

IN SEARCH OF MARIA EISENSTEIN

Carlo Spartaco Capogreco

Florence

In 1944 the Second World War was still raging through Europe. In Rome, recently liberated by the Allied armies, Donatello De Luigi inaugurated his publishing house with two promising book series: "Political Notebooks" and "Books of the Day." One of the first titles in the latter series was Maria Eisenstein's book, *Internata numero 6*, first published in October 1944.⁸⁰

In the foreword, the publisher enthusiastically described the new book as "neither a diary nor a novel, with the raw truth of the former and the imagination of the latter, Maria Eisenstein's work should occupy a special place beside the books that will leave a lasting record of these troubled years." He emphasized the idea that – despite the "cramped and oppressive" conditions at the concentration camp where the author was held – "In only a few other books, is the war at the heart of every stance and speech. Eisenstein's account remains alert to all the pain, all the terror."

Internee Number 6 is the first published eyewitness account of life in an Italian Fascist concentration camp, whose existence fell into oblivion after the war.⁸¹

These elements and the author's mastery of Italian (not her native tongue,) make *Internee Number 6* an invaluable document of significant literary and historical impact.

Who was the author of this book? The publisher's scant description of her offers only a small clue. Where was Eisenstein when her book first came out? Did she survive the deportations, which after September 8, 1943, swept away many Jews who had been detained in Fascist camps? Was she murdered in Italy, or did she survive? How much of Maria Eisenstein's work is diary and how much of it is fiction? And most importantly, where was the concentration camp of L. in which the story is set?

Unsurprisingly even ten or twenty years later, nothing was known of Maria Eisenstein in Italy, except for a cursory mention of her book in a 1963 article by Frantz Hajek. Nor did I find her name in the records documenting foreign internees.⁸² Her book was difficult to find, and Italy was not yet ready to fully confront its own history.⁸³

However, a mention of a M.E., referred to as a lecturer appeared in *Israel*, an Italian Jewish weekly run by Carlo Alberto Viterbo. According to the article, on December 7 1944, "Ms. Maria Eisenstein lectured [at the Jewish Circle of Rome] on the subject of 'Incomprehension,' leading the audience in a serious and deep examination of the causes of antisemitism."⁸⁴

This information proved that internee number 6 had been in Rome after the city was liberated and, fortunately, had not been a victim of the genocide.

Foreign Jews in Fascist Camps

Although the location of the camp is not explicitly stated in *Internee Number 6*, I was finally able to identify that "L." stood for the town of Lanciano, in the Abruzzi region, where the Fascist Regime established a concentration camp for women after Italy had entered the war.⁸⁵

Wartime contingency plans for arresting and imprisoning foreign and Italian civilians, considered dangerous or suspicious had been arranged in Italy before the outbreak of the Second World War. As early as 1933 to 1934, an inspector named Ercole Conti⁸⁶ was in charge of a plan to identify locations and buildings that would make for suitable concentration camps or could be converted into camps. A Ministry of the Interior official, he had been in charge of finding training camps for Croatian separatists led by Ante Pavelic and backed by Mussolini. The locations he identified were used as buildings for civilian internment. Mussolini's government put a "preventive" administrative measure into effect in June 1940. Thus the arrests began. One of the camps was the Sorge family villa at Lanciano, the same one described in *Internee Number 6*.

Internment was not theoretically connected to the new racial laws. However, as Klaus Voigt showed, the provision (linked to wartime emergency) was not entirely separate from the anti-Semitic policy carried out by the Fascist Regime in 1938 and thereafter.⁸⁷ This became especially evident in the case of foreign and stateless Jews.

On May 26, 1940, the Duce broadly speculated on establishing concentration camps that "included Jews" in the event that war broke out. At the same time, the Ministry of the Interior communicated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that "foreign Jews residing in Italy and especially those who had entered the country under false pretense or by illegal means should be considered enemies of the State."⁸⁸ On June 15, 1940, Italy's Fascist monarchic government decided to arrest and intern "foreign Jews belonging to states that practice racial politics," labeling them as "undesirable elements filled with hatred for totalitarian regimes."⁸⁹ Jews who had come to Italy to study at Italian universities (as did Maria Eisenstein, who arrived in Italy in 1936 to study literature in Florence) or to escape Nazi antisemitism, were suddenly interned as Jews regardless of their citizenship status.⁹⁰

Between June 1940 and September 1943, forty-eight concentration camps were created and operated by the Ministry of the Interior. The camps were located far from major urban centers and roadways, in areas without a large military presence (such as military posts and borders). Each camp (except for Ferramonti, Fraschette, and Farfa Sabina, which were barracks that could accommodate thousands of people) generally housed between 50 and 350 internees. Entire families were relocated to a few camps, such as Civitella del Tronto, Civitella della Chiana, Boiano, Agnone, and Tossicia, although most camps were exclusively for men. Lanciano was one of seven women's camps set up by the Ministry of the Interior and would remain so only until February 1942.

Living conditions in the camps depended on the attitudes of the camp officers and the time period. Many camps were thought at first to be "less harsh than jails," but conditions there went from bad to worse in 1942 and 1943, coinciding with the waning years of the regime. During this entire period, the obvious difficulties of mass internment were overcrowding, which worsened the already poor hygienic conditions, and an increasingly dire food shortage.

From 1942-1943, the government's subsidy to indigent internees to meet the cost of their internment was insufficient to cover the most basic needs. Beginning on September 8, 1943, interned Jews faced a much more serious danger: deportation to Nazi camps. In fact, when the armistice with the Allies was announced, the newly established Marshal Badoglio's government neither freed foreign internees nor repealed the racial laws. This gravely imperiled the Jews who remained at the mercy of the Germans, the police, and the militia of Mussolini's Social Republic.⁹¹

An Initial Attempt to Locate the Author

Although Maria's history was to be eventually revealed to me many years later, at the time of my preliminary investigation back in September of 1989, many years had passed since the war and everything concerning her story was enveloped in the fog. The buildings of Villa Sorge, where the internees were housed, had given

way to becoming part of the suburbs in a post-war Italy. Publications on the history of the city during the Fascist period offered no information on the camp and, at that time, the local library did not have a copy of *Internee Number 6*.

At the time, there was very little knowledge of the concentration camps created by the Fascist government at the start of the Second World War. Research had been done in Abruzzo but not on Lanciano which, beyond a few references in Klaus Voigt's essays, had otherwise only been mentioned in Maria Eisenstein's book.

I was used to encountering amnesia and denial in my field trips to research the camps, both among institutions as well as individuals. However, in Lanciano, a town that was awarded a Gold Medal for its part in the Resistance⁹² and one whose concentration camp had been the subject of a book as early as 1944, one might expect to find a memorial of some kind. This was, unfortunately not the case. Instead, the people I interviewed alluded to the fact that a few copies of Eisenstein's book had appeared over the years at the local library. The book was considered "slandorous of the residents of Lanciano who had worked at the camp" and "removed from circulation."

It took another fifteen years before Lanciano publicly acknowledged "its own" concentration camp. And it would be another quarter century before the city named a street

after Maria Eisenstein. In the meantime, the Sorge family sold the former camp which became a private residence.

In Lanciano, I managed to schedule a meeting with Luigi Russo⁹³, a local lawyer who had lived through the war and had a passion for history and local lore. Not only did Russo remember the camp and a few internees, but – to my surprise – he led me to believe that he had personally met internee number 6. However, he could not recall the name, Maria Eisenstein. He asked me to come by his office the next morning to resolve our doubts. He wanted to show me the doctoral thesis the internee he had met left him. As Russo suspected, the name on the title page of the black-bound thesis, was not Maria Eisenstein but Maria Luisa Moldauer.

“Before leaving Lanciano,” the lawyer explained, “Maria Luisa entrusted me with her thesis. She had lovingly preserved it as perhaps the only surviving remnant of her studies.”

Between Lanciano and Guardiagrele

In the 1940s, Villa Sorge stood on a road outside the urban center. The authorities estimated that it could accommodate about seventy people. The first to arrive, in July 1940, were women whom the Fascist bureaucracy had labeled “enemy subjects” and “foreign Jews” for the purposes of internment. The author of the book was arrested in Catania on June 17 of that year and arrived in

Lanciano on July 4, when the camp housed just under fifty foreign women internees: English, French, Russian, Polish, and "Jewish".⁹⁴

On June 29, 1940, the camp opened, and until September 18, 1940, it was directed by the Chief Magistrate of Lanciano.⁹⁵ After that, the police official Eduino Pistone took charge.⁹⁶ Per protocol in Fascist women's camps, Pistone was assisted by a female director. First by a fifty-three-year-old teacher, Rosa Pace, and later by a forty-three-year-old housewife, Maria Anna Fusco Marfisi.⁹⁷ The villa, as described, was enclosed by a metal fence spread out over three floors. On the ground floor were the entrance, four bedrooms, washrooms, and a "shed." On the second floor were five bedrooms, a kitchen, washrooms, and a covered terrace. The third floor comprised three other rooms. Depending on its size, each room contained six to ten beds.

The women's camp did not operate for long, as the women were gradually transferred elsewhere: first thirteen British women, soon followed by the French women and then other non-Jewish internees. On February 11, 1942, the largest transfer took place and included the last sixty internees, all Jewish, who were taken to Pollenza.

On February 27, new internees arrived, mostly noncombatant prisoners from Yugoslavia, and Lanciano became a men's camp.

As reported on September 1, 1942, by a delegation of the Red Cross,⁹⁸ housing conditions at Villa Sorge were harsh. The heating was inadequate, and the windows were drafty. The sanitary facilities – three toilets for seventy-five people – functioned poorly, mostly due to chronic water shortage. Life in the camp was perilous and turbulent.

According to the police files, in January 1941, after a dispute between a Russian internee (with whom the commissioner is said to have been infatuated) and the female director Marfisi, the commissioner was removed from his post. That summer, the new commissioner suffered the fate of the previous one on account of his daughter “having become overly familiar” with the internees.⁹⁹

In spite of the hardship, as long as the camp housed only women, the internees could move around to a degree. For an hour a day, they were free to walk just outside the villa (as far as a nearby church), and if accompanied by an officer, or other people designated by the commissioner, they could go into Lanciano to shop or for medical visits. As for meals, initially, each of the guests had to provide for herself using small charcoal stoves. Later on, management set up a communal cafeteria.

On September 8, 1943, most of the internees left, and the villa remained virtually unsupervised. However, after the “disbandment” following the news of the armistice, the camp, which had not officially ceased to exist, began to

fill up again, ultimately accommodating roughly seventy inmates. Finally, on October 28, 1943, the premises of Villa Sorge were seized by the German military command.¹⁰⁰ After my meeting with Luigi Russo, I left for Rome determined to find Maria Luisa Moldauer's file at the Central State Archives. I wanted to be sure that the author of the thesis and the author of *Internee Number 6* were indeed one and the same. Written in both German and Italian, the thesis was entitled "Style and Character in G. W. Goethe. Faustian Studies." Johann Wolfgang von Goethe is one of the few writers cited in *Internee Number 6*.

After some research, I was able to verify that "Maria Luisa Moldauer" and "Maria Eisenstein" were the same person. The documents showed that Maria Luisa, aka Maria Ludwika,¹⁰¹ born in Vienna on September 22, 1914, to a Jewish family of Polish origin, had been registered as number 6 in the concentration camp of Lanciano. It also turned out that, on February 4, 1942, she had married Samuel Eisenstein, a Romanian medical student at the University of Pavia, born on January 6, 1913, and interned in July 1940 in the concentration camp in Agnone (Campobasso).¹⁰² In 1944 she chose to publish under her married name.

Papers in her personal file confirmed her arrest in Catania, where she had moved four months before Italy entered the war. Eisenstein was interned for five months in the camp of Lanciano, from July 4 to December 13, 1940. The narrative of *Internee Number 6* continues until the end of January 1941.

According to documents, on September 6, 1940, Maria petitioned the Ministry of the Interior to be given back her freedom or at least – considering her poor health – to obtain better lodging by being transferred to what the regime called “free internment.”¹⁰³ On December 13 of that same year, the authorities ordered her transfer to the neighboring town of Guardiagrele.¹⁰⁴

Guardiagrele was the town with the highest number of “free internees” in the province of Chieti.¹⁰⁵ On April 9, 1941, a Romanian Jew, Samuel Eisenstein, was transferred there from the camp of Agnone. Maria and Samuel met in that town, where at first, they lived only a few yards apart in Via Murene.

On February 4, 1942, during a snowstorm, the two were married by Professor Elio Toaff, then a young rabbi from Ancona.¹⁰⁶ Six months after the celebration of their marriage, they were again transferred to Lanciano as “free internees.”

During the war, apart from the internees in the concentration camp, Lanciano was home to more than fifty other internees, of both sexes, including Jews,¹⁰⁷ who lived under various forms of police surveillance. Upon their arrival, the Eisensteins took up lodging on Via Cavour and later moved to Corso Bandiera. During this period of internment outside the camp in Lanciano, Maria illegally taught English¹⁰⁸ to the sister of the future lawyer Luigi Russo¹⁰⁹ who gave me a copy of her dissertation.

That means the couple was in Lanciano during the summer of 1943 until the armistice. The transitional government of Marshall Badoglio released most political prisoners and civilian internees, but did not revoke the internment of foreign and stateless Jews. That was done – hastily and under pressure from the Allies – after September 10, 1943. Amid the shock of Nazi occupation and the rise of Mussolini's Italian Social Republic, the stories of each concentration camp and confinement center vary widely.

In some camps the prisoners fled. Others camps remained in operation or were taken over by the new Fascist Republican government which, acting on an order from November 30, 1943, fully integrated them in the deportation machine.¹¹⁰

After September 8, with few exceptions, none of the roughly three hundred foreign Jews interned in concentration camps in the province of Chieti moved. Either they thought they could count on the support of locals, or trusted in the arrival of the Allies, or had no means to leave. Maria and her husband too remained in Lanciano; their police records continue through September 1943.

The last official mention of Maria appears in a report sent by the Prefecture of Chieti to the Ministry of the Interior on September 28, 1943: "The person in question, released from the constraints of internment, has remained in Lanciano due to a lack of means of transport. She is under surveillance."¹¹¹

The Sangro

Up to that moment, my search had yielded some answers, but it was still unclear what had become of the Eisensteins during the crucial period between September 1943, when they were still in Lanciano, and October 1944, when she published *Internee Number 6* in Rome.

If I wanted to piece together the puzzle of internee number 6, I needed to look for new sources. So, I resumed my search, hoping to find someone who had met Eisenstein in Rome. Two articles that appeared in 1944 in the Italian journal *Israele* led me to inquire with the Jewish cultural circles of the time. With the help of Michele Sarfatti, I contacted the translator Annamarcella Falco Tedeschi. I also got in touch with the journalist Arrigo Accornero and the writer Franco Lucentini who, at the time, had worked in Rome with the Allied Psychological Warfare Branch, the American military body in charge of media, censorship, and propaganda in occupied Italy.¹¹²

By other means, I tracked down someone who had met Eisenstein in Florence in the late 1930s, the translator Gabriella Bemporad,¹¹³ daughter of a well-known publisher, whose account added a precious piece to the puzzle.

Thus, I learned from several sources that the Eisensteins had served on the Prisoners of War Board and then – first one, then the other – left Rome and moved to California.

But none of my sources had been able to help me find their American address. Sometime later, Annamarcella Falco Tedeschi sent me an anthology of psychoanalysis edited by Samuel Eisenstein and others.¹¹⁴ Thanks to that book, I was able to make significant progress. From the front cover, I learned that in 1966, the year of its publication, Samuel was serving as a psychologist at the County General Hospital in Los Angeles. I wrote to him at the hospital and, although he had changed position, he answered my letter. We began a warm correspondence which quickly blossomed into a friendship.¹¹⁵

Through Samuel, I finally learned how he and his wife had managed to leave German-occupied Abruzzo. He told me that after September 8, he and Maria abruptly parted ways due to an incident that almost cost them their lives. Samuel was arrested for violating curfew to visit a sick person and was held in a cell for a few weeks. Fortunately, the Germans, who had established headquarters in Lanciano on September 12, did not realize he was a Jew, and – thanks to an influential acquaintance – he was released in early October.¹¹⁶

Reunited, Maria and Samuel were in Lanciano during the revolt against the Germans.¹¹⁷ The uprising in Lanciano took place on October 5 and 6, of 1943. Some historians believe that it was a rushed reaction sparked by a volatile mix of planning and spontaneity. Many lamented that the uprising began when the Allied troops were too far from the city to help. However, the revolt had important

consequences, and foreign Jews interned in Lanciano, first and foremost the Hungarian Carlo Schönheim, played a significant role in it.¹¹⁸

When the Germans threatened to destroy the town, the former internees realized that staying in the area was madness, especially for the Jews. So, in dribs and drabs, they headed for the mountains, with the ultimate goal of reaching the Allies on the other side of the Sangro river. The decision was approved by the newly elected podestà Antonio Di Jenno,¹¹⁹ who lent help to many former internees. Di Jenno's support is noteworthy because right after the armistice, examples of aid given to Jews by non-Jews were quite rare.¹²⁰ Though, to be fair, in those days, everyone in Lanciano believed that the Allies would arrive in a matter of days.¹²¹

The Eisensteins were among those who benefited from Di Jenno's support. "The mayor of Lanciano provided me with a fake ID," Samuel told me. "I was Alfredo Marino, a carpenter from Bari."¹²² So he and Maria headed straight for the Sangro Valley. With them was Maria's friend Susanna Lewinger, a German Jew, number 54 at Villa Sorge. On the other hand, their friend Ilona Schick was captured by the Gestapo a few days earlier but eventually managed to reach safety.

When they left, Maria, Samuel, and Susanna¹²³ could never have imagined that the German armed forces had just

then decided to resist the Americans along the Sangro and “fight for every inch of ground until their forces were exhausted.”¹²⁴ The Sangro became an integral part of the Gustav Line.¹²⁵ The decision made it almost impossible for their plan to succeed. But at that time, wading through the Sangro remained the only realistic option imaginable for anyone trying to cross military lines.

Abruzzo

The topography of Abruzzo forced the fugitives to pass through “a few areas of snowy mountains and steep cliffs”¹²⁶ crowded with Germans ready to kill enemies and informers. Of these, the area most heavily trod by refugees and stragglers heading south was Defensa, a forest located between the municipalities of Montenerodomo, Torricella Peligna, and Buonanotte. In mid-October, the forest was teeming with Italians and foreigners on the run who, while waiting for the right moment to cross the river with the help of local “guides,” sought refuge in the few existing shelters far from the villages: stables, natural caves, and charcoal-burning huts.

At the end of that month, in one of those makeshift shelters – an old mountain stable transformed into a sort of multinational welcome center – Maria Eisenstein met Alba de Céspedes. The then thirty-year-old Italian-Cuban writer was already a public figure. Her novel, *There’s No Turning Back*, had become an international success. De

Céspedes had reached the mountains of Abruzzo a few weeks earlier with her future husband, the Italian diplomat Franco Bounous.¹²⁷ By a strange twist of fate, for about nine months, she and her companion found themselves traveling almost the same route as Maria and Samuel, who fled Lanciano in early October.

Much has been written about the epic journeys over inaccessible mountain passes and ancient sheep trails, the so-called “paths to freedom,” undertaken by hundreds of Italian and foreign refugees and Allied soldiers seeking to cross the front and reach Allied troops.¹²⁸ The diary of the South African writer Uys Krige (who escaped from a prisoner of war camp in Sulmona), published in 1946 under the title *The Way Out*,¹²⁹ is particularly poignant. Joseph Frelinghuysen,¹³⁰ an American soldier captured by the Italian Royal Army in North Africa and interned in Sulmona, recalls in *Passage to Freedom*, published in 1990, meeting Samuel, Maria (whom he mistakenly calls Giulia), and Susanna on October 17, 1943.¹³¹ Alba de Céspedes, who was writing at the time of the events and who at any moment could fall into the hands of the Nazi-Fascists, and have her “crumpled notebook”¹³² confiscated, did not spell out the names of the three Jews whom she met on October 28. Ever cautious, she refers to them as Poles, “three young students who left home four years ago. Cut off for four years, not by youth, but by this problem and their anxiety.”¹³³

The writer goes on to describe at length the atmosphere and humanity found in that bivouac where she, Maria, and their traveling companions had taken shelter:

"At sunset, people from every shelter in the woods descend on our hovel, drawn to the heat of the fire. There are Romanians, Russians, Yugoslavs, a German Jew, and a few political prisoners. All brought together by a sense of human solidarity that nullifies borders and passports. No one asks your name or your political affiliation, only reads in your eyes the need to be helped during these difficult hours. Here, in this remote stable, a thousand meters up, it seems to me that the Italy we wished for is being born. Here, right here, in this ragged stable, hungry, with nothing left, nothing resembling civilized life, we are beginning to live civilly again. The Russian talks about his country, the Poles about their books, and the Jew no longer has that look of dismay when she stares at the top of the hill to check if the Germans are climbing down. They continue to talk. I like their voices, their shaky Italian, the open discussions."¹³⁴

Maria and Alba met for the last time during the first week of November. Then, the Eisensteins parted ways with de Céspedes and her companion. Everyone managed to cross into friendly territory, and in December, they met again in Bari, then the bridgehead of "liberated Italy."¹³⁵

Brindisi and Bari

On September 10, 1943, the King of Italy and his entourage of so-called “luxury fugitives” arrived in Brindisi in the early afternoon, though Allied troops didn’t completely occupy Bari until September 14. In Bari, the Eisensteins were hired by the Psychological Warfare Branch (PWB) as translators, while De Cespedes directed a radio show for Radio Bari called “the first voice of Italian democracy.”¹³⁶

Under Fascism, Puglia was home to one of the most powerful radio stations of the EIAR,¹³⁷ which, because it broadcasted in Arabic and Serbo-Croatian, had been a pillar of the airwaves war fought in the Middle East and the Balkans. Now, the transfer of the government to Brindisi made Bari Radio newly relevant, which gave many a reason to hope. The radio’s headquarters, studios, and offices were located in Via Putignani, in the large EIAR building attached to the Church of San Rocco, whereas its radio masts were located at Ceglie del Campo (Radio Bari I) and the Fiera del Levante (Radio Bari II). After the power void following the armistice,¹³⁸ starting on September 10, 1943, Bari’s broadcasting station resumed work, thanks to a group of volunteer technicians and intellectuals: Giuseppe Bartolo, Beniamino D’Amato, Michele D’Erasmus, Michele Cifarelli, and others.

On September 16, 1943, based on plans that had been put in place since July by the PWB, all Italian media

agencies came under Allied control.¹³⁹ At the time, the PWB had been operative for under a year and, after taking its first steps in North Africa, was now set to work in Italy. In addition to actively employing the radio to influence public opinion, it began restructuring media by involving all political forces hostile to fascism.

From the Allied landing in Sicily, on July 10, 1943, until the end of the Allied administration in the Italian territories, on December 3, 1945, all media, including film, was subjected to various forms of influence by the PWB. The radio, in particular, was considered one of the pillars of psychological warfare.¹⁴⁰

The PWB entrusted Scottish Major Ian Greenlees¹⁴¹ to direct Radio Bari. Greenlees was a liberally educated, eclectic intellectual with sophisticated knowledge of Italian culture who had even translated some of the work of Benedetto Croce. Radio Bari was then operating under the supervision of the Allied Force Headquarters in Algiers and began broadcasting pro-democratic programs.¹⁴²

In Greenlees's words, it was "the only station that until the liberation of Rome broadcast Italian programs, truly Italian, completely free" (though still subject to military censorship). Many Italians and foreigners, who collaborated with the Allies in Bari, like the Eisensteins, had been imprisoned, confined, and interned by the Fascists. They had risked their lives to cross the front and were eager "to contribute to the rebirth of the Italian

state.”¹⁴³ For them, the offices of the PWB and the board of the radio represented reassuring points of contact, and were vital stopovers on the road back to normality.

Alba De Céspedes reached Bari on November 27, 1943, accompanied by Franco Bounous and two other friends. “We looked like four mud statues,” she wrote in a letter to her mother. Like them, the future director of *Giornale Radio Rai* Antonio Piccone Stella,¹⁴⁴ Vincenzo Talarico,¹⁴⁵ and Diego Calcagno¹⁴⁶ also crossed the Sangro River between the territories of Bomba and Buonanotte.¹⁴⁷ Maria and Samuel, after finally managing to cross the Sangro at Villa Santa Maria, did not reach Bari until early December. They found the city still devastated by the recent bombing of the port.

By the end of the year, the broadcasts had become longer and richer in content. On December 1, the Press Office of the Brindisi Government asked de Céspedes to direct a program called *Italia Combatte*, designed to encourage partisans to fight back. Aired on Mondays and Fridays from 10:30 to 11:00 p.m. (the half-hour allotment granted by the Allies to the Badoglio Government), *Italia combatte* included a segment called *La voce di Clorinda* (*The Voice of Clorinda*)¹⁴⁸ which was conducted by the writer herself.

In addition to being a destination for fugitives from regions in Italy that were still under Fascist control,¹⁴⁹ Bari became an active political center for the new democracy, where

intellectuals regularly flocked to Giuseppe and Franco Laterza, the publishers of Benedetto Croce and the journal *La Critica*. From January 28-29, 1944, the Congress of the National Liberation Committee (CLN) convened in Bari, an event broadcast by Radio London to a wide network of listeners. At the informal gatherings in Palazzo Laterza at 43 Via Dante, the group, including Alba de Céspedes and Maria Eisenstein, established ties. The two women also worked together in the former EIAR building, which housed both Radio Bari and the PWB.¹⁵⁰

Calascione

As Allied Forces advanced north, Puglia lost its position as a strategic political hub. At the end of 1943, many displaced persons began leaving for Naples, where American forces had set up base while waiting for Rome to be liberated. The Eisensteins arrived in Naples in late January. They found the city still in ruins. De Céspedes arrived the following month when on February 11, 1944, the capital of liberated Italy moved from Brindisi to Salerno. In Naples, the Eisensteins continued to work for the PWB as translators, interpreters, and editors of newsletters. De Céspedes continued her “civil resistance” on the airwaves with Radio Napoli, and Greenlees arrived in Naples that February.

Back then, Naples was inundated with intellectuals, former prisoners, and exiles, many of whom saw in the

final collapse of Fascism the dawn of a new world. The bookseller and publisher Gaspare Casella generously welcomed them into his own house in Piazza del Calascione, which became a gathering place for journalists, writers, artists, and intellectuals of all backgrounds. Among them were Gino de Sanctis, Alberto Cianca, Leo Longanesi, Mario Soldati, Stefano Vanzina, Giaime Pintor, Dino Gentili, and Antonio Russi. Mario Soldati, who, like the Eisensteins and many others, worked with the PWB in Naples, would later dedicate moving verses to the Calascione scene and the people who were part of it.

In the Babel-like and occasionally extravagant Naples of the time, praying for peace between one air raid and another, de Céspedes took up her diary again and formalized her plans for her magazine, *Mercurio*.¹⁵¹ In fact, she sought permission from the Allies to publish it and began working out its cultural mission, in close connection with the political and intellectual circles that had been shaped by the writings of Benedetto Croce. *Mercurio* was born in response to the same civil and cultural turmoil that gave rise to other Neapolitan and Roman magazines, like *Aretusa*, initially published by Gaspare Casella and then passed on to Donatello De Luigi; *Rinascita*, founded in Naples by Palmiro Togliatti in June 1944; and *Noi donne*, originally printed in Naples.¹⁵²

In semi-destroyed Naples, while waiting to get to Rome, Maria Eisenstein also began to give a shape to her

autobiographical book, perhaps encouraged by Alba de Céspedes and Gaspare Casella. After a time, they put her in touch with the publisher Donatello De Luigi. De Luigi, then sixty years old, had been an antique dealer in Paris and had a volcanic personality. He had an open mind and an innate enthusiasm for the printed page. Giovanni Ansaldo famously called his bookstore “the first as you approach Italy from the sea.” Unfortunately, the devastating air raids of 1943 destroyed the original premises in Piazza Municipio, and, for better or worse, he had to move the shop to a warehouse at the Dogana del Sale. Even under such conditions, it remained the center of Naples’ cultural life.

Meanwhile, in March 1944, Samuel Eisenstein was transferred by the PWB to Piedimonte d’Alife, an area not far from Cassino, where he continued to work for the Allies. Then, in late June, shortly after the liberation of Rome, the Eisensteins, de Céspedes, and Bounous arrived in Rome.

Rome

Rome was the first capital in occupied Europe to shed the yoke of Nazi-Fascism. When US troops, under the command of General Mark Wayne Clark, arrived on Sunday, June 4, 1944, they found a city dehumanized by the long shadow of Fascism and terrorized by recent events: the bombing of San Lorenzo on July 19, the deportation of the Jews on October 16, and the Ardeatine massacre carried out just two and a half months before the city was liberated.

By the time the Eisensteins got there, the city was already teeming with displaced persons, former internees, refugees of all kinds (for whom several camps were set up outside the urban center), as well as military and civilian Allied personnel employed by the Offices of the Allied Control Commission or the Military Police. The latter remained in Rome until 1947.¹⁵³ Indeed, the liberation of Rome was not a moment but a process, and it did not end until the last Allied troops left the city after the peace treaty was drafted. In Rome, the classic interlude between war and postwar, between occupation and liberation, “was far less clear than in other Italian cities.”

Even more than in Naples and Bari, in Rome, numerous former prisoners of war and internees found employment working for Anglo-American auxiliary structures and international welfare organizations. Samuel Eisenstein continued to work for the PWB,¹⁵⁴ editing a medical newsletter.¹⁵⁵ Maria continued working for the PWB and collaborated with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. As the tragedy of the Holocaust (which affected her family) gradually came to light, she wanted to work directly with survivors as they struggled to regain a sense of self and find a place to call home. She gave lectures, usually focusing on the history of “misunderstandings” among different populations and religious groups, as well as where the West was to blame for having allowed anti-Jewish hatred to fester for centuries.

The Eisensteins were assigned a small apartment beneath Monte Mario that had been left behind by Fascists fleeing north. Their living room sofa became a bed for Gabriella Bemporad, a friend of the author's since graduation, also employed by the PWB.

"By some miracle, I found my city again tonight," Céspedes noted in her diary on June 30, 1944. "I also found something of myself that I thought I had lost for good."¹⁵⁶ After a while, Céspedes quit the radio and committed herself to *Mercurio* full-time. Having been granted permission to publish it that July, the magazine inaugurated its first issue in September. *Mercurio* brought together different generations of anti-Fascist intellectuals who shared the mission of ushering in a new culture and a new civil society.¹⁵⁷ For them, *Mercurio's* headquarters, at 27 Via Savoia, and the beautiful house of Céspedes at 53 Via Eleonora Duse, became important literary salons.

Franco and Mauro Lucentini's residence in Rome's Prati district also became a cultural landmark as another important literary gathering place. By the end of 1944, it was frequented by many intellectuals, for the most part Jews, who had joined the Americans as they made their way toward Rome. Some had come from as far as North Africa. Franco Lucentini badly wanted to "shed provincialism"¹⁵⁸ and create a gathering place for friends of various bents and people from multiple countries. He was able to achieve his dream on the beautiful terrace

of the large house in Via Avezzana that he had rented at a modest price with the aid of "one of the PWB bosses" (both brothers were working for the organization). Mauro still remembers Gabriele Baldini, Ruggero Jacobbi, Vittorio Gabrieli, Giorgio Melchiori, Joachim Flescher, Frantz Hajek, Claire Neikind (aka Claire Sterling), Alessandro Forti, Misha Kemenetsky (aka Ugo Stille, who performed special tasks for the PWB), Bluma Halpern (aka Flora Alvin), and Maria and Samuel Eisenstein.¹⁵⁹

The Eisensteins were among a select few who frequented both the salon on Via Duse and the one on Via Avezzana. Maria, whose book was published that October, a few weeks after the first issue of *Mercurio*, was now recognized by everyone in her circle as a writer. A "foreign" writer who, Céspedes pointed out in *Mercurio*, "writes in Italian herself."¹⁶⁰

In the February 1947 issue of the magazine, now in its fourth year, Maria Eisenstein published a short piece called "Ciuffo della bugia" (Tuft the Liar), an autobiographical story written with charming irony, in which she narrates her adolescence at a boarding school in postwar Vienna. The fact that the highly demanding "director-dictator"¹⁶¹ of *Mercurio* wanted Maria to collaborate on the magazine testifies to how much she admired her literary gifts.

In the summer of 1944, at the suggestion of Gaspare Casella and probably in collaboration with Irene Brin

who was advising him at the time,¹⁶² De Luigi read the manuscript of *Internee Number 6* and expressed admiration for Eisenstein's writing. His publishing house, Donatello De Luigi Editore, located at 7 Via dei Sabini, was the first to open in Rome after the city was liberated. And Eisenstein's book was one of their first publications.

America

At the end of the 1940s, when the magnitude of the Holocaust had become evident, Rome was a hub for large numbers of displaced persons who mainly came from Central and Eastern Europe, as well as from North Africa. Some wanted to travel on to the Americas; others favored emigrating to Palestine.¹⁶³

With the support of Samuel's family, the Eisensteins applied for visas to enter the United States, thus joining the first wave of migrants. At first, Maria had suggested staying in Italy because, after the war, her bond with Samuel started to appear flimsy ("It was what you'd call a 'war marriage,'" Samuel told me. "We didn't know each other very well, though we had many things in common.").¹⁶⁴ Although at first, according to Bemporad, Maria had wanted to work in the Italian publishing world. She chose instead, having obtained her visa, to be the first of the two to leave at the end of 1948. She was not alone when she crossed the Atlantic; on the ship with her was what was left of her beloved family: her fifty-year-old

mother, Blanka Seinfeld, who had escaped extermination by taking refuge in Siberia, and Maria's elderly grandmother who, unlike her husband, had survived life in the Łódź Ghetto.

Samuel Eisenstein left Italy in 1950 after completing his medical studies, which his internment had interrupted in 1940. In the 1990s, I learned that he and Maria had divorced as soon as he arrived in the United States. I also learned that Maria was still living somewhere in California. Samuel had last seen her about two years before we spoke. With the intention to speak with her, in December 1993, I embarked on a trip to meet her ex husband, Samuel, in Los Angeles, hoping that, with his help, I could finally meet internee number six. This, unfortunately was not to be.

In the Eisenstein home overlooking Sunset Boulevard, Samuel and I spent each day going over our latest steps in search of Maria. We had no search engines and relied exclusively on phone calls. As the days passed, the chances of tracking Maria down seemed to be slipping away, despite the efforts of many of Samuel's old friends and acquaintances. During those hours, I was able to look at documents and old photographs and listened to the elderly doctor who, over lengthy and pleasant conversations, told me about Maria and himself, about their internment, and about his Romanian family's miraculous arrival in America, by way of Trieste, in 1937.

One day, I took down a picture of Maria and photographed it. Returning to Italy, I brought with me that young and smiling image. Shortly thereafter, in March 1994, I would include it in the second edition of her book, published by Tranchida.

I mailed Samuel one of the first copies of the new edition. He wrote back, saying how much he enjoyed the gift and thanking me. Regretfully, he would not be able to inform Maria of the good news. "The saddest thing," he wrote that summer, "is that she does not know that her book is circulating in Italy again. What a pity! But I'm still looking for her address." On October 5, he wrote me again: "I have not stopped looking for Maria. It is unfortunate that she does not know that her book has been published again after fifty years."

Another letter from Los Angeles, dated November 2, 1994, brought an end to my hopes of being able to meet internee number six. "Maria's saga ended on a sad note," wrote Samuel. My dear friend had received the news that his ex-wife had passed away.

Maria Eisenstein died in California on October 16, 1994, a few months after her book was reissued in Italy. However, rather than the year of her disappearance, 1994 would long be remembered, paradoxically, as the year of her reappearance, the start of her rediscovery. In fact, the second edition of *Internee Number 6*, succeeded in putting the book back into circulation.

Italy's reckoning with its own Anti-Semitism

"I don't remember when it occurred to me to begin writing," recounts Eisenstein in her book. "I write for the relief of transcribing a few small things that happen in here. It helps to respond to them, to rant. At this point it has clearly become a kind of diary... But the camp is completely static: There is no action. There is only anxiety, wild mood swings—a silent scream. A scream that comes up from your soul—agony, grief, hatred—and does not translate into actual events. At least not yet."

"At least not yet" has the ring of a premonition, not only regarding the Lanciano camp, where the author was interned, but Italy as a whole. It seems to predict the eventuality of even more terrible events than those Eisenstein was experiencing in 1940.

Eisenstein might have been alluding to the downward spiral that, after the watershed moment of September 8, would lead Fascism to reveal itself: in November 1943, Mussolini's Minister, Guido Buffarini Guidi, ordered mass internment of Jews with the aim of deporting and exterminating them.¹⁶⁵

It has taken ages for even a postwar "democratic" Italy to contemplate what this young woman had clearly perceived at the time of her arrest in 1940, and then recounted in her book in 1944. Her silent scream went

unheard and her sentences were not taken at face value but instead regarded as fiction. Better at times than any historical essay, *Internee Number 6* plumbs "from inside" the vexations of Fascist internment great and small. The banality and misery of life in the camp and the profound anguish (which in some cases led to suicide) with which interned men and women had to grapple from the moment they were arrested quickly vanished into thin air.

In my opinion, *Internee Number 6* was "taken out of circulation" (as per the language I heard at Lanciano 30 years ago) because the text was too advanced for Italy back then. Not only was Maria Eisenstein speaking frankly about the Fascist concentration camps (almost an inviolable taboo at the time!), but she had denounced the widespread abuse and pettiness going on inside them, often without concealing the names of the perpetrators. In short, her work was not "politically correct" in a country committed not to process the memory of war and dictatorship but to building myths to justify and cover up the worst offenses of its Fascist and colonial past. It is easy to understand why, in a country "born out of the Resistance," foreign Jews were largely ignored: what they said, did, and wrote, did not reinforce the feel-good narrative that would take hold of the nation's memory. The denial of Fascism's consensus and the civil war that tore the country apart after the armistice was clearly ascribable, as Filippo Focardi writes, to the anti-Fascist parties' stringent demands for political legitimacy.¹⁶⁶

So it was no accident that *Internee Number 6* was forgotten. In the same years, another account of an inmate from Villa Sorge disappeared: a report on the insurrection in Lanciano written in 1944 by Amerigo Di Menno and the Hungarian Jewish doctor Carlo Schönheim who, together, had selflessly guided the popular revolt.¹⁶⁷ Did people fear that these documents might get in the way of those who were rewriting false narratives of their lives? There is no shortage of reasons to think so. After Di Menno's death and the sad removal of Schönheim from his post,¹⁶⁸ on July 20, 1946, a new report on the Lanciano revolt was published, this time studded with Risorgimento-style rhetoric. This new report claimed the participation of individuals who played no part in the revolt and raised the number of insurgents from 147 to almost five hundred. The phenomenon of post-war denial was not limited to Abruzzo and the city of Lanciano. It involved all Italian citizens, not just politicians, judges, and historians since the repression of memory in the Italian Republic speaks to the broader story of a country unable or unwilling to root out Fascism in the state.¹⁶⁹

Given the politics of memory in Italy at the time, I think that Maria Eisenstein's book, which came out before the war ended and was not published again for another fifty years, ran the risk of disappearing not only from circulation but from the bibliography of the Fascist period. If that did not happen, most of the credit goes to Frantz Hajek, who conferred "historiographic dignity" upon *Internee Number*

6 in 1963, when he mentioned the title in a footnote in his essay *Notes on Foreign Jews in Italy During the War*, a brief but incisive call to action that criticizes the lack of a comprehensive study of foreign Jews under Fascism.

When he wrote the essay, Hajek was a little over sixty and working at the Wiener Library in London. Hajek was not a professional historian but a legal expert. Yet he knew exactly what he was talking about. Born in Kyjov, Moravia, to Jewish parents, he arrived in Italy in the 1930s and had firsthand knowledge of Fascist internment: he and Samuel Eisenstein were among the first group of internees to arrive at the concentration camp in Agnone. Later he was transferred to a camp in Campagna. Having avoided deportation, Hajek found himself in Rome in the latter half of 1944. He was a regular guest at the Lucentini brothers' salon. After the war, he worked at the Czechoslovakian Embassy and shortly after that moved to England.¹⁷⁰

Hajek knew that during the war, the condition of foreign Jews in Italy (who were being arrested and interned with unparalleled ferocity from June 10, 1940, on) had been anything but heaven. In his essay, he first denounces the total dearth of accounts of the Fascist concentration camps. The sheer fact that the author of the essay was a "foreign Jew" who had been interned speaks volumes about the inaction of official historiography and the lack of interest in the subject that prevailed in Italian culture twenty years after the fall of Fascism.¹⁷¹ Like Maria

Eisenstein and Carlo Schönheim, Frantz Hajek knew that those camps had not been “vacation resorts” (as is often remarked in Italy) but filthy and mysterious holding cells that randomly turned out to be either the anterooms of death or the anterooms of freedom. He knew that the internees of Lanciano and the Chieti region had not escaped that binary paradigm that would produce, in Primo Levi’s words, both the “drowned and the saved”; he knew that many of them ended up in Auschwitz.¹⁷²

For those who finally wanted to plug that historical and civil gap, Hajek described what he saw as key to conducting such research:

- 1) Understand the peculiarities of Fascist internment. 2) Map the camps
- 3) Study the participation of foreign Jews to the armed resistance in Italy.

No one rushed to take up his precious advice. Indeed, the question of the Fascist camps continued to be ignored almost until the mid-1980s.¹⁷³ The prevailing vision of the Second World War in Italian historiography and collective memory revolved around 1943-1945 and the Resistance, the “monumental interpretation” of which left little room for experiences such as internment and deportations.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, to relativize and downplay them, Mussolini’s camps were compared to Hitler’s concentration camps.

The idea that concentration camps were solely a German phenomenon took hold both in public opinion and the media. Even when, under pressure from a younger generation of historians, many Italians were forced to admit to the existence of concentration camps in Italy, most were more likely to emphasize the camps' so-called merits (what the Italian camps "had not been" compared to their German counterparts) than attempt to grasp their complexities and historical context. Such positive spins reduced the historical complexity of the Italian camps to simple consolation stories.¹⁷⁵

If Campagna and Ferramonti have been praised as sites of "salvation," credited for protecting the Jews interned there from deportation,¹⁷⁶ it is natural to ask why for fifty years, nobody has talked about the camp of Lanciano, even though it was an important memorial site, as we have seen, given the role it played in the history of internment and resistance—and the fact that it has been seated at the center of a book like this one since 1944.

I believe the answer to this question lies in Maria Eisenstein's intimate and broad account and her specific condemnation of her arrest and internment ("There are seventy-five of us here, hanging in the balance between life and death, languishing..."); of the abuses of the camp director ("with excellent Fascist connections") and the commissioner ("a hypocrite, and vain, and trivial"), a self-proclaimed moral guardian; and of the ways the internees

were exploited outside the camp by peasants ("If we don't pay above market price, the countrywomen won't sell us their merchandise"), corrupt officials (for twenty thousand lire one could be released from internment) and corrupt local administrators (who skimmed 4,500 lire a month from the cafeteria). Maria Eisenstein gives no credence to the bizarre notions of genteel Fascism and vacation resorts. Far less to the artfully constructed – thus hard to erase from collective memory – stereotype of Italians as universally good and charitable, as "brava gente." In her unblinkered prose, that myth is dispelled by the behavior of none other than an anti-Fascist, the author's fiancé, Franco, who vanishes like a coward just when Maria needs him most.

That is why I believe this beautiful and courageous book is as indispensable as any historical account for understanding what Fascist internment represents, for foreign Jews most of all. Since her arrest and detention in a Catania jail, Maria Eisenstein tried to put into words the condition of being in the balance, "waiting for a resolution that will probably be negative and will end with my death." What exactly is a concentration camp? she wonders, trying to compare what she knew of the German camps and the internment of civilians in other states. "We were operating on no information," she writes, "and we tried to imagine a cross between the Isle of Man and Dachau."¹⁷⁷ Later, once she has been interned in Lanciano, she describes it "from inside," lucidly and without rhetorical flourishes: "Being in the camp is terrible. Prison makes you feel guilty. I am not

a strong person. I can see that now... But I still feel that I am alive... Recording in [my] notebook everything that has happened and is happening.”

The events that followed the publication of this book are significant and deserve to be known because – beyond the simple publishing history of the work – they form an integral part of Italy’s intellectual history and its politics of memory. In fact, they lay bare the contradictions of a republic “born out of the Resistance,” its fictions, and representations. They lay bare the long history of collective oblivion, which – not surprisingly – is also part of post-Fascist Italy’s common heritage.¹⁷⁸