



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE
AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

Preserving American Jewish History

MS-603: Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum Collection, 1945-1992.

Series E: General Alphabetical Files. 1960-1992

Box 86, Folder 16, NBC "Holocaust" - Italy, 1979.



ITALY--WHICH SIDE WERE WE REALLY ON? REMEMBERING THE BETTER SIDE OF THE PAST, TOO

Reports of *The huge response to* /The Holocaust) ~~programs~~ showing in Germany and America stirred a great interest in the program in Italy. Even before ~~it~~ its Italian showing, the program ~~generated~~ ^{was} ~~became~~ the subject of ~~much~~ ^{wide} commentary in Italian newspapers and journals. When ~~the program~~ ^{Holocaust} was shown, it played to huge, although not quite record-breaking audiences, and it quickly became ~~emeshed~~ ⁱⁿ partisan politics. ^{of an election period.} But, ~~even~~ though ~~Italy had been~~ ~~xxx~~ Mussolini had been Hitler's ally, the Italian response was not comparable to the German one--perhaps because of the absence of widespread anti-semitism in that period and the ~~xxxxxx~~ general public disregard for Mussolini's racial laws.

This was how the Italian press interpreted the nation's ^{strong but} less than passionate reaction to Holocaust.

Holocaust, which was shown on Channel One of national television, was broadcast over a five week period beginning on May 20th, 1978, played to 16.6 million Italian viewers on its first night, and this figure was followed by even larger ones--20.8 million, 19.3 million and 21 million and 21 million. In a nation of some 54 millions, this represented a huge proportion of the viewing aged audience.

Unlike Germany, where, the Italian press told its readers, the citizens were largely unaware of their own national past, the Italians had never been allowed to forget World War II. ~~The~~ left-wing ~~xxxxxx~~ political parties ~~had~~ ^{have} kept the memory of the War and its attendant horrors alive as part of their strategy for combatting contemporary neo-fascist parties. The political alignment in Italy--25% Communist and 50-60 percent anti-Fascist Socialist, Social Democrat and Christian Democrat--has seen to that. Thus, unlike Germany, the program failed to ignite a national furor that bordered upon catharsis.

Still, the first two installments of ~~Holocaust~~ have inspired big news-

big newspaper headlines and partisan comment from political candidates, reported the New York Times, ^{Still, it wrote the series seem} which ~~added~~, "but seem" to have been taken in stride by many Italians."

Spokespersons for the political parties each addressed the series in terms of their own priorities. Thus Marco Pannella, the leader of the ^{anti-communist} Radical Party said that "I do not know when the film will get around to August 1939 when Nazis and Stalinists united to strike at Poland and to massacre Jews, anti-Fascists and opponents of the Third Reich." And Antonello Trombadori, a ^{and so no friend of the Church --} Communist Party ~~official~~ asked "At what point did Catholic discrimination ^{Italian} against Judaism and the atheist racism of the Nazis converge?" ~~(The Communist Party is not friendly to the Church.)~~

^{Of course, the} spokesman for the National Democracy, a neo-Fascist group, ^{had other thoughts.} ~~felt otherwise.~~ Pietro Cerullo charged that the decision to show the series in the middle of an election campaign would benefit both the Christian Democrats and the Communists and that the scheduling represented "the worst kind of partisanship" by the state-run network.

But there were others who felt differently. Holocaust was shown on Sunday evenings in the middle of a ^{100 degree breaking} heat spell, as well as in the middle of an election campaign. Some people in the industry feared that many potential ~~part of or all of~~ viewers would miss the series because they would be coming home from the beach at the time it was on the air. They wondered whether RAI Television had tried to sabotage the showing by its timing.

The airing, though it generated none of the ^{and reexamination} ASTONISHMENT it did in ^{by the viewing public} Germany, was met with "deep interest and much sympathy," reported the Jewish Chronicle of London. ^{That's} ~~But no guilt.~~ Critics provided two reasons for this. The first was that many Italians had lived through the experiences and found vicarious identification with Nazi-inflicted sufferings too painful. The second was stated by Il Messaggero, the Rome Daily: "During the four evenings dedicated to 'Holocaust'" (in Germany) "the streets of the cities were

deserted. ^{it recalled.} The fact that our streets are deserted only on the occasion of a national soccer match" it suggested, could be ~~due~~ because "Italian anti-semitism was confined to only a fanatic minority. The masses do not feel indirect

guilt ~~nor~~ nor involvement in the horrors..."

As elsewhere, some papers criticized the, but for its "Hollywood style,"

but newspapers carried various stories on how the Italian government inter-
 vened, even under Fascism, to protest and -ave Jews, ^{on the air,} ~~and~~ an ongoing debate about anti-semitism past and present, was a ~~constant~~ ^{of} staple ~~on~~ the nation's news broadcasts.

An article in Il Giorno, for instance, described some of the ~~many~~ ^{whit I} cases where Italians ignored Mussolini's 1938 racial edicts, and cited several ^{to} documents showing the ways in which this proved consternating ~~for~~ the fascist officials. One such document was an irate report from an SS commander in ~~dated July 21 1943~~ France/about how "the Italian military authorities and police protect the

Jews with every means at their disposal," sheltering 1000 Jewish refugees along the Ligurian coast "in the best hotels" with all necessities, ^{provided for} and ^{imposed on} no restrictions, ^{them.}

A telegram from then then young diplomat Roberto Pucci, now Italy's Ambassador to England, in which he ^{prevented deportation of my Jews to Germany by only} ~~ruled~~ that Italian citizenship would be ^{not only} granted to Jews born in the occupation zone, ^{but to} those living there, and those only having close relatives, or property, there. ~~With this device, he was able to prevent deportations by the Nazis.~~

La Repubblica, another Rome daily, carried a large spread about a personal memoir by the son of the Italian Consul in Stuttgart un 1934, Italo A. Chiusano. He recalled his father's refusal to eat in restaurants that barred Jews and his reply to an SS official who told him about the Jewish "lack of creativity." To this, the article said, he replied that "Four men founded the modern world," and then cited "Four Great Jews of German speaking origin"--Marx, Einstein, Freud and Kafka.

^{public discussion}
 All this ^{public discussion} did re-sensitize the Italian people to the history of Nazi crimes. It also, suggested the Jewish Telegraphic Agency ^(JTA) Rome correspondent, "perhaps

ending + some closing spiel

added a ~~deeper~~ context of deeper understanding to the words recently spoken by Pope John Paul II in behalf of Jewish victims at Auschwitz and has aroused public opinion to a stronger stand in favor of the abolition of the statute of limitations on war crimes in Germany."

The Union of Italian Jewish Communities, at this time, requested the Italian government to send an observer to the Bundestag for the coming debate on the statute.

But the showing of Holocaust was not without ~~its less~~ *other kinds of efforts.* happy results.

It was followed by a marked increase in neo-Nazi graffiti, including ~~the~~ one that read "Long Live Dorf!"

The impact of the show was, to some extent, an age-delimited phenomena: People in their 20s and early 30s reported the N.Y. Times, reacted with "lukewarm" response since many ~~have~~ ^{had} already read extensively/about the Nazi period and the atrocities. But many schools held class discussions about the film, and teachers reported that interest was especially high among youngsters in their early teens, who had had little exposure to the events of the Nazi era.

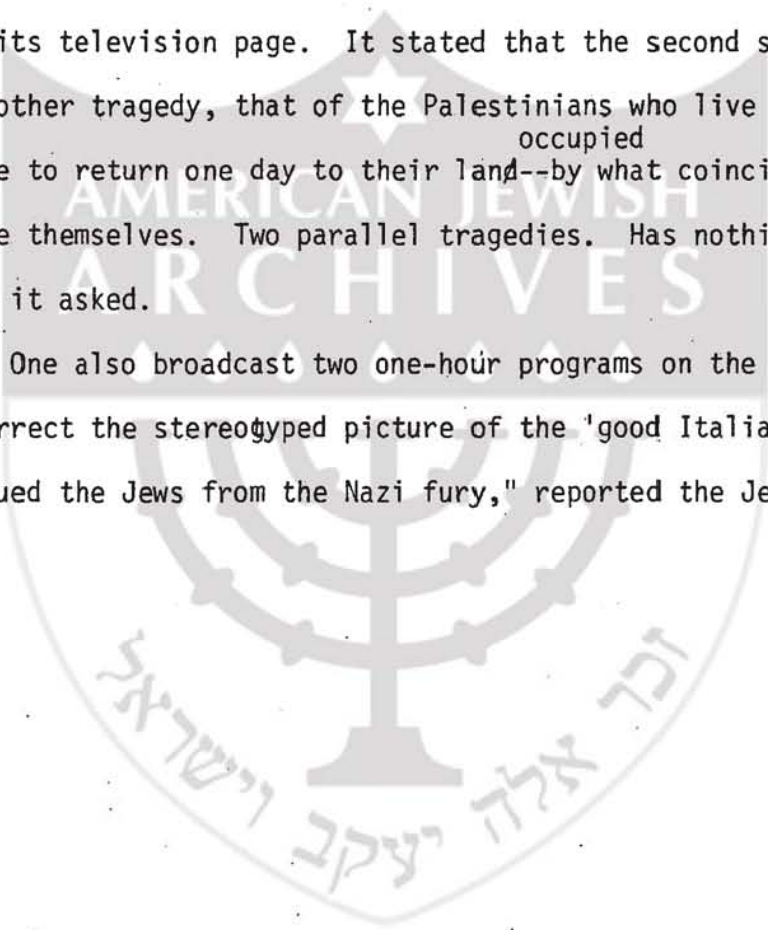
Following the first installment of Holocaust on Channel One, Channel Two aired a documentary entitled "Palestinians of the Diaspora", and the JTA correspondent wrote that "the juxtaposition of the two, hardly coincidental, was an attempt by the media to equate the persecution of the Jews by the Nazis during World War II and the plight of the Palestinian Arabs today. In the announcement that preceded and followed each telecast, the Palestinian people were described as "The New Jews of History," she wrote.

The documentary consisted on interviews with Palestinians in the U.S., Damascus, Kuwait, Algeria and Lebanon. It included scenes of a refugee camp and ~~attempted~~ laid the burden for Palestinian suffering at Israel's door. The refugees spoke of "Zionist influence" on the American mass media, about the inability of refugees to visit relatives in Jerusalem, and about their

difficulties in obtaining American citizenship because of "FBI suspicions that we are terrorists. Interviewees accused Israel of napalming refugee camps and stressed their desire "to return to Palestine." One told the camera that "the holocaust of the Jewish people cannot be solved with another holocaust of the Palestinians."

This linkage was not confined to television. Il Messaggero published summaries of Holocaust's first segment and of the Palestinian documentary on its television page. It stated that the second show's theme "concerns another tragedy, that of the Palestinians who live in the hopes of being able to return one day to their land--by what coincidence--by the Jewish people themselves. Two parallel tragedies. Has nothing been learned by history?' it asked.

Channel One also broadcast two one-hour programs on the "Italian Holocaust," "as if to correct the stereotyped picture of the 'good Italian people' who ~~appeared~~ rescued the Jews from the Nazi fury," reported the Jewish Chronicle.



Italy

1. J.T.A. - Rome. 2.6.79 "Holocaust" series due in Italy"
Being dubbed into Italian. Interest present now because
of reactions generated in Germany. "Slick" Hollywood
style. "This ^{part} quality - however produced a "gut
reaction" in Germany" unlike previous documentaries.
"fictionalized reality" moved the German. Italian
newspapers - total lack of info on WWII in German
school system. Political left enlightening Italian
public on anti-^{WWII} Fascist & anti-Nazi stance of the left.

2. Special to N.Y. Times 6.3.79 - By Henry Tannen
"View 9.9. 'Holocaust'". Inspired news headlines, partisan
comments - but general public taking things in
stride. Reactions mixed w/ elections. One question? "A
what pt. did Catholic discrimination against Judaism and
the atheist racism of the Nazis converge?" Also -
the right accused TV in Italy of "the using 'Holocaust'
to influence voters away from neo-Fascist candidate.
R.A.S. - National TV. Network. 18.5 million aud. for
1st night. 1/3 of the population. Interest & discussion in
classrooms.

3. J.T.A. - Rome. 5.22.79 by Tesi Palmieri. Billing
"Holocaust" series on Italian TV Followed by Leo
Balestrinar Series. "Holocaust" followed on air by

show entitled "Palestinians of the Diaspora" -
attempt to equate persecution of Jews w/ plight
of the Palestinian Arabs. Palestinians described
as "The new Jews of history." Fig. Il Messaggero -
also compared Palestinian problem to the Holocaust -
Have in common the theme of tragedy).

+ J.F.A. - Rome 5.11.79 By Lina Calmieri-Billy
"Behind the Headlines Italians Prepare for 'Holocaust'"
Beg. May 20.79 (National TV Channel 1) Italy probably
most well-informed & most interested in its past.
Reports on reaction in other countries published as well
as Italian behavior towards Jews during war. (Il Giorno
of Jews founded the Modern World acc. to Chusans -
La Repubblica article - Marx, Einstein, Freud, Kafka
Aimed special on Statute of Limitation (same time))