trying to negotiate conflict around political Zionism is to juxtapose “the Jewish State” and “the State of Israel” with “Israeli policy.” While some Roman Jews may criticize the latter, the entire community “has always stood side by side” with the former (di Castro 61). The sum total of these references is to make it difficult in the space of the museum to voice opposition to political Zionism or a critique of the State

of Israel. The murder of Tachè stands as a synecdoche for Arab-Israeli relations.<sup>18</sup>

### ***5. Roman Jewish Heterogeneity in Want of Homogeneity***

If it is to be true to the historical presence in Rome of the five different *Scole* and the artifacts the museum and Temple Maggiore house from these *Scole*, the museum must acknowledge the heterogeneity of Jewish customs. Giorgio Bassani's *The Garden of the Finzi Continis*, for example, thematizes the divisions within Ferrara's Jewish community—for example, when the narrator of the novel notes the “social and psychological distinctions” represented by the differences between an Italian and German synagogue (22). Radcliff-Umstead has argued that the novel reinforces a sense of those divisions through its lexical choices, combining Italian, Emilian dialect, Hebrew, Yiddish, and Sephardic-Ladino, for example.<sup>19</sup> As for Rome, tensions go at least as far back as the beginning of the sixteenth century, when, as a result of their increased presence, non-Italian Jews, including Ashkenazi, “became strong enough to vie for communal power” (Shulvass 12). When the dust settled, Italian and non-Italian Jews brokered a deal to share power, “the former [retaining] minor privileges.”<sup>20</sup>

The general absence of discussion of historical tensions between these groups seems significant. For at times, Judaism itself is presented in unequivocal terms. This is particularly true of religious practices. While Room Two explains that not all Jews are Orthodox, Roman Jews are described as such: “Along with the Orthodox tradition (the point of reference of Italian and Roman Jewry, even if not everyone in private observes every single commandment), modern Judaism comprises other movements,” which are named as Conservative Judaism and Reform or Liberal Judaism (di Castro 31). What these comments elide is that, associated with the World Union for Progressive Judaism, reform congregations currently exist in Florence and Milan, where there are two. Lev Chadash of Milan, the first Reform congregation, dates from 2001 (“World Union”; and “Lev Chadash”).

Room Four argues that, concerning the wearing of the yarmulke, “Jewish law requires that all men keep their head covered at all times—and not only in the synagogue—in a sign of respect for God” (see also di Castro 103). Describing Shabbat, the wall placard argues, “The Ten Commandments tell us to sanctify this day by resting . . . All activity considered work or which interferes with the natural laws is forbidden: this includes cooking, driving, shaving, writing or turning on lights.” and “On Shabbat, Jews cannot light fires, or its electric equivalent. Today, Jews leave lights on, but before the invention of electric lights, they used lamps like this

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one with a large reserve of oil.” Are these examples of what the guidebook means when it refers to “every little commandment,” including those not obeyed by some Orthodox Jews in private (di Castro 31)? Obviously the wearing of a yarmulke is a public act that the museum has told us should be constant. The unequivocal tone necessarily suggests, at least to non-Jews, that some who call themselves Italian Jews engage in forbidden acts.

These claims in particular suggest Pratt's point concerning the heterogeneity of reception of autoethnographic texts. Such texts employ both “insider” and “outsider” knowledge and hence will invite multiple interpretations. One can imagine non-Jews, Reform Jews, “cultural,” secular-identified Jews, and Orthodox Jews all taking up different positions in relation to these particular religious prescriptions. Another didactic sign in Room Three explains that “Jews see marriage as a contract, but this does not in any way reduce its value in a culture centered around the family.” Countering the stereotype of the mercenary Jew, the emphasis on the family in turn denies the possibility of homosexual Jews, not to mention the way both Jews and homosexuals were exterminated by the Nazis.<sup>21</sup>

In its attempt to cope with the degree to which Italian Jews, broadly, have been integrated into Italian national culture and, effectively, homogenized, the museum laments the loss of a vibrant and cultural distinct community. For instance, the museum notes that the Comunità's size is shrinking because of falling birth rates, an aging population, emigration out of the city and Italy, and mixed marriages. The positing of mixed marriages as pulling people away from the Comunità is itself significant and a historical phenomenon of the late nineteenth century. And while there is nothing intrinsic to mixed marriages that render their participants likely to leave the Comunità, the circumstances for intermarriage of Jews with non-Jews signaled secularization and embourgeoisement at the expense of the Comunità's welfare.<sup>22</sup> Hoping to counter this debilitating phenomenon, the museum instead argues that the consequence of membership has unexpectedly led to a tighter overall communal experience, “an increased rate of active participation of Roman Jews in community life” (di Castro 63). In place of numbers, community attachment through expressions of religiosity has saved the Comunità's declining population.<sup>23</sup>

One way to understand the clash of subject-effects the Jewish Museum provokes is as a symptom of the way it is at cross-purposes with itself. In an article on the institution of the museum as a site of conflict, Susan A. Crane argues that there has been a historical shift in the function of the institution. Specifically, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, museums became, first and foremost, “providers of instruction” (Crane 47). She writes, “What had begun as an elite undertaking to save, record, and produce the cultural heritage of the past and the present in the Romantic era . . . had exploded into

a popular public project” (47-48). That is, there occurred a shift in the role and aesthetics of the museum, from a 19<sup>th</sup> century aesthetic of instruction to a 20<sup>th</sup> century aesthetic of dialogue. This dialogue sometimes produces public controversy.

Despite its calling up of conflicting subject-effects, the Roman Jewish Museum’s failure to adopt a 20<sup>th</sup> century museum aesthetic of provocation and public debate is in part the result of the fact that it is addressed to tourists, who are rarely in a position to challenge directly the model of Italian Jewry with which they are being presented. Such tourists, for example, are not likely to be critical of the logic of the anthropological museum. And in case they are, the section on Libyan Jewry does its best to diffuse the potential to link the state of Israel with political violence except as a response to Arab nationalism, which only serves to highlight conflicts between knowledge, memory, and experience that many modern museums deliberately invite (Crane 49). In particular, tourists do not have a historical memory that produces the sorts of conflicts Crane's essay investigates.

## **6. Conclusion**

As we have tried to suggest in a variety of ways, the various and sometimes conflicting agendas of the museum are themselves the product of history and not the result of some sort of “failure.” What adds a particular layer of tension to this museum's project is that it seeks to respond not only to the complexity of Roman Jewish history but to create an institution that might capture, however fleetingly, this complexity. The museum's project is not simply anthropological; it is also responding to anti-Semitism, inserting itself into a dialogue about the Italian Resistance to fascism, and preserving the religious and cultural artifacts of a community. The museum's “19<sup>th</sup> century” aesthetic of preserving the Jewish past is a result of the 20<sup>th</sup> century genocide of the Shoah. The stakes in maintaining the curatorial function of a Jewish museum are high, given Nazi attempts to annihilate Jewish culture.

One of the constitutive contradictions of the museum is that it grew out of the desire to preserve the religious artifacts of the (Orthodox) Comunità but, as a result of certain historical “events,” including the tourist industry, transformed itself and its imagining of its audience. As long as Italian Judaism purports to be homogeneous, the didactic or anthropological impulse of the Jewish Museum of Rome will always be in tension with a 21<sup>st</sup> century ethos of the museum as the representation of diversity and unique communal experiences. Religious and culture-historical definitions of what it means to be Jewish in Italy will always trump the process of integration and assimilation.



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The degree to which the Jewish Museum of Rome exposes the historical reality of Italian Judaism itself as a “contact-zone” rather than a “community” is, at least from a certain standpoint, a measure of the degree to which it promises to evoke the history called for by another famous Jew, Walter Benjamin, who killed himself rather than face a Nazi concentration camp. For as Benjamin so famously argued, “In every era the attempt must be made anew to wrest tradition away from a conformism that is about to overpower it” (255). While all museums risk simplifying the past they seek to preserve, the rich and complex history of Italian Judaism necessitates that the museum explore the many inherent contradictions of Italian Jewish life.. Not to do so is to ignore this complicated history at a time when, at least according to some Italian Jews, the uniqueness of Italian Jewish cultural identity risks being lost (Bassi; Momigliano).<sup>24</sup>

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### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this essay, we have tried to make a distinction between the *Comunità* or Congregation and the diverse community of Jews. In some instances, however, the distinction is untenable and our choice, arbitrary. The problem is compounded by the English translations we cite, which do not always make this distinction. The linguistic slippage is itself a metaphor for the problem of determining who belongs to what. Clearly, not all members of the community are members of the *Comunità*, but what term should be used when both community and *Comunità* act together, for example?

<sup>2</sup> For one of the most recent accounts of postwar Italian cultural responses to the Shoah, see Gordon, which contains a chapter on Rome. The second chapter of Gordon’s study discusses the fraught planning of the not yet completed Museo della Shoah, to be housed in the capital city. Gordon argues that the museum’s “very incompleteness stands as a useful indicator of the ongoing vitality and uncertainty of Italy’s response to the Holocaust” (24). A cursory examination of “Il futuro museo” pages of the Fondazione Museo della Shoah website does not reveal, as of October of 2015, a date for construction to begin; the “Collezione” page is blank. In its examination of “some of the faultlines and filters of cultural history, memory and knowledge,” we see this present essay as of a piece with Gordon’s efforts.

<sup>3</sup> Prior to the Inquisition, Jews expelled from Savoy were welcomed into Milan by Duke Francesco Sforza (Shulvass 15); following the Spanish Expulsion, Ercole d'Este invited Jews to Ferrara (13); nearby Mantua accepted Jews fleeing the persecutions of Tridentine Pope Pius V (17); perceiving the economic benefits of Jewish merchants—and throughout most of its history of holding papal power at bay—the Venetian community contained Italian, Levantine, Sephardic, and Ashkenazi Jews.

<sup>4</sup> For an interesting exploration of the complex issues involved in the attempt to create a context in which to view museum objects, and one that examines in particular the case of the

US's Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC and its problematic efforts to “recreate” the experience of being a camp internee, see Branham.

<sup>5</sup> “Anyone dealing with a report or tale (the material of historiography or literary pedagogy) can and must occupy a certain ‘I’-slot in these dealings” (Spivak, *In Other Worlds* 335).

<sup>6</sup> On Nathan, see Florenzano.

<sup>7</sup> Translated by Bettin from a 25 January 1914 article in *Rassegna Contemporanea*.

<sup>8</sup> The museum's web page suggests that the present organization dates from 2005. Melasecchi provides a more detailed account. Briefly, in the 1990s, the Comunità realized the need for a new space. In 1998, the plans for the renovations became more concrete when the Comunità Ebraica di Roma formed an advisory committee (14). As director of the museum from 2005 to 2010 Daniela di Castro explained, “The methodological approach changed radically, because we chose as our starting point not an architectural reorganization of the space but rather an understanding of the works, interpreting them and proposing a new itinerary destined for a wide a public as possible—one made of people who did and did not understand Hebrew—including schools, visitors from other countries, and Italian citizens” (quoted in Melasecchi 14; unless otherwise indicated, all translations are our own). This is also the point at which the name of the museum changed to the Jewish Museum of Rome, “-signaling the extremely close relationship between the Jewish Comunità and the city” (14). In the meantime, a sum of money was received from the Italian government to be used for the Tempio Maggiore, and the Comunità decided to use it to amplify the space of the museum by using the Temple's basement area. In 2001, di Castro was appointed by the Comunità [consistency] as the special superintendent for the realization of the museum's renovation. Di Castro and architect Manuela Lucà Dazio initiated a new thematic ordering of the collection, chronologically organized within each theme. “Emphasis was given to the fact that the collection provided evidence not only of the history of Judaism and Europe, but also of the living present of a Jewish Comunità that is part of the civil and national fabric” (di Castro, quoted in Melasecchi 14). The catalog was published in October 2010; Di Castro seems to have been responsible for the text in both the museum and the catalog (Melasecchi 15). According to Melasecchi's interview with di Castro, current projects at the time included the reconstruction of donations from several families. “Alongside these ongoing activities there are plans for special events such as significant exhibitions that, in addition to providing opportunities for more careful research efforts, present to a larger public unfamiliar aspects of the life and culture of the Roman Jewish Comunità and, more importantly, underline the artistic, intellectual, and religious interconnections with the rest of Rome” (Melasecchi 15-16). We thank Dr. Melasecchi for generously sharing her work with us. As we will argue, the problem with this 2005 re-imaging of the museum itinerary is that, by the time it was adopted, it was already dated, for the field of museum studies had moved from a nineteenth century understanding of the museum as providing a source of education, to a twentieth century ethos of fostering controversy and debate.

<sup>9</sup> Without engaging in cultural stereotyping, we might note certain historical reasons for why the museum contains such beautiful objects, including the fact that the Jews were moneylenders and so possessed collateral when people defaulted on their loans (di Castro 113). Also pertinent is the Spanish Expulsion and Italy's receptiveness to the highly developed culture of Spanish Jews, as well as Italy's advantageous geographical position in terms of maritime trade and trade with the east.

<sup>10</sup> The timeline is reproduced in di Castro 33-34.

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<sup>11</sup> Jews on this list of signatories included Carlo Rosselli, Primo Levi, Carlo Levi, Vittorio Foa, and Leone Ginsburg (Pugliese 35). On Ginzburg's complicated relationship to Judaism, see Castronuovo. On Raphael, see Braun.

<sup>12</sup> For some reason, the signage on the wall calls this room six rather than five, as it is labeled on the brochure.

<sup>13</sup> For an account of the relationship between Libyan Jews and the Italian colonization of Libya that details the benefits Italian colonialism brought to wealthy Jewish merchants, see Ahmida 66.

<sup>14</sup> A socialist and ultimately denouncer of Fascism for its authoritarianism and violence, Momigliano lived in Rome from 1912 until 1924, when he committed suicide (Tarquini).

<sup>15</sup> Three important sources in English on Italian Jews and the Fascist regime are Sarfatti, De Felice, and Stille. Sarfatti and Felice disagree in particular on the level of Italian anti-Semitism prior to Fascism, with Sarfatti noting its presence across Italian history and Felice suggesting it was a recent phenomenon, linked to Mussolini's desire to emulate Hitler's policies. Recent critical work seems to have come to a consensus that Italian anti-Semitism has to be understood in light of Italian Colonial racism, which predates Fascism, though the debates continue. For example, Gillette argues a position close to De Felice's, while Bosworth sees Fascist anti-Semitism as linked to colonialist racism

<sup>16</sup> In the museum, the phrase reads "Palestinian attacks."

<sup>17</sup> The English museum text is slightly different, the Italian, different still, offering estimations of the number of Palestinian victims as ranging from hundreds to 3,500, and other historical details. The discussion of the way in which the aforementioned letter created the first "crack" or "split" (spacco) in the Comunità over the theme of Israel is prefaced by material not in the catalog or English museum text: it was "only in 1982, in the course of the operation 'Peace in Galilee' . . . [that] the Comunità Ebraica di Roma saw the birth in its bosom of a group strongly critical of Israeli politics."

<sup>18</sup> That there is not yet consensus on the Comunità's relationship to Israel is indicated by the inclusion in *Shalom*, the magazine published by the Comunità, of at least two articles defending the contemporary state. For, presumably, if the Comunità held a single position, it would not need to have that position re-iterated to itself. See Volli; and Pezzana. Volli says as much when he argues for the continuing need to defend Zionism "even in the official Jewish press." Particularly disheartening in Volli's article is the patently untrue claim that US scholar Judith Butler is among those noted leftist intellectuals of Jewish origin "actively marshaling against the existence of Israel" (our translation). While the catalog and museum both insist that members of the Roman Jewish Comunità "hold varied opinions concerning Israeli government and defense policies" (di Castro 61), Volli's article seems to be a kind of witch hunt (for many and various names are named) determined to expose Jews on the left and the right who express concerns about the current military policies of the state of Israel, as well as to decry the fact that such insidious positions currently "find expression in the Italian Jewish press."

<sup>19</sup> Born in Ferrara, Bassani moved to Rome in 1943.

<sup>20</sup> The guidebook is more circumspect than Shulvass, saying only that "blending these groups together was an arduous process" and that the coexistence of the various groups was regulated in 1524 with the Capitoli of Daniele da Pisa "providing for all Jews in a community government" (di Castro 45)

<sup>21</sup> Many museums on the Holocaust refer to the men in the pink triangle (some of whom were also presumably Jewish), including the Risiera di San Sabba in Trieste, which since 2005 has

included a memorial in remembrance to the homosexual victims of fascism, placed there by the Trieste branch of Arcigay, a national gay and lesbian movement (Trocino; an image of the monument may be found at “Giornata”). Bassani's fiction explores the relationship between the Fascist persecution of Jews and homosexuals, most pronouncedly in *The Gold-Rimmed Spectacles*. But Rome's is not a Shoah museum, and so perhaps this omission may result from a concern that the goals of the museum might be diluted with too great an emphasis on it. And if Rome's Jewish Community includes a gay and lesbian presence, this is not acknowledged in the museum. In any case, the Chief Rabbi in Rome has expressed his opposition to gay marriage (Magister).

<sup>22</sup> In the Italian context, secularization, secular education, and embourgeoisement went hand in hand. This, too, is a theme in Bersani's novel, where we see a relationship between one's middle class status and failure to follow Orthodox practices.

<sup>23</sup> This push-pull of modern Roman Jewish identity is emblemized in the Constitution (*Statuto*) of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (*Unione delle Comunità Ebraiche Italiane*) and framed by much larger phenomena for Jews all over the Italian peninsula. In this document, the tension between the singular and the plural is significant. The Communities and the circumstances to which they gave rise (in the original, *formazioni sociali*) are plural; the law and tradition are singular; the needs which the Communities [I assume, given earlier capitalization; you might want to use Italian for this group as well] address are plural; the Union is the singular (united, uniform, unitary, unanimous—*unitaria* in the original) expression of Italian Judaism. The passage both recognizes and denies the heterogeneity of Italian Jewish subjectivities. Article 2, on registration with the Community—a necessity if one wants to avail one's self of its resources—is similarly wracked by gestures of inclusion and exclusion: “According to Jewish law and tradition, those Jews belong to the community who reside in the precinct of the same. The rights and duties presented in this constitution are contingent upon enrollment, which is formalized via explicit declaration or derive from conclusive proceedings.” Article 3, referenced above [I see Article 2 referenced above, but I can't find Article 3 – clarify], argues, “Upon being denied enrollment, the concerned party can appeal to the council which, hearing the head rabbi, decides.” (On the role of the rabbi, see also Di Segni; and “Ufficio”) The tortuous legalese of constitution-worthy prose is itself a symptomatic repetition of the passage's tortuous logic. On the one hand, it suggests that one may belong to the Comunità by making a statement of one's allegiance to it—a symbolic gesture of desiring to belong, which, like all performative acts, brings into being the conditions it solicits—i.e. being made a part of the Comunità. On the other, the fact that, in consultation with the head rabbi, a group of “others” can negate that performative act undercuts the democratic gesture. The situation is in many ways nearly identical to what are erroneously called “assimilated” Jews, who, by declaring their Jewishness enter into the community of Jews, but whose commitment to the Comunità is always open to suspicion among those who define Judaism in religious terms first. The fact that Judaism can be both a religious and cultural identity, and that many Italian Jews have rejected, or at the very least moderated, their relationship to the former, exacerbates the potential to draw lines around who is “truly” Jewish and who is not. A historical product of these tensions, the museum cannot satisfactorily resolve them.

<sup>24</sup> Bassi writes, “The majority of Italian Jews are for all practical purposes reformed in their mentality and religious practice, but are viscerally hostile to institutionalizing this condition,” sentimentalizing religious orthodoxy but unwilling or uninterested in fully observing halakhà (252-53). His response is to propose an Italian reform movement. Momigliano has instead argued that this sentimentalizing of orthodoxy, encouraged by Israeli rabbis in particular, risks

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destroying what she sees as Italian Jewish specificity, with its historically relaxed views of halakhà. Unfortunately, Bassi's book has largely gone unremarked.

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