

NATION AND COMMEMORATION IN THE ADRIATIC.
THE COMMEMORATION OF THE ITALIAN UNKNOWN SOLDIER
IN A MULTINATIONAL AREA: THE CASE OF THE FORMER
AUSTRIAN LITTORAL*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to examine how commemoration practices and rituals characteristic of the post-World War I period took place in the multinational territory of the Northern Adriatic. The authorities took advantage of the successive celebrations taking place across Italy commemorating the third anniversary of the victory in World War I electing to erect a memorial to their Unknown Soldier. In order to ensure a complete success, they established subcommittees which would oversee local commemorations alongside the central committee set up in Rome. Even though the authorities stressed the need for ceremonies to remain modest and to show reverence for fallen soldiers, narrative practices and symbols were nevertheless imbued with nationalist ideas. In light of this, the present study aims to provide an analysis of how Slovenes living in the region annexed to Italy by the Treaty of Rapallo in 1920 responded to Italian commemorations of the Unknown Soldier.

Key words: Unknown Soldier, Austrian Littoral, commemorations, Northern Adriatic, Italy, Slovenes, nationalism, national identities, celebrations, First World War

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SINTESI

L'articolo analizza le commemorazioni ed i rituali commemorativi, caratteristici del primo dopoguerra che si sono sviluppati nell'area multinazionale dell'alto Adriatico, regione che prima della fine del primo conflitto mondiale ed il successivo disgregamento dell'impero austro-ungarico era conosciuta come Litorale adriatico. Le celebrazioni tenutesi in tutta Italia nel terzo anniversario della vittoria furono incentrate sull'erezione di un monumento sepolcrale dedicato al proprio Milite ignoto. Affinchè queste fossero estese a tutto il territorio nazionale, furono istituiti dei sotto-comitati che assieme a quello centrale, di Roma, il 4 novembre 1921 avrebbero organizzato le commemorazioni a livello locale. Nonostante le raccomandazioni delle autorità di celebrare le cerimonie in modo sobrio, in modo da risaltare la pietà verso i soldati caduti in guerra, le pratiche narrative ed i simboli correlati erano comunque caratterizzati da contenuti nazionalistici. Perciò l'articolo intende esaminare le reazioni alle celebrazioni italiane del Milite ignoto da parte della popolazione slovena, che dopo il trattato di Rapallo del 1920 venne a far parte del Regno d'Italia. Sebbene difficilmente si possa tratteggiare una chiara delimitazione nazionale, l'analisi porta alla luce una complessiva indifferenza e rassegnazione degli sloveni che, se aderirono alle celebrazioni, lo fecero dando loro un significato di commemorazione generale dei propri defunti.

Parole chiave: Milite ignoto, Litorale austriaco, commemorazioni, alto Adriatico, Italia, Sloveni, nazionalismo, identità nazionali, celebrazioni, prima guerra mondiale

In recent years, new practices of commemorating and remembering World War I have emerged in the contact area near the Slovene-Italian border. The cemeteries of those soldiers who died during World War I are being restored in addition to restoration to memorials to individuals or regiments, such as, for example the chapel dedicated to Hungarian soldiers in Visintini/Vižintini by Doberdò/Doberdob, in the region of Gorizia/Gorica which was situated on the western border of what was the Austro-Hungarian Empire in the past and is now a part of Italy.¹ Dedication of the chapel took place on 29 May, 2009, and was also attended by the President of Hungary, László Sólyom. The »Russian Chapel« on Vršič, situated not far from the present-day Slovene Kobarid (better known as *Caporetto*), is visited annually by the

¹ Writing about multiethnic or multilingual regions requires a multilingual approach. Therefore I refer to place names of the Northern Adriatic in the two main languages spoken by their inhabitants.

highest Russian authorities; moreover, European project funds are allocated for the restoration of tunnels, trenches and bunkers which are being transformed into sites of historical interest, usually dedicated to peace and coexistence.²

In contrast to World War II, which still divides the Slovene-Croatian-Italian contact area due to the accusations of »genocide« of Slovenes and Croats by fascist Italy or the post-war »ethnic cleansing« attributed to Yugoslavs (Slovenes and Croats) World War I is perceived, as notoriously stated by Pope Benedict XV during the war, as a widespread »pointless massacre« (Isnenghi, Rochat, 2000, 16), in which everyone was a victim, regardless of whether they were winners or losers. Therefore, there is generally a widespread sense of mourning in connection with the First World War. It is for this reason that, though the memory of the Second World War still provokes conflict in the everyday narratives of Slovenes, Croats and Italians, the tragedy of the First World War is seen in a different light, allowing for public commemoration in a way that is no longer seen as controversial.

Public commemorations of those killed during World War I are not something new and has been a long-standing tradition stemming from the first years directly after the war. Due to the nature of WWI, which deprived individuals of their identity and thrust them into indistinguishable, unknown and unknowable mass. Erecting a memorial that would include and address all those who died, including those whose bodies remained unidentified, was seen as one of the most appropriate ways of commemorating the events of the war. Thus individual countries began building memorials to their unknown soldiers and usually placed these memorials in the centre of their capital cities or other places symbolising the sacrifices of the soldiers of each nation. In the course of investigating the practices of commemorating the war dead and rituals associated with this, many researchers have applied methods of interdisciplinary approach. Alongside the usual historical research, studies have also been conducted from the disciplines of anthropology, sociology etc. Until recently however, only a few of these studies have focused on the way these practices, which often have a function of nation-building and in integrating individuals into the national body, were reproduced and reflected into nationally-mixed or at least ethnically non-homogenous areas. Following the revival of the study of nationalism and the national question starting in the 1980s (among the most important see Smith, 1999; Anderson, 1998; Gellner, 2006; Hobsbawm, 1993), this important gap was filled by experts who chose as their main research focus the area of Central and Central-Eastern Europe in the 19th and 20th century, notably the Habsburg Empire and its successor states.³

Despite these very important studies which have contributed greatly to new perspectives of historical examination of the Czech-German, Romanian-Hungarian or

2 In the framework of such projects, publications, websites, guides and other materials have been created. For the most recent, see Fabi, 2006 and Todero, 2008.

3 For an overview see the articles included in the volume Bucur, Wingfield, 2001.

Polish-Russian territories, no similar trend seems to exist in the westernmost part of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, i.e. the territory of the Northern Adriatic or the Italian-Slovene or Italian-Slovene-Croatian contact area. Therefore, this study intends to partake in the scientific dialogue and contribute a modest segment to the understanding of commemoration dynamics within the multiethnic societies and environments of Central and Southern Europe. Even though it does not aim to finalize the studies on all aspects of celebrations and mourning rituals within this border region, its objective is to analyse the way in which certain mechanisms have emerged and were reflected in the multinational space such as the region of the Northern Adriatic.

In the years preceding the Great War, the territory of the Eastern Northern Adriatic area had belonged to a single region, the Austrian Littoral, whereas after the war it was awarded to Italy and was renamed Venezia Giulia, thus becoming the easternmost part of the Kingdom of Italy. In order to acquire these territories, Italy – based on the promises of the London Pact – entered World War I, by declaring war against the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After parliament passed the decision, Italy entered the war on May 24, 1915. On this occasion, the poet Gabriele d'Annunzio, one of the most prominent figures propagating Italian interventionism and Italy's entering the war against Austria, addressed the waiting crowd: »We do not fear our destiny, we will embrace it singing [...]. In each of us there flares the youthful spirit of the twin Knights looking at the Quirinal Palace. They will descend tonight and water their horses in the Tiber, beneath the Aventine Hill, before riding off to the Isonzo and painting it red with the blood of the barbarians« (D'Annunzio, 1954, 61) (see also Pirjevec, 2004, 13. Cf. Asor Rosa, 1975, 1321–1324). This fulfilled the prophecy written long before him by Slovene poet from Gorica/Gorizia, Simon Gregorčič, in his poem *Soči* in which he foresaw that Soča/Isonzo would run red with blood and defeat the enemy (Gregorčič, 1981, 85-88).⁴ Indeed, a short time later, the area lying along the then Austrian-Italian border, running along the river Soča/Isonzo was transformed into a battlefield. As a result of the fervour of propaganda, as well as the actual significance of the fighting between Italian soldiers and the Austro-Hungarian army along the river Soča/Isonzo, the area soon became part of the Italian (and Slovene) collective consciousness. Suddenly the names of the Karst villages or plateaus – until that time unimportant hills above the Gulf of Trieste/Trst – became known to the wider public on all battling sides and after the war, the symbolic importance of these places were codified in the national mental landscape. This was true particularly in victorious Italy where the official narrative intensified the emotional charge of these places, which represented the »sacrifice of the Italian nation« (Isnenghi, 1997, 284). The official post-war memory was re-articulated with the aid of war narratives which provided a national repertoire of images, symbols and »national passwords« (Ashplant et al., 2000, 22). Erecting

4 The first edition of Gregorčič's poetry was published in 1881. Cf. Wörsdörfer, 2009, 34

memorials and naming streets after military leaders – General Diaz and General Cadorna – personalities related to the tradition of the *Risorgimento* and *Irredentismo*, »martyrs« or »heroes« of the anti-Austrian fight, such as Fabio Filzi and Cesare Battisti, the Italian government used toponymics as a means of »raising awareness« among the masses.⁵ In keeping with the fervour of the times, after Italian troops marched into Trieste/Trst on 3 November 1918, one of the central city squares was almost immediately (November 11) renamed after Guglielmo Oberdan, who in 1882 had organized a failed assassination attempt against the Emperor Franz Joseph during his visit to the Adriatic town (Raffaelli, 1996, 224). Settlements and areas symbolizing the victorious war, such as *Carso*, *Isonzo*, *Podgora*, *Sabotino*, *Piave*, *Trento*, *Trieste*, replaced pre-war street names not only in the national periphery, in the region of the formerly Austrian Littoral, but throughout Italy.

The years following the war, particularly from 1922 onwards (due to Mussolini's policy of the appropriation of the deaths and general mourning after WWI) saw the emergence of memorial parks (*parchi della rimembranza*), usually dedicated to honouring military units or individuals who were exalted due to their heroic actions (Isnenghi, 1997, 303). Such initiatives started in Trieste/Trst immediately upon the conquest of the city in 1918 when in its centre, on the hillock by the cathedral and the castle, the square was expanded and a memorial erected to the Italian army whose volunteers from Trieste/Trst who had fought on the Italian side (Wörsdörfer, 2009, 42–43). With the creation of memorial parks it was necessary to create a myth to obliterate the atrocities of death on the battlefield and instead emphasize the value of sacrifice in order to endow the experience of war with an entirely positive charge (Mosse, 2007, 7) and at the same time also to find a way to make the sacrifices of war an issue of national import. The line running from the Dolomites to the mouth of the river Soča/Isonzo not only represented the front line between the battling armies but also an ethnic line of the territory. The grand, imposing nature of the monuments is inversely proportional to the identity of a place: »the more striking the monuments, the more uncertain the national identity of the place, particularly in multi-linguistic areas« (Ceccoti, 2001, 11). Hence, the monuments in Redipuglia/Sredipolje or in Oslavia/Oslavje and elsewhere in the region which were awarded to Italy after the war and where a mixed Italian/Slovene population lived are not only *sites of memory and sites of mourning*, but also sites that mark national territory (Dogliani, 1996, 386). In this sense even commemorating rituals are not simply practices of celebration but often become a national identity-forming element as well as providing what amounts to moments of simultaneous national inclusion and/or exclusion.

The first form of elaborating the personal and collective mourning for the fallen soldiers and creating cult symbols was the erection of memorials to the Unknown

⁵ Among the most recent publications on the figure of Cesare Battisti see Gatterer, 2006.

Soldier (Isnenghi, 1997, 302). The unimaginably enormous number of victims and those declared missing in action, a horror previously unknown in history, encouraged warring countries to establish new forms of commemoration. The erection of memorials dedicated to unknown soldiers was a way in which to remember each individual soldier, while at the same time no one individual in particular (Gillis, 1994, 11).

In 1921, as had occurred in France and England a year earlier, Italy erected a memorial with the intent of creating a symbolically honouring the Italian soldiers who had died over the course of the more than three years of war (Piehler, 1994, 174–175; Cf. Michalski, 1998, 78–80). Like others before them, Italian post-war elites appropriated the invented commemorative rituals and directed this general mourning with the ideological function of creating a monolithic national identity (Connerton, 1999, 61). Thus, on the third anniversary of the celebration of victory, a memorial to the Unknown Soldier was erected in Rome. The process of the commemorative ritual was similar to elsewhere, for »[...] each nation developed its own language of commemoration, but some features were universal.« (Winter, 1995, 82). Thus, after the exhumation of bodies of soldiers fallen on various battlefields – in the Italian case these were eleven bodies exhumed in the area stretching from Rovereto, the Dolomites, Gorizia/Gorica, the lower Soča/Isonzo valley, and down to the Adriatic sea – one body was chosen and buried in a symbolically central spot (Cf. Mosse, 2007, 104–109).⁶ In Italy the central site is the Vittoriano, a huge memorial located in Piazza Venezia in Rome, erected in 1911 to celebrate the memory of Vittorio Emanuele II, first king of Italy. In the middle of the memorial complex the 'Altar of the Homeland' was then built.⁷ After a several days-long solemn ceremony the body of the chosen soldier was interred there, to »[...] extend and reinforce the imperial symbolism of the Vittoriano within Roman and Italian space« (Atkinson, Cosgrove, 1998, 40). On 4 November, a huge crowd gathered in Rome and hundreds of thousands of people gathered to attend the central celebration, which concluded commemorative rituals throughout the country. However, if the closing ceremony in the capital was the most stately, special attention was given primarily to the north-eastern part of the state where the most intense battles had taken place.

Hence, the official celebrations started in this area. After the exhumation, the bodies of the fallen soldiers were collected in Udine/Videm, where the headquarters of the Italian army had been located during the war. Then, in a solemn procession, eleven bodies were transported through Gorizia/Gorica, a city severely affected by the war and taken to Aquileia/Oglej. Here on 28 October an official celebration was held, attended by representatives of civil and military authorities as well as war veterans' organizations. After a holy mass in the basilica, the mother of a fallen Italian volunteer

6 For a comparison of commemoration practices on the Unknown Soldier in neighbouring countries, at the example of a Romanian case, see Bucur, 2009, in particular 119–125.

7 For the history and importance of the national monument in Rome, see Tobia, 1998.

soldier, Antonio Bergamas, (from Trieste/Trst which together with Trento were the symbolic cities of the Italian national unification after WWI) chose the body that was solemnly buried on 4 November under the Altar of the Homeland in Rome. On the first day, a train embellished with garlands, torches, and verses of *il Vate* d'Annunzio (who in September 1919 with his volunteer-legionnaires occupied Rijeka/Fiume with the aim of annexing it to Italy) took the casket through Udine/Videm to Venice. The railway stations along the way were decorated with flags, laurel wreaths, and torches. The fascist journal *Il Popolo di Trieste* described the departure of the train from Aquileia in enthusiastic tones, highlighting the participation of the population (and the role of the fascist militias) and made special note of the strong national feelings and emotions accompanying the event (*Il Popolo di Trieste*, 29. 10. 1921, 1). The train stopped at railway stations and crowds of people were able to approach, touch, and kiss the casket which was travelling in an open railway car. This physical contact only intensified the mechanisms of the appropriation of the symbol, an anonymous body individually and collectively embodying the Unknown Soldier (Labita, 1990, 142).

The bourgeois and nationalist press reported daily on the general mourning of the population accompanying the transit of the Unknown Soldier, while left-wing news-



Fig. 1: Celebration honouring the Unknown Soldier. Gorizia, October 28, 1921 (AST, CGVCG, AG, f. 288).

Sl. 1: Pogrebna slovesnost za Neznanege vojaka. Gorica, 28. oktober 1921 (AST, CGVCG, AG, f. 288).



Fig. 2: A commemorative postcard that sold for 1 lira (AST, CGVCG, AG, f. 288).

Sl. 2: Komemorativna razglednica, ki je bila naprodaj za 1 liro
(AST, CGVCG, AG, f. 288).

papers devoted no particular attention to the event. The Trieste socialist *Il Lavoratore* mentioned almost indifferently that in Cormons/Krmin, before the arrival of the train in Gorizia/Gorica, the convoy was »welcomed only by a few people, representatives of the authorities, a small group of fascists, industrialists and merchants and a small cluster of stylish women showing off their dresses« (*Il Lavoratore*, 21. 10. 1921a, 4). By contrast, the bourgeois *Il Piccolo* of Trieste enthusiastically reported that in Padua, the train was greeted by 50,000 people (*Il Piccolo*, 1. 11. 1921, 1).

Despite frequent cases of disagreement, direct or indirect subversion, non-participation, separate commemoration or open contestation through Bologna and Florence, the casket reached Rome, where it was – during a mass ceremony – buried in Piazza Venezia on 4 November. The highest political and military authorities from all over the country gathered there, representatives of veteran organizations, disabled veterans and war-related charities. The huge crowd of people who attended the celebrations, as elsewhere, demonstrated the success of such a ceremonial ritual

(Laqueur, 1994, 157–158). The organizing committee took this occasion to issue a commemorative postcard, which was sold for one lira apiece, the proceeds of which were donated to war orphans (Cadeddu, 2001).

Celebrations commemorating the Unknown Soldier were taking place throughout Italy. Nevertheless, the main goal of this essay is to highlight how the Italian celebration of victory at the erection of the memorial to the Unknown Soldier was accepted by those who had been defeated in the war. The announcement published by the organizing committee on 30th September 1921, and then posted as leaflets across the country read:

»[...] In every municipality, in every village of Italy, on the same day and at the same hour as the burial in Rome, all Italians, remembering the triumph of the arms which integrated the Fatherland into his inviolable terrestrial borders, remembering the Unknown Soldier, will exalt the nameless sacrifice of its best sons.« (AST, 1).

After the Italian annexation of the formerly Austrian territories, more than a million people of varying nationalities, among whom were many who had just fought against Italy as soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian army, suddenly found themselves living within the borders of Italy. How did these people perceive the commemoration of the Italian Unknown Soldier? How did non-Italians whose »Fatherland« was left behind the »inviolable borders« respond to commemorations? How did the Italians from the former Austria-Hungary who loyally fought in the ranks of the Austrian army perceive this post-war unilateral and exclusivist rhetoric?

This analysis concentrates upon the Slovene community in Italy who had lived in the former Austrian Littoral, a region named Venezia Giulia (Julian March) by the new Italian government. Italian authorities generally did not differentiate between Slovenes and Croats; both were usually thought of as the »Yugoslav minority«, in its entirety accounting for 500 to 600 thousand people (Kacin-Wohinz, Pirjevec, 2000, 27–28). The majority of Slovene soldiers loyally served in Austrian units during the war and were particularly involved in the battles on the eastern front in Galicia, but they also frequently clashed with the Italian army in the Dolomites or the Karst (Grđina, 2005; Lukan, 2008; Rossi, 1998; Verginella, 2001). However, it would be erroneous to think that there was a clear ethnic transversal separating winners and losers. Although dire times of war required individuals to make extreme choices regarding the identity scheme of their multinational and heavily fragmented social environments, they were no less fluid than in the period before the war.

It is therefore not surprising that during the war many Austrian citizens of Italian ethnicity had remained loyal to the Emperor; the annexation of these territories to Italy was not always accepted by a plebiscitary majority, as the Italian post-war propaganda rhetoric quickly attempted to prove. The number of irredentists who had fled to the Italian side was much lower than the approximately two thousand listed by post-war agiographical nationalist literature (Toderò, 2005, 22). On the other hand, in some

cases Slovenes greeted Italian victory with the conviction that in the national sense, they would enjoy greater freedom under the Italians than they had under Austria.

This was the case of Slovene writer Lovro Kuhar alias Prežihov Voranc who during the war had fled from the Austrian army to the Italian side on the Isonzo front and described his experience in the fascinating novel »Doberdob«, titled after the village Doberdob, which in the Slovene collective imagery represents a place of death *par excellence* for Slovene soldiers during World War I on the Isonzo front.⁸ Voranc spent the rest of the war living in Italian prisoner-of-war-camps because the Italian military circles were very suspicious of former Austrian soldiers. It was only towards the end of the war that they made use of the potential presented by the deserters from the Austrian army.

One may also take into consideration Ljudevit Pivko, a liberally oriented Slovene politician, who was mobilized during the war and sent first to the Isonzo front, and then to the Tyrolean battlefield. In September 1917, at Carzano, he organized the defection of a part of one Austrian Regiment to the Italian army and united a group made up of mostly Czechs and some Slovenes into a special squad to fight on opposite fronts against the Austro-Hungarian army. In his memoirs of these events, he showed how the political leaders of the Slovene minority in Trieste/Trst pushed for the entry of Italy into the war and how in their visions for the future, they came close to the Italian irredentists. In his work, he states that everybody was unanimously rejoicing over the end of Austria (Pivko, 1924, 22).⁹

Although his arguments encountered criticism, it can not be asserted that there was no one among the Slovenes who was looking forward to the Italian entry into war and the defeat of Austria, even among the Slovene elite of Trieste/Trst, many of whom were well aware that an Italian victory also meant the annexation of Trieste/Trst to Italy (Pleterski, 1971, 37). However, it was the case that due to their political views and regardless of their nationality, many were a priori against Italy going to war. After the war, often under the influence of the Russian Bolshevik Revolution, they dreamt of a socialist Trieste, or at least an independent country separated from the new »national« states which had arisen from the ashes of Austria-Hungary.

After the military victory of the Entente and his victorious arrival into Trieste/Trst, Italian General Petitti di Roreto assured the Slovene population that they would have more national rights than previously in the now collapsed Austria.¹⁰ It did not take long, however, for difficulties to arise in the newly »Liberated provinces«. Italian authorities, due to their unfamiliarity with local conditions and lack

8 In Slovene language the image was given a form of the phrase »Doberdob, slovenskih fantov grob« (Doberdob, the grave of Slovene boys). Cf. Verginella, 2008.

9 For a critical discussion of deserters in the Austro-Hungarian army see Überegger, 2008.

10 A copy of the proclamation is in Pirjevec, 2008, 112. For a selected bibliography see also Bajc, Pelikan, 2004.

of experience with multi-ethnic environments, plus their ideological leanings towards the French centralized state model (which interpreted the logic »that all of the nation that counted, that is, participated in public life, share a national culture«) (Lebovics, 1994, 240), often displayed an attitude of colonial force (Fabi, 1994, 301). These politics were primarily felt by the Slovene and Croatian population who were fundamentally »the Others« and in a period, rife with national passions, were considered to be anti-national by the authorities.

Therefore, a thorough analysis of a national community bearing an anti-national stigma in the new post-Habsburg context evokes a particular interest for research. This is especially true because public commemoration of fallen soldiers has a specific weight in the building process of a single national identity and because »[...] commemoration helps establish the cultural characteristics of the 'self' and the 'other', especially at times when one group challenges another for political dominance« (Bucur, Wingfield, 2001, 3).¹¹ As noted by Benedict Anderson, in the modern culture of nationalism, no symbols are more fascinating than monuments to fallen combatants and tombs of unknown heroes (Anderson, 1998, 17).

In the initial post-war period, the Slovenes living in the Kingdom of Italy did not pay special attention to the celebrations following the end of the war. On 1 November, 1919, on the first anniversary of the end of the war, their main newspaper, *Edinost*, wrote that the celebration held in Trieste/Trst to observe the end of Austrian domination »was not ours« (*Edinost*, 1. 11. 1919, 1). To »avoid writing for the censor's red pen« the news of this event, which was not given any particular emphasis, was being sourced from the Italian socialist daily *Il Lavoratore*.

In fact, given that the Paris Peace Conference was unable to solve the territorial dispute between victorious Italy and the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later on Yugoslavia) during the time in question, the destiny of the former Austrian Littoral was still undefined. The regional newsletter of the Gorizian Slovenes *Goriška straža* (The Gorizia/Gorica Guard), was a voice of the territory that was most directly affected by the events of the war. In its editorial entitled »Ob obletnici« [On the Anniversary] their complaint was that, despite the aid of »Slavic formations« in the Italian victory against Austria, Slovenes »[...] were denied the most basic necessities of life.« (*Goriška straža*, 4. 11. 1920, 1). *L'Adriatico Jugoslavo*, was a newspaper published in Zagreb and which served to spread the Yugoslav point of view throughout Italy. In its one-year recount of the end of the war and the Italian occupation of the eastern bank of the Adriatic, it claimed that in a single year of occupation, Italy managed to plant as much hatred as Austria had in a century (*L'Adriatico Jugoslavo*, 5. 11. 1919, 1).

¹¹ For a comparison of similar situations in the context of the Israeli-Arab rivalry, see Ben-Amos, 2003.

Apart from social and economic issues, the national question was among the most urgent. Slovene political representatives more or less openly assured the public that, despite the Italian military occupation and the London pact, a border would be drawn which would take into account the ethnic composition of the population.

This, however, was not to be. Soon after the second anniversary of the end of the war, on 12 November, 1920, the Rapallo Treaty was signed, defining the political borders in the Northern Adriatic area. A big part of the region which had been promised to Italy in 1915 as terms for its entry into the war and which had been occupied by Italian troops in the days following the end of the war, was annexed to Italy.¹² Hence, Slovene political representatives in Venezia Giulia could no longer consider the possibility of annexation to Yugoslavia, and rather had to create their own strategy taking into consideration their new situation within the framework of Italy. This is how *Delo*, a newspaper of Slovenes who entered the Italian socialist party, commented on the situation:

»The contract is signed, the borders are drawn. We are not surprised, we are not glad, we are not sad. What happened had to happen. This historical moment caught us as did the war. Our homeland is here. Here we will work full of hope, until we are welcomed by the red trenches of the new day, with a new homeland called socialism« (Delo, 15. 11. 1920, 1).

A similar sentiment was also noted by the Italian local authorities who monitored the atmosphere among the Slovenes and Croats in the region and found that in most districts indifference, depression, and resignation prevailed, especially among the rural population. These were the words of the civil commissioners from Pula/Pola, Poreč/Parenzo, Koper/Capodistria, where the population was ethnically mixed, but also from purely Slovene districts such as Postojna and Tolmin where some isolated forms of dissent did occur, but only by private individuals (AST, 2; AST, 3; AST, 4; AST, 5; AST, 6). Similarly, all was also quiet in the region of Tarvisio/Trbiž after the October 1920 plebiscite between Austria and the Kingdom of SHS (AST, 7).

Although it was the case that there was a general sense of malaise, there were individuals, especially teachers and lower clergy, who persisted in demanding respect for the distinguishing features of the Slavic population, such as the use of Slovene or Croatian language in public life and worship. In response, authorities labelled these efforts »anti-Italian propaganda« and generally suppressed any such attempts. In the same way, the efforts of Slovene political leadership stressed the importance of the recognition of the rights of the »Yugoslav minority«. They loyally but critically monitored the operation of the government in the management of the new provinces, highlighting a lack of respect towards the »Yugoslav minority«.

12 The question of Rijeka/Fiume remained unresolved. The countries settled it by annexing the city to Italy in January 1924.

Thus, when in 1921 Italy decided to unveil a memorial to the Unknown Soldier, the Slovene newspaper *Edinost* published extensive articles regarding the event. Days before the official start of the commemoration, they insisted that the celebration was exclusively Italian. According to the plans of its initiators, the celebration of the 4th November 1921 was supposed to represent a glorification of the Unknown Soldier in an impressive, ceremonial, and particularly national style (Labita, 1990, 131). Given the impossibility of an appropriate and solemn celebration honouring their own fallen soldiers, Slovenes of the Littoral were encouraged by *Edinost* to dedicate more attention to the living (specifically having in mind Slovene war orphans), the publication emphasized, the need to provide adequate (in particular financial) support. Thus was stated »[...] we will build the monument to fallen Yugoslavs in Primorska« (Edinost, 26. 10. 1921a, 1).¹³ Soon the newspaper's harsh stances were slightly moderated and it clearly stated »glory to the Unknown Soldier« (Edinost, 30. 10. 1921b, 2), refusing to grant it the status of a national symbol but recognizing »[...] an unknown man who wanted to give his life to the victory of justice« (Edinost, 3. 11. 1921c, 1).

Left-wing organizations and parties were similar in their actions in that they expressed no desire to share with the bourgeois parties the patriotic feelings and nationalist character of the celebrations accentuated by the national practice. The left-wing movement had always promoted the idea of celebrating an unknown hero, creating a valorisation of the mass sacrifice of ordinary soldiers without shining the spotlight exclusively on military leaders. In this »democratization of the fallen«, socialists and communists directing their collective grief towards fallen comrades, refusing to adopt the patriotic tones given to the celebration by the government and the military authorities (cf. Troyansky, 1987, 140).

The truce was signed between Italy and Austria-Hungary in the Villa Giusti near Padua on November 4, 1918. This was seen as the day of victory of one national bourgeois class over another and the left-wing parties chose not to »[...] dishonour the memory of the ordinary soldier« and therefore refused to participate in the »bourgeois comedy« performed by those »[...] who wanted the war and profited greatly from it« (Sema, 1986, 184–186). As in the case of the French Comrades, the left-wing movement interpreted the First World War as a cynical massacre of the proletariat (Wardhaugh, 2007, 188). Therefore, *Il Lavoratore*, which, after its left-wing split into socialists and communists in Livorno, was passed into communist hands and issued a statement that they (the communists) would not be in attendance at the ceremony honouring the Unknown Soldier (*Il Lavoratore*, 3. 11. 1921, 1). After the war and the annexation of the former Littoral region to Italy, many Slovenes sup-

13 The term Primorska (Littoral) denotes the territory more or less coinciding with the former Austrian Littoral and including the parts of the region inhabited by Slovene population which were annexed to the Kingdom of Italy after the First World War (Čermelj, 1965, 11; Marušič, 1996). See also Bajc, 2006 and Michieli, Zelco, 2008.

ported the left-wing movement in general and the communist movement in particular, predominantly because of the similar demands and the determination demonstrated by the Italian Communist Party therein (Kacin-Wohinz, Pirjevec, 2000, 51). In not participating in the commemoration ceremonies dedicated to the Unknown Soldier, the Slavic population received a two-pronged appeal for their non-participation: from the national side (Edinost and other nationalist newspapers) and many also from the political side (the Communist Party).

The Italian authorities decided that the main celebration would start in Aquileia and be concluded in Rome and would be accompanied by local commemorations throughout Italy. As a result, along with the main committee in charge of the organization of the central state celebration, a campaign for the establishment of local subcommittees all over Italy was launched. Subcommittees were to be composed of representatives of the civil, military and ecclesiastical authorities, and prominent individuals from local communities.

What was the situation in Venezia Giulia? How did Slovenes and Croats respond? In settlements with a majority Italian population or in places with a significant Italian element, committees were established which cooperated with the civil and military authorities in the organization of celebrations, funeral masses, and other commemoration rituals. Discrepancies occurred at the political level due to opposition by left-wing parties and antimilitary groups. It is important for our study to investigate the developments in ethnically mixed areas. Characteristic of these ethnically mixed areas are the writings of the Civil Commissioner of Volosko/Volosca in the Kvarner/Quarnaro region. He warned the provincial central authorities that while in the area along the coast where there was a compact Italian population, the committees could operate smoothly. He claimed that it was not necessary to »pay particular attention« to the functioning of committees in inland regions which were compactly inhabited by the Slovene/Croat population (AST, 8). Nevertheless, by order of the state committee and other state authorities, these rituals were modest and unpretentious. Generally, in settlements with a majority Slovene population no subcommittees were established. Despite the fact that civil authorities were assigned the task of taking care of their operation, in Istra/Istria, the province of Gorizia/Gorica, as well as other parts of the region, the use of force was avoided in order not to – as they themselves wrote in reports to the General Commissioner in Trieste/Trst – »generate the opposite effect«. These were the words of Civil Commissioner Gottardi from Gorizia/Gorica, where the train stopped for a few days on the way from Udine/Videm to Aquileia, from where it was then to depart, in the context of the national celebration, towards Rome.

The initiative for the organization of the celebration in Gorizia/Gorica was taken up by veteran organizations and the attitude of the population was »full of respect and worship for the poor deceased« (AST, 9). Masses and mourning rituals did take place, but the train did not pass through municipalities with a mostly Slovene popula-

tion and where the committees had not been set up. The Commissioner of Gorizia/Gorica pointed out the futility of coercive forms of commemorating (AST, 9). After the completion of the celebrations, Gottardi again highlighted the widespread participation of the urban population and »the Italian clergy«, from which it can be concluded that the Slovene priests and most likely their parishioners did not attend the celebrations. The Archbishop of Gorizia/Gorica, Frančišek Borgija Sedej, a Slovene, prohibited the priests in his diocese to hold mass outdoors. This command could possibly have been a veil concealing the purpose of delegitimation of official celebrations, the result of which greatly upset the Italian authorities. In some cases as in Gradisca/Gradišče, the priest was replaced with a military chaplain (AST, 10).

In the surrounding municipalities, which were almost exclusively populated by Slovenes, »[...] there were no special honours given to the Unknown Soldier, either because the funeral conveys pass that way, or because the Slavic population abstained from taking part in the processions and religious services, treating them as though they were none of their concern.« (AST, 11). Thus it can be asserted that at the establishment of local committees a nationality-based split occurred. Like in Transylvania, another area dealing with multiethnic tensions, »[...] the war dead didn't speak to universal ideals of heroism and sacrifice, and ethnic communities did not extend their feelings of pain and loss empathetically toward their neighbours of other ethnicities« (Bucur, 2009, 67).

In Istra/Istria in particular, where the Italian population was much larger and national passions much more pronounced, commemorations were more pompous and had a clear national connotation, such as in Mali Lošinj/Lussinpiccolo, where they also erected a small memorial. School children sang songs from World War I, the band played *Leggenda del Piave*, a song which had become a kind of »Italian La Marseillaise of the First World War« (Isnenghi, 1995, 97), and there were Italian flags hanging from windows (AST, 12). Similarly, in Pazin/Pisino, where the ceremony was particularly solemn or in Pula/Pola, where, as reported by the there Civil Commissioner »[...] the demonstration took on a very high political and national significance« (AST, 13; AST, 14). The ceremony in Rovinj/Rovigno was especially solemn and was attended by children of the Salesian Communities (*Oratorio Salesiano*), students of all schools with flags, a brass band, civil and military authorities, the fire brigade, representatives of war veterans' organizations and the local section of the *Fascio di Combattimento*, with forty fascists in uniforms, representatives of those politically persecuted by the former Austrian regime, and many other organizations with wreaths and flags, which were hanging from the windows of many homes. The procession, which according to the local Commissioner Giuseppe Quarantotto was about half a kilometre long, starting from the church and moving to the main square which had been named after the Italian king Vittorio Emanuele III, where the authorities had set up a ceremonial altar with military signs and torches. This was the site where the

authorities intended to build a monument of the Italian liberation of Rovinj/Rovigno (AST, 15). This case therefore clearly shows the exclusive nature of the celebration and merging of the commemoration of the fallen soldier with a national moment of the city's annexation to Italy. Also in Poreč/Parenzo, as elsewhere, authorities put up Italian flags with mourning bands, many were also hung from homes in the centre of the town and many commercial establishments were closed (AST, 16). It was particularly solemn in Koper/Capodistria because the ceremony was attended by delegates from an international conference being held at that time in Portorož/Portorose. People gathered in the main town square, then called the Piazza del Duomo and visited the cemetery in the afternoon. In Piran/Pirano, according to official data, the celebration was attended by more than three thousand people who gathered in Tartini Square and as in the ceremonies in Izola/Isola and Muggia/Milje, they threw wreaths into the sea in memory of fallen marines.

Because of the brief report of the Koper/Capodistria Commissioner Di Suni, there is not sufficient material for a definitive evaluation of the attendance of celebrations by the Slovene population, particularly in inland municipalities, such as Buzet/Pinguente, Roč, Dekani/Decani, Dolina, Klanec, Pomjan and Marezige/Maresego, where in most areas with the exception of the *carabinieri*, soldiers and officials who had moved there after the arrival of the Italian army and administration, there was virtually no native Italian population. It may be interpreted that the Slovenes considered the celebration as a continuation or upgrade of the All Saints Day of November 1 and gathered to honour the fallen in war, without paying specific attention to the figure of the Unknown Soldier. Also in places where both national components, the Slavic (Croatian and Slovene) and the Italian, co-existed in large numbers, there sometimes occurred a division along the national line. Thus, in Buzet/Pinguente, where in addition to military and civilian authorities there was also participation from the local brass band and pupils of Italian schools. However, the pupils of »Slavic schools« did not attend the celebration (AST, 17). Elsewhere in the region of Koper/Capodistria and in the above mentioned municipalities, the ceremonies proceeded without complications, as was the case in Dolina, where after the mass held by the priest Piščanec, a modest sum was collected for war orphans. However in that area there were no Italian schools and the population, apart from the military authorities and individual employees in the civil administration, was exclusively Slovene. Therefore also banners with the Italian tricolour were acceptable, for example in Pomjan, although in the local cemetery only soldiers killed in the Austrian uniform were buried.

In the coastal municipalities of the district of Volosko/Volosca the committees were working in coordination with military and civil authorities, so that the celebrations were successful and were also attended by Croatian political representatives, such as the deputy from Opatija/Abbazia Ulisse Stangher (Ulikse Stanger). It is not clear whether or not they were accompanied by the local Croatian population as well,

but in inland municipalities, such as in Materija, no committees had been established. Celebrations were limited to a religious ceremony and a procession to the cemetery to honour their fallen (AST, 18).

In these cases, the commemoration of the Unknown Soldier was often used to underline the Italian character of the region, in other words to »mark the territory«, in particular in areas lying along the ethnic border between Slovenes and Italians in the surroundings of Gorizia/Gorica, or Italians and Croats, such as in Istra/Istria. Therefore, it is not surprising that the non-Italian population did not participate in the organization of the celebrations. It does, however seem that the commemorative rituals were attended in greatly varying numbers in many parts of the region. The Civil General Commissioner of Venezia Giulia enthusiastically reported to the celebration committee for the Unknown Soldier in Rome, that commemorations had been very successful in the whole province, with no noisy festivities, but in the form of simple, heartfelt ceremonies. He underlined that the population as a whole, »without political and racial division«, participated in the ceremonies, and specifically commented on the »unexpected episodes of kindness and piety« by German and Slovene subjects: for example in Tarvisio/Tarvis/Trbiž, »where the German choir voluntarily provided the musical accompaniment for the ceremonies« and Žminj, »where the Croatian pupils, including the few Italian ones, sang Canzone del Piave« (AST 19; AST, 20). In the region of Tarvisio/Tarvis/Trbiž, the commissioner's report ignored the Slovene element, but pointed out that the Germans who formed the majority in that area, attended the celebrations in large numbers. There the commemorative ritual was of an essentially trans-national nature as wreaths were given to soldiers of the Italian and the Austrian armies, as well as to Russian and Serbian soldiers who had died in captivity. The religious ceremony was held bilingually – the local commissioner first addressing the crowd in Italian and then in German. This shows the importance of individual practices in the affirmation and the adoption of initiatives at a local level. Where authorities stressed the national tone of the celebration, it took place unilaterally and usually divided the population along the political and, above all, national premise. Elsewhere, as in Tarvisio/Tarvis/Trbiž, the more conciliatory stance adopted by authorities »[...] managed to neutralize the propaganda that the celebration had an anti-German orientation« (AST, 21). Also in Tolmin, according to Commissioner Giordano, the commemoration was attended by masses, including the authorities and »the entire population without regard to any national or political distinction«. There was also a mass attendance in the procession which went first to the Italian cemetery, and then to the Austro-German one, which can be understood in this context as a universal mourning for fallen soldiers (AST, 22).

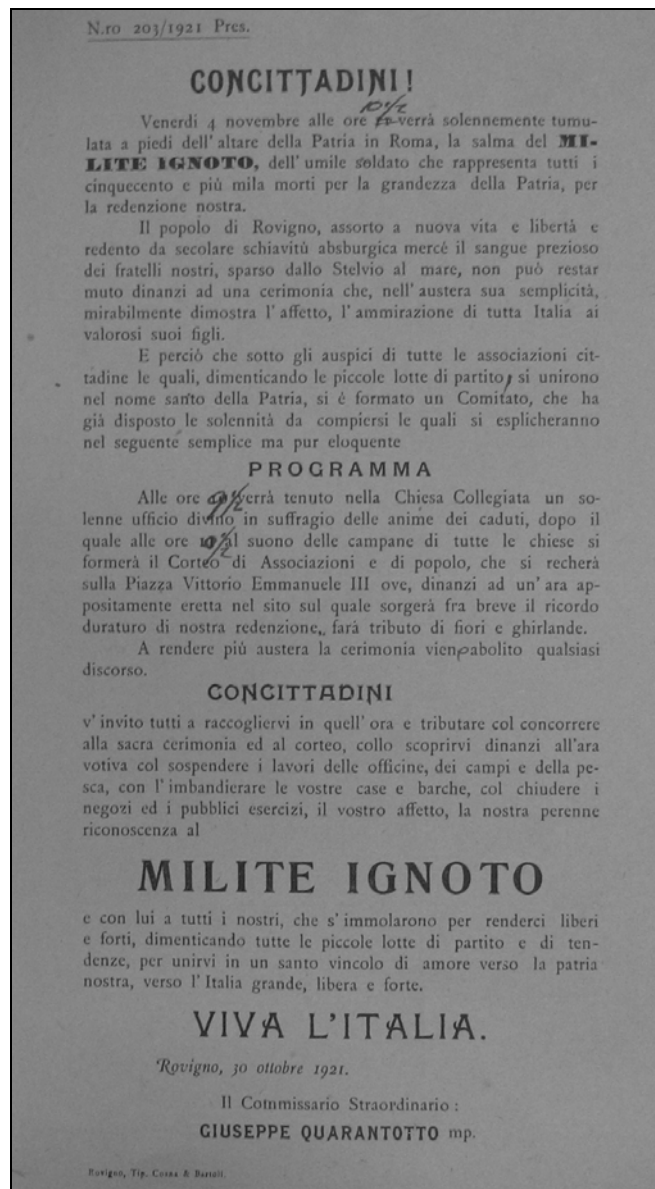


Fig. 3: A poster in Rovinj commemorating the Unknown Soldier (AST, CGVCG, AG, f. 288).

Sl. 3: Plakat v Rovinju ob komemoraciji Neznanege vojaka (AST, CGVCG, AG, f. 288).

It appears to be the case, however, that on the basis of a closer and more systematic review of individual cases, the government estimates should have been more cautious. The Civil Commissioner of the Sežana district complained that neither the mayor nor any other authority from Naklo, a settlement, which was part of the Sežana district, had attended the main ceremony organized in Divača (AST, 23). The same commissioner expressed satisfaction that in larger towns, such as in Sežana and Aurisina/Nabrežina, subcommittees had been formed, while in other places celebrations had been limited to religious ceremonies in churches and the blessing of the fallen in cemeteries (AST, 24). This shows that in centres with numerous Italian immigrants, especially those working in government departments, such as soldiers, *carabinieri*, police officers, municipal officials, post-office clerks, etc., the authorities were able to organize a more conspicuous celebration, while in other places the population did accept the invitation to join the commemoration, but did not see it as a commemoration of »the national Unknown Soldier« but rather as commemoration of their dead. This was a belief which may have been contributed to by the proximity of All Saints Day on 1 November, when people traditionally gather in churches and cemeteries to honour all of their deceased. Similar conclusions can certainly be drawn for the region of Postojna from where their commissioner reported that the commemoration was successful, although, as he himself wrote, »[...] the special environment of Postumia [Postojna] did not allow for the formation of Committees«. He must have meant that the ethnic composition of the population was fully Slovene and therefore uninterested in such mourning, but the commissioner pointed out that especially in Postojna, where he was able to personally oversee the preparations, the celebration was successful. The municipal council headed by Mayor Dovgan, unanimously decided to participate in the religious ceremony which was also attended by the Slovene member of the Italian parliament, Josip Lavrenčič, a military squad and representatives of all local Slovene societies. After the mass, the procession moved towards the cemetery, where many people gathered, so that Commissioner Cavalli commented that »altogether the population participated in the ceremony with vivid feeling, but also gave it the significance of commemorating all who had fallen in war« (AST, 25).

Although it is impossible to draw a clear and exclusive national dividing line, it can nevertheless be observed that where ethnic communities lived in close contact and participation in the celebrations also represented an expression of support to the other national community, Slovenes and Croats – for example in the Istrian town of Buzet/Pinguente – usually avoided participation. In other settlements populated exclusively by Slovenes – for instance in the area of Idrija – Slovenes would attend holy mass rituals and the short ceremonies that followed at local cemeteries. In some cases, the village brass bands or choirs participated. It was the case many standard elements of Italian war memorial language were inappropriate due to their nationalistic content, thus alternative symbols and narratives had to be found. The state

apparatus and decision-making centre applied their policies for the commemoration in a homogenous manner to the entire national territory and thus on such occasions demonstrated a similar awkwardness characteristic of the former Habsburg rule (for further details see Unowsky, 2005). Rome left the implementation of commemorative rituals to the representatives of territorial authorities and they were usually applied by means of a generally acceptable imagery of mourning, so that the contents of local commemorative practices in many aspects clashed with official discourse.

A final estimate calls for a thorough analysis of each separate case. In that historical situation there could have been no divided commemorations, in terms showed by Papadakis for a later period in the example of Cyprus (Papadakis, 2003). Not even organised forms of nurturing the memory and creating respective *lieux de mémoire* could have developed as was the case in Lorraine during the Franco-Prussian War in 1870–1871, where the French and the Germans, at a distance of a few kilometres, each held their own site of national remembrance (Maas, 1995, 335).

It is clearly the case therefore, that the former Austrian Littoral commemorations were divided in their content and may have been sufficient to their official form requested by the authorities, but were in fact clearly in contrast with the nationalist tone imposed by state authorities. The analyzed examples show the occurrence of situations where it is not possible to draw clear national borders (personal or collective) and where they often overlapped with political/ideological boundaries. A possible interpretation of the situation is that the Slovene population of the Venezia Giulia rejected participation in the official part of the celebration of the Italian Unknown Soldier. There is no information regarding organized protests, contestations, nor any sources giving examples of individual acts of subversion (such as hanging out banners and flags with Slovene national colours), as would later happen when the border between the Kingdom of SHS and Italy was still being determined. The majority of the Slovene population showed indifference towards public celebrations which resembled those with which the Slovene population greeted the Italian army when it occupied the Gorizia/ Gorica area during the war (Kacin-Wohinz, 1972, 80–93; Svoljšak, 2003; Visintin, 2000, 140) and by non-acceptance of national/nationalist iconography and rejection of narrative practices, instead interpreted the ceremony as a general commemoration of the victims of the war. The interpretation that in the first post-war phase a general mourning and memory of their dead prevailed (Tobia, 2002, 598) can undoubtedly also be extended to many Slovenes, but rejecting the nationalist coating of the Unknown Soldier was also fostered by the fact that by 1921 the violent impact of fascism had already sharply appeared in many places across Venezia Giulia. Pre-war racist nationalism and a multi-valued conception of inter-ethnic relations had already announced those fascist practices which were given the name »border fascism« and which in this area, sooner than elsewhere in Italy, also appropriated the Unknown Soldier.

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NACIJE IN KOMEMORACIJE NA JADRANU.
KOMEMORACIJE ITALIJANSKEGA NEZNANEGA VOJAKA
NA VEČNACIONALNEM OBMOČJU: PRIMER NEKDANJEGA
AVSTRIJSKEGA PRIMORJA

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POVZETEK

Študija se ukvarja z vprašanjem, kako so se komemoracijske prakse in rituali, značilni za obdobje po 1. svetovni vojni, odražali v večnacionalnem okolju zgornjega Jadrana. Proslave, ki so si sledile po vsej Italiji ob tretji obletnici zmage, so oblasti izkoristile za postavitve spominskega obeležja svojemu Neznanemu vojaku. Zato, da bi proslava uspela, so po vsej državi ustanovili podkomiteje, ki bi ob centralnemu, rimskemu komiteju, 4. novembra 1921 skrbeli za lokalne spominske svečanosti. Čeprav ne gre potegniti jasne in ekskluzivne nacionalne ločnice, je opaziti, da je pri ustanavljanju lokalnih komitejev večkrat prišlo do razcepa na nacionalni podlagi. V etnično večinsko italijanskih krajih dežele so se namreč ustanovili komiteji, ki so s civilnimi in vojaškimi oblastmi sodelovali pri organiziranju slovesnosti, maš zadušnic in podobnih komemoracijskih obredov, ki pa so bili namenoma, po naročilu državnega komiteja in drugih državnih oblasti, skromni in nepompozni. V slovenskih krajih pa praviloma ni prišlo do ustanovitve podkomitejev. Kljub temu, da so imele civilne oblasti nalogo poskrbeti za njihovo delovanje, so se bodisi v Istri, kakor tudi na Goriškem in drugje po deželi rajši izognili pospešenemu ustanavljanju, da ne bi, kot so sami zapisali v poročilih generalnemu komisarju v Trstu, »povzročili nasprotnega efekta«. Komemoriranje Neznanega vojaka se je zato večkrat uporabilo za poudarjanje italijanskosti dežele, skratka »markiranja teritorija«, zlasti v tistih predelih, ki so bili na etnični meji med Italijani in Slovenci, kot na primer v okolici Gorice ali med Italijani in Hrvati, kot na primer v Istri. Zato se na teh območjih neitalijansko prebivalstvo ni organiziralo za proslavljanje dogodka. Kljub temu se je komemoracij večkrat udeležilo, kar pa je bilo odvisno od posameznih predelov dežele. To se pravi, da kjer sta bili etnični skupnosti v tesnem stiku in je sodelovanje na proslavi hkrati

pomenilo podpiranje nasprotne nacionalnosti, so se Slovenci ali Hrvati, kot se je na primer zgodilo v Buzetu, izogibali sodelovanju. Drugje pa, v krajih, ki so bili naseljeni izključno s slovenskim prebivalstvom, kot na primer na Idrijskem, so Slovenci praviloma prisostvovali mašnim obredom in se nato udeležili krajših ceremonij, ki so jim sledile na posameznih pokopališčih. Včasih so sodelovale tudi vaške godbe ali pevski zbori. Kljub temu, da so oblasti poudarjale nujnost skromnih obredov, iz katerih naj bi izstopala pieteta do pokojnih vojakov, so bile narativne prakse in simboli prežeti z nacionalističnimi vsebinami. Zato je v primeru nekdanjega Avstrijskega primorja, med Slovenci, ki so po rapalski pogodbi leta 1920 sodili v Kraljevino Italijo, prihajalo do vsebinsko ločenih komemoracij, ki so morda zadoščale svojim formalnim oblikam, kot so to zahtevale oblasti, a so bile v resnici izrazito v nasprotju z nacionalističnim tonom, ki so ga vsilile državne oblasti. Ni podatkov o organiziranih protestih, kontestacijah, niti o posameznih subverzivskih dejanjih (kot izobešanje trakov in zastav s slovenskimi nacionalnimi barvami), kot se je dogajalo v povojnem času, ko se je še določala razmejitev med Kraljevino SHS in Italijo. Večina je pokazala indiferentnost do državnih slavnosti in z nesprejemanjem nacionalne/nacionalistične ikonografije ter z zavračanjem narativnih praks interpretirala ceremonije kot splošno komemoriranje vojnih žrtev.

Ključne besede: Neznani vojak, Avstrijsko primorje, komemoracije, zgornji Jadran, Italija, Slovenci, nacionalizem, nacionalne identitete, proslave, 1. svetovna vojna

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