Was Cesare Lombroso Antisemitic?

Gabriel Cavaglion

Jewish Italian physician Cesare (Hizkiah Mordecai) Lombroso (1835-1909) was a reformer in modern penology and is considered by many to be the father of positivist criminology. His writings on race, however, make him unquestionably antisemitic. Why would a Jew write on antisemitism?

Whether Lombroso was right or wrong is perhaps in the last analysis not so important as the unquestionable fact that his ideas proved so challenging that they gave unprecedented impetus to the study of the criminal offender. Any scholar who succeeds in driving hundreds of students to search for the truth, and whose ideas after half a century still possess vitality, merits an honorable place in the history of thought (Sellin, 1937). A careful study of Lombroso’s heritage, education, environment, and ambition yields some rationales for both his attitude toward his fellow Jews and his influential role in penology and criminology. This essay discusses all these elements in the formation of Lombroso—the scientist and the man.

Lombroso went to secular Italian schools in Verona and Chieri, in northern Italy. Here, thanks to his astute and idealistic mother, he was exposed to cultures of the non-Jewish world, “rich in poetry and art, so typical of distinguished and respectable Jewish families, in an enlightened, scholarly atmosphere, in which Jewish tradition was utterly compatible with revolutionary ideas” (Drapkin, 1977, 25).

Unlike his mother, his father was God-fearing, fearful and anxious, unskilled, and, as merchant and breadwinner, a failure. He was a man “made happy by a quiet life, study, and reading holy books” (Dolza, 1990, 29). His granddaughter, Cesare’s daughter Gina Lombroso, described him as “scholarly, kindhearted, gentle, and mild, but very shy, very religious, awkward, weak, and completely obedient to conservative traditions” (G.
Lombroso, 1915). He caused the economic collapse and the loss of the family’s assets when Cesare was a boy. This character, known in Jewish-European satirical literature as a “shlemiel” (Gilman, 1986), would come to represent the embodiment of traditional Judaism to the adult Cesare and the focus of his attack, as described below.

As early as age 10, Cesare rebelled against his father in everything connected with observance of the commandments, and he renounced faith and ritual. He considered himself a free thinker and a rationalist, adopting a worldview of materialism and skepticism, intermingled with the prevailing liberal humanist ideology of the period, as befitted an enlightened northern Italian Jew. As a telling example, his first name, Cesare, meaning a Roman emperor, is a nickname that he adopted as his formal name. By doing so, he allied himself with ancient Italian tradition and with the Romantic pride of modern unified Italy. The names inscribed on his birth certificate, Mordecai and Hizkiah, would be forgotten.

The tension he felt with religious conventions would remain conspicuous throughout his lifetime. For example, when he agreed, past the age of 30, to marry a Jewish girl, he refused to consult with family or with a matchmaker, as was the custom then, thus causing great tension between his traditional relatives and himself (Baima Bollone, 1992, 72).

Lombroso grew up in a period of historically fateful transformations: the continued emancipation of the Jews of northern Italy and the assimilation of the Jewish middle and intellectual classes into the life of the young nation, and their support for political movements that identified with insurgency and the unification of the state (Risorgimento Italiano). Lombroso served as a military doctor in military prisons in southern Italy (the Calabria region), where he encountered an assortment of dialects and cultures. He later directed a psychiatric hospital, was an academic researcher at the University of Torino, and was a political initiator in the People’s Party in this town (Wolfgang, 1973, 238).

According to Rafter and Gibson in their updated introduction to the Criminal Woman, Lombroso grew up at a time of political and intellectual upheaval, of yearning for the revival, unification, and independence of a divided Italy—the dream of expelling the occupying foreign forces, defeating absolutist regimes, and unifying the Italian peninsula under a parliamentary government (in Lombroso and Ferrero, 2004, 15).

Lombroso believed in the leaders of the independence movement. Shocked by the poverty, epidemics, ignorance, and malnutrition of the population that he saw as a military doctor in Calabria, he developed a sense of mission to improve the physical and mental health of the lower class. In time, notes the Italian historian Delia Frigessi, impelled by his political and
social sensitivity, he became an active figure in the Socialist party and served a term as a member of the Torino City Council (Frigessi, 2003, 263).

Lombroso was an active person by nature who, according to his daughter Gina, wanted to know everything about everything. He loved to be present where culture was produced and disseminated, and invested great effort in being part of the literary scene. He never missed an opportunity to express his opinion, even if it had no logical basis (Rondini, 2001). As will be seen below, it is not difficult to separate his impetuous, mercurial, and extroverted nature from the form and content of his scientific articles; neither is it a problem to differentiate between his desire to distance himself from what his father, as a believing Jew, symbolized for him and his own convictions regarding the place of the people of Israel.

**Racial Science Theory**

Lombroso, like many doctors of the period, was influenced by Darwinist theory and by phrenology and craniology (measurement of the brain and cranium to identify attributes of character/disposition, morality, and personality of the patient). Among other things, he developed a model for the identification of bodily attributes in criminals by measuring sizes, symmetries, and anatomical proportions. This anthropometry is an area that, despite the credit accorded to Lombroso, began its development as early as Della Porte in 1586 and Lavater in 1775 (for a review, see Jones, 1986, 82).

In the Lombrosian model, the concept of atavism is linked to an irreversible process of the hereditable transmission of internal physical characteristics and the creation of populations with inferior development among the species, such as criminals, wild men, and apes. To protect society, Lombroso believed that deliberate selection was appropriate, to complement and fortify natural selection (Lombroso, 1911, xv). In earlier versions, he considered criminals “atavistic throwbacks” to primitive varieties in the continuum of the development of the species. He determined that “the criminal is not at all a member of the race of ‘knowing’ humans, Homo sapiens, but represents instead a throwback to a residual form of an earlier, more primitive race—*Homo delinquens*” (Shoham, Rahav, and Addad, 1987, 72). Lombroso dealt with issues of eugenics by prescribing programs of physical and mental hygiene.

Lombroso considered himself a progressive, scientific emissary, tending to the concerns of the new status of his country, Italy. And as a scientist it was his desire to promote Italy as an equal among the European nations. He felt an obligation to an agenda of Italy’s internal affairs, wanting among other things to propose a solution for the enormous gap dividing Aryan northern Italy—European, progressive, and highly educated—from Semitic
southern Italy—Mediterranean, conservative, poor, distressed, and neglected (Gibson, 1998). One aim of Lombroso’s anthropology was to position Italy among modern European nations, thereby creating boundaries around a new Italian citizenry, or, in Horn’s terminology, “an imagined Italian citizenry” (Horn, 2003, 33).

In Lombroso’s world, northern Italians were Europeans in every respect, but he tended to marginalize the southerners, who had joined the unification of Italy in 1871. The southerners were the “Other”—primitive, untamed, poor, violent, vengeful, and corrupt. According to Horn (2003, 37-43), Lombroso’s preoccupation with crime represented his attempt to eliminate the “savage” from the European Enlightenment: to demarcate the boundaries between progressive Europe and the inferior third world. In the fifth edition of *The Criminal Man* (*L’Uomo Deliquente*, 1878), Lombroso stated that criminals speak like wild men living within the flourishing European culture. Thus, as a scientist, he proposed a solution involving the identification, classification, and eradication of the wild, a rational management of social deviancy.

Not surprisingly, Lombroso provided racist ammunition for Western demagogues. For example, in his book *Delitti Vecchi e Nuovi* (1902), he says, “Regardless of dress or habits that may camouflage the American black man, he has a surfeit of contempt for the lives of others, [has] the pitilessness so characteristic of all wild men” (Lombroso, 1902, 12). The white man is “most perfect,” the black, “most imperfect.” The black man represents “the most primitive race; he has not changed throughout thousands of years, and he still exhibits the childish style, his smile and movements similar to that of the apes” (quoted in Gibson, 1998, 105). Lombroso praises Western-Northern civilization, which he defines as industrialized, rich, well educated, and well informed by the press (Lombroso, 1902, 7). Australia is depicted as the most civilized country and a happy civilization, because of its white population and modernity. States with high rates of immigration from “barbarian” uncivilized countries nevertheless suffer from violent crimes. The presence of “colored populations” in the United States is characterized by “a lower stage of civility,” which accounts for the high murder rates. Homicide is part of daily life in the sense that beast-like sexual impulses are as well. Lombroso takes the same attitude toward people from the south of Italy, whom he views as the remnant of barbarian hordes (Albanians and Greeks), living in an inferior moral stage (Lombroso, 1902, 57), thirsting for revenge and perceiving this as natural behavior.
For the most part, modern Western criminology texts, with a few isolated exceptions—e.g., Adler, Mueller, and Laufer, 1991—have made little mention of the racial implications of Lombrosian theory. There is no mention whatsoever of this sinister subject either in criminological or in historical texts (Gibson, 1998, 114).

An attempt to understand why the texts have repeatedly ignored or muzzled the racial ramifications of Lombrosian theory and his shameless attitude toward Judaism is beyond the scope of this essay. I will mention just two possible explanations for the denial, the ignoring, or the silence: 1) the lack of English translations of a few of the original texts, and 2) criminological positivism’s fear of harsh criticism of the “founding father” of modern criminology, with the result, to be avoided at all costs, that the branch upon which they have been sitting could be cut out from under them.

Criminologists consider Cesare Lombroso’s methodology to be controversial. Criticism of the methodology of the father of positivism, however, is only part of the story. It is true that Lombroso was guilty of positivist thinking’s basic sin: the ability to organize one’s arguments with basic internal logic in order to explain how phenomena occur and fall into place. This is the First Commandment of positivism, as defined by Auguste Comte. But surely a more serious sin, as this paper will stress, is its substance.

It is primarily Lombroso’s flawed methodology that seems to have attracted most of the criticism of these literary genres throughout the years. This gives rise to a certain paradox in the body of our knowledge of criminology: while we can assert that Lombroso was indeed the father of modern criminology, could he also have been the father of criminological positivism, which insists on basing itself on objective and neutral empiricism, appropriate methodology, and the creation of internal logic?

A sample of 26 textbooks and introductions to criminology examined from the bookshelves of Israeli institutions of higher education reveals an invariable duplication of content. A thorough summary of this duplication, with an expanded critical discussion of the methodological problem, can be found in Dario Melossi (2008, 49-52):

- Regarding the nature of the criminal without regard to the cultural variable and its influences on the law enforcement system.
- A rigid reliance on causal fallacy, using only two variables (for example, body structure as a direct factor in criminal activity).
- The lack of a control group.
• A disregard of the screening done by the law enforcement system, which tends to imprison certain populations. These are prisoners, not necessarily representative of the criminal population.

Internal logic is rarely mentioned as the most damning shortcoming. It would appear that Lombroso took pains to eschew thought of any kind in order to graft the facts onto a supposedly logical theory. Gould (1981) says that Lombroso constructed virtually all his arguments in a manner that excluded defeat, thus making them scientifically meaningless. Whenever he encountered a contrary fact, he performed some mental gymnastics to incorporate it within his system (Gould, 126).

His “positivist method” was thus to create chaos in the course of developing the theory, or “the messiness of science-in-the-making” (Horn, 2003, 5). Lombroso preferred adding to his publications, including ever newer editions, to processing, fine-tuning, and integrating. He hastened to publish as much as he could, never subjecting his various editions to revision. The result was text that was uneven, confused, and full of contradictions and errors. Lombroso, a man of curiosity, was also impulsive and disorganized. He had an enormous craving for knowledge, information gathering, measurement, and the creation of categories in the naïve hope that loading more and more material and creating more categories would result in the creation of knowledge: “a considerable amount of work was involved in trying to make these texts cohere, to hold everything together under the umbrella of a new discipline, and to have it all count as science” (Horn, 5).

For example, the first edition of his book The Criminal Man (L’Uomo Delinquente, 1876) comprised 252 pages, while the three-volume fifth edition contained 1900 pages. Nothing was deleted from the earlier editions.

Criticism relating to Lombroso and the “other,” which centers on his treatment of women, also takes him to task for contradictions in internal logic (Smart, 1977, 32-34). A number of feminist scholars mention a qualitative defect in his distorted perception of women in general and delinquent women in particular (see a survey in Harrowitz, 1994, chap. 2). Lombroso was faced with a severe problem. He theorized that women turn to crime less than men do; therefore, they must theoretically be less atavistic. On the other hand, he adopted the notion that women are inferior to men and atavistic by nature. If Lombroso the private individual advocated free choice and divorce, Lombroso the researcher spoke of the utter inferiority of women to men (Gibson, 2002, 82). Here there is a failure of logic. As Zedner remarks (1994, 279), if all women are atavistic by nature, it is difficult to identify women who are criminals, because of the lack of external signs. The solution, according to Zedner, was the focus on prostitution, which Lombroso said included unfaithfulness and sexual promiscuity, the
natural expression of feminine degeneration. “Prostitution” was the magic word that can make sense of Lombroso’s theory regarding female delinquency in general.

This contradiction and probable emotional ambivalence regarding women is particularly manifest in Lombroso’s family life. He married a young woman and then drove a wedge between her and her observance of the Jewish commandments. Before his marriage, he wrote to a friend that she was young and beautiful, but that she observed the commandments; however, he would see to it that she forgot about them quickly. Although he favored progress, liberalism, and sexual equality, he insisted on signora De Benedetti’s devoting herself completely to being a wife and mother. Lombroso fell under the spell of a socialist feminist doctor, Anna Kulishov, a frequent guest in his home, who used her influence to further his daughters’ academic lives. On the other hand, his daughter Gina, a doctor, submitted entirely to his guidance and backing (Melossi, 2008, 61), and served as his personal secretary and faithful emissary of his theories on the American continent.

As noted, a review of the literature shows that only a few scholars are conversant with Lombroso’s ideas about race and their negative implications for Western culture in the twentieth century. Brennan, Mednick, and Volavka (1995) alone had the perspicacity to say that his ideas provided “a rational basis for European imperialism and American racial social policy” (Brennan et al., 65), but they do not elaborate. David Garland too (1997) is aware that Lombroso gained popularity in Italy thanks to the fact that the criminal type was both consistent with deep prejudices and endorsed the middle class in its perception of the criminality produced by urbanization processes (Garland, 30).

The Jewish question that preoccupied Lombroso, particularly in one of his writings on antisemitism (1894) and in how his writing fanned the flames of racism, is not discussed at all in the criminology literature. The fact that Lombroso’s book Antisemitismo e le Scienze Moderne was not translated into English probably explains this avoidance and silence, and it is also likely that, as mentioned earlier, it is hard for contemporary positivist criminologists to tarnish the name of their “founding father” with charges of racism or, worse, to accuse this enlightened and progressive Jewish doctor of Jew-hatred.

Racial Theory

Some of Lombroso’s followers veered ominously in the direction of race theory when they attempted to identify inferiority in human races, including not only the Homo delinquens and the mentally ill but also infer-
ior races—in particular Mediterranean/Semites, the black race, and the yellow race. There were those who suggested using selective breeding, social hygiene, or primary prevention (the sterilization of at-risk mothers, among other things) to deal with sub-races found in Europe. In Italy, for instance, the promoter of Mussolini’s criminal code, Enrico Ferri, praised positivism as a strong foundation for the fascist doctrine (as did Raffaele Garofalo and Alfredo Niceforo). The “scientific alibi” and its adoption by totalitarian political ideologies were exploited in other countries as well (Frigessi, 2003, 389). Gibson (2002) says that criminal anthropology promulgated the notion of race as a biological given and focused attention especially on racial differences by creating a hierarchy of superiors and inferiors, thus granting legitimacy to acts of oppression by the white regime and providing ammunition for propaganda for Italy’s colonial policy in Africa (Ethiopia, Somalia, Eritrea, and later Libya).

Regarding the Italian fascist regime, Gibson (2002) states that the cooperation of criminal anthropologists with Mussolini’s regime was not entirely opportunistic, since forms of early positivism and fascism shared ideological affinities. Both promoted surveillance, classification, and discipline. Both wanted to equip officials in the criminal justice system with flexibility and discretion rather than binding them with the rule of law. And both were careless about individual rights in the name of social defense (Gibson, 2002, 202).

According to Frigessi (2003), political racism also exploited criminal anthropology in the area of crime, since Lombroso interpreted physical and mental degeneration as a sign of inborn criminality, thus justifying sterilization, capital punishment, or some other form of killing (Frigessi, 382-383), or anything else that might justify forms of prevention, incapacitation, and negative eugenics.

Historian George Mosse (1978) asserts that the Nazis in Germany and the Fascists in Italy usually rejected Freudian theory, while they embraced Lombrosian psychology, extending the claim of racial inferiority to other populations, obviously including Lombroso’s own people:

Nazi euthanasia was based upon the proposition that degeneration as exemplified by habitual criminals or insanity was structural and final. But since the Nazis also believed the Jews to be degenerate as well as habitual criminals, Lombroso’s definition of criminality became a part of Hitler’s final solution of the Jewish problem (Mosse, 78).

One may say that Lombroso the Jew, the socialist, the liberal, the progressive founder of the science of criminal law, he who took pains in his political activities on behalf of weak populations, had an unintended, indi-
rect influence on racist thinking one generation later. The concept of degeneration as Lombroso developed it became the intrinsic name for "criminality, a soul imprisoned in Hell" (Mosse, 83).

With passage of the racial laws (leggi razziali) in 1938, Italy’s Jews officially became the focus of Aryan official racism. Clearly, Mussolini reflected the tradition of racial thinking and the dictionary that criminal anthropology had constructed a few decades earlier (Gibson, 2002, 104).

Not only totalitarian regimes were enthusiastic with Lombroso’s teachings. His ideas were promulgated among welfare workers, educators, doctors, and clerics, especially after 1890 in the United States (Rafter, 1992), where ideas about eugenics, especially negative eugenics, were proposed. These ideas included sterilization of women with “defective genes” and heredity research focusing on families with a high incidence of criminality or some other deviancy (for example, the case study of the Kallikaks; for a review, see Akers, 2000, 57-59).

In 1927, in the democratic United States of America, Ernest Albert Hooton received generous funding from Harvard University to verify Lombroso’s theories. He sampled over 13,000 criminals and more than 3,000 adult men as a control group in ten states. He measured 107 physical traits, crania, and faces, including tattoos. Hooton published his conclusions also in a book of popular science, Crime and Man (Hooton, 1939). He determined, among other things:

We can direct and control the progress of human evolution by breeding better types and by the ruthless elimination of inferior types, if only we are willing to found and to practice a science of human genetics. With sound and progressively evolving human organisms in the majority of our species, problems of human behavior will be minimized, and there will be improved educability. Crime can be eradicated, war can be forgotten.

Lombroso proposed the establishment of penal colonies, the isolation of inferior populations, and the prevention of the possibility to reproduce. It is instructive to read the explicit original that encourages negative eugenics, with an explanation of those with a hopelessly inferior structure who without mitigation will not be worthy of reproduction (Hooton, 392).

BLOND HAIR OR A HOOKED NOSE?

Many contradictions in internal logic, together with numerous distortions of basic facts, also arrest one’s attention in Lombroso’s treatment of the Jewish question and antisemitism. In his book Anti-Semitismo e le
Scienze Moderne (1894), Lombroso manifests ambivalence toward his people: he begins by defending but ends by accusing.

In the first part of his book, there is an attempt to define the Jews as “having characteristics of the Aryan race . . . with hair lighter than that of the British.” This claim is based on paradoxical logic arising from adoption of prejudices, clichés, hearsay evidence, stereotypes, and even grotesque gossip about his fellow Jews (Harrowitz, 1994, 29).

Lombroso did not identify himself as a Jew in his book. He disengaged, estranged himself, and spoke in terms of “they” and what “they” must do to gain an equal status and be assimilated among the nations, to emerge from their isolation and their inferiority. Among other things, “they” should forget primitive customs (something he himself did as a child and coerced his new wife into doing). In a sense, it appears that Lombroso was settling an ongoing account, a psychological unfinished business with his father, and he recommends that his people do what he did to his wife: they should forget tradition and conduct themselves as the Gentiles do.

His enlightened aspirations and his apologetic intentions were steeped in ignorance, particularly concerning Orthodox Jewish ritual, which he resisted from early childhood to distance himself from the religiosity of his father (Dolza, 1990, 30). Thus, for example, he called the eating of matzot on Passover a “stupid ritual” (“stupidi riti”), and he designated the custom of laying tefillin (phylacteries) as a primitive remnant of the real Orthodox Jew (“of whom, fortunately, very few remain”—Lombroso, 1894, 14).

Regarding circumcision, he said:

> Why should they not rid themselves of the savage injuring that is circumcision, of the many fetishes of their holy books . . . that they disperse throughout their homes [referring to mezuzot] and even affix on their bodies [phylacteries], as if they were amulets. . . . For the same reason, they should leave the liturgical use of the Hebrew language to foreigners, and become convinced that Our Father in Heaven can understand their prayer in whatever language they speak (Lombroso, 1894, 107-108).

There is an identifiable phenomenon in Lombroso characteristic of the spirit of the time: the fear of ritual and of the Holy Tongue—Hebrew. The Holy Tongue is a forbidden language that separates the People of Israel from the enlightened world. It is a language of merchants, of hidden codes, of concealment and falsehood. This belief, which included Yiddish as well, penetrated the consciousness of many enlightened Jews in Europe. It is a kind of Jewish self-hatred, or the adoption of the ancient beliefs of antisemites in Europe. For example, according to Gilman (1986): “The fear of the way the Jews interpret Scripture is easily transformed into a fear of the books possessed by ‘the people of the Book.’ The Jews’ books become
the embodiment of the blindness and dangerousness of the Jews” (Gilman, 31); in addition, “The devious and corrupt language of the Jews reflects and is reflected by their criminal actions against the Christian world. Remove the barrier of language, and one will have reached the first level in civilizing the Jew” (Gilman, 85).

As an enlightened Jew (or, better to say, as an enlightened Italian with a Jewish background), Lombroso attempted to renounce everything reminiscent of the past. Thus, for example, he asserts that: “The ridiculous rituals of matzot on Passover, which run so counter to what is accepted in the countries in which they live, arouse ludicrousness and even revulsion made even more intense by how important the Orthodox [Jews] consider them” (Lombroso, 1894, 14).

It is not only the Jews’ behavior and habits that Lombroso attacks, but also their physical and mental traits. Here, Lombroso contradicts himself by attributing to the Jews traits dependent on the body and genetics, not merely on language and customs. He further contradicts himself by identifying the Jews in the beginning of the book as an Aryan people, blonder than the British, but at the end he transforms them into Semites, and thus reprehensible.

It is actually at this point that Lombroso proceeds from an apologetic attitude to an antisemitic attack. Thus, for example, although at the outset he defines the Jewish race as superior to the Aryan, he perpetuates prejudices regarding both physical and mental traits. The Jew is “weak,” physically “small,” “neurotic,” “wretched,” and “boring.” His morals are also defective: he is “a cheat,” “a liar”; he is “lecherous” and “ambitious.” Lombroso further confuses inherited and acquired traits, primarily due to ghetto life and employment. Thus, for example, body measurements and wretchedness are intermingled, and this becomes a permanent given: “The Jews’ race is not a strong one. The Jew in large Jewish centers, particularly in the East, is usually small and fragile, his appearance ruinous and wretched” (Lombroso, 1894, 18). Lombroso turns fixed habits into hereditary physical traits, like tattoos among “born” criminals: “The habit [of making deals] has been so intensive and has continued for so many years that it has emphasized their habit of cunning and falsehood, the meager muscular energy so prevalent among merchants” (Lombroso, 1894, 13); and that “Jews make much use of their intellect, which gives rise to their neurotic characteristics” (Lombroso, 1894, 84).

Their moral inferiority is a result, among other things, of the Jews’ employment. Not only do they work with their intellect, but they are also traders, and as such, they became “the principal moneylenders; they brought to commerce the insatiable spirit of greed, as well as of deceit, which waxed among them from their continued practice [of trading]” (Lom-
broso, 1894, 89). From here he reaches his final conclusion: “I agree that most of them are immoral and covet power more than they covet good”\(^1\) (Lombroso, 1894, 100). Noteworthy are the sources of this moral inferiority, which are the result not only of their traditional occupation, but also of the nation’s difficult history:

This is one of the most stubborn races in existence; only the strong, the stubborn, the energetic could have insisted on remaining Jews; this is therefore a race of extraordinary stubbornness; but in order to hold their own, it was necessary to cloak their stubbornness in humility and flexibility, a special type of flexibility that also gives rise to moral inferiority (Lombroso, 1894, 16).

If the assertion that a number of Lombroso’s followers provided ammunition for racist propaganda in Europe is true, unquestionably these words, even without mediation or interpretation, could also have fanned the flames of Jew-hatred. It is important to note that his book, written in Italian, was translated in the same year (1894) into German, and into French in 1899.

THE ZIONIST QUESTION

The concept of degeneration that accompanies determinism and the conviction that immutable physical and character traits are ingrained has been interpreted differently by different thinkers. Some see a solution in fusion with other peoples or extermination (negative eugenics); others seek ways to improve the race (positive eugenics); on these concepts see, for example, Beirne and Messerschmidt (1995, 352-353).

For example, in the modern Land of Israel, the settlement movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, influenced by Max Nordau (1965, 187-188), there was widespread Zionist discussion of questions about Jewish degeneration in the Diaspora, and proposals along the lines of positive eugenics by would-be reformers (Biale, 1992, chap. 8; Cavaglion, 2004, 57-58). The emphasis in this application of the theory was to create a “Judaism with muscles” and to build the new Jew, who would grow and thrive on his land. In the 1898 Second Zionist Congress in Basel, Nordau, who had become one of the main leaders of the Zionist movement, called Zionism the political “remedy” to revive the body of the young Jew, after “the terrible desolation wreaked among us during 18 centuries of disper-

---

1. So that there be no doubt that these words are out of context, I will cite this passage in the original Italian: _Convengo tuttavia che la maggioranza loro non è morale, e sente più la bramosia, l’avidità del potere che quella del bene_ (p. 100).
sion” that have led to an “effete Judaism” (Nordau, 1965, 117-118). Nordau, who became Herzl’s right-hand man, saw in the teeming ghettos the reason for the Jews’ sickness, since they were deprived of decent physical conditions (Nordau, 1965, 187). That being the case, it was not heredity and the rigid determinism of biology but primarily the environment that caused the Diaspora Jew’s degeneration. Changing the environment—in other words, a return to the bond with the Land of the Fathers—would serve as a blessed cure.

Nordau continued the romantic streak of the people of the Enlightenment by depicting the male Jew in the Diaspora as a sickly creature, needing physical virility and “a stable and sound marriage” and a healthy bond with the land (Biale, 1992). He proposed a unique remedy to combat the frailty of the Jews. National health was guaranteed not only by physical training—“Judaism with muscles,” in his words—and a return to nature, but mainly by *aliyah* (immigration) to the Land of Israel, with the creation of complete family and community life (see also Gilman, 1985, 130). In Nordau’s opinion, it was the task of Zionism as a revolutionary movement to establish in Israel a new kind of “deep-chested men, taut of limb, bold of view,” strong young men like the legendary Bar-Kokhba (Nordau, 1965, 187-188).

Notwithstanding the controversy surrounding the source of the degeneration (usually hereditary according to Lombroso, environmental according to Nordau) and the various eugenic solutions, whether positive or negative, it is important to point out that Lombroso, the assimilated (and antisemitic?) Jew, and Nordau, the nationalist and Zionist, shared great mutual admiration. Each of these doctor-authors dedicated a book to his counterpart.

Lombroso met often with Nordau, entertained him in his home in Torino, and on a number of occasions called him “my brother in arms.” He identified with Nordau’s ideas, going so far as to define his thinking as “the only true salve I have gotten from the world” (Frigessi, 2003, 315). In the Viennese Jewish-Zionist newspaper *Die Welt*, the two doctors expressed mutual praise on several occasions (Frigessi, 320).

Despite his friendship with Nordau, at the beginning of Lombroso’s career he considered assimilation a solution for the problem of antisemitism, while the option of Zionism and the establishment of a Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel were out of the question. He advocated deliberate absorption and the fusion of Judaism, Christianity, and socialism—a new religion with political involvement that would bring new tidings to modern man. This was also the message that Lombroso imparted to the members of his family. Regarding Western Jews, he advocated their remaining in their native countries and committing themselves to merging with the Christians,
moving in the direction of a modern, syncretistic religion, with no narrow-mindedness: “The perfect solution would be if Jews and Christians, once they rise above the ordinary prejudices would unite in a new religion; in other words, a new, socialist Christianity, in which the Jews, having freed themselves of old and ridiculous rituals, could blend without shame or coercion” (Lombroso, 1894, 109).

Gibson (2002, 103) notes that the Jews of Italy became assimilated into the surrounding culture more quickly than their coreligionists in other Western European countries. They fought for the unification of Italy and were committed patriots of the new country, which promised their emancipation. It is thus easy to understand why in the early years Lombroso opposed Zionism in utterances such as the following:

One must also take into consideration that an extremely small proportion of the Jews, from Russia and Romania [Eastern Jews], will continue to feel an attraction to these countries (Palestine–Eretz Israel–Judea), which are not even their homeland. . . . We have seen, similarly, that from both an anthropological and a moral point of view, and even in terms of language and dress, they [Western Jews] have blended in their homelands and have been planted in the spirit of the land in which they live. . . . Thus, in Italy they are not merely Italians but also Venetians in [the] Veneto [region], Piedmontese in [the] Piedmont [region]. Now, how could they possibly be transformed into patriots of Judea? And what manner of farmers could all these or matchmakers, jewelers, wine-makers [be], and what kind of agricultural land can the desolate wasteland of Palestine [provide]? . . . If emigration at all, it should veer toward more modern centers, in Australia, North America, and also South America (Lombroso, 1894, 104-106).

Lombroso’s Zionist thesis, like his theses about women, “colored people,” Southern Italians or Jews, is inconsistent. His position toward Zionism did change with time, particularly after the Dreyfus trial, the pogroms in Eastern Europe, and his meetings with Russian Zionist leaders during the Criminology Conference in Moscow (Frigessi, 2003, 323). In the revised version of his Zionist thesis, Lombroso still did not believe that Zionism offered a solution for Western Jewry, which had already begun the desirable process of assimilation. But at the same time he said (and here again he contradicted himself) that the Land of Israel was the “cradle of eastern European Jewry” (Frigessi, 324), and on at least one occasion he said, “I believe in the renascence of the Jewish nation and in what could occur on the land on which the light spread to all the world” (quoted in Frigessi, 326). At the end of his life, Lambroso favored the possibility of Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel, although he refused to play an active part in the movement, for reasons of age.
This essay contradicts a long-standing criminological tradition that considers methodology and internal logic the primary deficiencies of the father of criminology. An analysis of texts in the original, to which English-speaking scientists—in particular criminologists, who have dominated academic discourse since the 1930—did not have access, sheds new light on very objectionable content in Lombroso’s arguments.

A study of Lombroso’s case constitutes a further example of an enlightened, assimilated Jew who adopts distorted exercises in logic to alienate himself at all costs from his roots and his people by means of supposedly scientific justifications.

Rafter and Gibson say (in Lombroso and Ferrero, 2004, 6) that in recent years scholars have been more cognizant of the intellectual and political context in which Lombroso operated. His internal contradictions reflect not only his personality, but also the Zeitgeist and the scientific knowledge available in the nineteenth century, and the attitude of assimilated Jews to their people.

As previously noted, Lombroso grew up at a time of political and intellectual upheaval, of the emancipation of the Jews, and in a period of yearning for the revival, unification, and independence of a divided Italy (Lombroso and Ferrero, 2004, 15). The issue, however, is not only time but also place. Turin, Lombroso’s adopted city, was the catalyst of this unification. It was first capital of the Savoy reign and Italy, and also the city that was the most open to European secular culture in that era. At this time, Italy, as symbolized by its first capital, “went from being one of the most backward countries in Europe, with its Jews confined to ghettos until 1870, to one of the most enlightened, in which Jews were able to aspire to the highest levels of society” (Stille, 2005, 22). To cite Cecil Roth (1946, 504):

... the impact of emancipation upon the internal life of Italian Jewry was immediate; in most respects, it was deleterious. It had withstood, cramped but unshaken the onslaught of the long generations of oppression; but as elsewhere, it proved unable to resist the insidious blandishment of the new world of opportunity and equality. Within a generation of the great edict of Carlo Alberto, assimilation had made appalling progress. Synagogues that were formerly open for service twice a day now had difficulty in assembling the necessary quorum once a week; and most of those who attended were graybeards, whose sons considered such things to savor of separatism and superstition.
During the Risorgimento, Jews were highly involved in the political revival; many died as patriots. In Italy, the struggle for the creation of a united modern state and the struggle for emancipation of Italian Jews were virtually synonymous (Stille, 2005, 25). As Molinari stressed (1991, 26):

This was the necessary premise to understanding the route taken by the Italian Jews in the united State of Italy: their national integration prompted them to cross the threshold of assimilation . . . and see their presence in the life of the country as proof that Judaism had a universal message.

Whereas before the unification of Italy identification with the Jewish community in all its complexity prevailed, Italian heritage gradually superceded ethnic ties. Italian Jews were Italian with a Mosaic faith/belief/background (Molinari, 32). They felt, for a variety of reasons, that they were the “most respected Jews in the world” (Milano, 1963, 370). Even at its inception, the advent of fascism did not lead to any deterioration in the position of Italian Jewry. On the contrary, twelve years after the March on Rome (1934), relations between Jews and Gentiles in Italy were more harmonious that ever before (Michaelis, 1978, 6). During this period, before the 1938 Leggi Razziali—the commitment to the Italian nation—caused many Jews to reject Judaism, “as if being a Jew meant not being completely Italian” (De Felice, 1961, 15), considering that identifying with tradition meant being contaminated by the diseases of the ghetto (Milano, 1963, 372). The same attitude helps explain anti-Zionism among Italian Jews. It is no accident that no Italian representative took part in the first Zionist Congress in 1897. Identifying with a new national movement meant betraying any form of being Italian.

After the unification, three Jews were elected to the first Italian parliament in 1861. In 1874, there were eleven Jewish deputies and in 1894, their number reached fifteen—the highest level in Italian history (Stille, 2005, 25).

This process highlights the perceived difference between the Jews of the past, with “their stupid rites,” and the opportunity to climb the social ladder. The fathers, like Cesare’s father, were seen as forced to live a life of fear and harassment; they remained enclosed in their inner ghetto of bigotry and superstition. The new generation, in particular in Turin, became “civilized,” more attuned and open to modernity, progress, science, nationalism, and socialism (A. Cavaglion, 2009). This mounting drive for emancipation and civil rights helps account for Lombroso’s fear of Jewish degeneration and his excoriation of tradition, which he depicted as representing physical,
mental, and moral evils. More generally, it may clarify his professional ambitions and his calls for assimilation.

*Gabriel Cavaglion is a senior lecturer in the School of Social Work and Department of Criminology, Ashkelon Academic College, Ashkelon, Israel.

REFERENCES


