

## Italy's social and political context

In mid-December, Renato Brunetta, PdL group leader in the Chamber of Deputies, defined the 900,000 euros going to the *Fondazione Museo della Shoah* of Milan as “pork” [*“marchetta”*].

The President of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCEI), Renzo Gattegna, expressed strong concerns regarding the position taken by a number of politicians, who demonstrate a blameworthy and inexcusable lack of historical knowledge of the true nature of Fascism starting from its origins.

### Anti-Hebraic prejudice

The qualitative study titled “*L’immagine degli ebrei. Indagine qualitativa*” [The Image of the Jews: a qualitative survey] directed by the manager of the *Osservatorio antisemitismo*, Betti Guetta, highlights the fact that prejudices and stereotypes continue in contemporary society:

- *The Jews are a closed, separate group that support each other*: very strict religious rules and strictures cause the Jews to be reserved and socially aloof, little inclined to mingle;
- A highly cohesive community that forcefully maintains its culture and traditions. Although they are integrated into Italian society, the Jews keep aloof and maintain a strong intra-group solidarity;
- A historical stereotype is confirmed by this study: most of the interviewees think that all Jews are wealthy;
- The wealth of the Jews is interpreted as: enterprise, business acumen, ability, excellence, far-sightedness, and thriftiness to the point of being miserly;
- The enterprising spirit of the Jews appears to be a cultural, if not an anthropological item. This knack for business results in the situation that *all Jews are very rich, no one has ever seen a poor Jew, they all have important jobs*;
- Alongside the stereotype of wealth is also that of stinginess, the tightfisted Jew, who never spends any money and hoards every cent;
- The word “Jew” is used as a synonym for a stingy person, and not only among the lower classes. And the fact that it has become a cliché risks reinforcing its denigratory connotation. People also say “*worse than a Rabbi*”;
- Alongside the theme of separatism and wealth, there is also the idea – especially in Milan – that the Jews have power: *the Jews (all Jews) hold major positions of power*. This idea is shared by many interviewees, and seems to derive from the combination of wealth, visibility, tenacity, competence and excellence attributed to the Jews;
- In Rome, the Jewish community appears to be “*a society within society*”, a sort of parallel organization with its own laws and rules of conduct;

Two other elements that are important to creating the image of the Jews derive from the knowledge and interpretation of the Shoah (along with the Day of Remembrance) and by the representation of Israel in the mass media.

- Many young people do not speak of the Shoah but of Jewish victimism: *the Shoah is a ruse that the Jews use to their benefit and gain*.
- Some deny sixty years of Jewish history and geography in evaluating the State of Israel exclusively in contemporary terms, terming Israeli policy as *Nazi barbarism*.

Greater knowledge and historical memory is seen in the older interviewees as opposed to the younger ones, who appear more indifferent and alienated. According to some, the

power of the Jews can also be seen in the fact that the municipal authorities take part in the celebrations for the Day of Remembrance.

The conflict in the Middle East also contributes to stoking dislike for the Jews. The State of Israel is often represented as the “oppressor” and arouses feelings of hostility. There is a widespread perception that a bond exists between Italian Jews and the State of Israel.

The orientation towards Israel ranges from moderately critical to highly antagonistic among the older and younger interviewees, respectively. Some of them hope for dissent among Italian Jews against Israeli policies.

The striking aspect of the results of this study is the distance between the reality of the Italian diaspora and its image in external eyes. The complexity of the community, with its many different viewpoints, varying degrees of religious observance, participation in the community and solidarity is not well known and thus the many prejudices and stereotypes regarding perceived immutable characteristics, assigning an identity to the Jew – almost placing him outside of time and space – are able to persist.

### **Anti-Semitism on the web**

In mid-December, after publication on the *Corriere della Sera* website of a video titled “Anti-Semitism even in Christmas Carols” [*Antisemitismo persino nei canti di Natale*] regarding anti-Semitism in Europe, many anti-Semitic comments were posted in response:

- *“Why are the Jews the object of attacks instead of others? There certainly must be a reason. The thing that is harder to understand is why the reasons for attacking them haven’t run their course over the millennia of their history. Probably the explanation for this situation doesn’t completely absolve the Jews, or their antagonists.”*
- *“Let us not confuse anti-Semitism, unquestionably criminal, with anti-Zionism, which is unfortunately justified by the criminal behavior of the State of Israel.”*
- *“It is a fact. The Jews are very powerful in the media and in finance. But there is no point in digging up old stories, the times have changed. I know a lot of people who hate Jews and they are certainly not Nazis. We all have a right to hate.”*

### **‘Movimento dei forconi’**

Another movement that stands out for a number of anti-Semitic statements is the *Movimento 9 dicembre*, more commonly known as the ‘*Movimento dei forconi*’ [literally “pitchfork movement”, a series of protests by farmers and transporters]. In mid-December, Andrea Zunino, spokesman for the ‘forconi’, stated in an interview in the newspaper *La Repubblica*:

*“We want the government to step down, [we want] sovereignty for Italy, now slave to bankers like the Rothschilds: it is curious that 5 or 6 of the world’s richest people are Jews... I don’t have proof. But I think that Hitler, who was probably crazy, used anti-Semitism to get revenge on his two-timing initial American financiers. Personally I don’t care.”*

### **Religious Fundamentalism**

In late April, the police arrested the members of a *jihadi* terrorist cell living in Apulia, Lombardy and Sicily. The extremists were part of a transnational organization characterized by virulent anti-Semitism and anti-westernism and by an aspiration to prepare and execute terrorist acts.