

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Metamorphosis of an intellectual: Gaetano Salvemini, exile in Europe and the United States

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(Received 6 August 2023; revised 14 August 2023; accepted 15 August 2023;
first published online 19 September 2023)

Abstract

Long neglected, Gaetano Salvemini's years of exile (1925–1949) now constitute a crucial period for reconsidering his intellectual and political profile. This article intends first to propose an overall interpretation of Salvemini's exile that considers the years 1919 to 1925 as the culmination of a profound turning point in his life. The central part of the essay is devoted to reconstructing the genesis of Salvemini's relationship with the United States and dwells on the reflections written after his first trip overseas in 1927. In them it is possible to find a clear analysis of the impact of Fascist propaganda on American soil and a definition of the tasks that exiles were called upon to perform in their host countries. Building on these premises, the study rereads Salvemini's years of American exile by focusing on three aspects. Firstly, his great ability to adapt to the American academic world. Secondly, his commitment to the field of research, with works dedicated to the study of Fascism, some centred on a reinterpretation of the concept of democracy and others on the methodology of history. Thirdly, his prodigious activity carried out in the antifascist struggle.

Keywords: Fascism; exile; United States; transatlantic cultural transfer; antifascism; democracy

1927: The discovery of America

On an unspecified day in early August 1925, Gaetano Salvemini crossed the border between Italy and France. At that precise moment, his long exile began, an exile that would lead him to settle in England for some years and move constantly between Paris and London. Starting in 1927, his travels began to include the United States. Contacted in October 1926 by William Speaking, an American manager who had offered him a lecture tour, Salvemini embarked for America at the end of December. An exhausting tour awaited him: more than 50 lectures concentrated between January and April, with continuous journeys from one city to another, some of which were marked by provocations from Fascist militants activated by the Italian regime's diplomatic structures (Salvemini 2002, xxxiv). In short, a less than pleasant trip. And yet, that first American experience allowed the Italian historian to elaborate some reflections that, as soon as he returned to Paris, were collected in an interview given to the weekly *La Libertà*, which had begun publication on 1 May 1927 by the Concentrazione d'azione antifascista, a coalition of antifascist groups operating from Paris from 1927 to 1934.

The interview includes a lucid snapshot of American society, which is described as a social agglomeration in which ‘the moral conscience of the great mass of Americans is anti-fascist’.¹ Salvemini’s attentive gaze does not miss, however, the fact that at the same time ‘a monstrous propaganda managed to convince an important part of the American public that Fascism saved Italy from Bolshevism, chaos, anarchy, reorganised its life and favoured economic prosperity’. While noting this starting point, the Italian historian believed there was still work to be done in presenting the true face of Fascism to the American public. In particular, it was necessary in his opinion to demonstrate that

it is not true that Italy before the advent of Mussolini was on the verge of anarchy and economic ruin; that it is not true that Italy owes a condition of special prosperity to Fascism; if you show them, with facts, that, on the contrary, Italy is today going through a difficult economic crisis, immediately the great majority takes a resolutely anti-fascist position (Salvemini 1927a).

What is outlined here highlights a qualifying point of Salvemini’s commitment to the antifascist struggle on a transnational scale – a commitment that began immediately after he set foot on British soil. Within a few months he had, in fact, developed an authentic organisational model destined to unfold on several levels. The first was that involving propaganda against the Mussolini regime and the circulation of information from Italy. For this purpose Salvemini intensified his collaboration with the British press, and developed the creation of new communication tools (bulletins, magazines) and of a sort of international press office that could convey all information concerning Italian events (Gussoni 2020, 31–59). A second level was the organisation of relief initiatives for exiles, such as the Italian Refugees Relief Committee (Gussoni 2020, 87–102). A third was the strengthening of transnational academic, cultural and political networks aimed at the development of research activities and the publication of works and articles on Fascism.

It is therefore no coincidence if, scrolling through the most accredited Salvemini bibliography (Cantarella 1984), one can easily verify how many of the articles published by Salvemini during 1926 and 1927 consisted of analyses dedicated to the origins of Fascism and its particular characteristics. These contributions are largely used by the Italian historian in the volume *The Fascist Dictatorship*, the first book of the trilogy dedicated to the history of Fascism. The work was published in December of his last year in the United States (Salvemini 1927b): in a short time, it confirmed the reputation Salvemini had acquired on an international level and the extent of his network of contacts. It was translated into French, Spanish and Chinese, and enjoyed wide circulation in Europe and other continents. A year after its first edition the volume, as the author himself recounts, was redone ‘from top to bottom’ and republished in London (Salvemini 2002, 86).

Interpreting Fascism and rethinking antifascism

That Salvemini’s first ‘American’ impressions contained *in nuce* an actual programme around which he wanted to organise all his public activities after leaving Italy is further confirmed by analysing the second article appearing the day after his return from his first trip to the United States. It is an article with a deliberately programmatic title: *L’opera degli emigrati*. The text, divided into three parts, was published on two separate dates in the same weekly mentioned above (Salvemini 1966, 290–302).²

Following a typically Salveminian logical procedure, in the first of the three parts the author immediately clarifies what, in his view, antifascists living outside Italy should not do. In other words, Salvemini immediately clears the field of hypotheses that he considers

totally outdated and primitive, such as those – circulating in those same years in antifascist circles – of organising armed expeditions capable of entering Italy with the intention of bringing down the Mussolini regime. The conclusions of the first part are therefore clear: the Fascist dictatorship ‘cannot be overthrown by moral forces alone’; a revolutionary crisis ‘is inevitable in Italy if the present situation is to be overcome’ (Salvemini 1966, 293).

In the second section the Italian historian specifically addresses the tasks facing political emigrants. In this case Salvemini starts from a simple question: how ‘can we, emigrants, contribute to the fight against fascism?’ The lucidity of the answer formulated is striking: ‘we must do what our brothers, who are suffocated and paralysed in Italy, cannot do’. And the first objective indicated is to ‘make known the real conditions of Italy in the countries where we are guests’ (Salvemini 1966, 293).

Thus a theme takes shape that will profoundly mark much of Salvemini’s political action in the years he spent away from Italy. This text confirms, in fact, the impression that Salvemini was very quickly refining his analysis of the Italian and international context and orienting it ever more clearly towards the study of the original features of Fascism. It is no coincidence that he specifies in very precise terms that the real crux of the matter was to hinder in every way the propaganda that the Fascist regime was orchestrating throughout the world, with great deployment of means, of presenting itself as the only barrier against the risk of Italy falling under the yoke of Bolshevism. It follows, therefore, that the primary objective must be to demolish, especially in England and the United States, the prejudice according to which a crisis of Fascism would inevitably produce the affirmation of Bolshevism. More generally, by shifting the focus of a potential antifascist initiative outside national borders, according to Salvemini it was necessary to analyse the organisation of Fascist propaganda abroad and the role of Italian communities (Luconi 2000; Pratelli 2012). Indeed, he writes in this regard:

By whom are the fascist groups formed among Italians abroad? In each colony the consul, the employees of the consulate, a certain number of knights or aspirants to knighthood, a certain number of thugs employed by the consulate for propaganda, and a few naive people who took this propaganda seriously are fascists. The remaining Italian population is more or less resolutely anti-fascist (Salvemini 1966, 296).

Beyond what would turn out to be the harsh reality of the North American context with regard to the organisation of antifascist activities (Varsori 1982 and 1984; Baldini and Palma 1990) and above all with regard to the relationship with Italian-American communities (Cannistraro 1999; Ottanelli 2009), it is interesting to note here that the problem that Salvemini was facing at the time was that of developing some kind of strategy to minimally affect the increasingly rapid and incisive ‘fascistisation’ of Italian institutions and society by the Mussolini regime. Salvemini was aware of the evolution of this, even though he had definitively left Italy, through Italian newspapers and magazines that he had sent to himself ‘under fake names’ (Salvemini 2002, 70–71). His proposed plan was as follows:

Our struggle among Italians living outside Italy can have an enormous influence on Italians living in Italy. Just think of the importance of emigrants’ remittances ... for Italian economic life. Every emigrant who refuses to send his savings to Italy is a ruinous enemy for fascism.

A plan that highlighted a very strong limitation: the lack of knowledge of Italian communities outside the European context. Years later, as had already happened in other crucial moments of his political and intellectual life, Salvemini had no qualms about admitting

the error of judgement he had made. In *Dai ricordi di un fuoriuscito* he writes in this regard, thinking back to his first American trip: ‘in 1927, tossed hither and thither like a condemned soul by that murderous impresario, I had come into almost no contact with Italians. In 1929 I returned to America with the intention of studying Italian circles and seeing what I could get out of them. It was not long before I concluded that I was completely off the mark’ (Salvemini 2002, 89–90).

His refocusing of the problem was indeed very rapid. Salvemini quickly perceived that Fascism had profoundly affected the national identity of Italian emigrants and that there was no possibility of being able to count on their support in the antifascist struggle. He also quickly realised that there was no shortage of admirers of Mussolini in American public opinion and in some sectors of academia itself (Diggins 1972; Canali 2017). The way forward was, therefore, a different one. From this point of view, the third and last part of the article *L’opera degli emigrati* provides a series of interesting insights that confirm how Salvemini at that precise turning point had perfectly understood that a clear change of direction was needed in the antifascist struggle. It is not surprising, therefore, that the part of the article in question is entitled *Avere idee nuove* and that, here, Salvemini identifies an initial polemical target towards which to direct his criticism in the traditional political parties ‘both those that are part of the “Concentrazione” and those that remain outside the “Concentrazione”, have, blessedly for them, no need for new ideas. Each of them has its own ideas, perfect, certain, immutable, definitive.’

To those he polemically called ‘traditional parties’, Salvemini attributed the responsibility for not having been able to bar the road to Fascism’s rise to power. Thus we read in this regard:

The victory of fascism did not happen without a reason. It may have been the intrinsic incapacity of the doctrines, it may have been the failings of the men who flaunted those doctrines: the fact remains that all the traditional parties proved incapable of resisting fascism. Mussolini is in Rome and we are in Paris, London and New York, in forced domicile (Salvemini 1966, 298).

Metamorphosis of an intellectual

Read as a whole, this text is doubly important. On the one hand it allows us to perceive how Salvemini places his action within a field in which there are two clearly distinct dimensions: the ‘internal’ dimension (the one linked to the context of origin) and the ‘external’ (international) one in which he now places himself and operates. On the other hand, it confirms that he now adopts a perspective that exploits the cognitive potential of the ‘exile’s gaze’ (Lévi-Strauss 1983), linked to his condition of estrangement and his position as an outsider.³

A confirmation in this context comes to us from the autobiographical pages dedicated by Salvemini to the reconstruction of his experience as an exile, written between 1954 and 1956, but actually conceived as early as the early 1940s (Salvemini 2002, xlii). Historians’ attention has mainly focused on the famous passage in which he states that he had always preferred to define himself as a ‘fuoriuscito’ (Salvemini 2002, 70), while due attention has not been paid to the fact that on that same page, a few lines earlier, the Apulian historian, speaking of his years spent far from Italy, stated:

Personally, I had no reason to complain about the life I was living. First of all, I had chosen it of my own free will. And it had turned out to be anything but painful. I was experiencing countries that would otherwise have remained closed books for me. I was learning a bit of the geography that no one had ever taught me at school,

and which in any case would have been of no use to me had I not left Italy. I owed it to the Duce if I expanded my culture and experience in contact with peoples. Thanks to the contacts with peoples so different from the one I was born into I arrived, in judging my own people, at an indulgence that I had often lacked when I lacked terms of comparison (Salvemini 2002, 70).

Evident in this passage is the ability to grasp the different opportunities offered by the experience of exile, an aspect that has long been ignored by the relevant historiography (Burke 2017). As for the definition Salvemini prefers to use, it should be remembered that it is common for many women and men who have gone through the experience of exile to use various expressions and indulge in one or the other depending on the phases and contexts in which they found themselves talking about it. The perception of the new condition of exile usually occurs gradually: it is the result of a slow evolution linked to various factors, including the conditions in which the protagonists of these events find themselves in the host countries and the type of relationship they choose to maintain with their land of origin (Camurri 2019, 75–76).

The long article of 1927 thus constitutes a key passage in Salvemini's experience as an intellectual now totally projected into a transnational dimension. On the one hand, it certifies his full acceptance of his new condition as an exile and, on the other, it confirms that the author had clearly understood and made his own the responsibilities that, at that precise turning point in European history, weighed on European exiles to relaunch and develop the struggle against totalitarian regimes. From this specific point of view it is evident how Salvemini's choices, in the various steps that prepared the definitive 'landfall' in America, were the result of his precise intellectual and political evolution and an equally clear and rational reading of the crisis of European civilisation that we can trace back to the period following the Great War. In essence, his exile has a strong political connotation. The radical nature of the actions taken in his antifascist battle, the intransigence that characterised his positions in the internal debate within the community of Italian and European exiles, are not linked, as has often been simply emphasised, to character issues. On the contrary, they are the distinguishing mark of a precise way of understanding the role of an exile.

Parallel to this dimension linked to the antifascist struggle, the American experience certainly also positively influenced his intellectual profile (Camurri 2015). As we shall see below, despite his no longer being young and his already broadly defined education, Salvemini demonstrated a great ability to adapt to the context of Harvard University, where he moved permanently in 1934. His openness to debate with other American and European scholars enabled him to enrich his cultural background and place him firmly within a network of scientific and academic relationships of extraordinary interest, distributed between Harvard and the other great universities of the East Coast, New York and San Francisco, within which the most important communities of exiles arriving from Europe in the period between the two wars had progressively formed (Camurri 2009, 43–62; Ash and Sollner 1996). In short, one might say that Salvemini, by a series of fortuitous coincidences, rather than being 'in the eye of the storm' as has been mentioned (Killinger 2002, 284), found himself in the right place at the right time. That is, at the centre of the most relevant phenomenon of knowledge transfer that occurred during the twentieth century, with the forced migration (for political and racial reasons) from Europe to the United States (Hughes 1975).

In reality, as I will try to demonstrate, it was not a matter of more or less fortunate coincidences. The thesis that I wish to argue here is based on the conviction that the choice of exile was the result of one of many evolutions of Salvemini's biography that took place between 1919 and 1925. This evolution must be connected to the reflections

Salvemini elaborated on the transformations produced by the Great War on liberal regimes, the need to rethink the characteristics of democracy and, not least, his decision to interrupt political activity. It is clear that this process experienced a strong acceleration with the rise to power of Fascism and the persecution Salvemini was subjected to by the Mussolini regime. But some evidence suggests that he had long since decided to leave Italy. Therefore, the question to start from can be formulated as follows: how and why did Salvemini mature the idea of becoming an exile?

This is an important question that has long been neglected by the historiography that has dealt with the biography of Gaetano Salvemini and which has only recently begun to be investigated in depth (Audenino 2009), removing those stereotypical representations of Salvemini of the American period (Camurri 2015, xxxiii–xxxiv), ascribable to the famous image of the ‘medieval monk’. This image was introduced by Enzo Tagliacozzo, historian, assistant and collaborator of Salvemini himself, with whom he worked as a fellow at Harvard between 1941 and 1942, and his first biographer (Tagliacozzo 1963, 83). We will, in essence, go in search of the clues Salvemini scattered in texts and letters that allow us to understand how Salvemini prepared his exile.

Becoming an exile in 1930s Europe

In what we can define as a sort of apprenticeship for life as an exile, we can first of all mention the fact that in 1922, when Salvemini made his first long journey to England, he was an established scholar who could boast a solid network of academic acquaintances even outside national borders, especially in France. These relations were linked to his ‘deep-rooted French-speaking culture’ (Quagliariello 2007, 160) which, as is clear from some of his correspondence with Carlo Placci (Salvemini 1988), was consolidated in the years dedicated to the preparation of the volume on the French Revolution, first published in 1905 (Salvemini 1905) and which underwent further developments in the following years with the consolidation of relations with the historian Elie Halévy (Quagliariello 2007, 159; Bucchi 2023, 46–80).

A second prerequisite that I would highlight, however, refers to an element that has been overlooked by Salvemini’s various biographers, namely the fact that Salvemini had long been part of that cultural and associative environment that from the 1910s onwards had transformed Florence into one of the capitals of international culture and one of the most cosmopolitan cities in Europe. A city where a vast community of British intellectuals, writers and artists from various European countries grew up, within which a large group of scholars from the Anglo-Saxon world gravitated around the two Anglo-Florentine landmarks of Vernon Lee’s villa Il Palmerino and Carlo Placci’s residence (Gussoni 2020, 13–15). Other nerve centres of Anglo-Italian friendships were the British Institute, founded in 1917, assiduously frequented by Salvemini, and Villa I Tatti, the Italian residence of Bernard Berenson, around which revolved an international network that linked Italy to European capitals and the United States: it was described as ‘a small court at a German or Italian principality’ (Sprigge 1960, 13). As has been well highlighted (Gussoni 2020; Camurri 2015) and as Salvemini himself had recognised (Salvemini 2002), both Bernard and his wife Mary Berenson played a decisive role in both the Italian historian’s English and American exiles. Finally, it is worth remembering that Salvemini’s meeting with his second wife, Fernande Dauriac, who enabled Salvemini to strengthen his ties with French cultural and political circles, was also linked to the city of Florence (Fantarella 2018).

Taking these elements into account, one can perhaps better interpret the first two trips he made to England. The first took place between the autumn of 1922 and the early months of 1923, interspersed with a few trips to France, where he learned of

the March on Rome (Salvemini 2002, 3). It was to all intents and purposes a study trip: the main objective was the learning of the English language, which Salvemini considered fundamental in order to be able to move within the international scientific community and to possibly aspire to some work experience in the United States. But also of interest to him was the study of English society. In fact, the trip allowed Salvemini to make a series of contacts with academic institutions and with some personalities from the world of journalism (Gussoni 2020, 19) that would soon become of great importance. The letters he wrote a few weeks after his arrival in England to Ernesto Rossi⁴ and Mary Berenson⁵ reveal to us a Salvemini enthusiastic about his experience. And again a careful analysis of the letters exchanged in those months with various interlocutors allows us to perceive that something is rapidly changing in Salvemini's outlook on life. This first and time-limited detachment from Italy allowed the Italian historian to realise that a phase of his life was coming to an end and that in some way he had to think about a new future. On 6 October, he wrote to Ernesto Rossi: 'I am increasingly feeling like a foreigner in Italy. I have wasted thirty years of my life in politics. And now I am beginning to grow old. I am tired, I have lost my taste for rowdy matters, without which there is no politics.'⁶

Week after week, as the political situation in Italy deteriorated, Salvemini's choice became clearer and clearer: to ask for a leave of absence from teaching and to spend an entire year between London and Paris devoting himself solely to his studies. In short, the impression is that of a man who is re-planning his future and, as we shall see later, is also reflecting deeply, using a more detached and meditated instrument such as the diaristic writing of the pages of his *Memorie* (Salvemini 2001). It is precisely at this stage that reference to the United States as a hoped-for future destination begins to appear in some letters. Among the various missives, the one dated 4 November 1922 is particularly interesting because in it the desire to plan a future away from Italy becomes more precise. Addressing the Berensons, he announces to them that he would be returning to England the following spring for a series of lectures, and he adds:

In the meantime the political situation will clear up: either the present regime will stabilise against all my expectations, or a disaster will happen. If I am destined never to return to Italy, I will have learnt English in the meantime, and I will certainly find a decent job in England or the US. Of course it's no fun starting a ... career again at the age of 50. But having wanted the war, it is only fair that I suffer the consequences ...⁷

The reference to America also appears in other missives,⁸ but the one that better than any other certifies in unequivocal terms that Salvemini now had a clear objective to pursue in his head, is the one sent in December 1923 to the Italian-American lawyer and journalist Gino Speranza, from which I quote a few excerpts:

My dearest friend

I am taking the liberty of writing to you of my personal matters, mindful of the courtesy you showed me in 1918 when we met in Rome.

I foresee that I will soon be forced to leave Italy. I have no desire to get involved in politics any more. But my past makes me intolerable to the fascists: nor am I willing to undo anything of my past. At what moment and under what conditions I will be forced to leave Italy, I don't know. I live by the day, with one foot on the ground and one in the air.

But in anticipation of abandoning my teaching, I must look for a new income to live on. I can go on for a year without worries. And I think it will be easy for me to find work in England: in the past year I have learnt English, and I am starting to get

by. But I would like to know if – if need be – I could also find work in the United States. It's an environment I don't know at all. And everyone tells me that there is nothing for a man like me to do.

A man like me, in truth, can do nothing but lectures and conferences. The subjects, which I have studied so far, and in which I believe I can say serious and interesting things are: the Italian Communes, France in the eighteenth century and the Revolution, the history of the nineteenth century; the international politics of the 50 years leading up to the war; the history of the war and the post-war full stop, from a diplomatic and social point of view.

Do you think it would be possible to get a number of American universities to invite me for 1924–1925, i.e. from the autumn of 1924 onwards, to give a series of lectures on any of these subjects, in English of course? The income would have to be such that it would compensate me for all my travel expenses, and leave me a margin to live on afterwards for some time.

I could also give a series of lectures outside the universities on post-war Italy and fascism: they would be scientific, objective, documented lectures to help understand the fascist phenomenon ...⁹

The 'wandering Jew of antifascism'

In the autumn of 1923 Salvemini returned to London to deliver at King's College the series of lectures on the history of Italian foreign policy from 1871 to 1915 previously mentioned in his letter to Bernard Berenson (Salvemini 1970). He actually arrived there as an illegal immigrant, having been denied a passport by the Italian authorities.

The subsequent events that characterised the two-year period 1923–1925, are too widely known to be reconstructed in detail here (Salvemini 2002, xvi–xx). On his return from his second 'mission' in England, Salvemini found himself having to come to terms with a series of events that led him to make some definitive decisions. The year 1924 was marked by a long series of personal vicissitudes, including the serious health problems of his second wife Fernande Dauriac. But it was above all the year of the Matteotti murder, which drove Salvemini to intensify his commitment against the Mussolini regime, consequently becoming increasingly exposed to Fascist attacks and provocations. On 8 June 1925 the Italian historian was arrested in Rome as part of the investigations that the Fascist police had started in connection with the clandestine newspaper *Non Mollare*, which had begun publication in January of that year. Salvemini was first imprisoned at Regina Coeli where he remained for about ten days, and was later transferred to the Murate prison in Florence. His arrest provoked reactions both in Italy (Camurri 2015, xlii) and abroad. Significant solidarity was expressed in England by a large group of academics (including Bolton King, John Maynard Keynes, George Macaulay Trevelyan, Thomas Okey) and various newspapers, causing the Foreign Office to intervene (Gussoni 2020, 24–25).

On 13 July, in a climate of strong tension, the trial against him took place in the Tuscan capital, at the end of which Salvemini was released on bail. On his way out of court, he managed to escape an ambush that the Fascist militias had prepared. Having escaped danger and spent the night at the Rossellis' house, the historian, who was always closely followed in his every move by the police, began a long tour around Italy.

First he went to Naples to visit Giustino Fortunato and Benedetto Croce, then he headed to Sorrento as a guest of Carlo Ruffino and Teresa Ruffino-Martini. From here he moved on to Rome where he stayed for a few days. In the meantime, on 25 July 1925, the amnesty for political offences introduced by the Fascist regime with the aim of releasing the murderers of Giacomo Matteotti from prison was granted. From that

moment on, Salvemini could concretely start thinking about planning his escape from Italy. From the capital he headed for Santa Margherita Ligure, where he was hosted by Raffaele Rossetti, and from there he reached Milan.¹⁰ Arriving by train late at night, he managed to evade the vigilance of two policemen and reached a house by taxi where he stayed in hiding for a few days, working out the final details of his plan to cross the border into France.

Apart from the varying, not perfectly corresponding reconstructions concerning the last steps of the escape plan, interest lies in the conclusion of the affair: in early August, Salvemini was taken by car to the border with France, which was crossed, without any difficulty, at the time when the control guards had gone away for lunch. After crossing the border, Salvemini made his way to the nearby station and shortly afterwards boarded a train. From that moment on, his life would change completely: for a few years he would be perpetually on the run, and on the move between France and England.

A flight made progressively more arduous not only by economic difficulties, and the lack of any kind of certainty about the future, but also by the sequence of measures directed against him in the space of a few months. We refer to the various proceedings concerning his academic position, the loss of his citizenship with the confiscation of his property (1926), and the constant controls to which his person, his correspondence and his publications were subjected. The uncertainty about the future of his academic position was the only thread that still kept Salvemini tied to Italy for a few weeks: this thread was broken, after various hesitations and after several consultations with his closest friends left in Italy, with his letter of resignation sent on 5 November 1925 to the Rector of the University of Florence. It was an act charged with political significance in which he denounced the fact that the 'fascist dictatorship has now completely suppressed in our country those conditions of freedom, without which the university teaching of history – as I understand it – loses all dignity.'¹¹

Many friends tried to convince him to reconsider his decision to leave Italy but all to no avail. The simple reason for this is revealed in still more letters sent during the first weeks of his stay in France. It is no coincidence that these first missives are sent from an address such as the Abbey of Pontigny, one of the most strategic meeting and discussion places for European intellectuals in those years of profound crisis in the culture of the old continent (Chaubet 2009). Albeit with some fluctuation, Salvemini's firm desire not to return to Italy emerges from these letters.¹² They are intertwined with those he received from English friends who took steps to procure him invitations to English universities for cycles of conferences and seminars,¹³ an unequivocal sign that even though so little time had passed he was already thinking about how to reorganise his work.

On 14 October 1925 Salvemini sent a particularly important letter to Mary Berenson in order to understand how far advanced his convictions were. To his friend who wrote worriedly about his economic condition, Salvemini replied that with the various pieces of work he had collected he counted on having made 1926 safe. About his new condition he specified:

I am starting life over for the third time: I began it at 17 when I arrived in Florence; I rebuilt it at 35 after losing everything in Messina; I am starting it again at 52 for the third time. If my health holds out, I feel that I will be fine this time too.¹⁴

A few weeks later, Mary Berenson again sent Salvemini another heartfelt letter full of concern and, as if wanting to discourage the recipient's intentions, added:

American universities have become, in an almost inconceivable way, altars dedicated to Capital, and professors and lecturers must become its [sic] priests, and preachers

in favour of its doctrines. The American bourgeoisie does not want to hear anything that could in any way harm their fanatical religion, and it is they who pay for the colleges and their management. Now fascist propaganda has convinced 9 out of 10 Americans and 99% of the bourgeoisie that they, the fascists, are not only fighting in this battle against negroid anarchy, but against the ugliest forms of Bolshevism. Fascism is therefore very popular among the American bourgeoisie ...¹⁵

Salvemini's reply came three days later from Paris, on his return from a few weeks spent in London where he had met his English friends who had given him a fraternal welcome:

Dear BB and dear Mary, do not grieve thinking of my 'exile'. I would feel more like an exile in Italy. When I am in London I am not an exile: I am at home, I am in the homeland of my heart, free among free men, a man among men. In Paris I feel more like an exile. Who knows that in London or England I won't find some steady occupation starting in 1927. Think what my life would be like these days in Florence, and you will understand that I have lost nothing by leaving.¹⁶

A clear element emerges from these exchanges of correspondence: Salvemini had by now fully settled into the role of the 'wandering Jew of antifascism' as he called himself (Salvemini 2002, 88): in a short time he had managed to give himself a programme of work and set up a plan to be able to launch various initiatives to oppose the Fascist regime. In other words, Salvemini had to all intents and purposes taken up the profession of an exile. He moved back and forth between London and Paris and, shortly afterwards, to the United States: in just a few months he had managed to turn around the difficult situation he had found himself in. He was no longer a man on the run: he became an exile totally dedicated to a cause and managed to make use of one of the opportunities offered by his new condition – that of looking at the transformations of social and political phenomena from afar. On the eve of his departure for his first trip to the United States, he wrote to friends who had remained in Italy that the decisive terrain for the fight against the Fascist regime was not in Italy: 'the key is in England and the United States. On these countries we must concentrate our efforts.'¹⁷

After the 1927 trip, the Italian historian returned to the United States on three other occasions as a visiting professor: in 1929, 1930 and 1932, before beginning his long teaching assignment at Harvard that lasted from Spring Term 1934 to May 1948. During these three periods, he was received respectively at the New School for Social Research in New York, the institution that was bidding to become one of the most important centres for gathering exiles from Europe (Krohn 1993; Friedlander 2019), Harvard University and Yale. As we know from an accurate account of these three experiences, alongside his teaching activities, Salvemini participated in various conferences and debates organised by American institutions and antifascist organisations (Audenino 2009, 15–17). The three trips allowed the Italian historian a slow and progressive 'acclimatisation' to American reality and offered him the opportunity to widen his network of knowledge.

Decisive in many respects was his stay in 1929. At that time, after the cycle of lectures held at the New School in New York, entitled *Italy from 1860 to 1922*, the Italian historian held a series of conferences at Cornell University, Indiana and Colorado. And it was then that he first visited Cambridge and Harvard University to meet the church historian Giorgio La Piana (Torchiani 2015) who introduced him to many colleagues. La Piana played a decisive role in Salvemini's American future, actively working from within the complex academic system of Harvard University to enable Salvemini to obtain an invitation as visiting professor for the Spring Term of 1930 (Salvemini 2002, 88–91) and above all working for his subsequent call to the chair of the history of Italian civilisation that

had been established with a special fund by the American actress Ruth Draper in memory of Lauro De Bosis (Salvemini 2002, 134–141).

Many elements lead one to think that the '29 visit sparked off a passion destined, over the course of the long experience of 1930, to turn into a fatal attraction towards the world of Harvard. However, if it is true that the 'discovery' of Harvard was decisive, it should not be forgotten that many factors influenced Salvemini's choice to turn more and more clearly towards the United States and that, as previously mentioned, these were intertwined with a precise evolution of the political path taken by the Italian historian between 1919 and 1925.

Very briefly one could say that the Salvemini of that period moved along a trajectory that is similar to that of many other European intellectuals who, on the ruins of the First World War, questioned themselves about the consequences produced by this tragic conflict, both with respect to the social and cultural changes it triggered and to the crisis of the liberal regimes and the rise to power of Fascism. This is a process that Salvemini performed in a secluded manner, without exposing himself in public debate but entrusting his thoughts to the reflective pages of his Memoirs (Salvemini 2001), pages in which the criticism of the liberal ruling classes (and those of the Socialist party) is severe. In the form of a soliloquy, he tries to clarify first of all to himself the meaning of the concept of democracy (Bucchi 2023, 146–147), in fact initiating a source of work on this theme that he would develop in the years of exile. The Italian historian was, moreover, fresh from the end of his long experience as editor of the weekly *L'Unità*, whose last very interesting phase¹⁸ had been characterised by the anti-protectionist campaign, the strong denunciation of the oligarchic degeneration of the Socialist party and criticism of the Giolittian system of power, and the relaunching of a new socialist reformism attentive to the demands of the liberal economic model. It is useful to recall here that it is no coincidence that this turning point coincided with the closure of the work that had long ago been started on Carlo Cattaneo, published in March 1922 (Salvemini 1922), a fundamental work for understanding the reflection started by the Italian historian on the future of democracy.

Putting all these elements together and taking into account the personal vicissitudes Salvemini encountered, and the persecution and deprivation he suffered at the hands of the Fascist regime, the choice of the United States as the final destination of his exile goes beyond the reported infatuation. Salvemini's America is first and foremost the space of freedom – it is the choice for a model of democracy to contrast with the totalitarian tendencies of the old continent.

The Harvard years

On various occasions Salvemini spoke of his years at Harvard as the best of his life. On 15 March 1935, after an epistolary silence lasting a few years, Salvemini wrote the following letter to his friend Mary Berenson, the document that best describes the Italian historian's life at the university in Cambridge, Boston:

My life here, dear Mary, is as happy a one as a man can have. After all, I do not live in America. I live in Widener Library from 8.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. and from 3 p.m. to 7.30 p.m. When I add to these hours of work the ten hours of sleep, which I cannot do without, I have very few hours left to live in America. And in those few hours my America is Cambridge, an enchanted island, where everyone is generous and kind to me, and where life passes as quietly as the Charles River. Widener is there at my disposal. The librarian has assigned me a study room, where I have all my books and notes. If I need a book, I go and find it myself without having to wait a

minute. I am the richest man in America, because I own Widener, and I pay no taxes. If a book is not in the catalogue, I ask for it and they buy it for me, thanking me for pointing out a gap that needed to be filled. And here too I have made some dear friends. This has been the good fortune of my life, the ease I have always found in making friends, becoming attached to them and being loved by them.¹⁹

This passage alone would be enough to refute the positions of those who had questioned the Italian teacher's ability to fit into the new American reality. The caricatured image constructed by Tagliacozzo above is therefore today to be considered completely outdated. Having elsewhere traced a balance of Salvemini's American experience (Camurri 2015, xlvii–lvii), I will try on this occasion to focus my observations using three parameters for evaluation that are usually applied in the field of so-called exile studies to reconstruct the exiles' life experiences and the impact of their professional activities in the host countries.

The first is that of adaptation to the new reality to which the exile moves. From this point of view Salvemini's adaptation to the American context was very rapid and, taking into account his no longer being young, in many respects even surprising. He by no means lived as a 'voluntary recluse' as his biographer quoted above puts it, but in a short time managed to build up a vast network of acquaintances, some of which in time turned into solid friendships. Starting therefore from the Harvard environment, we can point out the figures of the future Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, among the personalities closest to President Roosevelt, as well as those of many colleagues including the German political scientist Carl Joachim Friedrich; Arthur Schlesinger Jr; William Langer, lecturer in European History and president of the American Historical Association; Samuel Eliot Morison, lecturer in American history; and Kenneth Murdoch, lecturer in English literature and master of Leverett House, the student dormitory where Salvemini occupied two spartan rooms, one of which was used as a study room.

After this group of friends and colleagues, one can identify a second circle of people who constitute what we can call the Salvemini circle – people with whom he had frequent relations and great closeness and confidence: a sort of 'extended family'. Giorgio La Piana and his sister Angelina belonged to this small group, whose house was one of the places most frequented by the Apulian historian on weekends and major holidays. Also in Cambridge, another house, more worldly than that of the La Piana family, where Salvemini attended dinners and convivial evenings, was that of Matilde and Roberto Pfifer. Over the years, this circle of friends grew to include Anna Foa and Davide Jona, Franco Modigliani and his wife Serena Calabi. When he travelled for short periods outside Cambridge, his favourite destinations were the New York home of Maritza and Roberto Bolaffio, among the few people who enjoyed his complete trust, and the home of Michele and Hélène Cantarella (one of his most important translators) in Northampton (MA), the town that is home to Smith College.

Harvard remained his 'workshop', which first and foremost allowed him to work in the best conditions, to elaborate new research projects and, at the same time, using the prestige that came with belonging to that scientific community, allowed him to progressively expand his contacts with both the American academic and cultural world and with the political world, including the Italian-American one.

It is not yet possible to reconstruct a complete map of this network of relations built by the Italian historian during his American years: we can, however, demarcate a series of fields within which Salvemini's action developed, each of them comprising various nuclei of people.

To the world of academia and politics belong the following personalities with whom the Italian historian maintained solid relations: the journalist Walter Lippmann, with whom he had already come into contact before arriving at Harvard; Alvin Johnson, the

creator of the 'university in exile', the New School for Social Research in New York; the other great Italian exiles Max Ascoli, Giuseppe Antonio Borgese and the Slavist Renato Poggioli, also fleeing Fascist Italy, who in 1938 arrived at Smith College and in 1947 took up a post at Harvard University; the lecturer and renowned translator Arthur Livingstone; the writers Lewis Mumford and Sinclair Lewis; a committed intellectual figure like Roger Baldwin, whose name recurs in many cultural initiatives and in the defence of human rights; Arturo Toscanini; the art historian Lionello Venturi; and among the 'politicians' the minister Cordell Hull; Norman Thomas, a leading exponent of American socialism; the mayor of New York Fiorello La Guardia; and the lawyer Dan Acheson, the future foreign minister.

A separate group includes young American scholars such as Stuart Hughes, William Solomon, Norman Kogan, Reinhold Schumann and Catherine Boyd, whose careers were directly influenced by Salvemini's teaching. A further circle is that which includes the whole variegated world of antifascism, with, in the forefront, the exponents who gave life to the Mazzini Society (including the already mentioned Ascoli, Cantarella, Poggioli and Venturi). Also in this camp are other political activists belonging to various political families: militant socialists such as Battistoni, Bertelli, Clemente, Lupis, Massari, Valenti, Zito; Freemasons and Republicans such as Fama and Carrara; anarchists and anarcho-syndicalists such as Felicani, Guabello and Borghi among the former, and Galleani, Giovannitti and Tresca among the latter. Not forgetting the large group of mainly Italian-American trade unionists such as Antonini, Bellanca, Grandinetti, Gualtieri, Molisani, Sala and Salerno.

Particularly relevant is a fourth circle of personalities connected to the world of journalism, a field in which Salvemini was very active. Among the names that can be mentioned are those of Bruce Bliven of *The New Republic*; Hamilton Fisch Amstrong, long-time editor of the magazine *Foreign Affairs*; Oswald Villard Garrison and Freida Kirchway of *The Nation*; Raymond Graham Swing, and Dorothy Thompson.

The second parameter for evaluation we can use is that of scientific production and teaching activity. After stormy and difficult years, Salvemini found tranquility and serenity on the 'enchanted island' of Cambridge: all his energies were initially devoted to research and the preparation of a number of papers, in addition to teaching. Apart from the study programmes announced to Mary Berenson in the aforementioned letter, with objectives that were in part unfulfilled, according to a widely shared judgement the most significant fruits of Salvemini's years spent at Harvard were certainly those dedicated to the study of Fascism, with the publication of *Under the Axe of Fascism* (Salvemini 1936) which completed the trilogy begun with *The Fascist Dictatorship in Italy* (Salvemini 1927b) followed by *Mussolini diplomate* (Salvemini 1932), and the posthumous volume *Harvard Lectures. L'Italia dal 1919 a 1929* (Salvemini 1961) that had a complicated genesis and an equally complex publishing life (Bucchi 2023, 191–192).

The revival of interest in questions of methodology in historical research is significant. The occasion was provided by a series of lectures given in 1938 in Chicago, later collected in the volume *Historian and Scientist*, published by Harvard University Press in 1939. Salvemini's aim was to compare a series of issues that were at the centre of American historiographical debate in those years, such as that of the objectivity of historical research, a topic on which other great European historians exiled in the United States wrote, such as Arthur Rosenberg and Ernst Kantorowicz (Tortarolo 2007, Tortarolo 2016). As has been rightly observed (Bucchi 2023, 177–179), albeit with the presence of only a single new contribution, the overall layout of the volume appeared as an intelligent re-adaptation of the famous 1902 proslusion at the University of Messina (Salvemini 1902), the general theoretical framework of which it maintained.

A third field of research is that of the reflection on the crisis of democracy, on the opposition between democracy and dictatorships and on the concept of freedom, a

theme that would occupy a central position in Salvemini's writings from the second half of the 1930s. I refer essentially to two texts that constitute significant turning points in his intellectual biography: *Democracy and Dictatorship* (1934) and *What is Freedom* (1935), but these themes are taken up in other articles published in those years until 1940 when *Democracy Reconsidered* was printed (Salvemini 2007). This was by no means the first time the Apulian historian had reasoned on the subject of democracy. He had done so immediately after the March on Rome by entrusting to his diary (in the pages dated 28 January 1923) some enlightening passages in which he had tried to identify the reasons for the collapse of liberal institutions (Salvemini 2001, 195–200), the importance of which was underlined by Norberto Bobbio (Bobbio 1984, 52). If it is true, as has been written, that the above-mentioned pages of the diary 'would deserve a place of honour in any handbook of the history of political doctrines of rigorous analytical observance' (Portinaro 2009, 323–324), it is equally true that in the above-mentioned contributions new reflections find ample development and systematisation within a conceptual framework that has in the meantime been enriched by the best reflection of European and American political science of those years. From this point of view, the 1934 text presents clear references to James Bryce's *The American Commonwealth*; there seem to be strong Weberian influences and those of Hans Kelsen's writings on democracy published in the 1920s; and, above all, those referring to Schumpeter's *Capitalism, Fascism and Democracy* – a scholar who had begun teaching at Harvard in 1932 – with whom there seem to be the greatest convergences on the theoretical level (Portinaro 2009, 335). In short, Salvemini, thanks to his knowledge of the mechanisms of American political life and thanks also, one might add, to the 'contaminations' coming from the scientific international context in which he is fully integrated,²⁰ is able to develop a redefinition of the concept of democracy that was – not by chance – largely taken up by authors such as Norberto Bobbio and Giovanni Sartori, whose elaborations on these themes have had a strong impact on international debate (Portinaro 2009, 321).

Although he found himself in a marginal position within the complicated Harvard academic system, there is no doubt that the Italian historian succeeded in gaining the sympathy and esteem of many colleagues in just a few years. Why did Salvemini manage to win this consideration within a world where it was not easy for European refugees to fit in? Why, in other words, did Salvemini succeed at Harvard?

He was certainly an appreciated and beloved lecturer (Camurri 2015, li), but not only in the sense of a 'teacher' capable of creating a school of scholars who profoundly renewed the teaching of Italian history in America in that country's universities, but in the broader and more intimately connoted sense of his nature as a pedagogue, as educator, as admirably highlighted by Eugenio Garin (Garin 1959). But the historian and intellectual Salvemini was appreciated above all for his mental attitude, his openness and his ability to express critical and independent thought. These qualities certainly constituted distinctive traits of his personality, which in the Harvard community were particularly appreciated and automatically elevated him, like other exiles, to a position among the liberal exponents of that university.

There is, finally, a third parameter that can be used to assess Salvemini's American years, and that is political activity. If his intense research activity can be easily measured by consulting Cantarella's cited bibliography, it is almost impossible to give an exact indication of the Italian historian's considerable activity as a lecturer, which took him from one end of the United States to the other, in a sort of personal struggle against the Fascist regime (Valiani 1961, 1237–1341; Killinger 2002, 267–299; Quagliariello 2007, 168–207). What is certain is that in those years Salvemini produced an enormous amount of papers, articles, surveys, conferences, debates.

This was an unbridled activism that should not, however, be misleading. It was not only the fruit of a rediscovered tranquility and a new vitality, but also the result of a significant metamorphosis undergone by the intellectual Salvemini in the experience of exile; a transformation that also produced a resurgence of the old political passion, which had been dormant for some years after the disappointments and suffering suffered when he left Italy. The two aspects are, as we shall see below, strongly interconnected and constitute a distinctive trait of the exiles' experience, and correspond exactly to two axes along which the Italian historian's personal history unfolded: study and political commitment. Among the thaumaturgical effects produced by the stay on the 'enchanted island' of Cambridge, there was also that of having recomposed these two elements in a harmonious way.

As in other phases of his life, the rediscovered passion for politics in the 1930s was based on a precise political analysis of the European and Italian situation. The return to active political commitment that would see him progressively involved in the initiatives against the Mussolini regime, and its allies and sympathisers in America, took place on the basis of a precise redefinition of the categories of democracy and freedom that led him to fight not only against totalitarian regimes but also against the indifference that reigned in public opinion in countries not subjected to the yoke of dictatorships and against the intellectuals who, in those same countries, were engaged in the useless and harmful game of criticising democratic institutions.

Acknowledgements. I would like to express my sincere thanks to the two anonymous referees for their comments that helped to improve the content of the article. Thank you also to David Bamforth for the competence with which he conducted the revision of the English translation.

Competing interests. The author declares none.

Notes

- 1 *Un'ora con Gaetano Salvemini reduce dall'America, La Libertà*, 15 May 1927.
- 2 See Salvemini 1966, 290–302. *L'opera degli emigrati*, article comprising three separate parts: I, *Quel che non dobbiamo fare*; II, *La propaganda all'estero*; III, *Avere idee nuove*, 17 July and 14 August 1927.
- 3 I take up here some of the reflections developed by Carlo Ginzburg on the theme of distance in Ginzburg 1998.
- 4 See *Lettera di Gaetano Salvemini a Ernesto Rossi*, 6 settembre 1922, in Salvemini 1985, 74.
- 5 See *Lettera di Gaetano Salvemini a Bernard Berenson*, 8 settembre 1922, in Salvemini 1985, 78–79.
- 6 *Lettera di Gaetano Salvemini a Ernesto Rossi*, 6 ottobre 1922, in Salvemini 1985, 90.
- 7 *Lettera di Gaetano Salvemini a Ernesto Rossi*, 4 novembre 1922, in Salvemini 1985, 103.
- 8 See, for example, the letter addressed to Prezzolini, 5 November 1922, in Salvemini 1985, 113–114.
- 9 Houghton Library, Harvard University, Autograph File, S, 1556–1996, *Lettera di Gaetano Salvemini a Gino Charles Speranza*, 4 dicembre 1923.
- 10 We are following the reconstruction proposed in Tagliacozzo 1963, 63–64, which, however, from this point onwards diverges from that provided by Salvemini himself in his *Dai ricordi di un fuoruscito* (Salvemini 2002), 21–23.
- 11 *Lettera di Gaetano Salvemini al Rettore dell'Università di Firenze*, 5 novembre 1925, in Salvemini 1985, 74.
- 12 Symptomatic was the letter sent on 11 October 1925 to Nicky Mariano, the secretary of Bernard Berenson, in Salvemini 1985, 430–431.
- 13 See in this sense *Lettera di Ray Strachey a Gaetano Salvemini*, Londra, 22 agosto 1925, in Salvemini 1985, 386; or *Wickham Steed a Gaetano Salvemini*, Londra, 24 agosto 1925, in Salvemini 1985, 389–400.
- 14 *Lettera di Gaetano Salvemini a Mary Berenson*, 14 ottobre 1925, in Salvemini 1985, 436–437.
- 15 *Lettera di Mary Berenson a Gaetano Salvemini*, Vienna, 8 novembre 1925, in Salvemini 1985, 478–480.
- 16 *Lettera di Gaetano Salvemini a Mary Berenson*, Parigi, 11 novembre 1925, in Salvemini 1985, 213–214.
- 17 See *Lettera di Gaetano Salvemini a Umberto Zanotti-Bianco*, s.l. 14 dicembre [1926], in Salvemini 1985, 549.
- 18 See in this regard Grassi 1986, 329–363.
- 19 *Lettera di Gaetano Salvemini a Mary Berenson*, 15 marzo 1935, in Origo 1982, 166–169.
- 20 It is barely worth mentioning that some of the contributions on the theme of democracy were published in anthologies in which Salvemini found himself in the company of the most important exponents of democratic

and liberal culture of the time, many of whom were exiles like himself in the United States or other countries. See in particular, the collection edited by R.A. Anshen, *Freedom, Its Meaning* (Harcourt-Brace, New York, 1940), where Salvemini's essay *Democracy Reconsidered* (329–348) can be found alongside articles by Benedetto Croce, Thomas Mann, Paul Tillich, Alvin Johnson, Bertrand Russell, Franz Boas, Louis Brandeis, John Dewey, Henri Bergson, and Jacques Maritain.

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Italian summary

Per lungo tempo trascurati, gli anni dell'esilio (1925–1949) costituiscono oggi un passaggio cruciale per riconsiderare il profilo intellettuale e politico di Gaetano Salvemini. Il contributo intende in primo luogo proporre un'interpretazione complessiva dell'esilio salveminiiano che considera il punto di arrivo di una svolta profonda che interviene nella sua biografia negli anni compresi tra il 1919 e il 1925. La parte centrale del saggio è dedicata a ricostruire la genesi del rapporto di Salvemini con gli Stati Uniti e si sofferma sulle riflessioni scritte dopo il suo primo viaggio compiuto oltre Oceano nel 1927. In esse è possibile ritrovare una chiara analisi dell'impatto della propaganda fascista in terra americana e la definizione dei compiti che gli esuli erano chiamati a svolgere nei paesi di accoglienza. Partendo da queste premesse, il contributo rilegge gli anni dell'esilio americano di Salvemini concentrandosi su tre aspetti. In primo luogo, la sua grande capacità di adattamento al mondo accademico statunitense. Secondariamente l'impegno nel campo della ricerca, con i lavori dedicati allo studio del fascismo, con quelli centrati sulla rilettura del concetto di democrazia e quelli di metodologia della storia. In terzo luogo, la prodigiosa attività realizzata nella lotta antifascista.

Cite this article: Camurri R (2023). Metamorphosis of an intellectual: Gaetano Salvemini, exile in Europe and the United States. *Modern Italy* 28, 327–343. <https://doi.org/10.1017/mit.2023.47>