

Stefano Esteban Montuori (formerly Goldberger)

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In the documents of the University of Turin, where he had come at the age of 18 to study medicine, his forename is Italianized. In 1935 Stefano took an Italian surname, becoming Montuori rather than Goldberger. Born in a small town in the then Austro-Hungarian Empire, he felt Italy to be his country. But the race laws took it all away: Italian citizenship, work as a doctor, university rank and employment. He followed the example of his teacher Amedeo Herlitzka and moved to Argentina.

A foreign student in Italy

He was born in Bátorkeszi, in Hungary, on 4 June 1906 to Davide Goldberger and Karola Goldbergerova, the last of three brothers¹. On the outbreak of the First World War, his family moved to Prague, where he attended school and learned to read and write in Hungarian, Czech and German. When he was 18 he enrolled in the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery in Turin as a foreign student exempt from enrollment fees, taking advantage of the support provided by the Gentile reform of 1923, which had paradoxical results with the arrival of many young Jews from countries in the East². Stefano's brother Michele was already in Turin, studying engineering at the Polytechnic.

In the third year of study Stefano, as a research assistant, entered the Institute of Physiology, directed by Amedeo Herlitzka. The professor engaged him, with other selected students, in the research into high-altitude

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1 Anibal Péres Lloret, Lily Montuori, *Esteban Montuori (1906-1995)*, «Revista Medicina Buenos Aires», 55, 6, 1995, pp. 726-727. At the end of the First World War Bátorkeszi became a village in Czechoslovakia and from 1993 in Slovakia.

2 RD n. 2102, 30 September 1923, *Ordinamento della istruzione superiore*, art. 54. On this point, see the recent study of Elisa Signori, *Migrazioni forzate e strategie formative oltre i confini. Gli studenti stranieri, ebrei e non, nelle Università italiane (1900-1940)*, in Anna Rita Calabrò (ed.), *Disegnare, attraversare, cancellare i confini. Una prospettiva interdisciplinare*, Milan, Giappichelli, 2018, pp. 184-197.

physiology undertaken at the University's «Angelo Mosso» Institute at Col d'Olen, on Monte Rosa, where he was director. It was at 3,000 metres, in the tremendous beauty of the Alps, that his earliest scientific research and his passion for mountaineering came to birth. «This experience was very useful for him: he was vouchsafed the ability, which he maintained all his life, to operate with slender resources and to assemble “from zero” the instruments he needed»³.

He graduated on 18 November 1930, earning the distinction of having his thesis printed. In the same year and in the same faculty at Turin two other students began their medical studies, Rita Levi-Montalcini and her cousin Eugenia Sacerdote de Lustig, with whom Stefano was to have an enduring relation of friendship⁴. In the Gazzetta ufficiale of 29 October 1931 his name appears in the list of those from the University of Florence who had passed the national qualifying examination entitling them to practise professionally as surgeons⁵. Until the end of 1933 he was a volunteer assistant in the Physiology Laboratory directed by Herlitzka, as the latter confirmed, and at the same time he attended the Istituto Mosso as well as the medical section of the Ospedale di San Giovanni in Turin, while during the summer he attended the marine section in Trieste. In the winter of 1933-34 he performed his military service at the medical cadets school in Florence⁶.

Becoming Italian: from medical orderly in East Africa to lecturer

In 1934 he changed his name from Goldberger to Montuori, by a decision of the prefect in Trieste in accordance with article 2 of the RDL 10 January 1926 n. 17 for «the adaptation of the surname to an Italian form», which usually

3 A. Péres Lloret, L. Montuori, *Esteban Montuori*, cit., p. 726 (translated by Valeria Graffone).

4 Ibid. and the account by Eliana Montuori obtained by V. Graffone, 3 July 2019.

5 Ministero dell'Educazione nazionale, «Elenco dei candidati che hanno superato l'esame di Stato», GU 72, 10, 29 October 1931, p. 5280.

6 ACS, MPI, DGIS, *Divisione I, Liberi docenti, III serie (1930-1950)*, b. 334, f. «Montuori Stefano». The file is among those not yet catalogued under name. The information in the test was obtained from the proceedings of the evaluation committee chaired by Amedeo Herlitzka, Rome 23 March 1936.

happened at the request of the individual. In Trieste the first commission for this action, which was «expressly political and in the national interest», was brought about by senior representatives of the local Fascist party. In 1936 it appears that more than 18,000 citizens in the prefectures were given Italian surnames⁷. Though in theory it was forbidden to put pressure on the people concerned, the Trieste provincial federation had in fact mobilized to «advise, suggest, convince»⁸. In Stefano's family not everyone shared his choice; for example, his brother Gasparre (Gazo) Goldberger who was actually living in Trieste, in via D'Annunzio 2, did not do so⁹.

Recalled to service and mobilized from 6 February 1935 to mid-April, Stefano Montuori was sent as a medical reservist second lieutenant to the war in Abyssinia, serving with the 70th Infantry Regiment in the Gavinana Division, which was formed at Florence in 1934. His division was concentrated on the border between Eritrea and Ethiopia, and was pushed by General Nino Salvatore Villa Santa to the victory at Adua, which happened at the beginning of October¹⁰.

In this situation, the former member of the Physiology Laboratory at Turin University made a request to apply for a lectureship, having learned that a ministerial decree exempted candidates called up for Africa from additional tests¹¹. The request, dated 10 December 1935, reached the minister more than a month later, on 29 January 1936, after the deadline for submission

⁷ See Silvio Troilo, *Il diritto al nome nella propria madrelingua dei membri delle minoranze linguistiche*, excerpt from *L'uso della lingua negli atti e nella comunicazione dei poteri pubblici italiani*, ed. by Paolo Bonetti, Turin, Giappichelli, 2017, pp. 61-67. The documentation on this specific case is in Archivio storico dell'Università degli Studi di Torino (hereafter ASUTo), file «Stefano Montuori», decree of the prefect for Trieste, 6 July 1934. As a rule however the adaptation to an Italian form consisted either in a translation or an adjustment which retained the phonetic sounds of the non-Italian name.

⁸ Cited by S. Troilo, *Il diritto al nome* cit., p. 66.

⁹ As can be inferred from a letter from Stefano Montuori to the Minister for National Education, 12 June 1936, in ACS, MPI, DGIS, cit., file «Montuori Stefano».

¹⁰ See Regio Esercito, *19° Divisione di Fanteria Venezia* (of which the Gavinana was part) <<http://www.regioesercito.it/>> (accessed 18 February 2020).

¹¹ ACS, MPI, DGIS, cit., file «Montuori Stefano», letter of recommendation to the rector of Turin University, 3 April 1936 in respect of the lectureship appointment. The file also contains details of his military service.

had expired. The director general for public education sought advice on how to proceed from the minister, at that time Cesare De Vecchi, previously governor of Somalia, who accepted the request, and the appointments committee was reconvened¹². It comprised Professor Amedeo Herlitzka himself as chairman, with Tullio Gayda¹³, his former student and professor of physiology at Pavia, and Gaetano Quagliariello, professor of biochemistry at the University of Naples, and they proceeded only to assess the candidate's qualifications. Given the exceptional situation, and since it was the only request received, Herlitzka sent directly to the Minister for National Education, who was from Piedmont, a lengthy report on Montuori's career and his 25 publications, from which the panel «drew the conclusion» that the candidate demonstrated «technical preparation and scientific education combined with a flair for experimental research, such as to make it clear that he was now fully qualified»¹⁴. He was therefore unanimously recommended for the lectureship in experimental physiology, which he was awarded by ministerial decree on 18 May 1936. Two days later, the official recommendation was sent to the *podestà* of Trieste so that he could forward the decree to Doctor Montuori, resident at Piazza Carlo Alberto 9, Trieste¹⁵. In June the new lecturer - with the addition of fascist compliments - requested and obtained from the Minister for National Education a refund of the money spent in applying for his appointment.

«On his return, after two years of military discipline, he thought he would never again be able to think like a free man»¹⁶. He took up residence at

12 Ibid. Giuseppe Giustini, expressly by the minister (hearing of 7 February 1936), with the autographed note received and signed. Cesare De Vecchi was Minister for National Education from 24 January 1935 to 15 November 1936.

13 See Giuseppe Armocida, *Gayda Tullio*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, vol. 59, 1999 <<http://www.treccani.it/>> (accessed 15 February 2020).

14 ACS, MPI, DGIS, cit., file «Montuori Stefano», report of the assessment committee chaired by Amedeo Herlitzka, at the Ministry for National Education, Rome 23 March 1936.

15 Ibid., note from the Ministry for National Education to the *podestà* of the Comune of Trieste, 20 May 1936.

16 A. Péres Lloret, L. Montuori, *Esteban Montuori*, cit., p. 726.

Florence in October 1936 and asked to be able take up the lectureship at Florence University, as emerges from a letter of Giorgio Abetti, vice-rector of Florence University¹⁷. He returned to Turin, where at the beginning of 1937 he was named temporary assistant at the Institute of Physiology on the recommendation of the Institute's director, Amedeo Herlitzka, who in turn sent his «liveliest thanks» to the rector, Silvio Pivano, for accepting his request¹⁸. In this period Montuori began to work as a researcher for the Schiapparelli pharmaceutical company,¹⁹ for which Professor Herlitzka was a technical consultant.

Argentina, a forced choice

By the application of the previously mentioned racial laws, 58 academics were expelled from the University of Turin, among them Amedeo Herlitzka and Giuseppe Levi, professor of human anatomy²⁰. By ministerial decree of 18 March 1939 Stefano Montuori was also released and declared to have lapsed from qualification as lecturer in experimental physiology: in his file in the racial census he had declared his Jewish origins, while making clear that he was not registered as a member of the Jewish community and was not an adherent of any religion. The official communication was sent on 2 June from the minister to the rector of the University of Turin with the «Request to inform the party concerned»²¹. Four days later, the communication from the

17 ASUTo, f. «Stefano Montuori», letter from the vice-rector of the University of Florence, Giorgio Abetti, to the rector of the University of Turin, 10 February 1937, and *ibid.*, certificate from the Comune of Florence - Demographic Services - Sezione dello Stato civile, 3 March 1937.

18 *Ibid.*, letter from Professor Amedeo Herlitzka to the rector of Turin, Silvio Pivano, 20 February 1937.

19 A. Péres Lloret, L. Montuori, *Esteban Montuori*, *cit.*, p. 726.

20 On this see *Scienza e vergogna. L'università di Torino e le leggi razziali*, ed. by Giacomo Giacobini, Silvano Montaldo, Enrico Pasini, November 2018 - February 2019 <<https://scienzaevergognaunito.wordpress.com/>> (accessed 10 February 2020). See Valeria Graffone, *Espulsioni immediate. L'università di Torino e le leggi razziali, 1938*, Turin, Zamorani, 2018, p.76.

21 ASUTo, f. «Stefano Montuori», notification of lapse in qualifications as lecturer issued by ministerial decree 18 March 1939, letter from the Minister for National Education sent to the rector of the University of Turin, 2 June 1939 (a copy also in ACS, MPI, DGIS, *cit.*, file

rector, Azzo Azzi, professor in the Faculty of Medicine, was ready, but the addressee had left months before.

On 27 March 1939, sailing from Trieste on the *Neptunia*, Stefano reached the port of Buenos Aires²². On the same ship, though two months earlier, among other Hungarian Jewish arrivals were Ladislao Bíró (1899-1985), who with his brother György had shortly before created and patented the prototype of the ballpoint pen that bears their name,²³ and Montuori later established friendly relations with him. Buenos Aires was the destination for a number of Italian professors expelled from their universities, in particular from Turin and Bologna. In deciding on this destination, what influenced Montuori, now nearly thirty-three years old, was the fact that his professor was already in Buenos Aires, where a brother of his had been in industry for some years. Amedeo Herlitzka had arrived with his wife and younger son the previous month, 26 February, and was followed by other members of his family. If Montuori had no relatives in Argentina, his daughter states, there was nevertheless a group of Jewish emigrés to receive the «new» Jews as they arrived²⁴. His two engineer brothers also followed him, though the date is uncertain: in December 1941 Miguel and Gaspar Goldberger appear as business partners in a firm at 4951 Monroe Street, Buenos Aires, in connection with a patent for metal welding²⁵.

«Montuori Stefano», also 2 June 1939) and a copy of the letter from the rector Azzo Azzi to Stefano Montuori, 6 June 1939.

22 See the database Centro de Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos, CEMLA, *ad nomen*, <<https://cemla.com>> (accessed 20 February 2020).

23 László József Bíró, in Spanish form Ladislao José Biro (Budapest 29 September 1899 – Buenos Aires 24 October 1985), arrived on the *Neptunia* from Trieste 25 January 1939 in Buenos Aires where he settled, see again the database CEMLA, *ad nomen*. On the Fundación Biro web site, set up by his daughter Mariana Bíró in 1999, some photos from the archives <<http://fundacionbiro.org.ar>> (accessed 20 January 2020).

24 Interview with Eliana Montuori, 3 July 2019. For the dates relating to Herlitzka's arrival with his wife Frances Strauss and their son Lucio Paolo, see the CEMLA database, *ad nomen*, <<https://cemla.com>> (accessed 20 February 2020); he was followed by his doctor son Leonardo and his wife, who sailed from Marseille 26 June 1939, but they were all preceded by his other son Gino, an engineer, who sailed from Genoa on the *Augustus* and arrived 16 August 1935.

25 The Goldbergers do not appear on the CEMLA database, and Eliana Montuori does not record when they reached Argentina. The document referred to which records one of their

In Buenos Aires Esteban failed to obtain equivalence for his qualifications; to practise as a surgeon he would have to sit other examinations. It was impossible to find work in university clinics or faculties of medicine; not even Herlitzka managed this. Instead he found opportunities in the pharmaceutical field: he became a production manager in the then renowned Istituto Massone, and in 1940 he joined as scientific director the Gador pharmaceutical laboratory, founded that year by the Hungarian Nicholas Gador in collaboration with Américo and Jorge Balla, owners of a laboratory in Hungary, who in 1948 would move to Buenos Aires to escape the communist dictatorship²⁶.

In Argentina he became Esteban, a chemist and doctor by profession, according to the documents²⁷. In Italy, meanwhile, his citizenship was revoked. The Gazzetta ufficiale del Regno d'Italia of 4 January 1940 reads:

MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR

Revocation of Italian citizenship

By royal decree dated 12 December 1939 XVIII, registered in the Court of Audit 14 February 1939, Register n. 2 Internal, folio n. 266, it is declared with full effect that the Italian citizenship granted according to article 4 of the law of 13 June 1912, n. 555, to Mr Stefano Goldberger, born in Batorkeszi 4 June 1906 to Davide and Carolina Goldberger, is revoked.

Argentina

Thanks to his research activity in the laboratory of the Gador pharmaceutical firm, Montuori started on a collaboration with the Malbrán bacteriological institute and the Institute of Experimental Biology and Medicine founded privately in 1944 by Professor Bernardo Alberto Houssay (1887-1971), Nobel

already initiated professional activities in 1941 is the «Boletín Oficial de la República Argentina. 1942 1^{ra} sección» concerns the registration of a limited company, «Faves Fabricación y venta de especialidades técnica», Buenos Aires December 1941, with registered premises at 4951 Monroe Street and the patent registered by Dr Miguel Goldberger on the procedure for welding metals with low fluid content; available on line at <<https://archive.org>> (accessed 22 February 2020).

²⁶ *Laboratorios Gador, calidad nacional*, «Prescribe», December 2014 – January 2015, pp. 81-83, <<https://issuu.com/>> (accessed 10 July 2019).

²⁷ See immigration file for Esteban Montuori, issued by the Consulado Geral do Brasil em Buenos Aires, 27 August 1945, and that of 7 June 1955, with temporary permits, available on line at <<https://www.ancestry.com>> (accessed by registration 24 February 2020).

prize in 1947, who had been expelled by the military dictatorship from the Buenos Aires Faculty of Medicine, which he returned to only after the end of Peronism in 1955²⁸. The political situation in 1943 made things more difficult for some Italian intellectuals who had managed to find positions in universities; among others Aldo Mieli lost his post and moved to Buenos Aires, while Rodolfo Mondolfo in protest left the University of Cordoba.

Starting in 1945 Esteban travelled several times to Brazil, always to Rio de Janeiro, both before he was married and later²⁹.

In Buenos Aires he met Lily Zwillinger, born in Trieste in 1912 to a family Jewish in origin but strongly aligned with the Italian culture of the city. In 1939 Lily obtained a visa to travel to Chile; she later moved to Argentina, and was welcomed by the «Herlitzka Italian group», amongst whom was her future husband. In March 1948 their only daughter was born, to whom they gave the name Eliana, in memory of a dear friend left in Italy, whom Lily was convinced had been killed in a concentration camp: it was only many years later that Lily discovered that Eliana had managed to escape and was still alive³⁰. Lily proudly maintained her Italian citizenship, which she was keenly aware of as an achievement after Trieste's annexation to the Kingdom of Italy. She passed it on to the daughter Eliana, who thus acquired dual citizenship and attended Italian schools, right up to her high school leaving certificate, later becoming a psychiatrist³¹.

28 See Virgilio Foglia, *The History of Bernardo A. Houssay's Research Laboratory, Instituto de Biología y Medicina Experimental: The First Twenty Years, 1944–1963*, «Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences», 35, 4, 1980, pp. 380-396. Many years later Montuori was among the founders of the Fondazione «Bernardo A. Houssay», set up in 1974 with the aim of promoting young talents in science and arts.

29 For these trips in the 50s and 60s see the immigration file for Esteban Montuori, issued by the Consulado General do Brasil in Buenos Aires; and also the files in the name of his wife Lily Montuori, available on line at <<https://www.ancestry.com>>.

30 Interview with Eliana Montuori, 3 July 2019.

31 Eliana Montuori, born in Buenos Aires on 12 March 1948, attended the Italian school from the elementary first class until obtaining her high school leaving certificate in science. She graduated in medicine and specialized in psychiatry, devoting herself to the study and promotion of the theory of attachment. She worked at the Policlinico Gregorio Araoz Alfaro in Lanús, in the psychiatric department directed by Mauricio Goldenberg, a well-known Argentinian psychiatrist, one of the first psychiatric departments in a national hospital, but

I believe that my father was homesick for Italy and that his life was cut in two by emigration; he devoted himself exclusively to research and felt some nostalgia for his work as a clinician. [...]

My parents, as soon as they were able and had a little more money, went to Italy, I believe that the first trip to Italy was in the year '64, there were still planes that were not jets and they had a turbine, the journey lasted 36 hours. They had no relatives, they went because they wanted to return and it was possible to go as tourists. My mother always exchanged letters with friends in Italy, she still had some friends there³².

Silence and recognition

Stefano Montuori worked at the Gador laboratory until his retirement and even after taking a break he asked to be able to continue his research. He devoted himself to investigating endocrinology and reproduction; he achieved important results in the development of new drugs of the bisphosphonate group, which can inhibit the reabsorption of bone matter, preventing bone weakness and decalcification from osteoporosis. He published in international and Argentinian journals, especially in the 1960s. He received many prizes and distinctions: he was a member of the Asociación Médica Argentina, the New York Academy of Sciences, the Sociedad Argentina de Endocrinología y Metabolismo, the Sociedad Argentina de Fertilidad y Esterilidad, the American Society for Reproductive Medicine and the Sociedad Argentina de Biología.

He died aged 89, on 10 October 1995, after falling accidentally on the stairs of the pharmaceutical laboratory he had never wanted to leave. In 1999 the Montuori-Fundación Gador competition was set up in his name, sponsored

dismantled for the most part by the Argentinian dictatorship of 1976. She has been to Italy many times to take part in conferences and meetings, the latest in Pavia in 2014. She is currently a member of the «Grupo de Trabajo Perinatal» of APSA, the Association of Argentinian Psychiatrists.

³² Interview with Eliana Montuori, 3 July 2019. It is noteworthy that Montuori is not considered, even as Goldberger, in the writings on emigration of Italian Jews to Argentina, among which see Lore Terracini, *Una inmigración muy particular: 1938, los universitarios italianos en la Argentina*, «Anuario del Instituto de estudios históricos y sociales», 4, 1989, pp. 335-369; Eleonora Maria Smolensky, Vera Vigevani Jarach, *Tante voci, una storia. Italiani ebrei in Argentina, 1938-1948*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1998; Fernando J. Devoto, *Storia degli italiani in Argentina*, Rome, Donzelli, 2007 (or. ed. *Historia de los italianos en la Argentina*, Buenos Aires, Biblos-Cámara de Comercio Italiana, 2006), pp. 376-383.

by Gador, the leading pharmaceutical firm in Argentina, and open to young researchers and health professionals, to encourage research³³.

As his daughter records:

Neither my father nor my mother allowed themselves to put into words their homesickness for Italy, or the past, but almost all their friends were Italian Jews who had emigrated.

They felt that they had to show gratitude to the country that had welcomed them. But I think they never "recovered" from emigration and that they left the best part of their lives in Italy, in Europe.

My father hardly talked about the past, my mother a little more. I would say that for my mother it was an unresolved mourning³⁴.

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