

# Corrado Gini's ethnographic routes and international relationships during the CISP Mexican expedition

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## Abstract ITA

Nel 1933, Corrado Gini, statistico, demografo ed esponente dell'eugenetica italiana, organizzò e condusse la spedizione scientifica messicana del Comitato per lo Studio della Popolazione (CISP). A partire da alcuni documenti originali, custoditi presso l'Archivio Centrale di Stato di Roma e presso lo Smithsonian Archive di Washington, questo articolo si propone di mettere in evidenza una certa attenzione etnografica presente nei questionari e nelle note della spedizione messicana, sottolineando la natura multidisciplinare della metodologia di campo. L'analisi dei documenti intende indagare come e se i rapporti scientifici intessuti da Gini in Messico con Emma Reh e Manuel Gamio siano stati importanti e di stimolo per la formulazione di alcune teorie e aperture metodologiche.

**Parole chiave:** CISP, Corrado Gini, Emma Reh, Manuel Gamio, etnografia.

## Abstract ENG

In 1933, the Italian statistician, demographer and eugenicist Corrado Gini organized and undertook a scientific expedition to Mexico on behalf of the Italian Committee for Population Studies (CISP). Based on original documents preserved in the Archivio Centrale di Stato in Rome and in the Smithsonian Archives in Washington, this article aims to highlight Gini's ethnographic interest, which becomes evident through a consideration of the expedition's questionnaires and records, as well as the multidisciplinary nature of his fieldwork methodology. In addition, an analysis of the documents will explore whether and how the scholarly relationships that Gini forged in Mexico with Emma Reh and Manuel Gamio stimulated the formulation of particular theories and methodological approaches.

**Keywords:** CISP, Corrado Gini, Emma Reh, Manuel Gamio, ethnography.

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Corrado Gini will hardly play a role in the history of Italian anthropology<sup>1</sup>. This is because he is not considered an anthropologist. Rather, he was known as a statistician and demographer or eugenicist. Gini founded the Italian National Institute of Statistics in 1926 and held important offices during the Fascist regime and was responsible for the administration of public welfare. His positive, Catholic eugenics advocated controlled and state-regulated healthy reproduction, in contrast to Northern European and US “negative eugenics”<sup>2</sup>, which recommended practises such as birth control and sterilisation. The quantity over quality lemma was used by Gini to scientifically justify fascist policies of demographic expansion (see Cassata 2006). However, he also suggested finding contextual solutions based on different national cases, taking into account the potentially positive effects of miscegenation. Gini was a man of science, a strategic science clearly dedicated to serving the nation. In his theoretical elaborations, the interests of the state took precedence, and in conceiving fascist eugenics policy, he always affirmed the idea that the community took precedence over the individual. His “Inquiry on Large Italian Families” (1928-31) was a wide-ranging biopolitical census designed to understand and measure the qualitative and quantitative categories of Italian families in order to organise and legitimise national eugenics policy, and was part of a major project aimed at identifying an “Italian ethnic type” (Sacchi, Sorgoni, Venturoli 2020).

In this paper, I will reflect on some of Gini’s ethnographic interests, which I argue are particularly related to his international connections, but are also part of his vision of strategic scholarship in the service of national interests – but also vice versa – which was a central paradigm in both Italy and Mexico. To this end, I will examine the documentation of the CISP (Comitato per lo Studio della Popolazione) Mexican expedition led by Gini, entitled “Inchiesta demografico-antropologico-sanitaria sulle popolazioni indigene e meticce del Messico”, held at the Archivio Centrale di Stato in Rome, and Emma Reh’s collection of document at the Smithsonian Archives in Washington.

First, I will consider Manuel Gamio’s influence on Gini. He was one of the fathers of Mexican anthropology and one of the most important anthropologists involved in the construction of national identity in post-revolutionary Mexico, developing the “integral method of study” (Gamio

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1 Probably also because the fascist years are not normally studied in any depth by publications dealing with the history of Italian anthropology. Among the latest publications Gini is not mentioned as being an anthropological scholar (see, for example, Alliego 2011, 2021; Faeta 2011; Ricci 2019). However, we find a mention of the CISP research and of Gini’s method in Grottanelli (1977) as well as a nod to his ethnographic field works in Dore (1980).

2 On Anglo-German negative eugenics see in particular Kevles (2013).

1922), whose similarity to Gini's "integrated method" (Gini 1928) will soon become clear. The "integral method of study" used in Gamio's main project, the Población del Valle de Teotihuacán (Gamio 1922), envisaged the use of ethnography, archaeology, history and anthropometry, as well as agriculture, medicine and education, to understand and improve the lives and culture of the indigenous population<sup>3</sup>.

Secondly, I will present Emma Reh, a US science journalist and co-founder of the Society for American Archaeology in 1935, who provided a new perspective on a better ethnographic understanding of the Mexican CISP expedition led by Gini. Although Reh's sensibility and her way of understanding indigenous cultures may seem dissimilar to Gini's approach, we will see that Gini seems inspired by her ethnographic field notes.

Emma Reh, Manuel Gamio and Corrado Gini were closely connected, for it was Gamio himself who brought Gini into contact with Reh.

### **CISP and the *eugenica rinnovatrice***

In 1928 Mussolini supported the "Italian Committee for the Study of Population" (CISP). The committee included anthropologists, zoologists, psychologists, physicians, and some of the most famous scientists of the time in Italy: Agostino Gemelli, Nicola Pende, Alessandro Ghigi, Carlo Jucci and the anthropologist Sergio Sergi. Corrado Gini was not only the founder, but also the director of the CISP from the beginning. The aim of the CISP was to develop scientific research in demography, history, biology, ethnographic and sociological studies that were particularly relevant to the problems of the population (Gini 1928). The CISP organised ten multidisciplinary expeditions abroad and three expeditions to the so-called "Italian ethnic islands"<sup>4</sup> (Gini, Federici 1943), all of which were led by Gini in the field and were intended to research the "isolated ethnic groups" and the populations Gini described as "primitive" (Gini, Federici 1943, p. 4).

one of the essential purposes of the Committee will be to collect the largest possible amount of data on these primitive or decadent populations to study in particular the modalities and, if possible, the causes of decadence and the gradual disappearance of certain races as well as the causes of for-

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3 On Gamio's role in Mexican anthropology, politics and indigenism see, among others, Brading 1984, 1988; Knight 1990; Walsh 2004; Lomnitz 2001; Giraudo, Martín-Sánchez 2011.

4 These were the Albanian groups in Calabria, the Ligurian and the Ligurian-Piedmontese colonies in Sardinia.

mation and flowering of new races upon which our ignorance is almost absolute<sup>5</sup> (Gini 1928, p. 205).

The investigations were inspired by the “integral demography approach”: this involved collecting physical, anthropometric, ethnographic, biological and medical-anthropological data by means of questionnaires that were presented to the population and filled out by the scientists on the expedition (Gini 1937). The CISP expeditions studied some indigenous peoples in Tripolitania, the Samaritans in Palestine, eleven indigenous groups in Mexico, the Caraimi in Poland and Lithuania, the Dauadas in Fezzan, the Bantu in Natal, in some Albanian villages, in Calabria, Italy, in the Ligurian colony of Carloforte in Sardinia, in the Ligurian-Piedmontese colony in Calasetta and in Sardinia, Italy (Gini, Federici 1943).

The main concern underlying all the expeditions was the question of miscegenation. The comparison of data collected from isolated and mixed populations was crucial for Gini to prove his theory: endogamy and isolation lead to senescence and decadence, while a certain type of racial crossing turned out to be the key for the renovation of the nations. In the context of the Mexican expeditions, Gini claims that the data of the so-called hybrid subjects confirm a higher level of fertility, while isolated groups, such as the Seri in Mexico, show deficiencies and degenerative tendencies.

The CISP expeditions were Gini’s field laboratory to substantiate his most important theories: the *Teoria Ciclica delle Nazioni* and the *eugenica rinnovatrice*. In his “Cyclical Theory of Nations”, Gini claimed that there was an analogy between the development of populations and that of individuals: both were characterised by the succession of a juvenile, an adult and a senescent phase, each with its own specific reproductive capacity (Gini 1930)<sup>6</sup>. Gini emphasised the revitalizing effects of miscegenation and consequently the dysgenic effects of demographic isolation. The analogy between the individual and the population was reproduced in the dynamics of the mixed race: for Gini, there are no ‘pure’ breeds as far as Gini concerned, but “purified” breeds, which, however, could not survive in their national-biological isolation, since once they reached a certain degree of homogeneity, they would decay if not renewed by new interbreeding (Cassata 2006b). The death of nations is thus determined by

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5 Most of the documents written by Gini, published and unpublished, are written in Italian or French and have been translated by the author. All documents by Reh, published or unpublished, have been written in English, apart some from small parts in Spanish and native languages that I have left in original.

6 In his fundamental text *Nascita, evoluzione e morte delle nazioni* (Gini, 1930), Gini affirmed his cyclical theory and his thesis on mixed nations, taking the Italian region Veneto as an example of vitality infused by the “Slavic blood inputs”, and comparing it to the declining trend in the rest of the country.

the natural decline of the reproductive instinct (senescence), which can, however, be counteracted by mixed breeding: “the group transformed by the infusion of external blood begins a new period of its evolution” (Gini 1934a, p. 4) (Sacchi, Sorgoni, Venturoli 2020).

Gini's vision of mixed races did not correspond to an anti-racist vision. Gini did not claim that mestizos per se always represented a positive outcome; rather, he considered different variations that “may lead to intermediate products, to products more favourable or less favourable than the parent races” (Gini 1930, p. 308). However, his vision is certainly unique in the Italian cultural sphere of the time, offering interesting possibilities and unexpected political consequences. In the late 1930s, Gini was still trying to defend his scientific proposals despite the political trend against miscegenation, and he did not discard his cyclical theory of nations or his idea of the revitalising function of miscegenation. With the publication of the “Manifesto della razza” in 1938 in Italy, the definitive ban on interracial relations even in national territories, and the adoption of racist theories and policies similar to those in Nazi Germany, Gini began to be marginalised and was eventually excluded from Italian scientific and institutional life.

At a time when Fascist political censorship imposed a choice on Italian intellectuals and scientists – a political choice with significant scientific implications – Gini tried to strike a balance between the more articulated positions without taking a clear stance and, above all, without abandoning his cyclical theory of hybridism, which considered miscegenation as a beneficial and invigorating process for nations and populations, a position that was not in line with “Nazi and Fascist dogma”. At the same time, the national construction of Mexico based on the mestizo paradigm opened up new scientific and political perspectives and research opportunities for Gini that were on the wane in Italy (Sacchi, Sorgoni, Venturoli 2020).

### **The Mexican expedition and Gini's consideration of an ethnographic approach**

The questionnaires of the CISP expedition to Mexico are the only ones preserved in the Archivio Centrale di Stato in Rome, while the documents of other expeditions are unfortunately not in the collection of the Roman Archives and are probably lost. As far as the Mexican expedition is concerned, we also have other types of records, including letters between participants, notes by Gini such as the “Instructions for Group Leaders”, demographic and ethnographic reports, and various field notes from different members of the expedition. The Mexican expedition was “the largest expedition of the Committee” (Gini, Federici 1943, p. 11)

and lasted almost three months, from 7 September to 28 November 1933. Initially, the team stayed in Ixmiquilpan (Hidalgo) for a period of training and mutual scientific and personal acquaintance. In this new expedition, the questionnaires were reviewed and modified based on previous experience. The anthropometric and the medical-biological questionnaires were split into two different questionnaires, new forms were prepared and new instruments were used (Gini, Federici 1943, p. 11). The year before the expedition, Gini had been in Mexico to establish contacts with the government and to build closer ties with Mexican eugenics circles. During his stay, he supported and promoted the founding of the Mexican Committee for the Study of Population Problems (Gini 1937), whose most important representative was Gilberto Loyo, the country's first professional demographer, who had studied under Gini's supervision at La Sapienza University in Rome in the early 1930s (Stern 2000; Scarzanella 2010).

Gamio was Gini's main Mexican contact when it came to organising the expedition, both scientifically and logistically. He was a contemporary of José Vasconcelos, but their views on *mestizaje* diverged in many ways (see Vasconcelos 1925). Gamio had studied with Boas at Columbia University and advocated the equality of all races. He denied the superiority of the European races, but also distanced himself from Vasconcelos' theory of the "cosmic race", which served to justify the superiority of the "new Mexican man", the *mestizo*. Without denying the alleged backwardness of Mexican indigenous communities, Gamio, following Boas, tended to attribute these characteristics to the environment and to circumstances such as inadequate nutrition, lack of education, material poverty and isolation from the stimuli of national life (Gamio 1916).

Both in their letters and probably during his preparatory journey, Gini discussed with him which populations should be the subject of the CISP's study (Venturoli 2018). Gamio had already taken a similar approach with his *Población del Valle de Teotihuacán* project, which was to be the first stage of a major cognitive enterprise covering the whole of Mexico and aimed at mapping the heterogeneous peoples and their history as well as their geographical distribution.

Since people and land are entities closely linked and dependent on each other in almost all their characteristic aspects, it is necessary to fully know both to improve the living conditions, both material and abstract, of the former (Gamio 1922 p. 57)

In the project on the *Población del Valle de Teotihuacán*, according to Gamio's "integral method of study", ethnography, archaeology, history, anthropometry, geography as well as agriculture, medicine and many other disciplines were used simultaneously. To build the new nation, Gamio

wanted to shape the new Mexican citizen and participate in the political and social process of post-revolutionary Mexico. The high degree of interdisciplinarity and depth of Gamio's studies, as well as their political purpose, must surely have fascinated Gini.

The Mexican expedition was the second of ten expeditions in Italy and abroad conducted by the Italian Committee for the Study of Population under the direction of Corrado Gini. In the case of the Mexican expedition, it was decided to extend the study, which required even closer cooperation with local actors at the scientific and institutional levels. Therefore, the expedition was to be carried out through a scientific and financial partnership between the two committees - the Italian CISP and the Mexican Committee for the Study of Population Problems (Gini, Federici 1943, p. 12). The team consisted of Mexican, Italian and US members and was divided into four groups, each assigned to four different areas and peoples.

In addition to the questionnaires, blood samples, complete skeletons, and skulls were collected, and some facial moulds were produced (Gini, Federici 1943). Gini moved from group to group, spending time in particular with the second group during the examination of the Tarascan, with the first group for the survey on Seri people, and with the fourth group for the investigation of the Mixes. After the first CISP expedition in Palestine, Gini was in fact aware of the importance of complementary information that was not encompassed in the questionnaire's responses. Therefore, he believed that it was preferable for the director of the expedition to be free to travel and be devoid of specific duties in order to have time "to collect multiple information of primary usefulness, both general information on the habits and customs of the populations, and also, on the people examined, information of a particular nature that goes beyond the rigid system of questionnaires" (Gini 1937, p. 235). We have to bear in mind that during the previous year he had been in touch with Gamio, Loyo, and Mexican anthropological and eugenics scientific circles, and had also travelled to the country: most probably, during this period spent in Mexico, Gini's integral demographic method was influenced by Mexican theories that were paying particular attention to ethnography and the socio-cultural aspects of ethnic groups.

Gini's *integral field approach* is partly described in the form of a long narrative in the book *Magia Rossa* by Gian Gaspare Napolitano (1968). Napolitano was an Italian journalist who accompanied the team among the Seri, and reported his experience with keen eyes, both with regard to the indigenous people and to the scientists' group. His interpretation of the journey and the stay in Tiburon Island gives us a picture of the social and cultural context, and provides us with an insight into the expedition's fieldwork. Napolitano alludes also to the personal relationships among the members of the group and to the strength of Gini's leadership:

The professor [Gini] soon proved to be a strong inquisitor, able to work ten or twelve hours a day, from sunrise to sunset. [...] He sat in full dress [...] with Miss Marzi at his side, writing in shorthand and then copying the statements with a typewriter. The method was to identify immediately: names, then surnames, ancestors, as far as possible, and finally the original tribal names (Napolitano 1968, p. 140).

The investigation was organised in a chain. After the first questioning by the professor, the Indian was entrusted to Carlos Basauri, who made the measurements and took meticulous notes. [...] his wife Teresita was the one who took care of the women when modesty required it. [...] the Italian questionnaire contained a lot of novelty and included a hundred questions, [...] from descriptive, physiological, colorimetric characteristics to metric measurements, weight and condition of the teeth, from hair colour to the opening of the eyelids, from the height of the shin bone to the footprint. Basauri also collaborated with Mazzotti, who compiled the medical questionnaires and was the expedition's photographer. [...] He was responsible for collecting information on social diseases, the number and type of vaccinations, general appearance, organ characteristics, temperature, reflexes, hereditary stigmata, muscular strength, and especially the study of blood types. Sometimes he called Vaquero or Teresita, and this happened when the investigation concerned the sexual life, pregnancy, childbirth, menstruation [...] (ivi, pp. 141-142).

[...] working together, in a team, or *équipe*, they will quite soon be able to confirm the hypothesis of the Thompson brothers', [...] they had after all increasingly marginalised the purebred Seris [...]. The mestizos ruled and the others obeyed (ivi, p.142).

In a conference paper presented at the Mexican Society of Geography and Statistic on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 1933, in which Gini presented an analysis of the first results of the expedition, he exposed the data collected on the Seri people. Gini identified that ethnic group as a perfect example to illustrate his "cyclical theory of the nations" (Gini 1934a p.155): he proposed that their demographic decline was not the result of wars, but of their long and particular isolation conditions. Gini's interest in a more extensive and deeper fieldwork approach, focused on sociological and cultural aspects, seems to emerge in the slant he gave to the paper. Indeed, the paper deepens ethnographic data, in dialogue with two previous pieces of research undertaken by US anthropologists William John McGee and Alfred Kroeber. McGee was among the Seri in 1895 and published the book *The Seri Indians* in 1898; Kroeber studied the Seri among many other indigenous Mexican and Californian native groups in the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and published *The Seri* in 1931. Gini took into account the opposite positions of these scholars: McGee considered the

Seri as a population unrelated to any other in terms of race, language and civilization, while Kroeber was trying to incorporate the Seri into a bigger unit with other populations, both linguistically and ethnically. While contrasting a great deal of ethnographic data presented by McGee (Venturoli 2018, pp. 88-89), and even agreeing with Kroeber on the romantic aspect of some McGee's descriptions, Gini was convinced of the peculiarity of the Seri group especially in biological terms, asserting that they all presented the same blood type: "The pure Seri, or those regarded as such, that we have examined (127 out of the 163 existing) presented [...], all, without a single exception, the group O" (Gini 1934a, p. 156). Proving the extent of Seri segregation was extremely important for Gini, in order to sustain his thesis as to their degeneration being caused by isolation. The low degree of physical resistance, the progressive reduction in height over time, the widespread hemeralopia<sup>7</sup> and the rather reduced auditory faculty, were features caused by the degenerative situation of the group. Noteworthy, in claiming this, Gini was very close to Gamio's theories, affirming that degeneration also depends on being deprived of a good diet and a good education, while remarking, albeit with a certain paternalism, their intelligence and their learning ability:

The results obtained with the hemoglobinometer [...] show physiological poverty that is in line with the other degenerative data, but to what could it be attributed if not to the malnutrition in which, in this season, the Seris are living. (Gini 1934a p. 161)

Furthermore, the Seris cannot be considered inferiors. In adapting to their environment, they show remarkable intelligence... Those who have been their masters for a few years claim that they are not inferior in intelligence and that they show a strong desire to learn (*ivi* p. 175).

Among the expedition's documents in the Rome Archive, the "Instructions to group leaders", both in Spanish and in Italian, is particularly interesting. This document contains the guidelines with for completing the complex CISP interdisciplinary questionnaires, but it is also a kind of methodological fieldwork statement by Gini. In this document, he explains in detail to his group leaders how to carry out the scientific tasks of the expedition, such as keeping the daily field diary, and writing a bi-weekly report. He writes, with precise details and long explanations, how to use and complete the CISP demographic, medical and anthropological questionnaires, and what information should be considered most important. Finally, he explains which objects the groups needed to obtain

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<sup>7</sup> A term that in the past designated blindness during the day and vision at night. Now, however, it serves to indicate deficiencies in the faculty of adaptation to low light.

in support of the data, such as skulls, archaeological remains, ethnographic objects, hairs and facial moulds.

Each group leader is authorized to acquire, on behalf of the Italian Committee, ethnographic material related to fertility in the sense that it refers to customs that may exert an influence on the intensity of births and deaths and the fertility of marriages (Gini 1934a p. 3).

Gini always appears concerned about the relationship among the researchers of the groups, and he is very concerned to organize their roles and functions; but he is also worried about the good relations between the research groups and the local communities. His *integral method* included, in fact, the establishment of a relationship with the local physician and schoolteacher as mediators between the national society<sup>8</sup> and indigenous peoples. He was interested in the hygienic and sanitary conditions in the communities studied and the possibilities for improving them (Gini 1934a).

In the “Instructions to group leaders” Gini’s reflections are quite close to those of Gamio, pointing out that the populations were disadvantaged due to socio-cultural, economic, hygienic, and educational conditions and that these conditions need to be improved. However, looking at the article on Seri, it is clear that these views are not only based on anthropometric, demographic measurements and medical considerations, but also on careful ethnographic observations.

### **Emma Reh’s ethnographic notes in the expedition**

Enclosed is a story on the Gini-demographic investigation in Mexico which is about to begin. I mentioned no other names in the present piece because all of them are not determined. Unless there is one of these slips twixt cups and lips, then I am going. I would belong to the Yucatan-British Honduras-Chiapas expedition group, doing the sociological part of the work. (Emma Reh to Watson Davis, August 28, 1933a).

This is probably one of the first letters in which Emma Reh mentions Gini’s Mexican expedition. In this letter, she is writing to her friend and colleague Davis Watson at the Science Service editorial office in Washington. Emma Reh had been in Mexico since 1926, working as a

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8 Some of the researchers in the expedition were Mexican, belonging to the educated creole élite of the capital, other members of the team, Italian or foreigners, were in any case assimilated to the hegemonic white national context by the indigenous and rural communities.

correspondent for the US Science Service and various USA and Mexican journals on archaeological, anthropological, agricultural, political and cultural issues, submitting articles and photographs. Her main topic during the Mexican period was archaeology: “she often submitted more than a dozen stories in a month to Emily C. Davis, the staff writer assigned to cover archaeological and anthropological news” (Tressider 2005).

From her letters to friends in Washington, it is clear how involved she was in the intellectual life of Mexico, as well as in many important archaeological excavations held by United States projects in Mexico, in which she personally participated. In 1940, she attended the first Congreso Indigenista Interamericano as one of the official U.S. delegates (El Primer Congreso Indigenista Interamericano 1940). She remained in Mexico until 1935, when she obtained a position with the Soil Conservation Service (SCS), working with indigenous peoples in the southwestern U.S. “Her culturally sensitive article on the use of the psychogenic Peyote in Southwest US made one later author erroneously think that she was ‘probably Navajo,’ while another anthropologist considered her a ‘sensitive investigator’ of indigenous life” (Pernet 2019, p. 395).

Her manifest degree of familiarity with Mexican culture, and especially with Mexico's pre-Hispanic past, is evident not only from her articles, but also from the letters she used to send to her friends at the editorial office in Washington, in which her descriptive, almost pictorial ability to write is probably even more vivid and uninhibited than in the published articles.

Reh established professional relationships and friendships with many Mexican and US scientists and government officials who gave her privileged access to information from the archaeological excavations. In addition, she participated in the expeditions on several occasions and experienced first-hand some of the most important discoveries in Mexican and especially Maya archaeology, which she reported on in her letters and later in her articles, which she called “stories”.

The practical problems of life in Monte Alban are terrific. [...] In fact, water is such a problem that Caso is beginning to think that the miniature subterranean passageways were water cistern. But we don't agree with him. [...] That night when we were sitting around tomb ten in the starlight, the three Caso, Borbolla and Valenzuela took turns crawling in with the gasoline torch, after photos had been taken, and handed out, bones, pottery, jade etc. [...] <sup>9</sup> (Emma Reh to Emily C. Davis, November 24, 1932).

Manuel Gamio was her friend and mentor in Mexico. From Emma's letters we learn that she was a close family friend, spending a lot of time

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<sup>9</sup> Here Emma Reh is reporting on the archaeological excavation by Alfonso Caso in Montá Alban, probably the discovery of the “tomb seven” (Caso *et al.* 1969).

in their home, and was a sort of go-between for other American science journalists and scientists coming to the country. Her connections to the Mexican scientific and academic world enabled Emma to learn about the multidisciplinary Italian expedition, and Gamio was probably the one who put her in touch with Gini.

Gamio, who is not to be an active member of the research group, since he will be involved in Mexico's new agricultural organization and the six-year plan business (not yet official), urged Gini to take me on and pay me a salary. He warned me that Gini was harder-boiled than Mussolini. My talk with him today convinced me he is. And that is harder than I am (Emma Reh to Watson Davis, August 28, 1933a)

Introducing Reh's perspective in the context of the CISP expedition is important because the only questionnaires that survive in the Gini collection are the questionnaires she completed, and because these questionnaires confirm the attention to ethnographic detail and sociocultural context that Gini demonstrated during the Mexican expedition. Reh's sensitivity and approach to fieldwork seem to differ from those of the Italian expedition members. This is mainly due to two reasons. First, she was a woman with a degree in chemistry and with a very different sociocultural background than the other participants (especially the women) in the expedition. She grew up in Washington and was an economically independent, divorced woman who worked for a popular science journal. Second, Reh is skilled at writing scientific articles and, as is evident from her letters, has a strong interest in the political and sociocultural situation in Mexico. She might have been influenced by Boasian ideas, but also by the anthropological environment in America<sup>10</sup>, to which she clearly belonged as a co-founder of the Society for American Archaeology in 1935.

In the expedition, Reh was assigned to the third group with Dr. Dino Camavitto, Gini's pupil.

In the third group, Dr. Dino Camavitto and Dr. Trens (assisted by Miss Marguerite Aguilar) were responsible for anthropometric and for medical and biological surveys respectively, while Miss Emma Reh was responsible for the demographic part. This group had the task of studying the Tlapanec people of the State of Guerrero and the Negro and Zambo populations of the Pacific coast. The route in the Tlapanec region was particularly difficult, to the extent that Dr. Trens could not cope with it and, having given up work, was replaced for a few days by Dr. Diez Martinez, doctor of the Colonia de Repatración de Pinotepa (Gini 1934a, p. 151).

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<sup>10</sup> I am working on a text that addresses issues and problems faced by Emma in the field from a gender point of view as well. See Larson (2020).

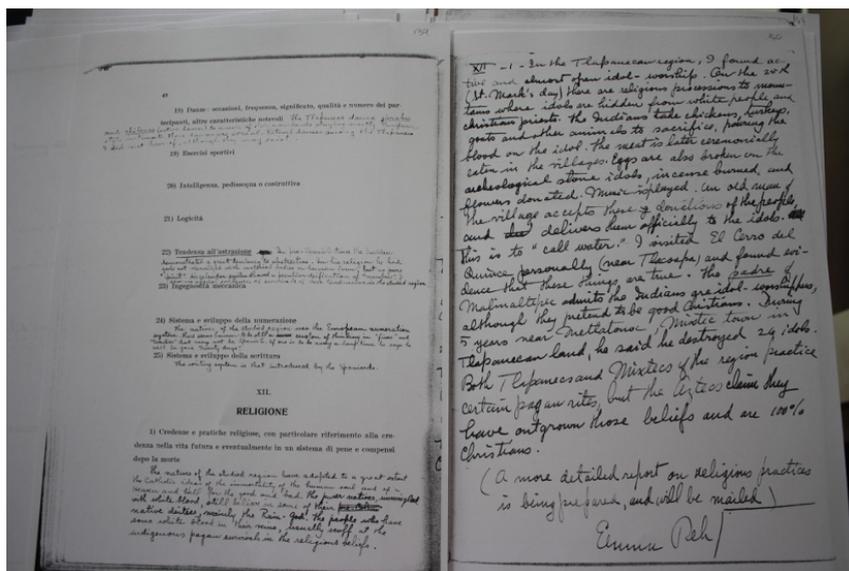
As mentioned earlier, the CISP questionnaire was reformulated specifically for the Mexican expedition. It was a complex and dense survey model consisting of twelve sections: 1) Physical characteristics of the territory, 2) Fauna and flora, 3) Ethnic groups, 4) General population, 5) Sexual and family life, 6) Personal development, 7) Nutrition, 8) Labor and production, 9) Property, 10) Social organization, 11) Mental characteristics, 12) Religion. Some of these sections were supplemented by additional sections and elaborated on specific aspects of the population studied. Reh completed her group's questionnaires, looking more closely at the cultural and social practices of the communities visited: her questionnaires are accompanied by notes and logs. Her approach to the topics and categories to be filled in the questionnaire is much more detailed than one would expect in this type of survey, and she dwells on detailed descriptions, sometimes supplementing them with drawings (see image 1). At the end of Gini's notes, found in the documentation, we read:

No one is sending ethnographic questionnaires or the required reports. In a letter to Cammavitto, Reh promises the questionnaire soon. She then tells him what happened after our departure. The packages of our communications have not arrived (Gini, Roma, 15 December 1933).

The interest Gini expresses in this letter shows his interest in Reh's ethnographic records and questionnaires. Reh eventually sent her questionnaires and included some ethnographic field notes. These documents report on the situation in four villages in the Tlapanèque region, el Tejote and Mailinaltepec for mixed Indians, Tlacoapa and Huehetepec for "pure" Indians, and one on the Costa Chica of Guerrero<sup>11</sup>, Omotepec, for the study of the Zambos. In addition, Rome's documentation includes other reports and ethnographic notes. Reh's ethnological material is also listed and analysed in letters to Gini during fieldwork, in which Reh appears very involved even in difficult times:

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<sup>11</sup> Even if by reading the questionnaires we realize that many more villages were visited.



Example of a questionnaire filled out by Emma Reh. (Comitato Italiano per lo Studio della Popolazione, Questionario, #2 Pure Tlapanecas; Tlacoapa; Huahuatpec, Archivio Centrale di Stato, Corrado Gini Documentazione D8, Spedizione Messico)

As Cammavito has already written to you, we have been obliged to spend a too great portion of our time to reach the place of our studies [...] we found resistance in the villages [...] I have done my best to gather as much ethnological material as possible, [...] travels is so difficult in these mountains [...]. Our pack animals were not strong enough to carry our equipment over the very steep broken trails between here and the Tlapa, and so Cammavito and I went on foot. There were three days of this, and on arriving here in Malinaltepec, I have not felt very well. I mention this not to complain, but because I had much greater ambitions in the gathering of extra ethnological materials than results show (Reh to Corrado Gini, November, 2, 1933).

Her working methods were based on conversations and observations. In her notes and letters, we often find the accounts of some interviews, some sentences transcribed in Spanish, probably as the informant told them, and the account of her participation in important events. Sometimes we find words or whole sentences in indigenous languages translated into Spanish and English, and we recognize throughout the documentation the importance that Reh attached to indigenous languages in order to understand cultural practices, which was not so evident at the time, especially in the context of the CISP expedition.

An Indian woman (Amuzgos) of Cochoapa informed that in the village girls were sometimes married before menstruation. “A veces se casan antes de tener la regla. Por conducta de una tercera persona, piden la mano de la muchacha. Llevan pan, chocolate, a las 8 de la noche a la casa de ella”. “Cucicí Tz’á mah ka hm dá” dicen. “Un hombre va a pedir a tu hija!” (El pididor<sup>12</sup> se llama tz’á ah) (Reh, 1933f).

Reh compiles lists of colours to identify different races, lists of combinations between races, and lists of hair types to determine the degree of miscegenation. It appears that she takes an emic viewpoint and gives priority to the opinions of informants who help her reconstruct the classification:

One informant of Ometepec (Dolores Hernandez, see cuestionario) explained the 5 types of hair recognized by people here:

1. cuculuxte = tight Africankinky (the word is Aztec)
2. chino = curled hair
3. crespo = wavy hair
4. crespos aguados = slightly waved
5. lacio = straight

(Reh, 1933f).

In general, Reh tends to stick to the themes and content of the CISP questionnaires, but it is clear that some topics she addressed were of particular interest to her. Specifically, she provided some fascinating insights into religion, traditional medicine, reproductive health, dietary habits, and political organisation, including in the context of gender relations. Her interest in religion was probably closely tied to her interest in archaeology, for we find detailed descriptions of rituals performed by indigenous peoples at pre-Hispanic ruin sites both in her letters and in her articles for the Science Service. Here is what she wrote about the “rain god” cult at Tlacoapa:

Every April 25 is his fiesta. Tlacoapa celebrates the feast on a mountain called Hueba Dziya, (Cerro del Quince; or Hill of the Fifteen) I was told that on the top of this mountain, which lies about 10 miles (?) northwest of Tlacoapa, there are two stone idols, which represent the Rain God and San Marco, simultaneously. My informant, the mother of the schoolteacher, described the celebration. Other details were given me by Timoteo Aburto (see cuestionario demografico of Malinaltepec) and varios inhabitants of Tlacoapa, who admitted taking part in this worship, and of being aware of its nature (see cuestionario demografico of Tlacoapa).

Live sheep; goats; turkeys; hens; chilote (alcoholic drink fermented from sugarcane-juice); copal gum (pre-Spanish native incense); candles; flowers; eggs;

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12 Wrong in the original text.

firecrackers are carried to music to the Hill of the Fifteen, on whose summit the two stone idols stand. An old man, between 100 and 70 years of age, previously appointed to officiate, represents the people before the idols, and presents the idols with gifts in their name.

The throat of the live animals and birds are cut and the fresh blood purred on the stone images, the fresh eggs are broken on the idol's heads, and the alcoholic chilote poured upon them. In the meantime, the flowers are placed about, candles and copal burn, music plays, and firecrackers are exploded.

This ceremony is a petition for rain. The corn seed is already on the ground on April 23. [...]

In the company of Preciliano Bazán (see cuestionario demográfico of Malinantepec), I visited the Hill of the Fifteen. We found the altar, a quadrangular trench in the ground about 2 M. long [...] lay dried flowers; egg shells; and sharpened pieces of bamboo about 10 cm long. Inside of the trench the earth was black and putrid. [...] there were copal drops on the stones [...] (Reh, 1933, CISP #2 *Pure Tlapenencas; Tlacoapa; Huahuatpec*).

This description is noteworthy for a number of reasons. Aside from the stimulating ethnographic information of which this paper is an example, it provides some indication of her methodology of data collection and her understanding of indigenous culture, as well as her ability to engage with local communities. We know that the CISP questionnaire required a household census and a count of people in the community, but from the report above we appreciate her ability to become intimately familiar with some people who clearly became Reh informants on specific topics. Her ability to deal with natives and connect with people, even to the point of accompanying them to the site of the ritual, is remarkable.

Moreover, she used to have long conversations with women about reproductive health and traditional medicine, to obtain information about gender dynamics.

Orizabita, hidalgo, Mexico, September 26, 1933, Interview with Petra Morgado, curandera of Orizabita. Petra does not speak Spanish. Only Otomi. [...] I asked first for information on treating pregnant women; second on treatment of women who want to have children and cannot; lastly on what women do in order not to have children. She gave me sample of toh, Otomi word meaning "mother-in-law", used to hasten birth; ef'hé, also for hastening birth, this being a sort of string-bean; corn-silk used for making tea, also to hasten birth, which is called shingui; and other substance [...] (Reh, 1933, CISP *Relazioni e Appunti*).

Both in the interviews and during field observations, several times Reh deals with the main theme dear to Gini, the miscegenation of races, often going beyond the simple answers to the questions in the survey. The most noteworthy part of the investigation regarding this topic is the Costa Chica

Questionnaire, for its heterogeneity. Here, after a long description of the ways of mixing among “Indians”, “Negroes” and “Spanish”, Reh tries to describe and interpret the emic perspectives:

[...] I asked an Indian woman why Indians did not marry negros, and she replied with pride, “We are Indians!” When I asked a negro woman why negroes did not marry Indians more often, she said, “We are gente de razon!”, or “civilized people” My impression in the presence of white in that territory both Indians and Negroes consider the others as inferiors race. Both however look upon Spaniards as superior race, and do not object to intermarriage with them. In social status, the Indian and the Negro on the coast are too similar to be attractive to each other. Their feeling toward each other is rather one of contempt. But one of mixed type is apparently ready to cross any other mixed type. [...] (Reh, 1933, CISP *Ometepec*).

## **Final words**

The years of the CISP expedition to Mexico are years in which Italian anthropology attempts to define itself and draw disciplinary boundaries<sup>13</sup>, and increasingly comes to grips with fascist politics. However, it is also a time when Italian ethnographic expeditions are specifically linked to colonial strategies<sup>14</sup>. At the time of the expedition, even if his ties to fascism are fading (Venturoli 2018; Sorgoni, Sacchi, Venturoli 2020), Gini is still a man of science committed to the state, and his idea of a scientific expedition to study peoples requires a “comprehensive view of the many different aspects of a field that encompasses all the human sciences” (Federici in Grottanelli 1977, p. 598). In addition, it must be remembered that the Mexican expedition also collected information for the Mexican government, so the typology of the data must have been influenced and negotiated with Mexican partners. By analysing available archival documents and contrasting them with published works, this paper demonstrates that Gini’s eclectic and holistic approach to the human sciences, expressed in his “integral method,” is very similar to Gamio’s. Moreover, it will be shown that for both of them anthropology could only be an applied and interdisciplinary anthropology.

Second, the paper highlights Gini’s interest in the social and cultural contexts in which ethnic groups are embedded: in conjunction with the biological data collected, the ethnographic material provides him with the

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13 In 1932 the two disciplines anthropology and ethnology are officially separated, and the Società Romana di Antropologia submitted a questionnaire to collect “the opinion of anthropological science scholars on the terminology and division of the human sciences” (Sergi, 1947, p. 7). On the Italian construction of the discipline’s boundaries see among others Sorgoni 1998; Remotti 2000; Piasere 2020; Alliegro 2011, 2021, Viazzo 2020.

14 See Sorgoni 1998 on connections between anthropology and colonialism.

means to elaborate his theories. Indeed, his isolation thesis—which holds that miscegenation is the only way out of degeneration and extinction—is based on several types of data, including biological, anthropometric, and demographic data, as well as ethnographic material, these seem to play a key role in his reflections, at least with respect to the Mexican expedition. When Gini affirms that the Seri are not biologically inferior, but that any social problem is due to economic reasons or problems of isolation, a strong link to Gamio and thus to Boas becomes evident. Moreover, this approach seems to be systemic in Gini's work: we find these ideas also in other articles and especially in his *Teoria ciclica delle nazioni*.

Interestingly, Gini's direct contacts with the US scientific community were not with the supporters of such theories but rather with those supporting the other side of the dispute, as represented by Charles Davenport and other scholars in the American Eugenics Movement. At the end of his notes about the Mexican expedition, Gini relates in fact about his visit to Cleveland University, where he had been invited by professors Thomas Todd and Wilton M. Krogman during his trip back from Mexico. In his notes we find an account of the visit to the anatomy laboratory run by Krogman and of the great collection of human skeletons:

[...] They show me the other parts of the laboratory. Reseaches that show that for various characters the superior individuals are already developed (but how can one judge then that they are superior?) [...] (Gini 1933).

As he stated in his “Information to the Groups Leaders” we have also seen his commitment to working with local people and village-level authorities, not just central government agencies. This approach is reflected in Reh's ethnographic insights, which seem to go far beyond the CISP questionnaires and give a new and unexpected twist to the data collected, due not only to her methodological approach in the field, but also to her particular sensitivity to indigenous cultures. She listened on the ground to what people had to say about them and sought to understand not only the different perceptions, but also, for example, the multiple nuances of marriage customs, as well as intermediary and internal practices such as mestizaje between Indians and Afrodescendants, and to explain the reasons for them. This position in this field is due to her social and cultural background: Reh was a graduate and independent woman living alone in a foreign land. In the Science Service, she participated in a project to popularize science as a tool to strengthen American democracy. Her involvement in political processes and scientific work differed from that of other women who participated in the CISP expedition. A difference that, as we can see from the words of Gini (1937, 1943) and Napolitano (1968), seems valuable for contacting Native American women on specific aspects and for taking notes.

Although Gini was clearly part of the global scenario and operated in international scientific circles, his expeditions were not isolated in the Italian scientific panorama of the Fascist era. In their article on Italian anthropology between the two world wars, Puccini and Squillaciotti (1980) listed nearly thirty anthropological/ethnological missions carried out by various institutions, including two CISP expeditions. Thus, although strongly linked to Fascist politics, Italian fieldwork was active in the period from the 1920s to the beginning of World War II. In this sense, between the two wars, Italy seems to have been part of an international trend that brought theoretical confirmation and practical development of applied ethnology (Puccini, Squillaciotti 1980, p. 80).

Nevertheless, it remains to be clarified whether Gini's ethnographic practice is mainly due to external influences (such as Mexican anthropology) or whether it is part of a practice integrated into Fascist Italian research in the field. Although there are some studies that deal in detail with the field practices of the Italian expeditions of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Sorgoni 1998; Puccini 1999; Alliegro 2011; Faeta 2011), I found it rather difficult to find out what methodological concepts were used during the fascist period. Therefore, not only are references to the ethnographic work of the CISP extremely rare in studies of Italian anthropology, but other scientific expeditions during the period of fascism are generally ignored.

This account of Corrado Gini and the CISP is just one example, and yet it opens up other stories that still need to be told in order to understand how intellectuals were connected during this period and how they spread and shaped ideas, things, and practices across the Atlantic at the beginning of World War II. Writing and reading these histories could reveal some aspects of Italian anthropology associated with the Fascist era that still seem quite hazy (Piasere 2020), and could also add some names to the pantheon of Italian anthropology in a period when disciplinary boundaries were not strongly defined.

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