



## **Conflicts, Borders and Nationalism: The Fiume Archive-Museum in Rome**

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### **Abstract**

The Fiume Museum in Rome offers at first sight nothing spectacular and certainly does not qualify as ‘national’. However, it can help focusing from a new perspective on the construction of an (imagined) community and the role of museums to build cohesion and identity; the process of constructing material heritage in order to materialize the nation and crystallize a center for the community; the construction of an historical narrative on traumas, identities, national belonging and contested heritages.

Moreover, following the story of this museum helps consider the politics of memory as often overlapping with a clear public use of history. Two examples are perfect cases in point. D’Annunzio’s occupation of Fiume 1920– technically speaking a putsch against the will of the Italian government and international diplomacy – was a powerful rhetoric tool in Mussolini’s hands. It created a myth while the battle was taking place: the so called ‘bloody Christmas, the heroic sacrifice of Fiume’s defenders - in short the myth of the ‘mutilated victory’.

Even more than Istria, Fiume is a synecdoche for Italian nationalism. After World War II the birth of the Fiume museum and the activity of the Istrian and Dalmatian community was deeply connected with the violent memory war on the *foibe* – the natural pits in the carsick area where about 3000 victims of political violence were thrown (dead or still alive) from 1943 to 1945). In 2004 – under the second Berlusconi government – a special law created the day of the memory of the *Foibe* victims.

## Borders

The little Fiume Museum and archive is located in Via Antonio Cippico, at the edge of Rome Laurentina, beyond EUR, thus distant from the monumental buildings representing the nation, and even further away from the city of Fiume itself, located on the eastern coast of the Adriatic and now belonging to Yugoslavia under the name of Rijeka. Why, therefore, start from this periphery to discuss historical narratives related to nation? And why, therefore, end up in a small apartment where one has to ring the bell – only in the afternoon – in order to be let in into a still unfinished and quite provisional museum to see objects which can hardly compete with the treasures of heritage to be seen just a few miles away – a museum which exhibits nothing spectacular at first sight?

After World War II a number of displaced persons from Fiume as well as from Istria and Dalmatia had been housed in the hangars where the workers had provisionally lived during the construction of EUR. Today, this area, called the 'Giuliano Dalmata' district recalls in every street name or monument the 'exodus' that followed the war. There, starting in 1956, the displaced persons assembled diverse items such as printed documents and manuscripts, replicas, paintings, parcels of tombstones and even earth and water from Fiume's sea and rivers, thus laying the cornerstone of a site of memory and pain but also of research: the Archivio Museo Storico di Fiume. In fact, although it does not qualify as 'national', and although it is rather peripheral, this institution can help focus from a less obvious perspective on a number of issues: the (re)construction of an (imagined) community and the role of museums in building cohesion and identity; the process of constructing material heritage in order to materialize the nation and crystallize a centre for a dispersed community; the construction of a historical narrative on traumas, identities, national belonging and contested heritages.

It can also help reconsider different kinds of borders: primarily, geo-political borders and their perception, in an area that has been one of disputed borders – not without fierce conflicts. If this is true for Istria as a whole, it is perhaps even more so for Fiume, the important port on the Mediterranean that enjoyed the status of *Corpus separatum* (separated body) under the Hungarian Crown from the late eighteenth century and was again, after being occupied by the French, restored to the Habsburg empire. Given its importance and its peculiarity, the city enjoyed a highly distinctive status, being defined a 'porto franco', or else it was granted different kinds of autonomy even when it was once again annexed to the Hungarian crown in 1867, shortly after the *Ausgleich*.

Secondly, account should be taken of the borders perceived as essentially ethnic. However, we should also bear in mind the peculiarity of this frontier area, which has constituted for a long time a somewhat hybrid space of multiethnic realities, as recognized by the more serious scholarship. Thirdly, social borders also need to be taken into account. While in Istria they seem to clearly overlap with the ones perceived as ethnic, in Fiume matters are more complicated and intertwined. Fourthly, linguistic boundaries were extremely important in Fiume because they were crucial when the city became Italian under fascism and underwent, along with other areas of Istria, a radical policy of italianisation. Later, the linguistic borders were to play a decisive role in the attribution of the population to one or the other state, after World War II, in the bitter struggle between Italy and Yugoslavia. But these linguistic borders were much more porous than usually described, given that the frontier was (and usually is) a place of multiple linguistic usages.

Other boundaries are involved: those between research and public use (and often abuse) of history. The narrative developed around Fiume figures prominently in Italy's memory wars. In recent decades it has played a crucial role in the revisionist discourse put forward in the press and among historians, as well as in the political agenda of the Right. A great deal of the right-wing and neo-fascist demonstrations from the 1950s to the 1970s revolved around the question of Fiume, of Istria, and the *foibe* – the Karst pits into which Italians were thrown dead or alive in the last phase of the war and shortly thereafter – and of the revision of the borders with particular attention to the so-called B-zone (occupied by Yugoslavia and including Fiume, while the A-zone was an area of Anglo-American occupation). Moreover, it was around the issue of the *foibe* that the historical revisionism became a matter of political discourse, public history, and public use of history. This issue was one of those most closely embraced by neo-fascist and right wing politicians, while the Left was for a very long time silent.

Thus Fiume, after having been connected after World War I with events of high political significance for Italian nationalism and fascism, was again frequently in the headlines during early 2000 when the debate concentrated on the issue of a new memorial law on the *foibe* broke out. It was then that the transition from an almost private memory of the exiles to a public memory, recognized by the state, was accomplished. Following the July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2000 law instituting the day of memory (named 'giorno della memoria' in order to commemorate the Shoah and the many Italian soldiers and activists deported to concentration camps), the new law devoted to remembrance (it: 'giorno del ricordo') was enacted on March the 30<sup>th</sup>. It indicated February 10<sup>th</sup> (UN resolution on the free territory of Trieste) as the day of the remembrance in memory of the victims of the *foibe*.

In this regard, it is worthwhile adopting, as Giovanni De Luna has done (2011), a 'wide-angle lens' that broadly encompasses the proliferation – not only in Italy – of days of memory and the relative laws, and the endeavour at least since the Ciampi presidency to solicit the construction of a shared memory. It will suffice, again drawing on what De Luna has written, to highlight the stages of a debate that well illustrates the coalescence of different interests around these issues. On 26 October 2001 the *Alleanza Nazionale* deputy Roberto Menia, former leader of the youth movement connected with the Movimento Sociale Italiano in Trieste, presented a first proposal for 'granting recognition to the relatives of the *foibe* victims', commemorating the defence of Italy's eastern border by army detachments such as the X Mas or Mussolini's *bersaglieri* battalion. Menia also proposed the institution of a day of memory on January the 20<sup>th</sup> to commemorate 10 January 1947. The centre-left instead advocated March the 20<sup>th</sup>, the day of departure of the last fugitives from Pola. In fact, the day finally selected commemorated not so much the *foibe* victims as the 'diktat' of Paris and the 'cynical and criminal intent of the victors'. A close reading of these texts shows that apparently at stake was not the issue of *foibe* but rather the painful matter of the borders. The debate was also joined by a rather reluctant left, which promoted a reading of the law in terms of 'shared memory' (the expression used by senator Milos Budin quoting the secretary of the Democratici di Sinistra, Piero Fassino. Interestingly enough, as Giovanni De Luna also pointed out, the political debate almost completely ignored the results of historical scholarship, citing only generic and imprecise sources and historical evidence – as is often the case of the double track of the public use of history and the historians' work. Thus only those few who advanced concerns and doubts about the opportuneness of enacting this new memorial

law cited the documentation produced by the Italian-Slovene commission or the *Quaderni della resistenza* published by the regional committee of Venezia Giulia.

In the public arena, this issue never lost its strong polemical character (De Luna: 2011), as is clear from the posters of right-wing activists calling for demonstrations on remembrance day, and which were often ripped up by left-wing activists. To provide just one example, in January 2012 a meeting on the *foibe* promoted by the right-wing activist group *Studenti per la Libertà* was banned by the deans of the political sciences faculty in Florence for fear that it would cause a riot. However, other borders are involved, such as those dividing disciplines. This would first entail adopting a museum studies approach together with the historical one.

Moreover, the issues at stake here are extremely sensitive, and require the use of other tools. Feelings of belonging and loss are crucial, as well as a constant confrontation with death and its representations. Eradication and fragmentation marked the destiny of a community that had to choose whether to remain under very difficult conditions or to leave (and few of them experienced distant exile in the USA or Australia). But estrangement marked also the lives of those who stayed in Italy and were often made to feel unwelcome, facing hostility, mistrust, misunderstanding, embarrassment, and subject to rancor if not open discrimination, likened to fascists or aliens. It will therefore be helpful to employ the instruments of anthropology, as Pamela Ballinger has done in her excellent book. This helps to deal with the above issues and to frame a broader context of public use of history and communication for the *foibe* drama. For instance, she observes the usefulness of the contiguous domain of documentary films, such as the one produced by Claudio Schwarzenburg, head of the Comune di Fiume in Esilio, which draws heavily on wartime propaganda films. Hence the last border considered here is the highly permeable one between history and anthropology.

### **Fiume: a synecdoche for Italian nationalism**

Fiume is a microcosm of all the themes of nationalism, going back to its complex relationship with the Habsburg Empire. Moreover, the case of Fiume is a perfect demonstration of the classic issues of protonationalism (from religion to ethnic identity). It focuses on the most terrible traumas as well as the difficult relationship with a nearby fatherland that is at the same time very distant. It is for many reasons a synecdoche, a perfect case in point of Italian nationalism outside of Italy.

It is useful to recall the sequence of events for a non-Italian audience. The Italian national council proclaimed Fiume to be Italian on the 30<sup>th</sup> of October 1918, after the end of the war and the abandonment of the city by the Austrian. President Wilson opposed the proclamation and ordered the grenadiers to abandon Fiume. In May 1919 seven grenadier officers assembled and swore to liberate Fiume or die in the attempt. In September 1919, the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio reached Fiume, which he had chosen for a demonstrative action of exceptional impact. He constructed an intense and dramatic, solemn and sacred occasion around the 'Christmas of Blood' in which the battleship *Andrea Doria*, captained by admiral Thaon de Revel, shelled the city. This was not merely another dramatic episode replicated in a narrative of great intensity. It was also, as Cattaruzza amongst others has written, a sort of trial putsch that subsequently would be of great benefit to the fascists, who perpetuated the memory of this episode. The so-called 'Regency of Carnaro' proclaimed on 8 September 1920 came to a sudden end. The Treaty of

Rapallo between the Kingdom of Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was signed on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November, 1920. Fiume was to be abandoned. On December 28<sup>th</sup>, in face of the ‘express threat of bombardment intended for the total destruction of the civil population’ (Ballarini, Stelli, Micich, Loria, 2010), ‘Commander’ D’Annunzio resigned.

However, between Italy or Yugoslavia there was a third option: that proposed by the *independentisti* a group mindful of Fiume’s ancient status as a free city. From 1920 to 1922, they created a free state of Fiume, which finally had to surrender to the annexationists. The constituent assembly went into exile at Portolè, protected by the king of Yugoslavia, and Fiume was annexed to Italy in 1924. When Fiume, Istria and Dalmatia were annexed, the fascist regime imposed the forced Italianization of the language and the education system, and even of surnames, which were mangled into Italianized versions. But it was during the Second World War and immediately thereafter that Fiume – as well as Istria – was again a contested territory riven by conflict. It became a war zone from the moment Italy declared war on Yugoslavia (1941). In 1945 Tito’s partisans entered the city of Fiume. The *foibe* – as said, the Karst pits into which were thrown, often after being bitterly humiliated and tortured, so many men and women who certainly were not all fascists or compromised with the past regime – were only the tragic tip of the iceberg (Cattaruzza, Dogo, Pupo: 2000; Pupo 2003). Subsequently, the long exodus from Fiume merged with those from Istria and Dalmatia. Despite further proposals of a free state – rejected by Yugoslavia – the story concluded with the imposition of a hard choice on the inhabitants. They were granted, not the right to self-determination, but only the choice between the two states, a choice determined by language, and other obvious and perhaps also less obvious constraints. As regards Fiume, which in 1945 had 47,839 inhabitants, around 80% of the population chose exodus.

In regard to this episode, the concept of a 'black exodus' beginning after 8 September 1943 when the former fascists abandoned Istria has been advanced, but it is much debated and by now discarded by the most attentive historiography. Pupo argues that, while in Zara the exodus was an evacuation caused by the bombing, in Fiume the autonomists were attacked even more when they were antifascist as they could more easily claim to play an important role. Consequently, such professional groups as trade unionists, for example, were also liquidated.

More recently, the concept of exodus has also been contested, as well as the possibility of using the terms of genocide or ethnic cleansing (obviously non-neutral notions propounded by particular constituencies) in reference to this exodus. The idea of applying the more correct concept of forced transfer of a population, within the context of a much more extensive phenomenon that involved central-eastern Europe in its entirety, has also been put forward.

Whilst the long exodus of the Italian population of Istria and Dalmatia corresponds fully to other histories of forced migrations, it also has a particular feature. ‘A population identifiable at national level and which was once politically, economically and socially dominant in a multinational territory’, it has recently been written, ‘was liquidated and forced to emigrate, not unlike what happened to the Poles of western Ukraine or to the Germans of the Bohemian provinces. Nevertheless, even if the final outcome was substantially similar, the events were more complex (also because they were much more protracted than in other cases)’ (Ferrara and Pianciola, 2012: 357). Accords among states for the transfer of the population and expulsion

measures were lacking and there were no precise plans for 'cleansing' these areas of Italians. But there were specific pressures both political and social that clearly applied to the Italians.

I have gained useful insights for this study from reflection on how, in other parts of the world, symbolic acts and joint commemorations have been constructed so that reconciliation is at the centre of complex and necessary practices. Reference to South Africa's Day of Reconciliation on December the 16th as well as to the district six museum in Cape Town ( Mceachern, 1998) seems apposite. In relation to Istria and Fiume one must consider what happened and what remained 'after the violence' – to quote the title of a fine book by Triulzi – and one must deal with a traumatic past of repressions. Sometimes the practices that have produced Museums and that in turn are produced by them and rotate around them, can be a way of coming to terms with a traumatic past without becoming imprisoned by it. Recourse to a concept like that of 'source community' may help to bring into focus the essence of the museum as a source of identity both for the community that produced the items conserved in museums or collected them (a community as a source) and their descendants (Peers, and Brown: 2003). In short, one must think about such practices as a dual movement, a two-sided relationship, in constant dialogue between museum curators, even though they have been solicited or directed to various extents by politics, and successive generations. Finally, one should not underestimate the outcomes of dialogue and research undertaken by museums such as the museum-archive in its dialogue with its Croatian counterpart.

### **A lost fatherland: the Fiume Archive-Museum in Rome.**

The Yugoslav communist regime rewrote history after 1945 as if from year zero, and, going back in time, it systematically cancelled everything that did not correspond to the ideological vision propounded as the 'democratic and progressive' truth . In Fiume, everything was brutally erased, beginning with the symbols that for centuries, under all political dominations, had marked the city's identity: its coat of arms, the two-headed eagle and the Latin motto, the flag of the city, its patron saints, all place names (not just the few introduced by fascism), and so on. Furthermore, in 1948, a Yugoslav government decree unified Fiume with the Croatian Susak. The new Rijeka was to have nothing to do with the historic Fiume, which had never existed. Only the Croatian Rijeka had ever done so, and removed from it, moreover, was anything that might disturb the coherent ideological rewriting of its history, such as, for example, the great tradition of Croatian Catholicism. In short, it was necessary not only to erase the historic Italian presence in the city and to reduce the multiethnic and multicultural Fiume to Rijeka, but also to recast Croatian Rijeka according to the new Marxist-Leninist canons (Stelli:2010).

This passage immediately furnishes – *a posteriori* – an interpretative key to the standpoint of the founders of the Fiume Archive- Museum.



Fig. 1: Overview of the presentation at the Fiume Museum. Photo: Ilaria Porciani.

The museum was created as an act of exhumation, reassembly, reconstruction and recovery of a memory and an identity, but also of a lost materiality. It is a place of memory that starts from objects and fragments saved from destruction. These are the things that remained after the loss, and they can be described as relics. Significantly, the museum does not contain only manufactured items. Stones, soil, even water from the Gulf of Quarnaro and the River Eneo are integral parts of the exhibition and of the discourse on the roots of the national belonging. Stones are also present outside the Museum as monuments. This is the case of the Karst boulder taken from the battlefields of 1915-18 placed in front of the Casa della bambina Giuliano Dalmata, the house of the little girl from Dalmatia and Venezia Giulia and unveiled on the fourth of November 1961, the day after the ‘day of victory’. Equally central, dominant and constant is the presence of death, essentially (but not only) as bereavement to be assimilated, or rather sublimated into a religious process narrated as an ordeal: an educative death, a *morte educante* (teaching death), as in the title of an important article written by Marino Raicich, of Fiume origin. Fiume (D’Annunzio’s ‘Fiume of Italy’) is at the centre of the discourse but subsumes the entire story of exile and death. It comes as no surprise when the visitor is confronted in the first room of the museum with a caption describing World War I as the ‘War of Redemption’.

The website explicitly states that the museum revolves around a *sacrario* – a ‘sacred memorial’ – commemorating the people from Venezia Giulia and Dalmatia ‘fallen for their Italian fatherland’. The objects that immediately confront the visitors most succinctly and symbolically recount the story of the nation: the soil, the language, the religion. And, of course, the flags and their colours replicated in numerous forms, until the last Italian flag taken away from Fiume.

Even before one's eyes dazzled by the bright light of early afternoon in Rome have adjusted to the gloom of the museum, one sees stones and soil, with mess-tins from the First World War and a cross. To the right is the statue of St. Vito, the Fiuman saint (in truth, recovered not from the city on the Quarnaro but from the first church dedicated to the patron saint and constructed in the Julian-Dalmatian village of Rome). It partially conceals a 1924 manifesto extolling the fascist annexation and Mussolini. To the left is an enormous, looming bust of Dante, the father of the language and so influential in forging the identity of the Italians, but also the figure to whom the Società Dante Alighieri, so decisive (on several occasions) in mobilizing the irredentists, was dedicated.



Fig. 2: The bust of Dante Alighieri. Photo: Ilaria Porciani.





Fig. 4: A fragment from Fiume's eagle symbol. Photo: Ilaria Porciani.

On the ground floor, there are other stones, this time engraved: fragments chiselled from the 'indeficienter' inscribed in the Fiume coat of arms, an enormous bas-relief map of the city of Fiume and its gulf created by E. Bombig in 1899 and one of the first donations to the museum by his niece Maria Bombig exiled in Varese; a fragment from Fiume's eagle symbol set on the civic tower demolished by the Yugoslav occupants after their entry into the city on 3 May 1943;

and then street numbers also bearing the Italian names of streets and alleys recalling the relationship with Venice: Viale delle Brazza, Calle dei Pescatori, Salita del Ricovero; the memory of Romanity – Calle Arco Romano – the relationship with the patron saint Piazza San Vito – and the D’Annunzian epic: Viale dei Legionari. Toponymy in Fiume (as in many other countries of central Europe) underwent violence, and exhibiting fragments of the Italian names subsequently banned serves to affirm and revitalize memory. The museum’s curators date the donation of the street numbers with Italian toponymy to the period following the collapse of the former Yugoslavia, when fragments still remaining in less frequented and dilapidated back lanes of Fiume were recovered.

Death – as we shall see in the conclusions – is constantly present, and it is a recurrent *leitmotif* throughout the entire museum.

### **Objects telling a story: from the most ancient times to the ‘Diet of Nobody’**

The narrative proceeds in chronological order interspersed with thematic parentheses. The initial texts are very modest and indicative of an evident shortage of means that has long marked the museum, recognized as an archive of exceptional historical interest and therefore endowed with public funds in 2004. They deal with history over a long period. One of the first captions briefly alludes to the existence of the Illyrian tribes of the Giapidi and Liburni who “from the most ancient times had inhabited the region bordering on the Quarnaro when the legions of Caius Sempronius Tullius began the conquest (129 BC) which was completed under Octavian. A wall was constructed from the foothills of the Julian Alps to the River Eneo in defence of Roman Istria”. Other captions inform the visitor that Tarsatica was already the centre of the Liburnia when the barbarians invaded in the sixth century, ‘without, however, overwhelming the coastal towns and the strongholds of the interior, which preserved their freedom’. In around 800, Charlemagne destroyed Tarsatica, but later, in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the ‘terra sancti Viti ad Flumen’ arose from its ruins.

The tension between the Latins of the coast and the Slavs of the interior as stressed, for example, by the current curator Marino Micich in his study on Fiume, does not seem emphasised in the museum, even if – as Ernesto Sestan pointed out – the Roman characteristics of the area were probably able to survive because the civil inferiority of the Croatian dominators meant that the dominated were left with substantial autonomy (Sestan: 42).

Meanwhile constituted in the twelfth century – as in the rest of Italy – was the Commune, and after various vicissitudes Fiume passed to the Habsburgs in 1465. The commune grew in strength and the official language was curial Latin, while the populace spoke the Venetian vernacular.

Very little is said about early modern times, nor about the eighteenth and nineteenth century history of Fiume – and partly Istria and Dalmatia – and no reference is made to the complex coexistence of various ethnic groups that Ernesto Sestan emphasised in his book on Venezia Giulia. This book, it is worth mentioning, was extremely non-partisan and made no concession to the then virulent nationalist rhetoric, despite being originally written in 1947 at the invitation of De Gasperi to oppose arguments against the tendentious memoirs of the Split lawyer Josip Smoljaka, foreign minister under Marshal Tito.

Glance at some document on the demographic composition of the city, at the surnames of the patrician families or the citizenship registers; you will see a variegated inventory of surnames, Italian, Croatian or of indefinable origin, nothing comparable with the impression of authentic Italianness that one gains, upon conducting the same investigation, in the Istrian towns, or even Trieste, or with the evident coexistence of Germans and Italians and Slovenes in Gorizia, in relation to different social categories. In Fiume the tangle of nationalities seems to bear no relationship to the social status of individuals: one finds Italian, Slavs, Germans among the patriciate, among the middle class, and among the plebes. Even more than the Triestians in Trieste, the Fiumans in Fiume had to feel essentially, entirely Fiuman and to be bilingual or trilingual according to relations among the towns, although the German influence seems rather weak compared with Italian and Slavic (Sestan, 1997: 67).

The museum does not insist on these aspects, but prefers to introduce the history of the city with the aid of some eighteenth-century views and its large collection of passports from the legacy of Anthonio Allazzetta – a Fiuman – donated to the museum by his sons Amedeo and Anteo, by the 1960s successful professionals in Genoa. A series of advertisements and photographs of shops and cafes, theatres and clubs provide an overview of Fiume's commercial life and of Italian sociability in the city.

Further references to the history of Istria concern the *Dieta del Nessuno* (Diet of Nobody), the episode commonly interpreted as the strong assertion of Italianness. In the crucial year of Italian unification – 1861 – as the Vienna government awaited the election of deputies from the Istrian *Landtag*, the latter protested twice by nominating 'Nessuno' (nobody). The episode was a moment of great visibility for the Italian propensity of the Istrians.

Instead, no mention is made of 1848, even though it was a turning point, since it was the year in which the Croats occupied the city. As Ernesto Sestan explains with his usual precision: 'they resorted to force in order to assert their claims on Fiume, taking advantage of a situation that made them paladins of the Viennese government against the Hungarians of Budapest.' The *Memorie* of Carlos De Franceschi, who witnessed the events (Sestan: 84 -85), emphasise the class-based nature of the ethnic oppositions that was by those years already visible. The Croatian peasants accompanied by their women joined the soldiers as they entered the city to pillage it. They came holding large bags, and went first to the expensive shops on the main street. On the other hand, the hostility of the Italian population was directed against the Croatian gymnasium, the institution that in the eyes of the citizenry represented the principal factor of Slavization.

The city was occupied by the Croats until 1867, when the Fiumans welcomed Hungary's protection by averting the risk of falling under Croatia's domination, and they were compensated to the extent that they continued to enjoy some form of autonomy since the city never lost its status of separate body. In the thirty years between Fiume's re-incorporation into Hungary to the celebrations of the millennium, the identity of the citizens was essentially hybrid: they all felt themselves to be "as much Fiuman as Hungarian citizens" (Volpi, 51-3). But at the end of the century, amid greater Hungarian centralization, conflicts arose between Italians and Hungarians. They centred on the gymnasium when the governor became president of the textbooks control committee, and the teachers were subjected to closer supervision.

### **From Italian Nationalism to a 'Vain Hope'**

The section devoted to the school is relatively large in both the museum and the archive. It consists mainly of legacies of educational material, often produced by women, most of whom

were primary school mistresses or at any rate teachers, who continued to cultivate the memory of the exodus through teaching activities which involved their pupils during the years of exile (Micich 2010). Particularly well exemplified by exhibits is the activity of the Hungarian schools. Gemma Harasim, the Fiuman teacher who was a contributor to the authoritative journal *La Voce* and wife of the eminent pedagogist Lucio Lombardo Radice, highlighted the distinctive nature of Fiume's educational system: after the Italian elementary schools, the children had to attend the 'city schools' in which both the German and Hungarian languages were compulsory. The languages were "imposed by the government, which had created a fictitious need for them through their introduction in all the institutions dependent upon it". But even at a time of incipient tensions, Gemma Harasim emphasised in 1909 in the pedagogic periodical *I Nuovi Doveri*, that this trilingualism could be "a spur to mental activity, a reinforcement of memory, a healthy intellectual exercise" (quoted in Sistoli Paoli 2010: 23-56).

Given its story, it comes as no surprise to find that the museum closely follows the history of Fiuman nationalism, starting from the first years of the century.

As one of the explanatory panels states fierce polemics ensued between the Italian and Hungarian newspapers. The commune opposed the Hungarian schools with its own Italian ones, and numerous patriotic clubs were created, such as the *Casino Patriottico*, the *Circolo Italia*, the *Club Alpino Fiumano*, and the *Canottieri Eneo*. The periodical *La Giovane Fiume* was founded.

In 1907 also founded was *l'Italia all'Estero*, which forcefully denounced rapid Magyarization and the Hungarian nationalist policy (Volpi 2003: 47). In 1912, the *Giovane Fiume* society – whose activities are documented in the museum with objects and flags – organized a pilgrimage from the Julian towns to the tomb of Dante in Ravenna, where Icilio Bacci made a speech to Italianness. "The association [the caption states with an emotive use of the present tense] is dissolved, Bacci is exiled, and the government introduces the state police so loathed by the Italians of Fiume."

The D'Annunzian phase is rightly preceded in the museum by a lesser known episode that also introduces the theme of the aspiration to a free state of Fiume: in October 1918, in fact, the Fiume deputy Andrea Ossoinack had demanded that the separate body of Fiume be granted self-determination. But most of the exhibits consist of photographs of volunteers and Roman 'legionaries', of funeral ceremonies in honour of the victims of the 'Christmas of Blood', of proclamations, orations, and D'Annunzian texts, as well as newspapers and banners that convey the entire rhetoric of the 'Fiume of Italy' preached by the poet. Of enormous size – but partly concealed by the already-mentioned statue of Saint Vito – is the poster of January 1924 addressing the "Citizens of Fiume!" immediately after the Nettuno Convention which completed definition of the frontiers between the kingdom of the Croatian Serbs and Slovenes and the Kingdom of Italy. This gigantic poster, celebrating not only D'Annunzio but also the Roman genius of Mussolini, was signed by various political parties (*Partito Nazionale Fascista*, *Partito Popolare* and *Partito Nazionale Democratico*) and movements such as the *Arditi*, but also by such diverse associations as the *Gioventù Cattolica* and the Masonic lodges, the Red Cross and the *Dame della Carità*, as well as by the federations of teachers and workers, and organizations like the *Club Alpino Italiano*. The poster concludes by declaiming: "We hereupon raise our first salute to our Dead, and in their glorious name we pledge our endeavour to work for their ordained greatness". The rhetoric on Fiume – here as elsewhere in the museum – is that of nationalism and of fascism:

“There is no point recalling the vicissitudes of our anguished and faithful waiting. Our thoughts instead go to those radiant youths who gave their lives for the glory of this day”.



Fig. 5: “Citizens of Fiume!”. Photo: Ilaria Porciani.

The sequence concludes with an even more dramatic poster: that of 15 June 1946, which recalls the forced abandonment and the fear at the onset of the Yugoslavian occupation: “The women and infants of Fiume implore you: Defend us! Save us! We can withstand no longer. Spies, police terror, arrests, also the anti-fascists struck down”. Thus introduced is the photographic sequence relative to the Yugoslav occupation.

Considerable space is devoted to the often-neglected story of the free State of Fiume. The story is told with the help of documents and objects, engravings, announcements of public rallies, newspapers and photographs of Riccardo Zanella, head of the Fiuman autonomist party, and of its leading representative, Mario Blasich (1878-1945), a doctor and politician, deserter from the Habsburg army who fought with the Italians in the First World War. The Fiuman autonomists were regarded as extremely dangerous by the Yugoslaves, who feared their great influence. Blasich was killed, and so were other leaders of the movement.

Also testifying to the protracted campaign for a free state of Fiume rooted in the Habsburgian privileges and the city's history is a poster of the Movement for the Free State of Fiume placed next to a flag on a pole which protrudes until it almost grazes the visitor. This poster, which after the Second World War, appealed to America, stated there could be "no doubt as to the honesty of the America fatally become our protectress". The struggle to maintain Fiume's status as a free city was doomed to failure, however.

Unfortunately Minister De Gasperi must fight his battle with his hands tied because all the parties that form the government coalition support the rights of our city. He has therefore had to start his defence of the Italian rights from the Wilson line, rather than from the much more legally valid basis of the Treaty of Rapallo. Hence our cause is compromised from the outset. Nevertheless, I believe that not all hope is lost. [letter addressed to deputy Andrea Ossineck exhibited in the Museum]

In conclusion, a panel questions what has been termed "A Vain Hope":

Of no use are the desperate efforts of the CLN in Pola and Trieste as they battle both locally and in Paris and Rome, where main points of effective support are the Julian Committee and the Dalmatian Assistance Committee. The 'market' among the great powers is in fact already settled. After Fiume, Zara and the islands, allocated at the outset to Yugoslavia, it is the Istrians that, with the 'French line', bear the weight of the sword of Brennus thrown on the scales of Italian reparations.



Fig. 6: *Foibe* in Istria. Photo: Ilaria Porciani.

The tone of the captions is obviously impassioned, and the language resounds with the painfilled Fiuman rhetoric. The photographs of the *foibe* bear an eloquent title: “Genocide”.

Death is constantly present. It is present in the rather few photographs of corpses recovered from the *foibe* and laid on the ground while waiting to be identified. But it is also present in the photographic documentation that recalls the departure – on the ship *Toscana* – of the coffin containing the mortal remains of Nazario Sauro, carried away at the time of the exodus. Sauro

had deserted from the Habsburg navy and been executed. He was considered a martyr in Italian Fiume. The caption is striking. “Images of the exodus. The dead depart as well”.



Fig. 7: “Images of the exodus. The dead depart as well”. Photo: Ilaria Porciani.

Death is also expressly narrated as holocaust. It is present in D’Annunzio’s speeches, in the celebration of the holocaust, in the depiction of Istria as encircled by a crown of thorns, and also in a series of recent paintings, not all of artistic value but nevertheless messages of pain. Other panels narrate the composite history of abandonment and loss also in terms of monumental landscapes and cultural heritage. “What These People Have Left” is the title of a section that emphasises the Roman and Venetian architecture in Fiume and Istria.

## The donors

The objects taken with them by exiles were surprising at times, and not always small. The DVD *Vivere in Esilio. Memorie del Villaggio Giuliano-Dalmata di Roma* edited by Emiliano Loria and produced in 2010 by the *Associazione per la Cultura Fiumana Istriana e Dalmata* of Lazio shows the abundance of household utensils left in a Trieste warehouse by those who departed. These are objects of everyday life, even very modest ones like small implements, but also bedside tables, desks – and even an astonishingly large quantity of entirely normal chairs, certainly of no great value, and today one might find it surprising to see what the exiles took the trouble to take with them. Evidently, there was a strong desire not to leave anything behind, to take everything away that was transportable. These are objects that testify to a tenacious attachment which is difficult to consider coolly. They are totems, tokens of painful abandonment of beloved places, and of the desire to cling to things.

It is perhaps solely in light of this only apparently incongruous set of items that one can understand the meaning – their anthropological dimension as donations – of other objects either exhibited in the archive-museum or conserved in its depository. There are objects of everyday life, children's toys, small things that would well fit into Ohran Pamuk's museum of innocence. But there are also items that the curators had removed from the sight of the public because they were considered as too distressing: of these, I was shown the shirt of a *foibe* victim whose family was allowed to exhume his corpse – an extraordinary concession. We can observe here an extreme form of martyrology, painful and harsh. Although the contexts are very different, it is difficult not to think of the shirts of the Risorgimento martyrs exhibited in some museums.

The book of donors, together with the announcements published in one of the refugee magazines, *Difesa Adriatica* (no. 14, 7-14 June 1964), reveals an extensive network – 375 names for the first six years – which has enabled the archive-museum to assemble all these disparate objects, as well as bequests of documents, books, periodicals, and flysheets; indeed, in some cases, entire libraries on Fiuman topics. Significantly, the list of donations was partly published in the Fiuman press. The archive-museum as a space open to the public, with its 500 square metres of expository space, the library containing around 5000 volumes and periodicals, and an archive of at least 40,000 documents, have at the same time constituted a point of reference and a pole of attraction for the Fiuman exiles. This movement has interwoven with another one of voluntary participation in the purchase of the museum's spaces. At the time of the dissolution of the *Ente Nazionale Lavoratori Rimpatriati e Profughi*, one of its members, Oscar Fabietti, anticipated the sum required to acquire a space in which to collect donations and documents, together with the *Associazione Libero Comune di Fiume*. Subsequently, it was the refugees who made 'gifts' carefully itemized in *La Voce di Fiume*, the magazine of the free commune in exile.

Involved in both cases were exiles of different political persuasions and belonging to different associations. The resulting panorama is so diversified that the 'leopard skin' metaphor can be aptly used to describe it. It would have been almost impossible for me to find my way through this thicket of associations of similar names without the useful historical text *Sintesi storica delle associazioni istriane, fiumane e dalmate in Italia e delle associazioni italiane nei territori ceduti dal 1947 ad oggi* published in 2011. This enabled me to draw a map from the first associations to the one founded in 2000 and called the *Mailing List Histria*, which amongst other things has promoted initiatives relative to litigation on abandoned property. But the list is still incomplete, even though it comprises 29 large associations (affiliated to which are a number of smaller ones like *Fameia Capodistriana*, *Cittanovese*, *Ruvignisa*, *Umaghese*) and 91 periodicals in total. This gives a good idea of the fragmentation, exaggerated localism, and frequent litigiousness of these initiatives.

Of course, the amount of donors, though substantial, is small compared with the huge numbers of the diaspora. Especially if one takes into consideration from Fiume alone, 90% of the inhabitants, equal to around 38,000 people, were exiled, whilst the overall figure for the Istrian, Julian and Dalmatian exodus is much greater: it amounts to the around 220,000 people who went to Italy, to which must be added the approximately 80,000 who found refuge in America and Australia, mostly through the International Refugee Organisation (Micich 2010: 23-43).

The register of donations allows one to draw a map which encompasses Venice and Veneto and large parts of the composite geography of the diaspora: Rome where hospitality was found at though in harsh conditions, by 12,000 Fiumans, Istrians and Dalmatians, and then Florence,

Varese, Genoa, Modena, Bologna, Bolzano, and many other cities besides (Orlić 2007:33 .68). By contrast, entirely absent from the museum is the extra-European exodus, the huge number of ‘*partiti*’ (those who left) who took nothing with them or at least have donated nothing to the archive-museum, men and women who settled in an ‘elsewhere’ distant from Italy. And also absent are the ‘*rimasti*’, those who preferred or were forced to remain in Fiume.

Individuals are present, but also associations, some of them headquartered in Istria. Hence a certain relationship with the *rimasti* continues. By means of the register of donations it is possible at least partly to reconstruct the small constellation of the Fiuman leagues, and of the various associations, from the Eneo rowing club to musical ones (for instance, the *Associazione Tartini* which bore the name of an illustrious Istrian musician, although he is usually considered Italian), the Fiume section of the *Lega Nazionale e l’Associazione del Libero Comune in Esilio* with offices in Padua. The *Libero Comune in Esilio* – an institution symbolically headed by a ‘mayor’ as if to confirm the aspiration to government of the city – publishes the periodical *La Voce di Fiume*, which serves as a link between *partiti* and *rimasti*.

It is also worthwhile considering the issue of gender. Out of 375 donors, a considerable number – 102 according to a calculation made by the museum and available in its archive – were women. In fact, the number increases if one inspects the lists of the donors more closely. In many cases the women act as intermediaries for the donations of the libraries of male exiles, under whose names they are registered. These women have enabled the museum to acquire books, documents, libraries, and materials from family archives often consisting of manuscripts, newspaper clippings, or photographs: all of which can be seen in the Archive-Museum or have been stored in drawers and cupboards.

This aspect prompts consideration of the memory conservation practices adopted by the first museums of the Risorgimento, where it was mainly the wives, daughters, and sisters of patriots who lovingly preserved their objects, relics, and keepsakes and then donated them to the museums. The works of Massimo Baioni have well evidenced the sacred value of items which ‘scientists’ – scholars of Risorgimento history – would find difficult to include among historical testimony. These were only not manuscripts and documents but also items with a strong affective charge that instead belonged in the sphere of private sacredness. They were small objects: handkerchiefs, spectacles, buttons, locks of hair, and even teeth – as in Mantua – or bloodstained shirts, which were transformed into testimonies of martyrdom, secular relics of the religion of the fatherland. These women often constructed a discourse intensely interconnecting family and nation; and they often had the honour of seeing their surnames inscribed in the national pantheon. Here – more than a century later – close analogies appear.

Women also transmit objects of memory, sometimes also of domestic and apparently exclusively private memory, but whose significance in this context is striking because they testify to the abandonment of the country but also of the home, to transit through reception centres or the sheds and then to finding again, after a long time, and far from Istria, the protection of four walls.

I have mentioned objects owned by the museum but not displayed to the public. The curator explained to me that some objects and images that might upset children on school visits to the museum had been removed from the sight of visitors. Only after talking to him for a long time did he show me, for example, the bloodstained shirt of a *foibe* victim or fragments of gravestones.

Nevertheless, photographs of lacerated bodies recovered from the *foibe* are very visible in the entry hall.

Absent instead is another genre of domestic items that could depict family or social life but also the symbolic sphere; namely food, so important for constructing the sense of home – and of the homeland – and the national, or regional, identity. Food, so replete with identitarian signs, to which Francesca Angeleri and Daniela Piu devoted in 2009 an interesting DVD entitled *Magna Istria*, is absent, and so are the recipes and the dialect names of the cherished possessions left behind by the *partiti*.

## Conclusions

What is exhibited in the museum is only part of a more complex discourse: an elementary narrative through images and objects that has interwoven with more detailed research, documentation, collection and verification of sources. But also of popularization: consider the involvement of schools from Rome and Lazio, and the organization of student trips to Istria connected with a visit to the Risiera di San Sabba, the concentration camp after World War II also used to house exiles from Istria.

The volume of the journal *Fiume dall'Esilio al Ritorno. Cinquant'Anni di Attività della Società di Studi Fiumani 1960-2010* 1960-2010 published in 2010 allows us to follow all the stages of the research activity, undertaken primarily by the *Società di Studi Fiumani* and by *Associazione per la Cultura Fiumana Istriana e Dalmata nel Lazio*, and the *Federazione delle Associazioni degli Esuli Istriani*. This work should also be compared with studies on these topics by scholars at several Italian universities, often associated with the University of Trieste, on the one hand, and research centres in Istria, primarily that of Rovigno, on the other. It is there that more extensive and substantial studies have been produced, while the archive-museum in Rome instead engages mostly in the recovery of fragments of narrative and the detailed analysis of individual cases. But its activity is important in collecting documents on specific aspects of Istrian-Dalmatian and Fiuman history, as testified by articles in the journal *Fiume. Rivista di Studi Adriatici*. Note the title, which is intended to mark continuity with the six-monthly journal *Fiume* produced by the first *Società di Studi Fiumani* and published in Fiume between 1923 and 1940.

However, it seems to me that the most interesting aspect of the activity of the Archive-Museum is its endeavour to move beyond fierce acrimony and establish a dialogue that creates new opportunities for analysis, study and knowledge. And this is all the more possible with the new generation. Of particular importance are the joint initiatives – unthinkable only a few decades ago – undertaken in Fiume-Rijeka.

Marino Micich was born of exiles from Zara in Rome. He told me that when he was a child he asked his father to help him understand who he was, given that he spoke dialect at home, Serbo-Croat with other exiles, Albanian with his mother, and Italian with his schoolmates. His personal story well explains why he chose as an epigraph for his chapter in the book entitled *Fiume nel Secolo dei Grandi Mutamenti* a quotation from Miklós Vársárhelyi, one of the survivors of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956:

My parents were Hungarian, my wet-nurse Croatian, my teachers Italian, my governess German, my schoolfriends and playmates Fiuman, therefore Italian, Croatian, Slovene, Istrian and Dalmatian. The first syllables that I heard were Hungarian, the first song Slavic,

the first sentences Italian, but among ourselves we all spoke our gentle Fiuman dialect[...]. I knew Hungarian, but I learned to count in Italian. My native city was a multicultural cradle which influenced me for the whole of my life (Micich 1999).

Conferences and seminars on Fiume have been organized in Italy and in Croatia, in partnership with other institutions, most notably the Lazio Region. Significantly, in relation to one of the poles that have advanced the claims of the exiles, seminars have been organized in collaboration with the rightist group *Azione Universitaria* created in 1996 as a section of the right wing *Alleanza Nazionale* party. The reference is to the seminars held at the Sapienza University of Rome in 1998 on Italian cultural identity in Istria, Fiume and Dalmatia from Campofornio to the present day, D'Annunzio the politician (2000), and World War II in Venezia Giulia. By contrast there is no collaboration with Italian universities other than La Sapienza, although projects have begun with the foundation of the Vittoriale – the villa on Lake Garda where Gabriele D'Annunzio lived – the University of Toulouse-Le Mirail, or more recently the Academy of Hungary.

The main international initiatives were launched in 1995 with a conference on 'Fiume Autonomy' (1896 – 1947) and 'Riccardo Zanella' (Trieste 1995), organized in collaboration with the popular (not state) university of Trieste. Organized in the following year was the first Rijeka-Fiume conference, with the cautious title *Itinerari Culturali*, followed in 1999 by another conference held in Rijeka-Fiume, 'Fiume in the Century of Great Changes' and by an important initiative on 'Fiume, A Crossroads of People and Cultural Itineraries' (Rome 2005) in which Claudio Magris and Laszlo Csorba participated.

In her broad account, Pamela Ballinger recalls the new interest in the issue of the *foibe* due to the appeal by judge Petitto, published in 1995, intended to find further witnesses to the Italian massacres in Slovenia. In the context of those years, in an Italy also marked by the Priebke affair, the project was mooted to create in Rome a museum of genocides, including the Inquisition, the Holocaust, and the extermination of Native Americans. However, this project was never truly developed. The debate on the *foibe* – Ballinger suggests – should be understood within this context. It was then that the discussion on the specificity of the *foibe* developed, with different opinions on their nature as ethnic cleansing – as historian Gabriele De Rosa suggested – or on their complex long-run background. It is difficult to put debates on display in museums. However, one should note that the different voices of this debate are absent in the museum.

The endeavour by the Archive-Museum to engage in dialogue with Slovenia and Croatian historiography is nevertheless useful. Acquiring a not exclusively Italian point of view and opening the door to scientific cooperation certainly does not mean forgetting the traumas experienced on either side, across a time-span that is difficult to reduce to the years of the Second World War and which more correctly should also include the previous decades – as has been suggested from several scholars. In my view, an activity of this kind cannot open the way to a shared memory, but through knowledge, analysis of the sources, and dialogue it may foster debate and open the way to reconciliation.

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