

# ***University Residential Colleges in the Fascist Period in Italy. A Model of Fascistization and Control of Students in the 1930s***

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**Abstract:** In the contemporary era, university residences in Italy have been important centers of aggregation for students, and a relevant subject in the broader national debate on the development of universities, also with regard to the relationship between center and periphery, and the issue of public and private funding at the local and national levels, in different historical moments. This contribution examines the years of the Fascist period during which the Students' Houses – this was the name used in Italy – grew in numbers, firstly as elements of control by the Fascist regime over the activities of university students, and then as places for the fascistization of both Italian and foreign students, at the hands of the Fascist University Groups, who organized and managed the Houses. The text analyzes the evolution of university residences, highlighting the key moments in the development of these places of student sociability. It examines the phases of construction and enlargement of the houses by the academic authorities in the framework of the construction agreements encouraged by Fascism; the forms of control over the students, who were guaranteed access only if enrolled in the Fascist university organization; the introduction of the racial laws of 1938, when Jews were expelled from universities, starting precisely with the university residences.

**Keywords:** Italy; Fascism; Fascist University Groups; totalitarian pedagogy; assistance; control

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## **1. Foreword**

With the advent of Fascism, Italian universities – although living their peaceful lives, cloistered in ancient convents and glorious architectural monuments – soon felt the imposition of an example that invested the entire national life; it was necessary to throw open the windows, get dressed up: find a modern rational architecture. [...] The students' houses, invoked for so long,

are now a reality, even if not yet capacious enough as to satisfy all the needs imposed by the ever-increasing school population (Spano, 1943, 150, 158).

Nicola Spano, editor of the *Gli Annali della Università Italiana* magazine, in 1943, a few months before the fall of Fascism, took stock of university construction projects in the Fascist 20-year era. During the years of the Fascist regime, Italian universities grew in numbers and also saw an increase in university students and their housing needs in the cities where the most attended universities were sited. Fascism inherited a building situation that had to deal with the stagnation caused by the long First World War, a period during which a large part of public spending was concentrated in the war effort. Even the slow reconversion after the conflict reduced funding for universities; therefore there was a need to turn to new forms of agreements that would bring together local authorities and the national state in order to provide for the accommodation and expansion of universities, as required by the development of high culture at the national level.

The difficulties were also due to the architectural models that inspired the choices. It should be remembered that the unitary state inherited the universities from the pre-existing governments, and therefore placed itself in continuity with the concentration of colleges in urban centers, where student accommodation had taken on its own specific definition starting from the structures of the Renaissance colleges. State colleges were gradually added, the result of the great change the enlightened rulers wanted for their universities, in order to remove the monopoly over high culture by religious interferences (Brizzi, 2007, 347-387). Thus, in the aftermath of the Unification, the choice was between the traditional rehabilitation of monumental buildings no longer in use or the building expansion of the universities, aimed at including laboratories and classrooms in the new urban plans of growing cities (Chiarantoni, 2008, 3-16). Even in the case of Milan where the investments in construction were relevant and both models were present, with the construction of the Technical Higher Institute – the future Polytechnic - in a peripheral urban area (Silvestri - Galbani, 2007, 419-424) and the birth of the Cattolica university thanks to the reuse of pre-existing buildings (*The Catholic University*, 1998), the construction of specific spaces for student residences does not seem to have been in the spotlight.

Fascism took on the requests of the university students and undertook to build a network of Students' Houses, to exploit them for its own advantage.

## 2. The Fascist Students' Houses between Assistance and Control

During the Fascist period, the construction of new residential colleges had multiple meanings. The regime fully reorganized the school and the university starting with the reform that had the name of the Minister of Public Education Giovanni Gentile. In 1923 Mussolini defined the provision as «the most Fascist of reforms», even if the reform did not fully respond to the dictates of Fascism, but allowed the regime to influence a key sector of Italian society, to govern dissent, and acquire credibility in the light of a progressive fascistization of culture.

The Gentile reform favoured an elitist model, opened only to bourgeoisie, in which the humanistic sector continued to be more highly considered over that of science and technology, thus also affecting the development of various universities. The reform also introduced limitations to the autonomy of universities, creating spheres of influence in the direct hands of university rectors, faculty deans and Institute directors in accordance to the Minister of Public Education, the Higher Council of Public Education and the Fascist National Party (PNF) (Salustri, 2021, 311-312).

As we will see, the *Opera Universitaria* was the perfect example of how the regime intended to totally control the life of Italian universities and university students. With the aim of bringing together culture, political education and sports, pillars of the totalitarian pedagogy of Fascism, the regime boosted the construction of special spaces within universities: well-equipped places that could also serve to show the progress achieved by Mussolini's government, both in the field of welfare and in the architectural field (Gaudio, 2010).

The Students' Houses were buildings that served as colleges, ready to welcome Italian and foreign students for whom these structures with single or double accommodation were an example of the achievements and modernity attained by the country thanks to the Fascist leadership. In the case of foreign students, university residences became an element of the regime's propaganda abroad.

Hot and cold water in the shared bathrooms and in the rooms' bathrooms, central heating, complete equipment for functional kitchens and laundries were just some of the elements that distinguished the facilities dedicated to university students, who could also take advantage of large common areas: from shared showers to leisure rooms, from the canteen to the bars, up to the areas dedicated to sports. In most cases the residences were not just an accommodation, nor were they simply study rooms where to prepare exams, but they became real shared places where feelings of belonging and camaraderie were built. The headquarters of the local Fascist University Group (GUF) and that of the University Militia were therefore of particular importance.

The GUFs, that played a large role in the totalitarian project of Italian Fascism (Gentile, 1995; 2002) thanks to the control over student aggregation centers, were created in the early 20s as a spontaneous organisation of young Fascist students and remained fairly independent from the Fascist National Party until 1926-28. After that time the Fascist Groups became part of the PNF, in charge of organizing all university students and educating young people to become perfect Fascists considering Fascism as a «total conception of life». This attempt reached its peak during the 1930s when every university in Italy had a GUF well recognizable. According to the directives of the Party, every Fascist student had to wear a uniform: a short jacket in black cloth, the collar closed with the coloured distinctive of the GUF, gray-green breeches and black boots. The traditional headgear of goliards, the classic «unicorn» in coloured felt indicating the university Faculty, was introduced in the uniform as the only distinction between the students. The traditional hat was gradually replaced by the helmet especially approaching the war when *gufini* deserted books and classes for guns (*Guf. Gruppi universitari fascisti*, 1936, 144-145).

The GUF gave its members benefits and facilities for university (usually meal tickets or study texts for lessons and examinations). The GUF also offered the opportunity to do sports, to participate in theatre and, cinema, in musical, literately and journalistic activities, to paint, to travel, and to meet influential people. Furthermore, not only university students had the possibility to join a GUF: graduates, young pupils who had finished high school and cadets, could all become members. Some of them were attracted by the possibility to attend the schools and courses of politics and economics that were organized within and along with the Groups (La Rovere, 2003; Duranti, 2008).

All of these efforts were made with the intention to spread Fascist ideas and ideology among people and to shape the «new Italian» ideal man, starting first with the educated youth (Ledeen, 1969; Wanrooij, 1987; Salustri, 2022). Since its origin, the idea of youth was an important part of Italian fascist ideology and Fascism used the myth of generation to create and maintain consent in a potentially closed society where all the subjects involved, men and women (De Grazia, 1981; 1992), children or adults, had a defined position (Gibelli, 2005).

The University Militia was part of this totalitarian project, arising from the need to extend one of the founding principles of the Voluntary Militia for National Security (MVSN) to academic circles, namely to establish a weapon to fight the enemies of Fascism and to maintain control over some elements within the Fascist movement itself (Aqarone, 1974). In fact, the Militia's initial task in the universities was to assist the operations of the Fascist University Groups against non-Fascist student associations, and at the same time to discipline those students who, although Fascists, showed that they could not comply with an excessive subordination to the Party (Segreteria dei Guf Roma, 1939, 131-137). The militiamen thus became a direct bridge between the university and the PNF, with the specific task of taking care of the education of university students and of keeping alive in them the warrior spirit of the Fascist youth. These youths had to express the perfect unity of military and academic training inside and outside the university halls, as summarized in the motto of Mussolini's youth, which has become very famous, and is traced back to Leo Longanesi, journalist and cartoonist, propaganda expert and collaborator of the regime: «*libro e moschetto, fascista perfetto*» («book and musket, perfect Fascist»).

The construction of the Students' Houses and their architecture fully reflected these purposes, and on the brink of the Second World War all the main universities could boast a residence for their students. The new University of Bari, decided upon by Minister Gentile and inaugurated in 1923, was already equipped with a house and a canteen for students capable of accommodating 130 university students, followed by Perugia in 1929, whose Students' House came with a tennis court and gym. Other universities had to wait until the thirties for the creation of places entirely dedicated to student organizations and associations. Before the imperial phase, in 1933, Messina, with 200 bedrooms, Siena and, as we shall see, Bologna opened the season of new achievements, the result of the recovery of pre-existing buildings or of new construction projects. In 1934 Parma and the Milan Polytechnic opened the doors of their Students' Houses, and the following year the Turin and Genoa Houses became key, perfect examples of Fascist rationalist architecture. Then Modena followed, where in 1936 the Albergo San Carlo was transformed into a Students' House. Later,

Pavia saw the Collegio Lorenzo Valla being built between 1936 and 1937 to house the sports facilities near the Ticino river between the Ponte dell'Impero and the Viale dell'Impero. Finally, just before the Second World War, there was the transformation of two pre-existing buildings in Camerino, and the beginning of construction work for a Students' House in Ferrara and then in Urbino (Turri, 1999-2000, 6; Romani - Monti - Selvafolta - Silvestri (eds.), 2020).

Fascism also exploited the expansion or construction from scratch of these university buildings to increase the use of labor in the construction industry, part of the huge investment policy that the regime proposed in order to try to solve the economic crisis of the early 1930s. Public works also served to encourage the consensus of the Italian population who looked with admiration and pride at the efficiency shown by the Fascist government in inaugurating cities, public buildings and reclaimed areas (Breschi, 2018).

At that time, the Students' Houses occupied a narrow share in the debate about the Fascist architecture, due to their small numbers; however, they are useful to frame some elements pursued by the regime through architectural modernity. In February 1935, the *L'Architettura italiana* magazine, on the occasion of the architectural competition for the construction of the *Casa del goliardo* in Turin, published an entire issue dedicated to the Students' Houses starting from an international comparison that examined Cambridge and Oxford, as well as the university city of Paris (with its Swiss Pavilion by Le Corbusier) and the Youth Houses in Germany (Dresden and Berlin), and it went as far as Moscow, Sierra Nevada and Algiers. The rationality of the buildings and the community purposes were praised, since they highlighted the role of the Students' Houses, considered as real centers of aggregation and university education, where the physical component would find its place, through sport, and in some locations even through dueling, seen as an integral part of military education. The spaces dedicated to the latter, described as the central element of the Fascist preparation of young people and placed in direct connection with the imperialist mission of Fascist Italy, are strongly present in the works of the architects competing for the construction of the new Italian Students' Houses, as evidenced by the winning project for Turin and the proposals for the Universities of Rome, Genoa and Padua, illustrated in detail by the magazine thanks to the publication of the design drawings (*L'Architettura italiana. Periodico mensile di Architettura tecnica*, 1939, 39).

As to the Students' House in the capital, much has been written about it, above all from an architectural point of view – in recent years, partly revaluing the stylistic-formal aspects of the buildings (Baratelli, 2019; *Palladio. Rivista di storia dell'architettura e restauro*, 2017; 2018; 2019). It is part of the great rearrangement project for the buildings of the Rome University, led since 1932 by Marcello Piacentini, one of the main architects of the Fascist period (Nicoloso, 1999). In addition to eleven buildings, the huge complex provided for the creation of special spaces dedicated to the University Militia and the Students' House. The latter was conceived as the only building that would remain outside the walls of the university citadel, and the students themselves of the Faculty of Architecture and Engineering of Rome were involved in its construction through a competition. This was a widespread method under the regime: in fact, the university students themselves, on more than one occasion, drafted projects and designs for the creation of places for the Fascist

youth, through competitions promoted in the *Littoriali della Cultura e dell'Arte*. These were a competition for university students born in 1933 as a propaganda event and a tool for regimenting young people (Alfassio Grimaldi - Addis Saba, 1983).

Even if the building as finished differs from the winning project due to the high costs of land expropriation and construction, the Students' House in Rome could initially accommodate as many as 160 university students, and provide meals for 300-400 students. However, the commitment was to subsequently expand the spaces of the structure, to the point of providing for the creation of a women's section (Salustri, 2022a). Furthermore, unlike the other buildings, whose construction was part of the activity carried out by the General Consortium for the expansion of the Royal University of Rome, the Students' House was built through the creation of a specific Consortium, born following an agreement between university bodies, a solution that can also be seen in other academic institutions, whose trace is also found in the documents relating to the Rome university (Azzaro, 2013, 110-111).

### **3. Building the Students' House in the Most Ancient University in the World**

The case of the University of Bologna lends itself well to understanding the role played by the Students' Houses during the Fascist period, as it allows to highlight the internal relationships among the academic institutions, between the governing bodies of the University and the GUF, and between the center and the periphery (Salustri, 2010a).

The traditional *Goliardia* (students' associations) had been asking for long decades for the construction of a student's house that could accommodate university students enrolled in Bologna, but only during the Fascist period did the University undertake the process for the creation of a student meeting place, thanks to the close link created between the University and Fascism and thanks to the role undertaken by the GUF (Salustri, 2022). Alessandro Ghigi, the rector appointed by Fascism in 1930, was the one to propose to the Board of Directors the purchase of the building in the central street of the University, trying to convince his colleagues that the expense should not have been considered too high and that the convenience for the University was in buying the entire building.

In this new site – Ghigi pointed out in the inauguration speech for the academic year 1931-32 – the assistance institutions will be based, without prejudice to strictly university-related uses, and we are confident we will be able to organize, through the collaboration of the GUF, a worthy home for students, which will offer them comfort and attractions after the courses' hours. I am sure I have the support of the Provincial Fascist Federation, with which the University is in the most perfect agreement, in this regard (*Annuario*, 1931-1932, 8-9).

Ghigi focused on the need to provide Bologna with appropriate bodies for assisting students, not only in order to take advantage of the freedom of intervention granted by university legislation in this area, but above all to avoid letting the University lag behind other universities.



The possibility of favoring the accommodation of university students by the city through a meeting place such as the Students' House convinced the representative of the Municipality and the government delegates to approve the rector's proposal, above all due to the fact that neither the Municipality nor the central government were called upon to a financial commitment. In fact, the project envisaged that the *Alma Mater* would contribute half of the price of the purchase of the building by using balance sheet surpluses, while allocating the remaining amount to the *Opera Universitaria*. Meanwhile, some funds from the Consortium for university buildings would be used for the adaptation work, to be replaced, over the years, by a contribution from all students<sup>1</sup>.

Therefore, the success of the Students' House was linked to the rector's ability to look ahead, with the will to increase his own personal prestige and that of the University of Bologna, and to the resolve of local and national authorities in exploiting the expansion of the University in order to increase the consensus for the regime, and the weight of Bologna on the national level. In 1933 Ghigi, when asking the Head of Government for the approval of an additional building convention – given the need to complete some works already started and to undertake others not foreseen by the 1929 convention (Lama, 1987; Zagnoni, 1988; Salustri, 2022) –, could list among the achievements that were the prerogative of the university administration «the purchase of the building and the refurbishment of the students' house (together with the *Opera Universitaria*)» for an amount of one and a half million Lire; while the completion of the house, which would be realized shortly afterwards with «the construction of a wing comprising 90 rooms», would cost 700,000 lire<sup>2</sup>.

It is no coincidence that in his request the rector cites the *Opera Universitaria*, an organizational structure within the universities, very important for the GUF's control over the student world. The value that the Party attached to the *Opera* can also be confirmed by reading the pages of the newspaper of the *Fascio* of Bologna. In fact, the *Opera* is presented as a cornerstone of Fascist education that has an anti-philanthropic value like all the assistance wanted by the regime, aimed at enhancing the figure of the new student: no longer a bookish «nerd», willing to give up anything in order to curry the professors' favor, but an expression of the youth of the Fascist era. For this reason, the role of the GUF as a lookout for the regime is proposed as essential, indispensable in the control and allocation of funds for university assistance (*L'Assalto*, March 4, 1933, 1).

The *Opera Universitaria* was established in Bologna by the Royal Decree Law no. 2478 on November 28, 1928, for the purpose of «providing encouragement grants to needy and deserving students, to orphans and children of disabled veterans of war or of the national cause, children of Italians residing abroad who are enrolled at the University, and study exchange scholarships for foreign students». From 1932 onwards, the rector (as president), the federal secretary of the Fascist Party, the

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<sup>1</sup> *Archivio storico dell'Università di Bologna* (Historical Archive of the University of Bologna, hereinafter ASUB), *Verballi del Consiglio di Amministrazione (29.1.1929-25.7.1931)*, meeting of April 23, 1931.

<sup>2</sup> Letter by the rector Ghigi to Mussolini, August 7, 1933 in ASUB, *Consorzio per gli Edifici Universitari* (pos. 22/b), b. 4 1929-1934, folder *Codicillo alla convenzione (1930-1934)*.

secretary of the GUF, a representative of the University Administrative Council, the trustee of the university professors section of the Fascist School Association and the administrative manager of the University became members of the *Opera's* Administrative Council<sup>3</sup>. The decision-making power of the Fascist university group was thus officially extended to the entire assistance sector, including the provision of scholarships to the most deserving or most needy students. The GUF thus had the chance of directly participating in the management of the ever-increasing funds of the *Opera Universitaria*<sup>4</sup>, while at the same time continuing to make use of extraordinary funding by individual Institutes or Schools through direct requests by its political secretary, supported by the local or provincial Fascist Federation<sup>5</sup>, as well as being able to directly request contributions by the Ministry.

A first step by the central government to clamp down on these requests and to regulate the university assistance sector was recorded in April 1933, when directions were circulated that made the *Opere Universitarie* central, pending the issue of the new general regulations:

With regard to the Students' Houses, since they amount to one of the most important forms of school assistance, and since, as a consequence, they must be established and maintained first of all with the funds of the individual *Opere Universitarie* and with the contributions from Institutions and individuals, the Rectors and Directors must always refrain from contacting the Directorate of the National Fascist Party to ask for subsidies and allocations.

As to the establishment and management of the Students' Houses, the following rules will be observed: if the Students' House is built on the initiative of the only University or the only Higher Institute of the location, it is part of the *Opera* of that University or institute, which will take care of its administration. If, on the other hand, the Students' House is to be established on the initiative of several Universities or Institutes of the same location, and institutions or individuals have contributed to its constitution, it should have its own legal and

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<sup>3</sup> ASUB, *Opera Universitaria* (pos. 62/b), b. 1 1932-1954, folder *Attività dell'Opera Universitaria dalla sua fondazione (1934-1938)*, Table attached to the letter by the rector Ghigi to the federal secretary of the Combat Fascist Federation, February 10, 1937.

<sup>4</sup> For the balance sheets of the *Opera* from 1928-29 until 1933-34, see: Central State Archives, Ministry of Education, General Direction for Higher Education, Department IV, Laws, Regulations, *Opera Universitaria*, scholarships, foundations 1928-1948, b. 6, *Specchio dimostrativo delle entrate e delle spese dell'Opera universitaria dati dell'aprile 1934-XII*, data concerning the University of Bologna, excluding Schools and Institutes.

<sup>5</sup> See the request of a 10,000-Lire contribution sent by the provincial secretary of the Fascist party, and later repeated by the GUF secretary, who sent a letter to the director of the Engineering School, appealing to the fact that the contribution «would tangibly testify to the understanding and sympathy with which you, the Director, and the directors of your Institute, certainly follow the efforts made by Fascism in Bologna to fortify our youth, in body and spirit, from infancy». ASUB, *Regia Scuola d'Applicazione per Ingegneri* (hereinafter RSAI), b. 14, folder *Opera della Scuola Concessione assegno di contabilità*, Letter from the Federal Secretary, March 28, 1933 and Letter from the GUF Political Secretary, March 29, 1933.



administrative personality. This result can be obtained through the creation of a consortium to this purpose, as has already happened for some important universities (for example: Milan, Palermo, Rome) (*Raccolta delle leggi*, 1934, 297).

A few months later, in the *Testo Unico* on Higher Education, the creation of a Central Committee of the *Opere Universitarie* was established, which had, among its tasks, the duty of promoting «the institutions of the Students' Houses in the cities having universities or institutes of higher education», and to support «the various initiatives of the Fascist University Groups for the purposes of culture and political and sports education of university students» (Art. 193 of the Consolidated Law, 1933, 97). Furthermore, in all the cities where several universities or higher institutes or universities and higher institutes were located, provision must be made for the creation of a local committee of the *Opere Universitarie*, with the purpose of coordinating the activities, without, however, any administrative prerogative<sup>6</sup>. The fact that some universities would assign management tasks to the Committees prompted the Ministry of Education to draw attention to their real duties, and this blocked the creation of the new body in locations such as Bologna, arousing the ire of the National Fascist Party and directly of the GUF (*Libro e Moschetto*, March 6, 1933, 1).

In addition, there was the interest of the academic faculty. In December 1933, Ghigi in fact proposed to set up the Bologna committee on paper only, because he wanted to keep the management of the Students' House in the hands of the University's *Opera Universitaria*, which, together with the University, had acquired the building and renovated it. If anything, the other *Opere* should only offer contributions for the functioning of the House, while this would not grant them any decision-making power on its management<sup>7</sup>. Therefore, Ghigi established the Committee, with the intention to hold on to the University's coordination powers and above all the administrative control. The University thus was linked with the *Opere* of Institutes and Schools, which were requested to contribute to the maintenance of the Students' House, since all university students could equally avail themselves of it<sup>8</sup>. The composition of the new Committee satisfied the Fascist Party, represented in the supervisory body directly by the federal secretary, together with the GUF secretary; moreover, both were also present in the *Opere* of individual Institutes and Schools<sup>9</sup>.

By means of this control, the Fascist University Group could state that it was thanks to the regime that what had been «for so many years a desire, our aspiration, an important problem and never fully addressed» was finally achieved (*La Nuova*

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<sup>6</sup> Therein, Circular directions of the Ministry of Education, March 11, 1933.

<sup>7</sup> ASUB, *Opera Universitaria* (pos. 62/b), b. 1 1932-1954, folder *Opera universitaria: contributi (1933-1934)*, Meeting of the Coordinating Committee of the Bologna *Opere Universitarie*, October 5, 1933.

<sup>8</sup> Therein, folder *Comitato delle Opere universitarie adunanza del 21 gennaio 1935 XIII*.

<sup>9</sup> See the minutes of the *Opera* of the Engineering School, contained in ASUB, RSAI, b. 14, folder *Opera della Scuola Concessione assegno di contabilità*.

*Guardia*, April 9, 1933, 2). The need to have a place where «even beyond the university classrooms a high and continuous sense of cordiality, camaraderie and discipline» (*Guf. Fascist university Groups*, 1936, 108) was thus met in Bologna, too, in a spacious structure. The building housed all the offices of the Fascist University Group (those of the political secretary, the secretariat, the political delegate and his assistants, those for enrolling, for travel and entertainment, for women's organizations and for foreign ones, for the press and propaganda, for the colonial section and for the management of pantries), in addition to the premises intended for the university Militia Cohort (the offices of the commander, of the employees of the commands and departments, and a meeting room), the Student's House (with various meeting rooms, party halls, rooms for conferences and readings, and bars), the guest rooms, libraries, study rooms and gyms and arms rooms (*L'Assalto*, 28 October 1933, 7).

The canteen, a pillar of the Students' House, amounted to another significant step for the weaving of relations between the University and the local authorities, falling within the sphere of indirect influence of the GUF. The regulations, which seemed to exclude the *gufini* (GUF members) from direct control over the canteen, in practice was to their complete advantage, since the GUF secretary, a member of the University Opera's Board of Directors, actually supervised the functioning of the canteen. Furthermore, Ghigi did not question the reports of the GUF on the allocation of meal vouchers and gave the secretariat of the Fascist association the task of choosing the staff to maintain discipline in the premises<sup>10</sup>. This gave the *gufini* a double control over such an important meeting place as the canteen: on the one hand, by managing the access to it and linking the students unable to attend the University without scholarships to the Group, and on the other by supervising the university students who made use of the service.

The assistance purposes – typical of the spirit of the students' associations in the 1920s – after the affirmation of the GUF took on a fundamental meaning, allowing the young Fascists to conform the aggregation activities, and through these the mentality and behavior of the university students, to the directives and spirit of the regime. The press recalled how, thanks to Fascism, the worst vices of the goliardic youth were eliminated in the Students' House: «the tavern and [...] the bearded and hairy students who smoke pipes, spit on the ground, or chew the moonlight, or build Hugoesque barricades» (*L'Assalto*, December 2, 1933, 4). Anything that did not comply with the directives and regulations of the regime, with which young university students must comply, had to be eliminated, therefore the control over the assistance structures greatly facilitated the task entrusted to the GUF members who, as the future Fascist ruling class, became the standard bearers of the regime in the Italian universities.

#### 4. The exclusion of Jews from residential colleges

During the fascist period, students coming from abroad were welcomed to Italian Universities with a 50-80% reduction of tuition fees that was controlled by

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<sup>10</sup> Therein, folder *Opera universitaria: contributi (1933-1934)*, Meeting of the Coordinating Committee of the Bologna *Opere Universitarie*, October 5, 1933.

the Ministries of National Education and Foreign Affairs and was applied by every Italian university. These students received help in finding accommodation, fellowships and scholarships, sports facilities, meal tickets, health care, access to study material, discounts in shops and language courses. After 1927 every foreign student was required to join the Fascist Group's foreign section as well as to hold a membership card in order to receive benefits. The foreign section, led by a *fiduciario*, organized foreign students according to their nationality and invited them to participate in the Group's activities, such as sports matches, theatre and cinema productions (CINEGUF), and art and literature competitions (*Guf. Gruppi universitari fascisti*, 1936, 38-43; Segreteria dei Guf Roma, 1939, 19-20). These kinds of benefits encouraged Jewish students, especially from Poland and the Baltics, Rumania, Hungary, Bulgaria and Germany, to enrol in Italian universities, escaping from antisemitic laws introduced by the governments in order to restrict or prevent the admission of Jews to schools and universities and to some jobs and professions (Stark; Benjamin; Zyndul, 2002). Italy was thus a «shelter» for Jewish students (Voigt, 1993, 1996) until the *gufini*, using their violent tones, became the leading supporters of the racial laws in Italian universities, acting as banner holders, controllers and perpetrators of the government policy against Jewish colleagues and teachers. Foreign Jewish students were their first victims.

In 1935-36 the GUFs began to reduce their welcoming activities, giving membership and benefits only to Italian citizens and from 1934 to 1937 the government progressively enacted measures to control the enrolment of foreign students but without a real law of exclusion for some categories (Salustri, 2010, 219-221). The turning point came in early 1938 when the Fascist regime began to pass anti-Jewish laws that strongly affected the Italian Jewish community. These initiatives were independent from German pressures and were to a certain extent a genuine consequence of the Italian fascist ideology and part of the Fascist totalitarian program. Anti-Semitism was exploited by the regime to create support and to generate a universal internal enemy for the Italian population in order to create a stronger consensus for WWII (Collotti, 2003, 63).

*Gufini* asked the rectors and the Minister of National Education to forbid all Jewish students, foreign or not, to enter refectories, dormitories or gyms. They demanded that strict enrolment procedures be introduced and that a distinction be made between Aryan students and non-Aryan ones at the exams.

Once again, the University of Bologna is the perfect example of the GUFs' control on student lives and on their forms of aggregation. On September 1939 the GUF secretary Tullo Pacchioni asked the rector «to affirm its influence through the work of fascist reclamation» because «the students' residence, created with noble purposes, in recent times is becoming a meeting place for Jewish persons of anti-fascist tendencies». Pacchioni wrote: «signs should be hung up obliging those who want admittance to the students' residence to join the PNF or the GUF, and furthermore [the GUF] sees fit to immortalize on the walls the Duce's words, taken from some of the most important parts of his speeches»<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> ASUB, *Studenti stranieri* (pos.35/a), b. 1 1908-1943, fasc. *Studenti ebrei (1939)*, Letter by the secretary of the GUF to the rector Ghigi, September 28, 1939.

This request was so important for GUF that only 17 days after Pacchioni wrote once again to the rector to know if «the problem» has been solved. He underlined that «the permission of the Minister to allow foreign Jews to be enrolled at universities does not at all justify the possibility for them to be present in and benefit from our assistance facilities». Pacchioni added that «the University is one thing, while the benefits we have to reserve to members of our race are another»<sup>12</sup>.

Jews were no longer allowed to receive welfare assistance, scholarships, awards or discounts and the residential colleges were transformed from a symbol of hospitality into places of exclusion.

The expulsion of the Jewish university students from the Students' Houses demonstrates the importance of these places within the Fascist totalitarian project. In the formation of a warrior youth, educated in the name of the Fascist ideology and ready to fight in the wars of conquest desired by Fascism, every space for indoctrination was fundamental, even more so if young people progressively became a weapon in the service of the regime, abandoning the book to take up the musket.

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<sup>12</sup> Therein, Communication by the rector Ghigi to the Ministry of Education, November 2, 1939.

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