

The Economic Persecution of Jews in the Press of Nazi-Occupied Europe. *Le Matin de Paris* and *Il Piccolo di Trieste*: Two Editorial Policies Compared (1940-1945)

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines, with comparative perspective, the strategies that the press of Nazi-occupied Europe used to deal with anti-Jewish persecution. The analysis focuses on the articles devoted to the spoliation of Jewish property edited by Il Piccolo di Trieste and Le Matin de Paris, two newspapers published under the close control of the German occupier respectively in the major cities of the Adriatisches Küstenland (1943-1945) and Occupied France (1940-1944). In particular, the surprising differences of such analysis will be questioned. In fact, on the one hand, the publications of Il Piccolo were completely silent about the economic persecution of the Jews in Trieste, although it was particularly violent; while on the other hand Le Matin used the economic redistribution of Jewish seized property as a propagandistic tool to show the benefits of the anti-Jewish policies. The reasons for this fundamental difference will be researched with the methodology of comparative history, questioning both the different socio-political context of the two cities and the politics of the occupier, which were very different in the two areas of occupation.

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to study the way the press reported the economic persecution of Jews in two local areas occupied by the Nazi administration and army. In particular, the paper will analyse from a comparative perspective the editorial

policies and the language used by two local newspapers published in the occupied cities of Paris and Trieste.

The study of journalistic reports of anti-Jewish persecution is of considerable interest. Newspapers, alongside with the radio, were the most widely used information media in the first half of the 20th century. For totalitarian states in particular, radio and newspapers represented an essential pedagogical medium. In 1921, in an article written in the columns of the *Völkischer Beobachter*, planning the construction of a great national socialist movement, Hitler warned about the need to develop «l'arma più tagliente al servizio di una simile causa: la stampa»¹. This project was put into action in the years between the Nazi seizure of power and the outbreak of the Second World War: within six years, more than 200 newspapers aligned with National Socialism appeared in Europe, reaching an estimated circulation of more than six million copies².

During the Second World War, newspapers kept citizens constantly informed about the progress of the conflict. In this period, censorship and Nazi propaganda controlled the publication and the language used in the news. For this reason, studying the press that circulated in occupied areas also means delving into the communication strategies of the occupiers, analysing their interests and plans through the analysis of the language used in the articles. The articles published in local newspapers of occupied areas can also be seen as the result of a relationship between the occupier and the occupied, between the oppressor's offices in charge of censorship and the indigenous staff of the newspaper. An analysis of both the collaboration between the local population and the occupying forces, and the possibilities of resistance for journalists, represented by the writing and publication of their articles.

This language, which permeated all themes in all newspapers in wartime Nazi-occupied Europe, will be analysed from a specific point of view: the economic persecution of the Jews. This theme, also known as the “anti-Jewish spoliation”, remained in the background of European and world historiography for a long period, especially in comparison to the other themes of Jewish persecution. While the latter was systematically examined since the 1960s, (starting with the work of Raul Hilberg, who gave a comprehensive and European interpretation of the matter and who, without going into it in depth, recognised the spoliation as a central and obligatory step in Jewish destruction's process), the first works on the specific economic persecution were published only at the end of the last decade of the 20th century, thanks to some journalistic scandals and the opening of new

¹ M. Olmi, *I giornali degli altri: storia contemporanea del giornalismo inglese, francese, tedesco ed americano, dal primo dopoguerra a oggi*, Roma, Bulzoni, 1990, pp.277-278.

² G. Salemi, *Europa di carta: guida alla stampa estera*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 2007, p.17.

archives³. The debate that took place during the last decade of the 20th century was such that 23 countries around the world appointed specific commissions to conduct investigations to quantify the belongings of Jews that had been spoiled in their territories and to ascertain possible responsibilities.

Since then, the topic of spoliation has emerged as an autonomous theme within the historiography of the Second World War and the Shoah. The first comparative works about the spoliation of European Jews' properties appeared, and other publications on the various national situations supplemented and complemented the work of the parliamentary commissions⁴.

Moreover, the importance of spoliation in the management of public opinion was noted from many quarters, as anti-Jewish spoliation and the consequent wealth redistribution often brought undeniable economic benefits. In occupied Europe, redistribution became one of the main reasons that brought to collaboration. It has been noted that:

The expropriation of the Jews, therefore, was not limited simply to the implementation of German orders but, was also linked to the behaviour of local societies towards the Jews, that is, to the different forms of antisemitism. As in the German Reich, the corruptive influence that spread with the enrichment from Jewish properties in the occupied territories could also lead to various forms of accommodation to the policies of Nazi Germany⁵.

In order to examine in depth the social dimension of the phenomenon of the anti-Jewish spoliation, this contribution is based on the study of these works, and tries to add a particular and completely new analysis on the language used in local newspapers to describe the economic persecution of the Jews.

The two newspapers chosen for this paper were published respectively in Trieste and in Paris. These areas are quite different from each other. On one hand Paris, the French capital and megalopolis; on the other hand Trieste, a rich harbour city by the Adriatic Sea. Both cities were home to Nazi military and administrative commands, albeit at different periods. In both cities, persecution against the Jews was mixed with economic interests of local people and German officials and soldiers, which were systematically reflected in the persecution practices and in their news reports. The Jewish communities of Trieste and Paris were among

³ M. Dean, *Robbing the Jews. The confiscation of Jewish property in the Holocaust, 1933 – 1945*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 4-5.

⁴ M. Dean, *Robbing the Jews. The confiscation of Jewish property in the Holocaust, 1933 – 1945*, op. cit., pp. 4-5.

⁵ C. Goschler, P. Ther, «A history without boundaries. The robbery and restitution of Jewish property in Europe», in: M. Dean, C. Goschler, P. Ther (a cura di), *Robbery and restitution. The conflict over Jewish property in Europe*, Oxford/New York, Berghan Books, 2007, p.10.

the richest in their respective countries. Among the Paris Jewish community there was the undoubtedly richest and wealthiest group of France – the so-called *Israélites*, to be read as “French citizens practising Israelite religion”. This term was coined by the Jewish upper class itself between the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century to distinguish themselves from the poorer, foreign or recently naturalized Jews, who were commonly called *Juifs* (i.e., Jews). On the eve of the Second World War, Trieste was the city with the largest Jewish community in relation to the total number of residents: the percentage was about 3%, much higher than a national average of no more than one per thousand. Moreover, in the Jewish community of Trieste, there was a small nucleus of very important personalities from an economic and political point of view, grouped around the two major insurance companies, *Riunione Adriatica di Sicurtà* (RAS) and *Assicurazioni Generali*.

I decided to consider two newspapers quite different from each other. On one hand, *Il Piccolo di Trieste*, a local newspaper with a circulation limited to the city. Founded in 1881 by Teodoro Mayer, an exponent of Jewish life in Trieste, *Il Piccolo di Trieste* always followed a pro-Italian editorial line in the years before the annexation of the Adriatic city to the Italian Kingdom, maintaining moderate positions until the establishment of the Fascist regime. Since the 1920s, the figure of Rino Alessi became increasingly important. He arrived in Trieste during the First World War as a correspondent and became editor of the newspaper in 1920; his arrival at the newspaper opened a phase of emphatic support to the regime that lasted from the March on Rome to 1938. In that crucial year, in fact, the newspaper was distinguished by a strong criticism towards the anti-Semitic campaign and the anti-Jewish policy introduced by the regime. This cooling of relations between the Trieste newspaper and the regime led to an open contrast in January 1938, when Rino Alessi wrote an article titled *Un Problema* (A Problem), in which he openly repudiated anti-Semitism and biological racism. This piece provoked harsh reactions from the more markedly anti-Jewish fascist press, in particular the ones from the director of *Il Regime Fascista*, Roberto Farinacci, who wrote an article in his newspaper, describing Trieste as a city totally in the hands of the Jews and asking the regime to intervene harshly. This article was followed by other publications by Farinacci himself and other anti-Semitic journalists such as Giovanni Preziosi and Piero Pellicano. They identified Trieste as an economic centre fully controlled by Jews, and *Il Piccolo* as a newspaper completely subservient to Jewish capital and Jewish interests⁶. After the publication of the racial laws, in November of the same year, Teodoro Meyer had to leave his position as owner to Rino Alessi who, at least until July 25th, 1943 cancelled all the voices

⁶ S. Bon, *Gli ebrei di Trieste. Identità, persecuzione, risposte*, Gorizia, LEG, 2000, pp.45-51

against the fascist anti-Semitism and the Pact of Steel. After the occupation of Trieste, the newspaper changed editors and directors several times, but continued to publish its papers until the end of 1944.

Le Matin was founded in 1884 in Paris, inspired by the British journalism that began with the *Morning News*. The leadership of the paper itself remained in English hands until 1895, those of Sir Alfred Edwards, who decided to sell the paper following the Panama scandal. After a couple of years, under the direction of Henri Poidatz, Maurice Bunau-Varilla took over the presidency of the newspaper and held the position until 1944. As Christian Delporte described it in the preface to Dominique Pinsolle's book, it was an «anticommuniste, antiparlementaire, xénophobe, munichoïse»⁷ newspaper. In the 1930s, the newspaper took an increasingly anti-communist stance, supporting all right-wing authoritarian regimes that were resolutely opposed to Marxist doctrine, such as Japan, Fascist Italy, the Franco front in Spain during the civil war and finally Nazi Germany⁸. With the latter, between 1933 and 1939, the newspaper found a real community of intent, as seems to be confirmed by Hitler's interview for *Le Matin*, which was the first interview granted by Hitler to a French newspaper. The newspaper's management forged a relationship with Ribbentrop, testified by the journalistic Pro-Germany campaigns concerning international issues such as the annexation of Saar to Germany in 1934 and the Sudeten crisis in 1938. These positions also led Nazi Germany to grant financial subsidies to the newspaper⁹. This cooperative would end in 1939, with the conclusion of the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact and the upcoming war. After that year, the articles in *Le Matin* began to be characterised by an integral and bellicose patriotism and by a criticism towards German expansionism. However, with the defeat in the spring of 1940 and the Nazi occupation, the newspaper changed course again coming to an agreement with the German occupier. *Le Matin* gained a privileged position in Paris and the opportunity of starting its publications – under strict Nazi control – before the signing of the armistice, on June 17th, 1940.

The two newspapers are therefore very different from each other, especially for their relationship with the Germans. In its first phase, *Il Piccolo di Trieste* was explicitly opposed to the Germans but it was later forced to align with by the Fascist regime; since the early 1930s, *Le Matin* was explicitly aligned with the regime but after the occupation, it had no choice but to resume an editorial line abandoned only a few months before, and to which the German invasion «donne

⁷ D. Pinsolle, *Le Matin (1894-1944). Une presse d'argent et de chantage*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012, p.13

⁸ D. Pinsolle, *Le Matin (1894-1944). Une presse d'argent et de chantage*, op. cit., pp.242-244

⁹ D. Pinsolle, *Quand la presse défie les états. Les ambitions internationales du Matin (1897-1944)*, in : «Relations internationales», n.153, 2013, pp.45-56

l'occasion de régler ses comptes et de clamer enfin haut et fort ce qu'il ne pouvait que sous-entendre ou dire avec une certaine prudence dans les années 30»¹⁰.

These differences do not interfere with the comparative mode if they are taken into consideration from the beginning of the research. Moreover, we must not forget the freedom of action of the Nazis who, both in Trieste and Paris had strict control over the press and could easily ban or modify the publications of *Il Piccolo*. *Le Matin* too, despite the trust from the Nazi regime, was under strict control of the *Propaganda Abteilung*. As a matter of fact, both newspapers were published in similar and comparable contexts. They had profound differences, to be analysed either from a bottom-up or from a top-down perspective. In other words, conscious of the different history behind the two newspapers, one can ask whether these differences were caused by different and free choices of the two editorial offices, or by two different approaches of the Nazi occupier in two different areas of occupation. However, this article will simply attempt to introduce these questions and establish a first attempt at comparison. The answer to these questions, due to their complexity, will therefore remain open.

2. IL PICCOLO IN TRIESTE: THE SILENCE OF THE NEWSPAPER IN THE OPERAZIONSZONE ADRIATISCHES KÜSTENLAND

After the occupation of Trieste by the German troops on September 8th, 1943 *Il Piccolo* became an editorial space which could satisfy the demands of the occupier. On September 16th, 1943, an article took an explicit position, stating that the defeat was not Italy's fault, but only of its weakest part, using the term "Jew" – for the first time since the occupation – in an instrumental way.

La vera Italia, quella degli operai, dei contadini, dei soldati l'Italia dei giovani consci della tragica fatalità dell'attuale conflitto e convinti che non esiste salvezza all'infuori della vittoria sui finanzieri, sui banchieri, sui plutocrati ebrei di ogni categoria, non ha capitolato, né capitolerà mai, quand'anche questo atteggiamento dovesse costarle più dolorosi sacrifici¹¹.

Starting from this article, terms such as "Ebreo", "Giudeo" and "Israelita" never left the pages of *Il Piccolo*, although they did not become a recurring and central theme in the pages of the newspaper. Between July 25th, 1943 and May 1945, less than forty articles concerning the "Jewish race" appeared on the journal. In this period, the language used by *Il Piccolo* is quite interesting, because it proves the

¹⁰ D. Pinsolle, *Le Matin (1894-1944). Une presse d'argent et de chantage*, op. cit., p. 270.

¹¹ *La vera Italia non ha capitolato*; in: «Il Piccolo», 16 September 1943.

reception and introjection of linguistic principles that had become the rule, even in a context in which one does not find a wide and repeated use of anti-Semitism in the pages of the newspaper. The figure of the Jew appeared overbearing when the newspaper dealt with topics such as, for example, foreign policy. The figure of the Jew stood out when the newspaper dealt with Jewish immigration to Palestine, the spread of anti-Jewish protests and measures throughout Europe and the world, the continuation of the war and the subjugation of the Allied powers to world Jewry. Outside the articles devoted to foreign policy, Jews were presented as criminals, spies, saboteurs in a wide variety of articles. In an apparently “light” article, which gave a historical reconstruction of the “betole” (i.e., popular taverns) of Trieste in the modern era, the Jew is described as the one who had given the order to kill the owner of one of these taverns¹². The day after, an article was entirely dedicated to the death of Abram Trebic Lincoln, a Hungarian “Jew” whose life was characterised by theft and misdeeds, which led him to work as a journalist and politician in Vienna («dove, più che in ogni altro centro europeo, aveva messo radici e si sviluppava la morbosa letteratura giudaica»), and in Budapest, where he influenced European foreign policy during the First World War. He was, in short, the embodiment of the Nazi-fascist stereotype of the thieving, scheming, chameleon-like Jew. As a Jew, public opinion should be pleased with his death: «Questa, a larghi tratti la vita avventurosa quant'altra mai di questo ladruncolo, che dovunque andava seminava rovina e discordia; sfrattato ed arrestato più volte, ricomparve poi sulle stesse scene a continuare la sua iniqua attività. Ora anche questa disgraziata e spregevole vita ha avuto fine»¹³.

However, the references to Judaism in *Il Piccolo* remained very general – except for situations as in the article just reported – and above all they never referred to the anti-Jewish persecution that was taking place in Trieste. The press never reported on the persecution and repression of the Germans, which were simply and systematically concealed. References to the measures taken by the Nazis against the Jews in Trieste were completely absent: there was no mention of expulsions, deportations, arrests, or confiscations. German ordinances were certainly published in Italian, starting with the first one, issued on September 11th, 1943 and published in *Il Piccolo* the following day¹⁴. The ordinance by which Nazi power asserted itself in the city was also published, but without any reference to the

¹² *Locande e bettole del passato*; in: «Il Piccolo», 20 October 1943.

¹³ *Un soggetto per film e romanzi. Le molte vite di Abramo Trebic-Lincoln. Deputato ai comuni, scrittore francese, uomo politico tedesco, venditore d'oppio in Cina e sacerdote buddista*; in: «Il Piccolo», 21 October 1943.

¹⁴ *Ordinanza del Colonnello Barnbeck*; in: «Il Piccolo», 12 September 1943.

persecution of the Jews¹⁵. According to the newspaper, the “Jewish problem” no longer existed in Trieste. On closer inspection, all references to the Jews of Trieste disappeared from the pages of *Il Piccolo*: therefore, it was not only the “Jewish problem” but also the Jewish community of Trieste itself that ceased to exist, which was in fact the actual aim of the occupier. In the twenty months of occupation, events such as the flight of the major Jewish financiers from Trieste, the arrests of Jews, the looting of their property and their resale to the retail trade were never reported.

The newspaper’s position appears rather complex. Anti-Jewish demands and themes had become part of its language, there were no qualms about using anti-Semitism to support its theses and to “colour” the tone of its articles. It is worth reflecting on the failure in the use of the newspaper for anti-Jewish propaganda and for the economic persecution of Jews, especially about the sale of their property. In Trieste, in fact, the spoliation of the Jews provided a rapid redistribution of low valued goods, which were sold at auction to the citizens of Trieste. This redistribution could have received wide publicity in the pages of *Il Piccolo*, it could represent an important issue in favour of the occupiers’ policies. Given the wide instrumental use that was made of the stereotype of the Jew throughout the years of the Nazi occupation of Trieste, it seems unlikely to attribute the choice of not using the newspaper as an advertising space to a sort of sentimentalism of *Il Piccolo* towards the Jews of Trieste. In my opinion, this very aspect supports the idea that the systematic silences on the anti-Jewish persecution policies (economic and otherwise) were due to a precise editorial choice: the question of whether this choice was wanted by the occupier, defended by the newspaper, resulted of an explicit agreement between the two actors or of converging interests, obviously remains open.

3. LE MATIN DE PARIS: A PRINTED CAMPAIGN ON PERSECUTION

In June 1940, German troops entered in Paris where they set up their offices, commands, and officers’ quarters, also in many of the *hotels particuliers* belonging to the wealthy families of French Israelites who had left Paris in the days of the *débaclé*. The editorial staff of *Le Matin*, like that of *Il Piccolo*, suffered some consequences. The reaction of *Le Matin*, however, was very different from what we have seen in Trieste as it reported daily about the persecution of the Jews. Economic persecution was also a recurring theme during the four years of occu-

¹⁵ *L’insediamento del Supremo Commissario della zona di operazioni ‘Litorale Adriatico’*; «Il Piccolo», 16 October 1943.

pation. While in *Il Piccolo* the term “Jew” is used in various ways in less than 40 articles, 41 articles in *Le Matin* specifically reported on the economic persecution of the Jews over the four years, and the number of occurrences of the term “Jew” is almost incalculable.

The economic persecution of the Jews was used by the newspaper in an instrumental way in relation to certain themes. In the first period of the Nazi occupation of Paris, the newspaper was concerned with explaining to the public why the German command and the Vichy government persecuted the Jews. In this context, the issue of the economic redistribution of Jewish wealth to the “French people” had a central role. The Jews, presented to public opinion as the war-mongers and the culprits of the 1940 defeat, had to be removed from the French national body to prevent them from further harming the community. Thus, on October 2nd, 1940, presenting the German order of September 27th, 1940, *Le Matin* stated that:

Les autorités occupantes ont pris une décision qui était attendue. Depuis quelques temps, les juifs qui étaient revenus à Paris et dans les grands centres se montraient particulièrement arrogants. Ils semblaient n’avoir aucune conscience de leurs lourdes responsabilités dans les événements qui ont conduit la France à la catastrophe. La population française supportait impatiemment cette attitude¹⁶.

Three days later, the newspaper published an article that explored the meaning and the consequences of the ordinance against the Jews, portraying them as «l’ennemi n°1, non seulement du peuple allemand mais de la paix et de la civilisation européenne tout entière»¹⁷.

In September 1940, in addition to the explanation of the reasons for conducting anti-Jewish policy, *Le Matin* began to complain about the presence of Jews in various economic sectors. On September 15th, an article mentioned the luxury trade, reporting on a measure taken independently by the Paris traders’ association, which introduced a sort of pass for commerce:

Trop des juifs encombrant des industries de luxe de Paris qui représentent aux yeux du monde le chic, le gout français. Il ne s’agit pas là d’un sectarisme exagéré mais bien d’un mouvement réfléchi et étudié, d’une épuration nécessaire au relèvement économique du pays, à la défense des intérêts français.

In order to obtain the pass, people had to satisfy the following requirements:

¹⁶ *Mesures contre les juifs. Ordonnance du chef de l’administration militaire en France du 27 septembre*; in: «Le Matin», 2 October 1940.

¹⁷ *Ce qui signifient les mesures contre les juifs*; in: «Le Matin», 5 October 1940.

Être français, né de père français non naturalisé, et ne pas être israélite; Être français, né de père français non naturalisé, patenté en France, sans distinction confessionnelle; Être titulaire de la carte de combattant de 1914 ou 1939, sans distinction confessionnelle; Être étranger et non israélite patenté à Paris avant 1914¹⁸.

The introduction of this article clarifies the reasons that brought France to exclude Jews from the economic field. The Jews “cluttered the luxury industries” and sullied one of France’s most famous sectors, which had to return to France as soon as possible. With these words, the article established a clear difference between Jews and French, as if they were two distinct categories: people could only be part of one of them. Even in January 1941, the economic measures taken to limit the influence of the Jews were still making news¹⁹.

In addition to the news concerning the measures taken in the economic field, there were also proposals to speed up and improve the spoliation, allowing a smoother transfer of property from “Jewish” to “French” hands. A few days before the promulgation of the framework law on economic Aryanisation, an article criticised the taxes on the transfer of property taken from the Jews. The author, in fact, complained that such high taxes would have affected French people intentioned to buy Jewish property. He presented a possible solution, the use of expropriation in the public interest:

Dans les cas des aryanisations, il faut faciliter les ventes et permettre au citoyen français qui se porte acheteur de parfaire sa transaction sans la grever d’une charge inutile. Le dégrèvement est possible, si l’on rattache, administrativement, l’aryanisation à une institution bien connue du droit français: l’expropriation pour cause d’utilité publique. [...] L’intérêt général est d’ailleurs évident: il s’agit d’aider un certain nombre de Français à devenir propriétaires au moment où les juifs campés sur la terre de France vont quitter ce pays. Car l’aryanisation doit être un grand bienfait national et social²⁰.

To ensure the success of this “grand bienfait national et social”, the newspaper not only published the full texts of the German ordinances, but also the short articles concerning the purchase of the Jews’ property²¹.

Le Matin stated that the Jewish question had existed for a long time and needed to be resolved. In this sense, the newspaper introduced various cultural-historical insights, to put the persecution of the Jews in a broader historical context, hoping for the introduction of extreme measures to reach a final solution. In one

¹⁸ *Plus des juifs dans le commerce de luxe parisien*; in: «Le Matin», 15 September 1940.

¹⁹ *Le Statut des Juifs commerçants*; in: «Le Matin», 11 January 1941.

²⁰ *Un point de droit. Aryanisation = expropriation*; in: «Le Matin», 19 July 1941.

²¹ *Les immeubles privés appartenant à des juifs vont être mis en vente*; in: «Le Matin», 24 November 1941.

of these insights, referred to past decisions taken in the 17th century and involved the expulsion of Jews from the country, under penalty of confiscation.

Des siècles durant la France fut puissante, et cela à l'époque où les juifs étaient éliminés en tant que facteur de puissance. En 1615, le roi de France ordonna que tous les juifs fussent chassés du pays. [...] Que notre gouvernement actuel ne prend-il une décision identique, l'assainissement total de la France ne se ferait pas attendre longtemps après une mesure aussi simple que nécessaire²².

One very interesting aspect is the persistence with which *Le Matin* described the spoliation and sale of the goods of one family, the Rothschilds. This obstinacy is evident from a simple statistical observation: 23 of the 41 articles concerning the economic restraints taken or to be taken against Jewish economic power were dedicated to the despoliation of the properties of the Rothschild family. Before the introduction of anti-Jewish legislation, some members of this noble and well-known family had already had their property confiscated: the laws on the withdrawal of French citizenship, in fact, punished those who had left France following the defeat, by seizing all their assets and transferring them to the Secours National. On September 10th, 1940 (before any law on the Jews was published), *Le Matin* stated that more than a hundred properties in Paris owned by the Rothschild family would be confiscated²³. This article was followed by other publications about different people and different properties. During the four years of occupation, there were so many reports of the Rothschilds' assets being seized that *Le Matin* gave to the family the ironic epithet of «bienfaiteurs du Secours National»²⁴.

The most important theme in the pages of *Le Matin* was the replacement of the rich and profiteering Jews with the true French and the Rothschild family represented a great propaganda tool. Their pomp and luxury were taken as a generic example of the injustice suffered by the “real French”, caused by the Jewish presence in France:

Un château, un domaine historique, 900 hectares de parcs et de forêts vont revenir à la communauté française. La France recouvre, enfin, grâce à une décision du ministre de l'Agriculture, l'un des plus beaux domaines de la région parisienne, l'abbaye de Vaux-de-Cernay et les immenses terres qui l'entourent, soit 900 hectares. [...] Cernay, c'est aussi un peu de l'histoire de France. Ici le roi séjourna souvent depuis le XV siècle, et, aux environs, de nombreux grands seigneurs dont les noms sont restés à des cités comme autant des témoignages de leur renommée [...]. Pourquoi a-t-il fallu

²² *La France et les juifs*, in: «Le Matin», 12 December 1942.

²³ *Les Rothschild possédaient sous leur nom à Paris près de cent immeubles*; in: «Le Matin», 10 September 1940.

²⁴ *Bienfaiteurs du secours national. Les Rothschild, les loges, les fuyards*; in: «Le Matin», 22 November 1940.

que parmi que parmi ces noms de France vint s'en glisser un étranger et, de surcroît, celui d'une famille internationale? Parce qu'à Cernay comme ailleurs le Juif a tenu à mettre sa griffe sur un souvenir du passé de la France. [...] S'il lui manquait le sens de la décence, les Rothschild possédaient celui de la propriété²⁵.

The Vaux-de-Cernay estate was later sold in August 1943 for almost six and a half million francs, as reported in detail by the newspaper²⁶.

The story of the theft and removal of the Rothschilds' properties became a way describing the power, the evil and the influence of the Jews. This is particularly evident in the article dedicated to the description of the Rothschild bank. This building, "occupied" by the Rothschild family for years, finally returned to the real France, who could use it for new and noble purposes:

Une banque comme les autres? Que non pas! C'est dans ces bureaux que les dynasties des fameux banquiers juifs ont comploté leurs grandes combines, c'est de là que sont partis les ordres qui devaient changer les sorts des États, affoler les puissants, ruiner les nations. Les murs sont les dépositaires de terribles secrets. Cependant, depuis la fuite de la tribu en juin 1940, quelques-uns de ces secrets ont été percés à jour. L'hôtel Rothschild nous apparaît maintenant tel qu'il était en réalité, une sorte de temple maçonnique, dans lequel le Veau d'or s'était embusqué, bien à l'abri de regards indiscrets. Un ascenseur pour vingt-trois marches. [...] Vingt-trois marches à gravir, vingt-trois marches seulement pour accéder au saint des saints, un parcours trop lassant sans doute pour des jambes de financiers. [...] un réseau inextricable de fils électriques, sonneries d'alarme - on ne sait jamais - tableaux d'appels sur lesquels on lit des noms bien français: M. Dreyfus, M. Lévy, M. Loeb...on s'étonne de ne pas les voir écrits en caractères hébraïques. [...] Actuellement, la banque est occupée par les services du Secours National. Là où trônait, dans le mystère, la force corruptrice se sont installés maintenant la solidarité et le devoir social. Sic transit... Et le Secours national s'efforce de mettre de l'ordre et de nettoyer la maison qui en a grand besoin. Les Rothschild, en effet, malgré leurs titres et leurs richesses, n'avait jamais pu se débarrasser de leur crasse, spécifiquement juive²⁷.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The comparative analysis between the editorial line of *Le Matin* and *Il Piccolo* gives us two completely different point of views. These differences are partly

²⁵ *Fief des juifs Rothschild, le château des Vaux-de-Cernay redevient enfin français*; in: «Le Matin», 5 February 1942.

²⁶ *Le domaine de Vaux-de-Cernay qui appartenait au Juif Henri de Rothschild a été adjugé pour 6 millions 400.000 francs*; in: «Le Matin», 2 August 1943.

²⁷ *Dans l'antré traqué des barons de Rothschild. Une visite à la banque de Rue Lafitte*; in: «Le Matin», 26 march 1941.

caused by the history of the two newspapers: the first one, owned by Jews for almost fifty years, until the introduction of the racial laws; the second one, close to German positions, if not in terms of anti-Jewish policy at least in a geopolitical sense. The very different use of economic persecution can undoubtedly derive from the chronology of the two occupations and their characteristics: the occupation of Trieste was brief and intense, while the French occupation was long and fluctuating in the relations between occupiers and occupied.

The chronology can also help us to better understand the different approaches of the two newspapers. Most articles on anti-Jewish plundering were published by *Le Matin* between 1940 and 1942. Only seven of the 41 articles identified were published between the beginning of 1943 and the liberation of Paris in August 1944. 28 of the remaining 34 articles were published between June 1940 and the end of 1941. According to this quick analysis, most of the publications of articles concerning despoliation emerged in the period during which despoliation was taking shape. This aspect can be interpreted as the need of the Germans and their collaborators to justify and explain what was happening, to a public opinion that for the first time had to deal with racist and discriminatory laws towards a minority of the State body. In Trieste there was no need of that: first, because during the occupation there was no legislation concerning anti-Jewish spoliation; second, because the occupier did not fear the reaction of public opinion, which was already accustomed to the discrimination and anti-Jewish persecution introduced by the fascist regime five years before.

It must be pointed out that the profound difference between the policies of the two newspapers concerned “only” the use of the chronicle of persecution at a local level, and not the general approach to anti-Semitism. This seems even more important in its influence on issues of collaborationism. As we have seen, although *Il Piccolo* did not report on the local anti-Jewish persecution, it was also completely aligned with anti-Semitism, which is evident in a substantial number of articles, in ways that we have partly described above. In the two newspapers the main themes were similar: reporting on the Nazi victories, the Allied bombing of the cities of one’s own nation, reporting on the nefarious deeds carried out by individual Allied figures and by the Anglo-American armies, in-depth coverage of the corruption and rot of the capitalist world, reporting on the protests the Jews and the measures that states were taking to solve the Jewish problem, and so on. What profoundly differentiates the two newspapers is their relationship with the events that took place in their local area, on which in one case there is a silence and in the other, there is the intention to use the themes of anti-Jewish persecution as an instrument. The question of responsibilities, reasons, and roles in such a choice remains open.