

Benedetta Luciana Sara Carnaghi

## Betraying Your Own

### Jewish Spies and the Deportation of Jews during the Second World War

#### Abstract

This article shows how the Fascist and the Nazi regimes orchestrated their repression proactively. They took advantage of Jewish informers who betrayed their own people, with traumatic consequences for their individual and their community's sense of identity. No spies were needed to arrest Jewish people under normal circumstances, but spies were essential for finding Jews who had gone into hiding in large cities. This article, based on previous research, court trials of convicted spies, and other archival and documentary material, illustrates this system of repression with cases in Austria, Germany, and Italy.

In his study of the genocide of Italian Jews, Simon Levis Sullam devoted one chapter to the informers.<sup>1</sup> He described their deeds as one of the most perverse consequences of “the encounter – and the clash – between executioners and victims [...] which pits even victims against each other”.<sup>2</sup> If it is true that the Italian, German, and Austrian populations were often complicit in Fascist and Nazi repression, it is important to show that the Fascist and Nazi regimes had orchestrated this repression proactively. A historical argument that overemphasises the popular nature of the dictatorships is dangerous inasmuch as it minimises the Fascist and Nazi regimes' responsibility for the terror they perpetrated. Instead, one must understand that the Fascists and Nazis adapted their repression to instrumentalise human frailty: Their spies and confidential informers often numbered among the individuals they persecuted. The Nazi logic was to recruit spies who already belonged to the social environment they were tasked with infiltrating. It was the most efficient way of proceeding: Blackmailing and forcing enemies to turn on their own people. The Nazis extended this system to all the countries they occupied.

In Nazi Germany, and later in the rest of Nazi-occupied Europe, it took little to arrest a Jewish person. An anonymous denunciation for a seemingly superficial matter was more than enough. However, if informants were usually not necessary to arrest Jews under normal circumstances, “there was an important exception: the search for Jews who had gone into hiding, attempting to avoid deportation”.<sup>3</sup> In large cities such as Berlin and Vienna, the Nazis “took advantage of the Jews' extremely desperate situation”, forcing them to spy on other Jews by promising them preferential treatment – essentially that they would not be deported.<sup>4</sup> Something similar happened in Italy. It is true, as Levis Sullam underlined, that most informers were “non-Jewish Italians who grasped at the chance to make money, exact revenge, or

1 Simon Levis Sullam, *The Italian Executioners. The Genocide of the Jews of Italy*, Princeton 2018, 118-130.

2 *Ibid.*, 118.

3 Carsten Dams/Michael Stolle, *The Gestapo. Power and Terror in the Third Reich*, Oxford 2014, 69.

4 *Ibid.*, 69.

remove an obstacle in their professional or personal sphere”<sup>5</sup> However, Jewish spies turned out to be particularly useful to the Nazis when they occupied Rome in 1943. The current historiography is largely limited to national perspectives. I here adopt a more transnational approach, which reveals how taking advantage of spies and informers among the targeted population was constitutive of the larger Fascist and Nazi policies of repression.

The sources – mostly records of court trials of convicted informers and the related press coverage – leave little space for the defendants’ voices, so it is somewhat difficult to give an unbiased depiction of their motivations. Dominick LaCapra has shown that it is also difficult to narrate traumatic events that “pose challenges to both reconstruction or representation and dialogic exchange”.<sup>6</sup> Historians have adopted contrasting approaches in the past, either removing the victims from their narrative or identifying with them completely. If Raul Hilberg in his 1961 magnum opus *The Destruction of the European Jews* “tended not to employ the testimony of victims and based his study largely on documents left by perpetrators”, then Daniel Jonah Goldhagen “instantiated the possibility of extreme identification with Jewish victims [...] accompanied by an inability to employ evidence to test rather than simply illustrate extremely questionable hypotheses and assumptions”.<sup>7</sup> Here, the issue is further complicated by the fact that in the case of Jewish informers, the line between victims and perpetrators is blurred. The informers exist in a grey zone to which the usual “grid linking together perpetrator, victim, equivocal perpetrator-victim, collaborator, bystander, rescuer, and so forth” is difficult to apply.<sup>8</sup> This is why I, unlike many historians, believe that narrative history might help to render the specificity of the individual circumstances of the cases treated here, where the details matter. Such an approach also takes into account the newest research on perpetrators, notably that included in Frank Bajohr and Andrea Löw’s edited volume *Der Holocaust. Ergebnisse und neue Fragen der Forschung*.<sup>9</sup> In his contribution,<sup>10</sup> Bajohr praised the micro-analytical focus on perpetrators and their networks for changing our understanding of how the Holocaust was implemented, but also stated that separating perpetrators from Nazi German society at large is difficult, as is coming up with a strict definition of who qualifies as a perpetrator and who does not. Bajohr cautioned against relying too much on the perpetrators’ personal motivations and biographical specificities, suggesting that researchers combine these insights with structural and institutional analyses.<sup>11</sup> This is what my research ultimately aspires to do.

I am aware of my sources’ biases and subjectivity. For instance, the examples I chose for the German and Italian cases also represent tropes with a long history – the beautiful, treacherous female spy – figures that elicited such a strong fascination that they ended up dominating the public interest and imaginary, while the many more male informants and the Fascist and Nazi officers for whom they worked were relegated to the sideline. I nevertheless chose to focus on these cases because the very rich, and still largely unexplored, archival material that they produced allows me to better examine the intersection of threatened repression that the informers suffered

5 Levis Sullam, *The Italian Executioners*, 125.

6 Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Baltimore 2014, 127.

7 *Ibid.*, 135.

8 *Ibid.*, 24. The concept of a “grey zone” was originally developed by Primo Levi, *I Sommersi e i Salvati* [The Drowned and the Saved], Turin 1986.

9 Frank Bajohr/Andrea Löw (ed.), *Der Holocaust. Ergebnisse und neue Fragen der Forschung*, Frankfurt am Main 2015.

10 Frank Bajohr, *Täterforschung. Ertrag, Probleme und Perspektiven eines Forschungsansatzes*, in: *ibid.*, 170.

11 *Ibid.*, 181.

and the voluntary collaboration that they offered. The only full-length biography that exists of Stella Kübler-Isaaksohn was written by her classmate, the Jewish journalist Peter Wyden, who was not shy about his infatuation with her: “why was she willing to agree to this Faustian pact with Hitler? I had always wanted to find an explanation for the secret of this beauty, whom I had once worshipped.”<sup>12</sup> The information provided in the biography, therefore, needs to be tested against the often biased depiction of the character. Doris Tausendfreund devoted a few pages to Stella and her second husband, Rolf Isaaksohn, in her analysis of the Berlin circle of Jewish spies.<sup>13</sup> As for Celeste Di Porto, no full-length biography exists. Her case is discussed in Amedeo Osti Guerrazzi’s *Caino A Roma*,<sup>14</sup> Anna Foa’s *Portico d’Ottavia 13*,<sup>15</sup> and Simon Levis Sullam’s *The Italian Executioners*,<sup>16</sup> but only in the context of the Holocaust in Rome. I will read Di Porto’s case in comparison to others, once again to highlight a larger pattern in the Fascist and Nazi police forces’ use of Jewish informers during the Second World War.

### From Unreliable Informers to Second-Rate Spies

Historians of the Gestapo in Vienna described how its Intelligence Department (*Nachrichtenreferat*) created a specific “requirement profile” which, depending on the activity or task to be undertaken, called for *Vertrauensmänner* (confidants; also known as V-men) who belonged to the social environment or milieu that they were ordered to infiltrate<sup>17</sup> – a requirement that forced them to betray their peers. The Gestapo leadership prioritised the surveillance and dismantling of resistance groups; emphasis was given to the so-called *Gegnerbekämpfung*, the fight against the enemies.

Between 1938 and 1945, 400 to 600 spies worked for the Gestapo in Vienna.<sup>18</sup> It is difficult to find traces of them in the Austrian archives, however, because V-men were not allowed to testify against their victims in court; the Gestapo only provided written evidence to the courts lest their informers be “burned”.<sup>19</sup> Also, after the bombing of the Vienna Gestapo headquarters on the Morzinplatz at the end of the war, the Gestapo still managed to destroy almost all their records by burning them in the building’s boilers and then in the atrium of the building in Riemergasse 7.<sup>20</sup>

Among these spies were a few Jews. Jewish spies were certainly instrumental, but not essential, in the persecution of Jews. Right after the ‘Anschluß’ in March 1938, an antisemitic wave began.<sup>21</sup> During the course of the war, Jews were arrested by the Gestapo for minor offences such as not wearing the yellow star and were easily de-

12 Peter Wyden, *Stella*, New York 1992, 17.

13 Doris Tausendfreund, *Erzwingener Verrat. Jüdische “Greifer” im Dienste der Gestapo 1943–1945*, Berlin 2006.

14 Amedeo Osti Guerrazzi, *Caino a Roma. I Complici Romani della Shoah* [Cain In Rome. The Roman Accomplices of the Shoah], Rome 2005.

15 Anna Foa, *Portico d’Ottavia 13. Una casa del ghetto nel lungo inverno del ‘43* [Portico d’Ottavia 13. A House in the Ghetto in the Long Winter of 1943], Rome/Bari 2016.

16 Levis Sullam, *The Italian Executioners*.

17 See for example: Franz Weisz, *Die V-Männer Der Gestapoleitstelle Wien. Organisation, Personalstruktur, Arbeitsweise*, in *Zeitgeschichte* 6/40 (2013), 338-357; Hans Schafranek, *Widerstand und Verrat. Gestapospitzen im antifaschistischen Untergrund 1938–1945*, Vienna 2017; Elisabeth Boeckl-Klamper/Thomas Mang/Wolfgang Neugebauer, *Gestapo-Leitstelle Wien 1938–1945*, Vienna 2018.

18 Boeckl-Klamper/Mang/Neugebauer, *Gestapo-Leitstelle Wien*, 190.

19 *Ibid.*, 191.

20 *Ibid.*, 191.

21 See section: “Denunziation als Todesurteil” in Boeckl-Klamper/Mang/Neugebauer, *Gestapo-Leitstelle Wien*, 211-214.

ported. In most cases, the denunciation of Jewish people led to their deaths.<sup>22</sup> However, it is nevertheless important to look at Jewish spies in the Viennese case. As Doron Rabinovici explained in *Eichmann's Jews*, it was in Vienna that Adolf Eichmann developed and tested his model for a Nazi Jewish policy from 1938 onwards, a policy which included incorporating the Jewish community into the Nazi machinery of destruction.<sup>23</sup>

Jewish spies were not listed among the V-men. They were considered second-rate spies: They had no special status and were not formally hired by the Gestapo. They received temporary protection for only as long as the Gestapo needed their services. They worked under Gestapo official Johann Rixinger,<sup>24</sup> head of Department II B (from 1942 called IV B) and a key figure in the persecution of Jews in Vienna.<sup>25</sup> They helped identify refugee aid organisations and illegal economic transactions, and were active in the detainment camps, seeking information from detainees under a variety of assurances and pretexts. These informers' names were not usually disclosed to the Intelligence Department (*Nachrichtenreferat*) of the Gestapo in Vienna. It was also not necessary to pay them: The Gestapo paid them only with supposed 'protection'.<sup>26</sup>

The best known of these Jewish spies was Rudolf Klinger (1889–1943).<sup>27</sup> Klinger stalked the mass transit camp in Kleine Sperlasse 2a, gaining the confidence of the Jewish prisoners and obtaining information from them that he then passed on to the Gestapo. He consistently operated by telling prisoners that if they divulged where they had hidden their possessions, he would rescue the items. He also led the inmates to believe that deportation could be avoided if they were willing to pay.<sup>28</sup> He followed this pattern with several victims, including Walter Lackenbacher and Othmar Bauer.<sup>29</sup>

Klinger also encountered the antifascist group led by Ella and Kurt Lingens and Karl Motesiczky and facilitated their arrest on 13 October 1942. They trusted Klinger when he offered to help Motesiczky's uncle, the banker Johann Lieben, escape to Hungary.<sup>30</sup> The Lingens were in close contact with the Polish resistance network through a person named Jurkowski. He had asked Ella if she had any contacts who would help a group of Polish Jews escape. So the Lingens sent members of the Polish resistance to meet Lieben and Klinger. Klinger promised to obtain fake passports for the Poles who wanted to flee. As the first Polish people arrived in Vienna, they were arrested: Klinger had denounced them to the Gestapo.<sup>31</sup>

22 Ibid.

23 Doron Rabinovici, *Eichmann's Jews. The Jewish Administration of Holocaust Vienna, 1938–1945*, Cambridge 2014.

24 See also: Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv (WStLA), Volksgericht, A1 – Vg Vr-Strafakten, Vg Vr 1866/46, Criminal Procedure against Johann Rixinger.

25 Rabinovici, *Eichmann's Jews*, 18. "Johann Rixinger, the Gestapo clerk responsible for Jewish affairs in Vienna, who had had enormous decision-making powers during the deportations and was implicated in the organisation of the mass murder, was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. He served only six and a half years".

26 Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat*, 252–253.

27 See: Rudolf Klinger's index card in Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstands (DÖW), 15062/05, Index Cards in Alphabetical Order from Innsbruck's Landesgericht or Regional Criminal Court about the Political Prisoners with Information on Prisons, 1945–1948.

28 Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat*, 252–253.

29 See the documents of the trial of Gestapo official Karl Zeitelberger (secretary of the criminal police) in DÖW, 19841, Criminal Case of Vienna's Landesgericht or Regional Criminal Court as People's Court versus Karl Zeitelberger (Gestapo Vienna), especially folders 5, 11, and 20. Klinger found where Othmar Bauer had hidden his gold and money and disclosed the location to the Gestapo. Bauer was arrested and beaten by Zeitelberger and two other Gestapo officers, Koch and Poscher from the Judenpolizei. The sub-lessor Anna Schmidt witnessed the beating.

30 See: Ella Lingens's statement in DÖW, 7245/b, Report on Karl Motesitzky about His Help for Jews.

31 DÖW, 7245/b, Report on Karl Motesitzky.

Other Jewish victims of Klinger included Alfred Freisinger along with his wife Hermione. Freisinger had been imprisoned in Dachau in 1938 for his work on behalf of the Social Democratic Party. After his return, he became politically active again, distributing an illegal workers' newspaper and giving foreign radio reports. In the course of this work, he met Klinger, who gained his trust before having him arrested by the Gestapo and returned to Dachau. Freisinger survived the Holocaust.<sup>32</sup> Klinger frequently invited Freisinger and his wife to his parties – social gatherings were one of the standard tricks he used to get close to his victims, as Otto Himmler, another of Klinger's victims, recounted in a letter on 7 July 1948. Also invited to Klinger's parties, Himmler was deported to Auschwitz with his wife. He survived, but his wife died there.<sup>33</sup>

The archival documents make it somewhat easy to list Klinger's crimes. But how are we to evaluate his ethical responsibility? Did he have alternatives? For example, could he have tried to escape, before resorting to cooperating with the Gestapo? The answer lies in the archives – specifically those of the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde, the representative body of the Viennese Jewish community, to whom Jews had to address their *Auswanderungsfragebögen* or "emigration questionnaires". The answer is yes: Among these *Auswanderungsfragebögen* there is one from Rudolf and Emma Klinger, his wife.<sup>34</sup> It is easy to deduce what happened next: emigration was not a real possibility. Rabinovici explained that the Kultusgemeinde was actually central to Eichmann's plans: After Austria's annexation to the Third Reich, the Nazis initially closed it down, but Eichmann "reopened the Kultusgemeinde office so that the Jewish administration could expedite persecution" and announce countless discriminatory laws against Jews.<sup>35</sup> If Jewish functionaries had initially entertained the hope that working there would allow them to help other Jews emigrate, they were wrong. Eichmann reorganised the office according to the 'Führer principle': "It was no longer an elected body representing the community but the implementing instrument of the state authority. Löwenherz assumed all rights and obligations that had previously been exercised by various committees."<sup>36</sup> Josef Löwenherz – a Jewish functionary who had been arrested and whom Eichmann had released from prison – was forced to be Eichmann's puppet, ultimately compiling the lists of the Jews to deport together with the apparatus of the Kultusgemeinde.

Klinger was not the only Jewish man whose recourse was to work for the Gestapo in Vienna. The legal consultant Dr Michael Stern (1897–1989) was also tasked with researching property hidden by other Jews, tracking down their illegal transactions, and even investigating what happened in the Vienna Archbishop's Office.<sup>37</sup> Stern's witness statement is contained in the Gestapo clerk Johann Rixinger's post-war court proceedings.<sup>38</sup> Stern said he had known Rixinger personally since the end of 1942.<sup>39</sup> Apparently, it was through the mediation of a certain Erich Führer, another Viennese lawyer and a friend of the head of the Gestapo headquarters in Vienna, that

32 See the appeal against the revocation of the official certificate of Alfred Freisinger, dated 9 August 1949, in: DÖW, 18053, Alfred Freisinger's Applications for the Official Certificate, 14 October 1946.

33 See the letter from Otto Himmler, dated 7 July 1948, in: DÖW, 18053, Alfred Freisinger's Applications for the Official Certificate, 14 October 1946.

34 Israelitische Kultusgemeinde (IKG), A/W 2590, 116, Dossier 12017, Rudolf & Emma Klinger's Emigration Questionnaires, 29 May 1939.

35 Rabinovici, *Eichmann's Jews*, 75.

36 *Ibid.*, 75.

37 Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat*, 255–256.

38 WStLA, Volksgericht, A1 – Vg Vr-Strafakten, Vg Vr 1866/46, see: Zeugenvernehmung, dated 5 April 1946, on p. 147 of the Criminal Procedure against Johann Rixinger.

39 *Ibid.*: "Ich kenne den Kommissar Rixinger persönlich seit Ende 1942."

Stern was granted permission to “intervene on behalf of the Jews in the Jewish section”, as he put it.<sup>40</sup> In the rest of the statement, Stern appeared to be defending Rixinger, arguing that even if the “traffic with the Jews – especially traffic that involved the Kultusgemeinde – was his responsibility”, Rixinger delayed deportations. Stern attributed “the decision-making power in the negative sense” (by which he meant “actual deportation or the instruction to forward the application for admission to a concentration camp”) to the head of the Jewish department, SS-Sturmbannführer Hans Dörhage. He also claimed that towards the end of the war, Rixinger became even more hesitant to let the deportations continue, “sabotaging” the deportation of 500 non-Jewish spouses and ‘mixed’ children to Styria.<sup>41</sup>

Stern – who was probably more resourceful and better connected than any other Jew who spied for the Gestapo – was lucky to survive. The archives of the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI) contain a curious exchange between Simon Wiesenthal and a woman claiming to be Stern’s girlfriend, Heidi Bauernhauser. She wrote several letters to Wiesenthal trying to convince him that Stern was not a friend of the Gestapo.<sup>42</sup> Her letters suggest that she was emotionally unstable, making it difficult to evaluate the credibility of her claims. Stern thus remains an ambiguous figure. The file in the VWI archives also contains an article about Erich Führer, which calls him “the main organiser of the Nazi money transfer to Switzerland”.<sup>43</sup> The journalist who wrote the article mentioned in passing that “even under Hitler, Führer was a close friend and patron of the legendary Michael Stern, the future doyen of the lawyers of Vienna”.<sup>44</sup> By contrast, the Austrian newspaper *Kurier* depicted Stern in more favourable terms:<sup>45</sup>

“The brilliant lawyer Dr Michael Stern, famous for his strong pleas as a defence lawyer, was one of thirty Jewish lawyers who were allowed to represent ‘non-Aryan clients’ in Vienna between 1938 and 1945 as ‘legal consultants’. Stern owed this to his non-Jewish wife Edith, who refused to divorce him and thus protected him from certain persecution by the Nazis. As a baptised Jew, he had to wear the Jewish star like his clients.”<sup>46</sup>

40 Ibid.: “Durch Vermittlung Dris. Erich Führer, der ein Studienkollege von mir und ein Du-Freund des damaligen Leiters der Gestapo, Leitstelle Wien war, wurde mir Ende 1942 die Erlaubnis erteilt, für Juden in der Judenabteilung intervenieren zu dürfen”.

41 Ibid.: “Nur der Antrag auf Einweisung in ein Konzentrationslager gingen von Wien aus. Aber auch diesbezüglich hatte, soweit ich beurteilen konnte, das Entscheidungsrecht im negativen Sinne, [das heißt] tatsächliche Verschickung, bzw. Weisung, den Antrag auf Einweisung in ein Konzentrationslager weiterzuleiten, der Leiter der Judenabteilung, Kriminalrat Dö[r]hage. Nur wenn Rixinger Bedenken hatte oder den Antrag auf Einweisung in ein Konzentrationslager aus anderen Gründen schon, wenn möglich, beim Sachbearbeiter verhindern wollte, intervenierte Rixinger in einen oder anderen Fall direkt mit Umgehung seiner direkten Vorgesetzten bei Oberregierungsrat Dr. Ebner, dem Leiterstellvertreter der Gestapo, Leitstelle Wien, früherem Abteilungsleiter der Judenabteilung, der schon Jahre früher bei einem Bezirkskommissariat in Wien mit Rixinger zusammen gearbeitet haben soll und ihm daher offenbar freundschaftlich verbunden war. Gegen Ende des Krieges wurde Rixinger, wenn ich so sagen kann, retardierende Haltung immer schärfer. Er hat zuletzt den Abtransport von circa 500 jüdischen Versippten und Mischlingen in die Steiermark, welche von Berlin befohlen war, durch seine Kommissionierung sabotiert und die Verschickung, die noch Anfang 1940 hätte stattfinden sollen, verhindert”.

42 Archive of the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI), Michael Stern’s file, 1965.

43 Robert Buchacher, Nazi- und Judenfreund, in: Profil, 17 March 1997, 73, in VWI, Michael Stern’s file: “Ein US-Geheimdokument bezeichnet den Wiener Rechtsanwalt Erich Führer als ‘Hauptorganisator’ des Nazi-Geldtransfers in die Schweiz.”

44 Ibid., 75: “Erich Führer war schon unter Hitler ein enger Freund und Schutzherr des legendären Michael Stern, des späteren Doyens der Wiener Rechtsanwälte.”

45 Margaretha Kopeinig, Starnwalt Stern und die Nazi-Justiz, in: Kurier, <https://kurier.at/politik/inland/starnwalt-stern-und-die-nazi-justiz/35.032.404> (27 October 2019).

46 Ibid.: “Der brillante Rechtsanwalt Dr. Michael Stern, berühmt für seine starken Plädoyers als Strafverteidiger, war einer von dreißig jüdischen Advokaten, die zwischen 1938 und 1945 als ‘Rechtskonsulenten’ in Wien ‘nichtarische Klienten’ vertreten durften. Stern verdankte dies seiner nichtjüdischen Frau Edith, die sich

The article cites correspondence taken from the files of Stern's law firm (dissolved in 1999) and studied by the historian and journalist Peter Malina. The *Kurier* also noted that the material was used for an ORF (Austrian national broadcasting network) documentary directed by Karo Wolm and Malina, who researched whether any Shoah survivors had been among Stern's clients. Malina found evidence that Stern used his Gestapo contacts to help his clients, but he could not determine whether Stern was a Gestapo informer.<sup>47</sup> Stern was rarely successful in protecting his Jewish clients: "More than 400 of his clients fell victim to the Shoah."<sup>48</sup>

For most Jewish informers, the supposed 'protection' of the Gestapo did not last and they were eventually deported. For the Nazis, they were useless as 'informers' after a certain period of time – specifically when they lost the opportunity to access confidential information within the targeted group of Jews. If they became reluctant to provide valuable intelligence, the Gestapo immediately disposed of them. Even the ever-zealous informant Rudolf Klinger was deported to Auschwitz, where he arrived on 7 October 1943.<sup>49</sup>

### The 'Graspers' and the 'Blonde Poison': Stella Kübler-Isaaksohn

In Berlin, the Nazis recruited some Jewish people to catch other members of their community. According to Carsten Dams and Michael Stolle, "in Berlin twenty-nine so-called Jewish 'Graspers' (*Greifer*) took up the offer and hoped through this 'forced betrayal' to improve their situation and that of their relatives – often, however, in vain."<sup>50</sup>

After the 'Factory Operation' (*Fabrikaktion*) of 27 February 1943, the roundup of the last Jews to be deported from Berlin, the Nazis considered Berlin *judenrein* ('clean of Jews').<sup>51</sup> And yet, there were still "between 5,000 and 7,000 Jews" who had "eluded arrest."<sup>52</sup> To track them down, the Nazis created a specific 'Manhunt Commission' (*Fahndungsdienst*), which was composed of Jewish spies.<sup>53</sup> Dams and Stolle noted that they took inspiration from Vienna, where this system had been first put in place: "In Vienna the Central Agency for Jewish Emigration had already created a 'Special Commission' with "unearthers' (*Ausheber*) or 'grabbers' (*Packer*) [who] were deployed to search for and apprehend so-called 'illegal Jews'."<sup>54</sup> In 1942, when the head of this department, Alois Brunner, was transferred to Berlin, he also imported this model of operation. The Manhunt Commission was initially housed in the transit camp for deportations on Große Hamburger Straße, directed by Walter Dobberke.

Of Dobberke's graspers, the best-known is a woman: Stella Kübler-Isaaksohn, born Goldschlag (1922–1994).<sup>55</sup> Together with her second husband, Rolf Isaaksohn,

weigerte, sich von ihm scheiden zu lassen und ihn damit vor der sicheren Verfolgung durch die Nazis schützt. Als getaufter Jude musste er Judenstern genauso tragen wie seine Klienten".

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid.: "Mehr als 400 seiner Mandanten wurden Opfer der Schoah."

49 WStLA, Volksgericht, A1 – Vg Vr-Strafakten, Criminal Procedure against Johann Rixinger, 40, "Niederschrift", 1 December 1945. In the paragraph about Rixinger's V-men, it is confirmed that Klinger was killed.

50 Dams/Stolle, *The Gestapo*, 69.

51 Ibid., 70.

52 Ibid., 70.

53 Ibid., 40; Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat*, chapter 2.

54 Dams/Stolle, *The Gestapo*, 70.

55 See: Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde (BArch), DO/1/4060, Isaaksohn Born Goldschlag, Stella-Ingrid, Lebenslauf.

she helped the Gestapo arrest Jewish men and women in hiding.<sup>56</sup> Peter Wyden based his biography of her on his own recollections and on a wide range of interviews. As mentioned above, the author's bias and male gaze should be taken into account when assessing his biography. He described Stella as "the school's Marilyn Monroe: tall, slim, leggy, cool, with light blue eyes, teeth out of a toothpaste ad, and pale satin skin".<sup>57</sup> He portrayed her as a living, untouchable Venus.<sup>58</sup>

However, her beauty could not change her Jewish origins. In 1935, the new Nazi laws "compelled her to leave her public high school and enrol in the private Jewish school of Dr. Leonore Goldschmidt at the Roseneck in the exclusive Grunewald section", the school that Wyden attended.<sup>59</sup>

Wyden depicted her as a popular girl, living a comfortable life. Things abruptly changed after the November Pogrom, when Jewish-owned stores, buildings, and synagogues were smashed by the SA. On that day, Stella was sent home early from school only to find out that her father was in hiding as Jewish males were being rounded up. Unlike Wyden's richer family, however, Stella's family was not able to escape Berlin.<sup>60</sup>

On 23 October 1942, Stella married the Jewish Manfred Kübler, who was the leader of a small jazz band in which Stella sang.<sup>61</sup> Stella was forced to work in a factory as an 'armament Jew', where she started seeing many Jews being taken away to concentration camps. On 27 February 1943, the day of another roundup, she and her mother narrowly escaped being among the arrested Jews. They were saved by the colour of their hair: "Both were blondes, and Nazis still believed that Jews could not be blond."<sup>62</sup> Stella's husband was not so lucky. He was arrested at his workplace, the company Wilhelm Banhaf in Pankow, and deported to Auschwitz with the 33<sup>rd</sup> transport of 3 March 1943.<sup>63</sup>

That was how Stella became one of the 18,300 Jews still hiding in Berlin – the people she later betrayed.<sup>64</sup> From that moment on, she was hustling. She met Rolf Isaaksohn, her second husband, in the late spring of 1943 "in the queue of a delicatessen shop on Olivaer Platz".<sup>65</sup> Guenther Rogoff, a long-time admirer of Stella's, had forged a police identification card for her. Isaaksohn was also a good forger: "for Stella he manufactured several additional documents to supplement those made for her by Rogoff."<sup>66</sup> But life in hiding was boring, so on 2 July 1943, Stella, Rolf, and Rolf's cousin Dorothy decided to go out in public to their favourite place, Café Bollenmüller on Mittelstrasse. Gestapo agents burst in and arrested Stella after her acquaintance Inge Lustig came in and waved at her. Lustig was already a *Greifer*.

The Gestapo policemen searched Stella's papers and recognised Rogoff's handiwork. Stella was beaten so she would turn her friend in, although she did not actually know where Rogoff was. She eventually managed to escape, after complaining that she had a toothache and had to get dental treatment, but was arrested again twelve

56 BAArch, R/58/9684, Isaaksohn, Rolf Israel; Archiv der Bundesbeauftragten für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (BStU), MfS-HA IX/11, Box PA 3472, Band 6, Stella Kübler-Isaaksohn's Interrogation Protocol.

57 Wyden, Stella, 15.

58 Ibid., 15.

59 Ibid., 25.

60 Ibid., 80.

61 Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat*, 143.

62 Wyden, Stella, 110.

63 Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat*, 143.

64 Wyden, Stella, 130.

65 Ibid., 139.

66 Ibid., 140.



hours later along with her parents, who were immediately “taken to the already infamous Grosse Hamburger Strasse” – the first step in the deportation to Auschwitz.<sup>67</sup>

At this point, it is easy to understand why the offer of the job as a ‘catcher’ became very appealing to Stella. Manipulated by Dobberke and “his more refined and better educated deputy, SS *Rottenführer* Felix Lachmuth” and “[s]oftened up by her beatings, Stella was a willing recruit who would join the staff and was to be treated like an employee”.<sup>68</sup> Her transformation into the ‘blonde poison’ (*das blonde Gift*) or ‘the terror from the Kurfürstendamm’ (*der Schrecken vom Kurfürstendamm*), as she was later called, was complete.<sup>69</sup> It is hard to determine precisely how many Jews were arrested because of her initiative, but it was probably more than one hundred.<sup>70</sup> However, even her zealotry did not pay off. After about seven months as a *Greiferin*, the Nazis informed Stella that her parents’ deportation could not be delayed any longer. On 23 February 1944, they were deported to Theresienstadt. In autumn 1944, they were deported onwards to Auschwitz.<sup>71</sup> Yet Stella continued to work for the Nazis and to deliver fellow Jews to their executioners. Wyden wrote that her husband Rolf pushed her to continue her job as a catcher, but their marriage slowly dissolved. Rolf also had a plan for when the war was over and “the recriminations” would follow: “he had accumulated plenty of money and had his private getaway plan. Stella had no place in it.”<sup>72</sup>

Stella continued to work for the Gestapo until the end, even though she was aware that she risked execution after the war for her actions. In February 1945, she discovered she was pregnant by one of her lovers, Heinz (Heino) Meissl, but the latter wanted nothing to do with her or the child. On 7 October 1945, while hiding in Liebenwalde, Stella gave birth to a daughter, Yvonne Meissl.<sup>73</sup> In March 1946, Stella was arrested and the baby was seized by the police, taken to a hospital, and handed off to a nurse, Alice Safristein. Yvonne, who later became a frontline nurse in Israel, “survived her first ten years through the kindness of strangers”.<sup>74</sup>

As for Stella, she was handed over to the Soviet authorities. She stood trial, her victims who had survived the deportation came forward,<sup>75</sup> and on 31 May 1946, she was “sentenced to serve ten years at hard labour in Soviet camps”.<sup>76</sup> Until 17 July 1948, she was held in the Torgau detention centre and on 3 February 1950, she was transferred to NKVD special camp Nr. 7 situated in the former concentration camp of Sachsenhausen. Subsequently, she was transferred from Soviet custody to the East German penal system and imprisoned in the Hoheneck penitentiary and later in the Waldheim detention centre. After almost ten years of imprisonment, she was released on 23 January 1956. During her detention, she had contracted tuberculosis.<sup>77</sup>

Shortly after Stella’s return to West Berlin, the Jewish community pursued a new criminal case against her. The atmosphere was heated. One newspaper reported that

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>68</sup> Wyden, Stella, 153. Stella spoke about her relationship with Dobberke and how he obtained the Jews’ addresses in the interrogation of 18 March 1946, in BStU, MfS-HA IX/11, Box PA 3472, Band 4, Teil 2, Stella Kübler-Isaaksohn’s Interrogation Protocol.

<sup>69</sup> Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat*, 142.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>72</sup> Wyden, Stella, 199.

<sup>73</sup> Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat*, 148.

<sup>74</sup> Wyden, Stella, 259.

<sup>75</sup> See for example the testimony of Erich Kalkstein, who was deported to Auschwitz because of Stella, dated 2 April 1946, in BStU, MfS-HA IX/11, Box PA 3472, Band 12, Stella Kübler-Isaaksohn’s Interrogation Protocol.

<sup>76</sup> Wyden, Stella, 233.

<sup>77</sup> Tausendfreund, *Erzwungener Verrat*, 149.

during the lunch break at the trial, the enraged witnesses “threateningly approached the defendant, who has been spared from pre-trial detention on account of a lung complaint” and “she was slapped in the face”.<sup>78</sup> She received another ten-year prison sentence, but did not serve it because she was credited for the years she had spent on the previous sentence and because of her poor health.<sup>79</sup> The press followed the negotiations with great interest. As the *Morgenpost* reported, the verdict was met with great disapproval. Many considered it too lenient.<sup>80</sup>

In the meantime, Stella had got married a third time, to Werner Friedheim Schellenberg, on 2 November 1957.<sup>81</sup> She had also converted to Christianity. Since her release from prison in 1956, she had been working hard to get custody of her daughter Yvonne, who was living with a foster family in Berlin, but had not succeeded (nor did the girl want contact with her mother, having learned of her wartime past). It took her until 1966 to get her daughter back,<sup>82</sup> but the reconciliation never truly happened. Yvonne hated the idea of being connected to her mother: “Nothing can help me [...]. I will live with it and die with it. I am Yvonne, who had better not have been born.”<sup>83</sup>

Stella Kübler-Isaaksohn killed herself in 1994 at the age of 72, jumping out of the window of her apartment in Freiburg.<sup>84</sup>

### The Other ‘Stella’: Celeste Di Porto and the Slaughter of the Roman Jews

On 16 October 1943, the SS broke into the alleys between Largo Arenula and Portico d’Ottavia in Rome. They took more than one thousand women, men, and children from their homes. Most of them were deported to Auschwitz. From that day on, the Roman Jews lived in the constant fear of being denounced to the Nazis. Yet they did not expect the threat to come from their own, least of all from a beautiful 18-year-old girl.

The ‘black panther’, as she would later be nicknamed, exuded the same charm as the ‘blonde poison’. Everybody, every document, and every article spoke about the extraordinary beauty of Celeste Di Porto (1925–1981): Even the Auschwitz survivor Piero Terracina alluded to it when he was interviewed by the Italian TV programme “Il Tempo e La Storia”.<sup>85</sup> Di Porto lived at Via della Reginella 2 in Rome. Davide Lom-

78 See the article: Schlag ins Gesicht der Angeklagten, in: Landesarchiv Berlin (LAB), B Rep 058, Box 1855, Handakte Band 1, Criminal Case against Stella-Ingrid Gärtner Born Goldschlag, Divorced Isaaksohn, Divorced Kübler (1922–1994). The article is from Adler Tagesspiegel, dated 25 June 1957: “Zu schweren Zusammenstößen und tumultuarischen Szenen kam es gestern vor dem Verhandlungssaal des Schwurgerichts, das den Prozeß gegen die 34-jährige Stella Kübler-Isaaksohn wegen Beihilfe zum Mord – begangen an ihren jüdischen Glaubensgenossen während der Jahre 1943 und 1944 als ‘Greiferin’ der Gestapo – fortsetzte. In der Mittagspause gingen einige der sehr erregten Zeugen drohend auf die Angeklagte zu, die wegen eines Lungenleidens von der Untersuchungshaft verschont ist. Sie erhielt einen Schlag ins Gesicht und flüchtete sich vor der Menge in die vergitterte Anklagebank, auf der sie auch während der Beweisufnahme zum eigenen Schutz vor etwaigen tätlichen Angriffen Platz genommen hatte.”

79 See the articles: 10 Jahre Zuchthaus für Stella Kübler, in: Tagesspiegel, 30 June 1957, and Genau dieselbe Strafe. 10 Jahre Zuchthaus für Stella Kübler, in: Tagesspiegel, 1 July 1957, as well as the court proceedings on pp. 30–151, in: LAB, B Rep 058, Box 1855, Handakte Band 1, Criminal Case against Stella-Ingrid Gärtner Born Goldschlag, Divorced Isaaksohn, Divorced Kübler (1922–1994).

80 Tausendfreund, Erzwungener Verrat, 150.

81 LAB, B Rep 058, Box 2487, Band 1, Criminal Case against Stella-Ingrid Gärtner Born Goldschlag, Divorced Isaaksohn, Divorced Kübler, Married Schellenberg (1922–1994).

82 Tausendfreund, Erzwungener Verrat, 151.

83 Wyden, Stella, 13.

84 Tausendfreund, Erzwungener Verrat, 152.

85 “C’era questa ragazza che era di una bellezza straordinaria ...” [“There was this girl who was of an extraordinary beauty ...”], is how Piero Terracina is quoted in Michela Ponzani, Celeste Di Porto. La Pantera Nera Del Ghetto, Il Tempo e La Storia [Celeste Di Porto. The Black Panther of the Ghetto, Time and History], Rai,

bardi, editor-in-chief of the online magazine *Note Modenesi*, was inspired by two photos of Celeste that he found in an archive in Modena.<sup>86</sup> He wrote a blog post about her story,<sup>87</sup> calling her “one of the most beautiful girls in the ghetto”: “tall, slender, black hair and eyes, bouncing breasts, a fleshy mouth, a magnetic and charming gaze. Fifth of eight children, in the family she was called ‘Stella’ [Star], apparently for her showy beauty.”<sup>88</sup> On the day of the ghetto raid, she miraculously escaped capture. The shock of the raid may have been one of the reasons why Celeste decided to collaborate with the Nazis and began her career as the ‘black panther’, denouncing other members of her Jewish community to the Gestapo. The job was certainly well rewarded. Aldo Pavia, president of the Italian National Association of Ex-Deportees in the Nazi Camps (ANED), enumerated the horrible price list in the documentary “Il Tempo e La Storia”: “Anyone who handed over a Jew to the Nazi authorities was awarded 5,000 lire if he was an adult male and therefore able to work, 3,000 lire for a woman, and 2,000 lire for a child.”<sup>89</sup>

But did she do it for money? Historian Anna Foa is convinced that it was more than that, once again highlighting a similarity to Stella Kübler’s circumstances:

“She was also moved by a sort of revenge against her world, which had perhaps treated her badly, and had forced her to leave school. Her father and her family were very poor and with the racist laws they had lost the chance to work. Her father was a peddler and the peddlers had had their licences taken away. Celeste was first sent to be a servant and then became a saleswoman. She had some conflicting relationships because she had a very dramatic love story with a boy who, just because she was poor, had not been able to marry her. The parents interfered. At this point she was infamous, in the sense that they considered her an ‘easy’ girl. She had had a series of boyfriends.”<sup>90</sup>

Di Porto’s circles were certainly murky. She had, for example, a relationship with the Fascist gang of the *squadrista* Giovanni Cialli Mezzaroma, and in particular with Vincenzo Antonelli, a prominent member of the gang and hunter of Jews. Di Porto had met Antonelli while working as a waitress in a restaurant called Il Fantino – known to be patronised by Fascists – in Piazza Giudia.<sup>91</sup> Beginning on 24 March

21 October 2016, [www.raiply.it/video/2016/10/Il-tempo-e-la-Storia---Celeste-Di-Porto-la-pantera-nera-del-ghetto-del-21102016-b3eab543-0035-4239-8d8e-d08e2c82bd72.html](http://www.raiply.it/video/2016/10/Il-tempo-e-la-Storia---Celeste-Di-Porto-la-pantera-nera-del-ghetto-del-21102016-b3eab543-0035-4239-8d8e-d08e2c82bd72.html) (6 August 2020).

86 Archivio Storico Francesco Luigi Ferrari, Modena, two photos: 1. “A Rare Photo of Celeste at 16 Years Old. For Her Beauty, in the Ghetto of Rome They Called Her ‘Stella’ (Star). It Became ‘Stella Ria’ (Evil Star) When She Began to Sell Her People to the Germans”; 2. “Celeste, Known as ‘Black Panther’, Former Collaborator of the SS, on the Day She Was Baptized in the Basilica of San Francesco in Assisi”.

87 Davide Lombardi, Il Mistero delle Foto Ritrovate, Note Modenesi. Appunti di Politica e Società [The Mystery of the Found Photos, Notes from Modena. Notes on Politics and Society] (blog), 23 January 2015, <http://www.notemodenesi.it/2015/il-mistero-delle-foto-ritrovate/>.

88 “All’epoca Celeste aveva appena 18 anni, abitava in via della Reginella 2, ed era considerata tra le più belle ragazze del Ghetto: alta, slanciata, capelli e occhi neri, un seno prosperoso, la bocca carnosa, uno sguardo magnetico e ricco di fascino. Quinta di otto figli, in famiglia veniva chiamata Stella, pare per la sua vistosa bellezza”. Cited in: Lombardi, Il Mistero delle Foto Ritrovate.

89 “A chi consegnava un ebreo alle autorità naziste veniva corrisposto un premio di 5000 lire se era un maschio adulto, quindi in grado di lavorare, 3000 lire per una donna, 2000 lire per un bambino”. Cited in: Ponzani, Celeste Di Porto.

90 “Era mossa anche da una sorta di rivincita verso il suo mondo che l’aveva forse trattata male, che l’aveva obbligata a lasciare la scuola. Suo padre, la sua famiglia erano molto poveri e con le leggi razziste avevano perduto la possibilità di lavorare. Il padre era un ambulante e tolgono la licenza agli ambulanti. Celeste viene mandata prima a servizio e poi fa la commessa. Ha dei rapporti conflittuali perché aveva avuto una storia d’amore molto drammatica con un ragazzo che proprio perché lei era povera non aveva potuto sposarla. I suoi si erano intromessi. A questo punto era malfamata, nel senso che la consideravano una ragazza leggera. Aveva avuto una serie di fidanzati”. Cited in: Ponzani, Celeste Di Porto.

91 Lombardi, Il Mistero delle Foto Ritrovate. Levis Sullam, The Italian Executioners, 123.

1944 – the day of the Fosse Ardeatine massacre – she lived with Antonelli and intensified her activity as an informer.<sup>92</sup>

In *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy*, Michele Sarfatti argued that Mussolini's policies towards Jews were independently conceived and implemented, not – as some historians have argued – a late concession to Hitler's obsession with the war against Jews.<sup>93</sup> If during the early years of the war, more Jews survived in Italy than in other European countries, the situation radically changed in September 1943, after German troops seized control of northern and central Italy, freeing Mussolini from prison and allowing him to form the Italian Social Republic or Republic of Salò – essentially a puppet state of Nazi Germany. Of all the cities in the territory of the Italian Social Republic, Sarfatti explained that Rome was obviously the “most important” and the “most delicate”, since the Pope lived there, it was the city “with the largest Jewish population”, and also “the only one where the Jews were heavily concentrated in one residential area”.<sup>94</sup> It is for this reason that “the specialised police unit commanded by Theodor Dannecker” had planned the raid of 16 October 1943.<sup>95</sup> It is also for this same reason that the Jewish informers' cooperation could make a real difference to the Nazis.

Di Porto's actions proved her desire to stand out, to be in charge of people's lives and deaths. Sometimes she saved people. The Jewish woman Rosina Di Veroli, for instance, testified that she had happened to meet Celeste, and that the latter had warned her not to come back to Portico d'Ottavia, effectively saving her life.<sup>96</sup> However, Di Porto's crimes outweigh her redeeming actions: The most infamous case of denunciation links her to the Fosse Ardeatine massacre, the mass killing carried out in Rome on 24 March 1944 by Nazi occupation troops. Di Porto is accused of having indicated the hiding places of 26 Jews who were later killed in that massacre,<sup>97</sup> including Di Veroli's family. The depositions at her trial, analysed in detail by Anna Foa in *Portico d'Ottavia 13*, make this quite clear.<sup>98</sup>

At the end of the war, Di Porto moved to Naples. She called herself Stella Martinnelli and started working in a brothel, but changing her identity was not enough. On 9 May 1945, two Roman Jews recognised her in Naples, and she was arrested and taken back to Rome. On 5 March 1947, the trial of the entire Fascist gang with whom she had been affiliated started. Even if the main defendants were the Fascists, it was the ‘black panther’ who dominated the coverage of the trial.<sup>99</sup> Amedeo Osti Guerrazzi noted that Di Porto's was one of the three trials that caused a particular sensation, the other two being the trial of Federico Scarpato, another collaborator, and that of the Fascist gang of Gino Bardi and Guglielmo Pollastrini.<sup>100</sup> However, while the atmosphere during Bardi and Pollastrini's hearing was almost cheerful, it was very tense during Celeste Di Porto's trial.

“Death to her!” the audience shouted when Celeste appeared in front of the judges, but she continued to be aggressive, rebutting all accusations.<sup>101</sup> The prosecutor requested a thirty-year prison sentence. On 9 June 1947, after an eight-hour delibera-

92 Osti Guerrazzi, *Caino a Roma*, 107.

93 Michele Sarfatti, *The Jews in Mussolini's Italy. From Equality to Persecution*, Madison 2006.

94 *Ibid.*, 186.

95 *Ibid.*, 186.

96 “Celeste [...] al momento di salutarsi, le consigliò di non farsi vedere da quelle parti per un po'. Rosina si ricorderà di questo avviso, e nel dopoguerra testimonierà a favore di Celeste, che le aveva salvato la vita”, in Foa, *Portico d'Ottavia 13*, 33.

97 Ponzani, *Celeste Di Porto*.

98 Foa, *Portico d'Ottavia 13*, chapter 5: I luoghi della cattura [The Places of the Arrest].

99 Ponzani, *Celeste Di Porto*.

100 Osti Guerrazzi, *Caino a Roma*, 149.

101 Ponzani, *Celeste Di Porto*.

tion, the verdict was reached: Celeste Di Porto, found guilty of theft and kidnapping, was sentenced to twelve years in prison,<sup>102</sup> which would ultimately be reduced to five. As had been the case with Stella Kübler-Isaaksohn, the sentence greatly angered the relatives of the Jewish victims, the Roman Jewish community, and the public in general. One article called Celeste's case one of the "links in a long chain of acquittals, inadequate penalties due to meekness or severity which demonstrate how much practical uncertainty and how much mental and spiritual disorientation there is in those who have the delicate task of *doing justice*".<sup>103</sup>

The conviction does appear strange: Why was Celeste not explicitly sentenced for collaborating with the Nazis and denouncing Jews? Anna Foa explained that in 1946, the amnesty proclaimed by the Minister of Justice Palmiro Togliatti pardoned "everything that had been committed for ideological reasons", including being antisemitic and sending Jews to extermination camps for that reason. The defendants would fall under the scope of the amnesty unless they had denounced Jews for profit or had personally killed someone. Since Celeste had not personally killed anyone, it was on profit that her accusations focussed, and on the fact that she had seized her victims' possessions, including the jewellery that she used to wear.<sup>104</sup>

On 10 March 1948, Di Porto was released, but her story continued to occupy the public consciousness. The rumours talked about a conversion to Catholicism during her detention, highlighting once again an analogy with Stella Kübler-Isaaksohn: a similar desire to distance herself from her Jewish origins. The rumours were confirmed when on 15 March she was baptised.<sup>105</sup> Auschwitz survivor Piero Terracina attributed this conversion to the attacks that Di Porto had suffered from her Jewish co-religionists, calling it "a plausible reaction".<sup>106</sup> The attacks continued with the slogan: "The Pope baptised her, De Gasperi pardoned her", a reference to the governmental pardon that had allowed her to be released.<sup>107</sup>

On 27 December, while Di Porto was having dinner in a Roman restaurant, she narrowly escaped an attempted lynching. From that moment on, her traces are hard-

102 Archivio Centrale dello Stato, Rome (ACS), Ministero Grazia e Giustizia, Gabinetto, Archivio Generale, Affari diversi per Min., Ministro Grassi, Box 13, Dossier 56, Rome. Popular Judges in the Trial of 'Pantera Nera' Celeste Di Porto and Others, 1947, A. Spallanzani's letter of 24 June 1947: "Sono stati condannati DI PORTO Celeste e CIALLI Mezzaroma Giovanni alla reclusione per anni 12, ANTONELLI Vincenzo alla reclusione per anni 18 e alla multa in L. 15000, ROSELLI Luigi alla reclusione per anni 16 e alla multa in L. 12000, VEZZANI Serrao alla reclusione per anni 14 e alla multa in L. 6000".

103 ACS, Ministero Grazia e Giustizia, Gabinetto, Archivio Generale, Affari diversi per Min., Ministro Grassi, Box 13, Dossier 56, Rome. Popular Judges in the Trial of 'Pantera Nera' Celeste Di Porto and Others, 1947, L. d'Arbenga's article *Giustizia Ingiustizia*, in *Gloria al Sacrificio*, 1 July 1947: "Celeste Di Porto, detta a ragione PANTERA NERA, Maria Ricottini, gli assassini di Massimo Gizzio, sono tutti anelli di una lunga catena di assoluzioni, di pene inadeguate per mitezza o per severità che dimostrano quanta incertezza pratica e quanto disorientamento mentale e spirituale vi sia in coloro che hanno il compito delicato di *fare giustizia*" (my emphasis).

104 "C'era nel 1946 l'amnistia varata dal ministro della giustizia Togliatti in cui veniva amnistiato tutto ciò che era stato commesso per motivi ideologici, per cui se eri antisemita e mandavi gli ebrei in campo di sterminio eri amnistiato. Se invece lo facevi a scopo di lucro non ricadevi sotto l'amnistia, oppure se avevi personalmente ammazzato qualcuno. Celeste, anche se girava armata, non aveva personalmente ammazzato nessuno e lo scopo di lucro invece è evidente. E sullo scopo di lucro questi processi insistono perché sono quelli che consentono una condanna che altrimenti l'amnistia avrebbe impedito". Cited in: Ponzani, Celeste Di Porto.

105 ACS, Ministero Interno, Gabinetto 1944-46, Box 128, Dossier 11096, Di Porto Celeste (1945), *Pantera Nera* Ad Assisi è stata battezzata, from *Giornale d'Italia* n. 71 of 26 March 1948.

106 "È stata una reazione tutto sommato legittima dal fatto che i suoi correligionari l'attaccavano in questo modo, quindi se lei si sentiva accusata ingiustamente può essere stata una reazione plausibile". Cited in: Ponzani, Celeste Di Porto.

107 "Il papa l'ha battezzata, De Gasperi l'ha graziata". Cited in: Ponzani, Celeste Di Porto; see also the article excerpt *Pantera Nera in libertà con l'applicazione del nuovo condono* [Black Panther Freed with the Application of the New Amnesty], in: *Tempo*, 22 February 1948, stored in ACS, Ministero Interno, Gabinetto 1944-46, Box 128, Dossier 11096, Di Porto Celeste (1945).

er to find. From Rome, she probably moved to Trento, then to Milan. In the end, she moved back to Rome, where she died in 1981 at the age of 56.<sup>108</sup>

Di Porto was not the only Italian Jewish informer. Another well-known figure is Mauro Grini. Originally from Trieste, sometime between the spring and the summer of 1944 he settled in Venice, where he “had an office in the local SS command” and “was on a mission to find Jews from his home city who had fled to the lagoon city where they hoped not to be recognized”.<sup>109</sup> However, it was evidently harder for some Jewish contemporaries to acknowledge the presence of Jewish informers and to judge Di Porto than it is for historians. The Auschwitz survivor Piero Terracina said: “It does not seem to me at all that there were Jewish informers.”<sup>110</sup> When asked about Celeste Di Porto, Terracina refused to condemn her, despite the overwhelming evidence at the trial:

“I knew that Celeste Di Porto’s father had been deported; he had been arrested by the SS, and I always wondered: Could Celeste not have intervened, if she really had this power, with someone from the SS to save her father?

I don’t feel I can condemn a person just for the ‘they say’.”<sup>111</sup>

In fact, Celeste Di Porto had her own reasons to want her father deported, as Anna Foa explained. Her father spoke with another young man detained in Fossoli – a transit camp before the final deportation – and told him his story. He recounted that, during his last days in Rome, everyone went to see him and asked him to intervene on their behalf or on behalf of those who had been arrested. He did not understand why they expected him to have that power, until someone told him what his daughter was doing. He confronted her, beating her wildly, at which point she told him: “The next time you do this, I will have you arrested.” A few days went by, and the story goes that he gave himself up to the Nazis out of shame; other testimonies say that he was actually arrested in a cinema. In Fossoli, all the Roman Jews avoided him, because he was the father of a spy. When he arrived in Auschwitz, he was immediately sent to the gas chamber.<sup>112</sup>

## Conclusion

It was not Giovanni Cialli Mezzaroma – the head of the most effective group of collaborators specialised in tracking down the Roman Jews – that dominated the post-war trial of his gang. It was Celeste Di Porto. And the volume of Stella Kübler-Isaaksohn’s trial records easily surpasses that of SS-Hauptscharführer Walter Dobberke, the head of the Jüdisches Fahndungsdienst (the ‘Jewish Manhunt

108 Ponzani, Celeste Di Porto.

109 Levis Sullam, *The Italian Executioners*, 119.

110 “Non mi risulta assolutamente che ci siano stati degli ebrei delatori”. Cited in: Ponzani, Celeste Di Porto.

111 “Io sapevo che il papà di Celeste Di Porto era stato deportato; era stato arrestato dalle SS, e mi sono sempre domandato: possibile che Celeste non sia intervenuta, se veramente aveva questo potere, verso qualcuno delle SS per salvare suo padre? Io non me la sento di condannare una persona soltanto per i ‘si dice’”. Cited in: Ponzani, Celeste Di Porto.

112 “Il padre di Celeste ha parlato con un altro giovane deportato a Fossoli, prima di essere mandati via e ha raccontato la sua storia [...] Gli ha raccontato, fra l’altro, di come tutti andavano da lui a chiedergli di intervenire a favore di questo e di quello arrestato e lui diceva ‘Perché proprio da me?’ ‘Io non posso far niente!’ E poi finalmente qualcuno gli dice di Celeste. E allora lui l’affronta e lei gli dice ‘Non ti intromettere!’ Lui la picchia selvaggiamente [...] e lei gli dice ‘La prossima volta che lo fai ti faccio arrestare’. Passano pochi giorni e la leggenda dice che si sia consegnato, altre testimonianze che sia stato arrestato in un cinema. Il vecchio viene arrestato e mandato prima a Fossoli, dove tutti lo evitano, i romani, perché è il padre della spia, e poi ad Auschwitz, dove viene subito mandato nella camera a gas”. Cited in: Ponzani, Celeste Di Porto.

Commission') with which she was affiliated in Berlin. Are these women's cases exceptional? There were not many women among the Jewish informers, so in a way, yes, they are. It is impossible to ignore the gender elements in their stories: their fetishised depiction as *femmes fatales* and the stereotyped mixture of power and helplessness they represent, the way they took advantage of their sex as capital to negotiate better conditions, and the limits of their agency. For these women, escaping gender-biased oppression played a part in and perhaps was even key to their decision-making: They both had complicated relationships with fathers, husbands, and lovers. Their conversion seems to be proof of an ultimate rejection of their family and community ties, of a desire to reinvent their identity. They shared that characteristic with more typical victims, as Dominick LaCapra showed: "especially for victims, trauma brings about a lapse or rupture in memory that breaks continuity with the past, thereby placing identity in question to the point of shattering it."<sup>113</sup> Both Stella Kübler-Isaaksohn and Celeste Di Porto went through this process. Perhaps their sex and attractiveness made them even more a target of the Fascist and Nazi recruiters. Yet male and female informers shared similar initial circumstances: a desire to save themselves and, usually, their families.

If it is hard to group Jewish spies together according to their motivation – mostly a combination of coercion and personal grievance or gain – it is not hard to recognise a pattern in the Fascist and Nazi manner of proceeding. One aspect of their 'proactive' terror state was to take advantage of the very communities it was targeting. Jews who had gone into hiding could only be located through other Jews, and so it made sense for the perpetrators to recruit spies within the Jewish community. This system, tested by Eichmann in Vienna, was exported into Germany, and ultimately applied by the Fascists in Rome in 1943.

This article was largely researched in the wonderful collaborative framework of a Junior Fellowship at the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI), where I benefitted from the help and advice of the other fellows and the VWI's team. I consulted the VWI's archive and library and the digitised Jewish records of the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde and conducted extensive archival research at the Dokumentationsarchiv des österreichischen Widerstands and the Wiener Stadt- und Landesarchiv in Vienna; the Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde, the Landesarchiv Berlin, and the Archiv der Bundesbeauftragten für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik (BStU) in Berlin; and the Archivio Centrale dello Stato in Rome. I wish to thank Kristina Satori for being a wonderful research assistant in Vienna and for helping me translate the documents from German into English. I presented a draft of this article at Cornell's Graduate History Colloquium. I am very grateful to my advisors, Enzo Traverso, Isabel V. Hull, and Claudia Verhoeven, and to the colloquium participants for their thoughtful suggestions and insightful critiques. Special thanks to Kelsey Utne, Samantha Wesner, and Allison Turner for their editorial help. I would also like to acknowledge Tim Corbett for his additional comments during the pre-print stage.

<sup>113</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, Ithaca 1998, 9.

**Benedetta L. S. Carnaghi** is a Ph.D. candidate in Modern European History at Cornell University. Her research explores the history of totalitarian surveillance from below, focusing on how the actors at the bottom of the fascist and Nazi chain of command chose to enforce or disrupt plans for authoritarian repression. Her work was supported by several programmes and institutions, including the Chateaubriand Fellowship Programme, the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI), the Fondation pour la Mémoire de la Shoah, and the Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD).

E-mail: [bc552@cornell.edu](mailto:bc552@cornell.edu)

---

Quotation: Benedetta Luciana Sara Carnaghi, *Betraying Your Own. Jewish Spies and the Deportation of Jews during the Second World War*, in: S:I.M.O.N. – Shoah: Intervention. Methods. DocumentatiON. 8 (2020) 2, 50-65.

DOI: [https://doi.org/10.23777/SN.0220/ART\\_BCAR01](https://doi.org/10.23777/SN.0220/ART_BCAR01)

S:I.M.O.N.– Shoah: Intervention. Methods. DocumentatiON. is the semi-annual open access e-journal of the Vienna Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies (VWI) in English and German.

ISSN 2408-9192 | 8 (2020) 2 | <https://doi.org/10.23777/SN.0220>

This article is licensed under the following Creative Commons License: CC-BY-NC-ND  
(Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives)

In appreciation to the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference) for supporting this publication.