

## Renata Calabresi

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Among the thousands of displaced scholars assisted by the Emergency Committee of New York, she is the only Italian woman for whom a grant was arranged. Even before the anti-Jewish laws, she had encountered difficulties in her university career, as a scholar of experimental psychology, a woman and an anti-fascist, connected to Professor Salvemini and the Rosselli family. She sailed to the United States on her own, on the *Conte di Savoia*, two months after her cardiologist brother. After countless obstacles and jobs, without having yet settled down, she came to Italy in 1947 and left again on a TWA flight. In New York, she became an established clinical psychologist.

### A bright girl

She was the eldest of the three children of the industrialist Ettore Calabresi (1870-1937) and Olga Minerbi (1876-1964), born on 2 November 1899 in Ferrara to a well-to-do family well known in the city. She attended the Ariosto classical high school, where girls could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Then, instead of enrolling at the University of Ferrara, which did have an ancient tradition, she enrolled at the Alma Mater in Bologna; and in her third year, in 1919, she decided to move to Florence, to the highly recommended Istituto di studi superiori pratici e di perfezionamento, in the Philosophy Department. Once she had spread her wings, her sister Cecilia, three years her junior, followed her, and shortly after their brother Massimo; in 1921 her parents also moved to Florence and their children returned to the family, in an elegant town house in via Masaccio. Yet for two years, she and her sister had lived in great independence and Renata was the most enterprising.

It was only on the choice of faculty that she had not managed to win over her

Link alle connesse  
Vite in movimento:

Enzo Bonaventura  
Cecilia Calabresi  
Massimo Calabresi  
Paul Calabresi  
Marion Cave Rosselli  
Carla Coen Pekelis  
Guglielmo Ferrero  
Leo Ferrero  
Bianca Maria Finzi  
Contini Calabresi  
Alessandro Levi  
Nino Levi  
Gina Lombroso  
Ferrero  
Sarina Nathan Levi  
Alexander Pekelis  
Amelia Pincherle  
Moravia Rosselli  
Carlo Rosselli  
Nello Rosselli  
Gaetano Salvemini  
Maria Todesco Rosselli

parents: they thought that medicine was not suitable for women, so it was Massimo who enrolled there, and not her, as she had wanted. But after two years in which she had taken few exams, Renata discovered that in Philosophy in Florence, which was organized as a centre for human sciences, there was the best equipped psychology laboratory in Italy, set up and directed by Francesco De Sarlo, a psychiatrist by training, who taught philosophy and in particular psychology, a young and controversial science. She therefore devoted herself to experimental research and in 1923 defended her degree thesis on «The determination of the psychic present», which the Faculty immediately decided to publish in its own series<sup>1</sup>.

The volume, also reviewed by the «American Journal of Psychology», came out seven years later<sup>2</sup>. There was not merely a huge publishing delay. By seemingly administrative manoeuvres, the minister Giovanni Gentile had ousted De Sarlo, who was at that time president of the Società italiana di psicologia, from the Institute of Psychology, requiring him to teach instead the history of philosophy. In 1926, even that was taken away, as De Sarlo was suspended from his post for presenting a talk on academic freedom to the national philosophy conference in Milan, which was interrupted and closed through police intervention. With her master professor, clearly «incompatible» with the regime's directives, Renata's already slim career opportunities plummeted<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> University of Florence, Humanistic Library, Minutes of meetings, 7 December 1923, p. 521. See also her student file in ASUFI, AC, SS, f. «Calabresi Renata». On Calabresi, I refer to my two essays listed here in the bibliography respectively of 2018 and, for the comparison of the paths of brother and sister, of 2019, and particularly to my *Italian Psychology and Jewish Emigration under Fascism. From Florence to Jerusalem and New York*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, especially chapter V.

<sup>2</sup> Renata Calabresi, *La determinazione del presente psichico*, Florence, R. Bemporad & Figlio, 1930.

<sup>3</sup> On the troubled fortunes of De Sarlo and his pioneering school, Patrizia Guarnieri, *Senza cattedra. L'istituto di Psicologia dell'Università di Firenze tra idealismo e fascismo*, Florence, Firenze University Press, 2012, pp. 71-103.

**Friends, relatives and professors: all anti-fascists**

Besides, the professors that the three young Calabresis had chosen for themselves were all anti-fascists, and so were their friends and their parents' friends. After Gaetano Salvemini had resigned, not silently, from the University, and was now an exile, Renata was not to see him again for fifteen years but she always knew where to find him, in France, in England and then in the United States. «Warmest greetings to our dear professor from this frozen pass»: among Salvemini's papers, the postcard from Stelvio of 20 August 1925, was sent to him at Abbaye de Pontigny by Renata and on behalf of Cecilia and Massimo «and also her father E. Calabresi»<sup>4</sup>.

Ettore Calabresi was under surveillance as an anti-fascist and a freemason «with unchanged sentiments», even after the so-called law against Freemasonry of 26 December 1925<sup>5</sup>. In December 1926, the Ferrara police headquarters arrested him for a few days; the Florence police headquarters came to search their home and seized card no. 41, issued to him by the Florence Provincial Committee of the «Unione nazionale delle forze liberali e democratiche»<sup>6</sup>, as well as correspondence that «confirmed his loathing for the Government and fascism»<sup>7</sup>. Prudence was not among the gifts of Renata's father.

Perhaps not Massimo's either, a member since 1925 of «Italia Libera», in which each member defined himself as a «fighter» and everyone often met at the Rosselli house, where Signora Amelia Rosselli was worried «seeing her two sons involved in increasingly dangerous adventures»<sup>8</sup>. The girls are

<sup>4</sup> R. Calabresi to G. Salvemini, Stelvio Pass, 20 August 1925, in ISRT, *Archivio Gaetano Salvemini* (AS), *Corrispondenza*, b. 78, f. 2. The handwriting is undoubtedly Renata's, but attributed to Massimo in the inventory of the papers: cf. *Archivio Gaetano Salvemini, Inventario della corrispondenza*, a cura di Andrea Becherucci, Bologna, Clueb, 2007, p. 84.

<sup>5</sup> *Contro la massoneria: la parola d'ordine del fascio fiorentino*, «Battaglie fasciste», 26 settembre 1925. Cfr. Anna Maria Isastia, *Massoneria e fascismo. La repressione degli anni Venti*, Florence, Libreria Chiari, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> ACS, MI, DGPS, DAGR, Cat. A1, 1935, b. 12, f. «Calabresi Ettore», National Union, membership card for Calabrese card [sic] Ettore, year 1925.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, Prefect C. Bertini to the Minister of the Interior, Ferrara, 12 December 1926; and the DAGR to the Prefect of Florence, 23 December 1926.

<sup>8</sup> Ernesto Rossi, «L'Italia Libera», in *Non mollare!* (1925). *Riproduzione fotografica dei numeri usciti*,

hardly ever mentioned, but they were there, and Renata was definitely around; she used to visit the Rossellis independently of her brother. A contemporary of Carlo, she became a great friend of Nello's girlfriend, Maria Todesco, and she even acted with the two of them in the theatre<sup>9</sup>; the boarding house in piazza Donatello where Renata and Cecilia were staying was a stones throw from via Giusti, where *signora* Amelia and her children lived from July 1920. It was probably professor Alessandro Levi who put them in touch: he was the older cousin of the Rossellis, living in Florence, and had been the thesis supervisor for Max Ascoli, their childhood friend from Ferrara, with whom they were now in touch and would always remain so.

### **A network of relationships**

Leo Ferrero was also enrolled in the same faculty as Renata and Cecilia; he was the same age as Massimo, the eldest son of Gina Lombroso and the historian Guglielmo, who had moved to Florence before the Calabresis and Rossellis, and left Italy before them, in 1930, to escape police surveillance and fascist intimidation. In January 1927, Leo noted in his diary: «if I do the sums there are few of my friends who have not been in prison»<sup>10</sup>. Massimo and Carlo Rosselli also ended up in prison at the Murate for a few days, together with Alessandro Levi, for paying a tribute to Giacomo Matteotti on the first anniversary of his assassination. In that frequently recalled episode, and who knows on how many other occasions, there were also some women, little mentioned even by their comrades in action. Renata and Cecilia were taken to the police station and detained only a few hours<sup>11</sup>.

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Florence, La Nuova Italia, 1955. p. 64, which mentions the most active members (pp. 51-52), including Massimo Calabrese [sic].

<sup>9</sup> There are various sources which demonstrate the contacts, including Fondazione Rosselli (FR), Florence, *Archivio Rosselli* (AR), M1406, poster of the play *I Fiori* by Serafin and Joaquín Álvarez Quintero, performed by Carlo and Nello Rosselli, Renata Calabresi, D'Ancona, Cividalli and others, May 1921.

<sup>10</sup> Leo Ferrero, *Diario di un privilegiato sotto il fascismo*, Turin, Chiantore, 1946, p. 182.

<sup>11</sup> For example E. Rossi, *L'Italia libera* cit., p. 65, gave the names of the women who took part, including the Calabrese [sic] sisters; Levi did not do so although his wife was there too: Alessandro Levi, *Ricordi dei fratelli Rosselli*, Florence, Centro editoriale toscano, 2002 (1<sup>st</sup> ed.

Salvemini was at this time already in prison, in Rome, awaiting trial in Florence, where many went in July to support him and get beaten up by the fascists – including his lawyer Nino Levi – in the incidents that followed. It was the famous trial for the clandestine paper «Non mollare», which Renata took great risks to help distribute, like the student Lucilla Rochat, the future wife of the partisan Willy Jervis and daughter of the stakeholder doctor Luigi Rochat, who also knew professor De Sarlo well.

In short, a close-knit network of bonds. What is striking is that they lasted, changing with time, and country and continent, amid countless personal and collective hardships, far beyond what they could have imagined at the time.

### **Neither husband nor work**

After student life, some married, and they each went their own way. It was not easy, given the times and their opinions. Massimo started a family and was trying for a university career in Milan, where Carlo Rosselli had been assistant to Luigi Einaudi for a couple of years before ending up again in prison and internment like Nello, with Marion and Maria, who followed the moves of their respective husbands. Max Ascoli also married and, after several unsuccessful attempts to find a university post, was thinking of going abroad. Leo Ferrero had gone to England in 1927, with his sister Nina, then continued to stay abroad, in Paris. Renata did not marry; she had not published a line since 1926 (the year in which De Sarlo was suspended from service), nor was she teaching philosophy in high schools, because this was a «masculine subject», as the ministry maintained, as did Giovanni Gentile among others<sup>12</sup>. She found herself teaching only in less highly rated schools, in private schools and evening schools for adults<sup>13</sup>.

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1947), p. 76.

<sup>12</sup> Gabriele Turi, *Lo Stato educatore. Politica e intellettuali nell'Italia fascista*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2002, p. 69. Gentile had already expressed himself in those terms in 1918, 1929 and 1933, see G. Gentile, *La nuova scuola media* [1925], edited by Hervé A. Cavallera, Florence, Le Lettere, 1988, pp. 276 e 343.

<sup>13</sup> ASUFi, AC, SS, f. «Calabresi Renata», application form, 31 December 1923, and, on teaching,

In 1930, however, she experienced great satisfaction: after constant postponements, and seven difficult years, the publisher Bemporad finally published her book on experimental psychology<sup>14</sup>. And De Sarlos former assistant, Enzo Bonaventura, came second of the three finalists in the national competition for the chair of psychology. He was the one who had been running the institute and the laboratory since 1923, with an annual contract and no academic power, not even the right to take part in the Faculty committee and the possibility of appointing *liberi docenti*. And in fact Renata did not yet have this. The Faculty did not seem willing to grant him tenure, but at least they had allowed him a volunteer assistant in experimental psychology.

He suggested Alberto Marzi: a recent graduate of 23, eight years younger than Renata, without publications or anything else, but with a PNF card since 1928<sup>15</sup>. It was demonstrably not right, on the basis of qualifications. And Bonaventura knew this; having seen Renata work for years, so much so that she seemed to be his own pupil rather than that of the now much marginalized De Sarlo. It was a bitter disappointment for her. But it was useless to feel sorry for herself: she *did* something.

In the first place, she resumed publishing. And she decided, at last, to move.

### **A university assistant in Rome**

Her brother had gone to Milan, to the medical clinic; for Renata's field, Rome was better. Here were the new winner of the chair of psychology, Mario Ponso from Milan, a researcher in optical perception, and an assistant, Ferruccio Banissoni from Trieste, who was involved in mental illnesses and

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see Calabresi family private papers (CC), f. «Renata Calabresi», CV, New York, March 1947.

<sup>14</sup> Archivio storico Giunti (ASG), Florence, *Fondo Bemporad* (FB), f. «Calabresi Renata», 1930-1931, correspondence with the publishers.

<sup>15</sup> For the date of his enrolment in the PNF, see ACS, MPI, DGIS, I, *Liberi docenti*, s. III 1930-1950, b. 310, f. «Marzi Alberto», certificate from the secretary of the Florence Federazione dei fasci di combattimento, 26 June 1936.

psychoanalysis: both openly aligned with the regime<sup>16</sup>. They both knew her, through specialist conferences.

There was already a volunteer psychology assistant at the Institute of Psychology in Rome: an army general, retired in 1926, with experience in the forestry and agricultural sectors – none in psychology – who in 1939 became a senator at the proposal of the secretary of the PNF<sup>17</sup>. But another volunteer assistant, in other words unpaid, trained in the leading prestigious experimental institute in Italy, with an excellent CV and highly regarded scientific publications, was convenient. In research terms, she was closer to the experimentalist Ponzio, who was in the Faculty of Medicine; instead, being a woman, when she was appointed in February 1931, she was placed at Banissoni's request in the Faculty of Education for teachers<sup>18</sup>. She turned out to exceed expectations, so that she received a special mention, an award; she had published at least two scientific essays a year<sup>19</sup>. After a competition, a committee chaired by Ponzio conferred on her the *libera docenza*, the teaching qualification in experimental psychology, valid for 5 years in any Italian University<sup>20</sup>. The ministerial appointment arrived by decree of 28 February 1935; in March she was recruited as organizer for vocational guidance, again a job deemed suitable for women, at the Ministry of National Education, where she found herself in contact with the powerful Agostino Gemelli, who flaunted his enthusiasm for fascism, and made every effort to

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<sup>16</sup> See for example, Mario Ponzio, *Psicotecnica e autarchia*, «Rivista di psicologia», 35, 1939, p. 298.

<sup>17</sup> ASURSa, FD, AS 1554, f. «Calabresi Renata», letter from Banissoni to the rector, Rome, 3 February 1931 with 6 enclosures. For the other volunteer assistant, see ASSR, *Senatori d'Italia, Senatori del Regno (1848-1943)*, Regio Esercito italiano, copy of the service record of Giuseppe Boriani, 26 October 1939 <<http://notes9.senato.it>> (accessed 14 January 2021).

<sup>18</sup> ASURSa, FD, AS 1554, f. «Calabresi Renata», letter from Banissoni to the rector, Rome, 3 February 1931.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, the rector to R. Calabresi, 24 February 1934, registration in the Roll of Honour and bestowal of a grant of 2,000 lire, and see *Scientific and Didactic Activities of Dr. Renata Calabresi*, Rome, Tip. R. Mantella, 1939, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> ACS, MPI, DGIS, I, *Liberi docenti*, s. III, 1930-1950, b. 85, f. «Calabresi Renata», report of the selection board, Rome, 19 October 1935; and all the documentation indicated in the text.

make psychology fascist<sup>21</sup>.

### Membership, oath, and termination

On 30 November 1933, the administrative director of the University ordered her to urgently present a certificate of enrolment in the PNF, «without which it will not be possible to confirm your reappointment for the academic year 1933-1934»<sup>22</sup>. Though afterwards she was in fact reappointed. But that was not enough. In order to teach she also had to take an oath, the one required of professors in 1931 had become compulsory, two years later, even for *liberi docenti*<sup>23</sup>. Renata swore allegiance to the regime on 21 December 1936; only then did the rector grant her the authorization, which he had refused her the year before<sup>24</sup>. On 20 January 1937, Dr. Calabresi began her first experimental psychology course in the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy. Her second course, in the academic year 1937-38, was also the last.

«Following the legislative measures in defence of the race, you have not been reappointed to the position of volunteer assistant at the Institute of Experimental Psychology for the academic year 1938-1939. Therefore I have ordered your termination from the aforementioned position, from 29 October 1938-XVII»<sup>25</sup>. Thus we read in a note dated 3 February 1939, without address, it is not known whether it was sent to «Calabresi Renata, Rome», a volunteer assistant for eight years<sup>26</sup>.

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<sup>21</sup> Two letters from Renata Calabresi have been preserved; Historical Archive of the Catholic University, *Correspondence*, b. 67, f. 19, sf. 1115; b. 69, f. 105, sf. 991.

<sup>22</sup> ASURSa, FD, AS 1554, f. «Calabresi Renata», circular letter from the administrative director to all volunteer assistant staff, Rome, 30 November 1933, including the papers indicated below in the text with the respective dates.

<sup>23</sup> See Gabriele Rigano, *I rabbini italiani nelle carte della pubblica sicurezza*, «Zakhor», 8, 2005, pp. 135-173, which cites precise primary sources on this point.

<sup>24</sup> ASURSa, FD, AS 1554, f. «Calabresi Renata», Minutes of the oath-taking, 21 December 1936, and Royal University of Rome, Lecture schedule, 1936-37, starting on 10 January 1937; R. Calabresi, request to the rector to teach in the academic year 1935-36, undated, and in her *Scientific and Didactic*, cit., p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> ASURSa, FD, AS 1554, f. «Calabresi Renata» seems to be a standard communication, to be completed, from the rector of the University of Rome, 3 February 1939.

<sup>26</sup> Angelo Ventura, *Il fascismo e gli ebrei. Il razzismo antisemita nell'ideologia e nella politica del regime*, Rome, Donzelli, 2013, pp. 108, 173, 176.



On her certificate of service dated 20 December 1938, someone wrote in pencil and underlined «Ceased», and in smaller writing «Jewish»<sup>27</sup>.

On 13 February 1939, Renata went to declare that she belonged to the «Jewish race». She had never associated with the Community, but had not cut herself off<sup>28</sup>.

### Ready to leave

Leaving Italy seemed the best thing to do.

Career prospects in her discipline that up to then were scarce, for a woman even more so, disappeared for her and many others with the laws of 1938. At the age of forty Renata Calabresi was ready to cross the ocean, both to find the professional fulfilment which she knew she deserved and to avoid having to endure fascism anymore. She was not lacking in acquaintance, resources and determination. Her brother Massimo decided to embark with his wife and children, even before they formally expelled him from the University of Milan, where he was an adjunct professor (*aiuto*) at the medical clinic. It was a question of seeing what to do with Cecilia, who was living with their mother Olga in Florence, while Renata was listed as «emigrated to Rome» from 14 January 1938, a few months after the death of her father<sup>29</sup>. Perhaps the three of them could go away together.

For at least a month she collected from the offices whatever was useful for documenting her CV, even the decree of her qualification to lecture, which a further circular in June with retroactive effect declared «forfeited [...] because of Jewish race»<sup>30</sup>. On 30 January 1939, Mario Ponzio, as director of the Institute of Psychology in Rome, signed a letter of reference for her and had

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<sup>27</sup> ASURSa, FD, AS 1554, f. «Calabresi Renata», certificate of the rector De Francisci and of the administrative director Righetti, Rome, 20 December 1938; letter from the rector to F. Banissoni, 7 February 1931, and the annual confirmations.

<sup>28</sup> Archivio UCEI, «Dichiarazione di razza», n. 17290, p. 119.

<sup>29</sup> ACS, MPI, DGIS, I, Liberi docenti, s. III, 1930-1950, b. 85, f. «Calabresi Renata», from the Municipality of Florence Registry Office to MPI, DGIS, 19 January 1957.

<sup>30</sup> ASURSa, FD, AS 1554, f. «Calabresi Renata», from the MEN, DGIS, to the rector of the University of Rome, 2 June 1939.

it countersigned by the rector as well as by the administrative director<sup>31</sup>. She even had a pamphlet printed in English, *Scientific and Didactic Activities of Dr. Renata Calabresi*, to send to those who might be able to help her<sup>32</sup>: «because of my belonging to the Jewish race, I was recently forced to stop my activity in Italy», she wrote on 4 February in a letter to the director of the Institute of International Education in New York, who was also the secretary, later chairman, of the Emergency Committee on Aid of Displaced Foreign Scholars. Instead of Stephen Duggan, it was the secretary, Miss Betty Drury, who replied to her: «I really wish there was something we could do to help you»<sup>33</sup>. She did not give her much hope.

### The Emergency Committee in New York

Between March and May 1939, the Emergency Committee opened a file in her name. The printed presentation brochure printed in English had an excellent effect: it brought together her CV, the «Report of the examining committee for the qualification to lecture; the long complimentary letter from professor Mario Ponzio, the list of her publications», and a dozen abstracts, half of which had appeared in «Psychological Abstracts». In addition, she included the very positive review of her book that had appeared in the «American Journal of Psychology»<sup>34</sup>.

In February 1939, Duggan also received a letter concerning her from Walter S. Hunter, the director of the psychology laboratory at Brown University and chairman of the department: «Miss Calabresi is Jewish. She has published some twenty-five articles in psychology and education and was highly recommended in 1934 and 1935 by Italian psychologists», not in 1938 but

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>32</sup> *Scientific and Didactic*, cit., pp. 4-5. A copy is held in NYPL, MAD, ECADFS, IA, Grantees, b.5, f. 2, «Calabresi Renata»; another copy in BLO, SPSL, MS 343/7-12, f. «Calabresi Renata».

<sup>33</sup> NYPL, MAD, ECADFS, IA, Grantees, b. 5, f. 2, «Calabresi Renata», letter from R. Calabresi to S. Duggan, Rome, 4 February 1939, and B. Drury to R. Calabresi, 28 February 1939.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Diserens, *La determinazione del presente psichico* [sic] by Renata Calabresi, «American Journal of Psychology», 46, 3, pp. 525-526.

earlier, probably when she was collaborating as an editorial assistant on «Psychological Abstracts» which Hunter had founded in 1927<sup>35</sup>.

A note to Betty Drury from an E.L. pointed out this woman as very interesting. Perhaps it was worth informing her about «Burke? [sic]»<sup>36</sup>. «Isn't she the same one who wrote to us?» Burks asked in the margin of the letter they exchanged a copy of, swapping questions and opinions, more initialled than signed. «Yes». Barbara Burks, a psychologist, three years younger than Renata, originally from New York, had worked extensively on IQ tests with Lewis M. Terman, whose books were also at the Institute of Psychology in Florence and in Rome. As secretary of the Committee for Displaced Foreign Psychologists of the American Psychology Association, she was trying to take a census of the data for psychologists fleeing Nazism and Fascism, already arrived in America or intending to come: in their first list Germans predominated, as always, and there were just three Italians: Bonaventura Enzo from Florence (who was in fact already in Jerusalem), Calabresi Renata from Rome and Rieti Ettore from Genoa<sup>37</sup>.

### **Few hopes, a misunderstanding and great tenacity**

Meanwhile Miss Drury replied to the two letters which Duggan had sent her about the case.

With Professor Hunter she was generous with advice for Dr. Calabresi: she should contact Barbara Burks of the APA Committee, Dr. Rudolf Littauer of the *Notgemeinschaft deutscher Wissenschaftler im Ausland* (Emergency Foundation for German Scientists Abroad) in New York; as well as associations in Milan, Geneva, London and Paris, aimed at German refugees and actually not very useful. To the person in question, however, she

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<sup>35</sup> NYPL, MAD, ECADFS, IA, Grantees, b. 5, f. 2, «Calabresi Renata», letter from R. Calabresi to S. Duggan, 4 February 1939; W.S. Hunter to Duggan, 2 February 1939.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, E.L., note to B.D., undated, with *Scientific and Didactic*, cit.

<sup>37</sup> NYPL, MAD, ECADFS, s. V, b. 174, f. 9, APA, 1938-39, 1944, «Displaced Psychologists and Scholars with Psychological Background in Related Fields», undated but March 1939; «Report of the Committee on Displaced Foreign Psychologists», 19 July 1939.

explained what it was not possible to do: the Emergency Committee could not suggest the availability of a displaced scholar to universities unless the institutions requested it. And then:

Because of the number of demands made upon it, requests, the Emergency Committee has been obliged to limit its activities almost entirely to the cases of scholars who have been displaced from university posts where they held the rank of professor or *Privat Dozent*. Nevertheless, we shall be glad to keep your papers on file [...], although I feel that I must tell you that, because of unfavourable economic conditions, there are almost no openings in this country at the present time<sup>38</sup>.

Besides discouraging her in general, it seemed that the secretary considered her to be unqualified. Renata pointed out: «I draw your attention to the fact that I am a *Privatdozent* at the State University of Rome (see the CV I sent you, p. 3 and pp. 4-5), and that I have taught courses in experimental psychology and vocational guidance»<sup>39</sup>.

This was 16 March 1939. On the same day, she also wrote to the Society for the Protection of Science and Learning in London.

### **Women and women's aid associations**

It was the secretary from London who contacted her and sent her two copies of the SPSL questionnaire, one for Dr. Massimo Calabresi. «We shall do our best to help you to find suitable positions, though conditions are exceptionally difficult now». Miss Esther Simpson did not want to raise false hopes either, and advised them to trigger their contacts in the United States, as Renata had in fact already done, «since prospects in that country are much better than in Europe»<sup>40</sup>. She revealed that both their names had been reported to her by the British Federation of University Women (BFUW). Just the day before, in fact, she had received a letter from the secretary of the

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<sup>38</sup> NYPL, MAD, ECADFS, IA, Grantees, b. 5, f. 2, «Calabresi Renata», B. Drury to R. Calabresi, 28 February 1939, and the reply from R. Calabresi, Rome, 16 March 1939.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>40</sup> BLO, SPSL, MS 343/7-12, f. «Calabresi Renata», letter from E. Simpson, 10 March 1939; and the reply from R. Calabresi, 16 March 1939.

BFUW Emergency sub-Committee for Refugees in London. Erna Hollitscher from Vienna, 42 years old, with a doctorate in languages but a job as a secretary, had emigrated to England in 1938 as an au pair; a Jewish woman, she carried out her role with great empathy for academic refugees – and evidently Renata had also tried there and also for Massimo: «the two Calabresis are eminent scientists, especially the brother, and I do not want to tell them that their case is absolutely hopeless until I have tried everything», she confided to Miss Simpson on 8 March 1939, sending her the documentation for both<sup>41</sup>. The SPSL secretary assured her that she would write «to them both and shall try to help them». And so she did.

### Questionnaires for London

In the questionnaire that Renata filled out for Miss Simpson, the United States, not England, was her preferred destination, then Canada, Australia, other British dominions. She was willing to move to countries in South America, but not to the Far East or the Tropics, nor to the USSR because of the language «and the living conditions, too hard for my mother». Religion: none practiced. She replied no, she had no children, she was not married, but had responsibility for her mother and a sister (who, she noted, had a PhD in literature). She knew Italian, French, English, German; she could read Latin. She indicated when and from where she had been dismissed for «racial reasons»: by the University of Rome, then by the ministry. About her «sources of income before her dismissal: none from the University, except occasionally, and 15,000 lire beforehand from the Ministry». This would be enough for her until the end of 1939. She had no pension; she had no benefits. A PhD in philosophy; *Privatdozent* in psychology, in the experimental and educational fields she specialized in «perception, psychology of time,

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, from E. Hollitscher to E. Simpson, 8 March 1939, and Simpsons reply, 10 March 1939. Renata's letter to the BFUW is missing. See Susan Cohen, *Crossing Borders: Academic Refugee Women, Education and the BFUW During the Nazi Era*, «History of Education», 39, 2010, pp. 175-182.

vocational guidance». Would she accept «an industrial or commercial position? ... Yes, possibly connected with vocational guidance activity».

For references she listed eleven professors. Three Italians: Ponzo, Gemelli and Giovanni Calò, the only two professors of psychology in Italy and an anti-fascist professor of education. The others all foreigners: Géza Révész from Amsterdam, Albert Michotte from Louvain, Édouard Claparède and Pierre Bovet both from Geneva, the Americans Walter Samuel Hunter from Brown University and Morris Simon Viteles of the University of Pennsylvania, lastly Auguste Ley from Brussels and Franziska Baumgarten from Bern<sup>42</sup>.

Renata Calabresi's questionnaire arrived on Miss Simpsons desk on 21 March 1939. At that date, the file opened by the London SPSL stopped (it resumed in 1946); on 16 March the correspondence in her file in her name at the ECADFS in New York was interrupted.

### **The interview in New York: protruding teeth**

Eight months later, and a few days after her 40th birthday, Renata embarked in Naples. She had someone photograph her under the bell of the *Conte di Savoia*. On 23 November 1939, she arrived in New York<sup>43</sup>.

She was alone. But she knew that she would meet her brother, her sister-in-law and their children. She took a room where they were staying, at the Raleigh Hotel, 115 West 72nd. After a few days, on 29 November, she showed up at the ECADFS office in Manhattan, at 2 West 46th, for an interview with Miss Drury. Who filled out her usual *Memorandum* with dates, name and address, discipline.

Here are her remarks about the candidate she had in front of her: «A nice, bustling little woman, graying hair, friendly and easy manners. English bothers her, but she has a good vocabulary and will get along. Prominent front teeth, grey, intent eyes».

<sup>42</sup> BLO, SPSL, MS 343/7-12, f. «Calabresi Renata», questionnaire.

<sup>43</sup> NYPL, MAD, ECADFS, IA, Grantees, b. 5, f. 2, «Calabresi Renata», interview card of B. Drury, 29 November 1939.

«Subject of interview»? «Actions to be taken»? On these matters, the appropriate spaces in the Drury Memorandum remained blank. But she noted that she had reported to Barbara Burks, the coordinator of the committee for displaced psychologists, and to the National Refugee Service, an association not aimed at academics<sup>44</sup>.

The Committee had nothing to suggest to «Renata Calabresi. Smart looking, alert, bright. Simply but nicely dressed». Neither before her arrival, nor after. At least until September 1940, when Miss Drury telegraphed her – first to a wrong address, then to one where she was no longer living – for a «possible position», naturally provisional, in competition with four other displaced scholars<sup>45</sup>.

It was only in the autumn of 1942, three years after her arrival that the Emergency Committee provided her with financial assistance, indirectly, after a request from an institution interested in Dr. Calabresi.

### **The anti-fascist network**

And up to then? How did she manage?

On 7 February 1940, she gave a lecture to undergraduate students of the Psychology Department at Brown University, Providence (RI), certainly at Professor Hunters invitation. From 29 February to 13 March she gave a series of lectures to students at Vassar College, Poughkeepsie (NY). On 7 May she gave a lecture to the students of Brooklyn College, Brooklyn (NY). They were useful experiences, and helped make her known to American academics. She put them all in her CV<sup>46</sup>. But they were not a job.

Salvemini had been teaching at Harvard since 1933 and had cultivated a network of acquaintances from which Renata too could find some support. Best of all those who had settled was Max Ascoli, who arrived in New York

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, note «Renata Calabresi», 29 November 1939.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, B. Drury, telegram to R. Calabresi, 11 September 1940; and four other communications seeking an address.

<sup>46</sup> CC, f. «Renata Calabresi», CV, typed copy, undated.

with his wife in October 1931. After receiving a Rockefeller Fellowship with Leo Ferrero and Mario Einaudi, he had gained the confidence of the director of the New School for Social Sciences in New York and consequently work in its Graduate Faculty. And he had got engaged, and in October 1940 married the widow Marion Rosenwald of Chicago, daughter of the philanthropist and wealthy chairman of Sears; this opened many doors for him, for his causes, and indirectly for the Italian exiles he was helping. Salvemini and Ascoli argued more and more frequently, even in the association of anti-fascist Italian intellectuals living in America, the Mazzini Society, established in December 1939 in New York at the home of the art historian Lionello Venturi<sup>47</sup>. Renata had arrived about a month before, and of these she knew at least, in addition to the aforementioned, also Nino Levi, Salvemini's lawyer, the journalist Paolo Milano, Renato Poggioli, former professor of the University in Florence, Cesare Lombroso, the young brother of Nora who was also in the United States with her husband Bruno Rossi. In a letter that ended up among Salvemini's papers, Renata gave her support to some initiatives, and in particular suggested getting involved with the «Italian university people» the group of physicists and mathematicians, Rossi and Fermi, De Benedetti, Rasetti and Segre<sup>48</sup>. Salvemini placed a great deal of trust in her assessments of people, she knew that «a fascist, even if Jewish, is always a fascist», while on the contrary Ascoli «recommended so many fascists [...] just because they were Jews», that he considered him unreliable<sup>49</sup>.

In August 1940, Mrs Amelia Rosselli also arrived, and Maria and Marion – the

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<sup>47</sup> ISRT, *Fondo Giustizia e Libertà*, VI, f. 1, b. 13, Mazzini Society, report by the provisional secretary Renato Poggioli, 28 December 1939. See Maddalena Tirabassi, *Salvemini e la Mazzini Society*, in Patrizia Audenino (ed.), *Il prezzo della libertà. Gaetano Salvemini in esilio*, Soveria Mannelli, Rubbettino, 2009, pp. 91-111. On the notable figure of Venturi, see Stefano Valeri (ed.), *Lionello Venturi e i nuovi orizzonti di ricerca della storia dell'arte. Atti del convegno internazionale di studi*. Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, Roma 10-11-12 marzo 1999, Rome, CAM, 2020, and Id., *Lionello Venturi antifascista «pericoloso» durante l'esilio (1931-1945)*, «Storia dell'arte», N.S., 101, 1, 2002, pp. 15-27.

<sup>48</sup> ISRT, AS, *Fondo Salvemini*, X, f. 8, b. 7, letter from R. Calabresi to R. Bolaffio, 21 March 1945.

<sup>49</sup> G. Salvemini to Costanza Peters, 5 November 1942, in Id., *Lettere americane 1927-1949*, ed. by Renato Camurri, Rome, Donzelli, 2015, p. 357.



Rosselli ladies – with their seven children. Max Ascoli went to meet them, Gaetano Salvemini to greet them<sup>50</sup>. They found themselves with friends already escaped to America. They settled in Larchmont, and Renata would sometimes stop at their home, especially to be with her friend Maria<sup>51</sup>.

Massimo had moved with his family to New Haven from December 1939, where he had a fellowship at Yale University. They said goodbye. Renata remained in New York, still looking for a post.

### Research assistant at the New School

It was to the New School, at 66 West 12<sup>th</sup> in Manhattan, that Europe's best social scientists gravitated. At the Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Sciences – through which it seems around two hundred scholars in exile passed<sup>52</sup> – was Max Ascoli, from 1939. By a decision of the director, Alvin Johnson (1874-1971), the Faculty offered research assistant positions; these were temporary, but allowed selected scholars to obtain immigration status<sup>53</sup>. Ascoli, Paolo Contini and others from the Faculty were able to assure Johnson, who was an economist, that this Italian psychologist had talent, many testimonials and skills, was fluent in four languages, and was certainly anti-fascist. She was able to collaborate usefully in some interdisciplinary projects of the New School's social scientists, and she also got on well with the group of psychologists coordinated by Wertheimer, who often took part

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<sup>50</sup> Silvia Rosselli, *Gli otto venti*, Palermo, Sellerio, 2008, p. 70.

<sup>51</sup> A letter from Ascoli's secretary was sent to Renata Calabresi at the Rosselli address, 16 February 1946, in Boston University (BU), Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center (HGARC), *Ascoli Papers* (AP), b. 174, f. 1, «R. Calabresi». I thank Renato Camurri for drawing my attention to the existence of these letters.

<sup>52</sup> See Renato Camurri (ed.), *Max Ascoli. Antifascista, intellettuale, giornalista*, Milan, Angeli, 2012, p. 117, and Claus-Dieter Krohn, *Intellectuals in Exile. Refugee Scholars and the New School for Social Research*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1993, pp. 59-86.

<sup>53</sup> Gerald Steinacher, Brian Barmettler, *The University in Exile and the Garden of Eden. Alvin Johnson and His Rescue Efforts for European Jews and Intellectuals*, in *Reassessing History from Two Continents: Festschrift Günter Bischof*, ed. by Martin Eichinger, Stefan Karner, Mark Kramer, Peter Ruggenthaler, Innsbruck, Innsbruck University Press, 2013, pp. 49-68 <<https://core.ac.uk>> (accessed 4 February 2021). The very fragmentary fund of the Alvin Saunders Johnson papers in Yale Archives, MS 615 <<https://web.archive.org>> (accessed 4 February 2021).

in the Graduate Faculty discussions.

The New School course catalogs record only the teaching faculty. The numerous research assistants are not named: not even Renata, nor the very young Franco Modigliani, a future Nobel Prize winner in economics, who in May 1940 came respectively first and third in the selection for three places<sup>54</sup>. Other clues help us. In some of her CVs, progressively updated, Renata detailed her work at the New School: «organized and supervised research and field work of students engaged in a Seminar on conflict of culture and Juvenile delinquency»<sup>55</sup>. This was the seminar held in 1941 by the lawyer Nino Levi and by Arthur L. Swift Jr., an expert in social group work.

### **Nino and so many projects**

Venetian by birth, a member of the management committee of the Milanese socialist branch by the age of 19, a professor and a lawyer, Nino Levi was one of the founders of the Unitary Socialist Party, which Massimo also joined. A friend of the Rossellis, in Florence in July 1925 he had effectively defended Gaetano Salvemini in the «Non mollare» trial, and the *squadristi* had attacked him as he left the court. It was from at least that time that Renata had known him; he was five years older, cultured, distinguished, rich. A full professor of law and criminal procedure from 1931 at the University of Genoa, he was expelled in 1938, fled to London and thence to New York with his two children<sup>56</sup>.

In the Graduate Faculty, he maintained a busy teaching activity with many courses and the seminar connected to the large project in which he involved Renata Calabresi, sponsored by the New School and supervised by an advisory committee of prominent American scholars, which focused on

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<sup>54</sup> New School Historical Archives and Special Collections, New York, *Graduate Faculty Minutes*, b. 1, 22 May 1940. There is no file in the name of Renata Calabresi.

<sup>55</sup> CC, f. «Renata Calabresi», CV, March 1947, typewritten copy.

<sup>56</sup> Gianni Isola, *Levi Nino*, in *Il movimento operaio italiano. Dizionario Biografico*, edited by Franco Andreucci, Tommaso Detti, vol. 3, Roma, Editori Riuniti, 1977, pp. 110-113.

juvenile delinquency in the Italian immigrant community. It was the work of a team of specialists in social work, pedagogy, pediatrics and gynecology, psychiatry and psychology<sup>57</sup>. She was able to make a good contribution.

As a research assistant, she reported on the sociological and psychological methodologies used, with special attention to life stories and various mental tests. In fact the «psychoanalytical interpretation of the family patterns and its implications as a factor of emotional and social maladjustment and consequently of delinquency was the object of animated discussions». Calabresi emphasized the multiplicity of the aspects examined and the comparative approach among communities of emigrants<sup>58</sup>. For data collection, the Domestic Relations Court made available case records in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Bronx and Queens. The direct relationship with the communities of Italian immigrants was favoured by an expert on Italian immigration in the Southern United States and above all by «Mr Corsi». This was Edward Corsi, a native of Italian Harlem linked to Fiorello La Guardia, the Commissioner of Immigration for twelve years under Roosevelt, deputy commissioner of the Department of Public Welfare in New York, who was very familiar with the situation of the 1,300,000 Italians in New York, 800,000 of them second and third generation<sup>59</sup>. In her detailed report, enthusiasm for the project and for the interest it had aroused among their Italian and American interlocutors is evident.

Unfortunately, of all this work on «Conflict of culture and juvenile

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<sup>57</sup> *Curriculum The New School for Social Research, Spring 1941*, New York, New School [1940], p. 39. For the courses mentioned see the NSSR catalogs, *The Graduate Faculty of Political Science, 1939-1941*, New York, NSSR, 1939, pp. 21-22, and following years.

<sup>58</sup> NYPL, MAD, ECADFS, IA, Grantees, b. 5, f. 2, «Calabresi Renata», «Cultural Conflict and delinquency. Summary. Seminar in Social Research, s.d., submitted by Renata Calabresi».

<sup>59</sup> See Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration, *The Italians of New York*, New York, Random House, 1938, and Gerald Meyer, *Italian Harlem: Portrait of a Community*, in Philip V. Cannistraro (ed.), *The Italians of New York. Five Centuries of Struggle and Achievement*, New York, New York Historical Society – John D. Calandra Italian American Institute, 1999, pp. 57-67. For any sources on the relations between Corsi and Nino Levi and Calabresi, I thank Nicole C. Dittrich, Special Collections Research Center at Syracuse University, and Steven Smith, Balch Institute of Ethnic Studies Library, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, where the collections of Corsi papers are partially inventoried.

delinquency» nothing was published, and the seminar on this topic at the Graduate Faculty which should have lasted fifteen weeks from 7 February 1941 was interrupted by a tragic accident. On 25 March Nino Levi, aged 47, died following a fall from a horse.

For Renata it was a tremendous blow.

### **Starting again: a room and 25 dollars**

She had hoped to make a new life. With this cultured, charming, committed man, she had similar ideas, common interests, support and a romantic relationship<sup>60</sup>. She now had to go on without him. Meanwhile, she had to find another job. She again asked for help from her friends, some of them put her up: in the CVs that Dr. Calabresi circulated, and in the few letters we have left, her address often changes.

In the summer of 1941, she found work as an instructor at Brooklyn College, Department of Psychology, and as a part time teacher at the Dalton School. Teaching undergraduate students on evening courses was quite a torment for her, not only, or not so much, because of language difficulties. The «obvious differences between the academic world she had been used to» and that of an American city college made her uncomfortable, noted an American colleague who saw her<sup>61</sup>. This often happened with European professors; they were even more competent in their subject than «the Average American college teachers», but they were not successful with those students. The problem was also discussed with Miss Drury.

Renatas teaching post was not confirmed anyway.

She looked for something else: in 1942, she worked as a research worker in West and East Harlem at the Foundation to Further Children Guidance in the

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<sup>60</sup> Levi had been a widower since January 1940, but I do not know exactly how far back the relationship with Renata dates. See, however, P. Guarnieri, *Quando il «cervello in fuga» è una donna. Renata Calabresi, displaced psychologist a New York dopo le leggi anti-ebraiche*, «Contemporanea», 21, 4, 2018, pp. 522-523.

<sup>61</sup> NYPL, MAD, ECADFS, IA, Grantees, b. 5, f. 2, «Calabresi Renata», Austin B. Wood a ECADFS, October 1943, e b. 135, f. 41, Brooklyn College, John White to Drury, 16 February 1940.

public education sector. And she applied for an assistant psychologist post at Rockland State Hospital in Orangeburg (NY), where the psychologist Elaine Kinder wanted her especially for the children's group. All they could offer her in Orangeburg was \$25 a month and «full maintenance»: «although we realize it was an inadequate amount, we have been unable to find any way of increasing it», not least because she did not have American citizenship. They did say, however, that they were «very much interested in Dr. Calabresi's background of training and experience», and did not rule out that «at the end of a year's service, a temporary or provisional appointment in the regular service of the hospital might be arranged», explained the psychologist at Rockland State Hospital<sup>62</sup>.

At the age of 43 – now emigrated for three years – she had the prospect of going to live in a village in the country and working practically without pay for a year at various tasks which the letter detailed, in that enormous hospital with almost 6,000 beds, overcrowded, with psychiatric patients in increasing numbers during the war.

### **Recommended by Max Wertheimer**

To accept those conditions, funding was needed. She and Rockland Hospital were agreed on this; so they knocked on the Emergency Committees door. Miss Drury returned to action: a new interview with the Italian lady, a further information sheet, her CV updated with «American experience». Renata thanked her and suggested the names and addresses of five references in New York, only one of Italian origin. There are letters of recommendation: from Gardner Murphy, who was then the chairman of the Department of Psychology at City College of New York, from the eminent psychologist Max Wertheimer, who emigrated to the USA in 1933, who had met her in the Graduate Faculty, and from Max Ascoli. Alvin Johnson also intervened to support her, although the candidate had not indicated him among the

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibidem*, letter from E.F. Kinder to ECADFS, 29 August 1942.

referees. The tributes were many and detailed. Austin Wood, assistant professor of psychology at Brooklyn College, also recommended her as a person and as a psychologist; without hiding that she had had some difficulties as a teacher of American undergraduates<sup>63</sup>.

Exchanges by letter and telephone continued. Elaine Kinder of Rockland State Hospital seemed a little impatient with the ECADFS; perhaps she had not been clear enough, «in writing you recently regarding Dr. Calibresi [sic] I fear that I did not make sufficiently clear to you the details». She asked Drury for \$35 a month for a year, and she confirmed the little that Rockland was able to offer.

«I realized that even with the supplementary salary this amount is less than a person of Dr. Calibresi's [sic] training and experience is entitled to. However, it is my belief that the clinical opportunities afforded by the institution are such as to warrant her accepting a limited salary»<sup>64</sup>.

The lady in question was not entirely in agreement. If at Rockland Hospital she enjoyed «an unparalleled opportunity to become acquainted with American methods of clinical psychology», as they said, she wished to specialize in clinical psychology, and so attend a research seminar at the Psychiatric Institute. This was not free, she had to pay the not negligible registration fee and for transport. «I plan to do some graduate work in clinical psychology and to attend a research seminar at the Psychiatric Institute in Manhattan. This will involve considerable expenses for tuition and commuting» They made two calculations, in pen, in the margin of the letter: the \$35 requested from the Emergency Committee was not enough. «I will find it difficult to get along with the small salary asked by Dr. Kinder». Kinder

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, all the papers mentioned in the text, from 4 September 1942; letters from B. Drury to B. Burks, 8 September 1942, and to Drury from R. Calabresi, M. Ascoli, G. Murphy, A. Johnson, all between 5 and 10 September 1942, M. Wertheimer, undated, but received on 12 September 1942; A.B. Wood to ECADFS, 13 October 1943.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibidem*, letter from E. Kinder to ECADFS, 5 September 1942, followed by R. Calabresi's letter to Drury, 11 September 1942, and E. Kinders to Drury, 23 September 1942.

agreed and backed her more realistic claim of \$60<sup>65</sup>.

### **The only Italian woman financed by the ECADFS**

The Committee discussed the application with all the documentation and finally approved it. On 25 September, the executive secretary informed Dr. Kinder, specifying that the grant of \$600 (\$120 less than what was requested) was to be paid in two instalments, would last for one year, was not renewable and would be cancelled or curtailed if Dr. Calabresi left Rockland State Hospital earlier than expected. The «successful candidate» found out after everyone else, when she had already started working in Orangeburg<sup>66</sup>.

This is how Renata Calabresi appears in the ECADFS series of grantees: the only woman in the small group of Italians for whom the Emergency Committee issued a grant, each different and in her case particularly low. It was given to her after she had been there for three years, and in fact came from the Rosenwald Family Association, which had come into being in December 1931, shortly before the death of Julius Rosenwald<sup>67</sup>. Among the five children who maintained strong philanthropic activity, Marion and Adele were especially committed to childcare and were in various ways personally close to psychology and psychoanalysis circles: in a second marriage, Adele Rosenwald married the child psychologist David M. Levy, whom she had met at the Institute for Juvenile Research in Chicago; her sister Marion was one of the founders of the Institute for Psychoanalysis in the same city<sup>68</sup>.

Perhaps Max Ascoli, besides writing a letter of recommendation to Miss Drury, had spoken about Renata to his wife Marion. Her brother-in-law, David

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibidem*, letter from Calabresi to S. Duggan, 20 September 1942, in reply to his of 14 September 1942.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*, letter from Calabresi to ECADFS, 4 October 1942, and copy of the Executive Secretary to E. Kinder, 25 September 1942.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibidem*, «Application for New Scholar under Rosenwald Family Association plan», 23 September 1942 (date of the application 31 August 1942).

<sup>68</sup> Peter Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2006, pp. 389-390. See Kenan Heise, *Marion Rosenwald Ascoli*, «Chicago Tribune», 2 October 1990.

Levy, who was an expert in Dr Calabresi's field, had also formed an excellent judgment of her, or so Ascoli stated, at any rate<sup>69</sup>.

Renata remained at Rockland State Hospital from October 1942 to December 1945.

At the end of her first year, when her fellowship was about to expire, Miss Drury asked for news. She politely apologized for not giving this to her before: she had little time to come «in the city». How was she getting on? Would it be possible to meet her and have a chat? The ECADFS executive secretary declined the suggestion. A phone call was enough for her, thank you<sup>70</sup>.

### **She does really want another job**

The correspondence resumed more than a year later, according to the file. Instead of Betty Drury, Frances Fenton Park was now in post, who advised Dr. Calabresi that she had suggested her name to the American Friends to interest them about a vacant post. She did not say where, nor what the job might be. The salary was \$2,400. Might Renata Calabresi be interested in it?<sup>71</sup> Yes, of course. But to the Quaker organization, which had had a Refugee division since 1938, the placement counselor let it be known that he did not want to displease the Rockland superintendent by taking away his staff, «to be a party to raids on his personnel», so he preferred not to recommend the Italian psychologist, as Mrs Fenton Park herself – entirely in agreement with him – explained to Renata.

She, on the contrary, did not agree at all. She went in person to the ECADFS

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<sup>69</sup> BU, HGARC, AP, b. 174, f. 1, «R. Calabresi», M. Ascoli to Helen C. Young, 30 January 1946.

<sup>70</sup> NYPL, MAD, ECADFS, IA, Grantees, b. 5, f. 2, «Calabresi Renata», R. Calabresi to B. Drury, 18 November 1943, in reply to the letter from B. Drury, 11 November 1943, and B. Drury to R. Calabresi, 19 November 1943.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* The letters referred to in the text are the following: from Frances Fenton Park to A.B. Miller, 4 December 1944, to R. Calabresi, 5 and 8 December 1944, to A.B. Miller, 8 December 1944 and 16 January 1945, to R. Calabresi, 23 January 1945, to A.B. Miller, January 26, 1945, by A.B. Miller to F. Fenton Park, 6 December 1944, 22 January 1945, by R. Calabresi to F. Fenton Park, 25 January 1945.



office in New York; she wanted to know which institution had that vacancy: «she does really want another job». The secretary refused her; as for her colleague in Philadelphia he turned elsewhere, to the Committee on Displaced Foreign psychologists, because she did not have suitable applicants in the ECADFS records<sup>72</sup>. Scrolling through the list there would, in fact, be others to approach, including another Italian.

Renata was a woman of unshakable tenacity. After an interminable three-way exchange of letters, she secured an appointment with Mr Alphonse Miller of the Society of Friends on 30 January 1945. It had been fully 57 days since the Executive Committee office had received that job offer. It was at the Woodbourne Institution for Defective Delinquents, inaugurated in 1935, which had about 800 male inmates with a steady increase of those with mental deficiency. The puzzle was made clear to her during the interview, it is assumed. Or maybe not. In her last note to Mrs Fenton, Renata confirmed the appointment and promised she would be in touch.

Here, however, the correspondence in the file ends.

### **Always searching, for contacts**

She remained at Rockland State Hospital, where she administered personality tests to child and adult patients, handled cases for the Domestic Relation Courts, practiced group therapy with children, and gave lectures in the nursing school<sup>73</sup>. Between September 1944 and June 1946 – according to one of her CVs – she was an Instructor in Abnormal Psychology at the Evening school of Hunter College in New York<sup>74</sup>. She did not stop looking, but she gave up on the ECADFS, and did not even reply to the SPSL in London, which asked her for information after the war to update their records<sup>75</sup>.

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibidem*, from F. Fenton Park to A.B. Miller, 4 December 1944, 8 December 1944 and 16 January 1945.

<sup>73</sup> BU, HGARC, AP, b. 174, f. 1, «R. Calabresi», CV, January 1946.

<sup>74</sup> CC, f. «Renata Calabresi», CV, March 1947, to be compared with the previous one of January 1946, and with the CV of January 1960.

<sup>75</sup> BLO, SPSL, MS 343/7-12, f. «Calabresi Renata», unsigned draft, but E. Simpson to R.

Perhaps her personal contacts could help her better.

To «Dear Max» she sent the umpteenth updated version of her CV, a copy of a notice for the competitive examination with her underlining in pencil, and a copy of her application<sup>76</sup>. The United States Civil Service in Washington was offering a variety of clinical psychologist positions in Veteran Administration hospitals and public health service clinics. For the executive level - salary \$4,300 – a PhD in psychology and three years professional experience were required; the work involved the diagnosis and treatment of maladjusted individuals. Ascoli got his secretary to reply to her: he had spoken about Renatas case to some big shots from the Veterans Service Center. As soon as he had news, he would contact her<sup>77</sup>.

The draft copy is from 16 February 1946. But her application seems to have stood still for a long time, despite Ascoli's involvement with the big shot. It was only in December 1948 that the VA asked him for references for her<sup>78</sup>.

And in the meantime? With the Rockland Hospital contract finished in December 1945, she was again unemployed, and she returned to New York, as a guest of her friends, the Milanos.

### **Still a bit too Italian?**

She learned that there had been a psychologist position vacant for some time at the Department of Family and Child Welfare in White Plains, the capital of Westchester County (NY). The Department looked after about a thousand adopted or institutionalized children who suffered from various mental disorders. With regard to Miss Calabresi, the director, Mrs Helen C. Young wished to know something about her general capacity and about her relating to others; she was especially worried that her different cultural

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Calabresi, 9 November 1944.

<sup>76</sup> BU, HGARC, AP, b. 174, f. 1, «R. Calabresi», letter to Ascoli, 4 February [1946] with the Announcement n. 405, 2 October 1945.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibidem*, Ascoli's secretary to Renata Calabresi, 16 February 1946.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibidem*, Issai Hosiosky to Ascoli, 30 December 1948.

background, due to the fact that she was Italian, might affect her work: in a negative sense, even if she did not say it explicitly<sup>79</sup>.

I should very much appreciate your opinion of Miss Calabresi's general ability in her field and in relation to other people. I am particularly anxious to know how much the difference in the cultural background which must have been hers from her years in Italy and ours enters in her work.

She therefore sought references in confidence from the New School, where the Italian young lady had worked. It was Max Ascoli who replied, reassuring her: she could not have made a better choice than Miss Calabresi. «During the years that she has been working in this country, she has succeeded in absorbing completely the methods and orientation of psychology as it is in this country»<sup>80</sup>.

That was what the director wanted to hear, even if the psychologists in the Graduate Faculty, Gestaltists like Wertheimer who had died in 1943, would not have agreed.

Evidently he was convincing, because Renata had the job from February 1946. She worked closely with the Foster Home Division, examining both babies for adoption and children and adolescents<sup>81</sup>.

But even that job did not last.

### **From the revoking of the racial laws to the returns**

The regulations on rehabilitating those persecuted by fascism for political and racial reasons had meanwhile been in existence since January 1944, even though discretion was to the fore in applying it and even in making it known.

«I am pleased to inform you that the decree has been revoked by which at the time you, being affected by the racial laws, were declared to have forfeited the right to the qualification as a university lecturer.

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibidem*, letter from H.C. Young to Graduate Faculty of Political and Social sciences, 21 January 1946.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*, letter from M. Ascoli to H.C. Young, 30 January 1946.

<sup>81</sup> The description of this work is in CC, f. «Renata Calabresi», CV, January 1960.

Yours respectfully»<sup>82</sup>.

In September 1944, the pro-rector of the University of Rome sent this same note to those who had forfeited this right. That for «*sig. prof.ssa*» Renata Calabresi was sent to the address she had left almost six years earlier, before the war. Posting was a bureaucratic performance rather than a real communication with the parties concerned, if no one bothered to reach them.

Even though she did not receive it, she knew of it well enough. There was an emergency decree «for the restoration of civil and political rights to Italian and foreign citizens previously declared of Jewish race». Within one year of its coming into force, those who had been dismissed from service by the provisions of 1938 were restored to office, automatically. Actually, for professors who had emigrated there was a specific clause on Italian citizenship which required them to submit an application<sup>83</sup>. Her brother Massimo, as well as others whom they knew, was preparing it.

But she herself had not lost a professorship or a position, as he had. For eight years, and even earlier, even though she had always published, she had remained just an unpaid voluntary assistant at the university. What could she have asked for? In her discipline, there were only two professorships left in the whole of Italy, in Rome and at the Cattolica in Milan, which was Gemelli's. There were no posts available and the line of applicants had grown over the years.

In late April 1947, however, the ministry announced a national competition for the chair of psychology. The first after seventeen years: it was in Milan, at the State University, and as usual it opened the possibility of two further places for those who came second and third in the rankings. One of the

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<sup>82</sup> ASURSa, FD, AS 1554, f. «Calabresi Renata», G. Caronia, pro-rector of the University of Rome, to R. Calabresi, 26 September 1944.

<sup>83</sup> This is the **RDL n. 25 of 20 January 1944**. See Francesca Pelini, *Appunti per una storia della reintegrazione dei professori universitari perseguitati per motivi razziali*, in Ilaria Pavan, Guri Schwarz (editors), *Gli ebrei in Italia tra persecuzione fascista e reintegrazione postbellica*, Florence, Giuntina, 2001, pp. 113-139.

committee members was Mario Ponzio from Rome, another was Giovanni Calò from Florence, and the indestructible Gemelli. Perhaps Enzo Bonaventura, already second in the contest of 1930, would return to Italy from Palestine? Everyone was wondering, and he did in fact come<sup>84</sup>. Even Renata herself, at that point, perhaps not by chance, decided to come to Italy, which she had left eight years ago. She took a TWA flight from New York to Rome.

She did not apply for that competition; she knew that even Bonaventura was not taking part, and he deserved to win it. She landed in New York on 1 August 1947, with two suitcases and many emotions<sup>85</sup>. She returned to White Plains, 10 Myrtle Street, where she lived for her work in an environment which – unburdening herself to Signora Amelia Rosselli – she considered provincial, «devoid of interest» and intellectually depressing<sup>86</sup>. She could not take it anymore.

After years in the United States, she had still not settled down.

### **Settling down. At nearly 50 years of age**

A few months later, the turning point. Perhaps in December 1947, about two years after she applied, she was appointed to the Veterans Administration Regional Office in Newark. From Manhattan, she was commuting to the brick city in New Jersey.

At the end of 1948, her position was confirmed and that year Dr. Calabresi at last resumed publishing: she presented to an American specialist journal some cases of veterans in therapy at the Mental Hygiene Clinic in Newark,

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<sup>84</sup> On this see P. Guarnieri, Enzo Bonaventura, and Ead., *L'emigrazione degli psicologi ebrei dopo il 1938: «false notizie» e minimizzazioni. Il caso di Enzo Bonaventura*, in Marina Calloni (ed.), *Razza e Istruzione. Le leggi antiebraiche del 1938*, Milan, Università degli studi Milano Bicocca, 2021, pp. 103-116 <<https://drive.google.com>> (accessed 10 June 2021).

<sup>85</sup> The trip is registered at the Ellis Island Foundation, but under Ranata [sic] Calabresi, and so missed it in earlier searches <<https://heritage.statueofliberty.org>> (access by login, 28 November 2020).

<sup>86</sup> ASFi, *Fondo Rosselli, Archivio familiare, Lettere di familiari e conoscenti ad Amelia Rosselli*, R-06124, Renata Calabresi to Amelia Rosselli, 6 July 1946.

and she demonstrated the validity of the Szondi test. In partnership with Theodora Abel she applied Rorschach tests to a hundred inhabitants of Tepoztlán in Mexico; their analyses were found to support the conclusion, in contrast to that of Robert Redfield, that Mexican village culture was highly confrontational, individualistic and non-cooperative. Oscar Lewis's famous book on *Life in a Mexican village*, incorporating their contribution, became a multi-printed and translated classic, though not in Italian.

She practiced privately as a psychotherapist in her beautiful house in Central Park West, where in 1949 her mother Olga, and a few years later her sister Cecilia, joined her. In Newark, «besides the regular duties in the field of psychodiagnosis and psychotherapy, and collaboration in the psychiatric team, [...she carried ] the major responsibility for the organization of the training program for the psychological trainees assigned to the station»<sup>87</sup>. As an expert in diagnostic methods for personality deviations and mental disorders, she continued to lecture at various institutions, including the Postgraduate Center for Psychotherapy in New York. She became a fellow of the Division of Clinical and Abnormal psychology in the APA, a member of the Rorschach Institute, later the Society for Projective Techniques and Rorschach Institute (directed since 1939 by the German Jew Bruno Klopfer); and she also joined the American Board of Examiners in Clinical Psychology. In Italy, it was only in 1968 that a law provided for the presence of psychologists in psychiatric care centres. Yet Italian psychology had established itself precisely because of its psychiatry soul, as those who had been at the school of Francesco De Sarlo well knew. In the 1950s, they realized that in Italy they did not even have clinical psychology, precisely the field in which Renata had retrained in the United States.

### **The Roman postman and the untraceable doctor**

The Ministry of Education in November 1956 asked the University of Rome

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<sup>87</sup> CC, f. «Renata Calabresi», CV, February 1958, and also for the details which follow in the text.

«to be so good as to inform them why Dr. Calabresi does not appear in the lists of *liberi docenti* registered at this university», where she had obtained the qualification in 1935, which had been cancelled in 1939 and restored in 1944<sup>88</sup>. The rector of the university in the capital looked through the papers: at the time the note 2476 of 26 September 1944 on the revoking of the forfeiture of *libera docenza* for racial reasons had been sent to Calabresi, subsequent to note 7634 of 12 June 1939 on the actual decree. Except that the communication of the revoking had never been «delivered to the person concerned because she had moved elsewhere, as is clear from the statement issued by the postman on the envelope»<sup>89</sup>. At the end of September 1944, on the envelope returned to the sender, an anonymous Roman postman had actually noted in pencil: «the doorman says addressee moved elsewhere». In conclusion: «Since 1939 Dr. Calabresi has not provided any news of herself»<sup>90</sup>. Missing for a good seventeen years.

At least they could have asked colleagues at the university about her. Mario Ponzio, president of the Society of Italian Psychology, retired since 1952 but still present at the Roman Institute of Psychology, had even written in a journal that she was working in the United States. Perhaps it would not have been difficult to ascertain, assuming they did not already know, that the alleged absentee was an active member of the American Psychological Association APA, for example. Did anyone have her foreign address? Did no one know that she had relatives and friends in Italy?

Someone from the ministry tried to find out «to which municipality Dr. Calabresi had moved». In January 1957, they asked the mayor of Florence, in February the mayor of Rome. Not a thing, no one knew how to track her

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<sup>88</sup> ASURSa, FD, AS 1554, f. «Calabresi Renata», MPI, DGIS, to the rector of Rome, 26 November 1956.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibidem*, the rector of the University of Rome, draft to MPI, DGIS, 5 December 1956, in the same file the envelope with the postman's note; and the reply of MPI, DGIS to the rector, 17 December 1956.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibidem*, the rector of the University of Rome, draft to MPI, DGIS, 5 December 1956, in reply to the note from the MPI, DGIS to the rector, 26 November 1956.

down<sup>91</sup>. In a note dated 17 December 1956, Minister Paolo Rossi thanked the rector for what he had done regarding the untraceable Calabresi.

And with this, the case of the *libera docente*, reopened twelve years after the cancellation of the 1939 decree against the Jews, was quickly closed.

### **A rector to be chased**

Rome, 10 January 1957, on stamped paper to the Rector Magnificus, «the undersigned, Renata Calabresi, requests a certificate stating that on 28 February 1935 she qualified as a lecturer in psychology»<sup>92</sup>. The next day the certificate was well and truly ready, with rector Papis signature.

In May 1957, from the ministry that had just passed to Aldo Moro, someone resumed the correspondence and invited Papi to have the Faculty examine the position of the *libera docente* who should have been reconfirmed. The rector repeated the familiar reply, his and the postman's. This time, however, he had to admit: «it would appear that Dr. Calabresi [...] emigrated to America, where she is currently living»<sup>93</sup>. The minister for Public Education replied that «if you were in a position to make known at least to which state in America she has emigrated» the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would have been concerned to trace her current address.

Days went by and «...despite the most careful enquiries it has not been possible to trace the relatives of Dr. Calabresi [...], therefore this university cannot specify to which state of America the aforementioned teacher emigrated»<sup>94</sup>. The case was unsolvable, therefore resolved, according to the rector.

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<sup>91</sup> ACS, MPI, DGIS, *Liberi docenti*, s. III, 1930-1950, b. 85, f. «Calabresi Renata», MPI, DGIS, to the mayor of Rome, 15 February 1957, quoting the previous note to the mayor of Florence, 16 January 1957, and his reply, 19 January 1957. In the file also the letters and drafts of the correspondence with the rector of Rome.

<sup>92</sup> ASURSa, FD, AS 1554, f. «Calabresi Renata», request for Renata Calabresi (signature illegible) to the rector, 10 January 1957, and certificate from the rector, 11 January 1957.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*, MPI, DGIS to the rector of Rome, 15 July 1957, and the rector's reply to the MPI, DGIS, 8 August 1957.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibidem*, MPI, DGIS to the rector of Rome, 28 August 1957, and his final reply, 18 September 1957.



It must be said that rector Papi had no great sensitivity for those «persecuted for political, anti-fascist and racial reasons», nor for others whom he should have protected. He was a professor of political economy, appointed in 1938-39 to the University of Rome, where his discipline had been almost destroyed by racial laws<sup>95</sup>. He remained at the helm of the university for fully thirteen years. In 1966, following incidents caused in the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy by a group of neo-fascist thugs, a 19-year-old student was killed – Paolo Rossi, a Catholic, a member of the Socialist Youth. The University was peacefully occupied by students and some academics; in a letter to the President of the Republic, they charged that in the university city:

a tiny minority of thugs, who have made their own the symbols of Nazism, SS, Fascism and extermination camps, can attack with impunity students and professors who do not share methods and ideas belonging to the most shameful past, and condemned by the laws of all civilized countries<sup>96</sup>.

In May 1966 rector Papi finally resigned.

The affair had considerable resonance in the press and in protest movements in many Italian universities. Probably Renata Calabresi also came to hear of it.

She retired in 1969: the year Phil Roth of Newark published *Portnoy's Complaint*. She was seventy. At the age of ninety-six Renata Calabresi passed away, in New Haven, where the rest of her family were.

### Major publications

- *La determinazione del presente psichico*, «Rivista di filosofia», 14, 1923, pp. 253-257.
- *La durata del presente psichico*, in AA. VV., *Atti del IV Congresso nazionale di Psicologia*, Florence, Bandetti, 1925.

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<sup>95</sup> Gabriella Gioli, *Papi, Giuseppe Ugo*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 81, Rome, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia italiana, 2014 <<https://www.treccani.it>> (accessed 4 February 2021), where it is not specified whether Papi replaced some dismissed professor.

<sup>96</sup> Guido Crainz, *Il paese mancato. Dal miracolo economico agli anni Ottanta*, Rome, Donzelli, 2003, pp. 213-215; Eugenio Scalfari, *Un crisantemo sul letamaio*, «L'Espresso», 8 May 1966.

- *La determinazione del presente psichico*, Florence, R. Bemporad & Figlio, 1930.
- *La percezione tattilo-cinetica delle grandezze e delle forme negli adulti e nei fanciulli normali e anormali*, «Rivista di scienze applicate all'educazione fisica e giovanile», 2, 1931, pp. 3-37.
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- *Contributo allo studio della illusione di Poggendorff nella percezione tattilocinetica*, in AA. VV., *Scritti di psicologia in onore di Federico Kiesow*, Turin, Anfossi, 1933.
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- With Theodora M. Abel, *The People as Seen from Their Rorschach Tests*, in Oscar Lewis, *Life in a Mexican Village: Tepoztlán Restudied*, Urbana (IL), The University of Illinois Press, 1951, pp. 306-318.
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