

ISTRIANS, IDENTIFICATIONS AND THE HABSBURG LEGACY.  
PERSPECTIVES ON IDENTITIES IN ISTRIA*Vanni D'ALESSIO*Università di Napoli Federico II, Dipartimento di Scienze dello Stato, IT-80134 Napoli, Via Mezzocannone 4  
e-mail: gidaless@unina.it

## ABSTRACT

*The author of this article discusses the problems of identity and identifications in Istria and the difficulties to categorize identity both by scholars (historians, ethnographers, sociologists) and by state authorities (censuses). The author describes his personal research paths and how, from his position of outsider/insider, he found a way to codify the representations and the expressions of people's identity in Istria. D'Alessio stresses the fluidity of ethnic borders and identities. Analyzing the late Habsburg times in Istria, he also describes how the political confrontation along the lines of nationality hardened the ethnic border and the osmotic movement between different forms of identification, and fostered the crystallization of identities.*

*Key words: Istria, Identities, Nationalities, Borders*

GLI ISTRIANI, LE IDENTIFICAZIONI E IL LASCITO ASBURGICO.  
PROSPETTIVE SULLE IDENTITÀ IN ISTRIA

## SINTESI

*L'articolo discute i problemi dell'identità e dell'identificazione in Istria, e le difficoltà di categorizzare l'identità sia dagli studiosi (storici, etnografi, sociologi) che dalle autorità dello stato (censimenti). L'autore, D'Alessio, descrive i propri percorsi di ricerca e spiega come la sua posizione d'insider/outsider gli ha permesso di trovare il modo per codificare le rappresentazioni e le espressioni dell'identità degli istriani. L'autore pone l'accento sulla fluidità dei confini etnici e dell'identità e, analizzando gli ultimi anni del dominio degli Asburgo in Istria, descrive come lo scontro politico lungo le linee delle nazionalità, irrigidì il confine etnico e il movimento osmotico tra diverse forme d'identificazione, favorendo una cristallizzazione delle identità.*

*Parole chiave: Istria, identità, nazionalità, confini*

### **Istrian borders and national identifications**

I approached Istria for the first time when I was looking for a place to analyze ethnic and national relationships in a border area. As many other students in the first half of the nineties I became interested on ethnic and national issues reading the works of scholars such as Ernest Gellner, Anthony D. Smith, Eric Hobsbawm, Benedict Anderson and others, and following the events in former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Like many historians and anthropologists I started to think that ethnic and national identifications, group behaviors and shared views and perceptions, were strongly linked to the process of shaping ethnic borders. Fredrik Barth's lesson on ethnic groups and boundaries was of course a guideline for this kind of interpretation.

Barth underlined the importance of the construction and maintenance of borders in the development and shaping of ethnic groups. The elements of differentiation between groups can evolve and transform, and what mainly matters are the processes of inclusion/exclusion by self and others (Barth, 1969). Barth also contemplated the possibility of dichotomous ethnic statuses and situations, and the possibility to cross the borders between them. This doesn't mean that these ethnic (and nationality) borders have been easily crossed, just as it has been very difficult up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century to cross social and economic borders in regions like Istria. Actually, in such multi-ethnic contexts the formation and shaping of ethnic and national borders between people have been very much connected with the developments of social and economic borders. Istria is an area of frontiers not only because it has been at the edge of Latin, Slav and German settlements in Europe, or because it has set as the heavy and troubled border between Italy and Yugoslavia. As in other Central and Eastern European regions (like Galicia, here discussed by Guido Franzinetti, which shares with Istria the same Habsburg legacy), borders have been a very strong feature of all social interactions, running between and across land and people.

My first readings of Barth came before I chose Istria as a research place. As I got acquainted with Istrian archives, Istrian territory and people, personal stories and more general histories, I considered the approach on borders (physical and mental, historical, geographical and cultural ones) to be fruitful for the Istrian case. This is also why I focused my research in the heart of Istria, in the town of Pazin-Pisino-Mitterburg, which has been a place of real confrontation between cultural, political and national constructions from the collapse of the Venetian Republic to the establishment of Socialist Yugoslavia. In Pazin I discovered that a thick national wall was built inside the community, not only between the people of the city and those of the countryside, but also between people within the very urban center. As for the rest of the peninsula, the first signs of contrast date from the middle of the 1840's and during the 1870's a local political contest initiated. Since then, local national elites started a pressure over the population in order to gain support and legitimization on their side.

From the 1880's to 1915, the local population was not only exposed to political and ideological pressure during the election periods, but also forced to choose between evident markers of alternative forms of social interaction and to show an open belonging to either the Italian or the Croatian group. Social interaction and public life was indeed split, with the establishment of a strong double network of schools and associations divided along the two lines of nationality (D'Alessio, 1999; 2003a).

Pazin was not the only town where ethnic and national antagonism took place in the North-Eastern Adriatic area. This antagonism was a key moment in the process of *national* emancipation and political and cultural mobilization of the population of the whole area, and it was partly an Italian *Risorgimento*, strengthening the Italian party and the Italian middle class, but it was also (at the Italians' expense) a Croatian *Narodni Preporod* (literally: *national rebirth*, therefore *risorgimento*). Even if the Italian leadership was not seriously threatened at a provincial level until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was nonetheless preoccupied, also because of the growing marginalization of the Italian middle class and party in Dalmatia.<sup>1</sup> Pazin represented a unique place in Istria for the heavy confrontation that occurred in town rather than just between town and countryside. Nonetheless, Slovenian and Croatian middle classes were more rapidly shaping in Trieste (Trst), in Rijeka (Fiume) and to a certain, minor degree, in Pula (Pola) and also in Koper (Capodistria). Cultural and political Croatian and Slovenian circles were also growing in very small towns and burgs of the Istrian Province, from the mostly Slavic ones of Podgrad (Castelnuovo), Materija (Matteria), Volosko (Volosca), Kastav (Castua), Vrbnik (Verbenico) or Sveti Petar u Šumi (San Pietro in Selve), to the more contested places such as Buzet (Pinguente), Žminj (Gimino), Tinjan (Antignana), Krk (Veglia), Cres (Cherso), Opatija (Abbazia). Borders started to be a normal ingredient of the social experience in these latter and more contested small towns and burgs, as well as in Pazin, but also in the other Istrian places, from the more Croatian and Slovenian to the more Italian ones, and to the whole province as well.

The reproduction of borders and the tendency towards a development of a divided society in Istria were possibly influenced by the still strong urban/rural disparities, or by the economic and political differences in cultural and social organization dating up to the long split between Venetian and Austrian Istria, or by the process of social differentiation and from the political confrontations, or more connected to the mere linguistic complexity of the region. Nevertheless, boundaries were a crucial feature of all Istrians' life. This was true also in the *long* century of Austrian sovereignty,

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1 On the real or intentionally overstated preoccupations for the facts in Dalmatia see the Italian liberal list *L'Istria*, and on the Croatian attitude towards the same events see the Croatian list *Naša Sloga*; see also Barbalić (1952) and Šetić (2005). See Vrandečić (2002) and Monzali (2004) for recent accounts on Italian political movement in Dalmatia.

when political borders were not an issue. Compared to the rest of the situation in the small Adriatic peninsula, Pazin was a specific place where borders were more evident, also because both *Società politica istriana* (the Italian party) and *Političko društvo za Hrvate i Slovence u Istri* (the Croatian-Slovenian party) intentionally pushed such a small town at the center of the political strife (with the establishment of the two national gymnasiums, of a unique and conspicuous number of voluntary associations and of the seats of the two parties). Yet, the problems and the borders of *Pisinoti* and *Pazinjani* were shared by most of the Istrian inhabitants. In Pazin borders became rather thick and ethnic tensions arose earlier than anywhere, also because of the influx of the Italians, Croats, Slovenes, and also Czechs, who moved to this town to study, to teach, for career and political opportunity, to open a business, etc.<sup>2</sup> In the early fascist era, and during and after WWII, tensions and violence were also stronger here than in other Istrian places, because of the establishment of such a border inside the community. In Pazin and in the different burgs of Pazin-ština/Pisinese, in fact, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it became much more difficult to cross ethnic and national borders. Still, *Pazinjani* became Italian Istrians not only in *Pola* but also in *Pisino*. Today, after fifty years from the Italian quasi disappearance, one can say that there are many *dubious* Italians in Pazin, but it is doubtless that even today many *Pazinjani* can go to Italy and start an Italian family within the same generation. In the whole Istrian territory and in Trieste, Gorizia and Rijeka, the Italian and Yugoslav *national* states complicated and made things heavier to people, like traveling around the once united territory, crossing cultural and linguistic borders and shifting from one identification to another. Nevertheless, people managed to move along and across these borders and continued to live with them and even to use them.

Maybe people were not so affected by development of borders (political and symbolic). But it seems to me that "Istrian borders" apparently have been and still are crossed within a single generation time. Maybe it is more correct to talk of *shifting* rather than *crossing*, of an osmotic movement between different positions in a wide range of possibilities, and about *identifications* rather than about *identities*. Anyhow, inside the same families there have been such developments that people found themselves in different situations, including diverse ethnic and national positions. Not only political borders have divided people and families, but also while living in the same state some families members have oriented themselves in a different way. There are definitely some limits to ethnic management. Borders are and were proba-

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2 On the case of the big number Slovenian professors at the Croatian Gymnasium of Pazin (along with Croatian professors from Dalmatia and from the Hungarian part of the empire) see Juričić-Čargo, 1999. On Czechs in Pazin (for example the pharmacist Josip Šebesta and the bookseller Ivan Novak) see DAP, 1; DAP, 2.

bly crossed only when a family, or individuals, would be in a borderline and in fluid circumstances and conditions. This is why I prefer to speak about shifting from one side of the other of ethnic and national borders, which can last very long and it is a matter of an osmotic process which includes the crossing of the many elements of which ethnic and national identities are made.

Bilingualism, which was and still is rather spread in Istria, gave people the possibility to *opt* for a national identity. Better said, people have been offered in some circumstances the possibility to make choices that strongly influenced their path to national identification. I am not referring so much to the post-WWII formal "options" for Italian citizenship, as to a set of choices which have been made in bi-ethnic or multiethnic communities of the Northern-Eastern Adriatic: social network, schooling, political parties, voluntary associations, jobs, ethnic resistance, partisan war, opposition to partisan war, exile, option for Italian citizenship, minority schools, minority associations. I am referring to a wide range of personal and family *options*, which includes ideological, cultural, social, economic, esthetic and emotional choices, and also choices related to sentimental relationships, familial ties, community bonds and political affiliations.

Of course, people could not *choose to be* German, Latin, Italian, Slav, Croat, Slovene, Yugoslav or Istrian. An example comes from the 1990's Istrian Italians: many of the declared Italians are in fact Croats. But what exactly means "in fact"? Identities are not fixed and still how an outside sign of belonging can be, like the formal membership in the Italian community today, or like the language and nationality declarations in the last sixty years. Still, being a member of an association which has a definite policy that intertwines with the identity of its members, or choosing to send the kids to a Croatian, a Slovenian, an Italian, or to a German school, it has had effects on the processes of personal and family identification. Making a declaration for a national group is a choice that needs to be considered in the eyes of the family and of the community in which somebody is living. It is a choice that can be made within a range of possibilities and that needs to be continuously asserted. Public statements and public expressions of national, and therefore (in such conflicting environments) political identity, do influence the processes of personal and family identifications.

#### **Autobiographical notes. Approaching Istria and its past from an "outside" perspective?**

As I mentioned above, at the time of my first readings and approaches to the problem of national and ethnic identification, I still had not chosen Istria as my research place. As a student of history I needed space and time where to place my analysis. That meant to me a border area in which I could observe the coexistence of different national groups and try to investigate the connections between groups and

the identification processes. I had followed the tragic events of the wars for the Yugoslavian secession. I had relatives from my mother's side in Croatia and maybe the war influenced my decision in studying nationalism in that area. Nevertheless, Istria and the area once part of Yugoslavia didn't come as my first option. My first thought was to make a research on ethnic problems in the United States. It was actually not easy to come up with a viable research project. In general, I was looking for a border area. I even considered the possibilities of a research in Valle D'Aosta, in Alsace-Lorraine and in the border area between Spain and France, maybe also because the department where I was studying was more oriented (apart from works on Naples and Southern Italy) towards Western Europe rather than towards Central and Eastern Europe.

I started to think of *going east* of Naples when I started to consider logistic problems of a long time permanence for the research. The relatives from my mother's side were living in Rijeka, in Trieste and in Istria too. Still, I knew very little about Istria. Rijeka is my mother's birthplace and I know the town ever since my childhood. I also had spent several holidays in Dalmatia, as a tourist. I never had been in Istria. Better said, I didn't know I actually had been there a few times for few hours. I am definitely not a real outsider, but I also didn't have a picture of Istria when I started my research, other than a very vague and *standard* Italian one, not really connected to the *esuli* experience since I never consider my mother exiled or refugee. I had been in *Albona* (Labin) and Zarečje just a couple of time to visit some relatives, but as far as I can remember I didn't associated those places with Istria. I might be wrong, but if I try to go back to the 1980's and early 1990's picture I had in mind, Istria was a very vaguely known geographic place, whose borders I could not spot without looking at the map.

I am Italian. This is something I started to realize when I was living in Zagreb with my Croatian wife, as I realized that I was a *non-religious Catholic* when I was living in the Catholic/Protestant Holland. In general, I never thought of myself as an Italian, but I was and I am. I was born in the United States but I didn't live there for long. We moved to Italy, to my father's birthplace in Naples, and I went to school in Italy. My schoolmates in Italy were probably associating my (once) blond hair and pale skin with the place I was born and constantly asking me to say things in English. I didn't speak Croatian. My mother is completely bilingual and she was using only Italian at our home in Naples. She spoke to me very rarely in Croatian after I had apparently asked her to stop. I was four and she thought something had happened at school. I do not remember, but, as I said, for any Neapolitan kid it sounded much more appealing my belonging to California and United States than to Yugoslavia. Since then I knew numbers, some words and sentences, but I had very few occasions to use them, even in Croatia. In Rijeka our relatives and friends spoke Italian (or *Fiuman* dialect) so I made no effort to learn Croatian, even if my mother was occasion-

ally saying that I should *learn* it. My knowledge was so superficial (or distant) that I thought, for instance, that *Hrvatski* meant actually *Serbo-Croatian* (and not just Croatian). Nevertheless, when my grandfather in Naples insisted that my mother, born in 1941 Fiume (and leaving the country at the end of the sixties to join my father) was an Italian, I replied that she was a Yugoslav. What exactly that meant to me I cannot remember, but it was rather odd to discover in 1991 that actually she could be Croat. In Rijeka she went to Italian schools and in the nineties, when I started to get interested in *these odd matters* and once asked her about her feelings and identity, she said that she is a *Fiumana*. I am actually happy that I never put my family under *investigation*. A problem of dealing with nationalities is the tendency to force people into categories and categories never fully explain people. About my mother's family in Rijeka/Fiume, before the nineties it was just a funny joke to me that they were nationally declaring themselves in a different way: Yugoslav, Italian and Croat. In 1991 I started to understand that things were quite more problematic, rather than just more complicated.

My grandfather from Rijeka, as I met him, was a detached person, very little interested in politics or in nationality problems (maybe because of his bad experiences during Italian fascism and Yugoslav socialism). He was born in a Croatian family, speaking *Čakavjan* in a village of Eastern Istria (Krapan). At about six years old he moved to Albona (*Stari Labin*), where he learned the local Venetian dialect that he had since used as a first language. At about thirteen he moved to work in Abbazia and later to Fiume. He spoke *Fiumano* or Italian everywhere but had no problem in speaking Croatian, although I think I never heard a word of Croatian between my grandparents. One of his sisters is still living in Labin and together they were speaking *Istro-Venetian*. With other sisters, especially the one who moved to USA, he was speaking Croatian. I also knew some sisters and brothers of my grandmother. When they met I know they were using preferably Croatian or Italian according to the place where they were meeting (Italian dialect in Trieste and Rijeka, Croatian in Istria). They (originally twelve) lived in different places: in Trieste, Rijeka or in villages out of Rijeka (which were in Istria, as I later understood). Since I spoke only Italian to the ones I knew I didn't know that some of them "were" Italians and some "were" Croats. Maybe a reason why national problems and Istria became so interesting to me was that I had paid no interest in them before.

My mother's family doesn't stand as a special example of a "divided and scattered" family after WWII (and also after WWI),<sup>3</sup> with some components living in

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3 I agree with Pamela Ballinger (2003) on the trauma brought up by Italian-Yugoslav 1945 border to land and people, though I would argue that a trauma occurred also after the same establishment of the state borders after WWI, which also cut people and divided families, also because it pushed individuals and groups to Yugoslavia (and to other countries). On this see Kalc (1996) and Purini (1998).

Trieste and Rijeka, other in Istria, and other in Zagreb, Friuli (and some in the United States). I tried to explain my odd position of insider/outsider. During my research it came always useful, in Croatia and in Italy, to refer to my ancestors. At the same time, it is also true that I didn't know much about Trieste and I didn't know anything about Istria. I chose Istria as my research place also because it was totally new to me. I definitely chose it because I had the impression that it was a place where borders strongly defined the space.

I was interested in borders not only from a political point of view, and I tried to find a place where borders were across the land and across the communities. My idea was to study the production of division and diversity in the society. While studying Croatian language I started to study the past and observe the land and talk to the people in Istria. I first went to Labin, where my aunt was living, and this town was the first place I started to research. A first look at the demographic statistics in Labin until WWII showed a strong presence of both Italians and Croats. Nevertheless, a more accurate observation showed a typical Istrian division of the space between Italians and Croats, with the latter more or less confined to the outskirts and the former limited to the urban area of Albona/Stari Labin. Since I was looking for a place where people of different languages and national groups would live and interact (not so much divided by the city/countryside border), I soon started to search for a community to research. After a while I started to focus my research on Pazin-Pisino-Mitterburg.

At first I wasn't sure I would end up with a research on the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It would have been interesting to investigate, in a small Istrian community, the demographic shift after World War I or World War II. This would have meant to concentrate more on the role of the state, and to study either Italians or Croats as victims and as *minorities*, well treated or mistreated by the state. Major ethnic strife had occurred during the Italian and Yugoslavian rules of Istria. This was strongly linked to the establishment of a national kind of State, both in the case of the 1918 Kingdom of Italy and of the 1945 Yugoslavia, given the way they behaved towards their respective Istrian *minorities*. I was more interested on the production of diversity and in the processes of identification and less in the role of the state. This is why I opted for the 19<sup>th</sup> century Austrian, and Constitutional, time. I thought, and still do think, that under constitutional Austria Istrian nationalities were confronting each other in somehow matching conditions. Furthermore, I was interested in looking at the process of nationalization. During the Austrian rule people were freer to move across the ethnic and national borders and identities, which in Yugoslav and Italian times appeared to be already crystallized. I shared the opinion that the pressure on Croats and Slovenes between the two world wars and towards Italians after World War II produced a strengthening of the identities, and assimilation in the society as minority or either resistance or abandonment. Nowadays, I don't share anymore such a straight view,

since I believe that processes of ethnic and national border crossings and assimilations have been operating and functioning during also Fascist Italian and Socialist Yugoslavian regimes. Between the twenties and the seventies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the forces of socialization and nationalization have played a role in producing the possibility for the new generations to interact outside a limited group, enhanced by the phenomena of family mobility and urbanization. Eventually, demography has oriented the new ethnic and national balance.

### **Understanding ethnic balance and nationalizations in 19<sup>th</sup> century Istria**

The Austrian part of the Empire was an interesting case since it didn't have proper minorities, especially in the Littoral (*Austrian Küstenland*). According to the 1867 constitution all national groups with a substantial presence in a certain territory shared school and language rights. This constitution didn't solve the problems of social, economic and political disparity, but was an important tool for the emancipation of the *non-dominant* ethnic groups (Kappeler, 1992). The way families had been settling in Istria throughout the centuries, and social and economic diversifications, were a major factor for the developments of ethnic borders and eventually for the distinction between the Italian community on one side, and the Slovenian and Croatian communities on the other. The ethnic division reproduced differences in social and economic status within the population. The Italian milieu represented a way to express a social condition. Assimilation to the Italian culture was a process that was experienced by families that grew economically and socially. Croatian and Slovenian were kept as languages of private or limited interaction by many families that started to belong to a middle class, and publicly remained mostly confined to the countryside. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century society underwent major changes. Private and public linguistic spheres tended to merge and Croatian and Slovenian languages started to be widespread also in their written forms.<sup>4</sup>

Until the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the process of assimilation into Italian culture was linked to the expansion of a linguistic socialization and nationalization which slowly drove the mixed, the urbanizing and the socially growing families from an Italian/Slavic or just Slavic milieu to an Italian one. More than a transfer from one national identity to another one, it was a process of nationalization, with deficiencies somehow not so different from those revealed by Eugene Weber (1979) for the French case. There was no nationalizing state in the Istrian case. For the Italianization of Istrians a big role was played by the identification of Istrian middle class with an Italian middle class, but Italian national activists were also mobilized. From the

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4 On written and Oral culture in 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Istria see the considerations by Bertoša (1993, 27, 81). See also Bertoša (1986) and Ivetic (1999).

middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in connection with the movements in Croatia and Carniola, national activists (at first only priests) were actively pursuing and propagandizing Illyrian, Slavic, Croatian and Slovenian linguistic and political identities in Istria too.

The development of Slavic national movements in Istria hardened the ethnic border and thus the process of nationalization to Italian culture. At the middle of the century most of Istria lacked Croatian and Slovenian activists, besides clergymen, or a Slavic middle class, except for the Kvarner Islands and the Northeastern part of the peninsula. Situation slowly changed towards the end of the century as Croatian and Slovenian societies grew in complexity (outside and inside the Istrian peninsula). Some peasants managed to emancipate from debts and started small private enterprises and, thanks to schooling, a growing number of Croats and Slovenes started to acquire jobs in school and in public offices. Important was also the arrival in Central, Southern and Western Istria of Croatian and Slovenian middle class people (school teachers, professors, lawyers, students, clerks, business people) from the Eastern Istrian places like Kastav, Volosko and the island of Krk and from Carniola, the Croatian Littoral and Dalmatia, and also from Bohemia and Moravia. People moved because of job opportunities and for the possibility to get clients which would prefer a Slavic bookshop, pharmacist or lawyer rather than an Italian one. Some of them, especially lawyers, also came to get involved from the very beginning into political activism.

When the Croatian party started to win local elections in Central Istrian burgs and also towns as Pazin and Buzet, they still had very few local educated people to chose for major positions. In Pazin an ironmonger, Antun Bertoša, was put at the head of the inner city Administration Council and a small trader from out of town, Innocent Fabris, became major. The latter was not a party leader or even well integrated into the party. At the end of the 1880's he was replaced by Antun Dukić, a lawyer from Kastav, and later by Dinko Trinajstić, a lawyer from Vrbnik (in the island of Krk), whose brother, also lawyer, had moved to the other vital and key center of Croatian political mobilization in Istria, Buzet (D'Alessio, 2003b, 150–153). Similarly, Matko Laginja moved his studio and political activity to Pula.

The development of an urban Croatian milieu in Pazin, Buzet and Pula and even before in Kastav, Volosko, Krk, Vrbnik and other small towns of the Istrian province, favored the formation of a new urban linguistic network. Italian ceased to be the only language of urban interaction. This was a big change for peasants living at the periphery of Istrian small cities or regularly coming to town, for craftsmen and other low-middle class people.

Social antagonism fostered the political harsh confrontation. The Italian party was typically representing the interests of landowners and entrepreneurs and the leaders were very often lawyers. Croatian and Slovenian new leaders, also lawyers, tried to protect the interests of the smallholders, often indebted with the Italian landowners.

Slavic national activists, thanks also to the support of the *national* clergy, were much more able than socialists to understand the rural reality, and managed to utilize social differences also as a tool of political mobilization. This way they protected the economically oppressed peasants but also promoted antagonisms inside Istrian society.

Ethnic tensions generally rise where the presence in the same site of a significant number of members of two or more competing ethnic and national groups leads to political confrontation and eventually to violence. Italians and Croats or Slovenes lived mixed or closed to each other in rural areas, in burgs and in some towns, though ethnic conflict took place in the latter more than anywhere else. This is because ethnic and political tensions were intertwined.

At the beginning of the democratization process, Italian liberal-national elite did not profess a nationalistic agenda towards the Slavs, but towards the Government. Italian liberals' idea was to gain support from the Slav peasants, but they did not reject a strong hierarchical social attitude. They had long (and still) assumed that Slavs would still naturally and willingly move towards an Italian cultural identification, as they would grow socially or *acquire* an education. As Croatian (linked to the *pravaštvo* movement) and Slovenian (and later Yugoslavian) political and national affiliations became a resource of identification and belonging for Istrian Slavs, Italian liberals started to worry. Italian intellectuals considered Croats and Slovenes as external forces, alien from Istrian peninsula and its *Istrian* residents, and artificially favored by the Austrian government at the Italians' expenses. They refused the idea of a transformation of the Istrian society even if similar dynamics were at work in Central-Eastern European 19<sup>th</sup> century society, as the traditional hierarchical division between dominant and non-dominant ethnic groups was slowly disappearing.

When Croatian and Slovenian candidates started to threaten Italian positions in Central Istrian towns and burgs, the Italian Istrian elite and the Italian (liberal-national) party launched a policy of *defense* of Italian language (and *civilization*). On one side Italian intellectuals spent a great effort in reinforcing the Latin and Roman legacy and diminishing the Croatian cultural traces in the Istrian past. On the other side, Italians began to subsidize Italian cultural associations, private schools and kindergartens and, using the hegemony of the Italian party in the provincial assembly and in most Istrian municipalities, hampered the diffusion of public Slovenian and Croatian schools (Cukrov, 2001). When Croatian and Slovenian private schools and cultural associations began to spread, two competing nationalizing forces started to confront each other. Only in this phase can we speak of assimilation attempts by the Italian elite towards the Slavic population, but the growth of Slovene and Croatian national activism reduced the efforts of Italian nationalists to reassert the orientation of the Slav populations towards Italian identification. The escalation of the political confrontation crystallized positions and, in general, made ethnic identifications more solid and ethnic relations more difficult.

After WWI Italian elites still believed in the possibility of a national assimilation of the Istrian Slavic population. Having attributed almost all guilt to the Austrian government for the spread of Croatian and Slovenian nationalities in Istria, the local Italian elite encouraged and assisted the Italian Central government in all administrative measures to *denationalize* Croats and Slovenes, especially after Mussolini seized power in 1922. But since 1918, with the idea that without their political leaders the "Slavs" would easily assimilate, many Italians supported the exile of Croatian and Slovenian leaders and the shutting down of Slavic schools and institutions. This was partly an answer to the limitations and repression suffered by Italians during the war, redirected towards the new (*old*) enemy: the Slavs who didn't welcome the Italian state, authority and affirmation of the nation. These hostile sentiments towards Croats and Slovenes, reinforced old borders between towns and countryside and, with the attempts of forced Italianization by the state, worsened ethnic relationships in the peninsula.

The harder Italian elites tried to assimilate the Slav populations the less they succeeded. When they tried to facilitate assimilation with schools and associations in the late Habsburg period, they were faced by Croatian and Slovenian elites who managed to counterbalance the new propaganda with their own associations and schools. When they wanted to impose *Italianization* with the help and active endorsement of the Italian state, they built resentment. Nevertheless, the spread of Italian cultural elements before and after WWI wasn't completely unsuccessful. Many families actually *italianized* before and also during fascism, and Istrian population as a whole was able to acquire many elements of Italian culture. What was annihilated, from the very beginning of Italian administration, was the urban centered confrontation in Buzet, Pazin, Pula, Volosko, and in other small burghs of the Istrian province. The center of Istrian Croatian and Slovenian political and cultural network again became the small villages of the countryside. Italian pressure over the Slavic political and cultural identity had the result of ending the challenge in the urban areas, where the public sphere was totally italianized. But, contrary to its hopes, the Italian regime was not able to encourage mass assimilations, or compel loyalty to the state (or to the *nation*). In 1939 a secret census, never publicized by authorities, showed that after almost twenty years of Italian administration Croats and Slovenes had not decreased from the previous 1921 census and actually had increased, as did the desire of revenge against Italians (Mattossi, Krasna, 1998).

### **In numbers: outsider and insider perspectives and looks at people's identity**

The 1939 statistics are based on the 1936 census, which did not investigate nationality of the inhabitants. They are considered to be much more reliable than the 1921 census, which was conducted right after the annexation of Istria and served the Italian

administration also as a proof of a true belonging of the little Adriatic peninsula to the Italian nation. Criticisms have been raised over the 1921 census, from the Italian side as from Yugoslavian side (Schiffner, 1990; Roglić, 1956). Still, the 1945 census, which was meant to counterbalance the Italian data, does not seem reliable either.

Albeit criticized, censuses used are extensively by scholars. I have also tried to comprehend the relationships between different ethnic and national groups starting from the results of the official censuses. One problem with the censuses' unreliability lays in the possible falsification and exaggeration of the data by the authorities and the local census personnel. But the main difficulties in using statistics, as a tool for studying ethnic and national affiliations in multilingual settings, is that there is not, and never was, such thing as fixed identities. Identities are volatile and dependant on time and circumstances, self-ascription and attribution by others. Circumstances and outside perceptions also serve as limitations to the possibilities to cross borders. Choices are possible only within a range of possibilities, although particularly wide in Istrian case.

The first investigation over the ethnic balance in Istria was not a proper census, but an ethnographic survey sponsored by the Austrian Institute of Statistics and carried out the 1840's by the director of the Institute, Karl Czörnig. According to this investigation, out of 228.035 inhabitants of Istria, 134.445 were Croats, 60.000 were Italians, 31.995 were Slovenes and 1.596 were Germans (Roglić, 1956).

In 1848 governmental newspapers used these percentages in a debate with the Istrian Italian deputies in Vienna, who asked the recognition of Italian as the official language in the Istrian province (De Franceschi, 1926, 257). The Ministry of the Interiors denied the Italian request objecting that most of the Istrian population didn't speak Italian and would not be able to understand the official language. Italians representatives objected that Italian was the only written language people used in Istria and was used in every town and village, where most of Slav people understood it. At the same time, they also disputed the claim that they were such a small numeric minority in Istria.

At the end of the 1850's another ethnographic account by the Austrian Institute of Statistics showed an increase of the Italian population and a decrease of Croats (132.091) and Slovenes (28.177), suggesting that the process of Italianization was still vital (Roglić, 1956). However, Italian intellectuals had in mind other numbers. In a 1857 publication of the prominent politician and intellectual Carlo Combi, the whole Istrian peninsula together with Trieste were said to have 290.000 residents, with 160.000 Latins-Italians, 15.000 Slovenes (which would "use" Italian language and customs), 3.000 Rumanians from the Valley of Raša/Arsa on the Eastern side of the peninsula ("keeping inside the family a romance idiom"), and 112.000 Slavs in the rural and mountain areas (Combi, 1890, 13).

Combi was directly involved in the Italian *Risorgimento* in Istria and he was far from being a detached outside observer (even if the analysis was actually made by

the Antonio Coiz, a friulian teaching in Koper). The same idea of contemplating Istria and Trieste as a single unit, marked by Italian prevalence, suggests a political orientation of this ethnographic assessment. At the same time, also Austrian authorities were not completely unbiased, as the Italian demographic presence in Istria involved both foreign politics (since Italians from Lombardy and Veneto were aggressively promoting independence), and the Austrian problem of nationalities.

A higher number of Italians than that appeared in the 1840s and 1850s Austrian "official" statistics, was also shown by the censuses on the "language of use" (*Umgangssprache*), held from 1880 to 1910.

*Table 1: The results of the official ethnographic studies of 1846 and 1857, of the Austrian censuses (1880–1910) and Italian 1921 census on the "language of use", of the 1939 secret Italian survey on nationality and of the 1945 Yugoslavian census on the family language (Czörnig, 1857; Roglič, 1956; Bratulić, Šimunović, 1985; Perselli, 1993; Mattossi-Krasna, 1998)*

*Tabela 1: Rezultati uradnih etnografskih študij iz let 1846 in 1857, avstrijskih popisov prebivalstva med leti 1880–1910 in italijanskega popisa prebivalstva iz leta 1921 glede na "uporabljeni jezik", italijanskega tajne študije o narodnostih iz leta 1939 ter jugoslovanskega popisa prebivalstva iz leta 1945 z rubriko "jezik v družini" (Czörnig, 1857; Roglič, 1956; Bratulić, Šimunović, 1985; Perselli, 1993; Mattossi-Krasna, 1998)*

Year	Population	Slovenian	Italian	Croatian and Serb <sup>5</sup>	Other	Strangers
1846	228.035	31.995	60.000	134.445	1.596	–
1857	241.147	28.177	72.303	132.091	2.301	6.275
1880	292.006	43.004	114.291	121.732	5.127	7.852
1890	317.610	44.418	118.027	140.713	6.845	7.607
1900	345.050	47.717	136.191	143.057	9.000	9.085
1910	403.598	55.134	147.417	168.184	15.728	17.135
1921	343.401	47.489	199.942	90.262	–	5.708
1939	296.460	28.884	161.739	103.924	1.677	–
1945	332.271	54.210	91.316	176.422	1.490	–

Direct comparison between the "official" data from 1846 to 1945 is not possible because what we have here is the result of different kinds of analysis. The 1846 and 1857 statistics were ethnographic surveys; the 1880–1910 and the 1921 censuses

<sup>5</sup> Austrian (Cisleithanian) and Italian censuses didn't make difference between Croatian and Serb languages and used Serbo-Croatian.

checked directly the language used by the population with interviews; in the 1939 there were no interviews but a secret census and investigations carried out by local state employees based on the results of the 1936 official statistics, which didn't check the language or the nationality. The 1945 census was based on the language spoken inside the families, but was also based on indirect methods and carried out in a still very tense political moment. Another problem is that these different assessments were not made on the same territory. Administrative borders of Istria weren't the same before and after World War I, so that in 1921 the area of Kastav and the island of Krk belonged to the Kingdom of Serbs-Croats-Slovenes. In the 1930's and in 1945 the Istrian province was even smaller, as the northwestern portion had been moved to the province of Trieste and the northeastern part to the province of Rijeka.

A crucial difference between the 1846, 1857 and 1945 data, on one side, and the data of the other censuses, is that the latter offered a picture on the language mostly used in the public space and the former on a more private element. In fact, the Austrian censuses on the *Umgangssprache* overestimated the strength and the diffusion of the socially dominant languages of the empire (Roglić, 1956, 15; Vivante, 1984, 169; Arel, 2002, 101; Purini, 1998). Italian was the main language of use for transactions in Istria and a Croatian or Slovene peasant could work for Italians or in an Italian environment and thus was bound to speak in Italian (generally in Istro-venetian). Which would be, then, his *umgangssprache*?

Yugoslav census experts stressed the mistake of the *umgangssprache* method and preferred the mother tongue as a more sincere sign of nationality. Still, doubts loom large. My mother was raised as "mother tongue" Italian (in dialect) from an "ethnic" (?) Croatian mother and family (and "self-identified" (?) Italian), speaking Croatian and Italian with relatives and the neighborhood, and she went to Italian minority schools in a rapidly *Croatizing* Rijeka and then she studied Italian (and English) language and literature at the University in Zagreb.<sup>6</sup> What Would be, then, her language of use? Probably Croatian. And her mother tongue? Probably Italian. She could easily fit in either of the linguistic boxes and also in either of the identification containers (Italian, Croat, Yugoslav). Anyhow, in the Yugoslavian 1945 census on "mother tongue" language, she would probably appear as a Croat. This is because in such mixed cultural frames, politicization plays a big role. Besides the question of social hegemony, the big problem which mines censuses is the political hegemony. This is also true for Austrian censuses.

During late Austria decentralization was rather developed. In the case of the censuses, data collection and counting was conducted by the personnel of the city coun-

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6 Pamela Ballinger (2003) adopts in her essential volume on history and memory in Trieste and Istria the terms "ethnic" and "self-identified", which I find ambiguous and over-determinate at the same time.

cil administrations, selected by the party locally in power. The census results were of great importance for the Istrian political equilibrium, because of their influence on the choice of the language to be used in schools and public offices. The census personnel could distort the results, playing on the ambiguity created by the high number of bilinguals (Schiffner, 1990). For example, in some towns where there was a shift in the political balance, there is a big difference between the 1880 and the 1890 data. In Pazin and Buzet the 1880 census was conducted by the Italian city administration and the 1890 census by the new Croatian administration. According to 1880 census in Pazin municipality there were 2.321 people speaking Italian and 12.259 Serbo-Croatian language, and in the inner town (bordering with the countryside) 1.517 speaking Italian and 1.591 Serbo-Croatian language. In the 1890 census the whole territory of the Pazin municipality had 1.454 Italian speakers (- 867) and 13.251 Serbo-Croatian speakers (+ 992) and the inner town 1.116 people using Italian (- 401) and 1.955 using Serbo-Croatian language (+ 364). In Buzet municipality the 1880 census shows 5.465 people speaking Italian, 3.626 Slovene and 4.858 Serbo-Croatian and the 1890 census shows 752 people speaking Italian, 1.801 speaking Slovene and 12.185 speaking Serbo-Croatian language Perselli (1993, 213, 257). Statistics for smaller villages show very radical and anomalous shifts, based more on the choice of those who collected the data, who had to check it and transmit it, and also on the personal choice of the family members, as political orientations and opportunism (very) likely played a role.

When the Kingdom of Italy took over, all these factors were more decisive, along with the basic intention of the state and local authorities to legitimate the annexation and diminish the *minority problem* by showing a higher number of Italians. In Austrian times, when the censuses were held over the years by different administrations, the data, considered as a whole, offer a useful orientation. The Italian data instead is much more doubtful. The cases of the two towns above mentioned are a good example. In the municipality of Pazin Italians became 8.777 (they were 1.378 in 1910) and in Buzet 4.160 (they were 658 on 1910). Strong shifts occurred in the territories of many mixed municipalities, and strong numbers of the 1910 speakers of Slovenian and Croatian languages were counted in 1921 as Italian speakers. A similar criticism can be raised on the 1945 Yugoslav assessment, partly carried out with indirect methods and with a clear purpose. Prepared in only four months during a confused period of extension of Yugoslav people's power, it was prepared for the Paris Peace Conference to legitimate Yugoslav claims for the whole Istrian territory, as the 1921 Italian census had to legitimate the 1920 Italian annexation.

### **Outside categorization through public and political belonging: associating and splitting up the community – national society and nationalism in late Austrian times**

I offered a few examples of Istrian censuses to stress the problems of the statistical simplifications. Censuses do offer a useful orientation, taking into account their offer of a fixed, and often biased or even insincere, picture of an going event. In my analysis of the Istrian populations I also looked at other kinds of demographic sources. For instance, records of marriages, baptisms and the *Status Animarum* books corroborate the Istrian multiethnic substratum. The records do not define the ethnic or national identity of the registered people, but they suggest the existence of mixed families. The family names offer no clear evidence of nationality, but records become very useful if connected to other kind of sources. The family records offer the opportunity to draw networks of people inside a community. It is also possible to reconstruct the networks of the members of a national community in a small community, but only if other sources are able to indicate evidence of an active national (or other) affiliation. The focus of my research, therefore, concentrates on the ways people expressed their identification in the public sphere.

Public expression and political belonging offer a fruitful path for the investigation of national identifications in multiethnic contexts. In the multiethnic Istria between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the process of crystallization of national identification influenced political-national choices in the social life and vice versa. Socialization and political identification became more and more intertwined. National belonging was not something just linked to a private sphere of life and interactions, since it brought about constant adherence to people, groups, values, which tended to be in open competition.

All Istrian towns, with the exception of Pula, were rather small (the very border between town and burg was often very slight). This implied a certain degree of familiarity between the members of a community. Except for the industrially growing Pula, also new comers were easily spotted, especially if they covered an easily recognizable position in the local society. Being a Croat or a Slovene in the public sphere of a bi-ethnic Croatian and Italian settlements or being vice-versa Italian in the opposite public sphere, implied a clear identification into a whole set of values and norms. For instance, speaking only or favorably Croatian, reading Croatian newspapers in public, choosing some bars better than others, entering some shops where people favorably spoke Croatian, joining meetings and events of one of the local nationally biased associations, would imply a definite position in the social arena. Positions were not so clear and often prevailed juxtapositions and apparently contradictory behaviors. Society did not appear in black and white colors and people could not choose only a definite color. Still, once a political fight had started and the bi-ethnic community had two separate networks of social interactions choices started to be unavoidable. People would still

interact across the ethnic lines, but it became more difficult to do so, and disapprovals would probably arise, especially from the leaders of the local community. In fact, these networks were locally strengthened by nationalist entrepreneurs, guiding political competition, leading nationalist associations, organizing public events, favoring selective employments and financial support. All this favored the tendency of the contested places towards a dichotomization of socialization and representations. Not only Pazin (maybe the "core" of such process), but also other towns and burgs, and the province as a whole, were becoming bifurcated.

The bifurcation of social interactions was one of the faces of Istrian society. However, it was a major force in the cultural and social orientations of the Istrian population. Different forces of economic and social and political interactions were pushing towards communitarian cohesion of shared experiences and mutual representations. Some of them were based on traditional economic relationships and cooperation, though these were also undermined by the peasants' anxiety for social change. Some of them were spiritual and religious forces, though Istria lacked, e. g. the Eastern Friulan social-Christian ability and intention to propagandize supranational cohesion and Catholicism (because of the bitter debates over the language to be used in churches and of the role of Slavic priests as national activists). This became a pretext for further divisions. The socialists were pushing towards internationalist solidarity and thus they were a political unifying force, though some of them were not immune from national agendas (Cattaruzza, 1998).

What I observed, looking at the production of newspapers and through police records, at narratives and at scientific and artistic expressions, it was not a radical eradication of the inter-ethnic and cooperative society, but a movement against it. This movement had its main actors in the political figures, which had a strong impact on the shaping and orientation of Istrian cultural and social life.

In Constitutional Austria, people started to be involved in an electoral mobilization, that only in the first years was limited to a restricted elite. Political parties in late Austrian empire reproduced national differences and the national communities were the base of political mobilization. Therefore, a clue to comprehend the mechanisms of Istrians' national identification of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century is the national-political fight that spread in the last period of the Habsburg Empire. The elites involved in this contest for the local supremacy used the weapons of national propaganda and tried to get support and legitimization from the population, who was pushed in one way or another to express in public their national-political affiliation.

In many little towns and villages of the Istrian province, with a special effort on demographically contested places, Italian and Croatian/Slovenian elites engaged a struggle for the local power using the weapons of national propaganda to gain legitimization and support from the population. They created a well organized web of nationalist associations stimulating the population to stand for one or the other side of

the ethno-national border. These were tools of national propaganda used by the national activists to enforce their side. The same associations also served as tools of national identification and expression by the population. The national conflict gave a political substance to ethnic public expressions and showing public adherence to one ethnic side meant taking a stand for that side of the national-political barricade. An open way to take side was to join one of the two national-political coalitions.

I focused my research on the open and visible elements of national identification. Therefore, I was looking for something less exclusive than the affiliation to a political party. Volunteer associations in Istria in fact were a vehicle for national expression not restricted to the political elites, even if they were directed by the latter. Moreover, many people participated to the very frequent public events organized by the associations: concerts and music festivals, political demonstrations, religious rites (these more frequently organized by the Croatian and Slovenian communities), benefit and subsidizing parties, open lectures on science, national culture, history and practical life. In Pula, Pazin, Koper, Volosko, Krk, Buzet and in other places where *a battle had to be fought* many associations were established.<sup>7</sup>

The association movement strongly contributed to clear the distinction between the two ethnic communities and, by driving the population to stand for one side or another of the political-national barricade, eventually brought to an increased ethnic division in Istria. The birth of nationalistic opposition between Italians and Croats/Slovenes took place during a process of urbanization and widening of the access to vote and political participation. The towns were seen as places to conquer by the elites of the traditional *non-dominant* ethnic groups and where intended as places to defend by the elites of the dominant ethnic groups. The urban space was the place of the conflict, where it ran the concrete (physical and symbolic) border between two nationalisms, and where the *self* and the *other* were living side by side.

## Conclusions

Studying Pazin and confronting this case with others in Istria I developed the idea that holding a membership of a national association, or maybe even occasionally joining an association, was a significant form of revealing and publicizing one's national identity. In Pazin and in the surrounding territory the association movement was stronger than anywhere else. In Pula there was the biggest number of associations in Istria: in 1912 there were sixty-six associations for a population of 58.562 inhabitants; at the very beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Pazin there were twenty-eight in the whole (rather spread) municipality of about sixteen thousand inhabitants and

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<sup>7</sup> On the Croatian associations Barbalić, 1952; For all associations in Istria and Austrian Littoral AST, 1 and AST, 2; For the associations in Labin and Pazin districts DAP, 3.

nineteen of them were active in the Pazin urban area of about four thousand people (DAP, 4). Still the nationalistic associations which were built in Pazin were spread all over the province (Sokoli and sport associations, čitaonice/čitalnice, Casini and sale di lettura, Cirillo e Metodio and Lega Nazionale, students', teachers' and professors' associations, etc.). In Pazin the two social networks became clearly divided, from the associations to some shops, from elementary to high schools, and so became the border between the two options of social interaction. These networks could not cover all possible sectors of social interactions, but they marked the territory and were increasing their influence over the population. Borders could still be crossed, but ethnic shifts became more difficult than before.

*Pazinjani* and *Pisinoti* experienced a fight for their own place that probably the other Istrians didn't experience at the same level. Although, it wasn't just a fight for Pazin. The establishment and the maintenance of the two gymnasiums was an issue that involved Italians, Croats and also Slovenes from the rest of the *Küstenland*. Pazin wasn't the main town in Istria, and it was a deliberate choice of the regional political elites to establish in this town the seat of the *Società Politica Istriana* and of the *Političko Društvo za Hrvate i Slovence u Istri*. Pazin was a place where the border of the political competition was visible and stiff and it influenced social interactions, but it wasn't at all the only place of confrontation, competition and implementation of distinct circles of socialization. The same political leaders who were meeting in Pazin, where also conducting at home a similar policy, in other conditions, but with similar goals.

The expansion and diffusion of the forms of urban socialization and of the bourgeoisie was very much intertwined with the diffusion of voluntary associations, as it was the expansion of the nationalist mobilization. WWI and the aftermath of national states would end this kind of cultural-political mobilization, which was possible only under the post 1867 Austrian society. Italian and Yugoslavian military and civil authorities reinforced those borders that were created by local elites, fostering ethnic tensions and conflict.

Establishing their sovereignty Italian and Yugoslavian state authorities immediately presented their picture and representation of ethnic and national balance in Istria. Their *outside* looks were the result of operations conducted with the decisive help of indigenous personnel. This was also true for Austrian censuses, which were also biased, because of the method but also because of the political orientations of the census takers. The new states covered and protected bigger unfairness. Although, the main problem lays in the limited selection of still pictures in which Istrian families or individuals had to be placed during censuses and during ethnographic statistics in Austrian times too.

Censuses and Ethnographic statistics had an impact on the representation of Istrian reality. Each actually offered one reality. According to that reality, and given

the social and political contexts which were only partly influenced by Austrian, Italian and Yugoslavian states, the population was influenced in their possibilities of identifications and also social interactions. A similar stress of definition and systematization, starting with the question "who was what" marked my research. Focusing on the role of national identities I limited the picture to one aspect of Istrian society and altered its representation (similarly to those scholars who focused primarily on class struggle).

I introduced my family in this article because their example presents the difficulties and ambiguities of collective categorization, by censuses and by scholars. The representation of a society clearly divided between nationalities helps us to uncover the policy of creation dichotomous social and national networks. A look at other aspects of social interaction might reveal the on-going processes of mutual recognition and cooperation, in late Habsburg times and during Italian and Yugoslavian periods.

I introduced my family also to clear my position in this volume of *Outside looks* on the Northern Adriatic area. My personal story also had an impact on the research orientation and attitudes. I had no intention nor need to prove the *Italianità*, the *Hrvatsvo*, *Slovenstvo* or *Jugoslovenstvo* of Istrian or Triestine society. Nevertheless, my *outsider* look was definitely influenced by my *insider* heritage, by my family's comments that I consciously and unconsciously intercepted, and somehow also by their social, political, philosophical positioning over time. This paper was probably also influenced by my newborn, who came right in the middle of the writing process. In Austrian Istria people were first recorded by parish priests in Latin, their names was declined in German by political authorities, and in each Istrian community (or newspaper) their form varied from Italian to Croatian or Slovenian according to who was naming them. In Italian newspapers and speeches Antun Bertosa became Antonio Bertossa and in Croatian ones Costantino Costantini became Kostantin Kostantini. Nowadays records oblige to opt for a more definite and definitive form (and identity). Marco or Marko?

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ISTRANI, IDENTIFIKACIJE IN HABSBURŠKA ZAPUŠČINA.  
POGLEDI NA IDENTITETE V ISTRI

Vanni D'ALESSIO

Univerza "Friderik II" v Neaplju, Oddelek za državne študije, IT-80134 Napoli, Via Mezzocannone 4

e-mail: gidaless@unina.it

**POVZETEK**

*Prispevek obravnava problem identitete in identifikacije v Istri. Ob dokazovanju fleksibilnosti konceptov, kot je identiteta, poudari težave pri njenem opredeljevanju v multietničnih kontekstih. Tudi pri sicer zelo različnih pogledih iz zunanjega okolja se namreč pojavljajo enaki problemi umetne klasifikacije; tako se, denimo, v svojih prizadevanjih, da bi odkrili in predstavili ravnotežje med narodnostmi na nekem ozemlju, soočajo s težavami tako strokovnjaki (zgodovinarji, etnografi, sociologi) kot tudi državne oblasti (v popisih). Avtor prispevka izpostavi nekaj konkretnih razlogov, zakaj je zanesljivost avstrijskih, italijanskih in jugoslovanskih popisov v Istri v 19. in 20. stoletju vprašljiva. Opiše tudi svoje osebne raziskovalne poti in pojasni, kako mu je položaj outsiderja oz. insiderja omogočil najti način, kako kodificirati predstave in izraze identitete pri istrskem prebivalstvu. Politični aktivizem in mobilizacija ter procesi, ki so se odvijali znotraj oz. izven istrskega lastnega družbenega in kulturnega okolja, so predstavljeni kot ključni dejavniki, ki so družbo v njenem dinamičnem razvoju napeljevali k delitvi po nacionalnih smernicah.*

*Analiza istrske družbe se osredotoči predvsem na pozno habsburško obdobje. Avtor poudari fluidnost etničnih meja in identitet ter opiše, kako sta razmah nacionalizma in proces nacionalne identifikacije v 19. stoletju okrepila etnično mejo in zakrnila osmotsko gibanje med različnimi oblikami identifikacije. Vendar pa se po avtorjevem mnenju to osmotsko gibanje ni zaustavilo in ga ni zmogla zaustaviti niti skrajno nacionalistična in do manjšin diskriminatorna politika tako Italije kot tudi Jugoslavije. Čeprav Habsburžani v Istri niso izvajali narodnostno usmerjene politike, pa so vendarle pripravili pogoje za ostra politična soočenja, v katerih sta se lokalni eliti posluževali nacionalne propagande. Skozi šolstvo in različna združenja sta stopnjevali proces nacionalizacije in pospeševali kristalizacijo identitet ter sčasoma tudi tendenco oblikovanja etnične sovražnosti.*

*Ključne besede: Istra, identitete, narodnosti, meje*

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