A visitor to the Jewish Ghetto of Venice will notice two markers—signs that confirm its identity. The first is the Holocaust memorial, composed of seven cast-bronze plates on a red brick wall surmounted by barbed wire. (It creates a visual parallel with the concentration camp that lends itself to an incorrect literal interpretation.) Besides this symbol of mourning, the most visible manifestation of Jewish life is that of the Lubavitcher Hasidim, whether in the guise of their Rebbe’s smiling face in the House of Chabad’s window or in the welcoming attitude of one of its active members bustling about the square. Both signs are certainly true to the Ghetto but they tell a very partial and misleading story of this unique area. In contrast to those evident markers, I want to bring forward and unravel some of the hidden and marginalized narratives of the Ghetto, and discuss their relevance for Jewish identity and the future of Venetian Jews.

“Ghetto,” the word which most directly defines an ethnic space and which has become synonymous with segregation, originated here. Several Jewish enclaves already existed within the Holy Roman Empire (from Prague to Frankfurt) well before the sixteenth century. But the symbolic primacy of the Venetian Ghetto is demonstrated by the rapid trademarking of its name all over Italy and Europe—a process due to the contradictory facets of the Venetian settlement. Its clear topographical structure facilitated a strict regulation of the Jewish population restricted to living there but, at the same time, there was a degree of autonomy and partial self-governance. In fact the Ghetto of Venice has often been much more than its name implies. Following recent historians, I prefer a more dialectical description of this area as a dynamic site in which, and around which, Jewish identity has been constantly negotiated.

The psychoanalyst Alberto Semè can help us to place the Ghetto in its broader historical and urban context:

Venice has always been a multiethnic city [. . .] for the very simple reason
that nobody can survive here for long [. . .]. So with us the problem has always been that of importing people and convincing them that Venice is a sort of Eden. [. . .] When I write ‘with us’, I’m evidently using an oxymoron: ‘we’, in fact, literally do not exist as an autochthonous population, as true indigenous people. We and they, the imported ones, are one and the same. [. . .] Other cities have a founding myth of purity. [. . .] Not us. The city was born as a refugium, a shelter, as a negative place, as a welcoming (damp) land for people escaping from the barbarians.²

Constrained within the narrow limits of an island, surrounded by water, a safe haven for refugees, multiethnic and multilingual, the Ghetto turns out to be a perfect microcosm of Venice, epitomizing the potentialities and contradictions of the city as a whole. Venice is a place where identity has always been dynamic and negotiated across different cultural boundaries, with foreigners quickly making themselves at home.

Consider the changing relationship between the Ghetto and Jewish identity by focusing on three different historical moments.³ The first “centripetal” moment takes place in the early sixteenth century and covers the establishing of the Ghetto as a Jewish quarter. The second, “centrifugal” moment (in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century) reveals the social division of the Jews after emancipation and their contradictory attitudes towards the Ghetto. The third, “gravitational” moment chronicles the revival of the Jewish community after the Shoah and explores its most recent developments. Then I will add a coda, which audaciously casts a look at some possible future scenarios for Jewish life in the Ghetto of Venice.

**Genesis: Centripetal Forces in the Ghetto**

*Geto del rame del nostro Comun:* “Public Copper Foundry.” This is the oldest designation of a peripheral, northwestern area of Venice where copper bars were produced for the fabrication of cannons, an industrial plant where the majority of workers were German. For security reasons the compound was walled in and isolated from the neighboring islets, one of which was used as a dumping ground for the losses and returns of the foundry. When the site became too small for the military demands of the Republic, the plant was transferred to the shipyard of the Arsenale, and in 1434 the whole area was put up for auction. The former dump was turned into an urban settlement, which by analogy took the name of *Geto Novo*. The newly erected edifices were built on the perimeter of the island, leaving a large courtyard in the middle: part of the space that was ostensibly destined for a new church. But a controversy between the two neighboring parishes left the Geto as the largest churchless square in Venice. It is not clear whether it was the early German foundry workers or the incoming German Jews who, gutturализing the initial “G,” turned the Getto (pronounced “jetto”) into the Ghetto.

In 1510, following the battle of Agnadello, where Venice suffered a crucial defeat from the League of Cambrai, many Jews fled from the warring territories to Venice and settled, as it was customary, near the market district.⁴ Five years later two different proposals were advanced that all these newcomers should be
concentrated either on the island of the Giudecca (whose name has nothing to do with Jews, contrary to a widely held belief, but derives from the verb “to adjudicate”) or in Murano, the latter a possibility which invites amusing speculations on a parallel universe of successful Jewish glass-blowers. In 1516 the City Council finally decreed the removal of the Jews e corpore civitatis, “from the body of the city,” as responsible for the “perversity of the state.”

The urban historian Ennio Concina points out that the establishment of the Ghetto took place in the context of a profound symbolic and urban renovation that followed the defeat of Agnadello, an event that marked the beginning of the irreversible decline of the city. Since preachers and friars blamed the vices and dissipation of the city for the defeat, the government reorganized not only its commercial infrastructures but also the external signs of its devotion. Venice refashioned itself as the New Jerusalem, one of the central elements of that Venetian myth whose symbolic power would make up for its political and military decline. While the new Church of San Salvador (the Holy Savior) was built in the center of the city, the final resolution of this process was to confine the Jews—theologically supplanted by the Christian verus Israel (the “true” Israel)—at the margins, in the Geto Novo.

The doors to the canal were walled up, barring access to the primary Venetian mode of communication. The services of the Jews were thus secured for the city but safely kept at the periphery, the traditional receptacle of all evil and perversity. The state of exception of the Jews was stabilized by an “inclusive exclusion.” The dump for the metal had become a dump for the people.

In 1638 the illustrious Rabbi Simone Luzzatto perfectly summarized the status of early modern antisemitism: “Those who, to defame the Jewish Nation, called it bilge and cloacae of every filthy business, by such abuse and slander they perhaps signified its necessity and urgency, being the bilge to the ship and the cloacae to the sumptuous palace of uttermost necessity.” The language of disease and prophylaxis was common in discourses on the constitution of the Ghetto, suggesting to Richard Sennett the image of an “urban condom.” But looking comparatively at the contemporary condition of European Jews, the historian Roberto Bonfil, observes that in fact the Ghetto was a sort of mediation between the chimera of unconditioned acceptance and the nightmare of expulsion.

When the Jews entered the Ghetto, where rental fees skyrocketed at once, they had to make of necessity a virtue: their internal reorganization of space can be best described as an experiment in imagination. The Ghetto turned inwards instead of expanding outwards. Buildings became taller and apartments much smaller: six- or seven-story palazzos accommodated as many as ten apartments. One family went to the extreme of purchasing the empty space in front of their home in order not to have their view restricted. When two centuries later an architect tried to identify an apartment belonging to his client, he found himself in a maze where only the position of a synagogue functioned as a reference point. Synagogues shared this introspective inclination and only one out of the five principal ones has a studied formal façade.
But Venetian sculptors and architects, showing how the Ghetto was not isolated from the artistic life of the city, designed all the interior decorations. In fact the Ghetto became a vital social and cultural laboratory, where five ethnic groups of Jews, who arrived in different waves from Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and the Ottoman Empire, gradually merged into one single group. This multiethnic composition is another unique feature of the Venetian Ghetto and its community.

The Ghetto had many cultural protagonists, among them Rabbi Leon da Modena, author of a celebrated autobiography, the already mentioned Rabbi Simone Luzzatto, and the poetess Sara Coppio Sullam. One single fact highlights the importance of this Jewish cultural milieu: out of the nearly 4000 Hebrew books printed in Europe up to 1650, 1284, or nearly a third, were printed in Venice, including the first Talmud.\(^\text{10}\)

The newborn community also developed a Judeo-Venetian jargon, characteristically made of the local language enriched with Hebrew terms. To quote only one meaningful example, Jews referred to the Ghetto by the term “hasser,” derived from the Hebrew hatzer הָצֶר, “courtyard,” which suggests an intimate and a familiar space.\(^\text{11}\)

Despite the strict rules, which forbade Jews to leave the area at night and prescribed the wearing of a yellow badge during daylight excursions, the Ghetto was characterized by a considerable incoming and outgoing traffic.\(^\text{12}\) Soon the area attracted curious visitors and the first account of Venice by an Englishman, Thomas Coryat, contains a revelatory statement. His first impression upon entering the synagogue was that Jews lacked respect to the place since they neither knelt down nor removed their hats from their heads. He later engaged in a theological dispute with a Rabbi and marveled at the man’s unwillingness to convert. The dispute then became a brawl, and Coryat was saved from threatening Jews by the providential intervention of the English ambassador, Sir Henry Wotton.\(^\text{13}\)

Throughout the early modern period the Ghetto was a place of contradiction and ambivalence, as the trials of the Inquisition testify. Many Portuguese merchants who were new converts were accused of a double identity, one inside and the other outside of the Ghetto. In one interesting case, Zuan Iacomo de Fidelì, a Jewish convert formerly known as Simele, was denounced to the inquisition for living in the Ghetto and practicing Jewish habits. In his defense, he claimed that he had been licensed to do that in order to convert his wife and children, newly arrived there, without being harassed by other Jews.\(^\text{14}\)

And then there is the most talked of Venetian Jew of all ages, imaginary as he is: Shylock. Shakespeare’s representation of Venice is famously ambiguous, very specific and very inaccurate at once. It is probable that he never set foot in Italy but gathered precious information on the city on the Serenissima from books and Venetian visitors in London. And yet recently the historian Brian Pullan has shown how certain details in *The Merchant of Venice* bear striking similarities to actual events that occurred in Venice.\(^\text{15}\) Just to mention one: Shylock’s loan of 3000 ducats could hardly match the real legal situation where Jews were not allowed to loan more
than 3 ducats, and it also differs from the 10,000 florins Shakespeare found in his literary source Il Pecorone. But 3000 ducats is precisely the sum involved in a trial that took place in 1567 between a Jew and a Christian. It was the Jew Abraham Abencini who accused the Portuguese Christian Gaspar and Giovanni Ribeira of usury and won the case. To complicate the story, a few years later the Ribeiras were discovered to be crypto-Jews, trying to secure a tie with the Jewish community by arranging the marriage of Gaspar’s daughter, Violante, to a distinguished Jewish family. Like Shakespeare’s Jessica, Violante resisted her father’s will and married a Christian man instead. The last relevant fact is that the Ribeiras did not reside in the Ghetto (which goes famously unmentioned in Shakespeare’s play) but in a parish quite far from it, showing how Jewish geography in Venice was more complicated. If we think of The Merchant of Venice as a text that subtly plays on the inversion, subversion, and conversion of religious and economic identities, Pullan’s findings become very tantalizing.

**Unification: The Centrifugal Ghetto**

The next moment under scrutiny involves a considerable leap forward. Napoleon has come, the heavy wooden gates of the Ghetto have been publicly burned in 1797, Venice has been a real democratic republic for a very short season during which the Ghetto has been renamed “Neighborhood of Reunion.” Then Napoleon is gone, after handing the city back to the Austrians: Jews are liberated but they still don’t enjoy full civil rights, which won’t be granted until 1818. The enterprising and the wealthy among them have gradually abandoned the Ghetto, which has reverted to its original name and has declined socially and economically. Two mid-nineteenth-century visitors provide a distorted glimpse of this decay and of the social division of the Jewish community. To this day it is evident in the self-explanatory categories of su and zò, “upper” and “lower” Jews. For the former, social ascent had corresponded to a distancing from the Ghetto, while the latter, the zò, being lower class, had remained in or around the Ghetto and had become identified, often derogatorily, with it.

Théophile Gautier recorded the decay of the Ghetto in his Voyage en Italie: “Everything had a strange, savage and mysterious air. Some quaint and furtive figures slid silently along the walls with a fearful air. Hooked noses, coal-black eyes on a green paleness, sharp features, pointed chins, everything emphasized a different race. [. . .] All the forgotten maladies of the Oriental leprosaria seemed to corrode those scabby walls [. . .] No line was perpendicular . . . a floor was caved in and another jutting out.”

Simon Levis Sullam, who has produced the most recent historical narrative of the post-Ghetto Jews, notices how Gautier’s account provides a sort of handbook of orientalism. It is a Baedeker of projective antisemitism, a gathering of all stereotypes, from Jewish stinginess to images of belle juives, beautiful and exotic Jewesses. And, of course, there is the claim of immense riches hidden from Gentile looks inside the run-down buildings. One might observe in addition the projected symbiosis between people and houses, with semihuman figures almost crawling
on walls, and these walls that are in turn personified as diseased individuals.

Another foreign traveler, the American William Dean Howells, expressed a similar sense of revulsion and orientalist fascination for the Ghetto. What interests me here, though, is not his own account of the visit itself, but the opening of the chapter in his book *Venetian Life* (1885) dedicated to Jewish life in Venice. It shows how Gautier was wrong on many accounts—most of all to the fact that whatever Jewish wealth there was had left the Ghetto.

Shylock is dead. [. . .] if he lived, Antonio would hardly spit upon his gorgeous pantaloons or his Parisian coat, as he met him on the Rialto; that he would far rather call out to him, ‘Ció Shylock! Bon di! Go piaser vederla’ [=Good Morning, Shylock, nice to see you]; that, if Shylock by any chance entrapped Antonio into a foolish promise to pay him a pound of his flesh on certain conditions, the honest commissary of police before whom they brought their affair would dismiss them both to the madhouse at San Servolo.18

Outside of the Ghetto the modern Shylock is envisioned as a man of mode, whose proverbial gabardine has been replaced by the latest Parisian cry. No mention is made by Howells of physiognomy or racial features, so that, as many recent critical studies have emphasized, on this occasion one would have needed to ask Portia’s question: which is the merchant here and which the Jew?

A Jewish perspective on this period comes from Israel Zangwill, the founder of Anglo-Jewish literature, who framed his collection *Dreamers of the Ghetto*—a modern epic of Jewish emancipation—with two stories set in Venice. In the opening one, “A Child of the Ghetto,” a child leaves the Ghetto during Yom Kippur and discovers the outer world. The consequence will be dramatic: “Something larger had come into his life, a sense of a vaster universe without, and its spaciousness and strangeness filled his soul with a nameless trouble and a vague unrest. He was no longer a child of the Ghetto.”19

The last story, “Chad Gadya,” analyzes the long-term effect of that discovery. After having studied for years in Vienna, an assimilated Jew returns to his wealthy family in Venice, who live now in a sumptuous palazzo on the Grand Canal. His participation in the Passover Seder reveals to him the impossibility of harmonizing his religious memories and his new modern identity. At the end of harrowing meditations, accompanied by the chanting of Chad Gadya, he drowns himself in the Canal, the last words issuing from his gurgling throat being “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.”20

The relationship of “upper” and “lower” Jews to the Ghetto from complete emancipation to the onset of Fascism is illustrated by Levis Sullam. He tells an exemplary episode which occurred in 1923, when the community decided to celebrate its patriotic contribution to the Great War. “The experience and remembrance of the war were in fact a moment of supreme fusion of the Jews with the nation; but they also were the instance of forced and necessary abandonment of any social, cultural, and religious difference.”21 Two memorial monuments were unveiled,
one in the Jewish cemetery in the island of the Lido, the other on the façade of the Levantine Synagogue. Initially the Israelite Fraternity—a philanthropic society constituted by affluent Jews in the Ghetto to help the destitute—had proposed a single monument in the Lido with the name of the 24 Jews who had perished in the war. The peripheral position of the proposed monument in the cemetery betrayed the disaffiliation from the Ghetto by upper-class Jews, and their desire not to separate a Jewish celebration from an Italian celebration. But voicing the feelings of a group of less affluent Jews living in or near the Ghetto, a plaque on the Synagogue was also requested, in imitation of Catholic churches.22 As Levis Sullam comments: “The Ghetto produced a peculiar ‘topography’ in Jewish Venetian memory, it continued to generate a division within the community and its memory, and, in some individuals, a sense and fear of a possible Jewish separateness from the Italian nation.”23 The terrible delusion of integration was finally shattered in 1938, when the Fascist regime (which many Jews had patriotically supported) issued the racial laws that categorized Jews as a different race, and expelled them from schools, universities, and most professions, creating a new social ghettoization.24

It was, ironically, under Fascism that the Jewish identity of Italians was dramatically reshaped. Eight years before the racist laws, a royal decree, designed after the agreement subscribed to by the Italian state and the Vatican, made it compulsory for Jews to affiliate with a single federation of Jewish communities. Those who didn’t accept were considered apostates. This event blocked any alternative to Orthodox Judaism, which, if hardly the dominant form of Jewish practice, has remained to this day the only officially organized form of congregation of Jewish life in Italy.25 Even more ironically, it was in the period between 1938 and 1943, under the racial laws, that many Jews rediscovered their Jewishness, and Jewish children of all classes were forced to go to school together, even though not in the Ghetto.

The worst was yet to come: when Italy signed the armistice with the Allies in 1943, Germany occupied Northern Italy. The new Nazi-Fascist regime deported thousands of Italian Jews to the death camps. Less than a quarter of a century after the celebration of Jewish patriotism in World War I, another plaque commemorates the six million European Jews, 8000 from Italy, 200 from Venice, many of whom were elderly people who lived in the Old Age Home in the Ghetto, who were murdered. On this sad page of Jewish history much has been written: unlike most other European states, the majority of Italian Jews survived. But it would be historically inaccurate to suggest, as widely asserted, that Italian antisemitism was but a courtesy of Mussolini’s to Hitler. Italian antisemitism was ancient and deep-rooted.26 At the same time one has to celebrate the many non-Jewish friends, neighbors and sometimes strangers, who saved the lives of the majority of Venetian Jews.

A moving black-and-white picture from 1945 testifies to the rebirth of the Community: a group of Venetian Jews, in front of the Levantine synagogue, gather around an American soldier, who is embracing the Torah scrolls.27
Today: Gravitational Force of the Ghetto

In the 993 pages which Giulio Lorenzetti devoted to the artistic beauties of the city in *Venice and Its Lagoon* (1956), its most accurate historical-artistic guide, the Ghetto merits ten lines. He designates the Campiello delle Scuole as the site where “stood the Synagogues of the Jews” (emphasis mine). Lorenzetti would be surprised today to discover that the Jewish museum and the synagogues, now advertised as tourist landmarks, count nearly 100,000 admissions a year. “Is this the Jewish church?”, “Is this the Mosque?”, “Is this the Pagoda?”, “Why do you still wait for the Messiah?”, “Why don’t you convert?” In a country that is still by and large monocultural, these are some of the questions that I have been asked by visitors in the Ghetto. They show the vague notions on Judaism entertained by many Italians. They also demonstrate how the Ghetto becomes a place for questioning, curiosity about Jews and Judaism, and the interrogation of religious and cultural difference. But the tourist success of the Museum is inversely proportional to the demographic decline of the Jewish community, caused on the hand by the general difficulties of the Venetian population and, on the other hand, more typically Jewish factors, such as intermarriage and the lack of an alternative to an orthodox community.

The cultural reclaiming of the Ghetto began in the late 1970s with a campaign that ironically began under the slogan “Let us revive the Jewish cemetery.” It was a politics of cooperation between the Jewish community (which returned its administrative offices to the Ghetto after an absence of decades of absence) and the administration that made possible the restoration of the main Jewish monuments, beginning with the ancient Cemetery on the island of the Lido. In the same years, the Lithuanian sculptor Arvit Blatas, a camp survivor and long-time visitor to Venice, contributed the first part of the Holocaust memorial, described at the beginning of this essay. The work was completed in 1993, when his bas-relief, “The Last Train,” was installed over a wooden plank bearing the names of all the deported Venetian Jews.

Despite the fact that the community regularly fosters events to celebrate Jewish life and culture, public gatherings in the Ghetto tend to focus on the commemoration of the Nazi and Fascist persecution. Situated in the most left-wing area of town, the Ghetto is often chosen as the site for the official celebration of Liberation Day (April 25) or Remembrance Day (January 27), which commemorates the destruction of the gates of Auschwitz. These have become the occasions for disputes between the left-center municipality, eager to celebrate its antifascist history, and the right-center regional government, eager to distance itself from the Fascist roots of some of its members.

As for the few local Jews, their relationship with the Ghetto, where only a handful of Jewish families currently live, has been sought in little traces. Jewish life is still oriented inwards for historical and architectural reasons but also for reasons of security. Significantly, the only public activities are funerals and the celebration of Yom Ha-Shoah in front of the Holocaust memorial. All these factors seem sadly to indicate that today Jewish culture manifests itself primarily under the melancholic signs of memory and death.
While the community declines and the Museum attracts by and large non-Jewish visitors, the Lubavitchers reach out to Jews. This group represents “one of the most visibly and successfully resistant ‘countercultures’ of Euro-American modernity [. . .] whose remarkable spread [. . .] is an odd echo of the global reach of American culture.”29 Having settled in Venice in the late 1980s (though they often get recognized as the most authentic Jews in the Ghetto), they have been very effective in bringing a conspicuous volume of religious tourism to the Ghetto. They have been the first to celebrate a Jewish holiday in the open, staging a public lighting of the lights of Hanukkah. While the community born 500 years ago is dying out, the Lubavitchers are capitalizing on the fame of the Ghetto and remain the only successful Jewish group in town, managing to open the first Kosher restaurant in decades and after many failed attempts by the community. Their visual and musical Jewishness has exposed the contradictions of both the local Jewish community and the tradition of Venetian tolerance, which concur in the belief that ethnic difference is respected as long as it is not exhibited. A recent interview in the local newspaper Il Gazzettino with the Lubavitcher Rebbe was used as the less traumatic way to underscore the difference between the more discrete Venetian Jews and this group, who seem to have attracted as many as 500 lawsuits against them. As for internal Jewish relations, the Lubavitchers don’t recognize the orthodox status of the Community, to the extent that their leader, who adorned the cover of a recent fancy book on “Rabbis,” asks in the same volume for generous donations to open a Mikveh, disregarding the one recently constructed for the Jewish Community.

Recent political events, both national and international, have made the Ghetto once again a sensitive spot in Venice. Frequent antisemitic and neo-Nazi graffiti have appeared there. In early 2002 a group of right-wing extremists were arrested for allegedly planning to blow up its gas pipes. During the worst stages of the Middle Eastern crisis, a vociferous group of pro-Palestinian demonstrators decided to build a mock military checkpoint to demonstrate the harshness of Palestinian life. Though their slogans were carefully devised so as not to surrender to the temptation of antisemitism, they staged their demonstration right outside the Ghetto. Lately the Ghetto was even included in the post 9–11 geography of terrorism: in July 2002 newspapers reported rumors that Al Qaeda had planned an attack on the site. It is just another irony that a site of Jewish segregation should become a Jewish symbol targeted by terrorism. Different as they are in their political orientations, these episodes seem to suggest that in some extreme instances, the Ghetto, though now largely a non-Jewish area, is taken as the emblem of Jewishness and somehow also disavowed as an integral part of greater Venice.

On a lighter note, that the ghetto has become a contended space can be finally demonstrated by a look at its virtual avatars in cyberspace. One can currently find three different websites: the first predictably launched by the technologically-gifted Lubavitchers, the second being the official homepage of the Jewish Community, and the third designed by a community member in disagreement with the official one.30
Coda: Ghetto 2010?
I want to conclude with a vision of the future. In our epoch of global metropolis, cities of quartz, and digital highways, one may desire to leave the fantasy of Venice intact and preserve the illusion of an arcadia on water, where time is frozen and the ugliness of modern urban life is magically absent. But behind its splendid façade Venice hides—epitomizes?—many of the contradictions of the society of post-modern spectacle: here culture is increasingly commodified and real people disappear.

The combined trends of Venetian and Jewish demography suggest that in a few decades the Jewish community will have vanished. Tourism has been rapidly destroying the social fabric of a city that had 170,000 inhabitants in the 1950s and counts now less than 60,000. Likewise, the Jewish community that had numbered 3,000 in 1910 is now below 500. Not only do young Jews share the problems of all Venetians in finding a job or affording a house, but they also suffer the difficulty of living a meaningful Jewish life in a shrinking community. The most realistic future scenario indicates that the unchallenged waves of tourism will definitely transform the Ghetto—the whole of Venice perhaps—into a large museum area. That, and not the floods that so attracted the international mass media, will finally kill the Most Serene Republic.

To offer an alternative to such a gloomy view, let me return to my opening quotation: “Venice has always been a multiethnic city [. . .] for the very simple reason that nobody can survive here for long [. . .]. So with us the problem has always been that of importing people and convincing them that Venice is a sort of Eden.”

Why should we not envision the Ghetto as the site of an International Center for Jewish Studies? With a rotating population of international scholars and students recreating the cultural vitality of the best eras of Leon da Modena and Sara Coppio Sullam. Instead of a mass tourism basking in melancholic—perhaps sadistic—fantasies of dead Jews, I dream of a new cultural traffic capable of creating a vivacious, pluralistic, international Jewish life in the Ghetto. Models to imitate abound: the Association of American College and University Programs in Italy counts over 80 members, some of which are already active in Venice.

It is then no utopia to imagine a Jewish-oriented academic program founded in the Ghetto, capable of restoring it to its most positive historical vocation. It would be a place where scholars and students, as well as artists and writers, can live in this unique historical environment, interact with the local community, and become a companion to it, always present, always different. The Ghetto needs a new kind of Jewish visitor. If in a famous joke, Jews have a few hours to learn how to survive under water, it may take just a bit longer to learn how to prosper over Venetian waters.

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NOTES


23. Levis Sullam, p. 251.

24. The history of the persecution is told by Renata Segre in *Gli ebrei a Venezia 1938–1945*. 

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27. The picture is reproduced in Segre’s volume.


31. The full list is available at <www.aacupi.org>. 