Libyan Jews in Rome: integration and impact on the Roman Jewish Community

Luisa Natale – Pia Toscano
Dipartimento di Scienze Economiche, Università di Cassino
Dipartimento di Scienze Economiche
Università degli Studi di Cassino
Via S.Angelo Località Focara, Cassino (FR)
Tel. +39 0776 2994734 Email dipse@eco.unicas.it
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Introduction

The presence of Jews of Libyan origin or descent in the Jewish community of Rome has been significant both quantitatively and qualitatively. Commerce, for example, received a considerable boost thanks to the economic vitality of the newcomers. "... The economic success of the Libyans is owed to their highly innovative entrepreneurial spirit and remarkable commercial know-how, of a kind that did not exist here in Rome before: the network system, for example, or the chain of stores. One can say that the Libyans reinvented the clothing sector in Rome". The “private sphere” was also affected, with a strengthening of the sense of Jewish identity fuelled by the Libyans' more pronounced attachment to religious tradition, than that of Roman Jews (Camera di Commercio-Comunità Ebraica di Roma, 2007).

From a quantitative point of view, the community in question currently numbers 777 individuals born in Libya and, considering their children and grandchildren as well – the so-called second and third generations – an estimated 4,000 people, at least, the equivalent of about 30% of registered members of the Community which, according to some authors (Sonnino, 2007), numbers just over 13,500 individuals. “In the Jewish School of Rome there are now more students from Libyan families than Roman, that is certain”. With these words, Shalom Tesciuba, president of the Welfare Committee of the Jews of Libya, illustrates the current demographic weight of the Libyan component within the Roman Jewish community.

The most significant period for the study of the socio-economic impact of the Libyan community on the Roman Jewish community is the period between 1960 and 1970. These years witnessed the arrival in Rome of a seizable contingent of Libyan Jews, and the beginning of their integration into Roman jewry, a process that has been defined by some more as one of amalgamation, with both communities complementing each other, than of the integration of one community into another. Mr. Bend Nahum made a statement along those lines on the occasion of the study day.

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* Luisa Natale, Professor of Social Statistics at the Faculty of Economics, Università degli Studi di Cassino e del Lazio Meridionale.
** Pia Toscano, Professor of Economic History at the Faculty of Economics, Università degli Studi di Cassino e del Lazio Meridionale

1 The present paper was co-authored by Luisa Natale, who wrote sections § 3.2 and 4, and Pia Toscano, who wrote sections § 1, 2 and 3.1. The Introduction, Conclusions and Appendix were written jointly. We wish to thank Eugenio Sonnino, Fausto Piola Caselli, Giovanni Porzio and an anonymous reviewer for their useful comments, constructive criticism and suggestions.

2 These observations emerged during an interview with the key informant AlphonseTammam. For the full interview with Tamman held in Rome on October 29th, 2009 see “Gli ebrei romani provenienti dalla Libia: inquadramento e caratteristiche socio-economiche” paper presented on November 5-7, 2009 at the Italian Society of Historical Demography Triennial Conference, in Naples.

3 See Appendix, interview 1.
held at the Beth El synagogue in Rome on February 3rd 2002, a meeting centred on the life and traditions of Libyan Jews: “... it should be pointed out - argued Nahum – that the encounter between the two Jewish groups never resulted in a complete integration or fusion but rather in a give-and-take between two communities that complement each other, a process progressively reinforced both by living in common Jewish contexts (schools, youth organisations, various other bodies and organisations, synagogues) and, clearly, from the formation of mixed couples and families”. From the very beginning, Libyan Jews have thus actively preserved their cultural heritage, asserting their independence and their unique traditions.

The adoption of a historical-statistical approach has allowed us to design the study along two lines of research. Through a critical review of the sources, the first aims to obtain information that may contribute to a historical reconstruction of events, specifically the period between the consolidation of the presence of a Jewish contingent of Libyan origin in Rome, and the present. The second, based on a methodology that integrates qualitative and quantitative approaches, consists of direct interviews (both in-depth and questionnaire-based) with key informants as well as with a representative sample of Libyan-born Italian Jews and their descendants. Special attention has been given to the identification of differential characteristics that may account for the particular mode of integration of these flows. Specifically, several aspects have been analysed, that may be considered distinctive features of the case of the “Tripolini” in Rome such as, work organisation, sectors of economic activity, pathways to social mobility, the geographic distribution of the newcomers in Rome’s urban context, family formation processes and social relations.

1. History

The most significant historiographical contribution to the study of the fate of the Jews of Libya is Renzo De Felice's book Ebrei in un paese arabo (Jews in an Arab Land), published in the late 1970s. The author, a leading expert on the Fascist period, had already tackled the history of the Jews of Italy under the Fascist regime, thoroughly addressing the problems associated with Italy’s colonisation of Africa. De Felice’s work contains a wealth of amply documented information covering all aspects of the history of Libyan Jewry - social, religious, political, cultural and economic. De Felice's perspective is never biased. Rather, in a effort to understand, he focuses his attention on the relations between the Arab and Jewish populations, especially during periods in which the situation of the latter was further compromised by colonisation, decolonisation, the emergence of Arab nationalism, Zionism, and the Arab-

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4 Specifically, information was collected from two archives: the Historical Archives of the Jewish Community of Rome (Archivio Storico della Comunità Ebraica Romana - ASCER) was used for information regarding the 1960s and 1970s (section 3.1), while the Register of Members of the Jewish Community of Rome was used to produce a snapshot of the community at a very recent date (October 2009) (section 3.2). We then turned to the Civil Register of Rome’s Municipality (Anagrafe del Comune di Roma - APR), from which we were able to gather information on families having at least one member born in Libya at the end of the year 2000. The use of material from these two sources combined (the Jewish Community and the Municipality), enabled us to collect data on the characteristics of the “Jewish population of Libyan origin” living in Rome, since such information is not yet available from the ASCER. Lastly, the preliminary information necessary for the construction of a questionnaire to be administered to a representative sample of the population of Libyan origin registered with the Jewish Community of Rome was collected through a series of qualitative interviews with key informants (three of these interviews are cited in full in the Appendix).
Israeli conflict. The book recounts the events that marked the history of the Jews in a land that had generally been hospitable, but that occasionally would turn hostile, mainly due to chronic political instability. Once out of Libya, these Jews would inevitably come to interact with the inhabitants of their countries of destination. Italy was a destination of choice, both because many Libyan Jews spoke Italian as a second language, and due to the fact that, during the period in which the Libyan government encouraged Jews to leave the country, dual citizenship was granted to those who requested it. An in-depth discussion of the “Jewish question” is beyond the scope of this study; Sergio Della Pergola’s book, *Anatomia dell’ebraismo italiano*, published in 1976, is a valuable resource for those who wish to understand the issue in the context of the modern world. In the first part of his book, Della Pergola sets the methodological stage for the study of the Jewish group as a minority within a larger population, by tackling a series of complex problems concerning the definition, identification and enumeration of the study population. In the Italian context, as Della Pergola notes, the Jewish community is the result of successive migratory flows from different geographical regions, flows that were, therefore, made up of people with disparate cultural and demographic characteristics. The first flow arrived from Palestine at the time of the Roman Republic. The last - which arrived in the mid-1950s and ‘60s - consisted of refugees from Egypt, Libya and other Arab states. For this reason, according to Della Pergola “… Italian Jewry represents an almost unique phenomenon; an open community imbued with local non-Jewish culture…” (ibid., p. 254). From a demographic standpoint, these migratory flows did not substantially alter the size of the Italian Jewish community, which remained small throughout its history. Indeed, its relative weight in the general population has been in constant decline. Even recently, an article published by Della Pergola in *Zakhor*, a journal devoted to Italian Jewish history (*Riflessioni globali sulla demografia degli ebrei, 2004*) , mentions Italy as having the lowest natural increase in the context of Europe's demographic transition of the 19th and 20th centuries. Della Pergola points out that among Jews, the balance between births and deaths remained negative for a long time, and only “… following the gradual emancipation from confinement to the ghetto, did it become positive for a period of a few decades” (Della Pergola, 2004, p. 128).

Moving to the more specific context of the city of Rome, recent improvements to the ASCER database allowed Eugenio Sonnino to offer, in the same issue of Zakhor, a detailed description of the factors that contributed to the evolution of the population of the Jewish Community in the past twenty years (*La popolazione della comunità ebraica di Roma durante l’ultimo ventennio*) Sonnino’s main finding was, that during the twenty years between 1982 and 2002, the Jewish Community of Rome recorded an ongoing decline in the number of registered members, from 14,444 on January 1st, 1982 to 13,591 on December 31st, 2002. Such decline was mainly due to an increase in emigration during the 1980s which, after a short hiatus, resumed in the following decade. Such outflow then slowly waned, ceasing altogether in the past few years. While “… change in reproductive behaviour is unlikely in the short term, one cannot count on a flow of immigrants like the one that occurred in Rome in the ‘60s with the arrival of the Libyan refugees either, in light of its underlying causes” (ibidem, p. 103). At any rate, as Daniele Spizzichino demonstrates in his paper, *Le trasformazioni demografiche della comunità ebraica romana (1945-1965)* , the twenty years that preceded the arrival of the Libyans (i.e., 1945-1965), were also characterised by an increase in the number of Jewish Community members (from 11,281 to 14,037), attributable mainly to a flow that brought 2,070 Jews to Rome during the period in question, against a very small number of emigrants (432). Thus, even in difficult
times - thanks to the importance that the Jewish community of Rome has always had within Italian Jewry - Rome represented a safe haven for Jews from other regions.

The historiographic lacuna regarding the fate of Roman Jews during the period in which the racial laws were in force and in the twenty years following World War II, has recently been filled by two books published by the Rome Chamber of Commerce, the first in 2004, and the second – cited above – in 2007. These are collections of articles each approaching the topic from a different angle – legal, economic, demographic and sociological - and are valuable tools for researchers in the field. An archival study by Francesco Colzi and Claudio Procaccia, for example, analyses the economic conditions of Roman Jews, illustrating the improvements that occurred in their standard of living between 1945 and 1965, thanks to higher incomes and higher levels of education, a trend similar to that observed among the other residents of the city.

The changes that took place within the Jewish community of Rome following the arrival of Libyan Jews in the late 1960s have yet to be investigated, integrating published material, documents, oral sources and field studies. On the other hand, the life of Libyan Jews between the end of the war and their forced evacuation from Libya, has been amply documented, not only in De Felice's book, but also in the books written by people who lived through the tragedy. People who relied “… on the support of relatives and the Jewish community of Rome” – to quote Victor Magiar, in his book E venne la notte. Ebrei in un paese arabo, – only when all hope was lost. The numbers are certain: following the 1945 and 1948 pogroms in Tripoli, 30,000 Jews were forced to leave for Israel, while 6,000 stayed in Libya. In June of 1967, most remaining Libyan Jews went to Israel via Italy, while 2,000 settled in Italy, between Rome and Milan. Leaving Libya, Jews were allowed to take with them no more than twenty pounds each. Max Varadi's L'esodo dalla Libia, revised version from the Hebrew original, is a historical reconstruction of the presence of Jews in Libya, as well as the memoirs of a person who took part in the organisation of the mass exodus towards Israel, while Mordekhai Cohen's Gli ebrei in Libia translated by Martino Mario Moreno, is focussed on the community's customs and traditions. Lillo Arbib wrote Gli ebrei in Libia fra Idris e Gheddafi 1948-1970 from his unique perspective as president of the Jewish Community of Tripoli, having lived through its dissolution and felt the weight of responsibility for its members, also vis-a-vis the government. Arbib's book is not only packed with the author's personal memoirs, but also with previously unknown official documents. On more than one occasion, the book emphasises the fact that, through these very difficult times, Libyan Jews were able to preserve their institutions, and defend their religious way of life and their Zionist aspirations with great courage and dignity.

The 2nd International Meeting of the Jews of Libya, held in Rome between the 19th and the 22nd of January, 1989 with the participation of Ben-Zion Rubin, Israeli former deputy minister of Labour and Social Welfare, provided some new information regarding the absorption of the Libyan Jewish community in Israel. The integration of this community marked by suffering, was natural, according the former deputy minister, partly due to its resilience, and partly because, for many Libyan Jews, the land of Israel had always been a desired destination. Twenty years after their arrival, proof of this could be found in the higher cultural level achieved by the new generation - the sons and daughters of those who arrived in 1967 - who, thanks to changes within the economic structure and to increased prosperity, were now able to reach the top of every profession, including medicine and other academic disciplines.
This generation was no longer limited to choosing between agriculture and construction, as the previous generation had been.

In Italy, the first step towards defending the new community was the founding of the World Organization of Libyan Jews, on December 13th, 1970, with the support of major international Jewish organisations and the aim of protecting Libyan Jews everywhere in the world. The association, among its many activities, has been in contact with the Libyan government since its inception, in an attempt to resolve the problem of the property confiscated from the Jews. Despite a firm commitment, however, results have long been meagre as far as the integration of the Libyan community not only into the Jewish community of Rome, but also into Rome's economic life. As for religion and traditions, Libyan Jews in Rome had to cope with the existence of a local Jewish community with a more secular approach than that to which they had been accustomed. Indeed, a study day on the lives and traditions of Libyan Jews, organised by the Jewish Cultural Centre of the Beth El synagogue in Rome on February 3rd, 2002, once again brought to the fore the memory of the tragedy and the strong bond with the land of Libya, transmitted to the new generations as well. There was a single underlying theme, however: smooth adjustment to a new life, while at the same time preserving the community's traditions.

2. Economic Identity

The difficulty in obtaining archival material regarding the social and economic life of Libyan Jews following their arrival in Rome, has thus far forced researchers to employ oral sources only, especially when attempting to determine the impact of this community on Rome's economic environment. Interviews with key informants representative of the economic sectors most frequently chosen by those who found themselves, as refugees, having to decide on their occupational future, confirm that the forced migration from Libya to Italy in general, and to Rome in particular, involved high level, competent migrants and entrepreneurs, since poorer Libyan Jews had already left for Israel in 1948.

Having, for the most part, attended Italian schools in Tripoli, Libyan Jews belonging to the middle and upper classes enjoyed the considerable advantage of knowing the Italian language, a circumstance which greatly facilitated their social and economic integration. At any rate, other factors contributed to determining how difficult a new beginning in Rome would be, economically. The immigrant's age upon leaving Libya was decisive in this respect. Those who had been working in Libya tried to continue in the same line of work or profession in Italy, at times – especially in the field of commerce - maintaining working relations with Arabs.

Shalom Teschiuba was 33 when he arrived in Italy and his close relations with Arab acquaintances allowed him not only to succeed in recuperating some of his possessions in Tripoli (see Appendix, interview 1), but also to continue trading in spices in Italy. "I began working again in 1968 thanks to Arab friends", he told Stefano Tironi, "It is thanks to them that I was able to continue my old work here in Italy. I would order spices for them, import, manage etc.... I made money, they made money, and we were all happy. I went on this way for four or five years. Then, in 1970 I set up my own company, more or less doing the same work as in Libya. I continued until 1985".5

5 Interviewed by Stefano Tironi. see: Tironi S., La comunità ebraica tripolina tra la Libia e Roma (The Jewish Community of Tripoli between Libya and Rome), dissertation, available at: http://morasha.it/tesi/trn/trn03.html
Giovanni Basile is among those who were fortunate enough to continue exercising the same profession in Italy as they had in Libya. After three years of work for the Banca di Roma in Tripoli, he was able to continue for the next forty years in the same line of work at the Banco di Santo Spirito in Rome. He is currently retired, and, as he put it, works “in the field of financial intermediation for small and medium enterprises and for individuals throughout Italy, concluding several transactions with Tripolitans”,6 evidence that the members of this community, even many years after their departure from Libya, try to maintain contacts with each other - ties of mutual solidarity as well as professional ties.

The entrepreneurial spirit prevailed also for those who arrived much earlier in life, as adolescents, and then, following in the footsteps of their fathers, proved successful in the field of commerce in Rome, as true innovators. This was the case of Hamos Guetta, who arrived in Rome when he was only 12 years old, and later founded the Obj by Ozer brand of clothing, a chain of as many as forty stores. Constant innovation is what allows an entrepreneur to maintain his brand's position against new, competing brands entering the market and possibly attempting to imitate the best characteristics of the leading brand. This is what marketing experts call first-mover advantage.7 In an interview conducted by the journalist Chiara Beghelli, Guetta defined Libyan Jewish immigration to Rome as an “intellectual capital” which today, he estimated, provides work for some 50,000 people. The share of Libyan Jews in the ownership and management of businesses in the sector of commerce is, indeed, difficult to assess. As Guetta underlines, “many friends, owners of well known brands, prefer not to reveal their identity for fear that antisemitism may affect sales”.8 At any rate, as it emerged in one of the many interviews conducted by Stefano Tironi, the ability of Libyan Jews, especially in the field of commerce, played a decisive role in the rebirth of the community in Italy.9

The ease with which Libyan Jews entered the field of commerce in Italy is certainly also due to the fact that – despite their highly diversified economic activities in Tripoli – as Roberto Nunes Vais explains, “the country's rapid economic development demanded more and more workforce in the tertiary sector. Jews, like Arabs, were silk, cotton and wool barracan weavers, carpenters and blacksmiths, but silver and gold trade and smithing were completely in their hands... Only a small group of professionals: medical doctors, engineers, lawyers, pharmacists and professors. These were few and far between, since Tripoli had no universities or institutions of higher education, and since the practice of sending young people to study in Europe was not common”.10

In Rome, however, not everybody managed to establish themselves rapidly, from an occupational point of view. In many cases, between initial fallback jobs, in order to keep oneself and one's family afloat, and the final attainment of a proper position, time passed, sometimes a long time. Most of the immigrants had to start from scratch, and

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6 See Paolo Cason's website, www.paolocason.it. The site, active since 2006, is dedicated to refugees from Libya who wish to find old acquaintances from their former lives in Africa. From the wealth of entries one can reconstruct the personal histories of many who arrived in Italy and had to start anew.
7 The brand that enters the market first has better chances of creating a clear position in the minds of consumers before the arrival of competition. Hamos Guetta's thriving business is proof that he was completely successful in his intent.
8 Interview conducted by journalist Chiara Beghelli, see www.kolot.it
9 See Tironi S., op. cit.
often the women, too, had to pitch in to keep the family going, until their husbands found permanent work; “as soon as I arrived in Rome, I – who had never worked before, besides taking care of the children and the household – had to work outside of the house as well. I worked as a perfume sales representative in the mornings, and as a part-time shop assistant in the shop of a friend of mine in the afternoons. My husband got by doing odd jobs. We went on like this for years and years, until we were able to get settled”.\footnote{Nunes Vais R., \textit{Comunità ebraica di Libia}, excerpt from a conference published in 1989 and cited in “Italiani d’Africa”, press review, March-April-May 2006.} What emerges clearly from another interview, is the refusal to give up in a situation of total uncertainty, and having left behind a life of economic comfort: “we arrived in Rome and immediately rolled up our sleeves. My mother went to sell books door-to-door, and in Libya she had three maids. Once we arrived in Rome there was no other choice, we had to start all over again. We were not going to sit there and cry. Nothing was going to be handed to us on a silver platter.”.\footnote{Anonymous, interviewed by Stefano Tironi for dissertation. Tironi S., op. cit.} There was, however, no lack of support - at the outset, and during the phase of adjustment to the new environment - from the Roman Jewish community, that took it upon itself to help those among the newcomers who most needed assistance, both economic and in terms of care.

At any rate, according to Shalom Tesciuba, president of the Welfare Committee of the Jews of Libya (Comitato di Assistenza degli Ebrei di Libia), the long phase of adaptation is now concluded. “among the members of the Libyan community of Rome there are many professionals, such as university professors, medical doctors, lawyers, journalists, entrepreneurs, and – a legacy from life in Tripoli – many are still merchants, especially in the fields of clothing and footwear”.\footnote{Ibid.} Despite having, by now, attained and consolidated, important professional positions many of them still often feel the need to speak about their past, to bear witness to the tragedy they endured in Libya. David Meghnagi, Professor of clinical psychology and the University of Rome is a case in point. He is author of several books on the subject. His most recent contribution is a book entitled \textit{Le sfide di Israele. Lo Stato ponte tra Occidente e Oriente}, published by Marsilio in 2010.

3. Documents available from the Roman Jewish Community

3.1 The Historical Archives of the Jewish Community of Rome (ASCER)

An examination of the documents available at the intermediate archival repository of the Jewish Community of Rome revealed the presence of material that may allow the reconstruction of the demographic movements of Libyan Jews from 1967 to the present, with special reference to the social and economic status acquired following their arrival in Rome. A preliminary exploration of the previously unseen sources present in this archive, and summarised in Tables 1 and 2 below, allowed us to identify paths to answers on arrivals, departures for Israel, membership in the Jewish Community of Rome, weddings, areas of residence, children attending the Jewish school and assistance received from the Jewish Community of Rome.
3.2 The Register of Jewish Community members

The register of the Jewish Community of Rome constitutes a point of departure for the outline of the demographic and economic history of the Community membership. As previously emphasised (Sonnino, 2004), such information does not apply to the total population of Roman Jews, since it does not include Jews who either left the Community, or never felt the need to join it as members.

Thanks to improvements introduced over the past twenty years, the database is computerised, and information referring to the years 1992 on, is searchable. The analysis of earlier demographic data requires the manual review of records (birth, death, marriage, membership cancellation) and family pages. The information contained in the personal files of the register is summarised in Table 3, followed by a preliminary analysis of data originating from this archive.

As far as Libyan Jews who arrived in Italy after the Six Day War (June 1967) are concerned, the above sources allowed the study of this subgroup's characteristics and transformations - both demographic (age distribution, size and composition of family groups, rates of birth, death, marriage, migration, exclusions from and re-admissions to the community, etc.) and socio-economic (occupational situation, income levels, geographic distribution, religious observance, etc.) - throughout the forty-year period since 1967.

Table 1 – Demographic Documents: Records, Bundles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of document</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Records</td>
<td>1960-70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registrations of marriage</td>
<td>1970-75</td>
<td>domicile and family page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registrations of death</td>
<td>1967-73</td>
<td>registration of death and funeral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registrations of birth</td>
<td>1967-72</td>
<td>for Libyan refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cancellation of membership due to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>christening or dissociation</td>
<td>1900-</td>
<td>from the Jewish Community of Rome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family pages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13 Ibid.
14 This register gathers information on the civil status of people who voluntarily decide to join as members and accept the religious rules that govern the life of the community.
15 In the same article, the author describes in detail how information is acquired, kept and managed, comparing the Register of the Jewish Community of Rome to that of Italian municipalities (Sonnino, 2007, pp. 83-84).
16 The change in attitude towards Jews in Libya following the Arab-Israeli war clearly emerges from Shalom Tesciuba's testimony: “... I remember that on the 23rd of May, 1967, with the closure of the Straits [of Tiran] and the situation in Israel – we heard Nass's speeches on the radio, war was in the air - even everyday human relations began to grow cold. We Jews were immediately identified with what was happening and what was being decided in Israel in those tragic days” (See Appendix, interview 1).
Bundles
1960-70
Family page of the person who emigrated or moved, registration as member of the Community, documents regarding the collection of Community dues, records pertaining to untraceable members (at early times), letters contesting dues calculated by the Community (at times)

Individual files
1960s

Miscellaneous
1969-

Miscellaneous bundle
Various Libyans among those emigrating to Israel

Executive committee
1967-

Table 2 – Economic and Administrative Documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of document</th>
<th>years</th>
<th>Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minutes</td>
<td>1967-69</td>
<td>Reference to Libyans and to the Welfare Committee of Libyan Refugees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board of Directors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Committee of the Jewish Community of Rome</td>
<td>Reference to organisational problems due to a large contingent (245) of new students from Libya in the Jewish schools of Rome.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documentary Sources</td>
<td>1972-75</td>
<td>Administrative status of Libyan Jews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1967-74</td>
<td>Status regarding dues and fees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1967-74</td>
<td>Decisions of the Board regarding accounting and taxation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1967-78</td>
<td>Correspondence regarding the integration of Libyan refugees at school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1972</td>
<td>List of Libyan paying members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Documents regarding the Libyan synagogue: worshippers not paying their dues, donations and collection of clothing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the moment, however, available information is limited to the following details: place of birth, district of residence, sex, age and marital status. According to this material, in October of 2009, the Jewish Community of Rome had 777 Libyan-born members (that arrived in Rome either before or after the Six-Day War). Forty-eight percent of them were males. Not surprisingly, exactly one third of the population was over 65, and 17% over 75. To contextualise this data, in 2002 the total number of registered members (including Libyans) was approximately 13,600. 49.9% of whom were males. The proportion of the elderly (aged 65 or over) was 19.3% (See Sonnino, 2004, p. 102). Back to the population born in Libya, almost all (94%) were born in Tripoli. The only other place of birth worthy of mention is Benghazi (4%).

The composition by marital status reflects the fact that the population is old: while for both sexes married people predominate, among females the proportion of widows is high. Among males, on the other hand, the second largest group after the married is that of the never-married (Figure 1).

### Table 3 - Information contained in the personal records of the Register of the Jewish Community of Rome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Records concerning</th>
<th>Information contained</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civil status</td>
<td>• Personal details of the registered member.</td>
<td>Each personal record contains both a personal ID number and the number of the relevant family page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sex.</td>
<td>The fields dedicated to the level of education and occupation are usually left blank. The socio-professional status was therefore inferred from the family pages.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Marital status.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Date and place of birth.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Father's name, Mother's name</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Personal details of the spouse.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact information</td>
<td>• Personal details of the registered member.</td>
<td>Each personal record contains both a personal ID number and the number of the relevant family page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Home address (street, street address, postal code, city).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mailing address (street, street address, postal code, city).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Telephone numbers and e-mail.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Polling station, voter's card number (for internal elections for the Community's institutions, that take place every 4 years).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious information</td>
<td>• Personal details of the registered member.</td>
<td>Each personal record contains both a personal ID number and the number of the relevant family page.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sex.</td>
<td>At the age of 18 each member must express his wish to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Date of registration as member of the Community.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Wishes to join the Community: yes/no.</td>
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The study of the population's composition by sex, age and marital status yielded interesting results. Such composition is the outcome of processes involving numerous factors, like reproductive and survival models, choices regarding the formation and separation of couples and migratory flows.

The population under study is a contingent characterised by a religious affiliation. In such cases, two additional relevant factors should not be overlooked. These are the movements of exclusion from, and re-admission to the Community, which determine the so-called *balance of accessions and secessions* (Della Pergola, 1977; Sonnino, 2004; Spizzichino, 2007). The contingent in question has a further distinctive feature: the cohorts born in Libya who live in Rome today, left their country of birth as refugees in the late 1960s. It is, thus, an adult population without younger generations. The age pyramid of Libyan-born members of the Jewish Community of Rome, constructed on the basis of age-distribution data from mid-October, 2009 is, therefore, truncated, as it lacks the younger age-groups (< 40), and shows a bulge in the 55-64 age-group (Figure 2). The “spindle” shape reflects the progressive ageing of

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Nuclear family</th>
<th>Personal details of the components of the registered member's nuclear family.</th>
<th>Each personal record contains both a personal ID number and the number of the relevant family page.</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kinship.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Date and place of birth of each family member.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Marital status of each family member.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marriages</td>
<td>Personal details of the registered member.</td>
<td>Each personal record contains both a personal ID number and the number of the relevant family page.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information regarding civil/religious marriages.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Information regarding separation and divorce (if relevant)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Immigration/emigration</td>
<td>Place of origin (immigration)/destination (emigration) of the registered member.</td>
<td>Each personal record contains both a personal ID number and the number of the relevant family page.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Note regarding christening (if member decides to convert to Catholicism).
- Note regarding dissociation (if member decides to leave the Community).
- Date of exclusion (from the Community) (due to christening, dissociation).
- Date of readmission (to the Community) (for having returned to the Jewish faith).
- Last religious marriage (place and date).
- Last religious divorce (place and date).
- Number of civil marriages.
- Number of religious marriages.
- Father's/mother's religion.
- Date of Milah (for males).
- Date of Tevilah (ritual bath).
- Date of conversion.
- Date of fulfilment of Bar Mitzvah requirements.

*Milah* is circumcision.

*Tevilah* is immersion in a ritual bath, part of the process of conversion to Judaism.

*Bar Mitzvah* is religious coming of age (which is achieved at the age of 13 and represents an important milestone in Jewish life).
surviving immigrants (especially females) who arrived in Italy as adults. It should, however, be noted, that the small size of the group, and of some of its sub-groups, in particular, precluded more in-depth analyses, enabling us to draw only a sketchy outline of this population. At least three salient findings emerged from the analysis:

a) the existence of a fair proportion of never-married men who - considering their current age - will probably translate into a significant prevalence of permanent celibacy;

b) the presence of a large proportion of widows, even among relatively young women;

c) the small size of the group of 40-44 year-olds (born roughly between 1965 and 1969), presumably due to selective migrations, which may have led families with small children, at the time, to choose destinations other than Italy (e.g., Israel), or may have caused individuals belonging to this “missing” generation, to show a stronger tendency to leave Italy in the years preceding our snapshot.

Figure 1 – Libyan-born members of the Jewish Community of Rome, by sex and marital status. Situation on 15.10.2009.

Source: Register of the Jewish Community of Rome

Figure 2 – Age pyramid of Libyan-born members of the Jewish Community of Rome. Situation on 15.10.2009.
An analysis of the geographic distribution of the population under study shows similar characteristics to what had already been observed among Roman Jews. The centre of Rome (first district) has always had a substantial number of Jewish residents. This phenomenon is attributable to two main causes: the first is related to historical restrictions which later favoured a tendency to settle in the central areas of the city, especially the ghetto. The second is linked to the need to live not far from work, in view of the fact that (at least until a few years ago) a disproportionately large number of stores in the centre of the city were managed by Jews. In the case of Libyan Jews, new dynamics are added to this underlying situation: the centre remains an important point of reference, but two semi-central areas are added – Quartiere Africano (in the second district), so called because many of the streets are named after former Italian colonies in Africa, and the area of Piazza Bologna (in the third district). Approximately 450 (or 58%) of the Libyan members of the Community live in these three districts (I-III) (Figure 3).

Testimonies collected in the course of the qualitative study currently under way suggest that a nucleus of Libyans was already living in the area of Piazza Bologna in the early 1950s. This is likely to have attracted later arrivals from Libya to the neighbourhood, including 1967 refugees. For these immigrants, as for the aforementioned Roman Jews, work-related considerations may have influenced the choice of neighbourhood in which to settle. Indeed, the arrival of Libyan Jews in Rome coincides with the construction of new neighbourhoods characterised by a high density of shops, such as the area of Viale Libia (Quartiere Africano). This may have constituted an opportunity for some to channel recuperated financial resources into the setting up of businesses.

**Figure 3 - Libyan-born members of the Roman Jewish Community resident in the city, by district of residence.**
As for the availability of funds, Mr. Dan Nunes-Vais' testimony offers some clues:

“Returning to Libya in 1968 was very easy. One could enter and exit to resolve economic problems, problems related to property, or work. Let's say that the Italians in Libya (the non-Jews) did not immediately understand that for them, too, things would go a certain way and even soon. They thought it was only a problem for Jews. The financial resources in Libyan banks were, obviously, blocked and so were also real estate that had not been transferred or liquidated before Colonel Gaddafi's rise to power. One might say that the Jews had two years of advantage over the others to understand the situation. Obviously, simpler people, less well-off or even people and families lacking useful contacts abroad, lived through a completely different experience”.

The concentration of shops in these areas may thus represent one possible explanation for such residential concentration, at least in the initial phase. Other explanations may be related to the human need for social and economic support networks, which are facilitated by geographic proximity, as well as to the specific religious needs of observant Jews (e.g. the necessity to live within walking distance from a synagogue so as to be able to participate in services on Saturdays and holidays when driving is prohibited).

4. Documents available from the Civil Register of the Rome Municipality

According to article 1 of DPR (Presidential Decree) number 223, dated May 30th 1989, the civil register of the resident population “… is the systematic collection of information on the status of individuals, families and cohabitants who established their residence in the municipality, as well as the status of people of no fixed abode who are domiciled within the municipality. The register comprises individual records, family and cohabitation
As we have seen, the ASCER database has the potential to provide interesting insights into the demographic and economic conditions of the study population. Analysis of this material is still in its early stages, however. Further information, albeit preliminary, on the characteristics of the Jewish population of Libyan origin can be drawn from another source, the Municipality's civil register of the population resident in Rome (APR). Here, the study population can be indirectly identified using a number of criteria as described below, provided due caution is exercised in the interpretation.

The APR contains information on the status of all those who, through registration and cancellation, feed the resident population register. We tried to gather preliminary information on Libyan Jews through the joint consideration of certain characteristics, such as citizenship (only Italian citizens), place of origin, and place of birth. We used individual status data extracted a few years ago during a study on the population of foreign nationals resident in the municipality of Rome. Stock information for December 31st, 2000 on resident families where at least one member is a foreign national was also gathered in the framework of the above study.

In using this data, we assumed that Libyan-born Italian citizens present in the archive at our disposal were, for the most part, Jews. Regrettably, we were unable to confirm or refute this assumption. It was, however, based on the observation that, in nuclear families that include Libyan Jews, often there are people with diverse nationalities. This clearly emerged from the testimonies collected in the course of the qualitative phase of the study. Specifically, there are nuclear families that include Jewish Italian citizens of Libyan origin, along with other family members holding citizenships other than Italian (usually from a limited range of countries including Israel, France, and a number of Arab countries). Obviously, the information at hand does provide a direct indication as to religious affiliation, and may thus include Italian citizens of Libyan origin who established their residence in Rome but are not Jewish. Efforts to quantify this flow - or at least that of the survivors - and comparisons with estimates from other sources, are in progress at the APR.

As far as the stock at the end of 2000, we extracted 503 families, comprising a total of 1,328 members, most of whom were born in Libya (860), followed by Italy (249), Israel (86) and other countries (Figure 4). All were resident in Rome on December 31st, 2000. Considering the fact that, more than 10% of this population was 80 years-old or older at the time, and that some of these people may not have survived ten years later, the number of individuals identified following this procedure (860 at the end of the year 2000), is remarkably similar to the number of Libyan-born Roman Jewish Community members in October of 2009 (taking into account only those resident in Rome, 19 only 735 of 777 members remain). Although by no means definite proof of the coincidence of the two populations, this match, coupled with other indications, encouraged us to cautiously proceed with the analysis of this material.

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records. The records, as per the preceding paragraph, contain the civil status as gathered from the declarations of those concerned, from official investigations and from the communications of civil status offices”.

18 We thank Dr. Carolina Brandi of the IRPPS-CNR for her kind assistance.

19 The list of Libyan Jews includes 42 individuals that are not resident in Rome, half of whom are resident in Anzio.

20 Due to the absence of reliable linkage keys, an attempt at record linkage between the two sources did not yield satisfactory results. It is however worth noting, that the age and sex distributions of the Libyan population present in the register of Jewish Community members on the one hand, and that present in the APR on the other, are very
Figure 4 – Individuals resident in Rome belonging to nuclear families that include at least one foreign national, and one Italian born in Libya, by place of birth. Situation on 31.12.2000.

*Source: our analysis of data from the Civil Register of the Rome Municipality*

If the two populations are indeed composed of the same individuals, and if this method enabled us to identify at least a large part of the population of Libyan Jews in the APR, then the APR would allow us to study an “enlarged” population, composed of all the members of families that include at least one Libyan-born member (whereas the data available to us from the register of the Jewish Community, for the time being, is limited to individual Libyan Jews only).

Figure 5 – Individuals resident in Rome, belonging to nuclear families that include at least one foreign national and one Libyan-born Italian, by period of arrival in Rome. Situation on 31.12.2000.

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6, once the 9-year time gap between the two
(a) excluding individuals born in Italy

Source: our analysis of data from the Civil Register of the Rome Municipality

The majority of this population arrived in Rome in the five years of the great exodus from Libya (1966-70), a period that includes the year of expulsion (Figure 5). Earlier flows are small, while after 1970, the volume of arrivals in the ten-year period between 1976 and 1985, seems to have been relatively substantial. The arrival in Rome of almost half of those born in Libya (45.2%) coincides with the expulsion of Italians from the country. For other countries of origin, other periods of arrival stand out. As can be seen in Table 4, arrivals from Israel and, even more so, from countries other than Libya or Israel, are much more recent.

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
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<td>Libya</td>
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<td>45.2</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>15.4</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Absolute n.</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>377</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>1328</td>
</tr>
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(a) excluding individuals born in Italy

Source: our analysis of data from the Civil Register of the Rome Municipality
Figure 6 – Age pyramid of the population resident in Rome, belonging to nuclear families that include at least one foreign national and one Libyan-born Italian, by place of birth. Situation on 31.12.2000

Source: our analysis of data from the Civil Register of the Rome Municipality
The age pyramid of the “enlarged” population of Libyan origin\(^\text{21}\) (Figure 6) is particularly interesting: contrary to what may be observed in the older age-groups, the middle age-groups (30-44 year-olds) include a noticeable component of people not born in Libya. This is probably due to a greater tendency among the younger generation of immigrants who left Libya in the ‘60s, to form “mixed” couples (albeit not in the literal sense of the word) with people not born in Libya.

The geographic distribution of the population extracted from the APR confirms and clarifies certain features that emerged from the analysis of the geographic distribution of the Libyan members of the Jewish Community of Rome. In addition to the central districts (I-III), a significant presence of families with Libyan members is observed in the fourth district, in the peripheral northeastern quadrant of the city (Figure 7).

**Figure 7 - Individuals resident in Rome, belonging to nuclear families that include at least one foreign national and one Libyan-born Italian, by district of residence. Rome, 31.12.2000**

![Map showing distribution of families](image)

- **more than 100 individuals**
- **between 50 and 100 individuals**
- **less than 50 individuals**

*Source: our analysis of data from the Civil Register of the Rome Municipality*

The distribution of nuclear families by number of household members yields a high percentage of families (about 1/3) comprising a single member, a finding presumably attributable to the considerable presence of widows noted above. The mean family size is 2.68.

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\(^{21}\) We refer to S. Della Pergola's concept of “enlarged Jewish population” composed of (1) the core Jewish population (i.e., people who identify themselves as Jews by origin and/or affiliation, and people born Jewish who do not identify as Jewish), (2) people of Jewish parentage who are not Jews at the time of study, and, finally, (3) all non-Jewish family members (spouses, children….) of both categories.
Conclusions

Studying the “differences within differences” is like walking along a road that branches off into several paths; paths that may, however, also converge. The first problem regards the definition of diversity and how it should be measured. Which aspect (demographic, economic, socio-cultural) of the phenomenon should one observe to assess the intensity of differences. The second regards the identification of the best practical approach to be adopted, in order to tackle an issue which, as noted in the introduction, has so far been little explored by quantitative studies within an essentially historiographical perspective.

A review of existing studies and an exploration of the material available from the archives of the Jewish Community of Rome gave us access to previously unseen documents allowing a reconstruction of the demographic movements of Libyan Jews from 1967 to the present, as well as their work histories, with special reference to the socio-economic status acquired by them follow”jewish community register”ing their arrival in Rome. Through this preliminary exploration we were able to identify paths to answers on arrivals, departures for Israel, membership in the Jewish Community of Rome, marriages, areas of residence, children attending the Jewish school and assistance received from the Jewish Community of Rome.

With regard to quantitative data, the preliminary analysis of the civil register of the Jewish Community, addresses, for the time being, only the characteristics of those born in Libya, a population of older Community members (all born before 1967). Currently, this population comprises 777 individuals. The analysis of available data, limited for the time being to few variables (place of birth, sex, age, marital status, district of residence) yielded the following results:

At least three salient findings emerge as far as the population composition:

a. the existence of a fair proportion of never-married men who - considering their current age - will probably translate into a significant prevalence of permanent celibacy;

b. the presence of a large proportion of widows, even among relatively young women;

c. the small size of the group of 40-44 year-olds (born roughly between 1965 and 1969), presumably due to selective migrations, which may have led families with small children, at the time, to choose destinations other than Italy (e.g., Israel), or may have caused individuals belonging to this “missing” generation, to show a stronger tendency to leave Italy in the years preceding our snapshot. There may also have been, one might speculate, a reduction in birth rates among Libyan Jews in these turbulent years (1965-1969); a cohort effect due to a possible tendency - in light of their difficult situation - to postpone childbearing for better times.

As for the geographic distribution, a tendency was observed, among Libyan Jews, to settle in a number of specific areas of the city. Three districts are home to about 60% of this population, concentrated especially in the centre (the first district), which remains an important point of reference, as well as in two semi-central areas: Quartiere Africano (in the second district) and the area around Piazza Bologna (in the third district).

Information from the register of the Jewish Community of Rome were later integrated with data from the Municipal civil register, so as to draw inferences with regard to the enlarged Roman Jewish population of Libyan origin.
The age pyramid of the “enlarged” population of Libyan origin shows a noticeable component of people not born in Libya among the middle age-groups (aged 30-44), contrary to what may be observed in the older age-groups. This is probably due to a greater tendency among the younger generation of immigrants who left Libya in the ‘60s, to form “mixed” couples with people not born in Libya.

As far as residential choices are concerned, the results are similar to those obtained from the Jewish Community register. A substantial presence of Libyans has been observed not only in the central districts of the city (I-III), however, but also in the fourth district, in the peripheral northeastern quadrant of the city.

Lastly, the qualitative investigation conducted so-far, allowed us to collect testimonies that are valuable not only for the clarity with which the evidence was expressed (regarding the departure from Libya, the migratory route, integration in Italy, intergenerational relationships etc.) but also for the emotional involvement that accompanied the narration, an involvement that underscores the need to bear witness to one's experience, to recount episodes that may be useful for the reconstruction of historic/cultural events through which they lived:

“... I keep many documents that belonged to my father, very important things, and I would like it if one day these were put at the service of historical and cultural knowledge. I too - at the health care institutions where I work - constantly come into contact with people who immigrated to Italy from other countries. I compare these experiences with my own and often feel the deep similarity to what I lived through, with my family, also with regard to the issue of belonging to a community, to the strong symbols and rituals of cultural identity.”

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[22] Appendix, interview 3
Appendix – Interview Transcripts

Below are the full transcripts of the four interviews conducted so far.

1. Interview with Key informant Mr. Shalom Teschiuba
President of the Welfare Committee of the Jews of Libya
Interview conducted at Beth–El Centre, Via Padova 92, Rome,
Monday morning, October 19th, 2009

Personal information:
Place of birth: Libya, year of birth: 1935
Occupation: entrepreneur

The historical and social atmosphere in Libya – Departure

I remember that the situation in Libya began changing slowly after 1952. Our lives were peaceful, relatively undisturbed, until 1967. Then things deteriorated. Actually, there was something “suspicious” on the part of the authorities because, for example, for the more important business deals, even for the state, the boycott of Jews and of Jewish businesses was obvious, or at least one always had to go through important Arab go-betweens favoured by the authorities. Everything seemed within the norm. In 1958, however, the system itself changed, but let us take one step back. In 1954 only few people had a Libyan passport - before that they did not exist because Libya was not independent – we are talking about a maximum of 10% of the population. Then there was a halt. Everybody else could only have laissez passer and exit visas. In 1954 I started travelling a lot. I visited many countries for business. There was work and prosperity for per everyone, which is why people underestimated the situation. Also, people did not travel that much in the past. Only business people travelled out of the country. I was twenty years old when I took my first trip, to Tunisia. Then, for my work as a merchant of spices (our family tradition) - and later also of many other kinds of merchandise - I started travelling three or four times a year throughout the Middle East, and also to the Far East. Going back to 1958, at some point it became clear that Jews were resident in Libya but not citizens, like the others. We were essentially foreigners, but normal life proceeded well, and life was good anyway, also as far as relations with the Arab population or with other nationalities present in Tripoli. Many of us spoke a number of languages – Italian, Arabic, French, English. It was normal in Tripoli. Before
1958 one could buy real estate and securities, then it became necessary to have an Arab front man, also for companies and businesses. At that point there were people who took advantage of the situation, but also people who continued to behave loyally. Ownership documents no longer existed for Libyan Jews. Abroad I had the opportunity to compare notes with other Jewish merchants, but I must say that only on one occasion was I alarmed at the idea that freedom for us could be revoked overnight, and I was in Tehran, where I used to go once a year. Otherwise, everybody considered the way relations were going normal, at least in commerce I mean, obviously. At any rate, I started depositing money in an account in a bank in Italy, but it was already 1962. I remember that on the 23rd of May, 1967, with the closure of the Straits [of Tiran] and the situation in Israel – we heard Nasser's speeches on the radio, war was in the air - even everyday human relations began to grow cold. We Jews were immediately identified with what was happening and what was being decided in Israel in those tragic days. We listened to the radio regularly. On the 5th of June there were demonstrations and disorders, and then the looting and beating of Jews began. The Arab population in general, however, was sympathetic towards us. We were helped by our neighbours, they protected, helped us, not just in my case - because fortunately, thanks to my work, I really had many, solid and important relationships – but also for all the others. I sought information at the police, spoke also to the religious authorities, and the authorities of the Community, but nobody had a clear idea of how grave the situation was. In my family, we were stranded in the house for 31 days. Our neighbours, Arabs, helped us with food - and it was the same with other families - with moving and also with money, because many left by plane in those days. The problem was to obtain visas. Those who were Italians were fine (maybe 10% had an Italian passport), but for the Libyans the situation was very difficult, even if we were of Italian origin, or born under the Italian colonial occupation of Libya, documents were not being issued.

All the way to mid-June the police would come around to people's homes to check and also, actually, to advise them to leave, leave Libya. Many were given the suggestion to go to “camps for your security”, as they said. The assembly camps were situated 3-4 km outside of Tripoli, and they started preparing them at least 6 months earlier. I remember that Colonel Ali Aghil saved numerous families by having the Jewish quarter surrounded by the army to protect its inhabitants who, at any rate, had to be evacuated at least to prevent looting and acts of violence that in cases like these develop in no time. Simpler, poorer people ended up in the camps, and many of them were later taken to Israel. Clearly - it is obvious - only those who had more opportunities and good contacts were able to make other choices. Indeed, if you said, “I am going to Italy” or to
some other European country, they gave you the exit visa immediately, but they would certainly not give you a straight official answer - neither the authorities nor the police - for Israel.

In the Jewish quarter there were 6,000 people in 1967. Before that, there were at least 40,000 Jews in Libya, 36,000 of whom were in Tripoli, and the others in Benghazi or other cities, practically. The exodus of the Jews, however, started already in 1946. The majority went to Israel. Many left even with Italian, Sicilian fishing boats, I remember.

**The arrival in Italy, integration, intergenerational relations**

I departed on July 6th, 1967, via Germany. There were no other flights available. Most of us suffered a lot having to leave our country, our beloved country, in which we had lived our lives for generations. The memory of that richness of family life, of social life, of tradition never leaves us: it is with us, in our hearts. We took the traditions with us, and we keep them alive.

There were 44 Synagogues in Tripoli, 25 in the old quarter of the centre alone. I remember the goods for the holidays displayed in the shops one after another, and that “little Jerusalem” that would come to a halt in unison for *shabbat*, and come to life in honour of the festivals. Life flowed with the rhythms of our way of life and our religious observance. There were also the new neighbourhoods of the city, and several families moved there, into a more “colonial” and international environment, but the heart of the Jews of Tripoli was in the old quarter. In my memories of Tripoli there is also the visit of Italy's King Vittorio Emanuele and Queen Elena. At the Main Synagogue the Rabbi of Tripoli blessed the king, who was visibly moved and impressed by his spiritual authority. The rabbi also blessed the [king's] son, Umberto, in Italy. I also had the prayer of the blessing of the king delivered to M. Gaddafi, as a gift and historical document.

Respect for tradition was very strong. Now it is coming back.

Personally, I committed myself to fostering love and respect for Jewish traditions and religious observance. Specifically, I dedicated myself to the dietary laws. As soon as the first New Year, I remember, I went to talk to Mr. Terracina to make sure we would have enough meat to celebrate properly. Then I went on to attend to wine, for example, and to *Kashrut* in general. It is a subject that tells how integration between Libyans and Romans began – dealing with the daily necessities and rituals together. I immediately went to the Chief Rabbi and the *Comitato di Assistenza Ebrei di Libia* (Welfare Committee of the Jews of Libya) was established - of which I have been president since 1968 – precisely to deal with and handle the situation without divisions between Libyans and Romans. Surely, the Roman Jews at first seemed to us to be more “secularised” than us, because certain things having to do with tradition remained for them limited only to the important holidays and to the rituals, no longer present on a daily basis in the families. Slowly
there was intermingling which, I believe, gave renewed importance to traditions and religiosity. We bought the Beth –El synagogue on July 28th, 1981. Many years earlier, with Simone Harbib I opened the religious school here in Rome, to prepare kids for the religious confirmation [ceremony].

As for the difference in mentality, for example at work, obviously some differences exist, but it is not about being from Tripoli or Rome. It has to do with one's line of work, being a big businessman is not like managing a single store or a clothing shop, for example. One should also take into account, that those who had to restart from scratch here, were motivated to rebuild their lives, their prosperity, a drive that Romans could not be expected to have, at home. Certainly there have been people who abandoned community life, or religious life, and threw themselves only into business and moneymaking, but this always happens. There was also a sort of Roman “parochialism”, but these are banal, superficial things.

I was thirty when I arrived, with money in my pocket and active business contacts. I immediately started with wholesale import and export. Within 15 days I found an apartment and restarted my business activity, notifying my contacts by telegram that I moved to Rome. I remember that many addresses I took from my files when I returned to Tripoli, with my brother and a few friends. It was October 17th, 1967, right after Yom Kippur on the 16th. The police escorted me all the way into my house or my store rooms when I had to liquidate and transfer everything possible. Mine was just one experience, one cannot generalise, and this holds for everybody else who had their own experiences.

But returning to the present, to the current reality of the community, nowadays there are many “mixed” marriages, that is, between Roman and Libyan families, even more than 20% of the marriages, and everybody generally enjoys a good “cous cous with meatballs”!

Curiosity is also spreading, cultural interest for the past, for the life of the parents and grandparents in Libya, a recovery of memories, I would say. One does not have to travel to do this, those who can and want to, can do it. It's there. But I will say this once again, the traditions are with us, inside of us. I went to Libya three times officially, as a representative of Libyan Jews.

In the Jewish School of Rome there are now more students from Libyan families than Roman, that is certain. My children all went to the Jewish school in the centre of Rome.

The role of women changed, a lot, because in the past women did not work, they stayed at home and dedicated themselves only to the family. Now they work more than the men, clearly, society in general changed.
2. Interview with Key informant Mr. Dan Nunes Vais

Interview conducted at a sports club,
Saturday morning, October 24th, 2009
(between 9:15 and 10:50, approximately)

Personal information:
Place of birth: Libya, year of birth: 1946
Occupation: accountant

Origins of the family
Thinking back to the origins of my family, I even had an ancestor named Vittorio Emanuele and
an uncle named Garibaldi, later known as Arbib Nunes Vais. These are the origins of the
community of Italian Jews in Libya, in Tripoli. Now – and I found information also on internet
about this – it seems that, around 1860, or even earlier, Jewish freemasons who wanted
independence for Italy and later escaped, found refuge in Libya. In Tunisia, too, by the way. I, we
Nunes Vais, have relatives in Tunis. So from the mid-19th century, we have been Italians in
Libya, both my mother's and my father's families. My great-grandfather was called upon to
establish the Italian school. My grandfather was born in Pitigliano, in Tuscany, near Lake
Bolsena In my mother's family they were mostly teachers, one daughter was, in fact, headmistress
of the Italian school in Tripoli. There was no Jewish school in the sense of an educational
institution and the Jews could not go to the Arab school. There were religious schools, each
synagogue had its own, there were many of those…I attended one outside of what I would not
call a ghetto, because it would not be accurate, but the old quarter, Tripoli's old quarter. It was
named the “Hara”…

The historical and social atmosphere in Libya - Departure
Certainly at the time perceptions were different. Not everybody attributed the same importance
to passports and expulsion orders. Citizenship, and even dual citizenship, is something that was
given later and even today it is very much debated, also for Italians that may be considered
“expelled” from Libya. I always had the certainty that I would end up in Italy, and when it
happened, as a result of my academic choices, I simply felt that I had returned home. We were
Italians in Libya, and Italian Jews, not Libyan Jews. It should be noted that Tripoli was a very
unusual city, because Arabs were a minority. Now, the numbers I can give may not be perfect,
but the scale is clear: there were 15,000 [foreign] inhabitants in Tripoli, Italians, French, English,
Spanish, an international city in the early 1960s and before that even more, then with Israeli independence in 1948, many left. Let's say that I remember 30 families of Italian origin, and others were Libyan....

I thought there were even more than 2,000 people for the nucleus of Jews from Tripoli. Considering the shops in Rome, they could be at least 770 like the members officially registered, so that the respective families should be many.

We were not expelled, or at least this is not how people like me experienced it. The differences, however, are very important. As it is important to distinguish between three factors, or different moments: the pogroms, from 1948 on and their aftermath, Libyan independence and, at the same time, Israeli independence and the war in Israel, and the revolution in Libya (1968/69).

My aunt, my sister and my grandmother were there in 1967 when there was a pogrom. Officially, though, no expulsion measures were taken. Acts of violence and turmoil were considered none of the state's concern. They left two or three weeks thereafter, and then later returned in order to pack up and do the necessary move. 1967 was a year of awareness. Those who did not sell or transfer real estate or other property lost everything. Again, we were Italian, not Libyan, but we were Jews. My aunt worked for the US embassy and could therefore have obtained special visas, but they preferred taking a normal airline flight. Leaving unofficially could have compromised our family's ability to return. Returning to Libya in 1968 was very easy. One could enter and exit to resolve economic problems, problems related to property, or work. Let's say that the Italians in Libya (the non-Jews) did not immediately understand that for them, too, things would go a certain way and even soon. They thought it was only a problem for Jews. We did not sell our house in 1969. The financial resources in Libyan banks were, obviously, blocked and so was real estate that had not been transferred or liquidated before Colonel Gaddafi's rise to power. One might say that the Jews had two years of advantage over the others to understand the situation. Obviously, simpler people, less well-off or even people and families lacking useful contacts abroad, lived through a completely different experience”.

The return to Italy and social integration
In Rome I noticed, towards those who came from Libya the same attitudes that are common towards the so-called non-European immigrants, snobbishness, in a word, towards those who come from a country that is different. That is how I perceived it. I socialised with both Romans and Libyans and could see the differences in behaviour, but probably many Libyan Jews did not even notice it or perceive it in this way. Much depends on the mentality or culture in the family,
on the social context. I saw it in this way, maybe the others did not. As a matter of fact I am convinced that “they” did not see it the way I did. When I say “they” I mean Libyan Jews who immigrated to Italy and not Italians in Libya or people who primarily saw themselves as Italians, with an historical family connection, even concrete ties with the country. My mother, for example, thanks to her female sensibility and caution, always made sure that some of the income remains and is accumulated in Italy, and always advised and encouraged my father to do the same. We knew that sooner or later we would go back, that, after all, our country was Italy. Many Italians in Libya simply remained anchored to the past, frozen at that moment, they remained there with the vision of their life there, let's say that they would go back tomorrow [if they could]. That is not how it was for us. As far as registering to be part of the Community now, it is important to understand this well. It is strange that there are few registered members. You must belong to a community, to express your Judaism, you cannot but resort to a community. Differences in the observance of traditions existed – exist - between Roman and Libyan Jews. It is not surprising that the Libyans immediately sought and wanted their own synagogue. I participated in its purchase in the late 1970s, about ten years after the beginning of the affair. It was the former Ausonia cinema, on a cross street of via Padova, I used to go there as a student. I rarely attended [services]. Actually, I also used to attend the other [synagogue] nearby. During the holidays the Beth El synagogue is almost not enough. It is full. On YouTube there's a blog of Libyan women who give cooking lessons. Cooking is important for tradition – smells, tastes, an original cous cous is always an opportunity to celebrate. I arrived in Rome in 1963. I was 17 years old, but I enrolled in University. In Tripoli, you did one less year of high school, so I was ahead. I had no intention of returning to Tripoli. I used to go to the synagogue only for the holidays. Only after the age of 30 did I start to become more interested in religious life, or rather, in a deeper understanding of the culture, also in terms of the knowledge of the Holy Scriptures.

**Intergenerational relations**

I think 1968 was an important watershed in terms of the understanding of intergenerational relations. I am thinking mostly of those who arrived here very young. This does not apply to me, personally, but to people a little younger than me, those who, in 1967, were 14 or 15 years old. They found themselves moving from a hyper-protective environment, for good or bad - in which rebellion was unthinkable, and drugs were out of the question – to the schools of 1968. Their parents had never heard of such a thing, [they had no idea]. For them school was a protected, secure environment. To find oneself smack in the middle of the events of ’68 was traumatic. An
incredible trauma. Those youngsters for the most part came out of it, however. The families held up, too. Everybody returned to normal behaviour. But the cultural trauma undoubtedly occurred. Now there is a very united community. It was and still is. Now there is intermingling in the community, also in its administration. There are also mixed marriages, but in any case the Libyans remain very united in their separate sense of community. Social mobility is a phenomenon that should be contextualised. In Italy, in Rome, it happened in a certain way. In Israel, or in the USA, in a completely different fashion. The generational passage is different in this respect. There is less social mobility in Italy, in the sense of the transformation of professions and occupations, rising professional and educational levels, but obviously if we compare this Italian phenomenon to what happened elsewhere, to the case of the Russian immigrants in Israel, for example... Today (in the Mediterranean world) many ask themselves, “are we Arabs, or not?”, in the sense that there is a renewed appreciation of the importance [of cross-cultural] contamination, of the different traditions and historical legacies, of cultural pluralism, and this [applies] to everything that at some point came under Arab influence, the epic deeds of the Arabs, so to speak, along the coasts of the Mediterranean, mainly. The same can be said also for skin colours. Certain identities are very artificial, imposed by the powers that be, or also by interests, such as in the case of oil, for example. Peoples' real lives are a whole different thing...

3. Interview with Key informant Ms. Claudia Fellus

Interview conducted at the interviewee's home

*Tuesday evening, November 3rd, 2009,*

*(between 18:00 – 20:00)*

**Personal information:**

Place of birth: Libya, year of birth: 1959
Occupation: Local Health Unit official (Azienda sanitaria locale, ASL), Rome

**Personal and family origin. Life in Tripoli**

What I would like to say straight off is that the trauma in this story is not trivial: the flight from one’s native land. I was 8 years old. On the 6th of June, the day on which the Six Day War broke out, my sister and I (I was born in ‘59, she in ‘61 and we have a younger sister) were at school. My father came to pick us up with the car and took a few other people along the way, who were
in the street, desperate, because there were attacks against Jews and violent raids into their homes. Tensions ran high in those days, with the closure of the Suez [canal], the city was in the grip of violent turmoil. I remember the TV always on, and a lot of pathos in the family.

As always happens in the Jewish world, people consider themselves citizens of the country in which they live, they feel at home, and they don't foresee how far certain dangerous situations can go. People were concerned, worried, on the alert, but we still remained there anyway. “Why didn't we leave?” I asked myself this as an adult.

I reconstructed my family's memories. People were saying that nothing was going to happen. One uncle told me of an initiative that was taken, to make a contribution to the Palestinians as a token of solidarity, an attempt to make a gesture of peace. I must say that I recuperated my memories only many years later, because as a little girl, I suffered a memory loss, due to the dramatic events that shook my family and my people, and that I witnessed (1). I was not aware of it until I reached adult age. I thought it normal for a child not to have memories of his own, but to only hear and remember what grown-ups were saying. This traumatised childhood also entailed serious health problems for me, which influenced much of my life (2).

Precisely on the basis of my experience, I would like to say that studies like this should be aimed at a better understanding and awareness of the traumas of forced migrations, especially on more vulnerable subjects. The trauma of cultural difference, the deep fissures that suddenly appear in the lives of people forced to leave their country and their home. In my case, and in the case of my sisters, we were children, my father and my mother were still young in the prime of their lives: they had to begin anew, from scratch, after a dreadful force tore us apart, took away everything we had and everything we felt we were. Migrations are like this too. At any rate, it is a mighty devastation.

Returning to the story of our lives in Tripoli: I can say that we lived in the Italian colonial neighbourhood, close to the cathedral (on via Nicola Boremizi, 5). Three families ended up barricaded in this house, with large quantities food, provisions fit for a state of war, indeed. There was also a very unpleasant episode with an Italian neighbour – but only one, because the others were all very sympathetic and diligent in helping - who said that it would be better if we left earlier, instead of endangering the lives of everybody in the building. My father, almost prophetically, replied that when they start picking on Jews, before long something serious happens also to all the others. And that's what happened, because the other Italians were also expelled from the country. In those days, there were also killings, tension skyrocketed.
I returned to Tripoli as an adult, with Shalom Tesciuba (and the delegation of Libyan Italian Jews), I stood on the street, right in front of our building, but could not bring myself to go up. The emotion was too intense. The name of the street had been changed.

**Departure from Libya. Migration and adaptation**

In my family we were French citizens and carried French passports. I think this possibility was due to the existence of a Tunisian relative of my grandfather's generation. He had us all take French citizenship as a precaution. After marriage, my mother – who was of Libyan nationality – also took French citizenship. My father was a friend of the French Ambassador to Tripoli, and it was he who told us that we were not to leave the house under any circumstances, that he was going to come pick us up the next morning, that we should not take luggage, and that he would escort us to the airport with a diplomatic car so we could leave. And that is how things went. My little sister wanted to take a rag doll with her, but a policeman, before boarding, slashed it open to make sure there were no jewels or other things hidden inside. This is how we left our lives there: we departed with only the clothes we had on.

**Life in Italy (Rome). Work and society (the Community)**

We arrived in Rome. Italy was our destination, because part of our family was already here, and because we spoke Italian and had been attending Italian schools. We also used to come to Italy every year for vacation. We were Libyans but - even though we did not live in the Hara but rather in the Italian residential neighbourhood - we were Libyan Jews. My father was not especially religious, my mother was no longer religious, but he was “very Jewish”, in the sense of belonging to his community. He was a very educated man. Both of my parents were, but they were still “orientals” in the Western context. My father was loved and respected by the people of our community.

Jewish-Arab coexistence in Tripoli had remained the same only for the humbler, simpler people of the old quarter, and then it was not even always peaceful given the general situation.

We arrived here. We were Libyans in every way. My parents spoke the Judeo-Arabic dialect, the food, education, behaviour. The five of us found ourselves living in a single room in my aunt's apartment near the Termini central station, Via Principe Amedeo. We were not poor, of course, but neither rich, and we were unable to take anything with us. Not even a change of clothes. Even relationships with our cousins (all males, except for a small girl) were difficult. We had different lifestyles and rules governing family relations, even in daily life, My grandmother
and my aunts were still in Tripoli and we were unable to [contact them]. We had no word from them. My mother was beside herself.

At school I had a very hard time. When, a year later I went to middle school at the Jewish school, our Roman schoolmates looked at me and the others as though we were some kind of “strange animals”. They used to ask us stupid, offensive questions, stigmatised us with the characteristic malice that youngsters reserve for those who are different. And yet we were much more educated and diligent students than the Romans. It is always the immigrant who has to integrate. It is as though someone in your home said to you: “the culture is mine”.

Maybe at the time people did not understand these things, but we kids in those conditions may perhaps have been in need of psychological support.

There is an important episode that I can recount. When other refugees arrived in the camp at Latina, we went to see them with my father, who was considered by everyone something of an authority figure. It was another traumatic moment for me: these big, long rooms and all of these people crying, screaming, speaking loudly, greeting with pain and despair, exchanging news [of loved ones]... A display of feelings and emotions that were too strong, too overt for a girl such as I was. Let's say that the trauma was transposed into my life.

Many of those refugees went to Israel, but many stayed in Italy.

I think that the Libyan Jewish community numbers 5,000 people. We Libyan Jews all found homes in the Quartiere Africano: this cannot be a coincidence, it is not trivial. Unconsciously, perhaps, this neighbourhood, with its African street names, must have exerted some sort of attractive force [on people]. In Piazza Bologna, at the Casina delle Rose, there was a kind of centre, let's say, where everybody used to meet. In my neighbourhood, at Viale Libia, the owner of the Marinari bakery learned how to make a kind of biscuits called “tripolini” still sold and called that to this day: a cultural transposition of recipes and ingredients.

I remember that on our balcony, which was well exposed to the sun, my father planted jasmin and other plants, and we referred to them using the Arabic names. With that jasmin we used to make sweet-smelling necklaces and bouquets. The search to rediscover one's cultural self gets stronger around those things.

My father was the first councillor for the Community of the Jews of Libya, and worked a lot also alongside the Chief Rabbi of Rome. He told me: “the Synagogue is not just a place for prayer. It is a place to defend culture and memory: it is a value”.

Liturgy for Libyans was completely different from that of the Romans. That's why the Libyans immediately sought their own place of worship. First, in several homes, garages, then at the former Ausonia cinema, and finally a proper temple on Via Padova.
I keep many documents that belonged to my father, very important things, and I would like it if one day these were put at the service of historical and cultural knowledge. I too - at the health care institutions where I work - constantly come into contact with people who immigrated to Italy from other countries. I compare these experiences with my own and often feel the deep similarity to what I lived through, with my family, also with respect to the issue of belonging to a community, to the strong symbols and rituals of cultural identity.

**Comparison between generations**

Today, I look at my nephew and he is Libyan. He wants Libyan food more than I do, and so are his friends and peers. They really are Libyans, even if they speak with a Roman accent. The force of traditions that are passed down [from generation to generation] is incredible. Culture - when it is cherished in the memory and transmitted willingly – is very strong, perhaps even stronger than a “motherland”, where certain things loose their meaning, are considered less important because they were never questioned or interfered with.

Our roots are in our memories and in our hearts. You don't want your culture to die with you. This allows you to practice it, live it, and transmit it to others, to the next generations. Today I see women who have never been in Libya, were not born in Libya, and yet they marry following the Tripolitanian ritual and they also organise - they want, for their wedding - all of the traditional celebrations, clothes and customs, exactly as they used to do in Libya. A mirror-image of Libya… It is all here now. In this community, that is Libyan and Jewish, I am a Libyan Jew – this is my identity.

**Notes to the interview**

(1) “I lost eight years of my memories”. The interviewee remembers that her father's car, parked in front of the house, near the main door, was set on fire when violence erupted against Jews, their homes and shops. The sight of that blaze may have been the cause of the loss of memory. She also recounts that years earlier ('48 - '50), one of her father's brothers and his entire family decided to move to Israel following a violent attack on the grandmother's house. For years in the interviewee's family any reference to those relatives was avoided to make sure that the children do not naively disclose their destination – Israel: it was like a name not to be pronounced. There is a clear memory of the mother having received threatening phone calls, and having informed the father. The girl clearly saw her parents, grandmother and aunts in fear and despair, just as – at the sight of the car in flames - she clearly perceived that their lives were in danger.

(2) The interviewee pointed out that the memory of those years returned to her through psychoanalysis, a treatment which she began at about 30 years of age (and which was also intended to resolve an eating disorder). Previously, it was as though the most traumatic episode of that month of June was the move to Rome (coinciding with the return of her memory) and entering the fifth grade at Federico Cesi elementary
school in the neighbourhood where the family lived. In that same period, unfortunately, following a simple domestic accident, the girl was hospitalised for tests at the Bambin Gesù hospital and for ten days could only see her parents during visiting hours. The rest of the time was for her only anguish, tears and loneliness.

Bibliografia essenziale

