

INTRODUCTION.
EXILE: AN ACCELERATION TOWARDS MODERNITY

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ABSTRACT

In recent years the literature dedicated to the history of exile has made remarkable progress in many different disciplinary fields: from literature to philosophy, from sociology to history. The articles collected in this monographic issue confirm that Italian historiography has also been positively affected by this trend. This introduction highlights the delays that have characterized Italian research in this field of studies: at the same time it tries to identify the reasons behind this turning point. Starting from the topics touched by the different contributions and taking into consideration some of the biographical paths that are reconstructed in them, the introduction identifies the elements that are central to the experience of intellectual migrations during the interwar period: the construction of cultural spaces and “translocal” community of knowledge that arise around academic, cultural, artistic and scientific networks where there is a high concentration of exiles.

Keywords: Intellectual Migrations, Transnational and Global History, Cultural Spaces, Community of Knowledge.

1. A FORGOTTEN HISTORY: NOTES ON EXILE AND ITALIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

In the past ten years, research into the history of exile has made considerable progress, in Italy as elsewhere. While we do not yet have an annotated bibliography, the proliferation of various initiatives on the subject (conferences, seminars, research papers and publications, databases) is there for all to see, confirming a now established trend. Proof that this is not some ephemeral occurrence, but a trend that has flourished over the years, lies in

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this monographic issue itself; its publication would have been unthinkable until just a few years ago.¹

Before attempting to outline the reasons for this turning point, I think it is appropriate to consider the reasons why, in the past, Italian historiography took such little interest in the topic of exile:² the interest was essentially limited to certain, very restricted areas of research, and flawed by various interpretative limitations. In other words, the novelty of this change in attitudes mentioned above can be better appreciated if we relate it to how Italian studies in this sector have developed, from the post-World War II period on.

I would therefore begin by outlining some general reasons. Among these, there is certainly a distorted perception of the phenomenon of exile, which for many years was considered as a sub-category of traditional migratory phenomena. Secondly, I would add the fact that often the idea of exile was equated solely with the forced mobility of opponents to the Fascist regime, and with their political activities in the countries they moved to. Here again, exile was seen as nothing else but a form of mobility, a mere transfer; in short, a change of residence. A third reason concerns the national perspective, which for a long time was used as the only criterion in the narrative of exile: this perspective generated separate literatures specific to the German case, the French case, the Italian case, the Spanish case and so on. Essentially, these were separate worlds and they formed so many areas of research, which often did not communicate with each other.

There are also other reasons, more closely linked to the academic/scholarly debate, and Italian historiography's late arrival to this field of research. Let us begin, then, by pointing out that the only sector in which there is a solid research tradition is that of exile during the revolutionary period (and the Napoleonic era that ensued), and particularly the cycles of the three "liberal revolutions" (1820-1821, 1830-1832, 1848-1849).³ However, it should be noted that for a long time, these studies took a line of investigation focused entirely on the experience of political exile; they followed an analytical structure introduced in the 1950s in a famous article by Alessandro Galante Garrone⁴ which remained substantially unchanged for many years. Only in the past decade have some works appeared which have

¹ The essays gathered here are the revised, expanded versions of several speeches presented at the international study conference *L'Italia in esilio. La migrazione degli intellettuali italiani dopo il 1938*, organised in Verona on 5-6 February 2019 by the University of Verona's Department of Cultures and Civilizations.

² I offered a series of reasons underlying this delay in CAMURRI 2009: 47-49.

³ See GINSBORG 2009: 25-48.

⁴ Cf. GALANTE GARRONE 1954: 223-242.

expanded the field of study, opening up to a transnational perspective and therefore focusing lines of research on intellectual history, on the circulation of ideas, of scientific and technological knowledge which generated significant processes of innovation in the field of economics.⁵

A second element that is relevant to the Italian case specifically involves the overlap which occurred for many years in this field of studies, between two types of phenomenon that were mistakenly considered comparable: the experience of exile, and that of *fuoriuscitismo*.⁶ In fact, the differences had already been pointed out in the 1950s by the aforementioned Garosci,⁷ which should have at least inspired caution in scholars of Italian antifascism in France;⁸ and more recently, Giuseppe Galasso discussed the theme and made some very pertinent observations⁹ as to the key differences between the two phenomena. Bearing this in mind, here we can highlight certain characteristics that must, we believe, be considered when comparing the two experiences. Escapes to France and, in certain respects, to Switzerland too,¹⁰ were classic cases of political emigration, which almost always ended up with a return to the original place of departure. Moreover, this type of experience lacks those elements which, by contrast, were such a keenly felt part of the exile's experience: the uncertainty surrounding the departure, the journey often made in precarious conditions; the tragedy of being uprooted and the problem of integration once at the end destination; the lack of specific cultural references, the difficulty in using a new language, and the problem of rebuilding a new professional life from scratch.

A third element concerns the suppression of the experience of Jewish exile caused by the anti-Semitic laws introduced by the Fascist regime in 1938. This was a chapter within the wider experience of Fascist persecution of the Italian Jews, and a particularly significant one in terms of intellectual history and the history of cultural migrations. Having been "forgotten" for decades, it partially resurfaced with the publication of the first works

⁵ See ISABELLA 2009; BISTARELLI 2012; BRICE 2012 and 2020; DIAZ, MOISAND, SANCHEZ and SINAL 2015.

⁶ On the meaning of the terms *fuoriuscito* and expatriate, cf. BURKE 2017: 2-4.

⁷ Cf. GAROSCI 1953: 8.

⁸ An extensive bibliography on *fuoriuscitismo* can be found in the appendix to VIAL 2007: 435-438, see also FEDELE 2000.

⁹ GALASSO 1993: 19-22.

¹⁰ There is a wealth of literature on Switzerland's role as a destination for Italian antifascist emigration. See: CASTAGNOLA, PANZERA and SPIGA 2004; SIGNORI 1983; CERUTI 1986; BROGGINI 1993.

on the expulsion of academics from Italian universities.¹¹ These were pioneering studies of their time that offered new insights into this page in the history of the Italian and European twentieth century; they almost always focused on exploring either the moment of forced departure,¹² or return,¹³ but neglected the central phase in this experience: essentially, the part related to what exiles did once they had arrived at their destinations.

2. AN EXILE TURN?

What, then, are the reasons behind the renewed interest we have recently noticed in the history of twentieth-century exile?

Leaving aside the merits of the individual scholars who, amid difficulties and scepticism, have begun to explore this field of study in recent years, this change of tack could be considered a signal – certainly not the only one – of a profound change that has occurred in Italian historiography during the years in question. It is the result of a variety of dynamics at play: structural changes that have shaped the Italian academic system; the changes that have more closely affected contemporary history, with the breakdown of several old, twentieth-century paradigms of interpretation;¹⁴ and in particular the decline of the national dimension, with the emergence of the so-called ‘transnational turn’.

Bearing in mind that its intrinsic characteristics mean that exile has always been a typically transnational experience, we could then assert that studies in this sector somehow anticipated this trend towards internationalization of research. It has given scholars a field for testing the impact that exchanges, interlaced experiences and cultural transfers have had on the lengthy history of intellectual migrations, following a line of interpretation that was described by Pierre Bourdieu in a 2002 article, *Les conditions sociales de la circulation internationale des idées*. Bourdieu’s article can be considered one of the seminal texts of transnational history, and has more recently been the subject of a broad international debate that we can merely touch upon here.¹⁵

¹¹ On this topic, we will mention just two works of fundamental importance: CAPRISTO 2002 e FINZI 2003.

¹² Cf. TOSCANO 2003: 185-207, CAPRISTO 2010: 177-200.

¹³ On this aspect cf. FINZI 1998 and GAGLIANI 2004. As for the question of expulsion and return, see PELINI and PAVAN 2009.

¹⁴ On the more recent international debate surrounding the crisis of historic disciplines, cf. ARMITAGE and GULDI 2014.

¹⁵ See IRIYE and SAUNIER 2009, HAUPT and KOCKA 2009, SAUNIER 2013, IRIYE 2013.

Lastly, there is an additional reason that is corroborated if we examine the profile of the academics who have contributed to this monographic issue, and it is the generational factor; this factor does not simply have to do with age, but also, to use Karl Mannheim's classic definition, with *Erlebnisschichtung*, namely a stratified common experience.¹⁶ Indeed, some of the authors who have worked on this issue have in common an academic background that took place outside of Italy. All of them certainly possess an analytical toolkit, built up from various disciplinary areas. These tools, as Peter Burke recently pointed out, are indispensable for moving in the spaces and cultural circuits in which the exiles' experiences take place.¹⁷

3. PEOPLE, SPACES, COMMUNITY OF KNOWLEDGE

The articles presented here tell us the stories of individuals and groups who, in the interwar period in Europe, were forced to choose the path of exile. These men and women moved around constantly, going from one country to another. In some cases they remained within the Old Continent, while in others they followed routes that took them – often via intermediate stops along the way – to transatlantic destinations: Mexico, the United States, Argentina.

Whether we are discussing individual or collective journeys, what emerges clearly is that the biographical element is crucial to unlocking the complex world of twentieth-century exile. As is that of space, obviously in the sense of not just geographical space, but cultural space, a concept that is held dear by anthropologists. These two elements (the biographical profile and spatial dimension) are fundamental in the paradigm shift that is occurring in studies on the phenomenon of exile, which I mentioned above. As the works published here show, exile can no longer be studied as a normal migratory phenomenon, the dimension of which is circumscribed (according to the methodological approach typically followed by studies on migration history) within the space between a place of departure and that of arrival.

By contrast, since it has been regarded as a phenomenon of intellectual migration with its own precise characteristics, and since the focus has shifted to the circulation of ideas, the creation of scientific and cultural networks, interactions and mutual influences between different experiences, the spatial dimension being studied has changed. In short, this research

¹⁶ Cf. MANNHEIM 1952.

¹⁷ See BURKE 2017: 12-15.

perspective requires an approach that could be defined as “translocal” (to borrow a term coined by economic historians); this allows us to follow the circulation of ideas and the concentration of knowledge in demarcated spaces. Thus, fully-fledged cosmopolitan knowledge communities develop at the centre of cultural, academic, and artistic networks which include a high concentration of exiles.¹⁸

Naturally, defining the features of these communities is no simple task and it requires complex research. However, the papers published here confirm that studying the experience of exile means not only working on the “processes”, in other words people’s journeys and the mobility; it also means focusing on the “products”, namely the contributions made by exiles in a range of disciplinary fields, and which helped to transform knowledge in the course of the twentieth century.¹⁹ I believe it is important to point out that the articles by the young researchers who have collaborated on this *Annals* are clearly oriented towards this direction of research. Their articles confirm that, if we dig deep into exile culture, putting together and picking apart the cultural maps produced by this experience, we can grasp its fundamental features and understand its central position in the cultural, intellectual and political history of the twentieth century. We can summarize exile culture’s distinguishing features as follows: firstly, its major contribution to the deprovincialization, opening up and broadening of the academic landscape generated by the interaction and hybridization of different cultures and experiences. This aspect is, not surprisingly, always mentioned by the protagonists themselves of the great cultural migration that took place between the wars.²⁰ A second distinguishing feature was alluded to by the exile Karl Mannheim when, in an article published in 1945, he referred to the “function” of mediation performed by refugee scholars; mediation between the culture of their native countries and that of their host country.²¹ A third relates to intellectual and artistic creativity, and a propensity for innovation that stems from what George Simmel called “the stranger’s objectivity”, and which Claude Lévi-Strauss defined as “the view from afar”.

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¹⁸ One classic example is the case studied in PIGHT 2008.

¹⁹ BURKE 2017: 29-30.

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