



## **Anti-Semitism in Italian Cyberspace**

20 May 2013

**Stefano Gatti**

Over the past five years, Italian cyberspace has witnessed continuing growth in online spaces marked by anti-Semitism. While there were some forty such websites in 2007, in 2012 the numbers were approaching one hundred, and counting.

This survey does not include—for the obvious reason of the impossibility of keeping track of them—the thousands of discussion forums, profiles, pages and posts with anti-Semitic content uploaded onto (and propagated via) the principal social media.

\*\*\*

According to recent studies by eminent anti-Semitism scholars, cyberspace and its websites, social networks, forums and blogs has become the main vehicle for racism, intolerance in general, and anti-Semitism in particular. Cyberhate is becoming socially acceptable; within it, anti-Semitism is a mere question of opinion.

While the Internet has not magically generated hate, it has informed and organized it, giving it an effective structure for relating to an audience. The Internet also tends to allow for the legitimization of hate speech. Search engines such as Google, Yahoo or Bing collect and occasionally promote hate sites with their conspiracy theories alongside legitimate sources of information. Social platforms such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Wikipedia or blogs have created an environment where anti-Semitism has become commonplace and even banal, and it is often not perceived as a threat.

So if it was the Web to become the principal mouthpiece for anti-Semitic discourse, it was mainly the advent of social networks to amplify it. Australian scholar Andre Oboler has dubbed this process “Anti-Semitism 2.0”, making reference to the introduction of Web 2.0 technology in 2004, which transformed network users from mere consumers to content creators.

In her 2012 study titled “Anti-Semitism 2.0: when social networks are vehicles for anti-Hebraic expressions”, professor Marcella Ravenna states that “Social networks thus create a culture where anti-Semitism is socially accepted, especially by young people, and where there is an erosion of resistance not only to expressing it, but also to creating and becoming part of networks of hate. A second risk is that in these environments, the negative beliefs that are propagated can—precisely because they acquire a normative status—induce people to commit actual acts of violence against Jews.”

\*\*\*

Italian anti-Semitic websites can be grouped into four categories:

**Neo-Nazi and/or Fundamentalist-Catholic:**

*HolyWar, EffeDiEffe, TerraSantaLibera, Il Cinghiale Corazzato, Stormfront Italia, Il Lombardista, Dagobertobellucci, Radio Islam, ANTIZOG (the politically incorrect blog of lawyer Edoardo Longo), Italia Sociale, Rinascita.*

### **Anti-Zionist:**

*Agenzia Stampa InfoPal.it, Cloro al clero, Forum Palestina, Arcipelago, Freedomflotilla, ARABcomint, BoccheScucite, Claudio Moffa, The Writing of Israel Shamir, Il Graffio News, Antiggiornale Antisionista.*

### **Conspiracy Theorist:**

*Disinformazione – Oltre la Verità ufficiale, Messaggi subliminali / Centro Culturale San Giorgio, ComeDonChisciotte, Nuovo Ordine Mondiale.*

### **Holocaust Denial:**

*Auschwitz I Indagini sulla truffa olocaustica, Olodogma, Olotruffa, Revisionismo Cartoline revisioniste sulla menzogna di Auschwitz, Studi revisionisti di Carlo Mattogno, HistoriaeVeritas, Civium Libertas, 21 e 33 Libertà di espressione, di insegnamento e di ricerca, AAARGH, CODOH.*

The online spaces with the largest, most varied and most extremist anti-Semitic content fall into the **Neo-Nazi or Fundamentalist Catholic** category, represented by *Holy War*, run by the Italo-Norwegian Alfred Olsen, and the Italian section of the white supremacist website *Stormfront*. Both sites, often a focus of media attention, are built around a core of fierce anti-Semitism that oozes from every page. An enormous quantity of anti-Semitic material can be found in these spaces: hundreds of cartoons, the major texts of anti-Semitic polemics, documents accusing the Jews of practicing ritual homicide, a variety of Nazi-rock numbers, and anti-Semitic/Holocaust-denial movies and documentaries.

Another website that is emblematic of this category is *EffeDiEffe*, an online newspaper put out by the EffeDiEffe publishing house, run by journalist Maurizio Blondet. The website is updated on a daily basis; new anti-Semitic articles appear virtually every day, many of them written by Blondet himself. The articles are available to subscribers who pay either 6.99 euros a month or 50 euros a year. *EffeDiEffe* has a conspiracy theory orientation and seeks to promote Holocaust-denial theories, explaining that the “Zionists” are behind major international events. The website also contains a virtual bookshop “Ritorno al reale” (back to reality) with a selection of some 1,300 volumes, including many of the classics of anti-Semitic thought. With a series of articles in summer 2009, *EffeDiEffe* also distinguished itself as the first anti-Semitic media to accuse Zionist Jews of being the main force behind the global “traffic in human organs”.

The **anti-Zionist** category encompasses websites characterized by a radical rejection of the State of Israel and Zionism. They project the stereotypical negative image of Jews (greedy, crafty, cruel, bloodthirsty, etc.) onto Israel, in that it is a Jewish state, or onto Zionism. The anti-Semitic paradigm is perhaps the most broadly applied and legitimized in order to further an anti-Zionist thrust.

Representative of this category is the *TerraSantaLibera* network. Members define themselves as “politically incorrect, unpopular on both the left and the right, gadflies to political & religious potentates of any credo or confession” and add “frankly, we don’t give a damn.” Edited by Filippo Fortunato Pilato, leader of the extreme rightist party Forza Nuova, *TerraSantaLibera* presents itself as a supporter of the ‘Palestinian cause’ but is actually a sort of archival compendium of all the principal anti-Semitic themes. It is perhaps the website with the best endowed and heterogeneous collection of anti-Jewish

documentation: articles, books in PDF format, audio, videos. *TerraSantaLibera* is a sort of platform containing various websites, a YouTube channel and a Facebook profile.

The online spaces with a **conspiracy-theory** bent, on the other hand, present an updated version of anti-Jewish discourse spread via the well known early 20<sup>th</sup>-century anti-Semitic hoax *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*—often transformed into a plot by the ‘Israel Lobby’—and thus interpret historical events and news through the lens of the ‘great Jewish conspiracy’, aimed at progressively achieving world domination.

Lastly, the **Holocaust-denial** category presents materials denying the genocide of the Jews, seeking to demonstrate that, although Jews indeed died during the Second World War, the number of deaths is far less than that claimed in the official histories. The Shoah becomes part of a conspiracy, a gigantic hoax spun by the Jews/Zionists to extort money from western nations by assigning blame for the Shoah to them, Germany first and foremost, and most importantly, to legitimize the existence and policies of the State of Israel.

Beyond their aggressive and at times trivial language, a typical characteristic of Italian Holocaust-denial sites is that some of them are administrated by middle-school or high-school teachers or university professors.

\*\*\*

Anti-Semitic websites often present a variety of materials running the gamut of categories. Thus, for example, a site mainly dedicated to denying the Holocaust will also offer conspiracy theories and anti-Zionist content, and so on. In addition to anti-Zionism, the most common online anti-Semitic currents are Holocaust denial and conspiracy theories, and especially the latter due to its polymorphism, adaptability, and the fact that it lends itself well to being instrumentalized, especially in periods of economic crisis such as the one we are currently living in.

Almost all of the Italian anti-Semitic websites, including the most radical, such as *HolyWar*, reject the anti-Semitic label, defining themselves as ‘politically incorrect’, ‘unpopular on both the left and the right’, ‘gadflies’, ‘fighting for freedom of speech’, ‘opposed to the enemies of our Western civilization’, and ‘anti-Zionist’ not because they are anti-Semitic but because they are ‘anti-racist’.

The main Italian anti-Semitic websites make sophisticated use of the Web and have progressively intensified their activity. In addition to updating their pages on a daily basis with the addition of increasingly rich and varied multimedia documentation, often accompanied by YouTube video channels or Facebook profiles, they organize conventions, even at the university level, and promote numerous aggressive campaigns against purported attacks by what they term the ‘Israel Lobby’.

This activism, however, is not exclusively manifested in a strictly cultural-ideological, identity-making and meta-political realm. It also assumes a more concrete form in “militant action” via the creation of blacklists of ‘Zionist enemies’, who are often identified by name, surname and address, accompanied by ambiguous invitations to “make good use” of the lists. And another item is multimedia dossiers against presumed enemies. Currently these are principally the parliamentarians Alessandro Ruben, Gianfranco Fini, Emanuele Fiano, Fiammo Nirenstein, or the president of the Jewish Community of Rome, Riccardo Pacifici.

## **Anti-Semitic websites opposed to the Fondazione CDEC**

An emblematic example of the new activism of the anti-Semitic websites is the birth in May 2010 of the website *Web Nostrum* (belonging to the anti-Semitic network administrated by Filippo Fortunato Pilato). The participation of the Fondazione CDEC's Anti-Semitism Observatory in two parliamentary hearings organized by the committee against anti-Semitism headed by Fiamma Nirenstein aroused vehement reactions in online anti-Semitic circles, including the creation of a dedicated website. Under the guise of defending the Internet from "liberticidal" attacks by a presumed 'Israel lobby', the website repeatedly targeted the parliamentarians Fiamma Nirenstein and Alessandro Ruben and the Fondazione CDEC with anti-Hebraic rhetoric. The appeal promulgated by *Web Nostrum* begins as follows: *"In Italy and the world, freedom of speech and thought are under attack by the Israel Lobby. Support our battle for freedom of speech on the network/Internet, the last frontier for the free communication of news. Join into a coalition with us, we will create a united force to oppose, via civil and legal means, this lobby, which has its representatives in almost all governments and almost all nations. United we can put a stop to plans for a world dictatorship by the Israel Lobby, which wants a gagged and blacked-out web. [We fight] for truth, justice and liberty."*

\*\*\*

The targets currently preferred by the websites of hate are the former Italian minister of international cooperation and integration, Andrea Riccardi, and the current president of the Chamber of Deputies, Laura Boldrini, because they have taken positions against cyberhate and asked for more effective legislation to fight it.

Indeed, one of the biggest problems associated with online anti-Semitism is the difficulty of fighting it through currently existing legislation. The Italian postal police is one of the most effective police forces in the world in monitoring Internet hate, but the Italian legal code contains no specific law punishing web-based anti-Semitism and racism, making the path to closing hate sites extremely difficult and tortuous. For example, current law makes it possible to black-out pedophilia sites with relative ease, but not anti-Semitic sites. Indeed, the neo-Nazi site *Thule Toscana*, one of the few anti-Semitic sites against which the authorities have taken action, was closed for racism and not for anti-Semitism.

Many anti-Semitic websites register their domain in the United States or other countries where promulgating anti-Semitic and Holocaust-denying theses is not a crime. This makes it impossible to intervene at the service provider level to black out the sites.

Furthermore, we do not have an adequate body of standards that would strengthen international coordination and make it possible to adopt more streamlined procedures for fighting racism and anti-Semitism on the web. However, some success has been achieved recently in containing or stopping the spread of anti-Semitism via the Internet:

- **16 October 2012** – the office of the prosecutor in Trieste sentenced the creator of the Nazi-Fascist Facebook profile "for those who want to reopen the Risiera" (Risiera di San Sabba was a Nazi concentration camp near Trieste) to eight months with a suspended sentence following a petition presented by the president of the Jewish Community of Trieste in March 2010;
- **18 April 2013** – following a complaint submitted by the Jewish Community of Merano, the DIGOS (General Investigations and Special Operations Division) of Bolzano blacked out two websites in Italy that are part of the anti-Semitic network *HolyWar*, administrated by the Italo-Norwegian Alfred Olsen.
- **19 April 2013** – Paolo Sizzi, of Bergamo, the administrator of a number of blogs and brutally anti-Semitic and racist video spaces, was sentenced to 1 year of prison and 6 months of community service for instigating racial hatred and slandering the President of the Italian Republic.

- **8 April 2013** – the Court of Rome issued a judgment for “incitement of racial hatred” against the principal administrators of the Italian section of the Neo-Nazi website *Stormfront*. The judge for the preliminary hearing, Carmine Castaldo, sentenced Daniele Scarpino, deemed to be the group’s ideological leader, to 3 years, Mirko Viola to 32 months, and Diego Masi and Luca Ciampaglia to 30 months each. According to the charges, the defendants “have promoted and directed a group whose purpose is to incite racial discrimination and ethnic, religious and racial violence” through the *Stormfront Italia* discussion forums, targeting “Jews and immigrants, inciting belief in the supremacy of the white race and instigating racism and Holocaust denial”. The four were arrested on 16 November 2012 after a complex investigation that began in October 2011 and led to 17 crime reports and 4 arrests in Italy. The convicted parties were granted house arrest, but the judge issued an ordinance expressly forbidding them from accessing the Internet during their period of detention. In spite of this, Mirko Viola, also known as *Biomirko*, has continued to issue threatening and racist messages and affirm his faith in anti-Semitic extremism.

## **Blogs**

Anti-Semitism has spread, becoming more emphatic and globalized in recent years thanks to the advent of the Internet. While the Internet provides an unprecedented opportunity for continuous and immediate access to information, it has also generated a perfect system for communicating the themes of hatred. The anti-Semites immediately intuited the great possibilities offered by this new mode of communication and quickly shifted their operations into cyberspace. For example, the Italo-Norwegian Alfred Olsen of *HolyWar*, the Swede of Moroccan origin Ahmed Rami of *Radio Islam*, and the American neo-Nazi Don Black of *Stormfront* have been spreading propaganda via Internet for almost twenty years now.

Recently, new online applications such as Facebook, MySpace, Gmail and WordPress have radically altered the face of the web, emphasizing its social dimension and its role as a facilitator of sharing, but they have also ushered in a climate where anti-Semitic discourse seem to have become socially acceptable.

An interesting example of how anti-Semitism spreads through a new medium of information is seen in a certain type of blog and discussion forum. The latter are websites, generally administrated by an individual or organization, where the author (blogger) can autonomously publish posts, news, information and all types of stories online in real time. In substance, it is a way to put ideas, information, images and videos that the blogger considers interesting online quickly and easily, often under the protection of a nickname or alias.

Today having a blog is very much in fashion and also quite easy. All you have to do is connect to one of the many platforms that host them, register, and with a few clicks of the mouse “your thoughts are online”.

But alongside the many valuable and interesting blogs, an enormous obscure area has developed, populated by communities—often with hundreds or thousands of followers—who spread a thick layer of anti-Semitism and racism. These range from *Il Lombardista*, administrated by Paolo Sizzi of Bergamo, offering a brutal form of neo-Nazism in an ethno-regionalist key, and the blog of a Milanese high school teacher who blends Holocaust denial and anti-Semitism with anti-Zionist undertones expressed in heavy-handed, violent language, to Holocaust denial sites such as *Olodogma* and *Olotruffa*, that republish the writings of Carlo Mattogno and posts marked by an aggressive anti-Semitism with a Nazi slant, and the sites of well known university

professors or journalists who spread a mix of Holocaust denial, anti-imperialism and pro-Islamic anti-Semitism.

Fertile ground for the growth of hate paradigms is also found in certain radical discussion forums such as *Stormfront*. The Italian section of this gargantuan U.S.-based Neo-Nazi website, online since 1995, contains dozens of discussion lists, some of which have been online for years, such as: “International Judaism”, “Riccardi an International Judaism collaborator”, “The Yellow Menace”, “Negroland”, “Racist Roms attack white citizens”, etc. The forums receive thousands of visits and thousands of posts characterized by an aggressive, brutal, mocking racism.

The evolution of the network also reshaped historical media such as radio and television, all now complemented by websites, some of which broadly propagate and disseminate information laced with anti-Semitism, conspiracy-theories and Holocaust-denial. An example in this case is *Iran Italian Radio*, an Italian language website for Iranian radio and television, under control of the ayatollahs, that includes certain voices of Italian anti-Semitism among its editorialists.

Online information organs with an anti-Semitic and hateful orientation enjoy a great deal of latitude. This is because most of these web spaces, blogs and forums are registered and/or hosted by servers located in countries where there is no law against promulgating anti-Semitic or Holocaust-denying discourse. In the absence of ad hoc international and Italian laws, hate finds great freedom of movement in cyberspace.

### **Web 2.0 and Anti-Semitic Films**

Last February 7, the parliamentary deputy from the Futuro e Libertà group Alessandro Ruben reported that the anti-Semitic documentary *Il nemico occulto* [the hidden enemy] was still present on YouTube. Running 14 minutes, the video was produced and put online in the spring of 2012 by Italian neo-Nazis affiliated with the website *Stormfront Italia*. *Il nemico occulto* is modeled after the propaganda films of the 1930s and '40s, and asserts that the current global economic crisis “is not an accident but a necessary step in achieving the new world order, directed by the elites of Jewish finance, whereby there will no longer be nations and peoples but merely markets and consumers. Jewish economic power, in a world dominated by the money god, cannot help but have an influence on world politics. All European governments are subjected to American Jewish domination” and “the most important Italian media conglomerates are directed, financed or infiltrated by Jews. The same Jewish usurpers who massacre women and children in Palestine are at the helm of world politics and force us to kneel before the dogma of the Holocaust.”

Heavy accusations are levied in the video against some of the major exponents of Italian Judaism, who are described as members of the omnipotent Jewish lobby that has turned Italian politics, mass media and finance to its own purposes. Following Ruben's complaint, *Il nemico occulto* was removed from YouTube, but it is very likely that it will soon be uploaded onto the same platform or onto other social networks again, as has happened many times in the past.

For the first time since the end of the Second World War, two anti-Semitic documentaries were produced in Italy in 2012, both by the neo-Nazi extremists of *Stormfront*. One went online in January 2012 with the German title *Wissen macht frei* [knowledge is freedom], evoking the phrase “Arbeit macht frei” written above the gate to Auschwitz. The 90-minute video denies that the Holocaust ever happened. The second is *Il nemico occulto*. The former premiered on January 27 in Como during a Holocaust-denial conference promoted by Forza Nuova Lario. Both videos went viral in the cyberspace of hate. Even though they were taken down and banned by the police, the new file sharing

applications that are easily available make finding and downloading the videos mere child's play.

Over the past eight years, the face of the web has changed radically and the main anti-Semitic sites in Italian cyberspace have become bona fide networks complemented with richly populated video channels, often hosted by YouTube, where users can watch, download and save the principal anti-Semitic films of the past, ranging from *Suss l'ebreo* [*Jud Süß*], produced in Hitler's Germany by order of propaganda minister Goebbels, to numerous modern films produced in the Arab-Muslim world, anti-Semitic sermons by fundamentalist Catholic priests and the speeches and lessons of the major anti-Semitic and Holocaust-denying Italian polemicists. In theory, social networks have regulations against uploading racist or anti-Semitic videos, but they are almost never enforced, as demonstrated recently by the Australian scholar Andre Oboler who he uploaded, in one day in late July 2012 and via a single account, some 1,700 racist and anti-Semitic videos onto YouTube without encountering any obstacles.

**Explanation of certain website names:**

*EffeDiEffe*: spelling of the initials (FDF) of the founder of the publishing house, Fabio Di Fina

*TerraSantaLibera*: Free the Holy Land

*Il Cinghiale Corazzato*: The Armored Boar

*Rinascita*: Rebirth

*Agenzia Stampa InfoPal.it*: Infopal.it Press Agency

*Cloro al clero*: Chlorine to the clerics

*BoccheScucite*: Unbuttoned Mouths

*Antigiornale Antisionista*: Anti-Zionist anti-news

*Disinformazione – Oltre la Verità ufficiale*: Disinformation – Beyond the Official Truth

*ComeDonChisciotte*: Like Don Quixote

*Nuovo Ordine Mondiale*: New World Order

*Auschwitz I Indagini sulla truffa olocaustica*: Auschwitz I: Investigations into the Holocaust fraud

*Olodogma*: Holocaust dogma

*Olotruffa*: Holocaust fraud

*Revisionismo Cartoline revisioniste sulla menzogna di Auschwitz: Holocaust Denial, Postcards on the Auschwitz lie*

*Studi revisionisti di Carlo Mattogno*: Holocaust denial studies by Carlo Mattogno

*21 e 33 Libertà di espressione, di insegnamento e di ricerca*: 21 and 33 [referring to Articles 21 and 33 of the Italian Constitution], Freedom of speech, instruction, and study