

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The ‘swastika epidemic’ of 1960 and the first major public debate about antisemitism in republican Italy

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Abstract

In December 1959, several episodes of antisemitism occurred in West Germany. These events spread rapidly to other countries and were dubbed by newspapers the ‘swastika epidemic’. In Italy, the episodes sparked intense debate among the main political forces of the time, framing the interpretation of antisemitic episodes within a context that considered the comparison between the two countries, while also being influenced by the political transition of centrist governments shifting to the left and the transition of religious opinion on Jewish-Christian relations. The general and unanimous condemnation of antisemitism was accompanied by various interpretations of the racism of Fascist Italy and the historical responsibilities of the Catholic world. The result was an extremely fragmented picture, but with significant political and cultural implications in a year that would see the explosion of political violence.

Keywords: antisemitism; neofascism; swastika epidemic; cultural debate; culture and media

Introduction

On Christmas Eve 1959, the newly reconstructed synagogue on Roonstrasse in Cologne (West Germany) was defaced with swastikas and the slogan ‘*Juden raus*’ (out with the Jews). Similar incidents quickly proliferated throughout West Germany and spread to other European countries and beyond, targeting Jewish institutions and individuals. The phenomenon was soon labelled by some newspapers as the ‘swastika epidemic’ (Loeffler 2018, 230–233).¹ During the period from late December 1959 to late January 1960, the West German government, led by Christian Democrat Konrad Adenauer, recorded over 600 antisemitic acts. Public opinion and political circles in West Germany were swift in their condemnation. The arrest of two members of the neo-Nazi Deutsche Reichspartei (DRP) for the Cologne incident ignited a significant debate concerning the persistence of Nazi affiliations and the perceived inadequacies of postwar denazification (Bergmann 1990). The Adenauer administration accused the East German secret services of orchestrating the attacks to undermine West Germany’s Western alignment, though no substantive evidence was provided. Later analyses suggest that East German and Soviet intelligence agencies may indeed have played a role, though the extent remains debated. The exact origins of the ‘swastika epidemic’ thus remain ambiguous, diverging from the political and cultural

discussions on antisemitism's persistence in Germany and beyond (Scholz 2010; Rid 2020, 120–123; Järvstad 2023).

In Italy, similar incidents soon followed. On 2 January 1960, swastikas appeared on the walls of Parma's Jewish community. The following day, the synagogue in Milan received a threatening letter, and on 4 January, swastikas and neo-Nazi slogans were scrawled on walls in Rome's former ghetto. In Milan, a Nazi flag was raised at Piazza del Duomo, while additional threats were directed at the Jewish school. Over the next several days, graffiti and anonymous calls targeted prominent Jewish figures and antifascist symbols in numerous Italian cities, including Rome, Turin, Messina, Modena, Florence, Venice, Trieste, and smaller towns. Coverage by the Jewish press underscored the growing alarm within the community.² On 8 January 1960, antifascist groups staged a protest in Rome's Jewish ghetto, and further demonstrations were held in other Italian cities. As Paola Bertilotti has documented, Italian authorities responded promptly, prosecuting offenders and increasing surveillance, which effectively curtailed the antisemitic incidents by late January: the investigations also revealed that, apart from isolated cases, the perpetrators were predominantly young far-right supporters who, at the time of Fascism, were either not yet born or were very young (Bertilotti 2011; Toaff 2017, 166–167).

This essay seeks to reconstruct the public debate that emerged in the Italian press – both daily and periodical – through analysis of a broad range of publications, aiming to elucidate the interpretative stances across different political and cultural perspectives. The interpretative framework that took shape during the swastika crisis proved durable. This research focuses particularly on Italian awareness in 1960 of the nation's specific responsibility for the persecution of Jews during the Fascist era, encompassing not only the antisemitic legislation of 1938 but also the role of the Italian Social Republic (RSI) and the Nazi occupation from 1943 to 1945 (Sarfatti 2018). The article positions the response to antisemitism within a broader analysis of postwar Italian political identity, revealing how public reactions were influenced by prevailing ideological divides and the still-evolving cultural memory of Fascist complicity.

In total, 46 publications were reviewed, encompassing a wide array of political and cultural views, including the following newspapers: *Corriere della Sera* (Milan), *La Stampa* (Turin), *il Messaggero* (Rome), *il Giorno* (Milan), *La Notte* (Milan), *La Nazione* (Florence), *il Resto del Carlino* (Bologna), and *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno* (Bari). Diocesan newspapers such as *L'Italia* (Milan) and *L'Avvenire d'Italia* (Bologna), as well as the Vatican's official *L'Osservatore Romano*, were also included. Political newspapers analysed included *il Popolo* (Christian Democracy, DC), *L'Unità* (Italian Communist Party, PCI), *Paese Sera* (close to PCI), *Avanti!* (Italian Socialist Party, PSI), *La Voce Repubblicana* (Italian Republican Party, PRI), and *Secolo d'Italia* (Italian Social Movement, MSI). Prominent periodicals included *L'Espresso*, *Gente*, *Tempo*, *Oggi*, *Epoca*, *il Mondo*, and *L'Europeo*, alongside the youth magazine *il Paradosso*. Various politically affiliated magazines were also examined: *La Discussione* (DC), *Concretezza* (DC), *Rinascita* (PCI), *Mondo Operaio* (PSI), *Critica Sociale* (close to PSI), *il nuovo ideale* (PSI), *il Borghese* (close to MSI), *il giornale dei genitori* (close to PCI), *Candido* (right-wing), *Tempo Presente* (progressive), *Lo Specchio* (close to MSI), *Ordine Nuovo* (far-right), *L'Italiano* (MSI), *il Ponte* (progressive), *La Civiltà Cattolica* (an unofficial Holy See outlet), *Volontà* (anarchist), and *L'Ordine Civile* (conservative Catholic). Publications from the Jewish press included *La Voce della Comunità Israelitica di Roma*, *Bollettino della Comunità Israelitica di Milano*, *Ha-Tikva* (Jewish Youth Federation of Italy), and *Israel* (Zionist magazine).³ While some of these periodicals engaged with these events more frequently, others limited their reporting to minimal coverage or provided no commentary. This selection was designed to cover the full ideological spectrum, from progressive and antifascist perspectives to conservative and neofascist stances. While the influence of the press cannot be measured solely in terms of article volume, the analysis also considers the quality of viewpoints expressed, with a particular focus

on widely circulated and authoritative publications. Thus, this selection does not aim to quantify the press's impact statistically but to present a qualitative representation of the primary narratives within Italian culture at that time.

Postwar Italy and the memory of Fascist antisemitism

In the years immediately following the Second World War, the memory of the Shoah, and Italy's role in it, emerged problematically for several reasons. Full awareness of the Shoah's scope developed only gradually, and the Nuremberg Trials, held in response to Nazi atrocities, had limited impact on international public opinion (Cavaglion 2006, 29). In Italy, survivors' initial testimonies often highlighted efforts to rescue Jews during the German occupation rather than Italian complicity (Momigliano 1946). Additionally, memory of the Jewish persecution was softened by a broader 'resistance paradigm', which cast Italians in a redemptive role as they fought against Nazi-Fascism. This focus on the Resistance, still taking shape in early postwar years, fostered the myth of the 'good Italian' as opposed to the 'bad German' in both war crimes and antisemitic policies. Depicting Italians as victims of Fascism, forced into antisemitic policies against their will, served the narratives of both Marxist and Catholic circles. Meanwhile, Cold War pressures reinforced ideological divides, limiting moments of self-reflection on Italy's wartime responsibilities. Conservative circles further complicated matters, promoting lenient interpretations of Italy's recent past to avoid a confrontation with communism. Against the backdrop of these processes, significant weight was accorded to what Claudio Pavone defined as the 'continuity of the State', namely the transition of institutions and organisations from Fascism to democracy, which certainly did not favour an in-depth investigation of the widespread guilt of those who had collaborated with the dictatorship (Bidussa 1994; Pavone 1995, 70–159; Collotti 1998; Rossi 2003, 89–93; Schwarz 2004, 5–18; Baldassini 2007; Schwarz 2010; Cooke 2011, 67–81; Focardi 2016; Formigoni 2016, 171–177; De Nicolò and Fimiani 2019; Focardi 2020, 153–166). Additionally, the Catholic Church's limited self-reflection on its role in fostering antisemitism impeded a more transparent reconstruction of wartime events, a particularly weighty dynamic in Italy, where Catholic culture and Vatican influence were strong (Moro 2002; Mazzini 2012; Zanini 2012; Rioli 2017; Palumbo 2020, 70–85).

By the 1950s, various publications had begun broadening Italian awareness of the Shoah, although the distinction between racial and political persecution was often blurred. *Si fa presto a dire fame* by former deportee Piero Caleffi and the pamphlet *L'oblio è colpa*, published by the National Association of Former Political Deportees in Germany in (ANED 1954), were among the works that addressed the Shoah (Caleffi 1954; ANED 1954). Also in (ANED 1954), *The Diary of Anne Frank* was translated into Italian, and in 1955 one of the earliest historiographical studies, Léon Poliakov's *Il nazismo e lo sterminio degli ebrei*, was published (Frank 1954; Poliakov 1955). Alberto Nirenstajn's *Ricorda cosa ti ha fatto Amalek* appeared in 1958, and that same year, Primo Levi reached a wider audience with *Se questo è un uomo*, reissued by Einaudi after its initial, limited release in 1947 (Nirenstajn 1958; Levi 1958; Baldini 2014). Cinema, too, contributed with films such as *Il processo di Norimberga* by Félix Podmaniczky (1958) and Gillo Pontecorvo's *Kapò* (1959). A travelling exhibition on deportations inaugurated in Carpi (Modena) in 1955 also saw increasing public success. Its stops in Rome and Turin in 1959 drew large audiences, indicating a growing Italian interest in this history (Mostra 1959; Consonni 2015, 142–166; Focardi 2020, 166–171). However, these works still emphasised German over Italian responsibility, reinforcing the perception that Italian antisemitism was less severe. The Contemporary Jewish Documentation Centre (CDEC), founded in 1955, played an important role in challenging this perception (Bassi 1979).

These initial steps in documenting the Shoah in Italy coincided with a period of political transition amidst the country's 'economic miracle'. Tensions within the centrist coalition

government sparked debate, especially within the DC, led by Aldo Moro since 1959, over new alliances. While some within the DC supported collaboration with the PSI with the aim of strengthening the popular base of the governing area, others preferred a more conservative stance, a view shared by various sectors of the economic, industrial, and ecclesiastical establishments. Amid this political climate, the neofascist MSI, under Arturo Michelini, sought greater institutional integration. In February 1959, a new DC-led government under Antonio Segni was formed, with external support from the Italian Liberal Party (PLI), the monarchists, and the neofascists. Although the neofascists' support was not decisive, the situation nonetheless heightened concerns about the country's potential rightward shift, a topic that loomed over the political debate (Crainz 2005; Forno 2012, 157–166; Soddu 2017, 85–98; Formigoni 2021, 57–65; Formigoni, Pombeni and Vecchio 2023, 189–195; Ignazi 2023, 88–92).

It was within this complex political context that episodes of antisemitism gained traction, thus becoming a focal point of political debate, intertwined with broader social discourses on Italy's wartime past and national identity.

The continuation of antifascist resistance

In the final days of December 1959, the press briefly reported antisemitic incidents in Germany and the initial cases that had spread elsewhere, primarily in short articles on internal pages.⁴ The coverage of the German cases intersected with that on Italo-German relations, given that Chancellor Adenauer's arrival in Rome was scheduled for 20 January 1960, prior to Italian President Giovanni Gronchi's trip to the USSR. As with many issues in Italian political debate, both domestic concerns and international factors played a role (Formigoni 2016).

At the time, left-wing parties paid close attention to these incidents abroad even before similar acts occurred in Italy. That the antisemitic episodes took place primarily in West Germany, where a neo-Nazi party existed, was viewed through a Cold War lens, with some commentators emphasising the 'Germany of Bonn'⁵ and accusing Adenauer's government of maintaining ties with Nazism.⁶ Leftist newspapers highlighted figures in Adenauer's government directly linked to Hitler's regime, such as 'Jew exterminator' [Theodor] Oberländer, interior minister, Hitlerian general [Hans] Speidel, and racism theorist [Hans] Globke.⁷ This line was echoed by Gianni Rodari in *Paese Sera*.⁸ Sergio Segre, a survivor of racial persecution and a communist partisan (Jesurum 1987, 87–90), wrote in *L'Unità* that unlike East Germany, there had been 'no self-criticism' in the West, where the political and economic structures were continuous with the Nazi era.⁹ In the same newspaper, Giuseppe Conato published investigations into the persistence of Nazism in West Germany,¹⁰ while Carlo Casalegno in *La Stampa* addressed the issue more moderately.¹¹ Criticisms of Adenauer often contained explicit references to his Christian Democratic Union's (CDU) political alignment with Italy's DC, thus merging international and domestic politics.

When the wave of antisemitism reached Italy, public concern intensified, with the topic remaining prominent in the press for days. Interpretations of international events through the Cold War perspective began overlapping with Italy's memory of the Resistance against Nazi-Fascism, making this a dominant theme. *L'Unità* warned that 'the remnants of Nazism and Fascism would like to raise their repugnant heads again'.¹² *Paese Sera* featured testimony from Andrea Gaggero, a former partisan priest deported to Mauthausen, who recalled encountering Jews marked for death at the camp. He denounced the national reconciliation that had allowed fascists to resurface.¹³ In *Critica Sociale*, Mario Berti discussed Italy's responsibility for antisemitic legislation in 1938 and the Italian Social Republic's (RSI) active role in hunting Jews during the Nazi occupation. Berti criticised the neofascists, who

distanced themselves from antisemitism without repudiating their past, and highlighted figures with Fascist backgrounds in Italian institutions.¹⁴ In *Mondo Operaio*, Piero Caleffi went further, asserting that Fascism bore great responsibility for embedding antisemitism in Italy. He argued that, while anti-Jewish laws were formally implemented in 1938, Fascism from its outset contained elements that led to antisemitism – a very advanced and anticipatory historiographical interpretation (Sarfatti 2018). These incidents, Caleffi warned, threatened not only Jewish people but the democratic fabric itself.¹⁵ PSI Secretary Pietro Nenni expanded on this, identifying antisemitism as ‘a primitive aspect of the reactionary challenge to the values of modern civilisation’.¹⁶

Other left-wing perspectives also attempted to analyse these developments. In *Il Mondo*, liberal-socialist historian Aldo Garosci, former member of Giustizia e Libertà and the Action Party (Pipitone 2017), remarked on attempts to attribute these incidents to communists. Though critical of communism, Garosci argued that the ‘swastika epidemic’ primarily indicated a fascist problem. He suggested that this antisemitism stemmed from the failure of postwar arrangements that re-established the primacy of nation-states, limiting European integration to economic matters alone.¹⁷ Alessandro Galante Garrone similarly examined the persistence of Fascism in *La Stampa*¹⁸, while Giovanna Berneri, in the anarchist *Volontà*, condemned the presence of the MSI in many municipal councils. She also broadened the scope to include non-antisemitic forms of racism prevalent worldwide.¹⁹ In *La Voce Repubblicana*, Tullia Zevi, then a correspondent for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, published an investigation into religious life in the Soviet Union, noting the Soviet authorities’ assertion that antisemitism was not a state policy and was actively opposed.²⁰ Aroldo Benini offered a historical perspective on Fascist antisemitism in *Il Paradosso*, tracing the academic, journalistic, and cultural support for anti-Jewish policies under Fascism.²¹ In *Tempo Presente*, Elémire Zolla traced antisemitism to its earliest roots,²² while Luigi Salvatorelli was among the few who linked the long history of European antisemitism to recent events in the Middle East, arguing that hostility towards Israel further fuelled contemporary antisemitism.²³

These events intersected with debates on educational reform in Italy, an issue extensively covered in *Rinascita* soon after the ‘swastika epidemic’.²⁴ Left-leaning educational journals stressed the importance of using education to combat antisemitism. *Riforma della scuola* argued for updated curricula that would include the past 40 years of history.²⁵ In *Il giornale dei genitori*, no explicit reference was made to these events, though articles clearly reflected their influence. Primo Levi noted the success of an exhibition on deportations, interpreting this interest as indicative of the need for a new language to teach Fascism and the Resistance – something the school system, in his view, lacked.²⁶ Another article (likely by Ada Gobetti) encouraged a dynamic teaching of antisemitism that would help students recognise contemporary racism rather than viewing it solely as a historical issue.²⁷ The socialist *Il nuovo ideale* lamented, ‘Nothing has been taught to the new generations’²⁸ and published a collection of deportation testimonies.²⁹ Similarly, in the democratic-leaning *Il Giorno*, Umberto Segre highlighted the importance of educating young people about the Liberation’s role in countering Fascism.³⁰ Ferruccio Parri in the socialist *Avanti!* argued that the problem lay not only in school curricula but also in the teachers, many of whom lacked knowledge of the Resistance. He contended that antisemitism reflected deeper issues within Italian democracy, which remained superficial; for this reason, socialists had to work towards a more substantive democracy (Parri’s comment alluded to debates on the PSI’s potential entry into government).³¹ *Paese Sera* interviewed young people in Rome, finding widespread condemnation of antisemitism alongside enduring anti-Jewish prejudice and ignorance about the war.³² The communist paper advocated for educational initiatives, including television programmes, and published a detailed investigation, serialised over several weeks, in which Carmine De Lipsis examined far-right organisations with

racist ideologies. Although these groups were marginal, the overall findings were deeply troubling.³³

Ultimately, the antifascist press, by framing these antisemitic incidents as an ideological continuation of Fascist attitudes, not only condemned the acts but also emphasised Italy's unresolved reckoning with its Fascist legacy. This perspective aimed to highlight a narrative that insisted on the continuity between historical antisemitism and contemporary political complacency, implicitly questioning the effectiveness of postwar 'national pacification' measures that had enabled fascist elements to re-emerge in Italian society.

Between anticommunist controversy and ancient antisemitism

The conservative press, which was numerically dominant and also an expression of a more deeply rooted widespread culture, initially took a stance on the antisemitism crisis that viewed it within the Cold War framework. This attitude was also reflected within the government itself, which 'seems in reality to be monitoring the mobilisation of left-wing parties and antifascist associations more closely than the activity of neofascist and neo-Nazi groups' (Bertilotti 2011).

Many newspapers espoused the theory that the antisemitic incidents were orchestrated by communists and the Soviet Union – a position not entirely baseless according to later historical analyses, though tenuous based on contemporary evidence (Scholz 2010). This interpretation was present in commentaries by *La Nazione* and *Il Resto del Carlino* regarding the West German cases, attributing them to East German involvement.³⁴ The hypothesis was also advanced by the conservative journalist Massimo Caputo in *Corriere della Sera*.³⁵ *Il Secolo d'Italia* similarly posited that communists aimed to provoke a reaction from the Bonn government, accusing them of undermining Adenauer through support of neo-Nazi movements.³⁶ The MSI outlet argued that this was a calculated ploy to damage Adenauer's standing,³⁷ a view echoed by *Candido*, whose cartoon by Giovannino Guareschi depicted Khrushchev with a swastika-emblazoned windmill.³⁸

Some conservative voices suggested that the communists, in fact, harboured anti-semitic sentiments themselves. *L'Ordine Civile*, under Gianni Baget Bozzo, published a review of Léon Leneman's *La tragédie des Juifs en URSS* (Leneman 1959), accusing the left-wing press of 'alarmism' to conceal Soviet antisemitism.³⁹ Filippo Anfuso, a former RSI ambassador in Berlin and leading figure in the MSI (Setta 1988), accused Italian communists of hypocrisy: 'antifascists in Rome and antisemites in Moscow', as he wrote in *Il Secolo d'Italia*,⁴⁰ which frequently ran provocative front-page headlines accusing communists and Soviets of antisemitism⁴¹ – a stance also prevalent among conservative circles in Germany at the time (Bergmann 1990). Any suggestion that fascists were to blame was firmly rejected by *Il Secolo d'Italia*, which threatened legal action if the left persisted in attributing responsibility to the 'responsible fascist leadership [that] operates in Italy in broad daylight'.⁴²

To the right of the MSI, *Ordine Nuovo*, the magazine linked to the neofascist organisation of the same name founded by Pino Rauti in 1956 (Tarchi 2016; Conti 2023), downplayed the incidents, calling them a 'fabrication' by the left.⁴³ *Ordine Nuovo* dedicated minimal coverage to the antisemitic wave, although it had espoused Julius Evola's racist theories since its inception (Picco 2011; Parlato 2015a; Giannuli and Rosati 2022). Some on the right accused 'Western Jews' of hypocrisy, claiming they condemned the European incidents but failed to address Soviet antisemitism. *Il Borghese's* editor Mario Tedeschi, a former RSI volunteer, argued this amounted to a betrayal of their Soviet co-religionists.⁴⁴

Others portrayed the incidents as acts of vandalism or madness rather than a neo-Nazi resurgence. Three days after the Cologne incident, *Il Resto del Carlino* attributed responsibility to the German communists but cautioned against rushing to conclusions, citing the

'teddy boys' – a rebellious youth subculture blamed for disturbances in Notting Hill in 1958 – as likely responsible for the defacement of a London synagogue (Volpi 2019, 109–123).⁴⁵ Giovanni Ansaldo, former collaborator of the minister and Mussolini's son-in-law, Galeazzo Ciano, expressed similar sentiments in *Tempo*, warning against overemphasising the issue, which, he argued, could provoke negative reactions towards Jews.⁴⁶ Articles in *Gente* and by its editor Edilio Rusconi similarly downplayed the events, claiming the perpetrators were not neo-Nazis but rather part of the 'party of idiots'.⁴⁷ Giorgio Pisanò, a former RSI volunteer (Parlato 2015b) and supporter of the theory that Mussolini was not antisemitic (Carioti 2010), described the incidents as the work of 'reckless individuals' without political ties, causing 'unnecessary alarmism'.⁴⁸ The decision to commit a young man with a swastika tattoo to a psychiatric hospital bolstered this narrative of the incidents as isolated acts of non-political disturbance.⁴⁹

In *Il Borghese*, Alberto Giovannini, a journalist charged in the postwar period with advocating Fascism (Vallauri 2001; Allotti 2010), minimised the issue, characterising it as mere vandalism inflamed by press sensationalism. According to Giovannini, the 'swastika affair' (he placed 'swastika' in quotation marks to suggest inauthenticity) was exploited by the left to foster a 'victimisation psychosis' intended to hinder conservative politics in Italy. He also noted Jewish involvement in early Fascism, aiming to demonstrate that antisemitism was absent in Italy, yet omitted any mention of the antisemitic laws and persecution from 1938 to 1945.⁵⁰ In a later article, Giovannini argued that the 1938 antisemitic laws were 'mimicking, albeit mildly, Hitler's racial laws', asserting that Mussolini was overly influenced by the reception he received in Germany in 1937.⁵¹ *Lo Specchio*, a popular magazine aligned with the MSI, similarly claimed that 'racism does not exist in Italy, it has never existed: the Fascist antisemitic campaign was more endured than embraced by the Fascists themselves'.⁵² Similarly, in *Oggi*, editor Emilio Radius, also with a Fascist past (Murialdi 1973, 113), argued that Italy's Catholic traditions had prevented antisemitic traditions, suggesting that Italians helped Jews during the war.⁵³ Edilio Rusconi in *Gente* acknowledged the antisemitic laws of 1938 but contended that they were unenforced, claiming no one persecuted Jews until the German occupation in 1943.⁵⁴

This trend of self-exculpation, attempting to dissociate the right from antisemitism and to portray Fascism as non-antisemitic, was evident even in more reputable publications. *Corriere della Sera's* Manlio Lupinacci cautioned against downplaying the severity of the current events, recalling that 'those few words, before seeing them written on those walls today, we saw them written on too many sealed train cars'. Yet, Lupinacci also offered a revisionist history of Fascism, asserting that in Italy 'there was never antisemitism'.⁵⁵

Some right-wing publications revived past antisemitic sentiments in implicit ways. *Il Secolo d'Italia* accused communists of attempting to instil 'pietism' (*pietismo*) in Italians to discredit the MSI, which was reportedly growing in electoral support.⁵⁶ The term 'pietism' held notable significance; it had been used in 1938 by the Fascist press to denounce Italians who showed compassion for Jews persecuted under the regime (De Felice 1993, 315–316). In *L'Italiano*, Claudio De Risio, associated with the faction led by former RSI fascist Pino Romualdi, accused 'Jewish International' propaganda of exaggerating Nazi crimes while ignoring other atrocities, notably those committed by the Soviets and other past civilisations. De Risio claimed the focus on Nazi-Fascist culpability was excessive and motivated by a political vendetta.⁵⁷

Enrico Insabato, a noted scholar of Islam, wrote in *L'Ordine Civile* criticising the reaction of international Jewry to the antisemitic incidents, which he regarded as mere acts of emulation or vandalism. In his commentary on the World Jewish Congress meeting in early January, which condemned the Cologne incidents and urged the German government to act against antisemitism, Insabato spoke of a supposed 'sense of racial superiority' and interference by international Jewry. He suggested that the antisemitic episodes were

orchestrated by Israel to encourage Jewish emigration from Europe as part of its strategy against Arab nations.⁵⁸ This perspective reflected a cultural current within the Italian right, influenced by René Guénon and Julius Evola, that viewed Eastern societies, including Islam, as upholding traditional values against Western materialism. Evola's concept of 'spiritual racism' resonated with these views, as did an anti-Israel stance that revived older European antisemitic stereotypes (Guénon 1924; Evola 1934; D'Annibale, De Sanctis and Donati 2019, 85–131). This oscillation between downplaying or denying Fascist antisemitism and reasserting antisemitic attitudes became a distinctive feature of Italy's neofascist right in the postwar republic (Rossi 2003, 91). It is noteworthy that such references to the Arab world occasionally produced divergent interpretations. In *Corriere della Sera*, Augusto Guerriero suggested that the centre of the 'swastika epidemic' was in Egypt, implicating Arab 'antisemitism'.⁵⁹ Here, the focus was not on the Arab-Israeli conflict but rather on a Cold War-era view that equated Egyptian President Nasser's 'Arab socialism' with Hitlerism, particularly given Nasser's alignment with the USSR.

The conservative press's framing of antisemitism as primarily a Soviet or Eastern phenomenon strategically deflected attention from Italy's historical responsibility, promoting a narrative that cast antisemitic incidents as foreign provocations. This narrative perpetuated a selective memory that preserved Italy's image as fundamentally 'innocent', distancing it from direct Fascist culpability while weaponising antisemitism within the Cold War's ideological battleground.

Lack of self-awareness

Catholic culture, politically represented by the DC, reflected the broader divides between left and right. Conservative views, such as those in *L'Ordine Civile*, stood in contrast to more democratic, antifascist perspectives aligned with the Resistance. The DC leadership condemned the antisemitic episodes, although it remained committed to supporting its ally Adenauer and interpreting events within a Cold War framework. This response was further complicated by postwar Catholic reflections on the long-standing relationship between the Church and the Jewish community. Debates emerged over Christian responsibility for fostering an anti-Jewish culture that had long marginalised Jews in European societies and was seen as a prelude to the Shoah. In line with this, Pope John XXIII had recently removed the terms 'perfidious' and 'perfidy' from the Good Friday prayer, responding to calls within the Church to reform its stance on Jews – a change that revived divisions within the Catholic world (Palumbo 2020, 132–139).

This complexity extended to Vatican-linked publications. *L'Osservatore Romano*, the official Vatican newspaper, attributed the events to neofascism and neo-Nazism,⁶⁰ while Vatican Radio issued severe criticism on 9 January.⁶¹ In contrast, *La Civiltà Cattolica*, the Jesuit journal, used the events to criticise communists for exploiting antisemitism for political gain. An article by Father Alessio U. Floridi cited Leneman's work to remind readers of Jewish persecution in the USSR.⁶² Later, Giovanni Caprile, a Jesuit scholar, documented the responses of Catholic leaders worldwide to antisemitic incidents, underscoring the Church's distance from antisemitism by highlighting papal teachings, particularly those of Pius XI and Pius XII, against totalitarianism and antisemitic violence.⁶³

Most Catholic newspapers approached the theory of Soviet involvement cautiously. *Il Popolo*, the Christian Democrat paper directed by Ettore Bernabei, mainly blamed the far right, affirming Catholic condemnation of the incidents while noting Soviet efforts to exploit the crisis.⁶⁴ Although there were reports of left-wing arrests, these received less attention than in right-wing publications.⁶⁵ The conservative faction's magazine *Concretezza*, led by Giulio Andreotti, hinted at communist hypocrisy, stating that those

protesting were sometimes themselves complicit in persecution.⁶⁶ The DC magazine *La Discussione* went further, claiming that the leftist press ignored restrictions on Jewish emigration to Israel from ‘behind the Iron Curtain’.⁶⁷ The magazine accused Italian communists of inflating minor Western antisemitic incidents while ignoring East bloc oppression, criticising Soviet leaders as ‘pharisaical’ – a term laden with anti-Jewish connotations.⁶⁸

Similarly, *L’Avvenire d’Italia* questioned whether the swastika incidents merited scandal from communists who ignored the Soviet Union’s persecution of Jews.⁶⁹ Without making direct comparisons, *L’Italia* recalled Soviet antisemitism⁷⁰ and tentatively suggested a Soviet role in the incidents.⁷¹ In a *L’Avvenire d’Italia* article, Lorenzo Bedeschi, a priest and antifascist historian, argued that excluding fascists from postwar democratic reconstruction had fostered resentment towards democracy and its symbols, including Jews.⁷²

Even the Catholic newspapers did not reflect on the antisemitism of Fascist Italy but instead attributed the phenomenon to Germany. Reporting on a Jewish community event in Venice attended by Shoah survivors, *L’Avvenire d’Italia* referred only to ‘Hitlerian racism’, omitting mention of Italian complicity in denunciations and arrests.⁷³ Moreover, the Catholic press did not reflect on the Church’s own long-term role in shaping anti-Jewish hostility. In *L’Italia*, editor Monsignor Ernesto Pisoni, a priest active in the Resistance, referred vaguely to ‘a very ancient evil’, yet stopped short of addressing the link between Christian anti-Judaism and the Shoah.⁷⁴

Il Popolo featured contributions from prominent cultural figures, including the ‘No to Racism’ manifesto published on 9 January 1960, in which mostly Catholic intellectuals condemned antisemitism.⁷⁵ Later, personalist philosopher Armando Rigobello advocated for teaching the Resistance’s moral rather than military dimensions in schools.⁷⁶ In a passionate article that still attributed the crisis to the USSR, *La Discussione* insisted that Christians had been foremost in defending Jews, arguing that ‘our Christian moral conscience, after all, “naturally” rebels even at the mere thought of racial discrimination’.⁷⁷

Within this mix of perspectives, a few figures called for a more critical assessment of Fascism. In *L’Italia*, Ruggero Orfei warned that anticommunism could not excuse the Italian public from confronting wartime history, hinting at the need to reconsider religious education in light of Jewish-Christian relations.⁷⁸ However, *L’Italia* also published an article by theologian Giovanni Battista Guzzetti, who, reflecting on historical Jewish persecution, suggested ambiguously that ‘something in the Jews’ might have provided ‘a pretext for such aversion’. He distinguished between racist antisemitism, which the Church condemned, and a supposed merciful antisemitism, which he portrayed as protecting Christians from Jewish influence without malice.⁷⁹ These contrasting views reflected the Catholic world’s internal divisions on the Jewish question, revealing a tentative but increasingly visible debate.

Overall, the Catholic press’s cautious treatment of Italy’s role reflects a tension within Italian society, where Christian Democratic influences sought to redefine Italy’s national identity while strategically distancing it from its Fascist past. This dynamic illustrates the selective approach to memory, often marginalising Jewish suffering as a peripheral issue relative to Cold War priorities.

Long-term consequences

On an international scale, the ‘swastika epidemic’ catalysed debates at the United Nations on racial discrimination. This began with the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities meeting on 27 January 1960, where a document condemning the antisemitic incidents was approved.⁸⁰ The process, alongside demands

from the post-colonial world, ultimately led to the 1965 adoption of the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination* (Loeffler 2018, 234–239; Schabas 2023, 244–268).⁸¹

In Italy, after January 1960's intense debates, media focus on antisemitism faded, partly due to rising political tensions following the formation of Ferdinando Tambroni's government in April, supported by the decisive vote of the MSI. The antifascist mobilisation against antisemitism evolved into broader political protest, capturing public attention for months (Cooke 2011, 84–86; Franzinelli and Giacone 2020). Nevertheless, January's discussions produced significant outcomes, notably the public's overwhelming rejection of antisemitism. Gianni Granzotto in *Epoca* noted: 'Never before had antisemitism encountered such total and indignant condemnation'.⁸²

Paradoxically, the antisemitic episodes sparked new cultural activism within the Italian Jewish community, leading to an increased focus on Jewish history and persecution (Toscano 2003, 289–290). One major outcome was the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCII) commissioning a young historian to study Fascist antisemitism, resulting in Renzo De Felice's landmark work *Storia degli ebrei italiani sotto il fascismo*, published the following year (De Felice 1993; Gentile 2002; Sarfatti 2004).

This debate on antisemitism also impacted parliamentary discussions, particularly on 25 and 26 January 1960 in the Senate, where representatives from across the political spectrum (including some Jewish members) recalled their antifascist and Resistance backgrounds. MSI Senator Enea Franza, amidst protests from antifascist forces, reiterated that Fascism was not responsible for antisemitic persecution, with the MSI willing to support a condemnation of antisemitism only if it excluded a denunciation of Fascism. Progressive politicians emphasised the need for greater awareness of antisemitism in schools, urging the government to update history curricula to reflect these issues.⁸³ Such calls paralleled ongoing debates on educational reform and the implementation of the Constitution, which had once been a tool of the Fascist regime (Palumbo 2024).

Notably, the 1960 public debate did not yet factor in the State of Israel as an interpretive element. Efforts by the Israeli government to link Israel's identity to Jewish history, including the Shoah, had yet to gain full traction (Zertal 2005). This would change with the 1961 Eichmann trial, complicating the discourse on antisemitism with Middle Eastern politics (Di Figlia 2012; Tarquini 2019; Palumbo 2020). Nonetheless, on 27 January 1960, Senator Adone Zoli (DC), along with jurists Vincenzo Arangio-Ruiz (PLI) and Tommaso Perassi (PRI), founded the 'Italy-Israel Association' to strengthen cultural and political ties between Italy and Israel – a project reportedly accelerated by the 'swastika epidemic'. The founding drew prominent members like the former President of the Republic Luigi Einaudi, the Resistance leader Ferruccio Parri, Piero Caleffi, and Ada Sereni, wife of antifascist Zionist Enzo Sereni (executed in Dachau in 1944) and organiser of illegal Jewish emigration to Palestine. In his address, Zoli highlighted Israel as both the Promised Land and a democratic bulwark in the Middle East, merging Christian theological views with Cold War politics.⁸⁴

Conclusion

Public and parliamentary debates ultimately crystallised major interpretive frameworks within Italian political culture, which would endure in the following decades. The debates from January 1960 represent not merely reactions to isolated incidents but underscore a significant ideological confrontation within Italy, reflecting efforts by various factions to reinterpret or defend their roles in the nation's Fascist past. This interpretive struggle, framed against the backdrop of Cold War tensions, reveals a deeper reluctance to confront

domestic complicity in racial ideologies – a theme that would shape Italian political culture in subsequent decades. Ultimately, the response to the ‘swastika epidemic’ illuminated persistent fractures within Italy’s collective memory.

A key aspect was the relatively widespread denunciation of antisemitism: no speaker attempted to justify it, suggesting that 15 years after the war, the trauma of the Shoah – albeit not fully assimilated – had influenced Italian perspectives. Overt antisemitism was no longer acceptable, even among the political heirs of Fascism, many of whom had direct involvement in the previous regime. Each political group, however, interpreted the events through its ideological lens. The Cold War context divided opinions, with some viewing the incidents as provocations by ‘Atlantic’ forces symbolised by Adenauer and Segni, while others blamed the USSR (Bertilotti 2011). Yet, two critical issues were underexplored. First, Catholic publications largely omitted reflections on the Church’s historical role in promoting anti-Jewish sentiment, though the topic had been discussed within limited circles of the Italian Catholic world for some time (Palumbo 2020, 94–139). This omission was apparent in repeated affirmations that Catholics had opposed antisemitism during the war and continued to do so. The second overlooked topic was Fascist Italy’s role in persecuting Jews before the Nazi occupation in 1943 and the long-term responsibilities of the Church. Conservative publications, both fascist and otherwise, carefully avoided acknowledging this, instead attributing blame solely to Germany. Catholic sources similarly focused on ‘Hitlerian racism’ without acknowledging the Church’s responsibilities. In both cases, introspective processes of re-evaluation were lacking – even though debates on these topics were no longer at ‘year zero’ – thus presenting a rather backward view of the reflection within the dominant sectors of the Italian cultural panorama of the period.

The interpretive frameworks established in January 1960 would prove resilient, remaining influential within the political cultures of republican Italy, albeit with varied nuances.

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Notes

1. See the reports from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency’s *Daily News Bulletin* from 28 December 1959 to 5 January 1960.
2. ‘Svastiche: il calendario del nuovo nazi-fascismo’, *Ha-Tikvā*. January 1960; ‘Croci uncinatate’, *Israel*, 7 January 1960; ‘Cronologia degli episodi antisemitici’, *La Voce della Comunità Israelitica di Roma*, January 1960; M. Paggi, ‘Nostalgie d’un passato ignobile’, *Bollettino della Comunità Israelitica di Milano*, February 1960.
3. I would like to acknowledge all the libraries that allowed the consultation of the publications under review: Sormani Library (Milan), Braidense Library (Milan), Catholic University of the Sacred Heart (Milan), University of Milan (Milan), Feltrinelli Foundation (Milan), National Library of Rome (Rome), Ugo Spirito-Renzo De Felice Foundation (Rome), Gino Bianco Library (Forlì).
4. From 26 December 1959 to early January 1960, news of antisemitic incidents in Germany and other countries was reported by almost all the newspapers under consideration: *Corriere della Sera*, *Il Giorno*, *Il Messaggero*, *Avanti!*, *La Gazzetta del Mezzogiorno*, *Il Popolo*, *L’Unità*, *Paese Sera*, *L’Avvenire d’Italia*, *L’Italia*, *La Stampa*, *L’Osservatore Romano*, *La Voce Repubblicana*, *Il Resto del Carlino*, *La Nazione*, *Il Secolo d’Italia*, and *L’Osservatore Romano*.
5. ‘Razzismo nazista nella Germania di Bonn’, *L’Unità*, 27 December 1959; ‘Fine d’anno antisemita nella Germania di Bonn’, *Avanti!*, 2 January 1960; ‘Si aggrava l’ondata antisemita a Bonn’, *L’Unità*, 1 January 1960.
6. ‘Proteste in Germania per l’oltraggio alla sinagoga’, *L’Unità*, 29 December 1959; ‘Un ebreo tedesco reduce dai “lager” minacciato di morte dai neonazisti’, *L’Unità*, 30 December 1959.
7. G. Conato, ‘Croci uncinatate e scritte antisemite in altre città della Germania Ovest’, *L’Unità*, 2 January 1960; G. Conato, ‘Il seme delle svastiche’, *L’Unità*, 17 January 1960.

8. Benelux [G. Rodari], 'Svastiche', *Paese Sera*, 4-5 January 1960.
9. S. Segre, 'Le svastiche di Adenauer', *L'Unità*, 6 January 1960. But on the topic of 'continuity' or 'discontinuity', see Lorenzini 1998.
10. G. Conato, 'I ministri di Adenauer sognano l'Europa delle SS', *L'Unità*, 7 January 1960.
11. C. Casalegno, 'È proprio scomparso il pericolo nazista?', *La Stampa*, 17 January 1960.
12. 'Minacciano di distruggere il tempio ebraico di Milano', *L'Unità*, 4 January 1960.
13. A. Gaggero, 'Don Gaggero ricorda la ferocia antisemita', *Paese Sera*, 11-12 January 1960.
14. M. Berti, 'Antisemitismo e cretinismo', *Critica Sociale*, 20 January 1960.
15. P. Caleffi, 'Il volto del nazifascismo', *Mondo Operaio*, February 1960.
16. P. Nenni, 'La posta in gioco', *Avanti!*, 10 January 1960.
17. A. Garosci, 'L'ombra della svastica', *Il Mondo*, 19 January 1960.
18. A. Galante Garrone, 'Ricordare e agire', *La Stampa*, 6 January 1960.
19. G.B. [G. Bernieri], 'Razzismo con e senza svastica', *Volontà*, February 1960.
20. T. Zevi, 'Nelle statistiche ufficiali 50 milioni di credenti', *La Voce Repubblicana*, 29 January 1960.
21. A. Benini, 'Il contributo italiano alla storia del razzismo', *Il Paradosso*, January-March 1960.
22. E. Zolla, 'Come nasce l'antisemitismo', *Tempo Presente*, January 1960.
23. L. Salvatorelli, 'Alle radici dell'antisemitismo', *La Stampa*, 17 January 1960.
24. 'Che cosa si insegna nelle scuole italiane', *Rinascita*, March 1960.
25. 'Educare all'antifascismo', *Riforma della scuola*, February 1960.
26. P. Levi, 'Il tempo delle svastiche', *Il giornale dei genitori*, 15 January 1960.
27. 'Commento alla cronaca', *Il giornale dei genitori*, 15 February 1960.
28. 'Simboli di morte', *Il nuovo ideale*, 16 January 1960.
29. L. Frattini, 'Perdonare non significa dimenticare', *Il nuovo ideale*, 16 January 1960; L. Frattini, 'Nudo con lo spazzolino da denti', *Il nuovo ideale*, 23 January 1960.
30. U. Segre, 'Un Paese non razzista', *Il Giorno*, 12 January 1960.
31. F. Parri, 'L'Italia dei cimeli fascisti', *Avanti!*, 8 January 1960.
32. 'Che cosa pensate del razzismo?' *Paese Sera*, 15-16 January 1960.
33. C. De Lipsis, 'A Campo Imperatore il raduno dei razzisti'. *Paese Sera*, 2-3 Feb. 1960; Id., 'A Roma e a Milano le centrali antisemite'. *Paese Sera*, 3-4 February 1960; Id., 'Le teorie folli dei razzisti italiani'. *Paese Sera*, 5-6 February 1960; Id., 'Sagra nazista a Friburgo col contributo dello Stato italiano'. *Paese Sera*, 10-11 February 1960; Id., 'Un centro di propaganda razzista finanziato dal Ministero degli Esteri'. *Paese Sera*, 17-18 February 1960.
34. V. Brunelli, 'L'antisemitismo in Germania è ispirato dai tedeschi di Pankow'. *Il Resto del Carlino*, 1 January 1960; V. Brunelli, 'L'ondata di antisemitismo forse organizzata dai comunisti per screditare Adenauer'. *La Nazione*, 2 January 1960.
35. M. Caputo, 'Adenauer cerca appoggi alle sue tesi per Berlino'. *Corriere della Sera*, 29 December 1959.
36. G. Martini, 'Il partito del Reich denuncia le provocazioni'. *Il Secolo d'Italia*, 31 December 1959.
37. 'All'insegna della svastica una beffa per Norimberga'. *Il Secolo d'Italia*, 3 January 1960.
38. 'I molini di Krusciov e la campagna anti-tedesca'. *Candido*, 31 January 1960.
39. 'Letture'. *L'Ordine Civile*, 1 February 1960.
40. F. Anfuso, 'Chi sono gli antisemiti'. *Il Secolo d'Italia*, 7 January 1960; F. Anfuso, 'L'antisemitismo nel gioco comunista'. *Il Secolo d'Italia*, 9 January 1960.
41. Some examples: "A morte gli ebrei" e bruciano le sinagoghe i comunisti dell'URSS'. *Il Secolo d'Italia*, 14 January 1960; 'Agenti della Germania Est fra i disegnatori di svastiche'. *Il Secolo d'Italia*, 16 January 1960; 'Da Mosca le direttive per l'operazione svastica'. *Il Secolo d'Italia*, 19 January 1960; 'Prove schiaccianti nei documenti comunisti. Un altro provocatore smascherato a Berlino'. *Il Secolo d'Italia*, 20 January 1960; 'Nuova denuncia ebraica delle persecuzioni antisemite nell'URSS'. *Il Secolo d'Italia*, 21 January 1960.
42. 'Basta col falso!'. *Il Secolo d'Italia*, 6 January 1960.
43. 'Ordine Nuovo e i fatti di Milano'. *Ordine Nuovo*, January 1960.
44. M. Tedeschi, 'Gli Ebrei traditi dagli Ebrei'. *Il Borghese*, 28 January 1960; M. Tedeschi, 'Stalin contro Israele'. *Il Borghese*, 11 February 1960.
45. 'Svastiche anche a Londra'. *Il Resto del Carlino*, 1 January 1960.
46. G. Ansaldo, 'La difesa più efficace'. *Tempo*, 2 February 1960.
47. E. Rusconi, 'Svastiche'. *Gente*, 15 January 1960.
48. G. Pisanò, 'Le assurde svastiche dei figli del dio sole'. *Gente*, 22 January 1960. It should be noted how Pisanò, while distancing himself from antisemitism, used the expression 'Jewish race' casually.
49. 'Arriva a Roma con la svastica sul braccio ed è ricoverato d'urgenza al manicomio'. *Il Messaggero*, 7 January 1960.
50. A. Giovannini, 'Svastiche e cretini'. *Il Borghese*, 14 January 1960.

51. A. Giovannini, 'Gronchi e Mussolini'. *Il Borghese*, 21 January 1960.
52. 'La svastica'. *Lo Specchio*, 17 January 1960.
53. E.R. [Radius], 'Barometro politico'. *Oggi*, 14 January 1960.
54. E. Rusconi, 'Gli ebrei'. *Gente*, 26 February 1960.
55. M. Lupinacci, 'L'aberrazione del razzismo'. *Corriere della Sera*, 6 January 1960. Lupinacci had been called a 'fairly enlightened conservative' by F. Compagna, 'Due decennali: "Il Tempo" e "Il Giornale"'. *Nord e Sud*, 1 (1954), 53–57.
56. 'La trappola del pietismo'. *Il Secolo d'Italia*, 5 January 1960.
57. C. De Risio, 'Riflessioni sul "genocidio"'. *L'Italiano*, March 1960.
58. E. Insabato, 'Svastiche e propaganda'. *L'Ordine Civile*, 15 January 1960.
59. A. Guerriero, 'Il flagello della svastica'. *Corriere della Sera*, 9 January 1960.
60. 'Altre manifestazioni antiebraiche'. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 5 January 1960; 'Vive deplorazioni e proteste contro le manifestazioni antiebraiche'. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 6 January 1960.
61. Radio Vaticana, Bollettino, 9 January 1960.
62. A.U. Floridi, 'Antisemitismo sovietico'. *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 6 February 1960.
63. G. Caprile, 'Gerarchia e organizzazioni cattoliche contro l'antisemitismo di oggi'. *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 19 March 1960.
64. 'Unanime la condanna per le gesta dei neo-nazisti'. *Il Popolo*, 7 January 1960; F. Amadini, 'Adenauer propone una legge per combattere l'odio razziale'. *Il Popolo*, 7 January 1960; 'Rigorose disposizioni per reprimere gli atti di intolleranza razziale'. *Il Popolo*, 8 January 1960; 'Otto persone arrestate a Milano per associazione filonazista antisemitica'. *Il Popolo*, 8 January 1960; 'Tre "fermi" a Foggia per gesta antiebraiche'. *Il Popolo*, 12 January 1960.
65. 'Un comunista "organizzava" l'antisemitismo a Berlino Ovest'. *Il Popolo*, 16 January 1960; 'Comunista arrestato per attività antiebraiche'. *Il Popolo*, 21 January 1960.
66. 'Anti-Sem'. *Concretezza*, 16 January 1960.
67. N. Mircescu, '...Ma il razzismo sovietico è un'altra cosa'. *La Discussione*, 10 January 1960.
68. C. Fincati, 'Svastiche sovietiche per Adenauer'. *La Discussione*, 17 January 1960. See also 'Potrebbe toccare a noi'. *La Discussione*, 31 January 1960.
69. 'Nell'Unione Sovietica la più feroce repressione antiebraica'. *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, 11 January 1960.
70. 'I comunisti contro gli ebrei'. *L'Italia*, 13 January 1960.
71. 'Fomentate dai comunisti le manifestazioni antisemitiche?'. *L'Italia*, 19 January 1960.
72. L. Bedeschi, 'What is neo-racism?'. *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, 7 January 1960. For this and other passages, in which Bedeschi attacked secular culture, Mario Cagli, a former racial persecutee, wrote a harsh condemnation of the theses expressed by the Catholic historian. Cf. M. Cagli, 'What is neo-racism?'. *Il Mondo*, 19 January 1960.
73. 'Gli autori delle scritte antisemite verrebbero "premiati" con forti somme'. *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, 12 January 1960.
74. E.P. [Pisoni], 'Il seme del male'. *L'Italia*, 6 January 1960.
75. The text read: 'At a time when some manifestations of antisemitism are occurring in Europe and Italy, which remind us of painful times we believed were definitively overcome, a group of men from Italian culture and journalism, through this manifesto, intend to express their condemnation of the recent shameful episodes, which offend the conscience of citizens. The memory of the degradation to which humanity descended in the extermination camps cannot in any way be erased amid indifference and indulgence. For this reason, every uncertainty must be banished in taking a resolute stance of moral condemnation in the name of the ideals of democracy and freedom, won through the Resistance.' This was followed by over a hundred signatures. 'No to racism'. *Il Popolo*, 9 January 1960.
76. A. Rigobello, 'La storia come storia di libertà'. *Il Popolo*, 21 January 1960.
77. 'La campagna antiebraica disonora l'umanità'. *La Discussione*, 31 January 1960.
78. R. Orfei, 'La svastica'. *L'Italia*, 13 January 1960.
79. G.B. Guzzetti, 'Fuori gli ebrei?'. *L'Italia*, 22 January 1960.
80. Summary record, Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, 27 January 1960, E/CN.4/Sub.2/SR.304, 14.
81. *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, 21 December 1965, A/RES/2106(XX).
82. G. Granzotto, 'I troppi teddy-boys dell'antisemitismo'. *Epoca*, 31 January 1960.
83. Atti Parlamentari [hereafter AP], Senato della Repubblica – III legislatura, 216^a seduta pubblica. Resoconto stenografico, 26 January 1960; AP, Senato della Repubblica – III legislatura, 217^a seduta pubblica. Resoconto

stenografico, 27 January 1960. See also: 'il senato della repubblica deplora il risorgente antisemitismo'. *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel*, 3 (1960): 75–92.

84. 'Zoli illustra i motivi dell'amicizia italiana per lo stato d'Israele'. *Il Popolo*, 28 January 1960; 'Rafforzati i sentimenti di amicizia fra Italia e Israele'. *La Voce Repubblicana*, 28 January 1960; 'L'associazione Italia-Israele si è costituita ieri a Roma'. *Il Messaggero*, 28 January 1960; I. Baldini, 'Costituita l'Associazione Italia-Israele con Luigi Einaudi presidente onorario'. *Paese Sera*, 28-29 January 1960.

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Italian summary

Nel dicembre del 1959 si verificarono in Germania Ovest diversi episodi di antisemitismo. Questi eventi si diffusero rapidamente in altri paesi e furono definiti dalla stampa come 'epidemia di svastiche'. In Italia, tali vicende suscitarono un intenso dibattito tra le principali forze politiche dell'epoca, collocando l'interpretazione degli episodi antisemiti in un contesto che teneva conto del confronto bipolare, ma che era anche influenzato dalla transizione politica (con la crisi del centrismo e la prospettiva del centro-sinistra) e dal mutamento dell'opinione religiosa riguardo ai rapporti ebraico-cristiani. Alla condanna generale e unanime dell'antisemitismo si accompagnarono diverse interpretazioni sul razzismo dell'Italia fascista e sulle responsabilità storiche del mondo cattolico. Ne emerse un quadro estremamente frammentato, ma con rilevanti implicazioni politiche e culturali in un anno che avrebbe visto l'esplosione della violenza politica.

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