

## Tullio Seppilli

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Even as a boy he wanted to be an anthropologist. He enrolled in the Escola de sociologia e politica in the University of São Paulo in Brazil, one of the most densely populated and multicultural cities in the world, where he had lived since he was a child. At almost twenty he found himself in Modena, as his father had decided. Tullio was not happy about returning to Italy – everyone white, everything small – and even the anthropology founded in 1870 had been jettisoned and distorted in the fascist period.

His story is to some extent typical of the second generation of Jews who emigrated from fascism, even in his return, and in the scientific and civil commitment that was inseparable from the experience he had had abroad.

### Childhood in Italy between Padua and Trieste

He spent his early years in Padua, where he was born on 16 October 1928, in via Dondi dell’Orologio, with his parents Alessandro and Anita Schwarzkopf, he from Trieste, she from Fiume, as well as a *Fraülein*, the nanny by whom he was to be rather rigidly educated and also to learn German, an essential language in the Central European culture of the time<sup>1</sup>. As an adult he no longer remembered either German or the Hebrew for which – like his cousins Nydia Licia and Livio Tullio, two and four years older than him respectively – he had taken lessons with the chief rabbi of Trieste, Israel Zoller (1881-1956), who was also the author of a children’s easy Hebrew book and a *libero docente* in charge of Hebrew language and literature at the University of Padua from 1927<sup>2</sup>. For Pesach in spring and during the summer Tullio used

<sup>1</sup> It was Tullio Seppilli himself who recounted these details in *Il sofà con Tullio Seppilli. Il fondatore dell’antropologia medica italiana*, a video interview conducted at the Angelo Celli Foundation, Perugia, on 12 March 2014 by Josep Maria Comelles and Isabella Riccò, available from 2018 on <<https://vimeo.com>> (accessed 30 July 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Zoller was Italianized as Zolli in 1933; chief rabbi of Rome from 1939, he converted in 1945 to Catholicism and was baptized with the name of Eugenio, in honour of Pius XII (Eugenio Pacelli);

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to go to his maternal grandparents, Emilio and Maria Luisa Schwarzkopf. His second name was that of his grandfather «with pince-nez and a long white beard, a wise man who knew so many things and was familiar with twelve languages»: he used to arrange the Pesach celebration for the whole family, and Tullio often recalled the blessing he had received under the *talled*. In 1920 Emilio Schwarzkopf set up the Società anonima forestale triestina (formerly M. Glass, Malabotich & Co.) and was involved in the international timber trade: he was a passionate irredentist, the president of the Zionist Club<sup>3</sup> and a member of the Trieste Jewish Community Council<sup>4</sup>.

During the period in which Tullio was attending the «Ardigò» elementary school – from the first year of school in 1934-35 to the fourth in 1937-38 – the Seppillis lived in an apartment in via dell’Ospedale 10, on the second floor of an aristocratic residence owned by the Tamassias, with a shady park.

In his autobiography in 2014 he wrote: «From that period I remember another, still quiet, small element of “difference”: in that big elementary school in Padua the only “the Jews exempted” from the religion hour were me and a little girl»<sup>5</sup>.

A fairly quiet life until the racial laws in 1938, which caused an earthquake in the lives of many people, including the Seppillis of Padua and Trieste, and

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see Gabriele Rigano, *Zolli, Eugenio Maria*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 100, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 2020 <<https://www.treccani.it>> (accessed 25 July 2022).

<sup>3</sup> «Guida generale di Trieste, il Goriziano, l’Istria, Fiume e la Dalmazia», 1902, p. 251, and 1912, pp. 84, 323, 494, 842; *Guida generale di Trieste e commerciale della Venezia-Giulia, Fiume, Sebenico, Zara 1922*, Trieste, Vitoppi Wilhelm & Co., 1924, pp. 172, 244, 554.

<sup>4</sup> Emilio Schwarzkopf (Sušice Schüttenhofen, Plzeň / Pilsen, Bohemia, 27 August 1864 - Trieste 3 June 1936) died before the racial laws, which he had to some degree predicted when fascists in Trieste attacked the workers’ offices and Slovenian clubs in 1921. Tullio Seppilli, *Mio padre Alessandro Seppilli: scienziato, educatore, uomo politico*, in Paola Beatini, Maria Margherita Tinarelli, Maria Antonia Modolo, Tullio Seppilli (a cura di), *Alessandro Seppilli scienziato, politico, educatore. Convegno nazionale nel decennale della scomparsa, Perugia (Sala dei Notari), 18-19 February 2005*, monograph number of «Educazione sanitaria e promozione della salute», 29, 1, 2006, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> Tullio Seppilli, *Come e perché decidere di «fare l’antropologo»: una personale case history nella brasiliana São Paulo degli anni Quaranta*, in Giancarlo Baronti (a cura di), *In ricordo di Tullio Seppilli*, monograph issue of «Umbria contemporanea. Rivista semestrale di studi storicosociali», 24-25, 2019, p. 110 and note 4 (previously published in «L’Uomo. Società tradizione sviluppo», 2, 2014, 2, pp. 67-84, and reissued in amplified and corrected form).

their relatives.

### **Because we are Jews, no school, no work?**

The enactment of the racial laws and the August 1938 census caught Tullio in Trieste during the summer vacation period<sup>6</sup>. It was near the apartment of his grandmother Luisa that he read for the first time the notice «dogs and Jews are not allowed to enter», posted in a shop window<sup>7</sup>.

On returning to Padua, he was prevented from attending his school;<sup>8</sup> his father Alessandro was first suspended from service at the Institute of Hygiene in October and then in November was declared to have forfeited the qualification as *libero docente* which entitled him to teach in a university, just as happened to some of his friends whom Tullio heard about from his parents. In a 2016 video interview, Tullio recalled the anguished questions of that period: «But why me, why can I no longer go to school because I am a Jew? Why can my father no longer teach at the university even though he used to teach?»<sup>9</sup>. In some cases the Jewish communities managed to organize courses held by Jewish teachers, expelled from state teaching, such as those who followed Nydia and Livio – his cousins, likewise excluded from school – to Trieste for a few months<sup>10</sup>. He was very upset by the forced removal, from the home of the Seppilli grandparents, of their elderly maid Teresina, after 32

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<sup>6</sup> Archivio generale del Comune di Padova (AGCPd), *Atti amministrativi per categorie*, b. 1881, «Annotazione appartenenza alla razza ebraica Seppilli Tullio», 1939, «Richiesta fatta dall'Ufficio di stato civile di Padova al Procuratore del Re di poter annotare sul registro di nascita che Seppilli Tullio appartiene alla razza ebraica come denunciato all'Ufficio di stato civile di Trieste».

<sup>7</sup> T. Seppilli, *Come e perché*, cit., p. 111. The practice of kosher ritual slaughter was banned shortly after, in October 1938.

<sup>8</sup> In Padua on 27 January 2017, on the occasion of the Day of Remembrance, a plaque was affixed in the «Mameli» secondary school of the II° Istituto Comprensivo «Ardigò», to commemorate the six children expelled from the «Roberto Ardigò» elementary school, including Tullio Seppilli; the «Mameli» school recently named the school library after him. See <<https://www.ic2ardigo.edu.it>> (accessed 16 July 2022).

<sup>9</sup> Tullio Seppilli. *Antropologo-comunista, serie Ritratti*, directed by G. Anastasio, film produced by the Laboratorio di cinema «Gabriele Anastasio», 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Nydia Licia Pincherle Cardoso (*Trieste, Italy, 1926; São Paulo, Brasil, 2015*), interviews from 1990 and 2010 by Equipe de história oral do Arqshoah-Leer/USP, p. 8, in *Arquivo virtual sobre holocausto e antissemitismo (Arqshoah)* <<https://www.arqshoah.com>> (accessed 16 July 2022).

years of living together; even his grandmother Luisa, now widowed, lost her Slovenian home-help, because Jews could not have Aryan domestic staff<sup>11</sup>.

His grandfather Giacomo Seppilli (Trieste 27 May 1864 - Perugia 3 January 1950), former president of the Jewish community of Trieste from 1922 to 1937, and a permanent member of the Trieste Stock Exchange Committee, together with his relative Massimiliano Czinner, was deprived of his employment card in October 1938<sup>12</sup>. And many others lost their employment, first in the public sector, in state institutions and bodies, and then in the private sector.

Jewish press publication was suspended in December, and the world of entertainment and that of culture and sport were also strongly affected: his aunt Alice, a pianist, a teacher of singing and theatrical diction in Trieste, and music critic for «Il Popolo di Trieste» (a fascist newspaper founded in 1920), was fired<sup>13</sup>. Her husband, the radiologist Giacomo Giuseppe Pincherle, known as Pino and in the Brazilian period as Josè (Trieste 26 July 1893 - Butantã 30 October 1966), Tullio's uncle by marriage, lost the management of the Trieste Municipal Hospital; he was deleted from the doctors professional register<sup>14</sup> and forced to leave the sanatorium for the treatment of tuberculosis that he had helped to found in Aurisina near Trieste<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> This is Teresina De Val, born in San Martino di Campagna on 5 December 1888, living as domestic staff with Giacomo Seppilli and Emma D'Ancona in via Ludovico Ariosto 3, 1st floor, in a house with 11 rooms (AGCTr, *Censimento 1921*, b. 55, f. «Via Ariosto 3 n. anagrafico 1877»), and the Slovenian maid of Luisa Treves, the widow Schwarzkopf. See T. Seppilli, *Come e perché*, cit., p. 111. As many as 2,500 workers, almost all of them home helps, were affected by the ruling, included in the decree of 17 November 1938, that domestic staff could not be Aryan. See Fausto Cohen, *Italiani ed ebrei: come eravamo. Le leggi razziali del 1938*, Genoa, Marietti, 1988, pp.62-64.

<sup>12</sup> Romano Canosa, *I servizi segreti del Duce. I persecutori e le vittime*, Milan, Mondadori, 2000, p. 279.

<sup>13</sup> *I giudei eliminati dal Circolo della Stampa*, «Il Popolo di Trieste», 18 November 1938, quoted in Silvia Bon, *Gli ebrei a Trieste 1930-1945: identità, persecuzione, risposte*, Gorizia, Libreria editrice goriziana, 2000, pp. 132, 144 n. 10.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

<sup>15</sup> *Nydia Licia Pincherle Cardoso*, cit., p. 8. As usual, the memories of those who were children at the time do not always match precise documentary evidence. The sanatorium in question, given the area, must be the present nursing home «Pineta del Carso», founded in 1933 as a sanatorium in Aurisina by a group of doctors from Trieste; cf. <<https://ilpiccolo.gelocal.it>> (accessed 30 July 2022).

It was necessary to act quickly, to look for other ways to live. And so Alessandro Seppilli, between August and September 1938, applied to the Municipality of Padua for a passport for travel abroad for himself, his wife and his son. The procedure proved long and difficult, to judge from the documents traced, given the obstacles deriving from their belonging to the Jewish race<sup>16</sup>. On 29 September 1938 the prefecture administrator, acting for the mayor of Trieste, replied – with reference to «Professor Alessandro Seppilli [...] by profession a surgeon, living in Trieste since birth» – that

For the aforementioned person, who is included in this population register, there is insufficient data to ascertain citizenship or even the family situation.

I would therefore appreciate if your honour would kindly inform me if the aforesaid person is an Italian citizen and if he satisfies any of the conditions provided for by art. 3 of the Royal decree of 31 January 1901 No. 36, and ensure that, with the greatest possible promptness, I am granted the authorization for the issue of the passport<sup>17</sup>.

On 6 October 1938 Alessandro again applied to the Municipality of Padua for a passport for travel abroad as the previous application (evidently prior to 9 September, though there is no trace of it in the papers) had not been successful. On 11 October 1938 the reply to a note from the Mayor of Trieste dated 9 September, signed by the municipal secretary for the Mayor of Padua, attested to the issuing of the authorization by the Municipality to the request, for study purposes, of the passport to Alessandro Seppilli, to his wife Anita Schwarzkopf and to his son Tullio, but it concluded: «For the avoidance of doubt, it should be noted that Seppilli is of the Jewish religion»<sup>18</sup>. And what had previously happened was repeated: to the request for the issuing of the passport on 25 October the Prefectural Commissioner of the Municipality of Trieste replied exactly as he had already done on 29 September.

<sup>16</sup> Similar requests made a few years earlier had not encountered any difficulties: for example that of 30 June 1934, made by Alessandro for himself, his wife and son to go to Yugoslavia, and likewise, the request by Anita Schwarzkopf of 30 June 1934 to the Municipality of Padua, for herself and her son, to be added to her husband Alessandro's passport; cfr. AGCPd, *Atti amministrativi per categorie*, b. 1322, «Richiesta di passaporto per l'estero Schwarzkopf Anita», 1934.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., b. 1601, «Richiesta di passaporto per l'estero di Seppilli Alessandro, 1938».

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

**Emigration: a temporary refuge or a new life?**

Nonetheless Anita had her passport, no. 826388, issued by the Trieste Police on 15 November 1938, as shown in the continuing «ficha consular de qualificação», the visa issued by the Brazilian consulate in Trieste on 10 May 1939, on which her son Tullio Seppilli was also registered; in her birth certificate the note about her belonging to the Jewish race appeared in the margin, dated 24 March 1939, while the registration was made in Trieste on 22 February 1939<sup>19</sup>.

The choice of migratory destination seems to have been quite fortuitous for the Seppilli family, according to what Tullio himself wrote:

«Thanks to a visa fortunately offered by a Brazilian fellow microbiologist – whom my father had met at an international conference and who had a relative in the government of his country – we decided for Brazil: São Paulo»<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, since the second half of the 1920s, after the United States' restrictions on immigration, more and more Europeans, migrants also for political reasons, had headed for countries in South America, and from 1938 many Italian Jews sought escape from the racial laws, particularly in Argentina and Brazil, precisely because there were already Jewish communities there which had already begun to form between 1800 and 1900, made up largely of Russian Jews who had emigrated because of the pogroms<sup>21</sup>.

In the Seppillis' case it was a solution considered as provisional, not a permanent choice, like that of Anita's favorite cousin, and her contemporary,

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<sup>19</sup> Alessandro, on the other hand, emigrated with passport no. 342134, issued by the Police in Padua on 31 July 1934 and with the permanent visa from the Brazilian Consulate in Trieste, also issued on 10 May 1939; the document may be viewed at *Arquivo virtual sobre holocausto e antissemitismo (Arqshoah)* <<https://arqshoah.com>> (accessed 30 July 2022).

<sup>20</sup> T. Seppilli, *Come e perché*, cit., p. 69.

<sup>21</sup> At the beginning of the 1940s there were more than a thousand people in Argentina, around 100-120 families in Brazil equivalent to around 400 people, 200 people in Cuba and other smaller numbers in Bolivia, Uruguay, Peru, Ecuador and Mexico. See Pietro Rinaldo Fanesi, *Gli ebrei italiani rifugiati in America latina e l'antifascismo (1938-1945)*, «Storia e problemi contemporanei. Semestrale dell'Istituto regionale per la storia del movimento di Liberazione nelle Marche», VII, 14, 1994, 14, pp. 27, 32-33.

Lidia Glass, the sister of Ciro – a well-known leader of the Italian Zionist Federation who died in 1928, at 27 years, in a car accident in Palermo – who joined her husband Aldo Servadio in Mandatory Palestine and made *aliyah* with him.

On 4 July 1939 Tullio and his parents disembarked in Santos, the port of São Paulo, after a fifteen-day crossing on the «Oceania», Launched in 1932 and built in the Trieste and Monfalcone shipyards. like the «Neptunia» on which the Pincherle family – the uncles, cousins and their grandparents Erminio and Emma Luzzatto – had crossed the Atlantic, landed in Brazil on 12 May 1939<sup>22</sup>. In December of that same year Tullio's grandparents also embarked on the «Neptunia»: Giacomo Seppilli, his wife Emma Venturina D'Ancona, and Maria Luisa Treves, the widow of Emilio Schwarzkopf, who, on her arrival in Santos, was registered as a housewife and a Catholic<sup>23</sup>.

### Daily life in São Paulo

Thousands of Italians had emigrated to Brazil, and especially to São Paulo, starting from the second half of the nineteenth century, for economic and/or political reasons, linked to the struggle for national independence or to internationalist anarchist and revolutionary movements. Already at the beginning of the twentieth century, the language and dialects of the peninsula were more widely spoken than Portuguese, so much so that they influenced São Paulo Portuguese and the city was considered "Italian", as well

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<sup>22</sup> *Nydia Licia Pincherle Cardoso*, cit., pp. 8-9.

<sup>23</sup> We are dealing with printouts from the immigration office of São Paulo, Planilhas 1 and 2, in Anna Rosa Bigazzi, «*In Difesa Della Razza*». *Os judeus italianos refugiados do fascismo e o anti-semitismo do Governo Vargas*, doctoral thesis, Universidade de São Paulo, Faculdade de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas, 2008 <<https://www.teses.usp.br>> (accessed 16 April 2022). Getúlio Vargas, having proclaimed the Estado novo in 1937, launched a campaign of forced nationalization and Brazilianization for immigrants (1938-1942), who were forbidden to speak their own language and practice their traditions, on the basis of a supposed «*verdadeira brasilidade*». A dictator sympathetic to fascism and Nazism, still strong in Europe at the time, he welcomed Jews by imposing a series of constraints on them: «among other things, Jewish immigrants had to show their baptismal certificates at the time of entry (which gave rise in Italy even to a sort of "market" for these certificates)»: see P.R. Fanesi, *Gli ebrei italiani*, cit., p. 33.

as for its strong imprint in gastronomy and architecture<sup>24</sup>. But it was also a multi-ethnic city where many Afro-Brazilians lived, and in general many immigrants, especially from the Far East, especially Japanese and Koreans. Daily life in São Paulo, for Tullio, as well as for his family and friends, was not easy. Here his grandmother Luisa attended synagogue and took her grandson,<sup>25</sup> but she lived alone so as not to interfere in the family life of her daughters Anita and Alice, supporting herself with small domestic crafts, especially sewing, and refusing any entertainment, even a trip to the theatre or the cinema, «she who had travelled the world with her grandfather Emilio»<sup>26</sup>. The Seppilli grandparents instead went to live with them, in a rented house with a garden in rua Salvador Pires, which became avenida 9 de Julho when in the 1940s the tunnel was made under the hill of avenida Paulista and the road was transformed into one of the main radial arteries of the city, while the fields, once wide and open, were replaced by new buildings. Afterwards, however, they moved into «a more modest house, still rented, suited to the worsening in our financial situation» and, since they could not afford holidays, his parents «sent him one summer to be an apprentice in a bookbinding shop»<sup>27</sup>. Their new home was in via Alameda Santos in the Paradiso district, the same street where Zélia Gattai also lived, who later became Tullio's friend, as did her partner Jorge Amado<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>24</sup> Angelo Trento, *Do outro lado do Atlântico: um século de imigração italiana no Brasil*, São Paulo, Istituto italiano di cultura di San Paolo/Instituto cultural italo-brasileiro - Livraria Nobel, 1989.

<sup>25</sup> Nydia Licia Pincherle, Tullio's cousin, in interviews with her about life in Italy and Brazil after 1938, speaks of two synagogues: that of Ponte, in rua 9 de Julho and that of Abolição, small and beautiful, attended by all Italians, but Tullio never said which one it was. See *Nydia Licia Pincherle Cardoso*, cit., pp. 14, 18.

<sup>26</sup> T. Seppilli, *Come e perché*, cit., p. 112.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>28</sup> Gilles Bibeau, *Tullio Seppilli (1928-2017). Una vita tra scienza, saggezza e servizio alla collettività*, «AM. Rivista della Società italiana di antropologia medica / Journal of the Italian Society for Medical Anthropology», 49, June 2020, p. 66. The journal was founded by Tullio Seppilli. Zélia Gattai (1916-2008) was Italian by background, a writer and photographer, companion of Jorge Amado (1912-2001), the writer and member of parliament for the Brazilian Communist Party, elected in 1945.



### **The anti-semitism of Italian Brazilians**

On the third day after his arrival, his father Alessandro – who found work as technical-scientific director of a small pharmaceutical company<sup>29</sup> – enrolled Tullio at «Dante Alighieri» in São Paulo, the only Italian school in the city, which issued a diploma valid both in Brazil and in Italy. He was «convinced that fascism would fall and that we could return to Italy». All the schools set up by the Dante Alighieri Society were, of course, offshoots of the Mussolini government, directed by principals loyal to the regime and characterized by that anti-Semitism that snaked through the descendants of those Italian immigrants – mostly southerners in São Paulo, whereas in other Brazilian states they were mainly northerners, largely from the Veneto – who had managed to achieve petty-bourgeois socio-economic status.

Tullio had to follow two courses in parallel and speak two languages, attending the first grade in the Italian middle school and the Brazilian fifth grade and experiencing a difficult situation, to say the least: «a small personal ordeal» that he had to endure «hopping from one class to another» and especially undergoing daily harassment and insults, as well as beatings, from a group of fanatically anti-Semitic boys, the children or grandchildren of poor Italian emigrants who in Brazil had sufficiently enriched themselves and identified themselves in the propaganda of the «homeland redeemed by fascism, racially pure and respected in the world»<sup>30</sup>. And so it was that Tullio, forced to leave his world and his childhood prematurely because of anti-Jewish persecution, found himself in a condition of exclusion and isolation where his life was worse than the last period he had spent in Italy: insulted because he was a «dirty Jew», discriminated against and in silence so as not to worry his parents<sup>31</sup>. The cousins Livio and Nydia Licia Pincherle, also enrolled in the «Dante Alighieri», likewise hated school precisely because of the prevailing anti-Semitism, although they do not seem to have suffered

<sup>29</sup> Tullio Seppilli. *Antropologo-comunista*, cit.

<sup>30</sup> T. Seppilli, *Come e perché*, cit., pp. 112-113.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114.

harassment; Nydia, however, succeeded after the first year, in going to the American Mackenzie College, where there was an atmosphere of freedom<sup>32</sup>. In August 1942 Brazil declared war on the Germany-Italy-Japan Axis and moved towards overcoming the ambiguity that had characterized both the foreign and the domestic policies of the Vargas government from its inception, even if nevertheless there still remained in the regime a “special regard” towards the fascist emigrés and in the post-war period towards the new fascist and ex-fascist exiles from the Italian Socialist Republic<sup>33</sup>. One of the consequences of the new state of affairs was that the «Dante Alighieri» school temporarily changed its name and passed to the Brazilian federal government. Tullio ended up in a quite different class where, he remembers, «I had the good fortune of an intense group life, the first dances, and the first timid attachments»:<sup>34</sup> the isolation was over.

### **Education at school and at home**

In retrospect, Tullio reckoned that he had received good training in the Brazilian school system, similar to the Italian one of the time (five years of middle school and then three of classical or scientific high school): a good training in research and in approaching different positions, acquired also in arguing over clashes on ideological issues. Among these is the battle for evolutionism: a kind of evidence of an unconscious approach to the anthropological field, of a “crusade” in which he felt «strong from reading the issues of the magazine “Sapere”» that his father had brought from Italy;<sup>35</sup> two of his schoolmates took part who, like him, probably found a form of redemption in that combative and enthralling action, and all three soon after

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<sup>32</sup> See Nydia Licia Pincherle Cardoso, cit., pp. 17, 19.

<sup>33</sup> Pietro Rinaldo Fanesi, *Gli ebrei italiani nelle Americhe dopo le leggi razziali del 1938*, Rome, Nova Delphi Academia, 2021, in particular chap. 4, *I rifugiati italiani ebrei in Brasile*, pp. 65-76.

<sup>34</sup> T. Seppilli, *Come e perché*, cit., pp. 113-114.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115. «Sapere», a popular scientific magazine whose editor from 1935 was Carlo Foa (Modena 21 July 1880 - Milan 12 September 1971), a physio-pathologist and endocrinologist, from 1939 a professor at the University of São Paulo.

joined the Brazilian Communist Party.

Playing a part in young Tullio's education, especially during the period in which he attended the classical high school, were his father Alessandro, who provided him with a genuine Greek course, and his mother Anita, who gave lessons at home on the history of the ancient Mediterranean world and on the history of literature and other European arts for him and his friends, in the belief that in their training they also needed «a more "European" view», while «husband and wife Giorgio and Maria Schreiber, biologists and zoologists, also Jews from Trieste, [had] the job of teaching us – several afternoons at their home – a bit of genetics and use of the microscope»<sup>36</sup>. He conducted natural history experiments in a kind of laboratory that he built in the basement of the house in via Alameda Santos and, «despite financial difficulties, also, for a few years, [went to] piano lessons with a dynamic German teacher»<sup>37</sup>. Learning to play an instrument, in particular the violin or piano, has always been an ability linked to the great importance of music in Jewish culture, especially Ashkenazi, and people tried to learn even in situations that in economic terms would not have allowed it. And, above all, Tullio was shaped in general and socio-political culture through the cultural gatherings held by his parents where, from the beginning of their period in Brazil, liberal, socialist and Marxist professionals and intellectuals, refugees of considerable cultural and intellectual depth, met periodically, and dealt with issues related to Brazil, but also to Italy, which they had had to leave, and to the possible developments after a liberation which they hoped was close at hand<sup>38</sup>.

It was a small community in great São Paulo, with its own culture blended with the enduring, debunking Jewish humour: it was no coincidence that as soon as they arrived they coined, to refer to themselves collectively, the phrase «Colonia Mussolini», which lasted over time because, as they used to

<sup>36</sup> T. Seppilli, *Mio padre*, cit., p. 21; Id., *Come e perché*, cit., p. 114.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>38</sup> T. Seppilli, *Mio padre*, cit., p. 20.

say, «we owe it to the Duce that we all came together here in Brazil...»<sup>39</sup>.

This group also included Tullio Ascarelli (1903-1959), jurist and lawyer, well-known for the depth and modernity of his contribution to twentieth-century law, and his wife Marcella Ziffer (Naples 1906 – Rome 1965), the cousin of Anita Schwarzkopf, as the daughter of aunt Regina, Luisa Treves' sister, and Ettore Biocca (1912-2001), a hygienist and parasitologist, later especially an ethno-biologist and archaeological anthropologist, and an anti-fascist<sup>40</sup>. Marcella Ziffer was also one of the large group of women belonging to Free Italy, the only anti-fascist association spread throughout the Brazilian national territory and present in 1942 and 1943 also in Uruguay and Argentina, and participated in a «“Committee for the Relief of War Victims”, promoted as a section of the Brazilian Red Cross by “Italia libera”»<sup>41</sup>. Young people from the «Mussolini colony» also joined, which prompted the São Paulo Jewish community to support Italia libera<sup>42</sup>.

### Political militancy

In the Seppilli household, a training ground for political debate, Tullio took part in meetings where he was able to listen to the most diverse anti-fascist positions of liberal democrats, socialists, anarcho-communists, historical communists; a united group of Italian anti-fascists was born, named after Giuseppe Garibaldi, which drew in both Jews who had come to Brazil as a

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<sup>39</sup> T. Seppilli, *Come e perché*, cit., p. 119.

<sup>40</sup> See at least Stefano Rodotà, *Ascarelli, Tullio*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 4, Rome, Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1962 <<https://www.treccani.it>>; Maria Carmela De Marino, Giuseppe Schiena, *Ettore Biocca e il suo archivio 1932-2001 / Ettore Biocca. The Man and His Archive 1932-2001*, «Medicina nei secoli. Arte e scienza», 27, 1, 2015, pp. 199-214.

<sup>41</sup> Angelo Trento, *Die Jüdische Immigration nach Brasilien nach Erlass der Rassengesetzen: die Colonia Mussolini*, in Achim Schrader, Karl Heinrich Rengstorf (hrsg.), *Europäische Jude in Lateinamerika*, St. Inghert, Werner J. Röhrig Verlag, 1989, p. 118; P.R. Fanesi, *Gli ebrei italiani*, cit., p. 34.

<sup>42</sup> Mario Toscano, *L'emigrazione ebraica italiana dopo il 1938*, «Storia contemporanea», XIX, 6, 1988, pp. 1287-1344, reissued in Id., *Ebraismo e antisemitismo in Italia. Dal 1848 alla guerra dei sei giorni*, Milan, Angeli, 2003, pp. 185-207: p. 200, to which I refer for the events of anti-fascism in Latin America at that time (pp. 200-204); Renato Treves, *Incontri di culture nell'America Latina alla fine degli anni Trenta. Una testimonianza*, in Gabriella Ferruggia, Paola Ledda, Dario Puccini (a cura di), *Americhe amare*, Rome, Bulzoni, 1987, pp. 257-258.

result of the «racial laws» and Italian left-wing militants – workers and intellectuals socialists, communists, republicans – already forced into exile by the 1920s<sup>43</sup>. It was at this time that Tullio, at the age of 16, enrolled in the underground PCB (Partido comunista brasileiro), and also found people who helped him make his choice: Ettore Biocca, with a slightly anarchist position, and the communist lawyer Giannino Maroni from Milan, with a more “scientific” stance, who had associated with Togliatti. A prominent member of the «Colonia Mussolini», Maroni followed him with pointers for reading the classics of Marxism, in Brazilian, Mexican or Argentine editions, or texts on contentious issues (one was on the relationship between Hitler, Stalin and the war in Spain which he had had from a distant cousin, Paolo Tolentino, originally from Trieste, who had emigrated to Rio de Janeiro), as well as with analysis of the contemporary strategies of the PCB, which in 1945, with the democratization of the country, became legal.

In 1945 Tullio took part in two events that he always remembered as extremely significant: in São Paulo a meeting of Italian anti-fascists with Luis Carlos Prestes (1898-1990), the «knight of hope», general secretary of the PCB, after 10 years of hard prison, the famous rally in the Pacaembù stadium to celebrate the party's return to legality, in the presence of an enormous crowd, where Pablo Neruda, a senator from the Chilean Communist Party, also joined in «with an unforgettable poem-rally. A few evenings later, in the very crowded São Paulo Municipal Theatre, Neruda [...] read his poems about the war in Spain and his now famous new *Ode to Stalingrad*»<sup>44</sup>.

In 1946, not yet eighteen, Tullio published, in the Communist-inspired Brazilian periodical «Paralelos», his first important article in which he discussed a volume by Guglielmo Ferrero, an anti-fascist who had escaped to

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<sup>43</sup> T. Seppilli, *Come e perché*, cit., pp. 116-117. On the importance of the character of Garibaldi in this context, see Alexandre Hecker, *Il mito di Garibaldi e gli italiani di San Paolo*, in Id., Vittorio Cappelli, *Italiani in Brasile. Rotte migratorie e percorsi culturali*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2010; Id., *Italiani in Brasile. il mito di Garibaldi e gli italiani di San Paolo*, «Forum democratico», 9, 123-124, 2010, pp. 20-23.

<sup>44</sup> T. Seppilli, *Come e perché*, cit., pp. 120, 125, 116-117 n. 11, 124 n. 18.

Switzerland and who died a few years ago, on the processes of legitimization of the historical forms of political power<sup>45</sup>. That year he finished the classical high school and passed the experimental diploma exam and then, the following year, took an entrance exam for the Sociology and Politics School of the University of São Paulo. He passed brilliantly and became one of the student coordinators for the movement in the various high schools and university faculties of the city<sup>46</sup>. In 1947 the period of legality for the PCB ended.

### **The return to Italy**

In the meantime, Alessandro Seppilli had returned to Italy in 1946 to ascertain the possibility of resuming his academic career, interrupted in 1938, while the situation of Tullio and Anita, with whom their grandparents Giacomo and Emma had remained, became increasingly difficult, especially on the financial level. They tried to launch a business planning, producing and selling designs for fabrics, which ended badly, for all their efforts and the humiliations they suffered in talks with the arrogant owners of the textile factories on the outskirts of the city, and Tullio then decided to give «repeat lessons to the children of those who could afford it»<sup>47</sup>.

Despite their financial difficulties, he and his mother would have preferred to stay in Brazil, as did the majority of the members of the «Colonia Mussolini»; even among those who returned there were some who, because of the difficulties they encountered in the process of reintegrating and the persistent hostility in an environment that was still fascist and anti-Semitic, came back to Brazil. The Pincherle family too remained in São Paulo: Alice, after a difficult start in her new Brazilian homeland, put her talents and also

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<sup>45</sup> Id., *Sôbre a legitimidade do poder*, «Paralelos», 2, 1946, pp. 19-23; Id., *Sulla legittimità del potere*, translation and notes by Massimiliano Minelli, in Giancarlo Baronti (a cura di), *In ricordo di Tullio Seppilli*, monographic issue of «Umbria contemporanea. Rivista semestrale di studi storico-sociali», 24-25, 2019, pp. 101-105.

<sup>46</sup> T. Seppilli, *Come e perché*, cit., p. 120.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 119-120.

her medical studies in Vienna in her youth to good use, also giving diction lessons to the actors of the Teatro Brasileiro de comédia, treating people who suffered with stuttering and hare lip, and teaching in the University of São Paulo School of Dramatic Arts<sup>48</sup>. Things went less well for her husband Pino: he found work as an assistant to a well-known radiologist, but, as his qualification was not recognized in Brazil, he worked in unfair conditions and without sufficient protection, so much so that he died prematurely. Both their children had remarkable careers, Nydia Licia as an actress, manager and teacher, and Livio Tulio, first as a pediatrician and then as a psychiatrist, specializing in the regressive hypnosis therapy known as «past life therapy». Tullio's plan was to stay in São Paulo where he regularly visited the Municipal Library; he had enrolled in the School of Sociology and Politics and was attending lectures by Roger Bastide and George Gurvitch in the Social Sciences section of the Faculty of Philosophy, Science and Literature of São Paulo University, in addition to the autonomous course on American social psychology given by Yolanda de Paiva. He also had his first ethno-archaeological experience, the only student on the excavation season undertaken by Ettore Biocca in 1944 at an indigenous *sambaqui* in the tropical forest of the island of Santo Amaro<sup>49</sup>. From his own accounts, it can be concluded that he never got over his bitterness over being forced to leave Brazil, so he always experienced *saudade* and this in some way also influenced his professional programmes many years later. At that period, leaving was a new drama for him,

a new (and perhaps more serious) loss of stability, of roots, of projects. A drama heightened by the "sense of guilt" for abandoning my commitment to a party that had recently plunged back into the difficult condition of being underground, to "move" to a country like Italy, where the Communist Party was legally, strong, and (perhaps...) within reach of

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<sup>48</sup> Nydia Licia Pincherle Cardoso, cit., pp. 16-17.

<sup>49</sup> T. Seppilli, *Come e perché*, cit., pp. 117, 121-122. This was the first scientific expedition in the American equatorial forest (1943-1944), whose development Seppilli narrates and which directed his scientific studies.

power<sup>50</sup>.

So in October 1947 Tullio returned to Italy, with his family on an ocean liner: they sailed from Santos, the first stop was Rio de Janeiro, where he had Prestes, whom he met secretly, sign a letter of accreditation to present to Palmiro Togliatti. Arriving at the port of Genoa, and then crossing Italy by train, he felt like a foreigner and was shocked by what he saw: everyone white, everything cultivated, everything small, everything accomplished<sup>51</sup>.

### **The university path from learner to lecturer**

Because of the demands of his father's university career, Tullio first went to live in Modena in 1947 and then in Perugia in 1949 with his parents and Seppilli grandparents, while his beloved grandmother Luisa wished to return to live alone in Trieste.

Not yet twenty years old, he found himself facing a world now unfamiliar to him both in its landscape and in its social and cultural aspects, with the additional difficulty that the years he had spent in Brazil were precisely those most formative a boy: from 10 to 19. In Italy a faculty of anthropology, a discipline that he had already chosen as his own, did not exist, and Tullio, taking advantage of the fact that his Brazilian university entrance exam was also valid in Italy, chose to enrol in the Faculty of Mathematical, Physical and Natural Sciences at Modena; he followed the degree course in Natural Sciences from 1947 to 1950, when he moved to La Sapienza University in Rome, where as teachers he had the anthropologist Sergio Sergi (1878-1972) and the palaeontologist responsible for ethnology, Alberto Carlo Blanc (1906-1960). Under Blanc he graduated in 1952 with a thesis on physical anthropology; he then graduated from the Scuola di specializzazione in scienze etnologiche directed by Raffaele Pettazzoni (1883-1959), and began his university career at the Istituto per le civiltà primitive and then at the

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>51</sup> Tullio Seppilli. *Antropologo-comunista*, cit.



Institute of Anthropology. His real teacher was Ernesto De Martino, whom he met at the end of 1952; he was his first assistant and he collaborated with him in the Centro etnologico italiano housed in Rome in the House of Culture of the PCI and in the Centro italiano per il film etnografico e sociologico, founded in 1953. Two other figures to whom he acknowledged he owed a great deal were Massimo Aloisi (1907-1999), a biologist and pathologist, his professor at the University of Modena, and Emilio Sereni (1907-1977), an agricultural historian and communist leader, whom he met for the first time in January 1949, as the delegate for Modena at the Centro universitario democratico italiano (CUDI), being very impressed by his “creative” Marxism. In Modena on 18 December 1955 Tullio married Lilliana Bonacini (1932-1971), his companion in political battles and studies, who was a researcher at the Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the University of Perugia and collaborated with him in research and publications.

His university career, both as student and as teacher, was packed and studded with courses held in Italy and abroad, including many in Brazil: at first he was a volunteer assistant (1953-1954) and then in charge of ethnology (1954-1956) at the University of Rome, then professor in charge of the newly formed Faculty of Mathematical, Physical and Natural Sciences in the University of Perugia (1955-56) from which he then moved, when it was established in 1957, to the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy. In 1956 he founded the Institute of Ethnology – from 1958 Istituto di etnologia e antropologia culturale (IEAC), later the Dipartimento uomo e territorio – which he directed until his retirement at the age of 72 in October 2000. From 1966 to 1975 he received his first teaching position in Cultural Anthropology set up at the University of Florence<sup>52</sup>. He was elected on the PCI lists as councillor for the Municipality of Perugia from 1964 to 1970 and for the Province of Perugia from 1970 to 1980, where he also held the role of deputy

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<sup>52</sup> Archivio storico dell'Università di Perugia (ASUPg), *Postunitario, Serie personale*, f. 2002 1-1-1 8, «Seppilli Tullio».

chair of the board for psychiatric services.

In Orvieto on 29 September 1999 he married the sinologist Anna Chang Tung. At least two clear and continuous lines – the elaboration of an anthropology which integrated the biological stage and the psycho-socio-cultural stage, and the broadly political analysis of cultural facts which would lead to shared action in the social area – emerge in all the fields of study and research he dealt with: from popular traditions to American studies and visual and medical anthropology. This last occupied a great part of his life from the 1960s and especially after 1996, the year after the death of his father Alessandro, when he founded and edited «AM. Rivista della Società italiana di antropologia medica», from 2000 the series «Biblioteca di antropologia medica» (BAM) and from 2014 the series «Studi e materiali di antropologia della salute» (SMAS)<sup>53</sup>.

The necessity of «*understanding* so as to be safer, and the need *not to be alone and to act in reality*» as Tullio Seppilli himself reiterated, characterize the construction of an «anthropology as research into the very heart of society, its problems and its injustices. An anthropology for “understanding” but also for “acting”, for “committing”», derived from his Brazilian experience and education<sup>54</sup>.

He died on 23 August 2017, leaving his study and research papers, as well as his correspondence, to the «Fondazione Angelo Celli per una cultura della salute» which he had chaired since 1993 and which had been established in 1987 by his father, called from 23 June 2021 the Fondazione Alessandro e Tullio Seppilli<sup>55</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> Tullio Seppilli edited other series at the following publishers: Argo editrice (Lecce), Electa Umbrian publishers (Perugia), Il Calamo (Rome), La Casa Usher (Florence), La Nuova Italia (Florence), Nuova Guaraldi (Florence), Ponte alle Grazie (Florence).

<sup>54</sup> T. Seppilli, *Come e perché*, cit., pp. 120-121, 125-126. Thus the title *Un'antropologia per capire, per agire, per impegnarsi. La lezione di Tullio Seppilli* of the second national conference of SIAM organized in his honour in Perugia, 14-16 June 2018 by SIAM and the Fondazione Angelo Celli per una cultura della salute, whose proceedings are partially published in AM; see in particular Cristina Papa, *Tullio Seppilli: Un'antropologia per capire, per agire, per impegnarsi*, «AM. Rivista della Società italiana di antropologia medica», 21, 49, 2020, pp. 17-32.

<sup>55</sup> The Seppilli collection, kept at the Fondazione Alessandro e Tullio Seppilli, is in process of

## Principal publications

For a list of the main publications, please refer to *Curriculum vitae*. 9. *Pubblicazioni scientifiche*, compiled by Tullio Seppilli himself and published on the *Antropologia medica* website of SIAM (Società italiana di antropologia medica) and of Fondazione Alessandro e Tullio Seppilli <<https://www.antropologiamedica.it>>.

Here are some titles not included in the aforementioned list.

- *Sôbre a legitimidade do poder*, «Paralelos», 2, 1946, pp. 19-23; *Sulla legittimità del potere*, pp. 101-105, translation and notes by Massimiliano Minelli, in Giancarlo Baronti (a cura di), *In ricordo di Tullio Seppilli*, monographic issue of «Umbria contemporanea. Rivista semestrale di studi storico-sociali», 24-25, 2019.
- With Anita Seppilli, *L'esplorazione dell'Amazzonia*, Turin, UTET, 1964.
- *Antropologia culturale e intervento sociale entro il contesto sociale italiano: metodologia e valori nella prospettiva del marxismo*, in *Le scienze sociali e il problema dell'intervento sociale nella realt. italiana*, Rome, ISTISS, 1966, pp. 199-214.
- *Strumenti di ricerca sulla medicina popolare*, in Tullio Seppilli (a cura di), *La medicina popolare in Italia*, monograph issue of «La Ricerca folklorica. Contributi allo studio della cultura delle classi popolari», 8, 1983, pp. 113-124.
- *Antropologia culturale e strategie sanitarie*, Florence, Usher, 1984.
- With Grazietta Guaitini Abbozzo, *La ripresa revivalistica dell'artigianato femminile in Umbria fra Ottocento e Novecento*, in Maria Luciana

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reorganization, divided into 12 series of which so far 216 envelopes have been identified, from 1954 to 2016 (revision 26 July 2022). See the description in Siusa, *Gli Archivi dell'Umbria. Seppilli Tullio* <<https://siusa.archivi.beniculturali.it>> (accessed 31 July 2022). Obituaries include Carlotta Bagaglia, Sabrina Flamini, Michela Marchetti, Maya Pellicciari, Chiara Polcri, *Pensando a Tullio Seppilli. Il saluto*, 4 September 2017, on the website of the Associazione nazionale professione italiana di antropologia <<http://anpia.it>> (accessed 31 July 2022); G. Baronti (a cura di), *In ricordo di Tullio Seppilli*, cit.; Luigi Benevelli, *In ricordo di Tullio Seppilli (1928-2017)*, 7 September 2017, in *La terra è blu. Forum salute mentale* <<https://www.news-forumsalutementale.it>> (accessed 31 July 2022); Piergiorgio Giacchè, *Addio a Tullio Seppilli, l'antropologo dell'opzione comunista*, «Il Manifesto», 26 August 2017 <<https://ilmanifesto.it>> (accessed 31 July 2022).

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- *Come e perché decidere di «fare l'antropologo»: una personale case history nella brasiliana São Paulo degli anni Quaranta*, «L'Uomo. Società tradizione sviluppo», 2, 2014, pp. 67-84; reissued, expanded and corrected, in «Umbria contemporanea. Rivista di studi storico-sociali», 22-23, 2015, pp. 264-281, and in G. Baronti (a cura di), *In ricordo di Tullio Seppilli*, cit., pp. 107-126.

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