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THE PATHOLOGISATION OF HOMOSEXUALITY IN FASCIST ITALY

The Case of 'G'

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The Pathologisation of Homosexuality in Fascist Italy

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This book is dedicated to A., G., S., V.A., G.F., M., O., V.P., C., B., M. e B.E., arrested at the end of the fascist regime because they were dancing together, in an apartment, in a small village near Turin. Three of them were subsequently deported to Germany. No trace of any of them to be found in the local archives, their lives seem to have vanished after that party. This research is in remembrance of their resilient joie de vivre, *their will to be together and be themselves, despite it all, in the middle of the war, their obstinacy in wanting to have fun and to love each other, at the edge of the precipice.*

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Contents

Abbreviations

ACS	Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Roma.
ASL	equivalent to NHS.
AST	Archivio di Stato di Torino.
b.	*busta*, sub-file.
CA	Collegno Psychiatric Hospital Archives.
doc.	documentary.
f.	*fascicolo*, file.
FP-GIV	Fondo Prefettura—Gabinetto, I Versamento: the Prefettura filing catalogue definition for most of the official documentation I consulted.
FtoM	female to male.
LGBT	lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual.
MtoF	male to female.
PNF	"Partito Nazionale Fascista", National Fascist Party.
RA	Racconigi psychiatric hospital archives.

When mentioning psychiatric patients, surname and first name initials are mentioned. The only exception is G.: for him, only his first name initial is mentioned as he is the protagonist of this story.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Abstract This chapter introduces the case of G., a man interned in Collegno (near Turin) in 1928 because of his "homosexual tendencies". It illustrates the research methodology and then succinctly talks about the legal issues connected with research on sexuality in Italy, in terms of legislation on data protection and privacy legislation. It also gives an explanation of why the subject of the persecution of homosexuality during Mussolini's dictatorship has not been investigated until very recent times, highlighting the problematic aspects of memory of Fascism and of the Shoah in Italy.

Keywords Memory • Persecution of homosexuality • Fascism • Oral history • Micro-history

Starting from the case of G., a man with "homosexual tendencies" interned in the Collegno mental health hospital in 1928, this book investigates the pathologisation of homosexuality during the fascist regime. No systematic study exists on the possibility that Fascism used internment in an asylum as a tool of repression for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual (LGBT) people, as an alternative to confinement on an island, prison or home arrests. This research offers evidence that in some cases it did.

G.'s case gives the opportunity to explain how psychiatric theory came to consider homosexuality a mental health disease, within a eugenics

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theoretical framework, and how the pre-existing internment laws could be bent to implement repression of LGBT people under Mussolini's regime. Research in the Turin *Prefettura* and police archives shows to what extent public security forces and the local mental health institutions cooperated in the repression of homosexuality. Finally, this research addresses another crucial issue, that of the role played by families in the repressive action against homosexuals under Fascism, and how they sometimes cooperated with security forces and psychiatrists in ensuring that their unwanted and non-conforming relatives would be segregated in an asylum. The case of G. is a clear example of this and seems to point in the direction of a shared responsibility between families, police, asylums and local administrations in the exclusion of homosexuals from society through internment. This is a precious indication of how traditional family values, at the centre of Mussolini's rhetoric, were crumbling under the pressures of a regime that relied on spying among its citizens, thus fuelling suspicion, mistrust and fear.

This research highlights how the dictatorship operated in a subdued, undetectable way, bending pre-existing legislation so that it would be perceived as an element of continuity with the past. This guaranteed that its brutality was—and still is—difficult to prove.

The case of G. is exceptional: his 31-page autobiographical statement, part of his patient's file, is an unprecedented document in Italian LGBT history that testifies, ahead of its time, determination, courage and awareness of the socio-economic consequences of discrimination. It also lays bare strategies, stratagems, omissions and lies that were necessary to survive, when one was identified as a homosexual in fascist Italy.

Part I: Methodology

The Collegno mental health hospital archives and the original library are located in pavilion number 8 together with several ASL admin offices. They are in poor conditions, with many files kept in cardboard boxes on the floor and along the corridors. Because of the several changes of premises, many documents are now missing while others are rapidly deteriorating due to dust, damp, mishandling and inappropriate cardboard files. The archives contain all the Turin psychiatric institutions' files, namely the Turin, Collegno and Savonera hospitals that were already functioning in the 1920s. The documents of the Grugliasco, Villa Regina Margherita, Villa Azzurra and Villa Rosa asylums, also kept in the archives, are not

relevant to this research since they were inaugurated after 1931, the last year considered by this study, as explained later. Because the Turin, Collegno and Savonera documents are all mixed up, so that it is impossible to know which one refers to which hospital until one actually looks at each individual file, all admission files between given dates were consulted, in order to avoid omissions.

For the purpose of this research, all the admission files for the year 1922 were consulted; then all files for 1926, generally considered a turning point as the dictatorship started implementing its most fierce repression; finally, all admission files from when G. was interned, 22 November 1928, until the day he was sent to the Racconigi psychiatric hospital for further examination, 25 September 1930: in total, 4442 admission files. The chronological focus of this research, is the first part of the fascist regime (G. was released on 9 January 1931), showing how certain trends and practices started to consolidate at the beginning of the *Ventennio*, the 20 years Mussolini was in power.

Admission files contain all the documentation relating to the internment of a patient from a legal, administrative and bureaucratic point of view: official medical certificates, dismissals' approvals, families' correspondence, Tribunal authorisations and legal statements of witnesses who backed the referral of patients to the psychiatric system. When a patient was described as "amoral", "immoral", "obscene", "degenerate", "erotomaniac", "nymphomaniac", "moral imbecile", "affected by moral madness", or when sexuality was mentioned, further investigation took place into the respective, more detailed clinical (or medical) file, if available.

In order to contextualise the research, newspapers of roughly the same periods were analysed: namely, all issues of *La Stampa* and *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, the two main daily papers of the nearest town to Collegno, Turin, for the 22 November 1928, the day G. was interned, and the first trimesters of 1926 and 1929, together with *L'Illustrazione Italiana*, a current-affairs illustrated magazine, for the last trimester of 1928.

The Collegno asylum's library was consulted in order to have a sense of what literature was available to health professionals at the time of G.'s internment, Unfortunately, many medical journals' issues appear to be missing and it is impossible to ascertain whether they were once there and have been lost in subsequent years, or whether they had never been there. Consequently, this analysis is mostly based on what could actually be found and read on the premises, although other information might have been available for consultation to doctors and nurses in the 1928–1931

period. When famous psychiatric journals, that could not be found in the Collegno library, are quoted, but that are likely to have been read by medical professionals working there at the time, they are marked with the symbol * in the note. In the bibliography at the end of the relevant chapter, all the psychiatric journals that have been consulted are listed, specifying where they were found.

The main sources of primary documentation, other than the Collegno Archives, were the State Archives in Turin. Since all the police documents for the fascist period have "disappeared", which probably means that they were destroyed at the end of the regime, this research is based mainly on *Prefettura* documentation. The *Prefettura* is the Italian institution that represents the State at a local level, coordinates the police forces and is in charge of public order. It is therefore in dialogue both with the Ministry of the Interior and with the police.

This study draws on a qualitative methodological approach and, as specified in its title, is a micro-history type of historical research: its aim is to talk about the repression of homosexuality through psychiatry during Fascism starting from the case of G., a particular and unique one used to shed light on the wider picture.

Part II: Legal Issues

Anyone wanting to carry out this type of research in Italy is required to confirm in writing that she or he is aware of, and will follow, the directives contained in two Italian decrees, n. 281 of 1999, with its amendments published in *Gazzetta Ufficiale* on 5 April 2001, and n. 196 of 2003. These impose a number of restrictions in an attempt to reconcile the need to allow historical research, in a world that veers towards data open access, with privacy and data protection issues. The decrees state that no identification of individuals must be possible when writing about facts that have something to do with sexuality, even when 70 years have passed from the closure of the file in question. This is why several details are deliberately omitted, such as the number of patients' files in full, patients' names, their place of birth, address, area where they lived and other elements that can make them identifiable. Internationally, scholars have published books on homosexuality and on sexuality during Fascism and have indicated dates of imprisonment, initials, or sometimes even first names and file numbers of persecuted people,[1] while others have resorted to invented names, but have mentioned other data, such as dates, names of places and so forth.[2]

In fact, it is impossible to talk about historical facts without revealing any details: it would jeopardise the credibility of any research and yet, strictly speaking, dates and names of archives, for instance, could be seen as identification enablers. In stating that sexuality is still an untouchable, taboo subject, the Italian legislation reinforces an outdated mentality, rooted in prejudice, that imposes serious limitations to historical research in this and related fields. It is one of the main reasons why there is a gap in scholarships on the history of homosexuality in Italy.

Part III: Historiographical Issues

Nevertheless, this gap, of particular relevance in regard to the fascist period, cannot be ascribed to the above-mentioned reason only. Italian historiography, often written by left-wing historians in the first post-war decades, has focused on those who opposed the regime, emphasising their struggle against the dictatorship. Italian school books, films and popular songs offer endless stories of heroic gestures, contributing to the creation of an idea of a partisans' resistance of epic proportions. This led to the spreading of the false myth that the majority of Italians opposed the regime, resisted, fought against it and finally managed to overthrow a much-hated dictatorship imposed from above. In reality, only a very small minority courageously opposed Mussolini, at least until the beginning of World War II. Uncomfortable truths, such as the fact that the fascist regime was immensely popular among all social classes, that it had the backing of the vast majority of Italian intellectuals and university professors are generally overlooked or underplayed.[3] The Grand Narrative of a heroic popular resistance is what most Italians still identify with and the crucial issue of collective responsibility in the dictatorship remains a taboo to this day. Italy did not have the equivalent of the Nuremberg Trials, where a nation condemned its past, drew a line in the sand and admitted its terrible mistakes. In Italy, after two years of turmoil and civil war, between 1943 and 1945, and after the initial days of Liberation, things were generally left to settle on their own accord. Most Italians, whose majority had to some degree supported the regime, subsided into a grey area, their role in the gigantic mechanism of fascist repression was quickly swept under the carpet. Very few individuals were sacked from their jobs in the public administrations or in the Tribunals, for instance, institutions that had once strongly backed and implemented Mussolini's directives. Most people carried on, only changing the colour of their shirts, and sometimes not even

doing that, as the MSI, *Movimento Sociale Italiano*, a party of "nostalgics", was allowed to be represented in Parliament. Unlike Germany, in the immediate after-war years in Italy there was not a real culture of remembrance, but rather one of forgetfulness, because reconciliation happened through forgetting. As an example of this line of continuity with the past, it has been recently pointed out that honorary citizenship given to Mussolini by many Mayors in 1923 and 1924, has only been revoked in the last few years: remarkably, in Turin, which is the focus of this dissertation, this did not happen until 2014.[4]

Italy came out of the war defeated in more ways than one: although, technically, it had joined the Allies in 1943 and therefore it had won, it had done so by betraying its initial allies, Germany and Japan, thus gaining an international reputation of lack of coherence, if not of sheer opportunism. Besides, the internal fight that marked the 1943–1945 period, between supporters of the regime and its opponents, had opened deep wounds that were difficult to heal. If the war ended with the country on its knees, economically and morally speaking, the past had also very little by way of accounts of heroism to counterbalance the general feeling of desolation: this can help frame the post-war historians' efforts to give dignity to the Italian people, by reconstructing a glorious past that would cement feelings of national pride and cohesion.

Given these premises and the renowned homophobic feelings of the Italian Communist Party members (one apt example of this is Pier Paolo Pasolini's expulsion from the party for "moral and political indignity" in 1950), it is no surprise that gay and lesbian victims of the fascist regime received very little mention after the war and in subsequent decades by historians. In addition, the series of Christian Democratic Party (DC)-led coalition governments that ruled the country till the 1980s, did not foster any interest in gender, sexuality and homosexuality issues. So, while the Italian Jewish community efficiently organised an immediate collection of survivors' memories and diligently reconstructed the repression it had suffered, keeping its memory alive, the history of other minorities who were persecuted by the regime, such as Roma people, Jehovah's Witnesses, anarchists, pacifists, Protestants, gays and lesbians, remained untold.[5]

This can explain the Italian LGBT community's expectations when archival material of the fascist years finally became consultable, by law after 70 years, so that at the end of the 1980s/beginning of the 1990s the first years of the dictatorship could be studied. This initial research, led by Giovanni Dall'Orto,[6] made it possible to identify some of the survivors

and encouraged some oral history interview work throughout the 1990s.[7] However, by then, most survivors had already died, the few that agreed to be interviewed were at least in their eighties and their memories had often faded. Accounts remained fragmented and partial.

Moreover, what emerged from the archives and subsequent oral history interviews was disappointing for most in terms of content. Instead of the expected counter-balance to the "Grand Narrative of the Resistance", there was no trace of heroic gestures, of fierce and brave opposition to the regime. The older generation of homosexuals had lived in the closet and had believed in discretion, sometimes hiding behind a respectable marriage. Even the words *omosessuale* and *lesbica* were often out of their dictionary and most of them, if male, referred to themselves using pejorative and insulting nouns such as *frocio, ricchione, femminella, arruso*. The few who accepted to be interviewed often did so only if total anonymity was guaranteed while most of them declined to talk. Their existence seemed to have been permanently scarred by the constant fear, humiliation and isolation they had endured during the *Ventennio*. In short, they represented everything the new generations of Italian queers, born after the war, stood against. The end-of-the-century queer motto "positive images, positive role models" excluded these older generation people, perceived as supine victims who had continued living underground lives well after the dictatorship and had never taken part in any of the activists' initiatives or civil rights campaigns in subsequent years. In turn, older LGBT people did not recognise themselves in the new coming-out generation's values, they felt snubbed, misunderstood, negatively judged and withdrew. The generational gap, that had impaired chances of collecting first hand oral accounts, widened further.

As Irwin-Zarecka underlines,[8] in terms of memory of the Holocaust there has always been a strong link between Germany and the United Sates, specifically because of the great presence of Jewish people who had fled Nazism and lived in North America, which has helped create a common ground for remembrance. This also contributed to making the general public, in these two countries and elsewhere, aware of the LGBT victims of Nazism. In Italy this powerful external lever has been missing: little international interest has been placed on the fascist persecution of homosexuals until very recently. The fact that Italian LGBT people had not been sent to concentration camps reinforced the pre-existing stereotype of a bland regime, where the excesses of Nazism had been avoided and where persecution of minorities was suspected of being undocumented

because almost non-existent. Besides, LGBT people sentenced to *confino*, it was often argued, were only a few hundreds, and spending two or three years on a Mediterranean island looked more like a holiday than a tough punishment.[9]

Within this context, it is easy to understand why the need to commemorate LGBT victims of Fascism arrived in Italy much later compared to Germany. When it finally arrived, it was in the wake of the German-North American route and shaped itself on it. Unsurprisingly, the most systematic attempt to collect and preserve the memories of LGBT survivors of Fascism was launched and entirely sponsored by the US-based Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation between 1994 and 1999. The pink triangle became a powerful symbol in Italy too, although, strictly speaking, it had nothing to do with the persecution of Italian homosexuals as, to this day, there is no evidence of any Italian person being deported to a concentration camp because of his/her homosexuality. In fact, the only monument to homosexuals who were victims of the regime, in Bologna,[10] is in the shape of a pink triangle, which shifts the focus of the commemoration from an Italian to a more international and generic one.

Therefore, if what Irwin-Zarecka says is true, that "a collective memory – as a set of ideas, images, feelings about the past – is best located not in the mind of individuals, but in the resources they share",[11] this rings particularly true in Italy. The scarcity of monuments in remembrance of queer victims of Fascism and the evident lack of institutional support of historical studies in this area are evidence that a collective LGBT historical memory of Fascism still needs to solidify, while the small number of Italian universities that offer gender studies and the almost total absence of private foundations backing research in the field complete the picture.

Recently, historians and researchers have started to lift the veil of silence that has surrounded fascist repression and have patiently recomposed a puzzle of the many, minute repressive events that took place, digging out proof after proof of the regime's actions. Now that survivors have almost totally disappeared, the reconstruction of the fascist dictatorship's brutality only relies on archival evidence, which is the initial motivation of the present research.

Part IV: Terminology

When talking about homosexuality during Fascism and prior to it, this study uses terms that were common at the time, but are now unacceptable, such as "sexual invert", "pederast", "pervert", "degenerate" and so forth. They appear in inverted commas the first time, to indicate that they are dated expressions from which the author wishes to distance herself, but afterwards inverted commas are abandoned because they would be an obstacle to the reader. The same applies to words that belong to the psychiatry language of the time, such as "mentally deranged", "morally insane", "moral imbecile", "frenastenic", "psychic degenerate" and the like. Post-1960 words such as "LGBT", "coming out" or "gay" are used only when referring to the post-war period and issues. The terms homosexual and homosexuality were in use in the 1920s. The word "queer" is used when talking about the past because it is the equivalent of many Italian pejorative terms that would have been in use during the fascist regime.

All Italian original text was translated by the author and is available on request. Nouns, such as Fascism, Anti-fascism and Resistance or *Resistenza* have capital letters, while adjectives or absolute adjectives (adnouns) are not. All foreign terms are in italics, apart from the name of institutions, universities, associations and the like. When quoting book titles, all nouns start with a capital letter for titles in English while Italian titles have a capital letter only for the first noun, following the two different traditions. Newspapers sometimes published articles without mentioning the journalist, which is why, in the endnote, the author's name and surname are missing. When only the initial of the author's name is mentioned, it is because this is how she/he signed her/his writing and the first name could not be traced.

Notes

1. Among them: Benadusi, Lorenzo. 2005. *Il nemico dell'uomo nuovo. L'omosessualità nell'esperimento totalitario fascista*. Milano: Feltrinelli; Dunnage, Jonathan. 2016. Policemen and "Women of Ill Repute": A Study of Male Sexual Attitudes and Behaviour in Fascist Italy. *European History Quarterly* 46 (1): 72–91; Ebner, Michael. 2011. *Ordinary Violence in Mussolini's Italy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Ebner, Michael. 2004. The Persecution of Homosexual Men Under Fascism. In

Gender, Family and Sexuality. The Private Sphere in Italy 1860–1945, Wilson Perry, ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

2. Giartosio, Tommaso and Goretti, Gianfranco. 2006. *La città e l'Isola*. Roma: Donzelli.
3. De Felice, Renzo. 1995. *Rosso e Nero*. Milano: Baldini&Castoldi; Foot, John. 2009. *Divided Memory*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan; Gordon, Robert S.C. 2013. *Scolpitelo nei cuori. L'Olocausto nella cultura italiana (1994–2010)*. Torino: Bollati Boringhieri. I ed. 2012; Zunino, Pier Giorgio. 1991. *Interpretazione e memoria del fascismo. Gli anni del regime*. Bari: Laterza.
4. Berizzi, Paolo. 2017. Il Duce è uno di noi? I Comuni si dividono sulla cittadinanza. *Il Venerdì di Repubblica*, July 14: 35.
5. See note 3.
6. Dall'Orto, Giovanni. 1987. Ci furono femminelle che piangevano quando venimmo via dalle Tremiti! *Babilonia* October: 26–28; Dall'Orto, Giovanni. 1986. Credere, Obbedire, Non Battere. *Babilonia* May: 13–17; Dall'Orto, Giovanni. 1986. Per il bene della Razza al Confino il Pederasta. *Babilonia* April–May: 14–17; Dall'Orto Giovanni. 1987. La "Tolleranza Repressiva" dell'Omosessualità. *Quaderni di Critica Omosessuale* 3: 37–57.
7. Goretti, Gianfranco. 2002. Il periodo fascista e gli omosessuali: il confino di polizia and Un "pederasta" catanese al confino. In *Le ragioni di un silenzio*, Circolo Pink, ed. Verona: Ombre Corte; Romano, Gabriella. 2001. "L'Altro Ieri", Video, and 2003. "Ricordare", Video. These were preceded by Rossi Barilli, Gianni and Hutter, Paolo. 1983. "Novecento", Radio Popolare Milano, Radio Interviews.
8. Irwin-Zarecka, Iwona. 1994. *Frames of Remembrance. The Dynamics of Collective Memory*. New Brunswick and London: Transaction.
9. An opinion voiced by Silvio Berlusconi when Prime Minister, reported in 2003. Mussolini non ha mai ammazzato nessuno. *Il Corriere della Sera*, September 11.
10. There are some commemorative plaques in Italy: one is in San Domino delle Tremiti where a group of gay men was sent to *confino* in 1938, one in the Fossoli prison camp, near Trieste and one in Catania, where most of the Tremiti *confinati* came from. The latter is regularly vandalised and, at the time of writing, it has been removed.
11. Irwin-Zarecka, Iwona, op. cit., p. 4.

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CHAPTER 2

"Dangerous to Themselves and Others, and of Public Scandal": The Internment Procedure

Abstract Through G.'s admission and medical files, this chapter illustrates internment laws and procedures, highlighting how Fascism pushed pre-existing legislation to its extreme consequences. In reconstructing internment's bureaucratic and legal practices, the chapter emphasises how the law could be bent to accommodate the regime's need to isolate those perceived as "different" and how psychiatry acquiesced in offering to "correct" individuals considered "non-conforming", "amoral", "immoral", "deviant", rebellious and, among them, homosexuals, in exchange for an increase of power and status.

Keywords Internment Law n. 36 of 1904 • Psychiatry • Public order • Non-conforming individuals

Through G.'s admission and medical files, this chapter illustrates internment laws and procedures, highlighting how Fascism pushed pre-existing legislation to its extreme consequences. In reconstructing internment's bureaucratic and legal practices, the chapter emphasises how these could be bent to accommodate the regime's need to isolate those perceived as "different" and how psychiatry acquiesced in offering to "correct" individuals considered "non-conforming", "amoral", "immoral", "deviant", rebellious and, among them, homosexuals, in exchange for an increase of power and status. Through the doctors' words, G.'s biography starts to

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take shape and it becomes clear how it matched the "degenerate" and "effeminate pederast" stereotypical description.

On 22 November 1928 a doctor was called to a police station in Turin. A 45-year-old man, G., had just been arrested for threats and aggression towards his brother.[1] The two had had a violent argument over money. The doctor visited him in the police station at 6 p.m. and declared that G. was

> affected by serious psychosis which makes him dangerous to himself and others; for this reason I consider his internment in a Psychiatric Hospital necessary and urgent.[2]

"Dangerous to himself and others"[3] is a standard expression, it corresponds to what the internment law in use at the time required. During the fascist regime internment procedure was still governed by Law n. 36 of 1904 whose article 1 stated:

> People affected by mental alienation due to any cause must be guarded and cured in asylums when they are dangerous to themselves or others or when they are of public scandal and when they are not, or cannot, be appropriately cured anywhere else.[4]

It is immediately evident that psychiatric care was declared compulsory by law only for those who constituted a social problem and not for those who were suffering from a psychiatric condition, the dangerous rather than the ill. Historians[5] have unanimously underlined how the law stressed the social control role given to asylums: at the time this was very clear to the medical professionals too, who often criticised the way the law was formulated. In fact, Law n. 36 was amply debated for over a decade before being approved[6] and remained controversial thereafter. The social control aspect given to asylums was however welcomed by some, interestingly by Luigi Anfosso, author of a pamphlet, published in Turin in 1907 with an introduction by famous Turin-based psychiatrist Antonio Marro. In highlighting the pros and cons of the newly introduced law, Anfosso gave an overall positive judgement of it, underlining that

> The main aim of the legislator was to dispose so that society could be freed from demented individuals [*mentecatti* in the original], because the

> safeguarding of public order demands that they are segregated and appropriately cured.[7]

Segregation is identified as a crucial issue of the law. From the mid-nineteenth century the European *bourgeoisie* had tried to tackle the increase of social problems created by massive urbanisation. Criminality, prostitution, alcoholism, tuberculosis, syphilis and mental alienation, all linked with impoverishment of urban working classes, were among the many tangible social threats that modern life brought. To define these worrying and constantly increasing social phenomena a term came in use, degeneration, that could explain moral decay and the connected tendency to commit crimes.[8]

As a response to these new impending social threats, scientists started formulating the basic principles of eugenics, a utopian theory whose aim was to identify ways in which human-kind and societies could be improved. Founded in Great Britain by Francis Galton, nephew of Charles Darwin, it spread successfully across Europe, and found in Italy very fertile ground in the second half of the nineteenth century.[9] An improved human race would ideally have to rely on reproduction by its best and fittest elements, the ones who had successfully fought and won the battle for survival, according to Darwinian theories. However, after World War I, it became painfully evident that also the fittest and best young men perished. Consequently, the following generation would bear the genes of those who did not fight: the sick, the old, the disabled. Research found a new impulse in trying to avert this natural decay of society. The theoretical debate gradually came to two main positions: the so-called "negative" eugenics, that developed in Protestant Northern European countries, theorised the need to eliminate unfit members of society to improve the "stock". This had extreme consequences as it led to compulsive sterilisation programmes in Sweden and Germany, and to the suppression of disabled people during the Nazi regime. Catholic-inspired "positive" eugenics concentrated on ways to cure the unfit, to isolate them and transform them into "better" human beings. How to cure, modify and prevent, therefore, became the most important aspect of the debate in Italy, which involved criminal anthropologists, criminologists, psychiatrists and politicians. Apart from a few voices of dissent, at the beginning of the twentieth century the Italian answer to questions of degeneration was a vigorous demographic campaign that aimed at inverting falling birth rates trends, together with a firm focus on preventative medicine, pre-maternal and

maternal care. Within this ideological frame, there were discussions in the Italian Parliament on the need to make pre-marriage medical certificates compulsory, so that hereditary diseases would not be passed on, on whether marriage for epileptics was to be declared illegal, on banning mixed-race relationships, on improving post-natal services offered to women, and on including sexual health courses in schools' programmes. Maternity now had a social function, private choices belonged to the public sphere and were the way in which citizens showed civil responsibility.

All these theories, as acutely observed by Mantovani,[10] were inherited by Fascism, which simply magnified them: the central role given to the demographic campaign, issues of race and the necessity to protect it, outlawing abortion and the use of contraception, the massive vaccination programmes, the improvement of post-natal care, the aim to uproot any manifestation of degeneration to guarantee the best Italic race, the need to cure the different and non-conforming elements of society could all be ascribed to a eugenics source.

Accordingly, the fascist regime did not feel any need to change Law n. 36, as it could very easily be bent to accommodate the dictatorship's needs and its eugenics programme: social danger, under Mussolini, could be interpreted not only as criminality, prostitution, idleness, vagrancy, as it had increasingly done from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, but also as Anti-fascism or rebellious behaviour. The definition was vague enough to become a powerful tool to silence dissent, whenever needed.

Across Europe, science started investigating the possibility of some inherited characteristics that would show if an individual had a congenital predisposition to degeneration and crime. The intention was to identify those who were genetically inclined to become social problems, so that they could be prevented from any wrong-doing. Darwinism had shown that in nature those who were not able to adapt, either perished or were destined to remain at a lower level of evolution, therefore inferior. The same principles were applied to men and women. Deviant behaviour was thought to show a lack of development, the causes of which had to be analysed. The Italian criminal anthropologist Cesare Lombroso pushed this to its extreme consequences: if there were innate elements of degeneration or lack of development, then it would be possible to detect criminals and deviants by simply scanning their family history, their genetic configuration and their physical appearance. Inspired by several theories that circulated in Europe at the time,[11] his atavism theory proved that delay or lack of development could be inherited and would worsen with

each generation. It was the final proof that degeneration was hereditary. Physical common aspects were searched for in criminals and prostitutes, in an attempt to find visible elements, a kind of degeneration stigmata, that would allow society to preventatively intervene, cure or isolate its flawed and potentially dangerous members even before they committed a crime. Physiognomical measurements became essential when dealing with degenerates: in evolutionist terms, the aim was to connect physical aspects such as the shape of the skull or the length of the limbs with lack or delay in development. This would allow professionals to categorise people into types, thus preventatively diagnosing them by just looking at them. It was seen as a decisive arrival point for atavism, whose aim was

> objectivity as refusal of a psychiatric practice that is centred on symptoms. The criminal and the mad individual speak by themselves, through a series of revelatory elements, and the task of the expert is merely that of a correct but simple connection between these connotative elements.[12]

Criminality and degeneration were now two faces of the same monster: criminals were believed to have a tendency towards immoral behaviour, while immoral or amoral individuals were in turn thought to have a genetic, inborn inclination towards crime.

The idea of a moral cure started to take form in the first half of the nineteenth century across Europe.[13] Originally thought to be a medical approach that took into consideration all aspects of an individual, it gradually came to signify that criminals and deviants had to be corrected from a moral point of view, their values had to be eradicated and substituted with those considered "normal". As Frigessi observes, "in a country with a strong Catholic tradition, moral cure could easily lose its Enlightenment connotations to get inspiration from religious principles".[14] Moral judgement and behaviour correction became a fundamental part of the psychiatrist's role.

To quote a famous concept of Foucault, medical science outlined what was to be considered normality and, in doing so, it continued to define what and who was to be classified as out of the norm.[15] Among all sciences, psychiatry had the duty to be the most normative. When sexuality and sexual perversions became an important element of psychiatric analysis, during the nineteenth century, there were immediate consequences that Tamagne clearly explains:

> Until the end of 19th century the field of sexual perversion had remained the prerogative of the courts of justice. The law punished acts like sodomy, but did not recognize a particular criminal status. But then, psychiatrists began to take an interest in sexual perversions. Now, the criminal was defined by his perversion: he was a homosexual, paedophile, sadist, or fetishist.[16]

Looking at Germany, France and England, Tamagne concludes that "the medical study of homosexuality arises from the incapacity of the law to define homosexuals and thus to work out a specific repressive strategy".[17] This rings even truer for the Italian situation where same-sex relationships were never mentioned as crimes by the Zanardelli and subsequent Rocco legal codes.

It is within this cultural context that asylums were given increasing responsibilities as a means of social control in Italy, sanctioned by Law n. 36, as they would be in charge of keeping non-conforming people, perceived as dangerous, separate. Society, modern life, big cities were now seen as the main cause of alienation and mental degeneration.[18] Mental health hospitals had to transform individuals, trying to correct their behaviour, moral code and set of values that had been corrupted by alienating life-styles. When that was not possible, they would have to free society from this burden, thus acting as a merely reclusive institution. "Conceived as they were for social defence, to incapacitate the dangerously insane (…) [mental health institutions] shared many characteristics with penitentiaries".[19]

Law n. 36 of 1904 also conferred full and unlimited power to the Director of a mental health institution, who now would oversee all aspects of an asylum's management, from economical to disciplinary, from medical to managerial and legal. For many, this completed a cycle that saw the rise in status of psychiatry, a process that had started almost two centuries before.[20] In fact, the law managed to give more power to the security forces, on the one hand, while on the other

> psychiatrists co-participated in a role that in the past had exclusively pertained to the police and to the judges and appeared as a new tool of public order defence, less discredited than the previous two and besides imbued by the halo of science.[21]

In order to understand how homosexuality came to be pathologised we must finally analyse the definition of "*pazzia morale*", moral madness, a concept that was already establishing itself across Europe and that Cesare Lombroso extensively focused on. As early as 1835, James Cowles Pritchard had presented moral insanity as a type of illness. In his words it was

> madness, consisting in a morbid perversion of the natural feelings, affections, inclinations, temper, habits, moral dispositions, and natural impulses, without any remarkable disorder or defect of the intellect or knowing and reasoning faculties, and particularly without any insane delusion or hallucination.[22]

As mentioned earlier, throughout Europe scientific research was converging on considering criminals, prostitutes, mentally ill people and deviants as people with a congenital genetic deficiency that translated into emotional inadequacy and immaturity.[23] The same had to apply to homosexuality. Some scientists started from these assumptions and theorised that after an initial pre-puberty phase where all individuals were bisexuals, "normal" men and women developed heterosexuality, while a minority were unable to move into adulthood and "remained" homosexuals.[24] But another crucial issue had been debated from the 1870s. Italian psychiatrists, criminologists and politicians had focused their attention on Lombroso's theories and had started debating their implicit, huge consequences: if criminality was a genetically inherited factor, a sign of lack of development or inability to adapt to the environment, this would imply no responsibility when committing crime, a statement that subverted all previous jurisdiction theories.

Similarly, if homosexuality was a congenital condition, it could not be averted. Most importantly, it could not be cured. When talking about the distinctive elements of Italian psychiatry at the time, Donnelly identifies

> a certain therapeutic pessimism, even fatalism, about the prognosis of mental disorders; the expectation was not quick treatment and release, but having to deal with chronic, enduring, and probably degenerative conditions.[25]

Some scientists were convinced of the presence of "*libero arbitrio*", free choice, and they rejected the idea of an immutable destiny that was

inherited and unchangeable. This made them firm believers in the possibility of curing moral degenerates. Others remained more aligned with the original Lombrosian beliefs. The echo of these contrasting opinions (which incidentally is at the core of Catholic beliefs, on whether Man has a predestined future decided by God and therefore immutable, or whether he is in control of his actions and can modify the course of events) finds a reverberation in what psychiatrists and society thought of homosexuality: was it an involuntary condition that one was born with, a genetic flaw, or was it a choice, a "vice" that one indulged in deliberately? Was it the result of a disfunction or hormonal imbalance that could be chemically or surgically modified? Was it retraceable in a family history where other immoral behaviours could be observed? The accepted final redeeming statement of this dispute seems to have been that homosexuality, like any other form of moral madness and deviancy, could be subdivided in two categories: congenital and acquired. The first type was a more serious condition as its cure would be difficult or even impossible. If it was acquired, it attracted a tougher moral judgement, but had identifiable social or psychological causes and could be eradicated. This binary interpretation has remained unchallenged until recent times in Italy and was certainly present during the fascist regime, together with other categories that were in place when considering sexual inversion.[26] Another common trait between moral madness and homosexuality was in the habitual/occasional Lombrosian distinction with regard to criminality, elaborated particularly by Enrico Ferri.[27] There was clearly a hierarchy between the two conditions and the second one implied, both for criminals and moral degenerates, that a social external factor might have been determining it. Therefore, it was a temporary situation that could be corrected.

The "public scandal" element, necessary to decide internment, present in article 1 of Law n. 36, shows again how the public order concerns overruled the strictly medical and psychiatric reasons for internment. Only what attracted public attention called for repression and segregation: this message was certainly powerful with regard to sexuality and sexual inversion in particular. In Italy, homosexuality was punished when recognisable, declared, public.[28] Hypocrisy, one could argue, was legally prescribed and was a condition for survival.

Finally, to decide somebody's internment there had to be, by law, an official authorisation by the Tribunal. However, in urgent cases, security forces could intervene and give a provisional authorisation, while waiting for magistrates to ratify it. The patient in this case would be admitted and

kept under observation for a period of 15 days, extendible to a maximum of 30 days, while the need for internment was being officially sanctioned. As Petracci underlines, this aspect of the law meant that during Fascism public security forces could legally enter Italian asylums whenever they wanted.[29] It was in fact very unlikely that a Tribunal would question a decision taken by the local security forces and corroborated by a doctor's statement. The anomaly became the norm and that is exactly what happened to G.: the Turin Court ratified his internment on the 31 January 1929, thus giving a seal of approval to something that had already happened more than two months earlier.

Another weak and interpretable aspect of the law was that internment could be requested by a family member, a tutor or "anyone else, in the interest of the sick person and of society".[30] As the Collegno archives show, families often referred relatives to the psychiatric system for a number of reasons: the shame they caused, the financial difficulties of having to cope with someone who could not work and contribute to his/her maintenance, rebellious behaviour and the impossibility of looking after him/her, to mention a few. Frequently the asylum was a way to settle disputes or to get rid of an unwanted relative. In the course of the debate that preceded the approval of the law, a Senator had warned, that its text should aim at

> safeguarding the liberties of the individual so that it could never happen that, because of evil hatred or greed to enjoy and seize someone else's properties, an unfortunate person could falsely be declared mad and thus be hijacked and dragged inside an asylum.[31]

Furthermore, the "anyone else" opened many other, terrifying possibilities: neighbours could request internment of a person behaving "strangely", the police, the *Carabinieri*, the Mayor, an employer or any figure of authority could ask for someone to be interned if alleged public scandal had been caused. Law n. 36 enhanced their powers and contributed to keeping the population in a state of constant fear.

This chapter looked at the internment Law n. 36 of 1904 and on how the regime used it for its repressive purposes. In particular, it highlighted in what ways the law could be used to persecute "different" and non-conforming behaviours, with homosexuality among them. Its article 1 stressed the moral control function given to psychiatry. The following chapter explains how homosexuality and its stereotype came to be considered a form of degeneration and of mental illness, pertaining to psychiatry.

Notes

1. Police files are not available, but it is possible to deduct this from his Collegno asylum admission files: CA, G.'s file n. 4***2.
2. CA, op. cit., Medical Certificate.
3. Law n. 36, 1904, art. 1. http://www.cartedalegare.san.beniculturali.it/fileadmin/redazione/Materiali/Legge_14_febbraio_1904.pdf
4. See note 3.
5. Among them Lonni, Ada. 1982. Pubblica Sicurezza, Sicurezza Pubblica e Malato di Mente. La Legge del 1904. In *Follia, Psichiatria, Società*, De Bernardi, Alberto, ed. Milano: Franco Angeli; Babini, Valeria. 2009. *Liberi tutti. Manicomi e psichiatri in Italia. Una storia del Novecento*. Bologna: Il Mulino; Canosa, Romano. 1979. *Storia del manicomio in Italia dall'Unità a oggi*. Milano: Feltrinelli; De Peri, Francesco. 1984. Il Medico e il Folle: istituzione psichiatrica, sapere scientifico e pensiero medico tra Otto e Novecento. In *Storia d'Italia, Malattia e Medicina*. Annali 7. Torino: Einaudi; Donnelly, Michael. 1992. *The Politics of Mental Health in Italy*. London and New York: Routledge; Fiorino, Vinzia. 2002. *Matti, Indemoniati e Vagabondi*. Venezia: Marsilio; Moraglio, Massimo. 2006. Dentro e fuori il manicomio. L'assistenza psichiatrica tra le due guerre. *Contemporanea* 9 (1): 15–34; Moraglio, Massimo. 2002. *Costruire il manicomio. Storia dell'ospedale psichiatrico di Grugliasco*. Milano: Unicopli; Tornabene, Massimo. 2007. *La Guerra dei Matti. Il Manicomio di Racconigi tra fascismo e Liberazione*. Boves: Araba Fenice.
6. Extensive account of the debate in and out of Parliament in Lonni, Ada, op. cit. and Canosa, Romano, op. cit.
7. Anfosso, Luigi. 1907. *La legislazione italiana sui manicomi e sugli alienati. Commento alla Legge 1904*. Torino: Unione Tipografico-editrice Torinese, p. 63.
8. Dall'Orto, Giovanni. 1985. Il concetto di degenerazione nel pensiero borghese dell'Ottocento. *Sodoma* 2, http://www.fondazionesandropenna.it/SodomaDue; Pick, Daniel. 1989. *Faces of Degeneration. A European Disorder, c. 1844–c. 1918*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Greenslade, William. 1994. *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel 1880–1940*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
9. On eugenics theory, debate and its developments in Italy the main sources of this research are Mantovani, Claudia. 2004. *Rigenerare la società. L'eugenetica in Italia dalle origini ottocentesche agli Anni Trenta*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino; Cassata, Francesco. 2011. *Building the New Man: Eugenics, Racial Science and Genetics in XX Century Italy*. Budapest: Central European University Press.

10. Mantovani, Claudia, op. cit.
11. Frigessi, Delia. 2003. *Cesare Lombroso*. Torino: Einaudi. An accurate analysis of primary sources on atavism in psychiatry and criminal anthropology in Europe is deferred to a more in-depth future research.
12. Villa, Renzo. 1982. Perizie psichiatriche e formazione degli stereotipi dei devianti: note per una ricerca. In De Bernardi, Alberto, ed., op. cit., p. 392.
13. Babini, Valeria. 1996. *La questione dei frenastenici, Alle origini della psicologia scientifica in Italia*, 1870–1910. Milano: Franco Angeli; Jones, W. David. 2016. *Disordered Personalities and Crime. An Analysis of the History of Moral Insanity*. London and New York: Routledge; Pick, Daniel, op. cit.; Schneck, Jerome. 1960. *A History of Psychiatry*. Springfield: Charles C. Thomas; Porter, Roy. 2002. *Madness. A Brief History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; De Bernardi, Alberto, ed., op. cit.
14. Frigessi, Delia, op. cit., p. 152.
15. Foucault, Michel. 1989. *Madness and Civilisation*. London and New York: Routledge. I ed. 1961.
16. Tamagne, Florence. 2006. *A History of Homosexuality in Europe. Berlin, London, Paris 1919–1939*. New York: Algora, p. 153. I ed. 2000.
17. Ibid.
18. Moraglio, Massimo, op. cit., 2002.
19. Donnelly, Michael, op. cit., p. 37.
20. Lonni, Ada, op. cit.
21. Canosa, Romano, op. cit., p. 98.
22. Pritchards Cowles, James. 1835. *A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind*. Quoted p. 117 in Schneck, Jerome., op. cit.
23. On Cesare Lombroso's theories and how they affected Italian psychiatry theory and practice, on moral madness and the debate on it during the second part of the nineteenth century in Italy the main source is Frigessi, Delia, op. cit., 2003.
24. Dall'Orto, Giovanni, op. cit., 1985.
25. Donnelly, Michael, op. cit., p. 36.
26. See Chap. 5.
27. Frigessi, Delia, op. cit. See also Chap. 3.
28. Dall'Orto, Giovanni. 1987. La "Tolleranza Repressiva" dell'Omosessualità. *Quaderni di Critica Omosessuale* 3: 37–57; Rossi Barilli, Gianni. 1999. *Il movimento gay in Italia*. Feltrinelli: Milano.
29. Petracci, Matteo. 2014. *I Matti del Duce*. Roma: Donzelli.
30. Art. 2, see note 3.
31. *Atti Parlamentari Senato del Regno*, legislatura XXI, II sessione 1902–1903, 26.3.1903, quoted in Canosa, Romano, op cit., p. 113.

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CHAPTER 3

"Psychic Degenerate": Why G. Was Interned

Abstract This chapter explains how homosexuality was pathologised: to do this, it traces the origins of the "effeminate male" stereotype, explaining how the socio-cultural concept of degeneration was extended to include "sexual inversion". Through the doctors' words, G.'s biography starts to take shape and it becomes clear how it matched the "degenerate" and "effeminate pederast" stereotypical description.

Keywords Effeminate male stereotype • Homosexuality • Vagrant • Unemployed

This chapter explains how homosexuality was pathologized. To do this, it traces the origins of the "effeminate male" stereotype, identifying how the socio-cultural concept of degeneration was extended to include "sexual inversion" and how the figure of the "pederast" was essential to the fascist rhetoric of virility. It illustrates how G. fitted the stereotype of the homosexual and of the degenerate.

G. was referred by his brother. But a simple dispute over money between siblings could have been settled by the police, even considering threats, aggressiveness or disturbance caused to neighbours.

In this case, internment was "necessary and urgent"[1] because G. showed several aspects of degeneracy. To start with, he had no fixed address, thus falling in the socially dangerous category of vagrants. In G.'s admission file

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there is a certificate, handwritten by his birth-village *Podestà*, the Medieval name given to Mayors during the fascist regime, which stated that he "has always led a wandering and vagabond life".[2] Being a vagabond with no fixed address was no longer a crime under the 1889 Zanardelli legal code, still in force in 1928, but according to its art. 94[3] it was a factor that could justify security forces' intervention.

Secondly G. was unemployed, another socially worrying element. Here it represented an even bigger anomaly since he had a degree and came from a middle-class family. Unemployment could be read as a clear sign of his lack of social skills together with an inability to fit into a work environment, which, as Dörner points out, has been closely tied with insanity from the industrial revolution onwards.[4] Thirdly, he owned nothing. One of his brothers in fact declared that he had no assets or properties in the village where he was born[5] and the Turin police confirmed that, consequently, there was no need to nominate a financial administrator in his absence.[6] This could have been interpreted as another sign of his lack of financial skills or, worse, as an indication of him having dissipated his wealth. The file contains correspondence between the hospital Administration and the Province Authorities with regard to payments of the patient's fees, which testifies that, despite its means, G.'s family did not agree to pay them to have him sent to one of the pavilions for paying guests, which would have guaranteed a better treatment. His social status box is filled in with "*povero*", indigent, belonging to the lower classes that so worried the *bourgeois* state from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.

Above all, G. was a homosexual. When denouncing him to the police, his brother, a renowned doctor and a fascist of the first hour, as he proudly described himself,[7] had not just told them about his persecutory actions to obtain money. He had concluded his accusations with an explosive detail: G. had "homosexual tendencies". He made this revelation knowing it would lead to internment and in fact this aspect was prominently noted in G.'s Collegno asylum admission and medical file.[8] This is why a doctor was called to the police station that evening: homosexuality was considered a mental disorder and had to be dealt with by a medical professional.

With this aspect of G.'s personality in mind, most elements of his character and biography fell into place. He was the perfect depiction of the stereotype of the homosexual in too many ways. Several historians[9] have concentrated on the creation of masculinity ideals as a revealing element of Fascism and its repression of the "other". George Mosse was the first to analyse the origins of the masculine stereotype,[10] which he placed in

bourgeois society of the late-eighteenth century. As a response to the increase in social problems connected with urban poverty, he observed, "manliness" and traditional values offered a powerful counter-balancing measure to the crisis; but "modern masculinity needed the countertype"[11] and therefore those who did not conform to this ideal masculinity concept were identified as "other", different, unmanly. The figure of the dandy that embodied the *Fin-du-Siècle* attempts to redefine men's role in society, was now stigmatised as a clear sign of moral and social corruption. Benadusi[12] underlined how the fascist propaganda attempts to build the Italian New Man ideal could only be fully effective if its antagonist was created too, that of the "effeminate pederast". Virility, Mosse argued, became a national symbol during the regime, embodied by the dictator's himself, his physique, his behaviour and way of addressing the crowds, his gestures; dandyism, weakness, effeminacy were perceived as anything that stood in the way, anything that was anti-Mussolini and his ideology. Furthermore, as the regime concentrated on demographic campaigns, homosexuality came to be perceived as sterile and therefore essentially anti-fascist and selfish, against what was good for the nation. The New Italian Man's actions were to be inspired by his love for the country: private life was considered a responsible act towards the nation, sexuality had to be aimed at procreation. Every Italian had the duty to be physically and morally fit, the regime insisted on the necessity to practice regular physical activity that would guarantee strength and health. Anybody that appeared different from this norm was considered as visibly contesting fascist ideals: the anti-New Man stereotype was lazy, weak, cowardly, undisciplined, selfish in its anti-family choice and therefore a scrounger and a parasite of society. His refusal to be an integral part of civilised life made him ugly, disharmonious, ridiculous.

Zuccarello[13] investigated these concepts further, showing how effeminacy came to equal "ugliness" under Fascism, the opposite of grace, strength and classically-inspired beauty: the homosexual was portrayed as thin, emaciated, pale, his eyes reddened by vice. A concept that the psychiatric profession took to its extreme consequences, in accordance with Lombroso's theories: deviancy, as mentioned, was thought to have some identifiable physical traits, homosexuals, criminals, prostitutes were examined, in search for some physical points of resemblance that would allow categorisation.

Going back to G.'s case, it is now clear how he could be interned, given the theoretical and cultural context. The Collegno asylum doctor confirmed

the diagnosis written by the colleague who had visited him at the police station and G.'s first succinct medical assessment is the perfect summary of what a homosexual was expected to be like: born in a small village in Piedmont, in the North West of Italy, as a boy he was sent to a seminary, so that he would be initiated to the clerical profession, but he changed idea; the implication of this statement is that he showed inconsistency, lack of will, fickleness, which, as highlighted earlier, were regarded as typical of effeminacy. Before World War I he joined the *Carabinieri* but, after three years of regular service, he was dismissed "for reasons that he ignores"[14] a doubly negative remark on the fact that, firstly, he was considered unsuitable to be in a prestigious force such as the *Carabinieri* and, secondly, he did not care to find out why he was dismissed, showing superficiality, or maybe a devious aptitude to lying, as he did not want to admit the reasons for his dismissal. He did not fight at the front, thus revealing cowardice, unfitness and lack of strength, other elements that linked him to the anti-New Man stereotype. He managed to become an officer, but was "retroceded because of his homosexual practices – which the patient admits – with a soldier".[15] He then got a degree in Law and taught in various private schools, but at the time of internment he was unemployed and lived in Milan with a woman. All these statements pointed unmistakably at social inadequacy connected with moral degeneracy: he unashamedly admitted homosexuality, was unable to find a proper job and to lead a normal life. Besides, he scandalously co-habited with a woman to whom he was not married. The doctor added that G. had asked his brother for some money, but, at his refusal to give him anything, he had threatened to kill his brother and himself unless he obtained the sum requested: suicide tendencies were a common reason for internment, as the Collegno archives reveal.[16] Besides being considered contagious, they were also believed, in Darwinian terms, to be the ultimate sign of unfitness to life. Homicidal threats in this case must have offered G.'s brother a further good reason to denounce him to the police. Most importantly, not only had G. become aggressive in his requests, he had also shown he wanted to live off other people's wealth: in other words, he was a lazy, selfish parasite, attributes increasingly associated with homosexuality. To conclude, as mentioned earlier, G. had no fixed address, an unmistakable sign of moral and mental disorder for psychiatrists at the time. From the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, asylums had been working as a segregation place for vagrants, together with alcoholics, prostitutes and other categories of people who were thought to be infected and infectious members of society.[17]

Therefore, G. embodied the quintessentially different, rebellious, degenerate, non-conforming and socially threatening individual. In addition, he was "not conscious of his state",[18] which translates into a refusal to consider himself mentally ill, a crucial aspect of what was thought to be the path to rehabilitation.[19] The Collegno nurse typed on the dotted line next to "diagnosis", on the front page of his medical notes: "exaltation in psychic degenerate with homosexual tendencies",[20] and G. entered one of the biggest psychiatric institutions in Italy.

The chapter explained how G. could be considered a moral deviant in need of psychiatric care and highlighted how his personality description matched the stereotype of the moral degenerate and of the homosexual. However, G.'s case is unique because he left a personal account of his experience: this exceptional autobiographical piece of writing is the focus of the following chapter.

Notes

1. CA, G.'s file, op. cit.
2. Ibid.
3. Quoted in Lonni, Ada, op. cit.
4. Dörner, Klaus. 1975. *Il Borghese e il Folle. Storia sociale della psichiatria*. Bari: Laterza. I ed. 1969.
5. CA, G.'s file, op. cit.
6. Ibid.
7. Bibliographical reference of his brother's autobiographical book cannot be given because the author's surname would make G. immediately identifiable. See Chap. 1.
8. CA, op. cit.
9. Among them Bellassai, Sandro. 2005. The Masculine Mystique: Antimodernism and Virility in Fascist Italy. *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 10 (3): 314–335; Bellassai, Sandro and Malatesta, Maria, eds. 2000. Genere e Mascolinità. Uno sguardo storico Roma: Bulzoni; Benadusi, Lorenzo, op. cit.; Mosse, George. 1996. *The Image of Man. The Creation of Modern Masculinity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; Spackman, Barbara. 1996. *Fascist Virilities. Rhetoric, Ideology and Social Fantasy in Italy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota.
10. Mosse, George, op. cit.
11. Ibid., p. 13.
12. Benadusi, Lorenzo, op. cit.
13. Zuccarello, Ugo. 2000. *Omosessualità maschile e modelli di virilità*. In Bellassai, Sandro and Malatesta, Maria, eds., op. cit.

14. CA, G.'s file, op. cit.
15. Ibid.
16. See Chap. 6.
17. Fiorino, Vinzia, op. cit.
18. CA, G.'s file, op. cit.
19. See Chap. 6.
20. CA, op. cit., Tabella Nosografica.

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CHAPTER 4

"He and I": G'.s Voice

Abstract This chapter analyses the autobiographical piece of writing that G. deposited at his lawyer's office before being arrested and interned. In this unique and precious document, he recounted his version of the story, narrating his life and describing the discrimination he had to endure. He accused his brother of persecuting him and attempted to reveal what lay beneath his hypocrisy. This document, that G. entitled *memoriale*, reveals the level of pressure and persecution a homosexual had to face under the fascist regime. Ahead of his time, G. highlighted the socio-economic consequences of homophobia and felt entitled to compensation.

Keywords Situational homosexuality • Passive/active homosexuality • Habitual/casual homosexuality • Persecution

This chapter analyses the autobiographical piece of writing that G. deposited at his lawyer's office before being arrested and interned.[1] In it, he recounted his version of the story, narrating his life and the discrimination he had had to endure. He accused his brother of persecuting him and attempted to reveal what lay beneath his hypocrisy. This unique document reveals the level of pressure and persecution a homosexual had to face under the fascist regime. Ahead of his time, G. highlighted the

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socio-economic consequences of homophobia and felt entitled to a compensation.

The peculiarity of this case is that G. left us his version of the facts, a 31-page long statement[2] which he had deposited at a lawyer's office before his arrest and subsequent internment, thus showing he foresaw the potential consequences of his actions. Probably he had someone deliver it or he sent it via post, as on the front page there is the lawyer's address, in Milan. The front page shows several remarks written in pen by different people. One states that a copy was sent to the King's Attorney, the other one that the original was deposited at the Turin Attorney General Office. A third note is by G. himself where he signed, a month after his interment, authenticating it as his own writing. Evidently, this was meant to be an important document, for several people and for different purposes. It was kept in G.'s medical file and it was referred to by doctors as one of the patient's manifestations to be analysed, but probably in its author's intentions it could also be exhibited in court in case of legal procedures. Most importantly, it was clearly conceived to be a public document, something that, in the hopes of the writer, would be read by lawyers, police officers, judges, bureaucrats, relatives and doctors. This is a particularly relevant novelty in itself: for the fascist period we are used to reading letters sent to one figure of authority only, written to ask for a more lenient sentence for instance, and therefore scholars have so far analysed texts that were meant to be a sort of private dialogue between two individuals.[3] G. wrote something the tone and style of which resemble a court defence speech.

The first reader had to be G.'s brother, through the lawyer: G. opened by asking him to read this document and "to have the courage to proceed extra-judicially",[4] thus foreseeing that a court procedure was likely. "On this document depends the salvation not just of two brothers, but of entire families"[5]: the style of this document is emphatic, as can be expected given the rhetoric of the time, and the fact that its author is a lawyer.

> If this piece of writing does not rescue me, then (if logic is still valid) it will necessarily send me to the asylum or to prison. But may my tyrant brother be warned, to end up in an asylum also a judgement by professionals is required.[6]

Similarly, G. added in a rather complicated manner, to end up in prison one person's statement alone would not be sufficient.

It emerges that G. sent this document specifically to the lawyer who had defended his brother in a court case and had "rescued him from incarceration".[7] A strange choice as he was unlikely to be sympathetic to him or to accept to defend him. It seems to be a way to guarantee that his words would be heard by his sibling.

G. then proceeded with his autobiographical account. At the time of writing, G. was 45, 11 years younger than his brother, and the two had been fighting for more than 30 years. He had always been treated as "a stranger, a superfluous or even damaging individual to the family".[8] Things had reached a point where his brother had even publicly incited him to commit suicide, an action that deserved from three to seven years sentence by the Zanardelli Code (art. 370), still in force in 1928, and was therefore a strong point in G.'s defence. Consequently, G. felt fatally pushed into using his gun first against his brother and then against himself: it was a way to justify his threats as a response to provocation, which in legal terms was a mitigating factor. Trying to reopen dialogue and wanting to be sensible, G. had sent an intermediary in the past, Mr. C., who was brutally sent away. So, at that point, G. had thought of going to Turin to settle the issue in person but had decided to write to his brother's lawyer first, to make his point clear.

The following chapter is entitled "*LUI ed IO*" [capitals as in the original],[9] "He and I". Here G. started by explaining what his brother was like since he was young:

> An absolute dominator with his family, he always did what he wanted to do, disposing of others as he pleased, only thinking about his interests.[10]

He had had an easy life, comfortably reached his degree without financial thoughts, could spend money as he liked, was free to do as he pleased, went to parties and even had a banquet organised to celebrate his degree. Then he married a rich woman, who allowed him to continue to lead the life of a millionaire. Even the money for his wedding was provided by his father[11] and when his wife died, her relatives continued to give him the necessary sums to carry on this *menage*. While all this was taking place, G. at the age of 10 was sent to work as a cleaner and runner in a deli shop in Turin. Then his brother decided to send him, against his will, to a religious seminary where he spent the years between 12 and 25 of age. G. eventually escaped as he did not want to become a priest, but his brother started influencing their father so that he would force him to join the *Carabinieri*.

"From here he won't escape again" he would have stated.[12] G.'s youth—he continued—was destroyed by his brother. He was lucky to find sympathetic minds within the seminary and was allowed to teach there for five years, so that he could pay his own studies. In one year he got the *licenza ginnasiale* with excellent marks, then he obtained a diploma in French and finally a degree in Law. He never received any help from the rich and successful sibling. When he moved to Turin in order to complete his university studies, he had to teach in a private Catholic school to pay his living and university expenses. Yet, despite these brilliant achievements, his brother continued to show cynical contempt and manipulated their father into not giving him any financial support to start his career or to rent a room in Turin. G. was always dismissed, despised, never trusted able to have his own family because "physically and morally not suitable for marriage",[13] a statement very much in line with eugenic theories.[14] That is why he started travelling in Italy and abroad, looking for jobs here and there: this is a clear attempt to justify his non-conforming life-style, as G. must have known that being a "vagabond" would have looked bad on his CV.[15]

The section entitled "My only black spot"[16] opens with a confession: forced to spend his youth in a men-only environment,

> fatally, because of the environment … I fell almost unconsciously (certainly without foreseeing the consequences) into the deplorable sexual habit that unfortunately is typical of the majority of those who spend their physical development period in men's communities. (…) The monster [underlined in the original] (and I will always shout monster until I am alive) uses this consequence, whose responsibility is his, and has used it as a most powerful and vile weapon to beat me, humiliate me, ruin me, increase respite around me … revealing it to everybody in public, adding to the list of my credits also that of … pederasty! (in fact, in my case it would be more precise to say homosexuality).[17]

Here G.'s words demonstrate that he was aware of the current ideas on homosexuality and, like in writings by those who were asking for a more lenient sentence or to be pardoned, he knew what his readers expected.[18] Firstly, he underlined he was not a congenital homosexual, he acquired what he described as a "deplorable sexual habit"[19] because of the environment he was in, an important distinction to make as it would entail substantially different consequences.[20] This type of homosexuality has

been defined "situational" by Robert Aldrich[21] who pointed out that in a society where female chastity before marriage was obligatory, homosexual sex was tolerated in certain circumstances as it "represented a 'lesser evil' than the seduction of virgins or married women".[22] Secondly, G. clearly stated he was not a pederast, that is, a passive homosexual, committing an act against nature. In his case, he specified, it would be more correct to talk about homosexuality, which indicates that he wanted to be considered an "active" homosexual, another very important element to insist upon because it would have very different consequences.[23]

Aldrich explained the cultural origin of this statement very clearly:

> sexual attitudes in the South placed great emphasis on an individual's taking the "active" sexual role in intercourse – that is, penetrating his partner, whether male or female, rather than being penetrated. (…) A man proved his virility and retained social status if he only played the "active" role – or publicly claimed to do so – in intercourse.[24]

"Coming out", as it would be called nowadays, was a rare practice: it is not surprising, given that one of the most punishable aspects of homosexuality was its visibility. Besides, as we have seen, "scandal" was not only an aggravating factor in legal, public security proceedings, it could also be decisive in determining the need for internment.[25] Consequently, silence was a necessary condition for survival. Previous oral history interviews confirmed this: there was even some form of internal distancing, within queer coteries, from those who were too visible, as they drew negative attention to the group.[26] Benadusi[27] mentions two instances of men declaring their homosexuality in the fascist years. The first one is the case of a teacher from Ancona who, accused several times for "*oltraggio al pudore*" (offence to decency), corruption of minors and "*adescamento al libertinaggio*" (luring somebody into libertine behaviour), as he had been banned from teaching, had received a number of *ammonizioni* and sentences, was on "*libertà vigilata*" (slightly more lenient than home arrests), started to fight against these restrictive measures. In his letters to the authorities, he admitted he was homosexual, but argued that, if homosexuality was considered an undesired gift of nature, an involuntary condition such as being physically impaired, deaf, blind or paralysed, why should it be persecuted, as physically disabled people were not? He had clearly assimilated the terms of the scientific dispute on whether a congenital condition would or would not imply any responsibility on the part of

those who committed a crime or an immoral action.[28] The other case was that of two men arrested with a friend in Germany in 1935 for Marks smuggling. They stated they were a couple because they were unaware it would have legal consequences in Germany, as in Italy sex between adult men technically was not against the law. They avoided trial in Germany and were repatriated but received a three years' *confino* sentence each "because in front of foreign magistrates they had pronounced lying statements which slandered Italy".[29]

From these two examples and from G.'s case, it emerges that to disclose one's homosexuality was a desperate, last resort. When all was lost, it was the final card to play to highlight some "mitigating" factors. That is precisely what G. did. He "pleaded guilty" because he knew that his brother was likely to mention his homosexuality to the police. He knew the legal framework very well, as can be expected of a man with a degree in Law, and knew equally well what the authorities wanted to hear. So, he claimed he had acquired the vice while in a men-only environment, thus stating his homosexuality was caused by a particular situation and underlined he had been sent to the seminary by his family, against his will. Therefore, the responsibility for the "contagion" was not his. Besides, he was not a passive pederast, a decisive and crucial detail which implied that in his case there was no sexual inversion. He was simply a man driven by a natural need who, pushed by imposed circumstances, had sexual intercourse with men because women were absent. In other words, he was a "situational" homosexual, to quote Aldrich.[30] His defence followed a recognisable pattern and in previous oral history interviews, the author frequently came across a similar scenario: many older gay men claimed they had sex with other men because they had been infected with the vice, when still young, by adult men. One man said he got married to stop rumours about his sexuality, while he continued having relationships with men; but always as "a man", that is, as an active homosexual, and he added that the only thing he regretted in life was to have had an affair with a man with whom he "had played the part of the woman".[31]

As a result of his homosexuality becoming known, G. continued, he was refused a promotion to become a C*arabinieri* officer. Furthermore, his brother spread the rumour in order to smear his reputation as much as possible and managed to manipulate their old father into writing a second will which excluded him: this is a precious proof of how dangerous it was to become a known homosexual, of the huge difference it could make in terms of career, reputation and family connections. G. became therefore

penniless, he did not even have the money to call his brother to court over their father's will and had to ask for financial help. His brother thought that marriage with a rich, much older woman could be a way out of trouble for both and introduced him to a woman in her sixties, even offering to pay the wedding expenses. But this marriage, "immoral and horrible" [underlined in the original],[32] did not take place as the bride-to-be withdrew. After that, G. was the recipient of some small amounts of money from his detested sibling: they allowed him to barely survive and were merely a humiliating gesture of pity.

Answering the question "But why?",[33] the title of the next section, G. proceeded to destroy his brother's personality and reputation with a series of accusations: he was always aware of his wife having many lovers and was happy about it because in the meantime he could have sex with underage girls. Secondly, he was a greedy man who had been heard saying he could not wait to bury all of his wife's relatives so that he could inherit their wealth. In addition, he did everything he could to encourage his sisters to use contraception (he would have even induced permanent sterility in them in the course of medical visits), in clear contradiction with Mussolini's demographic campaigns.[34] Furthermore, he even procured an abortion to an underage girl and for this reason he had to appear in court.[35] He had always shown contempt towards his family, was ashamed of his farmer father, did not love his wife, did not spend time with his son, was neither friendly nor hospitable to his two sisters. His mottos were a crude and cynical vulgarisation of Darwinism:

> the world belongs to cunning people, the destiny of the weak ones is to disappear (…). Conscience is the legacy of imbeciles. Religion is a bugbear, a constraint for the weak minds, laws were made for idiots, interests drive the world and in the world there are too many people, to have progress we would have to go back to a primitive state, Italy should not have more than 10 to 18 million inhabitants.[36]

All these statements summed up his lack of morality, his brutality and cynicism, his defiance of the regime's ideals and demographic campaign. G. wanted to show how hypocritical his brother was, how everything he said and did was immoral and against fascist directives, while, underneath the surface and beyond first impressions, G. was a much franker and more honest person, who had always shown strength of will, maturity and integrity.

> Treated in the above-mentioned way, [his] youth destroyed, always contradicted, despised, insulted and slandered in public, deprived, disinherited, thrown out of home … abandoned in poverty … instigated to suicide …. [37]

he was forced to emigrate, worked as a builder in France, later as a teacher in Cremona for a pitiful salary, then moved to Milan in search of a better job, but was now too old for state clerical jobs and could not go back into teaching because it was too late in the year to submit his application.[38] That was why G. went to see his brother: he had to ask for money, but only obtained a small sum together with these chilling words: "Don't ever come back to Turin … otherwise I'll have you sent to *confino*. May I never see you again. Why are you waiting to shoot yourself behind the ears?".[39] G. could have called his lawyer about these threats but preferred addressing his brother's lawyer instead because he wanted to try to find an agreement outside the court. He concluded proposing a meeting in Milan, where he was planning to marry his landlady. This important last statement had to convincingly underline that his homosexuality belonged to the past, it was a concluded phase.

The *memoriale* was meant to make waves. To depict a known and respected fascist, one of the most famous doctors in town as a cynical, immoral, calculated, violent, manipulative, shrewd individual, to say he had committed crimes such as incitement to suicide, performing an abortion on an underage girl and inducing sterility on unaware patients would be explosive material. The underlying message that a self-proclaimed loyal fascist could be like that, must have worried readers, among them the King's Attorney, as the implication that the regime was relying on the support of this type of individual was an insult to Mussolini's society. G. pointed at the hypocrisy of a system that gave power and credit to those who accused him of immorality and yet appeared to him to be the most immoral ones. Furthermore, in demolishing his brother's fascist credentials, he capsized all accusations and expectations, and wrote that he was much more in line with the moral ideals indicated by the PNF. In his first letter to the Director of Collegno's asylum there is an even clearer statement in this sense:

> I intend to use the right of defence that is granted to me by God and that is insuppressible by nature, deploying all the legal tools suggested by my religious and fascist conscience.[40]

It is likely that G.'s intention to subvert common opinion, portraying himself as a model fascist Italian, irritated his readers and back-fired. After all, G.'s life-style pointed in a different direction, as highlighted earlier. It is however an interesting detail to understand what kind of strategy he thought could be effective in the situation.

Not only did G. claim his part of family inheritance, he also stated he was entitled to more money because he was never accorded the same treatment his brother had, due to his homosexuality. In one of the letters he wrote from Collegno, he reinstated the concept, specifying further: "For all these damages (…) don't I deserve compensation?".[41] The fact that G. felt disadvantaged and remarked the socio-economic consequences of discrimination was ahead of times. It must have sounded unreasonable, maybe even scandalous. Somebody who admitted homosexuality, declared he was unjustly treated because of it for all of his life and instead of humbly asking to be forgiven, demanded a sum of money for the suffering it had caused: one can just see the disgruntled expression of those who read his words in 1928.

Besides, the entire *memoriale* had a rather threatening underlying message: instead of showing remorse, with this piece of writing G. implicitly warned his brother that if he proceeded and pressed charges, if he kept refusing to give him his part of the inheritance, his crimes and misconduct would become public. Scandal was a weapon G. could handle too. So, not only did G., like many of his contemporaries, show knowledge of the regime's key words (passive pederast/active homosexual, habitual/occasional homosexual, demographic campaigns, values such as family, religion, country); he also attempted to use this rhetoric to unmask those who hid behind it. From accused party, he wanted to become the accuser. The element of novelty of this position cannot be underestimated.

Faced with the very tangible possibility of another scandal after the court trial for allegedly performing an abortion on an under-age girl, his brother opted for the best strategy to invalidate any future accusations: a diagnosis of mental illness. That is why, when the police were called, he revealed the detail that he knew would push the security forces into sending G. to a psychiatric institution: his "homosexual tendencies". As a doctor himself, he must have known that his words would not be challenged by the medical establishment and as a renowned fascist he probably felt even more protected. Internment was the infallible weapon to get rid of an unwanted relative.

To conclude, G.'s *memoriale* constitutes a unique document for its time. In it, G. shows he is aware of the regime's rhetoric and at the same time that he is prepared to fight his battle using his brother's weapons. He spends most of his words demolishing his brother's personality, exposing his lack of morality and adherence to fascist principles, exactly like he says his brother had done to him in the past. This is one of the reasons why this document is so unique: it shows the extent to which people under the regime had absorbed its rhetoric and modes, how they used defamation, accusations of immorality and Anti-fascism to get rid of opponents, how this type of behaviour had become normal routine. However, G.'s argumentations on his homosexuality are equally crucial to understand a gay man's strategies for survival at the time. Whether he agreed or disagreed with psychiatric theories on homosexuality, he was ready and able to deploy them, in order to escape persecution, isolation, imprisonment or internment. It is another sign on how the fight among individuals had shaped itself on the regime's instilled ideology. His "coming out" must not be interpreted with present day parameters. It is an extreme tool of defence and it would have probably never happened in less traumatic circumstances. It was deployed only to demonstrate "diminished responsibility" factors. Yet, it could have also not taken place. In many cases this was the norm: accept accusations, not reply directly, try to diffuse them, avoid loud "scandalous" statements, impose self-censorship in the hope that it would mitigate punishment. In this respect, G. shows considerable courage and pride, as he does when he asks for compensation for the discrimination he suffered from. This aspect is the most authentically "modern" in the entire *memoriale*. It reveals a modernity of vision, a provocative tone and a challenging counter-reaction attitude that seems to belong to the post-Stonewall generation.

G. felt entitled to fight his battle relatively in the open, because of his social and cultural status, but also because he knew that, once his homosexuality surfaced and became known, he would have easily been cornered. Very few gay men and women were in a position as privileged as his. This does not diminish his courage and vigour, if anything it explains the silence that surrounded his words and underlines his achievement. Beyond the court-room rhetoric, the *memoriale* remains the moving testimony of a man who refused to be defeated and silenced, who took all his courage and fought against injustice and hypocrisy.

This chapter, entirely based on G.'s autobiographical piece of writing, illustrated the level of discrimination against homosexuals that could take

place within the family and its consequences in terms of work, career, reputation and relationships. The following chapter gives the rest of the picture and explains how the regime had managed, by 1928, to restrict all individuals' freedoms, entering every aspect of their life.

Notes

1. CA, G.'s *memoriale*, in G.'s medical file, 4***2.
2. Ibid. Pages 6 and 7 are missing.
3. Ebner, Michael, 2011, op. cit.; Giartosio, Tommaso and Goretti, Gianfranco, op. cit.
4. CA, G.'s *memoriale*, op. cit., p. 1.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid., p. 2.
7. Ibid., p. 2.
8. Ibid., p. 3.
9. Ibid., p. 4.
10. Ibid., p. 4.
11. Traditionally the wedding expenses in Italy are paid by the bride's family.
12. CA, G.'s *memoriale*, op. cit., p. 8.
13. Ibid., p. 11.
14. See Chap. 2.
15. See Chap. 3.
16. "*L'Unico Mio Punto Nero*", CA, G.'s *memoriale*, op. cit., p. 12.
17. Ibid.
18. Ebner, Michael. 2001, op. cit.
19. CA, G.'s *memoriale*, op. cit., p. 12.
20. See Chap. 2 and 5.
21. Aldrich, Robert. 1993. *The Seduction of the Mediterranean. Writing, Art and Homosexual Fantasy*. London and New York: Routledge, p. 175.
22. Ibid.
23. As explained in Chap. 2 and 5.
24. Aldrich, Robert, op. cit., p. 176.
25. See Chap. 2.
26. Romano, Gabriella, 2003 and 2001, op. cit.
27. Benadusi, Lorenzo, op. cit., p. 152.
28. See Chap. 2.
29. Benadusi, Lorenzo, op. cit., p. 186.
30. Aldrich, Robert, op. cit.
31. Romano, Gabriella, 2003, op. cit.
32. CA, G.'s *memoriale*, op. cit., p. 16.

33. "*Ma Perché*?", Ibid., p. 18.
34. Contraception was declared illegal in 1930. However, the regime's demographic programme and the Catholic Church had strongly campaigned against its use prior to that.
35. This case is discussed by his brother in an autobiographical book which cannot be mentioned. G.'s brother was tried and charged for having procured abortion on an underage girl and was therefore expelled from the PNF. He later appealed and was cleared of all charges. This is what G. refers to earlier when he says that his brother's lawyer rescued him from a prison sentence.
36. CA, G.'s *memoriale*, op. cit., p. 24–25.
37. Ibid., p. 25.
38. The fact that G. only taught in private Catholic schools might be an indication of his non-alignment with the PNF: state secondary school teachers were forced to swear their loyalty to the party from 1931, but the discussion over the need for their "fascistisation" had started years before and was at its peak from 1927, as explained in Goetz, Helmut. 2000. *Il giuramento rifiutato. I docenti universitari e il regime fascista*. Milano: La Nuova Italia. I ed. 1993.
39. CA, G.'s *memoriale*, op. cit., p. 27.
40. CA, G.'s file n. 4***2, G.'s letter dated 15.12.1928, p. 3.
41. CA, op. cit., letter 16.3.1929, p. 4.

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CHAPTER 5

"I'll Have you Sent to *Confino*": How the Fascist Regime Punished and Repressed Homosexuality

Abstract This chapter explains the extent to which liberties of every individual had been restricted by the regime. It focuses on censorship and the so-called moralisation campaign to show how the regime had managed to invade its citizens' private lives. The situation in Turin is used to exemplify what went on at a national level in terms of repression. The second part concentrates on repression of sexuality and homosexuality: although homosexuality was not mentioned by the Code of Laws, a number of legal measures existed and were deployed to repress and punish it. The intention is to depict the climate that surrounded G. in the last days of his "freedom", as his world was shrinking and becoming increasingly dangerous.

Keywords Censorship • Repression • Moralisation • Dissent • *Confino*

This chapter explains the extent to which liberties of every individual had been restricted by the regime. Based on research in the Turin Prefettura Archives and on newspapers articles of the period, it focuses on the so-called moralisation campaign and on how much the regime had managed to invade its citizens' private lives. The situation in Turin is used to exemplify what went on at a national level in terms of censorship and repression. The second part of the chapter concentrates on repression of sexuality

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and homosexuality, explaining how it was punished. The intention is to depict how G. must have felt, the climate that surrounded him in the last days of his "freedom", as his world was shrinking and becoming increasingly dangerous.

If G. had bought *La Gazzetta del Popolo* the day of his arrest and subsequent internment, he could have not failed to notice that its appendix novel was entitled "You will suffer",[1] a rather grim omen. However, it is unlikely: *La Gazzetta del Popolo* was a lower middle-class readership paper, with a distinctive popular press flair and it would have probably not been the choice of a university-educated person.

G. is much more likely to have read *La Stampa*, the first and most authoritative newspaper in Turin. On 22 November Seventh (which means 1928: the calendar now had to be counted on the years Mussolini had been in power) *La Stampa* offered a totally rosy picture of current events. This is hardly surprising: in a *Prefettura* note both *La Stampa* and *La Gazzetta del Popolo* are said to be completely in line with the regime's directives,[2] as was most of the Italian press by 1928. The paper that day informed its readers that the government was tackling unemployment, while Anti-fascism was almost defeated as another *fuoruscito*, a term that indicated those who managed to expatriate in order to escape from persecution, had been arrested in Belgium and an anti-Italian plot had been discovered in Gorizia, at the border with Slovenia. The paper could conclusively state that the regime's opponents were now in "the last trenches".[3] In prominent position, there was an update on the archaeological discovery of some ancient Roman ships in the Nemi Lake.[4] Mussolini's propaganda boosted the ideal connection between present Italy and its glorious past, the Roman Empire. Any significant archaeological discovery was used to fuel national pride and ambition for colonial expansion. The other pages of *La Stampa* gave accounts of local police forces' successful efforts, official visits, inaugurations and sport events. Among the "soft news" that increasingly filled papers' pages, a report on a residents' campaign against an invasion of pigeons in the central piazza Carignano that had pushed another group of citizens to defend the pretty birds.[5]

In the meantime, the infamous *Tribunale Speciale*, instituted in 1926, was busy: in only one day Laura Cavallucci, a Turin typographer who had agreed to print anti-regime leaflets, was sentenced to a year in prison, Salvatore Capogrossi received a 10-year sentence for trying to revive a branch of the Communist Party in a small village near Rome, and Giuseppe Barletta got four years behind bars for distributing *Battaglia Sindacale*

(Trade Union Battle), a paper that was officially banned.[6] Disproportionate punishment, together with the discretionary way it was inflicted, has been identified as a tool of fascist repression in itself, that kept the population in a state of constant terror.[7]

However, a non-sympathiser of the PNF would have probably read the paper from a different perspective: the frequent arrests of anti-fascists meant that opposition to the regime had not been totally uprooted as claimed by propaganda, while Italian *fuorusciti* continued their political activity abroad and linguistic minorities, reluctant to accept the imposition of having to speak the Italian language, resisted.

Nevertheless, even reading between the lines, the picture must have looked bleak. From 1926 onwards Turin, like the rest of the country, had undergone what was called "*epurazione*", a moralisation campaign which masked tough censorship of any dissenting voice: publishers and book-shop owners were tried in court for printing and selling books now described as offensive towards the common sense of decency,[8] among them Sappho's and Anacreon's poems. *La Stampa* titled "Literature unsuitable for young ladies ends up in court"[9] where even the headline avoided the words "indecent" and "scandalous", opting for a softer expression, to be on the safe side.

Turin ballrooms had been a main target. *La Gazzetta del Popolo* reported:

> In all major Italian towns, the public security authorities, following precise government directives, have implemented a vigorous purge and surveillance on ballrooms, and, particularly, on those clubs or venues where dancing could mask less legal intentions on the part of those who frequent them. (…). Apart from finding an incredible number of under-age girls, [the police] discovered some past-times that had hardly anything to do with dancing. (…) It is fatal that these young girls with very little experience and a lot of vanity, when in contact with equivocal and vice-ridden people, in environments where morality and good habits are too … absent, slide into vice and perdition.[10]

The journalist added that in the last few days eight dance-halls had been closed and six more were under police investigation, while, according to the article, in 1925 alone 40 clubs had been closed and 17 fined, together with 29 hotels and 17 *affitta-camere* (short-let accommodation). Several police raids had taken place in Turin's dance schools, dance-halls and similar clubs and many teenagers, particularly girls, had been brought to

the local police station, where they had been handed over to their parents as a sign of warning.[11] All this was confirmed by the local *Prefettura* correspondence with the Ministry of the Interior:

> Necessary to eliminate this shame, deplored even by authoritative press – clubs and so-called dance schools constitute dangerous hotbeds of moral infection for adolescents. (…).[12]

The Ministry of the Interior warned local *Prefetti* of other dangerous forms of entertainment, such as the so-called *tabarin*, a type of stage performance similar to a *varieté* show:

> In recent years, a kind of entertainment of exotic origins (…), the so-called *tabarin* has been introduced in our country. It is unnecessary to mention that such a type of entertainment, for its character and for the public that follows it, among which people with little or no morality, is a source of corruption and vice, and always constitutes a serious danger for young people who are more prone, because of their young age, to be hit by the pernicious impressions of equivocal environments (…).[13]

The moralising campaign, which dated back to the beginning of the regime, now extended to all forms of entertainment, even music: jazz was a major target. Based on improvisation, it increasingly was associated with rebel attitudes and potentially immoral, promiscuous night-clubs, something that found a strong echo in the local newspapers.[14] Besides, it was "foreign" and, as such, it raised suspicions just like other "imported" trends, such as Feminism, considered as quintessentially American. The country had to be self-sufficient and focus on its traditions and history. Even foreign names had to be translated and "Italianised": Albrecht Dürer became a desolately provincial "Alberto Durero", to quote an example taken from a magazine of November 1928.[15]

However, from the killing of the socialist MP Giacomo Matteotti in 1924, the repression had touched many other aspects of public and private life, and in 1926 had reached its peak: Law n. 2307, approved on 31 December 1925, aimed at "the integral fascistisation of the press".[16] The control of newspapers and magazines was a top priority and the *Prefettura* was given full powers to intervene when a publication was thought to be irreverent or critical of the regime. This clearly was reflected in the situation in Turin. Main newspapers and magazines in circulation in 1928 in Piedmont were *La Stampa*, *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, *Il Momento*, *Il*

Piemonte, *Il Primato* and *Il Giornale dei Combattenti*: the first four were described by the *Prefettura* as "favourable to the current political policies", while the latter two were said to be "even more favourable".[17] Local voices of dissent such as *Ordine Nuovo*, *Altoparlante*, *La Plebaglia*, *Umanità Nuova* had already disappeared, *Il Baretti*, founded by the famous Turin anti-fascist intellectual Piero Gobetti, published its last issue in Autumn 1928, *La Protesta* and *La Riscossa* would cease publication in 1929.[18]

In addition, several cultural associations, perceived as uncontrollable and potentially hostile to Fascism, were forced to disband: from cradle to grave, the state now offered a number of options where sport and socialisation could take place under its vigilant eye. This can be observed at a local level too. By 1928 many cultural associations in the Piedmont region had been dismantled, among them the Italian Federation of Workers of the Publishing Sector (*Federazione Italiana dei Lavoratori del Libro*) and the Literary Club (*Circolo Letterario*) in Torre Pellice, the small town where the majority of Italian Protestants lived. The latter is an unequivocal indication of the level of censorship and persecution of religious minorities that the regime had started implementing.[19]

As Ebner's research shows,[20] everywhere throughout Italy many *osterie* and *trattorie*, a traditional meeting place for working class people, had been forced to close, often the result of spying activities: the ones that continued to operate were full of informants ready to over-hear anti-regime comments, more easily pronounced when under the influence of alcohol. Sometimes the owners and staff had been recruited as informants, on the promise that they could continue their activity without too many bureaucratic entanglements. Hotels, identified as a primary meeting location for anti-fascists, had been regularly searched, fined or shut down. Again, this happened in Turin as well and the local *Prefettura* files are full of correspondence, to and from the police (both *polizia politica* and normal police), regarding surveillance of public places: a *bottiglieria* (unsophisticated wine bar) in via Principe Amedeo was brought to the *Prefetto*'s attention on 10 January 1929 because "the worst kind of Turin anti-fascists gather there", but after investigation, charges were dismissed. However, on 17 May 1929 the *polizia politica* wrote to him again as

> another confidential source reiterated to the Ministry that B.R.'s bar, situated in Turin in via Principe Amedeo […], is a gathering place for known anti-fascists, who are regularly engaged in anti-regime propaganda. One of the

> most excited preachers and slanderers would be B.R. himself, although he allegedly declared on many occasions he is a police informant.[21]

Evidently, spying had become the norm and suspicion surrounded everything and everybody, to the extent that even the police were sometimes uncertain of their own informants' loyalty.

In Turin and elsewhere space for independent cultural activities was shrinking, social life had been drastically reduced, entertainment was monitored, censorship was in full swing in every sector, including books, newspapers, theatre and cinema.[22] Paradoxically, even *coriandoli*, the traditional coloured pieces of paper thrown in the streets at Carnival, had been banned by a local *Prefettura* decree.[23]

Furthermore, the regime had started to interfere with the most intimate sphere of its citizens' life, indicating that private choices had to be submitted to the nobler common cause. Sexuality, family and the sphere of affections were now an important part of the life of the state and had to serve the demographic campaign. The tax on celibacy, approved in 1926,[24] imposed a payment on unmarried men between the age of 25 and 65, but its burden varied with the payer's age: 35 lire per year for those between 25 and 35, 50 lire for men aged 35–50, 25 lire between the age of 50 and 65.[25] In 1928, in compliance with eugenics theories, an amendment was being discussed in Parliament on whether deaf, mute, disabled, paralysed and blind men were to be exempt from payment, as only healthy people were to be encouraged to procreate. It was approved in January 1929. Abortion and contraception were outlawed in 1930[26] but long before they were already depicted as being immoral and selfish activities, essentially against fascist ideals: the advertisement of contraceptive devices had been banned by the Public Order Law in 1926. The message was unequivocal: the fascist regime wanted to be perceived as the order-making force which would push every excessive and non-conforming behaviour out of the picture, through the imposition of a very strict code of morality. As Dunnage acutely observed: "'Moral order' was to be considered the best guarantee for 'public order'".[27]

The dictatorship had almost managed to silence dissent, to impose its moral laws and its code of behaviour, although not completely. Women continued to use contraception: as Passerini argues, in many cases the use of "induced sterility" instruments, such as condoms, or methods such as *coitus interruptus* gained the connotation of a form of rebellion.[28] The tax on celibacy seems to have gathered little consensus and there must have

been a high number of evaders, as in 1929 the state felt the need to introduce the legal duty for employers to report unmarried members of staff to the authorities, in an attempt to frame tax-dodgers.[29] Several popular songs ridiculed the tax, showing how unpopular it was. One of them went[30]:

> So, dear bachelor colleagues / let's always remain bachelors / and if the taxes increase / we will happily pay them / so that we will always be free. / We'll sleep with dolls / and instead of walking around with our mother-in-law / we'll happily stroll in the company of a poodle.

In 1937 it was necessary to link success in state careers to marriage and the number of children one had.[31] In Turin there was even a desperate attempt to start a solidarity campaign, hoping employers and private home-owners would provide accommodation and jobs to young, potentially child-bearing couples.[32] Despite all this, birth-rates inexorably continued to fall and Mussolini's elegant 1930s' statement "Children or you'll be beaten up with a stick" (in Italian "*Figli o legnate*")[33] clearly shows his consequent irritation. For all the slogans, the official congratulations to mothers of twins and the cash rewards to prolific mothers, in Northern Italy births kept decreasing steadily, from 26.6 every 1000 residents in 1921–1925 to 19.8 in 1936–1940.[34] Finally, the urge to gather, dance and have fun seems to have continued undeterred, despite impositions and limitations, as by the end of 1929 in a medium-size town like Turin there still were 51 dance-halls open and functioning.[35]

Most importantly, in the Piedmont capital and elsewhere, many citizens still found the courage to voice their dissent: in 1930 the owner of a photographic shop, "according to information received by a confidential source (…) spoke incessantly and in very vulgar terms about the Regime [capital letter in the original]".[36] In the same year, at Caffè Roma, run by the B. Sisters, informants reported constant hostile comments being pronounced against Fascism; but reading other anonymous letters, all scrupulously filed and investigated, one learns that this also happened at Caffè Romano, Frejus, San Lorenzo, Delle Provincie, Galliari, Consolata, Piemonte and Baio. Several hotels in Turin were kept under special surveillance, which suggests that the authorities were aware of anti-fascists' gatherings taking place in some of them, and frequently people reported anti-regime chants and writings on walls of the town's buildings.[37] Ustica, Lipari, Ponza and other Italian islands increasingly were full of detainees

sent to *confino* for having pronounced phrases against Mussolini[38] and so were mental health hospitals.[39] Finally, despite the tight grip of censorship on the press, in 1937 Dino Alfieri, Secretary of the Press and Propaganda Ministry, still considered it necessary to issue written directives to the journalists of satirical magazines, to remind them that "the satirical press has the precise duty to target all behaviours that are not in harmony with the ways of life taught by Fascism".[40] Clearly some out-of-line life-styles and some criticism against the regime persevered.

However, at the end of 1928, for a man like G. the world had not just shrunk significantly, it had become dangerous too. Homosexuality was not mentioned by the Zanardelli and the Rocco Codes of Law, and an amendment that would criminalise it was never approved. Nonetheless, men who had sex with men were sued for a variety of crimes such as scandalous behaviour, prostitution, soliciting prostitution, obscene acts in public, rape, assault, abuse of minors and offence to sense of decency, among others. There was a difference of penalties given to so-called "habitual" homosexuals and those who engaged in same-sex acts occasionally, thought to have been "infected", badly influenced, driven by circumstances and not by their nature. It made a lot of difference if the vice was congenital or acquired because in the first instance a cure would be almost impossible. Equally there was a difference between a passive or an active homosexual, habitual or casual,[41] and if there was visibility, ostentation or discretion.[42] Most historians who addressed this issue[43] have underlined the difference in sentences, showing that the maximum penalties were given to those who were identifiable and were considered to be "passive pederasts". Some have also indicated the social class and status element as another decisive factor and it has been correctly emphasized that most of the homosexuals sentenced to *confino* came from the lower social classes. Equally, it has emerged with clear evidence that there was a level of tolerance of those individuals who kept their homosexuality quiet, hidden, without making big public statements.

Sanctions varied from *confino*, confinement on a small island or in a small village usually in Southern Italy for up to five years, to *ammonizione*, an official warning which implied that the person in question would have to sign in, morning and evening, at the local police station and could not leave the town of residence; to *diffida*, a more serious type of sanction that meant the person was told officially that if caught committing the same crime again, conviction would ensue. For certain crimes there was imprisonment and many are likely to have ended up in prison for crimes con-

nected with homosexuality: the *Bollettino della Scuola di Polizia Scientifica* provided a list of more than 1000 individuals jailed as "homosexual offenders" in Rome alone between 1927 and 1939.[44] In addition, the police could incarcerate and question anyone at their discretion and used these measures against homosexuals too.[45] One older gay man who accepted to be interviewed in the late 1990s[46] confirmed this. He said that during the *Ventennio* he was frequently arrested, kept in the local police station, sometimes for days, and then released. There was no trial, no warrant, no interrogation and no official order of arrest, it all seemed to be completely at the discretion of the local police and it was possible, as rightly observed, because "legislation deprived citizens of legal protection against the arbitrary behaviour of the police".[47] The interviewee also testified that, being known to the authorities as a pederast, he was often arrested in towns he was visiting, and sent back to Naples, where he resided, with no particular charge. These measures seem to have been imposed as deterrents and as warnings. Ebner reconstructed another similar case, that of Guglielmo, a 22-year old Florentine man who was known to the local police since he was 14 years old:

> Guglielmo's lengthy criminal record consisted mainly of several charges of extortion and numerous police citations for "pederasty". He had been assigned to *diffida* and *ammonizione* several times in the late 1920s for being a 'vagabond' and a "pederast". From 1926 to 1939 he was arrested and detained 13 times, usually for "being in the company of suspected pederasts".[48]

Confino, like all other sentences, was imposed arbitrarily. As Emilio Lussu wrote at the time:

> the *confino di polizia* is the regime's masterpiece: the danger of being sentenced to it is dangling above us all. (…) The sentence is for few, the threat is for everybody.[49]

As homosexuality gradually became associated with a crime against "race", it acquired stronger political connotations and sentences to *confino* for men who had sex with other men intensified. Scholarship has associated this phenomenon with the introduction of racial laws in 1938. However, there is ample evidence that persecution through this type of sentence started much earlier: G.'s *memoriale* is further proof that already in 1928, to accuse somebody of pederasty was believed to lead automatically to a

confino sentence. *Confino* and *domicilio coatto* (home arrests) dated back to the Liberal State and so did the societal prejudice against homosexuality. There is some "continuity between fascist Italy and the previous Liberal State, in the context in which Mussolini's policies in the sphere of gender and sexuality largely represented a reinforcement of pre-existing ideas and norms".[50] It is interesting to note that continuity with the previous body of laws served several purposes. It did not draw attention to the crime in question and at the same time it allowed the state to harden pre-existing legislation without alerting the population of a drastic change of policy.[51] In essence, it was a quick short-cut to introduce changes through the *Prefettura*'s special decrees or to "creatively" interpret pre-existing legislation.

However, it is certainly possible to argue that stereotypes of effeminate men[52] were pushed to the extremes during Mussolini's dictatorship and that this form and extent of persecution of homosexuality had never taken place in unified Italy before. The ideas existed before Fascism, but not the actions to implement these ideas to their logical and extreme conclusions.

Il Duce himself had declared: "*confino* is social hygiene, national prophylaxis. Society isolates these individuals like the doctor isolates infectious patients"; it was a "social laxative that helps the country get rid of numerous and dangerous influences".[53] G.'s brother, a doctor, would have been very familiar with these metaphors and, as a proud self-proclaimed fascist, would have probably agreed on their meaning in principle.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to reconstruct with precision the persecution of homosexuality in Turin during Fascism as all the police files have "disappeared" for the years 1922–1943: the silence imposed by the regime has remained almost intact until the present day. Not to ever mention homosexuality had the precise intention of denying its existence: it was tolerated to a certain degree, only as long as it remained invisible.[54] The repressive action of the state could take place in a hidden, subtle way that was—and still is—difficult to pin down. Silence was also meant to protect Italians from ideas that could negatively influence them: in the same way, suicide was not to be mentioned because, as Mussolini telegraphed to the Italian *Prefetti* in 1926, to talk about it publicly would constitute "a dangerous suggestion for the weak or weakened spirits".[55]

Unsurprisingly, there is only sporadic mention of homosexuality in the Turin newspapers analysed. Shortly after G.'s arrest, a young man, accom-

panied by some of his friends, was reported to have stopped another man in a street in Turin and to have asked him for money not to reveal he had approached him sexually in Parco Michelotti. At his refusal, the blackmailer and his friends had paid a visit to the man's wife, managing to obtain five Lire from her in exchange for discretion. Later, however, he still denounced the man, but a member of the gang retreated, saying that the story was a complete fabrication and the police accepted this version of the facts.[56] Clearly, as the stigma around homosexuality hardened and same-sex relations were pushed underground, homosexuals became easy prey of blackmailers.

Scattered here and there, in the local press and in the Turin *Prefettura* files, there is mention of "different" people that leaves little doubt about the kind of censorship society imposed: a successful woman entrepreneur who never liked dolls as a child and showed no interest in small talk, was often told she "should have been born a man", as recounted by an article entitled "Illusions and delusions of a masculinised lady"[57]: her brilliant achievements are described as the abilities of a freak and are somehow ridiculed. A young Piedmontese woman, "educated abroad", is signalled to have appeared in Calcutta, as the Italian Consul reports: "she demonstrates no Italianity feelings and, for the life-style she leads, has generated serious suspicions in the local English community".[58] Women who socialised without the presence of men generated concern: on one instance a "ladies only club" was investigated but turned out to be a clandestine brothel.[59] On another case, an anonymous letter denounced a woman who hosted regular gatherings of women in her apartment, but it turned out that she was giving German lessons to a group of friends.[60]

Silence was not completely impenetrable, though, and people heard about what was going on, in their town and elsewhere, among them queer people in particular, since some form of a circuit existed and rumours of blackmailing and intimidations circulated. For instance, although it had never happened to her, another person who accepted to be interviewed between 2006 and 2010, MtoF transsexual Lucy, knew of black shirts ambushing gay men and she was aware of beatings of the more visible ones in Bologna.[61] She, at the time a young boy, also knew of some local homosexuals who had been sent to *confino*, although she did not frequent them.

Even within the constraints imposed upon historical research on sexuality in Italy,[62] Milan, Venice, Florence, Bologna and Catania now have a partially documented queer "scene", whose meeting places, cruising areas, bars and hotels have been identified.[63] Little is known about Turin, but

> It would appear that sad manifestations of pederasty are rampant: Alfredo F., who is a technician of this activity [*sic*!], says it is widely practiced in Venice, in Turin, in Milan, areas and towns he frequents as he is a variety shows artist.[64]

Besides, if extortion of gay men took place in day-light, other homosexuals are likely to have been blackmailed and Parco Michelotti must have been a credible location to mention when referring to a meeting place for men who wanted sex with other men. If three men were arrested and sentenced to *confino* for "acts contrary to *buon costume*"[65] in 1940 in the Borgo Dora area, a bushy area around a river, this plausibly was a meeting spot already in the early fascist era. During the *Ventennio* four Turinese female friends are likely to have formed two lesbian couples, as immediately after World War II, two of them, sisters at birth, were reported to have "become brothers" and "now named Luigi and Lino" were "engaged to be married to girls they knew when they were all officially of the same sex".[66] And finally, queer men and women must have had parties where they danced together, if at the end of the dictatorship and in the middle of the war they still found the enthusiasm and urge to gather, listen to music and be together. The Turin *Prefettura* Archives reveal that 12 young men were arrested and three of them deported to Germany for having done just that.[67]

G. is likely to have known that, by insisting on deserving compensation for the discrimination he had suffered at the hands of his brother, he was risking a lot. He was certainly aware of the possible consequences of a public disclosure of his past homosexual *liaisons*. Yet, he decided to go ahead, as he also must have thought he had nothing left to lose: he had no job, no money, no fixed address, his father had disinherited him and probably all these conditions were caused by his homosexuality becoming known. Many men and women are likely to have been in a similar situation at the time. The really unique fact is that G. rebelled against silence. He wrote this clearly at the end of his long *memoriale*: he described himself as "one of the many victims who does not want to disappear".[68] So, despite feeling, understandably, cornered, he refused to admit defeat and prepared to fight his desperate battle against injustice, his brother and the repressive system he represented.

This chapter painted the backdrop of the *memoriale* and gave an idea of what it must have felt like to live in Italy in 1928, especially as a homosexual: pressure was increasing in all areas of life, the dictatorship was

crucially transforming private choices into gestures of responsibility of every citizen towards the state. The following chapter focuses on G.'s internment and draws the picture of what happened within the Collegno asylum's walls.

Notes

1. Vincy, R. 1928. Tu Soffrirai. *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, November 22, p. 8.
2. Both AST, FP-GIV, b. 170, Ordine Pubblico.
3. 1928. Le Ultime Trincere (sic) dell'Antifascismo. *La Stampa*, November 22, p. 2.
4. Ibid., p. 3.
5. I piccioni. Lettere del pubblico, Ibid., p. 6.
6. Tre processi al Tribunale Speciale, Ibid., p. 4.
7. Ebner, Michael, 2011, op. cit.
8. 1926. Editori e Librai processati per offesa al pudore. *La Gazzetta del Popolo*, January 13, p. 6.
9. 1926. Letteratura non per Signorine in tribunale. *La Stampa,* January 3, p. 4.
10. 1926. La sorveglianza sulle sale da ballo. L'opera di epurazione compiuta a Torino. *La Gazzetta del Popolo,* January 19, p. 6.
11. Ibid.
12. AST, FP-GIV, b. 204, Ordine Pubblico, telegram Ministry of Interiors, 31.12.1926.
13. Ibid., telegram of Ministry of Interiors of 22.12.1926, n. 13,500.
14. 1928. Pro e contro il jazz-band. *La Stampa,* November 22, p. 6.
15. 1928. Nel quarto centenario della morte di Alberto Durero. *L'Illustrazione Italiana* LV, 48, November 25.
16. Murialdi, Paolo. 1980. La stampa quotidiana del regime fascista. In *La Stampa Italiana nell'età fascista*, Castronovo, Valerio and Tranfaglia, Nicola, eds. Bari: Laterza, p. 33.
17. AST, FP-GIV, b. 170 Ordine Pubblico, 9.8.1924.
18. Castronovo, Valerio and Tranfaglia, Nicola, op. cit.
19. AST, FP-GIV, b. 647, Scioglimento Circoli.
20. Ebner, Michael, 2011, op. cit.
21. ATS, op. cit., b. 645 bis, Movimento sovversivi e Sequestro stampe.
22. On censorship during Fascism: Bonsaver, Guido. 2013. *Mussolini censore. Storie di letteratura, dissenso e ipocrisia*. Bari: Laterza; Castronovo, Valerio and Tranfaglia, Nicola, op. cit.; Forno, Mauro. 2005. *La stampa del ventennio. Strutture e trasformazioni nello stato totalitario*. Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino; Wanrooij, P.F. Bruno. 1990. *Storia del pudore. La questione sessuale in Italia 1860–1940*. Venezia: Marsilio.

23. 1926. I "coriandoli" vietati. *La Stampa,* February 7, p. 6 and 1926. I coriandoli. *La Stampa,* February 8, p. 3.
24. Decreto Legge n. 2132, 19.12.1926.
25. Data provided by Ginsborg, Paul. 2014. *Family Politics. Domestic Life, Devastation and Survival, 1900–1950.* London and New Haven: Yale University Press.
26. Rocco Code, art. 554 and art. 552.
27. Dunnage, Jonathan. 2016. Policemen and "Women of Ill Repute": A Study of Male Sexual Attitudes and Behaviour in Fascist Italy. *European History Quarterly* 46 (I): 72–91, p. 75.
28. Passerini, Luisa. 1987. *Fascism in Popular Memory. The Cultural Experience of the Turin Working Class.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. I ed. 1984.
29. 1929. Le denunzie per l'imposta sui celibi. *La Stampa,* January 13, p. 5.
30. Cherubini, Bixio. Circa 1928. "Allegri Scapoli". Milano: Rusconi.
31. De Grazia, Victoria, 1993. *Le donne nel regime fascista*. Venezia: Marsilio. I ed. 1992.
32. 1929. Il problema demografico a Torino e una nota del "Regime Fascista". *La Stampa,* March 14, p. 6.
33. ACS, *Mostra della Rivoluzione fascista*, b. 7, f. 7, Romagna, report of 1st February 1930, quoted p. 108 in Wanrooij, P.F. Bruno. 1990. op. cit.
34. De Grazia, Victoria, op. cit., p. 76.
35. 1929. Pericoli e insidie delle cosidette accademie di danza. *La Stampa,* December 8, p. 5.
36. AST, op. cit., b. 645 bis.
37. Ibid.
38. Ebner, Michael. 2011, op. cit.
39. See Chap. 6 and Petracci, Matteo, op. cit. Franzinelli, Mimmo and Graziano, Nicola. 2015. *Un'Odissea Partigiana. Dalla Resistenza al Manicomio.* Milano: Feltrinelli.
40. Quoted p. 146 in Forno, Mauro. 2005. *La stampa del ventennio. Strutture e trasformazioni nello stato totalitario.* Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino.
41. Benadusi, Lorenzo, op. cit.; Ebner, Michael. 2004, op. cit. Ebner notes the difference of sanctions but mistranslates "habitual homosexuals" as "men who engaged in consensual sex", thus slightly missing the point.
42. See Chap. 3.
43. Dall'Orto, Giovanni, op. cit.; Giartosio, Tommaso and Goretti, Gianfranco, op. cit.; Benadusi, Lorenzo, op. cit.; Rossi Barilli, Gianni, op. cit.; Ebner, Michael, 2004 and 2011, op. cit.
44. Ebner, Michael. 2004, op. cit., p. 144.
45. Benadusi, Lorenzo, op. cit.
46. Romano, Gabriella, 2003, op. cit.
47. Dunnage, Jonathan, op. cit., p. 80.

48. Ebner, Michael. 2004, op. cit., p. 143.
49. Quoted in Benadusi, Lorenzo, op. cit., p 131.
50. Dunnage, Jonathan, op. cit., p. 74.
51. Benadusi, Lorenzo, op. cit.
52. Mosse, George, op. cit.
53. Both quoted in Benadusi, Lorenzo, op. cit.; the first, p. 128, is from Mussolini's "Discorso dell'Ascensione" pronounced on 26.5.1927, the second one, p. 131, is from Lussu, Emilio. 1945. *La Catena*. Firenze: Vallecchi. On Mussolini's use of the medical metaphor see Rigotti, F. 1987. Il medico-chirurgo dello Stato nel linguaggio metaforico di Mussolini. In *Cultura e società negli anni del fascismo*, Istituto lombardo per la storia del movimento di liberazione in Italia, ed. Milano: Cordani.
54. Dall'Orto, Giovanni. 1987, op. cit.; Rossi Barilli, Gianni, op. cit.
55. Quoted in Castronovo, Valerio and Tranfaglia, Nicola, op cit., p. 89.
56. 1929. L'estorsione di quattro giovinastri. *La Gazzetta del Popolo,* March 22, p. 6.
57. 1929. Illusioni e delusioni di una signora mascolinizzata. *La Stampa,* March 2, p. 6.
58. AST, op. cit., b. 645 bis, 23.8.1930.
59. 1929. Un club per signore sole.*La Gazzetta del Popolo,* March 15, p. 6.
60. AST, op. cit., b. 645 bis, 1930.
61. Romano, Gabriella. 2009. *Il mio nome è Lucy. L'Italia del XX secolo nei ricordi di una transessuale*. Roma: Donzelli; Romano, Gabriella. 2011. "Essere Lucy", Video.
62. See Chap. 1.
63. Rossi Barilli, Gianni, op. cit.; Dall'Orto, Giovanni, op. cit.; Giartosio, Tommaso and Goretti, Gianfranco, op. cit.; Romano, Gabriella, 2011, op. cit.; Milletti, Nerina and Passerini, Luisa eds., op. cit.
64. Quoted in Benadusi, Lorenzo, op. cit., p. 181.
65. 1940. Tre persone arrestate per atti contro il buon costume. *La Stampa,* February 21, p. 5.
66. 1947. Sisters change sex. Two Italians engaged to girlhood friends. *News of the World,* March 9.
67. AST, op. cit., b. 204, Ordine Pubblico, 29.4.1944.
68. CA, G.'s *memoriale*, op. cit., p. 1.

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CHAPTER 6

"House of Sorrow": The Collegno Asylum in 1928–1931

Abstract This chapter concentrates on the Collegno asylum where G. was interned. It brings evidence to show how psychiatric institutions had become a place of detention for "deviants" and those who had committed actions against current morality, against Fascism and its values. Collegno asylum's detention, rather than medical, role clearly emerges and this research also shows, through several patients' cases, how families, psychiatrists and public security forces collaborated in ensuring that "unfit" individuals could be removed from society. The chapter reconstructs the Collegno mental health hospital routine while G. was interned there: through patients' files, it proves that morality constituted an increasingly decisive element in mental health diagnosis and care.

Keywords Collegno asylum • Immoral • Non-conforming • Obscene • Homosexual

This chapter is based on archive research carried out in the Collegno asylum, the "House of Sorrow",[1] and reconstructs its routine while G. was interned there: through patients' files, it proves that morality constituted an increasingly decisive element in mental health diagnosis and care. Psychiatric institutions had become a place of detention for "deviants" and those who had committed actions against current morality, against Fascism and its values. Families, psychiatrists and public security forces

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often collaborated in ensuring that "unfit" individuals could be removed from society.

After a cholera epidemic and due to overcrowding, in 1854 most of the Turin asylum's patients were transferred to a convent in Collegno (Fig. 6.1), a small village situated just outside the town. Its position was considered ideal, because it was conveniently distant and isolated from the urban centre, thus removing "alienated" individuals from society. At the same time, it could offer farming work to its patients, which was considered therapeutic.[2] Therefore, from the following year it was permanently

Fig. 6.1 Collegno ex mental health hospital. The main courtyard

used as a mental health hospital in its own right, although the strong connection with its Turin counterpart remained. Several modifications were brought to adapt the building to its new purpose. At the time of G.'s internment, the asylum consisted of 14 pavilions, plus several labs for the patients' ergotherapic work and a big laundry building. Its structure was considered one of the most modern in Italy. It had attracted well-known psychiatrists since it opened and, together with the Turin mental health hospital, was among the most famous in the country.[3] In 1928 the medical staff included prestigious names, such as Carlo Ferrio, Giovanni Marro and Marco Treves, most of them strongly influenced by Lombrosian theories, since the famous criminal-anthropologist and theorist had lived, taught and worked in Turin. The Director of Collegno asylum between 1915 and 1937, Federico Rivano, kept in touch with many other institutions in Italy and abroad, that he had also visited,[4] so that the hospital he oversaw could be in line with the most modern care trends and standards. In 1928 Vitige Tirelli, director of the Turin asylum, could proudly state:

> Respect and friendly affection between doctors and nurses, both nuns and non-religious staff, reign, order and silence are the rigorous norm adopted. The ancient and outdated concept of a forced reclusion has been replaced by that of a permanence in the psychiatric institution to the patient's exclusive advantage, the physical and moral imposition has been substituted by kindness and persuasion, made effective by the doctors' and nursing staff's care (…) In the new buildings of the Collegno psychiatric hospital there is (…) luxury of space and wealth of light and of every medical appliance.[5]

However, looking at the period of time that G. spent in Collegno, under the surface of efficiency the routine was far from impeccable. First of all, escapes were a regular occurrence. Hospital correspondence reveals that patients constantly tried to flee and often succeeded: on 8 April 1930 a nurse was reprimanded because he let a patient escape while he was coming back from work. We learn that during the same night another patient had escaped by cutting the iron grid of the toilet windows.[6] On 16 April 1930 two more patients ran away: they opened the window and the shutters of the dormitory using a spoon and the aluminium handle of a urine pot, despite the two night-shift nurses on duty[7]; another man simply left by opening the door, as he had copied the key in the blacksmith's lab where he worked during the day.[8] On 24 September 1931 a nurse was reprimanded because two patients had escaped.[9] Nurses in fact had to be

reproached on a number of occasions: on 11 February 1931 one of them was declared unsuitable for the job because he was caught "in a deplorable and molest state of drunkenness" in a public bar and, despite the Director's first warning, he was caught in the same state again. The *Carabinieri* had remarked that he was wounded because of a fall "caused by drunkenness".[10] On 18 June 1929 two nurses did not realise that during the night a patient had left his bed and had hit another patient with a broken glass bottle; they clearly had not carried out their surveillance duties.[11] A nurse was caught asleep while on duty on 12 June 1930,[12] one was fined and another one was punished with the withdrawal of the equivalent of 10 days' salary for the same reason on 24 June 1929.[13] The so-called "*mancanze di servizio*" (service deficiencies) are a constant presence in the hospital's internal correspondence files.

Care clearly left a lot to be desired too: on 5 April 1928 the general Secretary informed the Director, in writing, that some patients' families had complained about the lack of tidiness and cleanliness of interned relatives.[14] The nursing staff level of general education appears to have been very low, their letters and reports contain many basic grammar errors, something that is confirmed by a note issued by the Collegno asylum Chairman, the Medical and the Administrative Directors on 18 March 1931, where male members of staff were invited to follow extra elementary literacy courses, on offer five evenings a week.[15] Petracci[16] pointed out that during Fascism psychiatric nursing staff were increasingly recruited for political rather than professional merits. Nurses had to swear loyalty to Fascism, like teachers and all other public-sector employees, and were expected to be "good citizens", which at the time meant good fascists. In a letter dated 3 August 1929 the Secretary of the Collegno hospital wrote to two head-nurses and voiced concern as they were said to have been stopped by *Carabinieri* and to have received a *diffida* that would ban them from attending a public event held on 1 August. Preventative temporary arrests and *diffide* were quite common. They became law with the introduction of the Rocco Code. Its article n. 203 stated: "For the penal code, a person is socially dangerous when, even if not accusable or punishable […] it is probable that s/he will commit new acts that the law considers crimes".[17] The asylum Secretary communicated that a special internal investigation would follow as "a suspect political position cannot be tolerated, in view of the official oath you have pronounced".[18]

Staff were not only ignorant and unprepared for the task, but also, sometimes, physically violent: G.M.,[19] an unmarried man of unknown

professional status, interned in July 1930 for post-lethargic encephalitis symptoms, started a fight with two other patients. He was tied to his bed with very short straps. As a result, he became more agitated, shouted, spitted at the nurse who, at that point, punched him twice in the stomach. As the patient later died of complications linked to peritonitis that required two surgical operations, there was an internal investigation: according to four patients' witness statements, the nurse had punched him deliberately holding the metal key to tighten the straps, so that it would protrude and cause more pain. Shortly afterwards, in 1934, a Collegno psychiatrist, Marco Treves, was sacked because he had criticised the use of violent containment methods and had introduced a photographer to document abuses perpetrated on patients.[20]

Apart from extreme cases, there are also traces of other minor crimes committed by staff: on 19 December 1931 the Director reassured the King's Attorney on mistreatment and theft of money allegedly perpetrated by nurses at the patients' expenses. The Attorney had received denunciation of such crimes and had asked for clarification. Rivano wrote[21] that he was convinced no crime had been committed because the doctors visited the patients every day and were therefore aware of anything that might bother them. In addition, the staff was constantly under vigilance by chief-nurses, who were kept an eye on by inspectors. If there had been such incidents, no doubt he would have heard about it, he concluded. Yet, staff misbehaviour was so evident, gross and frequent that it was necessary to declare an "amnesty" in favour of personnel, approved by the Board of Directors on 25 February 1930.[22]

Other problems afflicted Federico Rivano: on 22 April 1929 the Board of Directors acknowledged his complaint that "the pavilions have reached the extreme capacity limits of what is tolerable" and it was impellent and very urgent to create new additional premises.[23] But overcrowding must have continued to be a problem as on 15 June 1931 he wrote to the Chair of the Provincial Authority in Turin to say that

> the shocking overcrowding of asylums in Turin, Collegno and the *Ricovero Provinciale*[24] [is such that], in order to accommodate the many patients that are admitted daily, especially in the hot season, we had to use some of the refectories as dormitories.[25]

According to the Register of Patients' Movements, on 6 January 1931 in Collegno there were 1,988 men and 335 women, plus two new

entries and one dismissed patient.[26] Overcrowding was a problem not only in Turin and Collegno, as observed by Moraglio:

> From 1927 and for all the fascist period every year a new record would be broken both in terms of number of [psychiatric] patients and in terms of the percentage of them compared with the resident population.[27]

In 1928 in Italy there were 64,268 psychiatric patients and by the time G. was dismissed, in 1931, there were 72,269.[28]

Overcrowding brought further problems: on 16 April 1930 the *Prefettura* wrote to the Hospital's Chairman to remind him of the annual occurrence of typhus and gave directives on how to fight it.[29] Punctually, on 3 July 1930 one of the doctors informed the Director of a case of typhoid infection, but on 28 April of that year the Director had already told the local Sanitary Officer that a patient had been isolated in a cell because he had contracted an infectious disease not otherwise specified.[30] Clearly promiscuity, crowded accommodation and poor hygiene conditions created health problems that were considered potentially dangerous, while ignorant, undisciplined and sometimes even violent staff completed the picture.

Ironically, within this context and with this kind of priorities, the Board of Directors had to also ensure that the PNF directives were implemented and that everything ran smoothly towards "fascistisation", even within the asylum's walls. A solemn *Te Deum* was celebrated in the hospital chapel in February 1929, like in most Italian churches, to thank God that the Concordat between the Italian State and the Catholic Church had been signed.[31] On 25 September 1931 a leaflet was released internally, saying that black grapes from the Asti hills would exceptionally be distributed

> in line with the *Duce*'s project in favour of agricultural production (…). In this way all our employees will benefit from the generous attention of the *Duce*. Long live Fascism. Long live the King.[32]

An equally emphatic note was circulated on 7 July 1930, where staff were asked to contribute to Bread Day, one of the many new official celebrations introduced by Fascism:

> the Administrative Directive of the Asylum, the Clerical Staff, the Employees and the patients [only category in lower case in the original text], have

> always demonstrated to unanimously participate to every National celebration, therefore I rely on such spirit of agreement on this occasion too, translatable in a donation of One Lira. [underlined in the original].[33]

The crowd of people interned in Collegno when G. was there had been referred to the psychiatric institution for problems ranging from alcoholism to depression, from epilepsy to "religious delirium", from *dementia* to paralysis. As it has been highlighted by all scholars who studied mental health institutions in Italy in the last couple of centuries, most internees were there because of their poverty[34]: there is an evident huge majority of indigent people in Collegno and Turin mental health hospitals too, in line with nineteenth century theories that identified lower classes as potentially dangerous to the *bourgeois* state.[35]

Many, like G., had been interned because of their lack of acceptance of social rules, common morality and behaviour. In the period analysed[36] rebellion appears to have been a major focus of attention: not observing rules and reacting against a given role were considered pathological. In April 1926 A.G.,[37] a 10-year-old child who was rebellious towards his family, particularly to his father's second wife, was declared affected by "constitutional immorality characterised by alterations of moral sense, escapes from home, kleptomania, inactivity, impulses against people and objects". He was admitted on his father's request, but there was also a statement signed by four witnesses, presumably neighbours, who confirmed that

> in the last three years he has been affected by mental alienation with tendencies towards theft and damages. Several times he has been caught while attempting to burn down his house, by setting on fire a heap of paper in the middle of a room (…) Other times he attempted suicide (…). He has often attacked his step-mother (…).[38]

In 1922 B.E.[39] was described as "immoral, dionysiac and cocaine-addict". She had two children from an "illegal relationship which lasted six years"[40] and some time prior to internment she was shot at by her lover who was under the influence of cocaine. The psychiatrist reconstructed rather minutely her biography from the point of view of her relationships, the fact of having had several was considered in itself proof of mental instability, deviancy and immorality, in a period when virginity was the only option for a respectable unmarried woman. The doctor in fact specified that B.E. had led a disordered existence, with serious faults in the moral

sphere, she had used cocaine, had been a prostitute and on one occasion had been violent when taken to hospital. While under observation, she seemed

> oriented in time and space – not hallucinated, alert and present – with a lack of memory [unreadable words]. She has not manifested delirious ideas. She is calm, works, cries, says she is not mad and that all the accusations against her are fabricated by her sister. She sleeps. She does not plan, or has attempted, to kill herself.[41]

The medical professional added:

> she remained very quiet and conscious, dominating herself perfectly in the hope, induced by the writer [the doctor, referring to himself], that she would be dismissed at the end of such period.[42]

The implication here is that the mentally ill patient is essentially immoral and therefore untrustworthy, a liar who is able to plan actions in order to deceive the doctor, who, like in this case, has no problem in lying to the patient in return. In 1922 B.E.,[43] a 30-year-old cleaning lady had shown signs of "erotic delirium" as she fantasised that several individuals were in love with her and would "attempt against her honour",[44] something that is not difficult to believe, as servants were often forced into sexual intercourse with members of the family they worked for. She was said to have a persecutory delirium and to be physically aggressive towards her employers; her rebellion against her social role and profession was therefore an essential element in diagnosing her madness. M.L.,[45] a 16-year-old embroiderer, was first sent to Buon Pastore, a religious institution for single mothers, young female offenders and women with non-conforming behaviour, but was subsequently sent to the Turin asylum in 1922. She had been the victim of physical violence at home, at the hands of her mother and brothers, prostituted herself from the age of 13 and was a wine and liquor drinker. She was interned on the basis that she was amoral: "for this reason and for the lack of freedom, which cannot be given to her because of her irresistible sexual tendencies, she attempts suicide".[46] The medical notes described her as "vain, liar, amoral, perverted".[47] She was also reported to have said: "the more they keep me inside, the worst it will be",[48] showing reluctance to reform and stubborn rebelliousness. The Director of the Turin mental health hospital wrote to

the Director of Buon Pastore asking to readmit her there, as he did not think there was a mental health issue, but only a "moral" or behavioural one. On 25 March 1923 the Buon Pastore Director replied that M.L. lacked constancy in her purpose to change her life-style, just like another young girl, A.T.,[49] another 16-year-old embroiderer who showed signs of "incoercible nymphomania"[50]: both were denied re-admittance.

In several cases so-called acts against decency were an important factor when determining the need to intern someone such as, in 1926, B.A.,[51] a 16-year-old girl "affected by *dementia precox* and for this infirmity (…) inclined to commit acts contrary to decency and morality", but otherwise "upset, but tidy, often laborious, in good physical conditions".[52] In particular, nudity was considered an extremely serious sign of mental derangement because it implied lack of morality and shame, embodying the quintessential public scandal. It led to internment even when it was linked to post-traumatic behaviour: B.G.,[53] a 25-year-old unmarried woman, who had been sexually abused as a child and had witnessed a murder, was interned in 1930. She fainted and showed

> similar neurological manifestations, [had] a serious irritation of the sexual sphere with insistent vulvar and mammal erethism [hyper-excitability linked with nervous causes] (…) she is insomniac, refuses food, has a tendency to self-harm, to throw objects and to exhibit herself naked.[54]

Masturbation, already pathologised by sexologists in the second half of the nineteenth century,[55] was still considered an unequivocal sign of mental illness, especially in women, and it was an option to be discouraged in the current regime effort to increase birth rates. T.A.[56] was 15 in 1922 and was described as "*mixedematosa*, [showed swelling due to liquid retention], erotomaniac, obscene, needy of care, mentally limited".[57] She used to escape from home during "erotomaniac" phases and, when at home, she constantly engaged in obscene acts. She "ferociously" masturbated from the age of five and according to her father she was initiated to this by her grandfather, thus revealing that she had endured sexual abuse at an early age. She reciprocally masturbated with her brother and stated that she did not mind if she was masturbated by a man or by a woman. Adding scandal to scandal, she said this "without showing any shame, without blushing, with indifference".[58] Otherwise, she was calm, worked, had an orderly behaviour, her physical conditions were described as excellent.

Her internment was only justified on the basis of her "severe 'erotomania'" and "the obscene acts" she engaged in.[59]

Moral judgement also played a role in G.R.M.'s case,[60] a young woman who was interned in 1922 because she started showing signs of imbalance with suicidal tendencies, after having been seduced and abandoned by her office boss. Her mother's letters to the Director of the asylum stressed how her condition was not due to her immoral behaviour, but rather to her seducer's lack of scruples: she obviously thought that psychiatrists would judge her daughter on the basis of her pre-marital relationship. Besides, suicide attempts or even just manifested intentions of taking one own life were considered a serious pathology and many people were interned on the basis of this diagnosis alone. In eugenics terms, suicide was the way in which "nature itself (…) tries to eliminate the less fit for the fight for life",[61] people who showed suicidal tendencies were generally considered a bad, almost contagious influence on others[62] besides falling in the category of the "dangerous to themselves".

In some cases, patients, particularly women, were interned as a preventative measure against possible future immoral behaviour. D.L.R.V.,[63] a 17-year-old unmarried woman with "amatory tendencies that are not easily controllable in a subject below the age of 18",[64] was interned in 1930 for "amoral psychopathic symptoms".[65] She had engaged in correspondence with four boys at the same time, which pointed at her lack of morality, fickleness and mental instability, and her file in fact contains the letters of one of them that she was not allowed to read. She would be readmitted three more times after 1930. In Lombrosian terms, the idea behind preventative internment was that amoral people, like criminals, were thought to be so because of a genetic predisposition and were, therefore, expected to automatically fall into their pattern of behaviour.[66]

In extreme cases, internment was simply a punishment for having stepped out of line. For instance, the same year M.G.[67] was interned because of "mental alienation with delirium of jealousy".[68] She was referred by her husband who refused to take her back home when she was declared fit to be released. The patient replied she was prepared to go and live with her father, but he too declined to accept her. There was an exchange of correspondence between the Director of the Turin mental health institution and the patient's father: Tirelli tried to convince him to have his daughter back as there was no reason to keep her inside an asylum any longer. Also M.G. wrote to her father, imploring to agree, blaming him for siding with her husband who had caused her much suffering,

adding that she only needed his signature and then she would go to work as a servant, not burdening him with her presence. After all this insistence, she was eventually taken back home by her husband. After this episode, it is easy to imagine she would have no longer complained about her husband's infidelity.

Sometimes the psychiatric hospital substituted an absent or incapable family in looking after patients who were of public scandal, but were otherwise not considered deserving of internment: F.M.A., a 48-year-old woman from Turin, was interned in 1930

> both because she shows improper manifestations she indulges in when she runs away from home and that are of public scandal; and because she is not and cannot be conveniently looked after.[69]

The implication is that, when present and apt, the family had to automatically become a reclusion place for individuals who were behaving in "antisocial" ways.

A number of patients were in the Collegno or in the Turin asylum simply because of their anti-fascist opinions, showing how the 1904 law could be bent to silence dissidents: F.F.,[70] a Jewish secondary school teacher, was preventatively interned in 1926 and described as

> paranoid with fixed ideas. He manifests hatred against authoritative fascist personalities that he considers an obstacle to the realization of his political idea. From reading his many bizarre, nonsensical letters, it appears that this mental imbalance could degenerate and allow him to put into action some of his intentions of suppressing these personalities, etc. … I therefore think that the abovementioned F.F. is dangerous to himself and others (…).[71]

The same year, another teacher, M.M.,[72] who had already been in prison because of her politically subversive loud statements, was interned and declared a social misfit and a parasite:

> She leads a vagabond life, living of help and subsidies. Relatively calm, but shows undoubtable signs of mental alienation with symptoms of hallucinations of a persecutory character.[73]

R.G.[74] had written insulting and threatening letters to Mussolini, either anonymously or signing with a false name. Interned in November 1926, he would be dismissed only in 1931. X.G.,[75] an unmarried clerical

employee, was charged for having insulted the head of government because he had torn to pieces a photo of Mussolini. Sent to Collegno in 1930 to assess a possible diminished responsibility due to mental health problems, he was certified as "affected by psychosis"[76] and interned. Like L.C.[77] who was succinctly diagnosed as affected by "frenastenia with delirium of social reforms"[78] in 1926. Psychiatry theory pathologised any anti-fascist behaviours and there is evidence of this in an interesting article in the psychiatric journal *Il Pisani* which describes a court case against a miner who had thrown an egg shell against a *Carabiniere* saying: "Who are you to me? And who is Mussolini, who made you a *Carabiniere*, to me?".[79] The case well illustrates how an entire psychiatric case could be construed from a small, insignificant incident. After medical examination, the man was said to show "abnormalities of character with tendencies to isolation and fights", "intellectual decay" worsened by chronic alcoholism, "interpretation and memory faults", "hostility and diffidence towards the environment".[80] Moreover, he did not recognise authority. Therefore, he was declared

> A primitive deficient who always lived in the most absolute ignorance and in the most dire isolation of the mines (…) alcoholic weak of mind (…) elevated feelings in him never developed at all.[81]

The border between criminality, mental illness and immorality had faded away, in perfect accordance with Lombrosian theories.

The influence of Cesare Lombroso is evident as patients were often described in an attempt to find traits that would identify mental illness by common physical appearance elements linked with a lack of development: B.A., an unmarried farmer interned in 1930 in Collegno, was described as having

> a profoundly degenerate physiognomy: monkey-like face, trapped ears, numerous and deep horizontal wrinkles on his forehead, developed frontal breasts, asymmetric prognatism [protruding jaw]; smaller right eye. Walking and posture generally clumsy and uncertain; tremor in his hands and eyelids; scarce tactile sensibility and reaction to pain; deep reflexes are vivacious, superficial ones are murky. Parenchymatous goitre. Already at first sight he shows an evident mental deficiency: he mutters his words in a way that is difficult to understand; also from a lexical point of view, his vocabulary and argumentation's deficiencies are numerous (…) Rudimentary affectivity towards his family members; a limited ethical-affective generic sensitivity; a

> characteristic distaste for continuative, constant and productive work; a strange and irregular conduct, which is even more abnormal sometimes as there is abuse of alcohol.[82]

As noted by Canosa,[83] it is evident how this approach de-humanised the patient, to make him/her become a simple assembly of elements that had to fit patterns, models and statistics.

In the meantime, psychiatry intensified its research on sexual inversion. Psychiatric journals offered a chance to the professionals to present difficult, new, controversial cases, so that other colleagues could contribute, enriching medical knowledge. Most Italian asylums published one and the psychiatrists' library in Collegno subscribed to many of them, so that it is possible to deduct that the staff working there at the time were well informed about current therapies and assessments trends. Among these publications, the authoritative *Rivista Sperimentale di Feniatria* had talked about moral madness in more than one issue. In one article, by Augusto Mario Coen, published in 1923,[84] it had been extended to include sexual aberrations such as onanism, narcissism and sexual inversion. Following current beliefs, "Sexual inversion does not deserve a special place in the pathology of aberrations, because, given the association of homosexual tendencies with other general symptoms, the psychopathic element is at its basis too".[85] The author mentioned Lichternstern's experiments of castration and testicle transplants, a much debated topic at the time not just in Italy,[86] and reported one case where a similar operation had been performed in Germany on a young man aged 20: two weeks after a testicle transplant, he would no longer have shown any "homosexual interest".[87] Hermaphroditism attracted special, almost obsessive attention: it confirmed that a group of individuals remained trapped in an intermediary development stage, characterised by bisexuality, which in their case was visible in a body with both genitalia. In the same magazine, in 1930 an article by Giuseppe Bianchi, psychiatrist in Novara, illustrated a case of eunucoidism,[88] in 1929 Giulio Agostini wrote a long article on hermaphroditism based on the observation of one of his patients,[89] in 1929 Michele Levi wrote an article on "intersexuality"[90] and in 1931, in *Rassegna di Studi Psichiatrici*, Angelo Vanelli published another article on the same subject,[91] just to quote a few.

Gaetano Boschi[92] spelled out contemporary theories on bisexuality, according to which pederasts would have kept both male and female personality aspects without letting one prevail over the other. Boschi

mentioned the case of a man who had no sex with his wife because he was attracted by his cleaning lady, a woman with strong masculine traits. He defined him a "sexual particularist",[93] rather than impotent, bisexual or sexually inverted, in the attempt to categorise something that escaped traditional psychiatry categories.

The *Quaderni di Psichiatria* had published in 1925 a report by Mario De Paoli, a psychiatrist in Como mental health hospital.[94] In speaking about those "disgraced individuals, victims of that serious moral degeneration called passive sexual inversion",[95] he indicated that these degenerative phenomena were associated with an altered endocrinal functionality. To further illustrate his point, he continued by inserting the description of two cases analysed by one of his colleagues, whose notes constitute a precious account of homosexual men's lives in those years: Case I, was C.L., a 19-year-old man. His father had contracted syphilis and had had passive sexual intercourse with men which proved there was an hereditary factor. From the age of 15, the patient engaged in passive pederast sexual practices, starting with a foreign client of the Milan hotel where he worked. He then met a couple of like-minded individuals and started prostituting himself. He had several affairs, received letters "written by his lovers with such loving tenderness that it is as if they were written to a real woman",[96] which implies that the medical professional somehow acquired access to them. At the same time C.L. started committing small crimes: petty theft, he stole some of his mother's jewels, forged his father's signature to withdraw some money from his savings account. It is evident the link drawn by the doctor between homosexuality and criminality. In 1924, presumably in an attempt to straighten him up, his parents convinced him to join the colonial militia, but after a couple of months C.L., was declared "affected by passive pederasty with indigenous people".[97] was expelled from the military and repatriated. Back home, he started the same routine again, but he had become violent, on one occasion, during a discussion, he kicked his father in his stomach. The family at this point sought medical advice and the doctor referred C.L. for internment. Once in the asylum, interrogated on his private life, he talked about his "perverted instincts" with pleasure, without trace of shame, when in bed he wrapped the sheets around his body in order to show his physical beauty (a detail given to prove his vanity, but that reveals a homo-erotic gaze on the part of the health-carer). Internment eventually took his toll and after a while he started showing signs of depression, refusing to eat. When the professionals told him that

he had caused grief to his mother, he cried, blaming only his father and brother for his internment.

His aspect and gestures are described as female-like, he had no beard but had a lot of hair. Lucid, oriented, he spoke in a refined way, his memory was perfect, his perception reactive, his intelligence vivid, he showed no shame when talking about his previous thefts and lovers. After three months' internment a drastic change was observed: he stopped talking about his vices, regained a cordial rapport with his father and brother. Besides, while interned he did not attempt to have sexual intercourse with other men. C.L. must have understood that the only way to get out of the psychiatric institution was to stop defending his case, playing the part the psychiatrists expected him to. Hence his sudden "repentance". At the end of such description the diagnosis, predictably, was: "psychopathological episodes in a morally deficient, sexually inverted individual".[98]

Case II was P.A., a 33-year-old cleaner. His father was an alcoholic and his mother had been interned once, which in eugenics terms pointed unmistakably at an inherited mental and moral degeneracy. From an early age he felt he belonged to the other sex: he enjoyed playing with dolls, sewing and cooking. He started working as a cleaner and, at the age of 16, fell in love with the butler who worked in the same household. Their relationship lasted one year, but when his employers became aware of it, he was sacked. He began leading a vagabond life and engaged in frequent jealousy scenes with other young passive homosexuals, because he was afraid they might steal his lovers. "Feeling incorrigible and seeing that it was impossible for him to find a honest job as, because of his vice, he was always sacked"[99] he started socialising with male prostitutes in Milan. They imposed on him the name of Rosetta and he prostituted himself, but tried to make a living also in other ways: dressing up as a *chanteuse*, he sang in *osterie* and night clubs. In this way, he managed to earn so much money that he was in a position to keep his lovers, something that is revealing of the fact that *en-travesti* performances must have been popular in fascist Milan. During the war he worked as an officer attendant, but was sacked when caught admiring himself in the mirror, wearing the officer wife's clothes. At that point he was referred to the Reggio Emilia psychiatric hospital where he was interned for 18 months. Once released, he started his activity as a *chanteuse* again, but the police issued a *diffida* not to wear female clothes and therefore, in order to make a living, he started selling sacred objects in the streets, something that is very near to begging. He started drinking and using cocaine, on one occasion was taken to hospital

in Como because found drunk in the street and his feminine aspect, gestures and facial expressions, his thin elegant fingers had surprised the doctors: presumably the professional consulted his previous A&E hospital notes. In the Como asylum the medical examination revealed two anal protuberances which in the past had been associated with pederasty, but whose diagnostic importance—the psychiatrist noted—had decreased as it had been ascertained that they could have more than one cause. The fact that homosexuals were subjected to humiliating anal inspection to ascertain their passive sexual role[100] is documented. P.A. was convinced of the incorrigibility of his defect, thus showing unwillingness to change; not only that, but if one asked him about his habits, he was immediately in a good mood and scandalously happy to talk about them. The psychiatrist ended his article by putting these two cases in relation to one another, trying to identify common physical traits that could help future diagnosis. Both patients' thoraxes and abdomens were described as disharmonious. Hyperactivity of the thyroid combined with hypo-activity of the sexual gland, manifested in puberty age or infancy, was considered likely. An endocrinal dysfunction was thought to be the cause of their behaviour and their long legs were interpreted as a further confirmation of hormonal imbalance.

The *Bollettino dell'Accademia di Genova* published another case study that showed how lack of morality went hand in hand with lack of shame and repentance. Luigi Tomellini[101] illustrated the case of M.M. who had started running away from home as a small child. At 14 his passive sodomite relationship with a *signore* [an upper-class man] in the village became known.

> In relating this, the patient states he can't avoid doing this [having sexual encounters with this man] since he says that everybody is aware of it, and he adds that also other young boys in the village consented to do what he did, and this would be practiced by boys in general as there would be nothing wrong with it; he says it is a way to satisfy pleasure.[102]

Up to the age of 17 he caused problems to his parents who tried and failed to correct him. When he finished school "he dedicated himself to dissipating money stolen from his parents in lust and women".[103] Then he had to do his military service, but was always put under arrest. He pretended to be mad so that he would be exempt. However, once achieved his goal, he started drinking, indulged in idleness and excesses. His father

forced him to expatriate and he spent some time in South America, but when the money ran out he came back: this implies that he was a scrounger who could only live as a parasite, another stereotypical aspect of the pederast, as observed earlier.[104] He was eventually interned for *pazzia morale*. In this case too, it is important to note how homosexuality is linked with an overall lack of morality and a tendency to commit crimes, in line with Lombrosian theories.

To quote other examples: an article by Marco Levi Bianchini[105] talked about male traits present in "alienated" women. Among them there was a 44-year-old patient, "interned for impulsive delirious episodes in psychodegenerate deaf and mute person. Erotic and homosexual, but certainly because of lack of men",[106] placing her in the category of "situational" sexual inverts.[107] In the same issue G. Santangelo connected cocaine consumption with eroticism and degeneration: "women [who use cocaine] become almost always lesbians, men, if they don't become pederasts (something that in truth rarely happens), find an outlet for their instincts in collective practices of the most unruly and abnormal lust".[108]

The subject of homosexuality was often debated and even included when not entirely relevant with the main topic discussed. This is the case in an article by Annibale Puca on sexuality and spine damage[109] that mainly deals with male impotence. However, the fifth case analysed is that of a boy who "together with secondary traits of femininity, shows feminine gestures, behaviours and preferences. He is very well-known in the town where he lives for being the characteristic type of the homosexual".[110] There is no mention of a spine injury or impotence, but the "funnel-shaped anus", proof that anal examination had taken place, is noted.[111]

In contrast with this extended medical interest for the topic, G.'s clinical file constitutes an evident exception. G.'s homosexuality does not seem to have been investigated. He provided some indications on how, when and why he had sexual intercourse with other men, explaining its socio-economic consequences. The professionals did not ask for further details. They were clearly aware of theories, therapies and surgery used in cases of homosexuality, elsewhere in Italy and abroad. Yet G.'s homosexuality occupies a small part of his file. There is no evidence of a search for characterising "effeminacy" traits, there is no comment on his posture, gestures, facial expressions, body hair or beard, no measurements or detailed description of his physical features, which in other files are prominent, and no trace of any anal examination to ascertain his sexual role in homosexual

intercourse. G.'s homosexuality remained tagged on a general picture of degeneracy, but it never became the focus of attention.

G.'s days in the Collegno asylum were "long and boring"[112] by his own admission. Patients were not allowed to have any object or personal item of clothing apart from the asylum's uniform, movement was restricted, work offered was manual work, such as farming, shoe-mending, carpentry, clothes weaving and washing (Fig. 6.2). There was a patients' library and, from what we read on G.'s medical notes, he had access to newspapers. He spent 22 months in the Collegno mental health hospital, writing letters, receiving visits only from his cousin.[113] On a number of occasions, he exchanged views with the hospital Director. He smoked, drank coffee, read books and newspapers.[114] He must have looked like a lion in a cage.

Collegno's psychiatrists don't seem to have been very sympathetic towards him, as can be expected: the fact that G.'s brother was a famous doctor in Turin and a loyal supporter of Mussolini, one among the first medical professionals to side with *Il Duce* publicly in the town according to his own autobiographical account,[115] must have interfered with their judgement. During Fascism, to take G. seriously or to openly show understanding would have been politically and professionally, maybe even

Fig. 6.2 Collegno ex mental health hospital. Some ergo-therapy labs

morally compromising. Yet, doctors were not so compactly against him. In a letter[116] G. expressed gratitude to the Director and one of the psychiatrists, Anselmo Sacerdote, for their help in convincing his brother to give him a sum of money that presumably would allow him to buy cigarettes, newspapers and other small items while interned. He managed to meet the Director on several occasions and he always addressed him with kindness and respect in his letters. There is no mention in his files that he was forced to work and there is no indication of any treatment. In fact, it is plausible to say that he was not given any. In this, he would not be totally exceptional: the institution in itself, the asylum's discipline and forced labour, called ergotherapy,[117] were considered therapeutic, internment was the medicine apart from cases where sedation or restraints were thought to be necessary. Like in a prison, time was thought to be the cure, the institution's discipline would straighten behaviour and shape character, work would teach self-esteem: needless to add that, within this mentality, punishment and intimidation could find a therapeutic justification. At the beginning of the twentieth century, prior to electro-shock, introduced in the late 1930s, the main clinical therapies consisted of clinotherapy (keeping the patient in bed), hydrotherapy (prolonged baths in hot, warm or cold water) or shock-based cures such as insulin-induced coma or convulsions caused by Cardiazol. Schizophrenia was treated with inoculation of parasites responsible for malaria, that gave very high temperatures and subsequent fits. The assumption behind it was that, as epileptics were observed to never be schizophrenic, if schizophrenics experienced artificially provoked fits similar to epileptic ones, they would be cured.[118] Otherwise, the patient was simply observed and commented upon, his progress, or lack thereof, was remarked, but very little else happened.

Doctors seem to have left G. in peace. Maybe, while on the surface they could not be seen to side with him, some of them thought he had been unjustly interned. In a letter, G. indicated that he would have liked to be invited to a conversation that had taken place between his brother and the Director.[119] Since we know from G.'s words that the brother never paid him a visit, the conversation with Rivano is likely to have been an exchange of opinions between colleagues and perhaps it was interpreted as an overstepping the line, an intrusion into another professional's sphere. Besides, it is not totally unlikely that, among the Collegno medical staff, there was some discontent with the custody role allocated to psychiatry: Rivano was in touch with the world and was certainly aware of the debate that was taking place in Italy on the issue. As observed earlier, many professionals were resenting

the fact that Law n. 36 sanctioned a reclusion role for psychiatric hospitals rather than a medical one.[120] He could have plausibly been unhappy with this and with the way the regime was bending psychiatry to do its dirty work. It is equally plausible that Sacerdote, a Jew who lost his job in 1938 when racial laws were introduced in Italy,[121] was not particularly in line with the regime either. Tirelli, Director of the Turin mental health hospital in the same years, at the beginning of his career was a medical assistant in Collegno. He was remembered as somebody who never obeyed fascists.[122] Collegno psychiatrists could have looked at G.'s case with a certain degree of prudent benevolence because of their discontent with the new course psychiatric practice had taken together with an underlying lack of sympathy for fascist ideals.

By reading other Collegno files it emerges that improvement was measured on the basis of several criteria: primarily if patients had acquired awareness of their status as mentally ill people, then if their behaviour had changed, so that they showed to have learnt how to behave properly, even forcing themselves to do so, acting a part, not following their instincts, so that they would be able to go back to society. Importantly, they had to demonstrate understanding and respect for figures of authority, the institution's rules, its rigid timetable and impositions. Another crucial sign of recovery was showing shame, remorse, repentance, a regained sense of morality, thought to be a necessary step on the path towards sanity and civilisation. G. did not consider himself insane and certainly did not show any signs of having repented. On the contrary, he kept insisting he was right and sane. He was calm, cooperative and disciplined, had adapted to his new life fairly well. Doctors commented positively on his behaviour, his keeping not idle, his acceptance of the rules, his cleaning and tidying up his dormitory. Although he did not socialise with other patients, he had not withdrawn into a passive state. His lack of repentance was negatively remarked upon, together with his hostility towards his brother, his threats, his lack of resilience, his rebellious and polemical attitudes, his sarcasm. However, there is no proof that the professionals considered him affected by a particularly severe form of psychosis. The absence of treatment, of imposed ergotherapy, of comments on his recovery or lack thereof, of intrusive medical examinations all seem to point in the direction of doubt and suspended judgement.

He is the only patient whose "homosexual tendencies" are noted on the front page of the medical and admission files for the period analysed. Another patient, B.A., an unmarried domestic worker interned in 1930 in

Collegno for "schizophrenia (scarce moral sense – critical – invasive – not talkative – sitophobic)",[123] was reported, although not in prominent position, to have been accused of pederasty and of having sexually abused children in his care while he worked as a teacher. Also, in this case, no mention can be found of his pederasty in subsequent notes. Homosexuality does not appear to have been a specific concern among Collegno and Turin practitioners at the time. It was noted when there, so that it was presented as a relevant factor when tackling mental and moral degeneracy, but there is no indication that it drew specific attention or cures.

G.'s medical files contain three letters written by him and addressed to the Director of Collegno's asylum. They are very lucid, it is unlikely that a serious professional such as Rivano would have not noticed their coherence. Here is the voice of a man who shows logic, intelligence, culture and strength of character, who is "ready and prepared to demonstrate what my untamed, alone, naked will can be like" [underlined in the original][124]; one gets the impression that the Collegno psychiatrists were in a difficult situation, on the one hand having to deal with a patient with clear signs of non-conforming behaviour and with legal charges for violence and threats against a well-known brother, who was also a respected colleague and a renowned fascist. On the other hand, facing a moral and medical dilemma, as they were keeping in an asylum someone who was clearly well-behaved, rational, calm, determined, not dangerous, not a threat to society, and ultimately not mentally ill. Probably in this case it was too easy to understand why G. had been referred for psychiatric internment and Rivano may not have liked the idea of being used, together with the institution he directed, in a bitter family dispute. Besides, he was on rather orthodox Lombrosian ideological positions: when called for a psychiatric assessment of a rapist by the Turin court, he co-wrote a statement[125] where he declared that the young man who had carefully premeditated and planned a sexual assault on an under-age girl was to be considered totally irresponsible of his actions on the basis of his family history: an amoral mother, a hysterical aunt, a cousin who had committed suicide, combined with the effects of typhoid infection contracted in childhood were the involuntary causes of his actions, only incidentally aggravated by the effects of overheating after having drunk. Rivano clearly thought that inborn degenerates could not be cured and that punishment would have achieved no result. Maybe he thought that G. was not an occasional homosexual, as he had stated, but a congenital, habitual one who could not be treated, that he was not to be

held responsible for his degenerate actions and that keeping him inside an asylum was pointless.

This chapter shed light on the daily practice of an asylum during the first part of the fascist regime. It showed to which extent internment had become one of the available options to incapacitate dissenting and non-conforming individuals, or those who were considered immoral. However, G.'s case presented several moral and professional dilemmas to the Collegno psychiatrists, as the chapter explained. Beyond the PNF official directives, evidence suggests that they took a distance and delegated a final decision on G.'s dismissal to another asylum's colleagues. It is an interesting indication of dissent within the psychiatric profession, or at least of a critical non-aligned attitude of some within the profession during the dictatorship. G.'s internment followed a pattern that appears to be quite unique: his path to dismissal is analysed in the following chapter.

Notes

1. CA, op. cit., G.'s letter to the Director of Collegno's asylum dated 1.2.1929, p. 1.
2. As described later in this chapter.
3. On the history of Collegno's asylum Cossa, Diana. 2012. *Ospedali psichiatrici di Torino, Archivio Storico (1685–1987)*. www.cartedalegare.it; Ferrio, Carlo. 1948. *La Psiche e i nervi*. Torino: Utet; Falconio, Rino. 1928. *Il Regio Manicomio nel II centenario, 22/6/1728–22/6/1928*. Torino: No Publisher; Fenoglio, Luigi. 1902. *Cenni sul R. Manicomio di Collegno*. Torino: Bertolero; Tirelli, Vitige. 1928. Cenni storici sull'origine e sullo sviluppo tecnico-scientifico del Regio Manicomio di Torino. *Note e Riviste di Psichiatria* XVI: 533–563.
4. Rivano, Federico. 1908. *Relazione della visita fatta ad alcuni manicomi italiani e dell'estero*. Torino: Spandre; CA, OPT 279.
5. Tirelli, Vitige, op. cit., p. 561–562.
6. Both CA, OPT 272.
7. Ibid.
8. CA, OPT 268.
9. CA, OPT 284.
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11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. CA, OPT 270.
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15. CA, OPT 270.
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17. Quoted in Franzinelli, Mimmo and Graziano, Nicola. 2015. *Un'Odissea Partigiana. Dalla Resistenza al Manicomio*. Milano: Feltrinelli, p. 29.
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19. CA, file n. 4***0.
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36. 1922–1931, see Chap. 1. Introduction.
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38. Ibid.
39. CA, file n. 4***8.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid.
43. CA, file n. 4***0.
44. Ibid.
45. CA, file n. 4***1.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid.

49. CA, file n. 4***7.
50. CA, M. L.'s file n. 4***1.
51. CA, file n. 4***6.
52. Ibid.
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110. Ibid., p. 90.

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112. CA, G.'s file, op. cit., G.'s letter dated 1.2.1929, p. 1.
113. The Collegno asylum Visitors' Register is not available for the period of G.'s internment, but G. hints at these visits in RA, file n. 1***5, letter dated 6.10.1930.
114. CA, op. cit., letter dated 1.2.1929, p. 2.
115. See note 8, Chap. 3.
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CHAPTER 7

"My Untamed, Alone, Naked Will": Freedom

Abstract This chapter sheds light on the last part of G.'s internment and tries to explain why he was released. It is based on archival evidence found in the Racconigi asylum, where he was sent for a second psychiatric assessment. The chapter further sketches G.'s personality, as it emerged from this last series of events and from his writings, and draws a hypothesis on the likely conclusions of the family saga that had brought him to an asylum in the first place.

Keywords Racconigi asylum • Psychiatric assessment

This chapter sheds light on the last part of G.'s internment and tries to explain why he was released. It is based on archival evidence found in the Racconigi asylum, a mental health hospital in the same region as Collegno but under a different Provincial authority, where he was sent for second psychiatric assessment. The chapter further sketches G.'s personality, as it emerged from this last series of events and from his writings, and draws a hypothesis on the likely conclusions of the family saga that had brought him into an asylum in the first place.

On 25 September 1930, after almost two years internment, G. was transferred to the Racconigi mental health hospital for a "*perizia*", a further psychiatric appraisal. This procedure appears to be unusual, the

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Collegno archives do not have similar documentation for any other patient in that period of time. Perhaps the sympathetic Director and Dr. Sacerdote decided to push the course of events in order to find a solution to a case that they did not know how to handle. Transferring the patient, they would pass on the responsibility of a politically, professionally and morally difficult situation. Racconigi is a small town in the province of Cuneo, hence its asylum fell under another Provincial authority, something that reinforces the idea of an attempt by the Collegno team to get an independent medical opinion, from professionals who were likely to be a bit more removed from the patient's influential, Turin-based brother.

Having re-obtained his belongings, G. was transferred to the Racconigi asylum, where he had to get rid of them again, following procedure: Sister Angelina took care of his hat, handkerchief, jacket, waist-coat, trousers, coat, canvas shirt, vest, pants, shoes, tie, collar and braces, the clothes of a middle class man with a hint of sophistication,[1] despite being allocated to the category of "*povero*" on all his admission files, as he had no means and could not contribute to the payment of internment fees. G. had to wear a second uniform—light and dark brown striped canvas jacket and trousers—and entered another institution.

The Racconigi doctors expressed perplexity, they opened G.'s medical file notes with: "The history of this patient is without doubt the most complex one can imagine".[2] It is evident that some of the patient's version of the facts did not entirely convince them:

> up to the age of 23 his life can be summarised as a series of escapes from convents and of re-joining his brother who becomes regularly furious and brings back the "naughty" 23-year-old man to the convent.[3]

They evidently thought he was immature, at 23 he still behaved like a rascal. Further down, between the lines it is possible to read more of the doctors' judgement and general disbelief: one person could not have been the cause of all his disgraces, G.'s life seemed to have revolved entirely around his brother in an obsessive, unhealthy way. The fact that he wanted to get married and could not because his brother prevented it by not giving him the necessary money, is accompanied by an exclamation mark. G.'s statement that his sibling must help him has an underlining of the word "must" because the medical professionals clearly questioned it.

However, other than his animosity against the detested brother, the obsessive and unjustified accusations against him, the lack of criticism, his

immaturity and few other negative remarks, the picture did not lead to a diagnosis of mental illness: "In the manifestations of his actions here we could never notice anything outside normality".[4] The Director of the Racconigi psychiatric hospital therefore wrote that G. had to be released.[5] Consequently, the Turin Tribunal, having read the medical assessment, declared that G. was not affected by mental alienation, he was neither dangerous to himself nor to others. His immediate release was authorised on 30 December 1930.[6]

G.'s Racconigi file also contains a letter he wrote to his brother a couple of weeks after having been transferred.[7] It was composed in the presence of medical staff, as he stated, to try and find a peaceful reconciliation. It is interesting to note the change of tone: G. at that point knew he was winning, things had finally started moving the way he wanted and therefore he was displaying a reassuring, mature and wise tone. Crucially, he invited his brother to reopen dialogue and to agree to a compromise on the basis of the fact that it would be in his interest too:

> You were sure that making me disappear in an asylum would have solved this dispute in your favour (…). But having been expelled from the PNF and having received a confirmed sentence was not enough to make you change direction? Do you really need another court trial to show what is concealed under your attempt to smuggle me as insane (…)?[8]

G. could suddenly threaten his brother: he asked him to withdraw, agree to pay what was due or else he would have to fight another battle in court, as G. would press charges against him. G. knew that his brother did not want this: having been found guilty of performing an abortion on an underage girl, he was expelled from the National Fascist Party and his reputation was ruined. Several years later he inserted a section on this episode in one of his books, explaining his reasons and defending his case[9]; it was, by his own admission, the most difficult moment of his otherwise refulgent career. So, G.'s thinking proved to be right. In the aftermath of the scandalous trial that had so many implications on his brother's political and professional career, all legal charges against him were almost certainly dropped.

Sent back to the Collegno asylum on 6 January 1931, G. was released three days later. He was a free man and presumably a well-off one too, since it is plausible that his brother accepted to fulfil his financial requests, in order to close this story once and for all and avoid being called to court again.

To be released from an asylum, completely cleared of a mental illness diagnosis, was an exceptionally difficult result to achieve, G. must have been aware that it was an astounding victory. Of those who were interned in the Racconigi hospital between 1928 and 1930, 43.1% remained there for more than ten years, with an additional 9.6% whose internment would last between five and ten years.[10] Besides, the Racconigi archives hold files of patients who did not have the same cultural tools and determination to fight the system: F.N., for instance, an unmarried farmer, described as "delirious impulsive homosexual",[11] interned in 1930 shortly after G., was one of 100 patients who underwent lobotomy in 1937.[12] Evidently other stories, still to be investigated, did not have a happy end.

This chapter focused on G.'s internment in another institution and it showed that different approaches were adopted when dealing with homosexuality during the regime. It also highlighted G.'s strategies and his ambiguities. G. is a heroic figure in many ways and an anti-hero in other respects. In this, he well epitomises what the majority of individuals had to do in order to survive during the fascist regime, how they coped with the pressures they were forced to endure, how they compromised and how they resisted.

Notes

1. RA, op. cit., Oggetti del Ricoverato, 25.9.1930.
2. RA, op. cit.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid. The text of the official legal "*perizia*" is not in the Racconigi files.
7. Ibid., 6.10.1930.
8. Ibid.
9. See note 8, Chap. 3. G.'s brother was cleared of charges on appeal.
10. www.cartedalegare.it
11. RA, file n. 1***5.
12. Riccatti, Emilio and Borgarello, Giovanni. 1938. La leucotomia prefrontale di Egas Moniz in 100 casi di psicopatie gravi. *Schizofrenie* VII (1–3): 241–267.

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CHAPTER 8

Conclusions

Abstract This chapter highlights how families had a large responsibility in the decision to have someone interned, but at the same time it shows how psychiatry was, at least in this case, fairly reluctant to collaborate with relatives and security forces in implementing the repression of homosexuals. G. demonstrated that he knew the system, its rhetoric and its methods, and was willing to compromise and adapt, in order to obtain his freedom. However, he was, in certain respects, a pioneer, showing that he had an awareness of his rights and the courage to fight a fierce battle to obtain compensation for the injustices he had endured. This ambiguity is in many ways representative of the survival strategies implemented by many Italians under the pressure of the dictatorship.

Keywords Release • Family saga • Hero/anti-hero • Strategies

This research proves that, during Fascism, it was sufficient to reveal someone's homosexuality to the police to start a procedure that could entail exclusion from society through reclusion in an asylum. In this case, psychiatrists seem to have followed directives, even without strong medical conviction, thus offering help to security forces in their repressive and moralising activity.

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Furthermore, as shown, the vast majority of Collegno's patients were referred by a relative, which highlights how family values were dissolving and had become a mere empty propaganda slogan under Mussolini: repression fuelled and favoured suspicion, lack of trust and blackmail. It was possible to use the brutality of the regime for one own's purposes even among relatives, and some people took advantage of it. The family had become an important player in the dictatorship's repressive mechanism: the police relied on it as much as it did on psychiatrists when it came to silencing voices of dissent, out-of-line behaviours and, like in G.'s case, homosexuality. This book concentrates on male homosexuals because it stems out of the case of a man who had sex with another man. Besides, no Collegno, Turin or Savonera women internees were described as lesbians for the 1922–1931 period. However, great importance has been given to issues of morality that unmistakably show how limited the sphere of women's sexuality and behaviour was.

G.'s *memoriale* underlines to what extent ordinary citizens had assimilated and were expected to use fascist rhetoric in order to survive. To strengthen his position and fight his case, G. had to demonstrate that he knew all the propaganda key issues. He even tried to prove he was in line with them. The declaration of his same-sex relationship was instrumental in stating that he was an active and situational homosexual, so that he would be judged less severely. In other words, as it was unavoidable, it was used as part of a strategy to show that he shared the regime's moral values.

He contested accusations "from within", as we would say today, he did not publicly reject Fascism, its ideals, its foundations. This does not mean that he was not against the regime, in fact he is very likely to have been at least critical of it, but he chose not to reveal his real political beliefs. He even stated on a couple of occasions he was a good fascist, although his biography makes it highly unlikely and the statement almost sounds like a deliberate provocation. Overt hostility towards the dictatorship would have meant a much longer internment: several anti-fascists were interned in the Collegno asylum while G. was there, as explained in Chap. 6, several more are likely to have already been there when he arrived, and he might have been aware of it. Equally, an overt, proud declaration of his sexuality would have had an impact on his final diagnosis. G., like the majority of Italians at the time, was aware that self-censorship would guarantee a higher chance of immunity.

G.'s piece of writing is a photograph, precious because unique, of a non-conforming man's life during the fascist regime. His rancorous underlying tones are probably representative of the way many homosexuals must have felt at the time: forced to be silent, closeted, invisible, angry because of the discrimination they had to suffer every day, resentful, painfully aware of the consequences of declaring their sexuality, bombarded and surrounded by hostile messages.

However, several aspects of the protagonist's life-style remain very vaguely defined: although G. admitted he had had same-sex relationships when he was young and in a men-only environment, which he could not have avoided admitting since it was on his records, he was very skilled at leaving most things unsaid. The woman he lived with turned out to be his landlady and then, to dissipate further doubts, he said he was going to marry her, which seems highly improbable as there is no mention of her in any of his letters, his Collegno and Racconigi files do not contain any correspondence from or to her. One is induced to think that she was, willingly or not, used as a cover-up. There is no statement that suggests that G. had other same-sex relationships or that he frequented other homosexuals. There is also no mention of friends, acquaintances, former colleagues and the hospital files do not hold any correspondence to and from them. If G. had any, he was very careful to keep them a secret. He reconstructed his biography, but deliberately gave no hints about his present circumstances.

It is impossible to assess how internment affected G.'s professional and personal life. It seems very unlikely that he could have worked as a lawyer afterwards, particularly because internment remained on record. The Lawyers' Associations of Milan and Turin have not replied to requests to know if he was in their list of professionals after 1931. The stigma of being a homosexual is likely to have continued to be an obstacle to his career and achievements.

While nothing is known about how internment impacted on his future, G.'s *memoriale* is an important testimony on the social and economic consequences of homosexuality that he had already experienced: rejection from the family, professional and social marginalisation, consequent lack of income. It is possible to note that there is no mention of any visits, correspondence or benevolent gesture on the part of G.'s other siblings, two sisters and a brother: with their absence and silence, they seem to have sided with his older brother.

To conclude, G. remains an ambiguous character: he admitted his homosexuality only to state that he was an active, occasional homosexual, therefore, in fascist terms, not responsible for it and not incurable. He did not reject Fascism, on the contrary he even declared he was broadly in line with the regime's moral code and used scandal and blackmail, as much as his brother did, as tools in order to fight back and reach his goals. On the other hand, he had the courage to declare his same-sex relationships and took upon himself the terrible consequences of this statement. He won his case, managing to obtain part of his inheritance and probably even compensation for the discrimination he had suffered. He was a pioneer in insisting that he had rights and that he had been damaged, psychologically, socially and financially, by homophobia. There is no doubt that he fought against the fascist system, its values, its impositions, its repressive mechanism. The suffering he endured to prove his point and to protest against injustice is undoubtfully heroic.

G.'s ambiguity makes him very representative of the way in which many individuals were forced into self-censorship and other survival techniques in Italy during the dictatorship. His life is made of lights and shadows, courage and cowardice, secrecy and contradictions, truths and lies: it is a precious testimony of how a totalitarian regime wrecks peoples' lives, transforms their personality, dents their conscience, presses them into decisions, dilemmas and choices they would have otherwise never had to face.

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[1] Note: Page numbers followed by 'n' refer to notes.

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