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The reception of the Istrian-Dalmatian refugees between
history and memory

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In this space, I just want to name my 84-year-old grandmother Anna. She was just seven years old at the time of most of the sources I read, and I constantly thought about her. I am grateful you can see this thesis done, nonna!

Abbreviations

ACB: Archivio Comunale di Bologna

ACS: Archivio Centrale dello Stato

ASB: Archivio di Stato di Bologna

ASP: Archivio di Stato di Parma

FG: Fondazione Gramsci

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the reception of the Istrian-Dalmatian refugees in post-war Italy, with a focus on the planned exodus from Pola in the first month of 1947. Many exiles' accounts recount instances of unwelcoming attitudes towards them, in particular those coming from the Italian communists. The most known episode is the "train of infamy", an act of hostility perpetrated by communist railway workers in Bologna. The incident turned into a "lieu de mémoire". The aim of the thesis is to reconstruct this episode, place it in the story of the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus, and find connections with similar episodes. Attention is then devoted to the political debate around Pola's exodus and the actual stance of the communists on it. The research combines contemporary sources, which are the 1947 newspapers and archival documents, with memory sources, such as witnesses' accounts, books, and magazines produced by the exiles' community. The historical reconstruction of the "train of infamy", however, faces inconsistencies and a lack of primary sources, opening further research questions.

Introduction

There is a non-functioning wall clock on the facade of Bologna train station. It always marks 10:25; it has been marking 10.25 for forty-three years. This is a not lack of maintenance: the clock stopped in the morning of August 2, 1980, due to the explosion of a bomb in the station. This event is known as the Bologna massacre, part of a “Strategy of tension”. Therefore, the broken clock became a symbol of the tragedy: the decision to fix it in August 2001 sparked controversies, and after five days, it was once again stopped at 10:25.¹ The clock became a “lieu de mémoire”;² its story has a mnemonic value for the relatives of Bologna massacre victims and for the city in general; it is described as the “clock of memory” (“orologio della memoria”)³.

This narrative, however, is flawed: the clock was not damaged as a result of the bomb; it has not been marking 10:25 for forty-three years, except five days. The clock was operational; it was occasionally stopped at 10:25 during the massacre commemorations, also serving as a photo opportunity for the media. After the 1996 ceremony, the clock could not be restarted and remained out of order primarily due to a lack of funds for its maintenance.⁴ Five years later, in 2001, that broken clock was already a symbol, and restarting it “after 31 years” was perceived as an outrage to the memory of the massacre; a tradition had been invented.⁵

The clock’s story is not the only “lieu de memoire” connected to Bologna train station. The station, like many other stations, has multiple plaques on its walls. There is a plaque listing the names of the eighty-five Bologna massacre victims, of course. On platform 1, however, one of the several plaques recounts another story:

During 1947, convoys carrying exiles from Istria, Fiume and Dalmatia to Italy went through this station. The exiles were Italians forced to leave their homeplaces due to the violence of the Yugoslavian national-communist regime and to pay, as innocent victims, for the burden and consequences of the war of aggression undertaken by fascism. Bologna quickly shifted from an attitude

¹ Anna Lisa Tota, ‘Tra simbolo e funzione: l’orologio della memoria’, *Il Mulino* 23, no. 4 (2002): 630–32, <https://doi.org/10.1402/1325>.

² Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire’, *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 7–24, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520>.

³ Tota, ‘Tra simbolo e funzione’, 636.

⁴ Tota, 634.

⁵ Tota, 636–37; Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *L’invenzione della tradizione* (Torino: Einaudi, 1987).

of initial incomprehension to a welcome that is in its traditions, turning many of those exiles into its citizens. Today, Bologna wants to remember those dramatic moments in national history.⁶

The “attitude of initial incomprehension” refers to an episode known as the “train of infamy”. This story gained a pivotal role in the memory of the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus. This “lieu de memoire”, as all the others, deserves an inquiry. The “lieux de mémoire”, indeed, are the ways in which collective memory framed the past in relation to the present, not a scientific reconstruction of the past. This thesis seeks to reconstruct that historical event and then situate it within the broader context of the Istrian-Dalmatian exiles' reception and memory.

The theme of the thesis emerges from an interest in memory politics. The choice fell on the “Giorno del ricordo” and the issues around its origins and development. This Italian memorial date, on February 10, was established in 2004 to commemorate the foibe massacres and the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus.⁷ Those are two distinct historical events that occurred in the context of the Upper Adriatic borderland, or the “Eastern border” from the Italian perspective. The choice of a joint memorial date put in strict relation the foibe and the exodus, intending them as two phases of an ethnic cleansing plan against Italians. The foibe had an impact on the exodus, but the historiography refuses to categorise the two as part of an “ethnic cleansing” plan;⁸ this category, nevertheless, is constantly

⁶ “Nel corso del 1947 da questa stazione passarono i convogli che portavano in Italia esuli istriani, fiumani e dalmati: italiani costretti ad abbandonare i loro luoghi dalla violenza del regime nazional-comunista jugoslavo e a pagare, vittime innocenti, il peso e la conseguenza della guerra di aggressione intrapresa dal fascismo. Bologna seppe passare rapidamente da un atteggiamento di iniziale incomprendione a un'accoglienza che è nelle sue tradizioni, molti di quegli esuli facendo suoi cittadini. Oggi vuole ricordare quei momenti drammatici della storia nazionale”.

⁷ Tullia Catalan, ‘Il Giorno del ricordo fra celebrazioni, sguardi esterni e stereotipi’, *Italia Contemporanea*, no. 296 (August 2021): 124–44, <https://doi.org/10.3280/IC2021-296006>; Raoul Pupo et al., ‘Giorno del ricordo e divulgazione storica’, *Contemporanea* 24, no. 2 (2021): 305–35, <https://doi.org/10.1409/100697>; Federico Tenca Montini, ‘Confini stridenti. Nazionalismo antislavo e giorno del ricordo’, *Zapruder* 36 (2015): 126–32.

⁸ Pamela Ballinger, *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans*, Princeton Paperbacks (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2003), 282–83, <https://press.princeton.edu/books/paperback/9780691086972/history-in-exile>; Erminio Fonzo, ‘Use and Abuse of History and Memory: The Istrian-Dalmatian Exodus and the Current Refugee Flows’, *Journal of Mediterranean Knowledge* 2, no. 1 (1 June 2017): 66; Eric Gobetti, *E allora le foibe?* (Bari-Roma: Laterza, 2021), 37–46; Raoul Pupo, ‘Due vie per riconciliare il passato delle nazioni? Dalle Commissioni storico culturali italo-slovena e italo-croata alle giornate memoriali’, *Italia Contemporanea*, no. 282 (22 December 2016): 253, <https://doi.org/10.3280/ic282-0a2>; Tenca Montini, ‘Confini stridenti. Nazionalismo antislavo e giorno del ricordo’, 131; Mattia Vallerin, ‘La memoria delle foibe e dell’esodo giuliano-dalmata. Le rivendicazioni della destra italiana e il dibattito nelle istituzioni europee’, *Italia Contemporanea*, 2018, 111–12, <https://doi.org/10.3280/IC2018-288004>; Louise Zamparutti, ‘Brava Gente and the Counter (Re)Public of Italy: Constructing the Foibe as a National Symbol’, *Romance Studies* 35, no. 1 (2 January 2017): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02639904.2017.1299913>.

repeated in the public discourse, endorsed by the highest institutional figures in Italy. There is a problematic relationship between historiography, nationalism, and memory politics about Upper Adriatic history; the first chapter partly addresses this issue, drawing a short history of this border area.

Out of the foibe-and-exodus nexus, the choice went to the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus in itself, trying to decouple the stories of exiles in the longer postwar period from the foibe massacres, entangled in the logic of World War II. The thesis deals with the narratives of the exodus and the memories of the exiles' community. The exodus is a complex subject, a migratory movement over a relatively large time span (1943-1956, and marginally later) and from multiple, distant locations. The second chapter is devoted to defining the coordinates of the exodus, its waves, and its motivations. It is also important to place it in the broader context of the other migratory movements in the "century of refugees".

The exodus of almost all the population from the Istrian city of Pola presents unique features, and it is further investigated in the third chapter. This wave left incomparably more sources than the others, both in the contemporary political debate and the development of the exodus' memory. The photos of the "Toscana" ship carrying Pola citizens to Venice and Ancona are the most widely used on the "Giorno del ricordo". The Italian government was deeply involved in the exodus' planning, and the reception of Pola's refugees received substantial media coverage.

Pola's exodus was ongoing in the days of the Italian signing of the World War II peace treaty on February 10, 1947. The Italian political debate of those days focused on the two events. On one hand, the peace was framed in an almost unanimous climate of national mourning. On the other hand, the exodus provided contentious arguments for the anti-communist narratives: the majority of Pola's citizens were leaving in front of the prospect of living in a socialist country. Faced with a challenging circumstance, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) adopted a distinct framing of Pola's exodus; the fourth chapter analyses this debate.

A preliminary reading of the sources of the time reveals elements of discrepancy with the current narratives of the exodus. The research moved towards the investigation of one single episode: the "train of infamy", which became a central aspect of the narrative of the exodus. The event recalled through the image of the "train of infamy" was an act of hostility carried out in the Bologna train station by communists (members of the PCI and the labour union CGIL) against a convoy of exiles from Pola. This episode is one of the most known and cited in the exodus' memory, but it has not yet received historians' attention besides quick mentions, rarely longer than one paragraph. The fifth chapter addresses this gap.

The Bologna episode was just one display of a larger cluster of acts of intolerance. The sixth chapter lists other episodes of hostility against the Istrian-Dalmatian exiles, addressing the variety of grounds on which these prejudices emerge. The chapter deals as well with instances carrying an opposite meaning: the displays of solidarity for the exile by some communists.

The research on the episode was largely carried out with newspapers contemporary to the episode (February 18, 1947, but the very date is uncertain) and archival sources. The newspapers, daily and periodical, were read in Bologna at the Archiginnasio city library, the BUB University library, the Fondazione Gramsci Emilia Romagna, and the Istituto Storico Parri; in Padua at the Biblioteca Universitaria, the San Gaetano city library, and the “Ettore Ancieri” Political Science library; in Venice at the Marciana library and the Correr Museum’s library; in Trieste at the IRSREC FVG institute; in Parma at the “Mario Colombi Guidotti” city library. The rest of the newspaper has been accessed through online databases, when available.

Besides national and local newspapers, the publications of the exiles’ associations are important sources. Two of them were printed during Pola’s mass exodus. *L’Arena di Pola* was indeed the local daily newspaper of the Istrian city, and after the exodus, it relocated to Gorizia and continued its existence as a weekly and then monthly publication. *L’Arena di Pola* issues are entirely available online from 1948 to the year before the current one.⁹ *Il Problema Giuliano*, then renamed *Difesa Adriatica*, was the newspaper of the Julian Committee in Rome. Both newspapers provide a large amount of information about the exodus and the exiles’ lives in Italy. Over the decades, several other editorial projects have been carried out by the exiles’ associations, and they represent a large corpus to investigate the exiles’ memory.

Beside newspaper, the research was developed through an enquiry on archival sources, such as the documents produced by various institutions: the state administration and police; the political parties, especially the PCI; the labour union CGIL; the Catholic organisations, given their involvement in the reception of Pola’s exiles; the exiles’ associations. The lack of detailed information about the Bologna incident could not exclude any of those possibilities, nor could it be determined for sure where to find the sources. Given its nature of political incident, the first archival collection considered was the Bologna prefecture’s one.

The research was carried out in the following archives in Bologna: the state archive (ASB), the archiepiscopal archive (AAV), the municipal archive, and the “Paolo Pedrelli” archive of the CGIL.

⁹ Until 2009: <http://www.arenadipola.com>; after 2009: <https://www.arenadipola.it/index.php/archivio-arena-di-pola>

The Central State Archive in Rome was visited three times. Single-day visits were also paid to the state archives in Parma (ASP), Milan, and Gorizia, chosen for different reasons: Parma's archive because the "train of infamy" allegedly stopped there; Milan's archive because of the Ministry for Postwar Relief North Italy detachment in the city; and Gorizia for the potential traces left by the titine propaganda, connected to the "train of infamy" by the historian Roberto Spazzali.¹⁰

On the level of literature, this thesis draws primarily from the historiography of the Upper Adriatic borderland. The first operation was to locate the coordinates of Upper Adriatic history. Egidio Ivetic's "Storia dell'Adriatico" provided a useful synthesis for the history up to the 20th century.¹¹ For the key moments of the Modern Age, Raoul Pupo's production is a good starting point, with "Adriatico amarissimo. Una lunga storia di violenza"¹² and two more volumes covering specific cities, "Fiume città di passione"¹³ and "Trieste '45"¹⁴. A multitude of works investigated the region as a borderland. Among them, for Early Modern history there is Ivetic's "Un confine nel Mediterraneo"¹⁵ and for the 20th century, there are Glenda Sluga's "The problem of Trieste and the Italo-Yugoslav border",¹⁶ Rolf Wörsdörfer's "Il confine orientale: Italia e Jugoslavia dal 1915 al 1955",¹⁷ and Marina Cattaruzza's "L'Italia e il confine orientale, 1866-2006".¹⁸ The Trieste question was investigated in the field of international relations with volumes such as "Italy and Tito's Yugoslavia in the age of international détente".¹⁹ Other works dealt with the relations of Italian politics with the Julian March, from the PCI perspective²⁰ and the Christian Democracy (DC) perspective.²¹

¹⁰ Roberto Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, Faretra (Trieste: Ares, 2022), 479.

¹¹ Egidio Ivetic, *Storia dell'Adriatico. Un mare e la sua civiltà* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2019), 201.

¹² Raoul Pupo, *Adriatico amarissimo. Una lunga storia di violenza*, Cultura storica (Bari: Laterza, 2021).

¹³ Raoul Pupo, *Fiume città di passione*, Cultura storica (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2018).

¹⁴ Raoul Pupo, *Trieste '45*, 1. ed, Storia e società (Bari-Roma: Laterza, 2010), 201.

¹⁵ Egidio Ivetic, *Un confine nel Mediterraneo: l'Adriatico orientale tra Italia e Slavia (1300-1900)* (Roma: Viella, 2014).

¹⁶ Glenda Sluga, *The Problem of Trieste and the Italo-Yugoslav Border: Difference, Identity, and Sovereignty in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 1.

¹⁷ Rolf Wörsdörfer, *Il confine orientale: Italia e Jugoslavia dal 1915 al 1955* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009).

¹⁸ Marina Cattaruzza, *L'Italia e il confine orientale, 1866-2006*, Saggi (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007).

¹⁹ Massimo Bucarelli et al., eds., *Italy and Tito's Yugoslavia in the Age of International Détente*, International Issues, vol. 38 (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2016).

²⁰ Marco Galeazzi, *Togliatti e Tito. Tra identità nazionale e internazionalismo*, Studi storici Carocci (Roma: Carocci, 2005); Patrick Karlsen, *Frontiera rossa: il Pci, il confine orientale e il contesto internazionale, 1941-1955* (Gorizia: Editrice Goriziana, 2010).

²¹ Paolo Gheda and Federico Robbe, *Andreotti e l'Italia di confine: lotta politica e nazionalizzazione delle masse (1947-1954)*, Contemporanea (Milano: Guerini, 2015).

Nationalism is a key issue in Modern Upper Adriatic history, and it has widely influenced historiography. To critically reflect on its impact, useful volumes are Vanni D'Alessio's "Il cuore conteso: il nazionalismo in una comunità multi-etnica",²² the collection of essays "Nazionalismi di frontiera: identità contrapposte sull'Adriatico nord-orientale" edited by Marina Cattaruzza,²³ both published in 2003, or the more recent Mila Orlić's study on the multifaceted Istrian identity "Identità di confine. Storia dell'Istria e degli istriani dal 1943 a oggi", published in 2023.²⁴ The research on the Upper Adriatic borderland also expanded in the direction of oral history, with the work by Gloria Nemeč "Un paese perfetto. Storia e memoria di una comunità in esilio. Grisignana d'Istria, 1930-1960";²⁵ and the historical-anthropological approach, as in the case of Pamela Ballinger's "History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans",²⁶ published in 2003, the first extensive fieldwork regarding the Istrian-Dalmatian exiles in Trieste, and ten years later Stefano Pontiggia's "Storie nascoste. Antropologia e memoria dell'esodo istriano a Trieste".²⁷

Every February 10, a persistent reference to an alleged conspiracy of silence covering the foibe massacres and the Istria-Dalmatian exodus echoes: "too many years of silence" is a commonplace of nearly all official speeches and media coverage on that day.²⁸ It could seem that there was no historical

²² Vanni D'Alessio, 'Italiani e croati a Pisino tra fine Ottocento e inizio Novecento: la costruzione di identità conflittuali', in *Nazionalismi di frontiera: identità contrapposte sull'Adriatico nord-orientale*, ed. Marina Cattaruzza (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2003), 73–121, <http://digital.casalini.it/8849804091>.

²³ Marina Cattaruzza, ed., *Nazionalismi di frontiera: identità contrapposte sull'Adriatico nord-orientale* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2003), <http://digital.casalini.it/8849804091>.

²⁴ Mila Orlić, *Identità di confine. Storia dell'Istria e degli istriani dal 1943 a oggi* (Roma: Viella, 2023).

²⁵ Gloria Nemeč, *Un paese perfetto. Storia e memoria di una comunità in esilio. Grisignana d'Istria, 1930-1960* (Gorizia: Istituto regionale per la cultura istriano-fiumano-dalmata, 1998).

²⁶ Ballinger, *History in Exile*.

²⁷ Stefano Pontiggia, *Storie nascoste. Antropologia e memoria dell'esodo istriano a Trieste* (Roma: Aracne, 2013).

²⁸ In 2024, all the four highest-ranked Italian state officials mentioned the "silence" in their ceremonial speeches: 'Foibe: Mattarella, Si Formò Muro Di Oblio e Imbarazzo', *Ansa*, 9 February 2024, Website edition, https://www.ansa.it/nuova_europa/it/notizie/nazioni/croazia/2024/02/09/foibe-mattarella-si-formo-muro-di-oblio-e-imbarazzo_46c99ac0-5187-49f1-b841-cc58ae405fbc.html; 'La Russa "Strappato Il Silenzio Sul Dramma Delle Foibe"', *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 8 February 2024, Website edition, <https://stream24.ilsole24ore.com/video/italia/la-russa-strappato-silenzio-dramma-foibe/AFIbYaeC>; 'Giorno Ricordo: Fontana, Foibe Tra Pagine Più Orribili Storia. Per Troppi Anni Silenzio, Chiedo Scusa per Quelle Sofferenze', *Ansa*, 9 February 2024, Website edition, https://www.ansa.it/nuova_europa/it/notizie/rubriche/politica/2023/02/09/giorno-ricordo-fontanafoibe-tra-pagine-piu-orribili-storia_53a3e811-647b-4827-8569-fbf1becc85ca.html; 'Meloni, Qui a Chiedere Perdono. Sulle Foibe Colpevole Silenzio', *Ansa*, 10 February 2024, Website edition, https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/topnews/2024/02/10/meloni-qui-a-chiedere-perdono.-sulle-foibe-colpevole-silenzio_f41bbf29-572a-4418-9e8d-e5eed8be7cd0.html.

investigation or space to debate the topic for a long time. This is not really the case, at least in the last decades. There is a portion of truth in the denunciation of decades of silence: prior to the radical changes in Italian politics, and therefore in memory politics, in the 90s, the foibe-and-exodus did not find a significant space in the national media and public debate; rather, those topics were debated in the areas directly concerned, such as Trieste.²⁹ A conjuncture of factors made the issue unpalatable for the main political actors and political culture. Both the PCI and the ruling party DC had reasons not to promote the memory of foibe-and-exodus nexus: the former because of the role of the Yugoslavian communists, the latter for convenience in international politics. Raising the issue of the foibe massacres would have also pushed Belgrade to engage in a discussion about Italian crime during World War II. The topic was thus left to the fringes on the political right and to the exiles' communities.³⁰

This unfavourable political context for the promotion of the foibe-and-exodus memory did not prevent the historical investigation. Early studies were produced in the exiles' circles, such as "L'esodo dei 350 mila giuliani, fiumani e dalmati" by the friar and exile Flaminio Rocchi, first published in 1970.³¹ This kind of work, however, often did not meet scholarly standards and presents a strong nationalist bias. The Regional Institute for the History of the Resistance Movement in the Julian March (IRSML FVG) published a first notable volume about the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus in 1980, "Storia di un esodo".³² At the end of the 1990s, a group of historians—Raoul Pupo, Marina Cattaruzza, Marco Dogo, and Fulvio Salimbeni among them—started to connect the exodus to broader Balcanic and Central European history.³³ On this trend, the two collections of essays "Naufraghi della pace. Il 1945, i profughi e le memorie divise d'Europa"³⁴ and "Dall'Impero austro-ungarico alle foibe: conflitti nell'area alto-adriatica"³⁵ appeared in 2008 and 2009, respectively. To place the exodus in the broader context of European migration in the Modern era, reference works were

²⁹ Catalan, 'Il Giorno del ricordo fra celebrazioni, sguardi esterni e stereotipi', 126–27; Raoul Pupo, *Il lungo esodo. Istria: le persecuzioni, le foibe, l'esilio* (Milano: BUR, 2005), 7–11.

³⁰ Gobetti, *E allora le foibe?*, 89–108; Orietta Moscarda Oblak and Marina Cattaruzza, 'L'esodo Istriano Nella Storiografia e Nel Dibattito Pubblico in Italia, Slovenia e Croazia: 1991-2006', *Ventesimo Secolo: Rivista Di Studi Sulle Transizioni* 16, no. 2 (2008): 11–14, <https://doi.org/10.1400/180334>; Vallerin, 'La memoria delle foibe e dell'esodo giuliano-dalmata. Le rivendicazioni della destra italiana e il dibattito nelle istituzioni europee'.

³¹ Flaminio Rocchi, *L'esodo dei 350 mila giuliani, fiumani e dalmati*, 4th ed. (Roma: Difesa adriatica, 1990).

³² Cristiana Colummi et al., eds., *Storia di un esodo. Istria 1945-1956* (Trieste: Istituto regionale per la storia del Movimento di liberazione nel Friuli-Venezia Giulia, 1980).

³³ Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 9.

³⁴ Guido Crainz, Raoul Pupo, and Silvia Salvatici, eds., *Naufraghi della pace: il 1945, i profughi e le memorie divise d'Europa* (Roma: Donzelli, 2008).

³⁵ *Dall'Impero austro-ungarico alle foibe: conflitti nell'area alto-adriatica* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2009).

“L'età delle migrazioni forzate: esodi e deportazioni in Europa, 1853-1953” published in 2012 by Antonio Ferrara and Niccolò Pianciola,³⁶ together with Silvia Salvatici’s “Senza casa e senza paese: profughi europei nel secondo dopoguerra”³⁷ and the collective volume “People on the move: forced population movements in Europe in the Second World War and its aftermath”,³⁸ both published in 2008. Interesting insights on a new direction—the other Italian “exiles”, returning from Italian colonies—can be found in Pamela Ballinger’s “The World Refugees Made: Decolonization and the Foundation of Postwar Italy” published in 2020.³⁹

Among books devoted exclusively to the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus, Gianni Oliva’s “Profughi: dalle foibe all'esodo”⁴⁰ and Raoul Pupo’s “Il lungo esodo”⁴¹ were both published in 2005—that was the year of the first “Giorno del ricordo”. Pupo’s volume, in particular, was fundamental, and its ideas and categorisations were largely adopted for this thesis. Another historian whose production was essential for this thesis is Enrico Miletto. He published a study on the memory of the exiles in Turin, “Con il mare negli occhi: storia, luoghi e memorie dell'esodo istriano a Torino” in 2005,⁴² followed by “Istria allo specchio: storia e voci di una terra di confine” in 2007, but also the 2019 study on the exodus from Zone B and the counterexodus, “Gli italiani di Tito”⁴³ and the 2020 book “Novecento di confine: l'Istria, le foibe, l'esodo,”⁴⁴ whose sixth chapter on the arrival of the exiles in Italy contains essential information for this thesis. Specifically on Pola’s exodus, the most extensive study was published in 2022 by Roberto Spazzali: “Pola città perduta” proved crucial for this thesis.⁴⁵

³⁶ Antonio Ferrara and Niccolò Pianciola, *L'età delle migrazioni forzate: esodi e deportazioni in Europa, 1853-1953* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2012).

³⁷ Silvia Salvatici, *Senza casa e senza paese: profughi europei nel secondo dopoguerra*, Biblioteca Storica (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008).

³⁸ Pertti Ahonen et al., *People on the Move: Forced Population Movements in Europe in the Second World War and Its Aftermath*, Titolo Collana (Oxford: Berg, 2008).

³⁹ Pamela Ballinger, *The World Refugees Made: Decolonization and the Foundation of Postwar Italy* (Cornell University Press, 2020).

⁴⁰ Gianni Oliva, *Profughi: dalle foibe all'esodo. La tragedia degli italiani d'Istria, Fiume e Dalmazia*, Le scie (Milano: Mondadori, 2005).

⁴¹ Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*.

⁴² Enrico Miletto, *Con il mare negli occhi: storia, luoghi e memorie dell'esodo istriano a Torino*, Collana dell'Istituto piemontese per la storia della Resistenza e della società contemporanea Giorgio Agosti. Studi e documenti (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2005).

⁴³ Enrico Miletto, *Gli italiani di Tito: la Zona B del Territorio libero di Trieste e l'emigrazione comunista in Jugoslavia (1947-1954)* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2019).

⁴⁴ Enrico Miletto, *Novecento di confine: l'Istria, le foibe, l'esodo* (Milano: Angeli, 2020).

⁴⁵ Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*.

Most of the historiographical production mentioned above includes reflections on the memory politics around the foibe-and-exodus nexus. Further books specifically dealing with the issue are Guido Crainz's "Il dolore e l'esilio: l'Istria e le memorie divise d'Europa" published in 2005;⁴⁶ the collection of essays "Naufraghi della pace: il 1945, i profughi e le memorie divise d'Europa" published in 2008 (Crainz et al. 2008); Alessandro Cattunar's "Il confine delle memorie"⁴⁷ and Federico Tenca Montini's "Fenomenologia di un martirologio mediatico"⁴⁸ both published in 2014; Patrizia Audenino's comparative study on the memory of the Istrian-Dalmatian exiles and three more groups of displaced people, "La casa perduta: la memoria dei profughi nell'Europa del Novecento", published in 2015;⁴⁹ Erik Gobetti's 2021 pamphlet "E allora le foibe".⁵⁰ Other volumes were useful to understand the wider Italian politics of memory, such as Filippo Focardi's "Nel cantiere della memoria: Fascismo, Resistenza, Shoah, Foibe"⁵¹ and Aline Sierp's comparative book on Italian and German politics of memory, "History, memory, and trans-European identity: unifying divisions".⁵²

In this thesis, only the Italian form of toponyms is used, except for the English ones when they are different from the Italian (as in the case of Padua, Venice, and Dalmatia). This applies to both locations currently under the Italian state and locations in Slovenia and Croatia. In the text, Fiume is always spelled in this way, although its official name nowadays is Rijeka; vice versa, Trieste is the current toponym, but the city is called Trst by Slovenes. This choice was made for the sake of clarity, to avoid the constant repetitions of duplicated names in the text (such as Pola/Pula or Zara/Zadar), and because the primary sources are entirely in Italian, as most of the literature. This choice was made despite the will to respect the topographical "politically correct"⁵³ and recognise the plurality of the region.

⁴⁶ Guido Crainz, *Il dolore e l'esilio: l'Istria e le memorie divise d'Europa* (Roma: Donzelli, 2005).

⁴⁷ Alessandro Cattunar, *Il confine delle memorie: storie di vita e narrazioni pubbliche tra Italia e Jugoslavia (1922-1955)*, 1a ed, Quaderni di storia (Firenze: Le Monnier, 2014).

⁴⁸ Federico Tenca Montini, *Fenomenologia di un martirologio mediatico: le foibe nella rappresentazione pubblica dagli anni Novanta ad oggi* (Udine: Kappa Vu, 2014).

⁴⁹ Patrizia Audenino, *La casa perduta: la memoria dei profughi nell'Europa del Novecento*, Studi storici Carocci 225 (Roma: Carocci, 2015).

⁵⁰ Gobetti, *E allora le foibe?*

⁵¹ Filippo Focardi, *Nel cantiere della memoria: Fascismo, Resistenza, Shoah, Foibe*, Collana dell'Istituto Nazionale Ferruccio Parri (Roma: Viella, 2020).

⁵² Aline Sierp, *History, Memory, and Trans-European Identity: Unifying Divisions*, Routledge Studies in Modern European History (New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2014).

⁵³ See Altin's comment on the "Alpe Adria hostel" exhibition, Roberta Altin, 'Museografie e memorie dei campi profughi istriani', *Italia Contemporanea*, no. 298 (June 2022): 231, <https://doi.org/10.3280/IC2022-298017>.

For the same reason, the overall region concerned by the Istrian-Dalmatia exodus in no instance (except quotations) is defined as “Eastern border” or “confine orientale” in Italian. This definition reflects the view of one side, the Italian one; seen from the other side, indeed, it is rather a Western border, or “Zahodna meja” in Slovenian.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, “confine orientale” is the official definition used by the law establishing the Day of Remembrance, and it is adopted in part of the literature.⁵⁵ Recent historiography prefers an alternative wording: “Upper Adriatic” or “Upper Adriatic borderland” (“frontiera alto-adriatica” in Italian).⁵⁶ Alternatives are “Northern Adriatic”⁵⁷ and “Northwestern Adriatic”.⁵⁸ “Upper Adriatic” has the merit of being culturally-indifferent, coming from a geographical description. Vice versa, a culturally marked term is “Venezia Giulia”.

“Venezia Giulia” reflects an Italian nationalist perspective. The linguist Graziadio Isaia Ascoli, from Gorizia, coined the definition “Tre Venezie” in 1863 to delineate three regions asserted by the new state: the “Venezia Euganea”, which encompasses the region surrounding the proper city of Venice; the “Venezia Tridentina”, which refers to the mountainous area surrounding Trento; and the “Venezia Giulia”, inspired by the Julian Alps, whose name in turn derives from the Roman Empire colonisation: the historical capital of this region, now known as Cividale del Friuli, was called Forum Iulii. The Venezia Giulia was therefore “invented” by Ascoli, as a way to replace the official name of the Austrian Littoral (Österreichisches Küstenland).⁵⁹ The term “Julian” replaces “Istrian” in the most common Italian name for the Julian-Dalmatian exodus, “esodo giuliano-dalmata”. An alternative to the use of this Italian-oriented term is “Julian March”, as adopted by the anthropologist Pamela

⁵⁴ Marta Verginella, ‘Asimmetrie, malintesi e sguardi speculari: da una storia etnocentrica ad una storia plurale e congiunta della regione alto-adriatica’, *Acta Histriae* 20, no. 3 (2012): 321–34.

⁵⁵ Cattaruzza, *L’Italia e il confine orientale, 1866-2006*; Giorgia Giusti, ed., *Quattro lezioni sul Confine orientale. Espulsione e abbandono delle terre istriane e dalmate dopo la seconda guerra mondiale* (Mantova: Istituto Mantovano di Storia Contemporanea, 2020); Karlsen, *Frontiera rossa*; Wörsdörfer, *Il confine orientale*.

⁵⁶ Ivetic, *Un confine nel Mediterraneo*, 28.

⁵⁷ Miha Kosmač, ‘Building Italianità in Northern Adriatic: The Case of Organized Migration of Population from Pola/Pula’, *Nationalities Papers* 46, no. 6 (November 2018): 992–1007, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2017.1342076>; Marta Verginella, ‘Writing Historiography on Migrations at the Meeting Point of Nations in the Northern Adriatic’, in *At Home but Foreigners: Population Transfers in the 20th Century Istria* (Koper: Annales University Press, 2015), https://www.academia.edu/25945426/Writing_historiography_on_migrations_at_the_meeting_point_of_nations_in_the_Northern_Adriatic.

⁵⁸ Cattaruzza, *Nazionalismi di frontiera*.

⁵⁹ Miletto, *Novecento di confine*, 27.

Ballinger in “History in exile”.⁶⁰ In this thesis, “Upper Adriatic” and “Julian March” are used alternately.

⁶⁰ The choice is explained in the preface of the Italian edition, Pamela Ballinger, *La memoria dell'esilio: esodo e identità al confine dei Balcani* (Roma: Il Veltro Editrice, 2010), xiii.

Chapter 1. The Upper Adriatic borderland

1. “Even stones speak Italian”

The long Roman (670 years) and Venetian (980 years) presence and the associated cultural, artistic and commercial activities led to the predominance of the Latin and Italian civilisation, which finds its most striking expressions in language, customs, and the arts. The Kingdom of Croatia never extended its power into Istria.¹

I see epigraphs all written in Latin, I see outside the churches all written in Italian, I see no inscriptions in Croatian, or Slovenian, maybe, I would even agree with them, but there aren't (Giulio, exile from Pirano, 2007).²

Many accounts of Upper Adriatic Area history by exiled people follow the same pattern: they start with the Roman domination on the area—still present in the toponym “Julian” and in many archaeological traces—and they go on with the Venetian domination on the Eastern Adriatic coast. The two dominations are supposed to be proof of the Italianness of the region. The descent of modern Italy from the Roman Empire, widely used by fascism, could not be taken seriously in an historiographic debate; otherwise, Italy could legitimately declare war on forty countries, as ironically points out Gobetti.³ The Venetian lineage holds greater significance due to the fact that the Venetian Republic ceased to exist in the wake of the age of nationalism, and thus it can be seen as the primary driver for the spread of Italian culture and language through the Eastern Adriatic coast. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Italian was the lingua franca, not only in the Florentine form, but more often the Venetian one;⁴ furthermore, some relevant cities in the Upper Adriatic, such as Trieste and Fiume, were never under the rule of the maritime republic. Giulio, an exiled person interviewed by

¹ “La lunga presenza romana (670 anni) e veneziana (980 anni) e le relative attività culturali, artistiche e commerciali hanno fatto predominare quella civiltà latina ed italiana che trova le sue espressioni più probanti nella lingua, nei costumi e nelle arti. Il Regno di Croazia non ha mai esteso il suo potere in Istria”, Rocchi, *L'esodo dei 350 mila giuliani, fiumani e dalmati*, 97.

² “Io vedo epigrafi tutte scritte in latino, vedo fuori dalle chiese tutto scritto in italiano, non vedo scritte in croato, o sloveno, magari, gli darei anche ragione, ma non c'è”, Pontiggia, *Storie nascoste. Antropologia e memoria dell'esodo istriano a Trieste*, 66.

³ Gobetti, *E allora le foibe?*, 5.

⁴ Ivetic, *Un confine nel Mediterraneo*, 92.

Ponteggia's during an ethnographic research in 2007, even added a third element to the lineage, the Byzantine Empire:

It cannot be said of Dalmatia, or of Istria, that, after two thousand years of foreign domination, Istria has once again returned to the [Croatian] motherland. But which motherland? The motherland is who? Rome, Byzantium, Venice, that's my motherland.⁵

The Italian nationalist narrative naturally sets the claim of an ancient history and ancient roots for the Italianness of the region against an inferior, uncultured Slavic culture that seized Italian territories as a result of World War II without a legitimate claim. In the words of the exiled friar Flaminio Rocchi:

[There's an] absence of traces of Slavic-Balkan civilisation in Venezia Giulia. In the field of architecture, the Romans have left in Trieste the Capitoline Hill, the Forum and the theatre, in Brioni the thermal baths and villas; in Parenzo the Praetorian Palace and the Lapidarium; in Pola the Amphitheatre, the Arch of the Sergii and the Temple of Augustus, two theatres, the Twin Gates and the Gate of Hercules (the oldest Roman monument in northern Italy, built in 40 BC); in Fiume, the Roman Arch; in Zara, the Forum; in Spalato, Diocletian's Palace; and the Via Flavia from Trieste to Pola, the cities of Nesactium and Salona.⁶

This stress on the architectural remains of the Roman and Venetian dominations resulted in the recurrent phrase “even the stones speak Italian”. The presence of the Saint Mark winged lion, the famous symbol of Venice, is an identitarian marker of Italianness, often cited by exiled people when talking about the Venetian core of cities like Capodistria.⁷ Even in exile, Istrian communities reproduce the lion, as in the Julian neighbourhood in Rome⁸ and in the Sardinian village of Fertilia.⁹ During the 1946 visit of the Allied commission in the Istrian Zone B, under the control of the Yugoslav authorities and thus unsafe for the open expression of Italianness, some Italians elaborated an anonymous suggestion for the commissars: visiting the graveyards since the headstones could

⁵ “Non si può dire della Dalmazia, o dell'Istria, che dopo duemila anni di dominazione straniera l'Istria è tornata nuovamente alla madrepatria [croata]. Ma quale madrepatria? La madrepatria mia è chi? Roma, Bisanzio, Venezia, questa è la mia madrepatria”, Ponteggia, *Storie nascoste. Antropologia e memoria dell'esodo istriano a Trieste*, 67.

⁶ Rocchi, *L'esodo dei 350 mila giuliani, fiumani e dalmati*, 100.

⁷ Jan Bernas, *Ci chiamavano fascisti, eravamo italiani: istriani, fiumani e dalmati: storie di esuli e rimasti*, Testimonianze fra cronaca e storia. Seconda guerra mondiale (Milano: Mursia, 2010), 30.

⁸ Diego Zandel, *I testimoni muti: le foibe, l'esodo, i pregiudizi*, Testimonianze fra cronaca e storia (Milano: Mursia, 2011), 65.

⁹ Bernas, *Ci chiamavano fascisti, eravamo italiani*, 30.

“speak” Italian.¹⁰ Why are cultural aspects, such as stones, so crucial in the narratives about Upper Adriatic history?

Europe's history, according to nationalists, is seen as a clash between ethno-cultural communities, especially in border areas. The concept of the «border region» is frequently employed to measure the extent and boundaries of a nation, with the presence of violent conflict serving as the primary factor in interpreting the dynamics between different national groups. Upper Adriatic history is commonly understood as the outcome of a firm national dichotomy between Italians and Slavs. As a result, the region's historical experiences have become predominantly focused on the nation, simplifying its complexity and emphasising its traumatic and violent aspects, such as the foibe massacres. The emphasis on ethnic groups and their contentious relationships has provided justification for territorial claims and consolidated collective national memories. Transnational history, in its various forms, tries to address this issue: Istria's history can be portrayed as the multicultural history of a region rather than primarily the battleground of two distinct national projects. However, it is important to note that this viewpoint is relatively new in historiography. Many of the works written on the history of the Upper Adriatic region are influenced by the “opposed nationalisms” paradigm: particularities of the formation of the competing “nationally imagined” communities are often overlooked. This is particularly relevant considering the presence of a racist perspective: from a western point of view, the Adriatic was the rift between western Europe and the “less cultivated, less polite” parts of Europe, splitting the “civilised” Italians from the “uncultured Slavs”. A crystal clear example of racial approach can be found in the words of Elvia Fabianich, a Fiume citizen belonging to the minority of Italians that did not leave the city. Interviewed in 2010, she said about the postwar immigration to her city:

When Fiume was flooded by Slavs, I could not realise who these people with their very primitive habits were. They were people seeking their fortune. Those who had jobs, had their lives in Zagreb, Split, Belgrade, did not stay here; those who stayed were mainly people from the interior, the poorest parts of Yugoslavia. They did not know what a bathroom was, what a toilet was. Sometimes we would hear funny anecdotes. We used to laugh about it. People who had filled the bathtub with soil so they could plant vegetables in it, chickens in the house and on the balcony. Things you don't expect to see in the city.

¹⁰ Raoul Pupo, *Il lungo esodo. Istria: le persecuzioni, le foibe, l'esilio* (Milano: BUR, 2005), 155; see also a *Corriere della Sera* report during Pola's exodus: Giuseppe Silvestri, 'Pola Muore Lentamente', *Corriere Della Sera*, 30 January 1947.

Those narratives play a critical role in comprehending certain accounts of the exodus and will be used in the following chapters; however, the purpose of the following paragraphs is to outline the history of the Upper Adriatic region based on the findings of rigorous historical research.

2. A brief history of the Upper Adriatic border

The Roman Empire reached the Upper Adriatic in the third century BCE, and after some military campaigns, it completed the conquest of the region in 177 BCE. The Romans founded the colonies of Tergeste (modern-day Trieste) and Pietas Julia (modern-day Pola) among others. After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the area was ruled by the Goths, the Byzantine Empire, and the Franks.¹¹ Finally, at the turn of the second millennium, two key political entities appeared: the Republic of Venice on the western Adriatic shore and the Duchy (and then Kingdom) of Croatia on the eastern side, while on the northern side, the Patriarch of Aquileia ruled under the Holy Roman Empire.¹² In the following centuries, the Venetian domination expanded on the eastern shore, gaining parts of western Istria and Dalmatia and acquiring the Aquileia patriarch territory,¹³ while Croatia went through a personal union with the Hungarian Kingdom and then became part of the Habsburg monarchy.¹⁴ The Habsburgs fought with Venice for control of the Upper Adriatic; they established their control over Trieste and the eastern part of Istria, lasting until 1918.

A thorough survey of the political entities, their wars, and their treaties would require an extensive amount of space. Nonetheless, in order to understand the context of modern history, it is important to observe how the Adriatic Sea has been a sea of diversity between peoples for centuries. At the end of the Middle Ages, there was the perception of *Schiavonia*, the Slavdom, as a generic region between the eastern Alps and Albanian lands, opposed to Italy.¹⁵ Different ethnic and linguistic groups coexisting in mixed territories did not lead to tensions or conflicts for over a millennium, from the end of the sixth century to the age of nations. Ethnic conflict had no real opportunity to arise in a largely stable socio-political order characterised by substantial immobility and rarely disrupted during

¹¹ Ministero dell'Istruzione, 'Linee Guida per la didattica della Frontiera Adriatica', 20 October 2022, 23, <https://www.miur.gov.it/documents/20182/0/Linee+Guida+per+la+didattica+della+Frontiera+Adriatica.pdf/a6becbb8-5a98-d10f-7e36-6405fb320a5c?version=1.0&t=1666339646483>.

¹² Ivetic, *Storia dell'Adriatico. Un mare e la sua civiltà*, 121–27.

¹³ Ivetic, 139–46.

¹⁴ Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War*, 3rd ed (New Haven (Conn.): Yale University Press, 2010), 16–40.

¹⁵ Ivetic, *Storia dell'Adriatico. Un mare e la sua civiltà*, 253.

peasant uprisings.¹⁶ Demographic composition did not represent a key issue. For example, the repopulation efforts carried out in Istria by the Venetian authorities, such as the one involving 124 families from the Bologna area in 1560,¹⁷ and the 1670s one involving brigands from the Kotor/Cattaro area,¹⁸ took place in a pre-national era and thus did not have a real political significance; they were not aimed at changing the Latin versus Slavic group population ratio, as is the case of modern-era colonisation and emigration processes.

In the pre-19th century Adriatic world, before the emergence of the modern idea of nation, identities and belonging were fragmented among various political entities (kingdoms, republics, duchies), regional units, municipal and sub-regional identities; there were, at best, the ideas of *Italy* and *Slavdom* but not a clear distinction between an Italian and a Slavic population.¹⁹ The Upper Adriatic political framework, entering modernity after the French revolution, evolved: one of the main actors, the Venice Republic, disappeared in 1797, and the whole territory fell under the Austrian (and then Austro-Hungarian) multinational Empire. The Austrian Littoral, as the administrative subdivision was named in 1849, was predominantly inhabited by Italians in the cities, with substantial German, Slovenian, and Croatian minorities, while in the countryside it was homogeneously inhabited by Slovenian and Croatian-speaking populations. The numerical relations between Italian and Slavic components were influenced by significant migratory flows from the hinterland to the region's urban centres, especially Trieste.²⁰ In 1866 the Italian Kingdom, proclaimed five years earlier, reached the limits of the Friulian plain with the annexation of the Austrian Veneto. Still, this expansion left under the Austro-Hungarian rule many Italian-populated cities, such as Trento and Trieste, along with the entirety of the Upper Adriatic contested area. Those became the “terre irredente”, unredeemed lands, a focal point of Italian nationalism focused on the culmination of the national unification; this was the driver of the 1915 intervention in the First World War against the Austro-Hungarian Empire. At this stage, nationalism deserves an analysis in itself. Ivetic argues that the age of nationalities in the Eastern Adriatic can actually be viewed as a historical period in its own right that is intimately related

¹⁶ Milica Kacin Wohinz and Jöze Pirjevec, *Storia degli sloveni in Italia: 1866-1998* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1998), 9.

¹⁷ Lia De Luca, ‘Venezia e le immigrazioni in Istria nel Cinque e Seicento’ (PhD, Venezia, Università Ca’ Foscari Venezia, 2011), 65–67.

¹⁸ Slaven Bertoša, ‘Le tribolazioni dell’adattamento: alcuni aspetti del ripopolamento dell’Istria meridionale con gli Aiducchi (1671-1676)’, *Atti. Centro di ricerche storiche Rovigno* 40 (2010): 201–30.

¹⁹ Ivetic, *Un confine nel Mediterraneo*.

²⁰ Marta Verginella, ‘Radici dei conflitti nazionali nell’area alto-adriatica: il paradigma dei «nazionalismi opposti»’, in *Dall’impero austro-ungarico alle foibe. Conflitti nell’area alto-adriatica* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2009), 12.

to the social modernisation processes that began in the middle of the 19th century.²¹ According to the same author, the age of national confrontations in the eastern Adriatic could be outlined in three “times”: the phase of national separations between 1860 and 1914; the intolerance ridden 1918-1945; the national redefinition from 1945 to the present.²²

The nation, as a concept, broke through with the events of 1848. In that year, people from all social classes in the seaside cities of Istria and Dalmatia expressed their identification with Italian culture and nationality. The process, however, followed different paths in different regions.²³

From 1860 onwards, the Istrian notables had to deal with two concerns that related to the national dimension. The first issue pertained to the geographic status of Istria, whether it was considered part of Italy or not. The second issue pertained to relations with the Slavic population in the area.²⁴ Furthermore, in 1848, there was a surge of Slavism, as the formerly fragmented and dispersed Slavic population collectively constituted the majority of the Habsburg Empire population.²⁵ Towards the end of the century, Croatian and Slovenian middle classes emerged, attacking the predominant position of Italians, trying to mobilise peasants along with them.²⁶ In the 1880s, Istria experienced a period of political maturation, characterised by the emergence of a new cohort of radical politicians. In 1883, four Croatian representatives were elected to the Italian-dominated provincial diet.²⁷ Schools, libraries, associations, banks, and cultural institutions were the instruments in the campaign for the nationalisation of the masses in Istria.²⁸ Most historiographical works play on the dichotomy between the Italian cities on the coast and the Slavic countryside.²⁹ More recent studies return a more complex picture: peasants could be opposed to the city’s (and thus “Italian”) interests, but did not automatically identify as “Slavs”. Even between “Slavs” there were different identities, like Pan-Slavic, Yugoslavian, Croatian, and Slovenian. Peasants’ reluctance towards clear-cut national

²¹ Egidio Ivetic, ‘Il «prima»: Sui Contrasti Nazionali Italo-Slavi Nell’Adriatico Orientale (1848-1918)’, in *Per Una Storicizzazione Dell’esodo Giuliano-Dalmata*, ed. Angelo Ventura (Padova: CLEUP, 2005), 50.

²² Ivetic, *Un confine nel Mediterraneo*, 243.

²³ Egidio Ivetic, ‘Ripensare lo sviluppo della nazionalità italiana nell’Adriatico orientale dell’ottocento’, *Atti* 35, no. 1 (2005): 309–18.

²⁴ Ivetic, *Un confine nel Mediterraneo*, 219.

²⁵ Ivetic, 221.

²⁶ D’Alessio, ‘Italiani e croati a Pisino tra fine Ottocento e inizio Novecento: la costruzione di identità conflittuali’, 74.

²⁷ Ivetic, *Un confine nel Mediterraneo*, 236.

²⁸ Ivetic, ‘Ripensare lo sviluppo della nazionalità italiana nell’Adriatico orientale dell’ottocento’, 315.

²⁹ Ivetic, *Un confine nel Mediterraneo*, 254; for a critical view on this dichotomy: Petrungraro, *Balcani*, 20–26.

categories remained persistent throughout the 20th century, despite all the efforts of different authorities over time.³⁰

In Dalmatia, the Italian language and culture had thrived for centuries, but in an “a-national” or “pre-national” situation. This did not imply a favourable outcome for Italian nationalists: between 1860 and 1882, Croats emerged victorious in the struggles for control of the municipalities and the provincial diet. The Italian community in Dalmatia shrank and converged in Zara, the only city with an Italian political majority—and eventually, some decades after, the only Dalmatian city acquired by Italy after the First World War.³¹

The situation in Trieste is particularly multifaceted. For centuries, this town had an extremely small territory; over time, the Slovenes settled in the suburbs and then on the outskirts of greater Trieste. The city boomed after the 1719 institution of a free port that attracted many different religious and cultural communities, being a meeting point of the German, Italian, and Slavic worlds.³² The nationalisation process in such a city worked differently from the process in smaller towns or in the countryside. The city developed in a Mitteleuropean context: the ruling class was heavily influenced by liberalism and nationalism and had a Jewish segment. From the 1860s on, the ruling class took the Italian identity as a political factor.³³ The construction of the Italian national affiliation in Trieste, however, did not stress the destruction of foreign ties. The idea was to join a broad “imagined” Italian community that was not at odds with the communal and identity of an international port city.³⁴ On the other side, affirming an Italian identity also meant downplaying the Slovenian one, an identity developed in a closer connection to the clergy and then anti-liberal. Starting in the mid-19th century, a Slovenian middle class and a Slovenian political movement emerged. The Slovenes did not have political power in the city, nor were they the majority. Still, the city was crucial for their national identity; more Slovenes lived in Trieste than in Ljubljana. In 1904, the Slovenian community inaugurated the Narodni Dom, a cultural centre and seat for many national organisations.³⁵

³⁰ Orlić, *Identità di confine. Storia dell'Istria e degli istriani dal 1943 a oggi*, 22.

³¹ Ivetic, ‘Il «prima»: Sui Contrasti Nazionali Italo-Slavi Nell’Adriatico Orientale (1848-1918)’, 58; Luciano Monzali, *Gli italiani di Dalmazia e le relazioni italo-jugoslave nel Novecento* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2015).

³² Ivetic, *Un confine nel Mediterraneo*, 207.

³³ Giampaolo Valdevit, *Trieste: storia di una periferia insicura*, Testi e pretesti (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2004), 2–4.

³⁴ Maura Elise Hametz, *Making Trieste Italian, 1918-1954*, First published 2005., Studies in History, New Series (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 4–5.

³⁵ Valdevit, *Trieste*, 5–7.

Fiume was promoted to free port at the same time as Trieste, becoming its “sisters” in the context of the Habsburg policy of institutional reforms. In the 18th century, it was transferred from the Austrian crown to the Hungarian one, while still remaining under the rule of the Habsburg monarchy. It was governed as a “corpus separatum” directly from Budapest, with some degree of autonomy and special rights, and not depending on the surrounding Kingdom of Croatia, another subject of the Hungarian crown. This political complexity was reflected in a quite intricate development of the national question, which gave space to alliances. The Hungarian authorities favoured the Italian community at the expense of the Croatian one, incentivizing immigration from the Italian peninsula. The Jewish and German communities were also conspicuous, and bilingualism was the norm. At the end of the century, the mostly Croatian suburb of Sušak was quickly growing, and the Italian-Hungarian agreement experienced a crisis: the matter was control over education. At the beginning of the 19th century, Italians were politically divided between autonomists and irredentists, with the latter aiming for unification with Italy.³⁶

In the meanwhile the fascist movement emerged in the form of “fascismo di confine”, border’s fascism, an early and virulent form of fascist violence that emerged from the ashes of the war and defied the competition of D’Annunzio occupation of Fiume in September 1919. Emerging in the nationalist field, the Trieste fascio led by Francesco Giunta quickly became the protagonist of a watershed event in the history of national confrontation on the Upper Adriatic.³⁷ In Spalato, a Dalmatian city assigned to Yugoslavia, the unrest between the Croatian majority and the Italian minority escalated in July 1920, leading to the death of three people. Nationalist demonstration were immediately called in Trieste on the 13th of July: one pro-Italian demonstrator was stabbed to death in unclear circumstances, but the news sparked an anti-Slavic pogrom that led to the burning of the Narodni dom - the symbol of the rise of the Slovenian community in the city. The arson marked the beginning of an interminable series of squad expeditions, conducted with military methods, benevolently tolerated when not accompanied by the forces of order. The Trieste exploit was repeated in Pola, Pasino, and Monfalcone, where fascism presented itself as an instrument of employers’ reaction against the workers’ movement.³⁸ On the other hand, the arson became central in the narratives and in the memories of the Slovene community and the antifascists.³⁹

³⁶ Pupo, *Fiume città di passione*, 3–37; Gianluca Volpi, ‘Fiumani, ungheresi, italiani. La formazione dell’identità nazionale a Fiume nell’epoca dualista (1867-1914)’, in *Nazionalismi di frontiera: identità contrapposte sull’Adriatico nord-orientale*, ed. Marina Cattaruzza (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2003), 47–71, <http://digital.casalini.it/8849804091>.

³⁷ Anna Vinci, *Sentinelle della patria: il fascismo al confine orientale: 1918-1941*, 1. ed, Quadrante Laterza 166 (Roma: Laterza, 2011), 52–59.

³⁸ Pupo, *Adriatico amarissimo. Una lunga storia di violenza*, 55–60.

³⁹ Vinci, *Sentinelle della patria*, 78–80; Wörsdörfer, *Il confine orientale*, 27–28.

With the October 1922 March on Rome, the fascist movement was no longer one of the actors in the chaotic postwar years: it seized power. The fascist policies for the borderlands thus came directly from the central government.⁴⁰ The 1923 Gentile school reform abolished the teaching of Slovenian and Croatian and replaced it with Italian, marking the beginning of a systematic process of italianisation. The Special Inspectorate of Karst was established in 1924 with the responsibility of monitoring and controlling the Slovenian countryside. The italianisation of geographical locations and the prohibition of the use of languages other than Italian in public spaces (courts, administrative offices, shops, and public exercises) were ordered in 1925. Two years later, surnames were also ordered to be italianised.⁴¹ The purpose was often to bring back to Italianness the share of the population that was supposedly turned Slavic (e.g., through a modification of the surname) under the Austro-Hungarian authorities. This is nonsense from a historiographical perspective, but it is important to understand Italian racism: many Slavs or bilingual people were actually Italians who should rediscover their real lineage. Such racism enacted subjugation and violence but was free from biological content, unlike Nazist antisemitism. For this reason, mixed marriages were not forbidden in the Julian March; the main aim was to assimilate and forge Italians, denying the presence of other national belonging.⁴²

This political repression was not unopposed by Slavic activists. Some groups, such as TIGR, embraced terrorism; they realised two attacks in Trieste in 1930, triggering a trial by the fascist Special Tribunal for the Defence of the State that led to four executions. The TIGR had links with the Italian antifascist emigration, and other Slavic groups were based in Yugoslavia and participated by Slavs who emigrated from the new Italian provinces.⁴³ The Yugoslavian Kingdom or third countries received thousands of Slavic refugees from the Kingdom of Italy as a result of fascist national repression. Historiography has not yet determined an accurate number;⁴⁴ they were at least some tens

⁴⁰ Piero Purini, *Metamorfosi etniche: i cambiamenti di popolazione a Trieste, Gorizia, Fiume e in Istria: 1914-1975* (Udine: Kappa Vu, 2014), 88–95; Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 31–35.

⁴¹ Miletto, *Novecento di confine*, 49–53; Vinci, *Sentinelle della patria*, 161–68.

⁴² Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 25; Glenda Sluga, 'Identità nazionale italiana e fascismo: alieni, allogeni e assimilazione sul confine nord-orientale italiano', in *Nazionalismi di frontiera: identità contrapposte sull'Adriatico nord-orientale*, ed. Marina Cattaruzza (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2003), 189–94, <http://digital.casalini.it/8849804091>.

⁴³ Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 51–59.

⁴⁴ Moscarda Oblak and Cattaruzza, 'L'esodo Istriano Nella Storiografia e Nel Dibattito Pubblico in Italia, Slovenia e Croazia', 16.

of thousands. This emigration was in part facilitated by the Italian authorities, keen to thin out the Slavic population.⁴⁵

According to Pupo, an overall evaluation of assimilation policies—defined as “ethnic reclamation”, modelled on the land reclamations fostered by fascism—returns an embarrassing failure for the fascist regime.⁴⁶ Despite the harshness of measures and despite the triumphant propaganda claiming the disappearance of the “allogeni” (foreigners), the 1939 secret census registered just a slight decrease of the non-Italian population in comparison to the 1921 census. The decline was sharper in cities, where the acquisition of the Italian identity carried more benefits and was a vehicle of social promotion, while there was no decrease in rural areas.⁴⁷ Overall, fascism and the Julian declination of Italian nationalism actually strengthened Croatian and Slovenian identity, completing the Croatianisation and Slovenisation of Istria's peasant masses.⁴⁸

Which were the population sizes of the various ethnic groups in the Upper Adriatic, under Italian control, just ahead of the outbreak of World War II? That time serves as a benchmark because it predates the major demographic shifts brought about by a brutal war that was waged in the region beginning in 1941 and which resulted in the postwar Istrian-Dalmatian exodus. In this context, it is important to be cautious when handling demographic data because, in addition to the fact that ethnic belonging is not a binary trait that has remained constant over time, censuses are also state-led activities that have biases about the demographic makeup depending on the authority in power at the time. For this reason, the demographic trends of the Upper Adriatic areas in the 20th century are not simply achievable through a comparison of Austro-Hungarian, Italian, and Yugoslavian census data.⁴⁹ A comparison of the most detailed researches on the topic returns the following table:

⁴⁵ Kacin Wohinz and Pirjevec, *Storia degli sloveni in Italia*, 41; Sandi Volk, ‘Gli spostamenti di popolazione italiane, slovene e croate al confine italiano tra fascismo e dopoguerra’, in *Una storia balcanica. Fascismo, comunismo e nazionalismo nella Jugoslavia del Novecento*, ed. Lorenzo Bertucelli and Mila Orlić (Verona: Ombre corte, 2008), 97–99.

⁴⁶ Pupo, *Trieste '45*, 9; Cattunar, *Il confine delle memorie*, 70–78.

⁴⁷ Pupo, *Adriatico amarissimo. Una lunga storia di violenza*, 70–72.

⁴⁸ Ivetic, *Un confine nel Mediterraneo*, 252.

⁴⁹ Olinto Mileta Mattiuz, ‘Le genti di Pola nella seconda metà dell’Ottocento e l’esodo/rientro alla fine del primo conflitto mondiale’, in *Prvi moderni popis stanovništva u Istri*, ed. Aleksej Kalc (Koper: Histria editiones, 2012), 407–30; Guerrino Perselli, *I censimenti della popolazione dell’Istria, con Fiume e Trieste, e di alcune città della Dalmazia tra il 1850 e il 1936*, Etnia (Fiume: Unione italiana Università popolare di Trieste, 1993).

City	Inhabitants	Ethnic composition
Trieste ⁵⁰	252.400	88% Italians, 12% other (mostly Slovenes)
Fiume ⁵¹	61.300	75% Italians, 22% Croats and 2% Slovenes
Gorizia ⁵²	51.400	71% Italians and 28% Slovenes
Pola ⁵³	39.220	85% Italians, 14% Croats
Zara ⁵⁴	28.900	75% Italians and 20% Croats
Region	Inhabitants	Ethnic composition
Istrian peninsula (including Pola) ⁵⁵	367.600	50% Italians, 34% Croats and 12% Slovenes
Trieste and Gorizia mountainous inlands ⁵⁶	157.100	86% Slovenes and 14% Italians

The beginning of World War II and the Italian intervention in June 1940 were seen with apathy from Julian March Italians, as was common in the rest of the country⁵⁷. However, the war became closer at an earlier stage for the population of the Upper Adriatic. In April 1941, Italy, along with Nazi Germany, Hungary, and Bulgaria, attacked the Yugoslavian Kingdom. The motivations are to be found in the wider war context, but they certainly fit the Italian imperial ambition of further eastward expansion. Italy already controlled most of the Upper Adriatic; with the quick Yugoslavian defeat and the consequent split of its territory between Axis powers, it stretched further east. Three new

⁵⁰ Data from the 1939 classified census, Purini, *Metamorfosi etniche*, 172–73.

⁵¹ Elaboration on multiple sources, Olinto Mileta Mattiuz, ‘Gli spostamenti di popolazione nel territorio annesso alla Jugoslavia dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale. Tentativo di quantificazione demografica’, in *Dopoguerra di confine* (Trieste: Università di Trieste, 2007), 703.

⁵² Data from the 1939 classified census, Purini, *Metamorfosi etniche*, 172–73.

⁵³ Data refers to 1940, elaboration by Olinto Mileta Mattiuz, ‘Le Genti Di Pola. Indagine Demografica Sulla Storia Di Una Città’, *Quaderni*, no. 22 (2011): 120.

⁵⁴ Elaboration on multiple sources, Mileta Mattiuz, ‘Gli spostamenti di popolazione nel territorio annesso alla Jugoslavia dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale. Tentativo di quantificazione demografica’, 703. Additional three-four thousand Italians lived in Dalmatia outside Zara

⁵⁵ Elaboration on multiple sources, Mileta Mattiuz, 703.

⁵⁶ Elaboration on multiple sources, Mileta Mattiuz, 703.

⁵⁷ Pupo, *Adriatico amarissimo. Una lunga storia di violenza*, 98–99.

provinces were instituted: Lubiana (corresponding to southern Slovenia), Spalato (in southern Dalmatia, modern-day Split), Cattaro (further south, modern-day Kotor in Montenegro); the two small border provinces of Fiume and Zara were expanded. There were plans for future colonisation of those territories. The new provinces attracted a number of Italian military and civil servants, the short-lived pioneers of the Italianisation; most of them left after the 1943 armistice in the so-called “black exodus”. Besides the new formal boundaries of the Kingdom of Italy, there was the Italian sphere of influence on the Independent State of Croatia. Despite the name, it was a puppet state controlled by Italians on the west and Germans on the east. This was the maximum extension of Italian rule on the eastern side of the Adriatic, which was paired with a brutal repression of partisan forces and atrocities against civilians.⁵⁸ In the Podhum massacre, in the proximity of Fiume, on the 12th of July 1942, 91 people lost their lives; on the Arbe island, 30.000 people suffered the internment in a concentration camp.⁵⁹

The 8th of September 1943 Italian armistice marked the beginning of the catastrophe for the Italian population and serves as a turning point in many exodus narratives. Italians were no longer under the protection of Italian authorities; the whole Upper Adriatic population was exposed to the high levels of violence characterising the war in Central and Eastern Europe.⁶⁰ The Italian military collapse gave the Third Reich full control of the Upper Adriatic, eventually excluded from the Italian Social Republic puppet regime and rather integrated by Nazi Germany into the Operational Zone of the Adriatic Littoral (OZAK). The Italian breakdown also put the Yugoslavian partisan forces on the stage. They were capable of seizing control in Istria in September 1943; the first round of the foibe massacres, with an estimated 500–700 victims, happened at this juncture. The actions were mainly aimed at symbolic figures who belonged to either the party or the state, which were indistinguishable from one another. On one hand, some historians reject the existence of any plans, arguing that the violent incidents were the results of the Slavic population's frustration with fascist repression.⁶¹ On the other hand, other historians consider this interpretation reductive, paving the way for a downplay of the relevance of the massacre: Croatian sources highlight the priority task of cleansing Istria from

⁵⁸ Eric Gobetti, *Alleati del nemico: l'occupazione italiana in Jugoslavia (1941-1943)*, Quadrante Laterza (Roma: GLF editori Laterza, 2013).

⁵⁹ Carlo Spartaco Capogreco, ‘I “luoghi della memoria” e le potenzialità turistico-culturali dei siti storici dei campi di concentramento di Rab, Molat e Mamula’, *Qualestoria. Rivista di storia contemporanea* 49, no. 2 (2021): 155–72, <https://doi.org/10.13137/0393-6082/33487>; Alessandra Kersevan, *Lager italiani: pulizia etnica e campi di concentramento fascisti per civili jugoslavi 1941-1943*, Documenti (Roma: Nutrimenti, 2008); Gobetti, *E allora le foibe?*, 24–25.

⁶⁰ Pupo, *Trieste '45*, 7.

⁶¹ Gobetti, *E allora le foibe?*, 30–37; Tenca Montini, *Fenomenologia di un martirologio mediatico*, 46–50.

enemies of the people, a model similar to Stalin's purges.⁶² The 1943 massacres were actively used by nazifascist authorities as a tool of anti-communist propaganda.⁶³

Since 1941, in the former Yugoslavian territories, there has been a complex conflict involving ethnic and political components. In the Balkans there was not just a clash between occupied and occupied forces but also a civil war, with the partisan movement dominated by communists and different nationalist groups, such as Croatian Ustašas, Serbian Chetniks, and Slovenian Domobranci, fighting along nazifascist forces and one against the other.⁶⁴ The Yugoslavian liberation movement had been active in Venezia Giulia since 1942, and the Italian liberation movement since the autumn of 1943. The CLNs (National Liberation Committees) were formed in Gorizia and Trieste, but not in Pola; in Istria, the Italian anti-fascists were unable to create an autonomous resistance. In the fight against Nazis and Fascists the two movements collaborated, but there were differences between them in structure—the Italian resistance was multi-party, the Yugoslavian resistance was communist-led—and in objectives. The Italians wanted to drive out the Germans, establish a liberal-democratic state, and maintain Italian sovereignty over at least part of Venezia Giulia, while for the Yugoslavian partisans, who were fighting to establish a communist regime, liberation also meant the annexation of the Julian territories. In the autumn of 1944, the Yugoslavian communists made their demands explicit and asked the Italian communists to support them in the name of proletarian internationalism. The Julian ones ended up accepting and leaving the Trieste CLN, while at a national level, the PCI held an ambiguous position, which ultimately favoured the Yugoslavian side. The prospect of entering a plurinational and socialist state, like Tito's Yugoslavia, sparked many hopes among the Julian proletariat. Julian society was fragmented along lines of force that did not fully coincide with national divisions, with different segments awaiting their own liberators in the wake of the 1945 German collapse.⁶⁵

The liberations from the Nazi occupation arrived in Venezia Giulia from the east and west. The Yugoslavs prioritised reaching the Isonzo line, postponing the liberation of significant parts of

⁶² Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 72–76.

⁶³ Elio Apih, *Le foibe giuliane: note e documenti* (Gorizia: Libreria editrice goriziana, 2010), 20; Tenca Montini, *Fenomenologia di un martirologio mediatico*, 75.

⁶⁴ Enzo Collotti, 'Le occupazioni italiane nei Balcani', in *Dall'impero austro-ungarico alle foibe. Conflitti nell'area alto-adriatica* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2009), 94–101; Gobetti, *Alleati del nemico*; Pupo, *Adriatico amarissimo. Una lunga storia di violenza*, 98–115; Tanner, *Croatia*, 141–67.

⁶⁵ Gian Carlo Bertuzzi, 'Resistenza italiana e movimento di liberazione sloveno e croato nella Venezia Giulia', in *Dall'impero austro-ungarico alle foibe. Conflitti nell'area alto-adriatica* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2009), 119–45; Karlsen, *Frontiera rossa*, 38–91; Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 85–87.

Yugoslavian territory, while the Anglo-Americans in the final days of April joined the “race for Trieste”⁶⁶. The Yugoslavian IV Army arrived first, but a division from New Zealand immediately followed. There were two different liberators, characterised by two distinct political ideologies and two different approaches towards the enemies: the Germans preferred surrendering to the Anglo-American forces. The Yugoslavs protested the intrusion into a city that was seen as a territorial gain to their social and national revolution. Those tense events led to the May 1945 “Trieste crisis”, the first international confrontation between East and West.⁶⁷ The crisis ended with the Belgrade agreement of the 9th of June 1945, dividing Venezia Giulia into two occupation zones: Zone A was entrusted to the Anglo-American military administration, while Zone B was handed over to the Yugoslavian military administration. Gorizia, Trieste, and, as an exclave, Pola were assigned to Zone A; the Yugoslavian army had to leave those cities after approximately 40 days of occupation.⁶⁸

At this juncture came the second wave of foibe massacres, accounting for between 3 and 4 thousand victims. Among the targeted group, thus, were not only the perpetrators of years of fascist repression, but even antifascist, non-communist or non-aligned with the Yugoslavian annexion, and innocent civilian victims of private revenge. Those were the victims of a showdown, similar to many others in Europe, at the end of the war. The goal was mainly a political one: cleaning the territory from potential opposition to the project of a communist Yugoslavian state. In the Italian memory of the events, however, those violences are read as the proofs of an ethnic cleansing targeting Italians for their bare nationality. This thesis became prominent, even being endorsed in official speeches by a former Italian President of the Republic,⁶⁹ but it is mostly rejected by historiography.⁷⁰ The victims are collectively called “infoibate”, a term that encompasses both those who were actually thrown into the foibe and those who were shot, forced to die of hardship, or who disappeared without any indication of their true fate. Something analogous happened with the gas chamber representing the whole Holocaust, while Jews were murdered in a variety of horrifying ways.⁷¹ The psychology of the foibe

⁶⁶ Pupo, *Trieste '45*, 147–53.

⁶⁷ Sluga, *The Problem of Trieste and the Italo-Yugoslav Border*, 133–46.

⁶⁸ Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 87–98; Sluga, *The Problem of Trieste and the Italo-Yugoslav Border*, 85–109; Valdevit, *Trieste*, 52–56.

⁶⁹ ‘Intervento del Presidente della Repubblica, Giorgio Napolitano, in occasione della celebrazione del “Giorno del Ricordo”’, <https://presidenti.quirinale.it/elementi/54223>.

⁷⁰ Ballinger, *History in Exile*, 282–83; Fonzo, ‘Use and Abuse of History and Memory’, 66; Gobetti, *E allora le foibe?*, 37–46; Tenca Montini, ‘Confini stridenti. Nazionalismo antislabo e giorno del ricordo’; Vallerin, ‘La memoria delle foibe e dell’esodo giuliano-dalmata. Le rivendicazioni della destra italiana e il dibattito nelle istituzioni europee’, 111–12; Zamparutti, ‘*Brava Gente* and the Counter (Re)Public of Italy’, 7.

⁷¹ Fulvio Salimbeni, *Le foibe: un problema storico* (Trieste: Unione degli istriani, 1998), 3.

massacres, their impact on contemporary Julian March society, and their intense political use decades later still has a heavy impact on the narratives of the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus.

3. The peace treaty and its long aftermath

The peace treaty was signed in Paris on February 10, 1947. This date became highly symbolic since it was chosen for the “Giorno del ricordo”, the Italian memorial day for the foibe massacres and the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus. Paradoxically, among many other possible dates, the day of the peace was chosen to commemorate violence and suffering on the Italian “Eastern border”.⁷²

In 1945 and 1946, both the Rome government and the Italians living in the Julian March cultivated illusions of a favourable outcome of the treaty. The Italians of Istria, particularly those in urban centres with reduced Slavic presence, spent a long time unaware of the potential loss of Italian territories. Their perception of the gap between Italian civilization and Slavic barbarism, as well as their propensity to see the Allies—particularly the Americans—as the new Italy's friends who had to defend its rights and interests—all had an impact on the simplified schemes through which they looked at the international situation. Furthermore, in their perception, the contrast between communism and anti-communism could help garner support for the Italian cause.⁷³ This seems, apparently, to be a good point, but it is flawed by anachronism. The hostilities between the Soviet Union and the Western allies did not escalate immediately after the war, and during the Paris conference, the anti-communist argument did not represent a strong card in the hands of Italian negotiators.⁷⁴

⁷² Catalan, ‘Il Giorno del ricordo fra celebrazioni, sguardi esterni e stereotipi’, 131; Filippo Focardi, ‘Il passato conteso. Transizione politica e guerra della memoria in Italia dalla crisi della prima Repubblica ad oggi’, in *L'Europa e le sue memorie: politiche e culture del ricordo dopo il 1989*, ed. Bruno Groppo and Filippo Focardi, Prima edizione, I libri di Viella (Roma: Viella, 2013), 69–70, <http://catdir.loc.gov/catdir/toc/casalini12/13807184.pdf>; Gobetti, *E allora le foibe?*, 4–5.

⁷³ Diego D’Amelio, ‘La difesa di Trieste. Strategie e culture politiche delle forze italiane nella battaglia per il confine orientale (1945-1954)’, in *La difesa dell’italianità: l’Ufficio per le zone di confine a Bolzano, Trento e Trieste (1945-1954)*, ed. Diego D’Amelio, Giorgio Mezzalana, and Andrea Di Michele, Percorsi. Storia (Bologna: Il mulino, 2015), 381–414; Fabio Capano, ‘Fighting for Trieste: Nationalism and Political Violence at the Edge of the Iron Curtain’, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 21, no. 4 (7 August 2016): 603–26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1354571X.2016.1207321>.

⁷⁴ Massimo Bucarelli, ‘Roma e Belgrado nel complicato dopoguerra adriatico: avversari per scelta, amici per necessità’, in *La difesa dell’italianità: l’Ufficio per le zone di confine a Bolzano, Trento e Trieste (1945-1954)*, ed. Diego D’Amelio, Giorgio Mezzalana, and Andrea Di Michele, Percorsi. Storia (Bologna: Il mulino, 2015), 305–9; Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 112.

The idea of a resolution through an “ethnic line” was considered: a high-profile international Allied commission visited the Julian March in early 1946 to draw border proposals. The line was simply impossible to draw due to the distribution of the ethnic groups on the territory and the unlikelihood of clear-cut, binary ethnic belonging in a mixed territory. The Allied commission returned four different lines (American, English, French, and Soviet) quite divergent from one another. The Soviet one was the most favourable to Yugoslavia, and the American one to Italy. The two involved states had their own proposals, too. Italy had to forgo the “strategic” border, which aims to control topographical hotspots like passes and peaks, and instead opt for an “ethnic” border, such as the one put forth by American president Woodrow Wilson at the conclusion of the First World War and giving Italy the majority of Istria. Yugoslavia, instead, traced a “strategic” border on the line splitting the Alps from the Friulian plain, at the same time pointing to an ethnic criterion: the federal republic should have stretched until the westernmost Slovenian settlement.⁷⁵ Such a line would have included urban centres with an Italian majority, but the claim remained legitimate from the Yugoslavian perspective according to the “ethnic territory” ideology adopted by the Slovenian national movement: according to this idea, Italian urban centres on the Slavic “ethnic territory” are “islands in the sea” doomed to be submerged.⁷⁶ This was also the realisation of a class struggle, since the “oppressed” countryside could take revenge on their “oppressors” in the cities.

The idea of holding a plebiscite in the contested Julian March emerged as a potential democratic means.⁷⁷ However, the project was rejected and never came close to fruition. On the Yugoslavian side, such an electoral, “bourgeois”, procedure did not match the revolutionary ideals.⁷⁸ They opposed the idea of a “blood plebiscite”: the Julian antifascist partisans were for the most part in favour of annexation to Yugoslavia. The Italian government, although not actively promoting a plebiscite, struggled with the ambiguity surrounding its result⁷⁹. Ethnicity-focused population censuses, considered unreliable by some specialists. Furthermore, the alignment of Italian-speaking Julian communists with Yugoslavia and support for the federative state even in the Trieste and Monfalcone working classes added a layer of unpredictability to the potential outcome. Another factor of prudence was the potential trigger of another plebiscite in South Tirol, a border region that was supposed to be entrusted to Italy despite its German population. The President of the Council of Ministers was Alcide

⁷⁵ Cattaruzza, *L'Italia e il confine orientale, 1866-2006*, 9.

⁷⁶ Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 9.

⁷⁷ Colummi et al., *Storia di un esodo. Istria 1945-1956*, 194.

⁷⁸ Karlsen, *Frontiera rossa*, 53–55.

⁷⁹ Cattaruzza, *L'Italia e il confine orientale, 1866-2006*, 303–4; Colummi et al., *Storia di un esodo. Istria 1945-1956*, 205.

De Gasperi, from the Trento region, and thus personally closer to the South Tirol question. Although downplayed by historiography, in the exiled people's memory emerged, and still prospers, the narrative of a De Gasperi betrayal of the Julian March in order to save South Tirol (Pupo 2005, 116-120; see also, among many, the account of the exile Livio Dorigo in Bernas 2010, 87). A 1955 article in the exiled newspaper *L'Arena di Pola* recounted:

De Gasperi himself was reproached for this unwillingness to support the plebiscite principle. De Gasperi, who had the courage and sincerity to reply that he understood and justified the reproach of the Pola and Istria's people. But he added that the plebiscite for Istria and Venezia Giulia in general would have meant the opening of a similar prospect for Trentino and Alto Adige, and it was this prospect that had induced him not to support the thesis of the plebiscite in Venezia Giulia, or the idea of making it a free territory. He further added that he knew that, because of this fact, the Istrians considered themselves betrayed.⁸⁰

The agreement was impossible; as a result of the impasse, the French had some room for manoeuvre. They suggested drawing a border that would be more favourable to the Yugoslavs—a tactical move aimed at gaining support from the Soviet bloc for their own border issues involving the Saar region.⁸¹ Moreover, the compromise included a buffer state, similar to the post-First World War arrangements (Memel Territory, the Free City of Danzig). The Free Territory of Trieste (FTT) was unsuccessfully opposed by Italy and Yugoslavia but came into existence some months after the peace signing, although it never developed into a real, sovereign state due to the impasse about the appointment of a governor. During its whole existence, it was divided into two zones: Zone A controlled by the Anglo-Americans and with closer links to the Italian state; and Zone B under Yugoslavian military provisional control. Zone A included the city of Trieste and most of the FTT population; zone B was a coastal strip of northern Istria, from Ancarano to Cittanova.

Palmiro Togliatti attempted to counter the FTT by negotiating a direct Italo-Yugoslavian agreement in 1946. In an interview for the communist newspaper *L'Unità*, on November 7, 1946, he stated:

⁸⁰ “Di questa mancata volontà di sostenere il principio del plebiscito ne fu fatto rimprovero allo stesso on. De Gasperi, che ebbe il coraggio e la sincerità di rispondere che il rimprovero dei polesi e degli istriani egli lo capiva e lo giustificava. Ma aggiunse che il plebiscito per l'Istria e per la Venezia Giulia in genere avrebbe significato l'apertura di analoga prospettiva per il Trentino e Alto Adige, e questa prospettiva era quella che lo aveva indotto a non appoggiare la tesi del plebiscito nella Venezia Giulia, o l'idea di farne un territorio libero. Aggiunse ancora che lui sapeva che per questo fatto, gli istriani si consideravano traditi”, ‘Le Pagine Palpitanti Del Grande Monito Di Pola’, *L'Arena Di Pola*, 4 May 1955.

⁸¹ Tenca Montini, *Fenomenologia di un martirologio mediatico*, 240.

Marshal Tito has declared to me that he is willing to allow Trieste to belong to Italy, that is to say, to be under Italian sovereignty, if Italy agrees to leave Gorizia, a city that, also according to the data of our Ministry of Foreign Affairs, is predominantly Slavic, to Yugoslavia. The only condition that Marshal Tito sets is that Trieste should receive, within the Italian Republic, a truly democratic autonomous statute [...] I think it is time to stop using the Trieste question to spread discord between two populations [...] I think, therefore, that Marshal Tito's proposal can happily serve as a basis for a definitive solution to all the controversial questions between the two countries and, above all, to suffocate forever any possible hotbeds of discord between them.⁸²

Togliatti was aware that the progressive division of Europe and the Soviet support for Yugoslavian claims damaged the PCI's credibility as a defender of national interests. At the same time, a communist move could challenge, in front of Italian public opinion, the De Gasperi government, busy struggling with the harshness of the peace conditions. Togliatti met with Tito in November, and they elaborated a proposal that granted Yugoslavian consent to maintain Italian sovereignty over Trieste and the non-establishment of the FTT in exchange for the cession of Gorizia. However, this proposal was met with disapproval in Italy: it was labelled “infamous barter” and did not rehabilitate PCI national credentials.⁸³ The following day, the prominent Christian Democracy member Guido Gonella wrote in the prominent clerical newspaper *L'Avvenire d'Italia*:

Therefore, the moral on the table would be that we should abandon the legitimate claims presented three days ago in New York, relating to the ethnic line and the plebiscite in the contested areas, in order to accept an unfair barter, which offends the Italians of Gorizia, which offends the tens of thousands of fallen soldiers, in order to liberate this Italian city, which above all injures that minimum strategic guarantee of eastern Veneto, of whose gate Belgade wants to have the key.⁸⁴

⁸² “Il Maresciallo Tito mi ha dichiarato di essere disposto a consentire che Trieste appartenga all'Italia, cioè sia sotto la sovranità italiana, qualora l'Italia consenta a lasciare alla Jugoslavia Gorizia, città che anche secondo i dati del nostro Ministero degli Esteri, è in prevalenza slava. La sola condizione che il Maresciallo Tito pone e che Trieste riceva, in seno alla Repubblica italiana, uno statuto autonomo effettivamente democratico [...] lo penso che è ora di smettere di servirsi della questione triestina per seminare discordia tra due popoli [...] lo penso dunque che la proposta del Maresciallo Tito, può felicemente servire di base per una soluzione definitiva di tutte le questioni controverse tra i due Paesi e soprattutto per soffocare per sempre ogni possibile focolaio di discordia tra loro”, ‘Il Maresciallo Tito è Disposto a Lasciare Trieste All'Italia’, *L'Unità*, 7 November 1946.

⁸³ Giovanni Di Capua, *Il biennio compromissorio, maggio 1945/aprile 1947. L'Italia del Don Basilio* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2006), 404–5; Karlsen, *Frontiera rossa*, 152–54; Galeazzi, *Togliatti e Tito*, 78–80; Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 119.

⁸⁴ “Dunque la morale della tavola sarebbe che noi dovremmo abbandonare le legittime rivendicazioni presentate tre giorni fa a New York, relative alla linea etnica ed al plebiscito nelle zone contestate, per accettare un baratto iniquo, che offende gli italiani di Gorizia, che offende le decine di migliaia di caduti, per liberare questa città italiana, che lede

Furthermore, Yugoslavian diplomacy later clarified that Tito's assent only concerned the city of Trieste, not the coastal strip connecting the urban centre with the Italian border, leaving it isolated in Yugoslavian territory.⁸⁵

Despite being unable to immediately incorporate Trieste, socialist Yugoslavia had a more extensive western border in comparison to its interwar predecessor. The Paris Peace sanctioned the acquisition of the entire Dalmatia, all the Adriatic islands, Fiume, and most of the Istrian peninsula, including its biggest city, Pola, under Anglo-American control since June 1945.⁸⁶ On the north part, the new boundary crossed the city of Gorizia: the centre remained under Italian rule, but the eastern neighbourhood and the surrounding countryside became Yugoslavian; a twin city, Nova Gorica, was founded there.⁸⁷

On March 20, 1948, the governments of France, Great Britain, and the United States issued a tripartite declaration proposing the return of the Free Territory of Trieste to Italian sovereignty. This move was part of a range of initiatives prepared by the governments of Washington and London to support Italy's government parties in the run-up to the crucial April 18 elections. The declaration strengthened Italy's negotiating position by protecting Trieste: the recognition of the legitimacy of Italian aspirations seemed to prefigure an Anglo-American commitment to defend Italian positions, which had not been obtained during the peace negotiations. It also sparked hope for the Italian population in the Yugoslavian-controlled Zone B of the FTT, foreshadowing the return of the whole territory under Italian control—but that hope went beyond the understanding of the real diplomatic work linked to the declaration.⁸⁸ Similarly, on February 17, the Soviet Union issued a statement endorsing the restoration of Italy's former colonies under a kind of trusteeship in an effort to boost PCI performance.⁸⁹

soprattutto quel minimo di garanzia strategica del Veneto orientale, della cui porta Belgado vuole avere la chiave”, Guido Gonella, ‘Ridiculus Mus’, *L’Avvenire d’Italia*, 8 November 1946.

⁸⁵ Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 120.

⁸⁶ Miletto, *Novecento di confine*, 107–8; Raoul Pupo, ‘Il nuovo confine fra Italia e Jugoslavia’, in *Dall’impero austro-ungarico alle foibe. Conflitti nell’area alto-adriatica* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2009), 161–82.

⁸⁷ Jure Ramšak, ‘Modernity Anchored in the Past: Making a New Socialist Town on the Yugoslav-Italian Border (1947-1955)’, *Qualestoria. Rivista Di Storia Contemporanea*, no. 2 (2019), <https://www.openstarts.units.it/entities/publication/33d79e9f-f459-45ae-ab8a-7101d8b28203>.

⁸⁸ Jože Pirjevec, ‘L’Italia repubblicana e la Jugoslavia comunista’, in *La questione adriatica e l’allargamento dell’Unione europea*, ed. Franco Botta, Italo Garzia, and Pasquale Guaragnella (Milano, Italy: Franco Angeli, 2007), 49; Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 160–61.

⁸⁹ ‘L’U.R.S.S. Conferma Di Appoggiare Il Mandato Italiano Sulle Colonie’, *L’Unità*, 18 February 1948.

1948 was a turning point in the Trieste question: first, the April 18th elections gave an absolute majority to the DC and left the PCI undoubtedly in the opposition, a political setting that would eventually last for more than forty years. Second, and more importantly in this context, Tito collided with Stalin's leadership on the socialist block in June 1948, and the public excommunication of Yugoslavia from Cominform created a new geography of alliances in the context of the Cold War. Yugoslavia went through a troubled time and developed a better relationship with the western world, becoming a useful "third part" in the confrontation between blocks. For a western-aligned Italy, the new status of the neighbouring country was beneficial: the Julian March was no longer an hotspot of the Iron Curtain "from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic". On the other hand, PCI remained part of the Cominform, loyal to Moscow, and thus could finally criticise that inconvenient ally that was Tito. A worse fate suffered the Italian communists that remained in, or moved to, Yugoslavia: the loyalty to PCI and Stalin's line became a ground for political persecution.⁹⁰

Overall, the 1948 developments cleared a substantial part of the political complexities surrounding the Trieste question. These factors, including the impasse over the FTT governor, the failure of the free state to get ahead, and the increasing divergence between the two zones, gradually diminished the rational justification for the Anglo-American financial and military commitment for Zone A. Moreover, the political turmoil in Trieste persisted: Italian nationalists directed their anger towards the Allied Military Government (AMG). In March 1952, there were serious incidents. During the summer of 1953, the Italian government sent the army to the border with Yugoslavia to be ready to unilaterally occupy Zone A. On November 8, the UK and US governments officially announced their intention to dissolve the GMA and entrust Zone A to the Italian administration. In November 1953, there was the final escalation: the four-day Trieste revolt. There were violent clashes between the police and the protesters: six civilians were killed. Neofascist groups took part in the revolt.⁹¹ The revolt in Trieste was followed by a wave of repression against the Italian population in Zone B of the FTT.⁹²

Finally, after lengthy diplomatic negotiations, the "Memorandum of Understanding" between Italy, Yugoslavia, Great Britain, and the United States was signed in London on October 5, 1954. It sanctioned the dissolution of the FTT by giving the Yugoslavian civil administration control over Zone B and a small portion of Zone A (Muggia's mountainous inland) and returning Trieste and the remainder of Zone A to the Italian state.⁹³ The agreement included protections for minority rights

⁹⁰ Miletto, *Gli italiani di Tito*, 249–56.

⁹¹ Pupo, *Adriatico amarissimo. Una lunga storia di violenza*, 236–42.

⁹² Miletto, *Gli italiani di Tito*, 153–57; Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 183–84.

⁹³ Cattaruzza, *L'Italia e il confine orientale, 1866-2006*, 321.

among its special conditions, but it made no decisions regarding principles of sovereignty.⁹⁴ The Memorandum was even rejected in a non-binding vote in the Italian Senate. The bilateral relations between the two states were further enhanced: a 1955 agreement signed in Udine facilitated cross-border movement and implemented some forms of economic cooperation.⁹⁵

More than twenty years later came the final settlement of the Italo-Yugoslavian border. The Osimo Treaty was signed on November 10, 1975. Italy finally renounced any claim on the former Zone B, and the sovereignty issue was solved. The signing was facilitated by improved diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and the United States, a period of relaxed tensions in international relations known as *détente*, and the Italian government's deliberate efforts to expand its influence in foreign policy by acting as an intermediary with Eastern European countries.⁹⁶ Also, the internal political scenario was different: in Italy, those were the years of Aldo Moro's centre-left, and impact on the national political debate was residual; it sparked only heated reactions in Trieste.⁹⁷

The Osimo Treaty was the last chain in the long history of border modification in the Upper Adriatic. However, there was an additional change in the political entities in the Upper Adriatic. Yugoslavia, along with other socialist countries, experienced a fatal crisis after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Slovenia and Croatia proclaimed independence in the summer of 1991: the process of detachment from the Yugoslavian federation was quicker and less traumatic for the former, while the latter experienced a lengthy and bloody war. Nevertheless, the Yugoslav Wars spared the Julian March, and the borders in that area did not change. The Istrian border between Slovenia and Croatia was just upgraded from the internal border of a federation to an international border. Some hardliners in the right-wing parties and in the exiled people associations tried to open a debate about the border revision, but they were impracticable provocations. Italy finally recognised the two states in their 1954 borders and agreed with them some forms of protection for the minorities in the respective countries.⁹⁸ From this

⁹⁴ Cattaruzza, 324.

⁹⁵ Massimo Bucarelli, 'Détente in the Adriatic. Italian Foreign Policy and the Road to the Osimo Treaty', in *Italy and Tito's Yugoslavia in the Age of International Détente*, ed. Massimo Bucarelli et al., International Issues, vol. 38 (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2016), 223.

⁹⁶ Cattaruzza, *L'Italia e il confine orientale, 1866-2006*, 335–44; Miletto, *Gli italiani di Tito*, 190; Valdevit, *Trieste*, 117–18.

⁹⁷ Diego D'Amelio, 'Il dibattito pubblico sul trattato di Osimo fra ragion di Stato e protesta locale', *Qualestoria. Rivista di storia contemporanea* 41, no. 2 (2013), https://www.openstarts.units.it/bitstream/10077/23174/1/04-Amelio_83-107.pdf; Luciano Monzali, 'Aldo Moro, Italian Ostpolitik and Relations with Yugoslavia', in *Italy and Tito's Yugoslavia in the Age of International Détente*, ed. Massimo Bucarelli et al., International Issues, vol. 38 (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2016), 199–216.

⁹⁸ Cattaruzza, *L'Italia e il confine orientale, 1866-2006*, 354–60.

point on, the Upper Adriatic experienced an improvement in mobility thanks to the accession of the two new countries to the European Union (Slovenia in 2004 and Croatia in 2013) and the Schengen Area (Slovenia in 2007 and Croatia in 2023).

Chapter 2. The Istrian-Dalmatian exodus: waves, grounds, historiography

1. An exodus in multiple waves

Across the 20th century, the borders of the Upper Adriatic changed several times. Even if we limit our analysis to a single phase—the “retreat” of the Italian component from the Adriatic Sea's eastern shore—the entire process still took a significant amount of time, occurring between 1943 and 1956 (and occasionally even later). The migratory movement's variation in both time and space may even call into question whether it can be regarded as one cohesive unit. Some historians, such as Raoul Pupo, argue that the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus deserves to be discussed as a unit since there is a common ground of motivations for the departure.¹ However, it is crucial to outline the different “waves” of the exodus.

Black exodus

The first of the waves is defined as the “black exodus” for its political connotation: it concerned people deeply involved with fascism or representatives of the Italian state in the Julian March and Dalmatia. Twenty years of fascist regime marked a close link between the state apparatus and the ideological mission of Italianisation of the region. For this reason, civil servants in the area were also seen as representatives of an ideology, fascism, and thus were a possible target of the violence from those opposing Italian rule. The chaos triggered by the September 8, 1943, armistice led to intense partisan activity and the first occurrence of the foibe massacres. This was a push factor for the migration of Italians—military personnel and civil servants—affiliated to fascism, especially those from other Italy's regions who were relocated in the Julian March there for their role, sometimes with their families. The Gorizia area experienced most of those departures, and an estimated five thousand people left the city of Idria, a seat of mercury mines.² In the rest of the region, the phenomenon did not involve a large number of people: a minority of apical figures, especially high-ranking ones, left after the armistice or in the wake of the partisans' takeover.³

¹ Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 191–92.

² Audenino, *La casa perduta*, 36.

³ Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 79–80; Roberto Spazzali, ‘In Italia e oltre. Accoglienza e sostentamento nello sventagliamento degli esuli giuliani’ (Gli esodi del Dopoguerra in Europa: aspettative e prospettive nel confronto fra giovani di seconda generazione, Trieste: Unione degli istriani, 2003), 109.

It could be argued that the “black” one was not a distinct wave of the exodus but rather a phase of it, blurred into many other movements during World War II. Those years witnessed large-scale deportations and forced migrations. Without recalling the most horrific extermination camps, there are multiple other instances of forced relocation, such as civilians in the bombed urban centres; in Pola itself, the authorities ordered the relocation of part of the population.⁴ The Upper Adriatic area was also the stage of an astonishing story: 40.000 Cossacks relocated to the Friulian mountains after a long journey alongside Nazi forces.⁵

Zara

The only Dalmatian territory that Italy acquired after World War I was Zara. Despite the expectation to get the entire Northern Dalmatia, barely 55 km² of Zara and its surroundings became an Italian province in 1923. It was an exclave, an Italian outpost on the Balkan peninsula. Following the 1941 aggression against the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the province was enlarged and formed, along with the newly instituted Spalato and Cattaro provinces, the Governorate of Dalmatia.⁶

The exodus began as early as 1942 due to the proximity of the partisan front, leading to a psychosis of fear and flight. The September 8, 1934, armistice led to the consequent German occupation of Zara. On September 11, flyers proclaiming the annexation of the city to the Nazi-allied Independent Croatian State appeared. For the Italian population of that distant exclave, the psychological impact was tremendous: they felt under the control of hostile forces. Furthermore, between November 2, 1943, and October 31, 1944, fifty-four Anglo-American raids hit the city, killing approximately 2.000 of its 22.000 inhabitants. The bombings of November 2nd and 28th took the people of Zara completely by surprise and caused hundreds of deaths. The main question raised by the Zara affair concerns the reasons for the fury of the Allied bombers, as the military logic underlying their action is not clear. The belief spread among Italians that the bombings were requested by the Yugoslavian liberation movement with the aim of destroying the main Italian settlement on the Dalmatian coast.⁷

After the November 28 bombing, the outflow of refugees from Zara became an exodus. The refugees were leaving first through the roads, heading north from Dalmatia, and then through the sea, with the steamboat “Sansiego” granting the only regular connection with Trieste. On May 24, 1994, the German authorities gave the order to evacuate the city. Many citizens moved to Trieste, Venice, Pola,

⁴ Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 69–72.

⁵ Pupo, *Trieste '45*, 31–35.

⁶ Gobetti, *Alleati del nemico*, 15–17; Miletto, *Novecento di confine*, 130.

⁷ Colummi et al., *Storia di un esodo. Istria 1945-1956*, 45–47; Miletto, *Novecento di confine*, 133; Oliva, *Profughi*, 89.

or even Apulia. The wartime evacuation turned into a permanent leave. In May 1945, at least 10.000 Italians left, and just a few thousand remained. Those left, among many difficulties, after the Yugoslavian takeover or after the 1947 Peace Treaty, using the option clause. Some sporadic departures continued in the following years. In the 1950s, the Yugoslavian authorities closed the last Italian-language school.⁸

Accounts of Zara's exodus could also be found in May 1948: the exiles' newspaper "Difesa Adriatica" told the story of a group of people leaving the Dalmatian city, entering Italy through Fiume and Gorizia, after multiple rounds of frisks by the Yugoslavian authorities, and then further suffering the disorganisation of Italian authorities. Forty-six of them were sent from Udine to a refugee camp in Civitavecchia (Lazio). They arrived unannounced, and they were sent back to Rome and then to the Presestino transit camp.⁹ In July, a group of ninety-five exiles were transported from Zara to Ancona with the steamboat "Nesazio".¹⁰

Fiume

Fiume experienced traumatic events after the war, including looting by Yugoslavian troops and the execution of prominent antifascist figures. The Fiume autonomist faction faced harsh repression despite being antifascist; the same antifascist credentials made them a dangerous competitor to Tito's project.¹¹ The transition to a new reality in Fiume was sudden and unproven, with the city becoming a Yugoslavian city without any formal declarations of autonomy. The city was heavily Croatianised, with efforts to emphasise the Croatian presence in education, culture, and toponymy. This oversizing of the role of Croats in city life conveyed the impression that power had been taken by their traditional national antagonist, determined to reshape the city and its society.¹² The new regime established a largely unshared power, with the police component having a free hand but being inefficient in

⁸ Miletto, *Novecento di confine*, 130–32; Fulvio Molinari, *Istria contesa. La guerra, le foibe, l'esodo*, GUM. Testimonianze (Milano: Mursia, 1996), 81–82; Luciano Monzali, 'A Difficult and Silent Return Italian Exiles from Dalmatia and Yugoslav Zadar/Zara after the Second World War', *Balkanica*, no. 47 (2016): 317–28, <https://doi.org/10.2298/BALC1647317M>.

⁹ Oddone Talpo, 'Si è Giunti al Limite! L'Odissea Di Un Gruppo Di Profughi', *Difesa Adriatica. Settimanale Dei Giuliani e Dei Dalmati*, 20 June 1948.

¹⁰ 'Optanti Zaratini Sbarcati Ad Ancona', *Difesa Adriatica. Settimanale Dei Giuliani e Dei Dalmati*, 29 July 1948.

¹¹ Pupo, *Fiume città di passione*, 240–47.

¹² Marco Abram, 'Integrating Rijeka into Socialist Yugoslavia: The Politics of National Identity and the New City's Image (1947–1955)', *Nationalities Papers* 46, no. 1 (2 January 2018): 69–85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2017.1339679>.

subsistence problems. The economic crisis in Fiume during the first post-war years further exacerbated the situation. Italians were the targets of confiscations and dispossessions.¹³

In the summer of 1946, the Italian population in Fiume was facing a critical situation due to the regime's persistent focus on the annexation and liquidation of “remnants of fascism”. The economic situation was harsh: people suffered from hunger and from the incompetence of the new authorities. The Italian population, especially, felt at the mercy of an arbitrary power, resulting in collective anguish; their dissent was shown through the massive participation (even the industrial workers) in the religious procession for the Corpus Domini.¹⁴ The first wave of departures from the city, involving over twenty thousand people, was a composite flow of political exiles, impoverished clerks, traders, and artisans. The authorities' reaction to this wave of departures was ambiguous, with a violent press campaign and harsh rules. The choice of exodus was blamed solely on reactionary propaganda—they were defined as “fascists” and “chicken-stealer”—and the oppressive attitudes towards those leaving strengthened their determination to escape.¹⁵ As early as January 1946, more than twenty thousand people left Fiume's province¹⁶. Part of the Italian population in Fiume consisted of people who moved to the Adriatic city in the interwar period; they were among the first people to leave the city.¹⁷ Fiume's official assignment to Yugoslavia in autumn 1946 transformed the departures into a mass exodus, destroying the economic foundations of the urban middle class. In 1947, Fiume was a predominantly Italian urban centre, but local communist leaders took initiatives to promote the Croatian identity in the city, also through toponymic and cultural events; they claimed the city “always has been Croatia”.¹⁸ The Exodus continued over the next three years, under the form of the “option” enabled by the peace treaty¹⁹. Data from the city committee of the Communist Party on the options show how there were, until June 1949, 13.544 requests: 58% were immediately approved, and for those denied,

¹³ Orietta Moscarda Oblak, ‘Fiume nel vortice della repressione cominformista e delle opzioni (1949-1951)’, *Quaderni del Centro di ricerche storiche di Rovigno* 31, no. 1 (2020): 51–55; Gustavo Corni, ‘The Exodus of Italians from Istria and Dalmatia, 1945–56’, in *The Disentanglement of Populations: Migration, Expulsion and Displacement in Post-War Europe, 1944–9*, ed. Jessica Reinisch and Elizabeth White (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011), 80, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230297685_4.

¹⁴ Pupo, *Fiume città di passione*, 251–52.

¹⁵ Oliva, *Profughi*, 101.

¹⁶ Colummi et al., *Storia di un esodo. Istria 1945-1956*, 85.

¹⁷ Francesca Rolandi, ‘Those Who Left and Those Who Arrived: Population Movements from and to Post-Second World War Rijeka’, *History in Flux* 3, no. 3 (1 February 2022): 112, <https://doi.org/10.32728/flux.2021.3.5>.

¹⁸ Pupo, ‘Il nuovo confine fra Italia e Jugoslavia’, 248–49.

¹⁹ Corni, ‘The Exodus of Italians from Istria and Dalmatia, 1945–56’, 81.

77% of the 4.922 appeals were therefore accepted, totalling 11.706 successful options.²⁰ The options were opened once more in 1951.

Pola

Pola's case is unique among the different waves. Differently from the other territories transferred in 1947, the exodus was the result of months of public debates and political initiatives. In this way, the quantity of sources left is incomparable to other waves. Moreover, nearly 90% of the population of the city left in a sort time, between February and March 1947.²¹ Pola was an exclave of occupation zone A; differently from Fiume and the rest of Istria, the majority of the population left a territory under Anglo-American control to reach Italy with the substantial help of the Italian government. They did not escape from the Yugoslavian authorities; rather, they left in advance, avoiding falling under Yugoslavian control. The debate about the exodus took place in the last months of the Peace Conference, and precipitated when it became clear that Pola was destined to be assigned to Yugoslavia. The exodus was officially declared open on December 23, 1946. The planned exodus of the population took place between January and March 1947, and the city was handed to Yugoslavian forces on September 17, 1947.²²

Pola's exodus, however, represented nearly 10% of the whole exodus. Pola's exiled people were a minority, and in some way a privileged minority since they had the possibility to plan their departure during months, they were assisted by the Italian government, and they received better forms of welfare. Stating that has no intention to downplay Pola's population trauma for the departure, it is just to point out the substantial differences with other waves. Still, on the side of historical reconstruction, it could be said quite safely that the Pola population's experience was unique, and it got the highest level of attention from the Italian public opinion among all the exiled Julian-Dalmatians. It is also the most "visual" of the exodus' waves since it was photographed and filmed, and its photos are the most frequent images circulating on books and February 10 Remembrance Day's flyers. For this reason, the internal debate and the political implications of Pola's exodus will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

Istrian countryside

According to Pupo, a major trigger factor for the exodus was the destruction of traditional values in the countryside and villages of central-southern Istria, "still pre-modern realities", which shocked the

²⁰ Moscarda Oblak, 'Fiume nel vortice della repressione cominformista e delle opzioni (1949-1951)', 69.

²¹ Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 330.

²² The most extensive work on Pola's exodus is: Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*.

Italian communities.²³ The “war communism” climate enacted by the new authorities gave many reasons for dissatisfaction. Some individual initiatives, such as the mostly forced recruitment of “voluntary workers” for the construction of the Lupogliano-Stallie railway in harsh conditions—it was defined as the “Istrian Siberia”—pushed many to leave. Those social and economic reasons, thus, went beyond the national question, affecting also the Croatian rural population. Why is this relevant? Article 19 of the Peace Treaty provided the possibility for Istrians remaining in the areas passed to Yugoslavian sovereignty to opt for Italian citizenship and move to Italy, reserving this right only to people who had Italian as a language of use. The language of use criterion was a rather loose one, especially considering the extent of bilingualism in the region and the stress of fascist authorities on the Italian-only policies.²⁴ In this way, many individuals who were ethnically Slavs but had some knowledge of the Italian language found a legal way to emigrate. Many options came from the Istrian countryside, which was supposed to be predominantly inhabited by Slavs, to the surprise of Yugoslavian authorities: 90 percent of the inhabitants of Pisino chose to leave. That was the proof that in mixed-lingual areas, national belonging was “not a given of nature but an act of election” but strongly influenced by the conditions and policies of the moment, as the Italian historian Ernesto Sestan wrote in those years.²⁵ Following an initial hesitant beginning, the volume of option requests in Istria surged in the late spring of 1948.²⁶ The deadline, scheduled for November 1948, was postponed until February 1949 due to the high number of requests, and in 1951, a second round of options was opened thanks to an Italian-Yugoslavian bilateral agreement.²⁷

Zone B

The last episode of the long postwar border settlement was the 1954 London Memorandum of Understanding that assigned Zone B of the FTT to the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia. Zone B, comprising a small portion of northern Istria with the coastal towns of Capodistria, Isola, Pirano, Umago, and Cittanova, fell under the control of the Yugoslavian Army in 1945 and, following the FTT establishment in 1947, spent seven years under the Yugoslavian provisional administration. Differently from the territories officially acquired by Yugoslavia with the Paris Peace, Italian communities in Zone B did not lose hope in a future settlement recognising their national aspirations, if not the assignment to the Italian Republic. For this reason, the peak of the exodus in this area came only after the Memorandum. From October 1954 until the options deadline in January 1956, 17.677

²³ Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 141.

²⁴ Orlić, *Identità di confine. Storia dell'Istria e degli istriani dal 1943 a oggi*, 150–61.

²⁵ Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 143.

²⁶ Orlić, *Identità di confine. Storia dell'Istria e degli istriani dal 1943 a oggi*, 142–59.

²⁷ Colummi et al., *Storia di un esodo. Istria 1945-1956*, 334–36.

people left Zone B and 2.784 left the small portion of Zone A transferred to Yugoslavia; it was the last wave of the different exoduses. However, an additional seventeen thousand people left in the previous decade; only five thousand Italians remained.²⁸

How, therefore, did the Italians live between 1945 and 1954? This was not an easy time for the whole community. Political repression intensified at some points, such as the October 1945 protests for the introduction of a new currency, the June 1948 Cominform crisis, and the April 1950 local elections held in an atmosphere of intimidation.²⁹ Between 1950 and 1952, Italian teachers and the clergy were targeted.³⁰ The performance of the Yugoslav administration was so poor that even the Italian working class and the Italian communists were dissatisfied. However, other factors kept the Italians in their territory, such as the gradual introduction of Yugoslavian legislation, the military administration's desire to maintain distance from national rivalries, and the proximity to Zone A, subjected to the Allied military government, that attenuated the sense of isolation that weighed heavily on the Italians of the rest of Istria.

The counter-exodus

Historical essays about the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus mention another “wave” of the phenomenon, a peculiar one: a migratory movement going upstream. It is the story of the Italians who chose to migrate to Yugoslavia for a variety of reasons, but mainly political ones. While it could be said that many Istrian-Dalmatian exiles decided not to live under a socialist state, and that is especially true for those exiles whose identity was actually Slovenian and Croatian, there were Italians who fulfilled their desire to live in a socialist society by moving eastwards. They were aware that Italy was assigned to the “Western” bloc, and the April 1948 elections further cemented this status. However, some segments of the Julian March society, especially among industrial workers in the Trieste and Monfalcone areas, fought for the annexation of their areas to the federative republic; this aim failed with the Paris Peace, and thus emigration to Pola, Fiume, and other industrial centres became another way to finally build socialism. For the Yugoslavian authorities, this was a welcomed move. Their choice could be used for propaganda, and they were skilled workers replacing those who left: the Monfalconeses got important roles in Fiume’s industries. Paradoxically, the counter-exodus became a matter of concern for the Italian Communist Party, suffering a drain of local cadres. Crossing the

²⁸ Colummi et al., 469–95; Miletto, *Gli italiani di Tito*, 153–63; Oliva, *Profughi*, 167; Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 180–86; Sandi Volk, *Esuli a Trieste: bonifica nazionale e rafforzamento dell’italianità sul confine orientale* (Udine: Kappa Vu, 2004), 258–60; Wörsdörfer, *Il confine orientale*, 270–81.

²⁹ Miletto, *Gli italiani di Tito*, 61–94; Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 149–58.

³⁰ Colummi et al., *Storia di un esodo. Istria 1945-1956*, 391–401.

border was also a recourse for those Yugoslavian-aligned communist activists who experienced political persecution in the Anglo-American Zone A.³¹

The counter-exodus did not engage Italians exclusively from the Julian March. There were also Italians coming from other regions, mainly the South: teachers, journalists, actors, and artists that, in Fiume, worked in the schools, Italian-language newspapers, and the theatre. For a while, there were two different Italian communities in the city: the “native” community, constantly decreasing, and the “non-Julian” one.³² The story of the counter-exiles was, however, short and tragic: the June 1948 Tito-Stalin split combined with the allegiance of many of them to the PCI (and thus to the Soviet Union), made them an internal enemy for the Yugoslavian authorities. Most of them returned to a hostile Italy or migrated to third countries; the worst fate was suffered by the two hundred Italians interned in the Goli Otok camp as political prisoners.³³ The counter-exodus is a fascinating and intricate story, maybe a niche story, but it did not represent a real mass exodus in its dimension, involving just a few thousand Italians.³⁴

How many were, then, the exiles? The answer also depends on who is included in the category of “exiled”: the “Italians” who left Istria and Dalmatia? Those who left Tito’s regime for political reasons? As described above, the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus was a long, varied phenomenon regarding a population whose ethnic boundaries were not clear-cut. There is not just one answer, nor was there a definitive census: the quantification is debated in historiography and often stretched in the political use of the exodus. There was, nonetheless, an attempt at a census. It was launched in 1953 by the “Opera per l’Assistenza ai profughi giuliani e dalmati” (OAPGD), a charity entity for the Istrian-Dalmatian refugees—a private initiative but strongly backed by the Italian government.³⁵ It was financed by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and carried out under the direction of Amedeo Colella. The Opera survey was published in 1958,³⁶ but it refers to the years 1954–1955, and later departures are thus excluded. Many exiles, especially those of the immediate postwar period, were not traceable because they emigrated to other continents. In this way, they did not create links with associations or the Italian state relief programmes.³⁷ Some of the Colella team’s data are based on a

³¹ Miletto, *Gli italiani di Tito*, 193–207; Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 130–31.

³² Miletto, *Gli italiani di Tito*, 194–95; Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 132–33.

³³ Miletto, *Gli italiani di Tito*, 297.

³⁴ Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 130.

³⁵ Pupo, 211.

³⁶ Amedeo Colella, *L’esodo dalle terre adriatiche: rilevazioni statistiche* (Roma: Opera per l’assistenza ai profughi giuliani e dalmati, 1958).

³⁷ Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 189.

sampling of the whole group: the family names starting with “M” and “P”.³⁸ The number of detected exiles is 201.440, but the researchers estimated a 20% of undetected exiles, thus raising the number to a quarter of a million.

Looking for an answer in the Italian public discourse, the most frequent figure is higher: 350.000. The number was established in a meeting of exiles’ associations in 1986: the deliberation “commits the member associations to adopt this data in all documents and publications”.³⁹ The exiled friar Flaminio Rocchi, author of an early book about the exodus (first edition in 1969), affirmed that besides the 201.440 of the Opera’s survey, there were 50.000 “not found”, 80.000 emigrated to a third country, and 15.000 left after 1958. The sum is 346.440, all ethnic Italians, and he marked the number in the title of his book, “The Exodus of the 350 Thousand Giulians, Fiumians and Dalmatians”.⁴⁰ In addition, he counted other categories such as 10.000 Italians whose emigration was denied by Yugoslavian authorities; 90.000 Italians remained despite the will to leave because they were old, women, or infirm; 23.000 that died during WW2; 60.000 Slavs escaping communism, 10.000 of them seeking asylum in Italy.

Other researchers proposed other estimates. The Slovenian-Italian Sandi Volk calculated a total of 237.000 exiles: 140.000 autochthonous Italians, 67.000 Italians emigrated in the region after 1918, and 30.000 Slovenes and Croats;⁴¹ the Croatian demographer Vladimir Žerjavić estimated a figure between 190.000 and 200.000: 22.359 optants from Slovenia; 25.065 from Zone B of the Free Territory; 119.000 ethnic Italians and 25.000 Croats from Croatian territory;⁴² the Italian Olinto Mileta Mattiuz came up with a total of 302.000 exiles. 252.000 were “Italian” exiles, of which 188.000 “autochthonous”, 36.000 immigrated during the interwar period, with their 4.000 children born there, 24.000 soldiers and civil servants with their families; the “Slavic” exiles were 34.000 Slovenes and 12.000 Croats; finally, there were 4.000 of other ethnicities (Romanian, Hungarian, Albanese).⁴³

2. The multiple motivations for an exodus

³⁸ Mileta Mattiuz, ‘Gli spostamenti di popolazione nel territorio annesso alla Jugoslavia dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale. Tentativo di quantificazione demografica’, 693.

³⁹ Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 296.

⁴⁰ Rocchi, *L’esodo dei 350 mila giuliani, fiumani e dalmati*.

⁴¹ Volk, *Esuli a Trieste*, 53.

⁴² Vladimir Žerjavić, ‘Quante persone emigrarono dai territori annessi alla Croazia e alla Slovenia dopo la capitolazione dell’Italia e dopo la seconda guerra mondiale.’, *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 29, no. 1 (1997): 147–53.

⁴³ Mileta Mattiuz, ‘Gli spostamenti di popolazione nel territorio annesso alla Jugoslavia dopo la Seconda guerra mondiale. Tentativo di quantificazione demografica’.

Raul Pupo identifies three interpretative hypotheses about the Julian-Dalmatian Exodus: a denialist approach, an intentionalist approach, and a functionalist one.⁴⁴ The three terms represent categories of the historiographical debate about another, quite different, historical event: the Holocaust. While it is quite easy to grasp the sense of the term denialism, the other two need further explanations. In the debate about the Holocaust, the intentionalist approach posits that the genocide was a result of a premeditated plan, decided long before its implementation, whereas functionalism suggests that the genocide evolved as the result of bureaucratic processes and improvisations rather than a centralised plan.

Between the three approaches, in both cases, the most absurd is the denialist one. Indeed, it represents a more concerning danger when applied to the Nazi final solution than to the Upper Adriatic issue. Denialism is often quoted in the debate around the foibe, which is a historical event close to the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus but different in its nature (massacres on the one hand, mass migration on the other). Istria and other parts of the Julian March, as well as many Eastern European borderlands, underwent a huge demographic change in the postwar years: why would anyone try to deny such macro-events? To answer this question, it is important to remember that when the historiographical debate started, the very place where the facts happened, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, was still present. The political atmosphere in Yugoslavia, however, precluded a free and open discourse: the Istrian-Dalmatian Exodus was deliberately overlooked for decades by both Slovenian and Croatian historiography, which also downplayed its significance, using terms like “optants” and “emigrants” to sanitise the narrative. The goal of this linguistic strategy was to reject the terminology of Italian politics and historiography and to present the Italian exodus from Istria as purely an economic migration, leaving out the theme of national oppression. The official Yugoslavian narrative held that the Italian government was spreading anti-Yugoslavian propaganda. The debate gradually evolved, moving towards a functionalist approach: the Exodus was a result of difficult post-war circumstances. The post-war economic crisis in the Julian March certainly weakened Italian resistance, but Italy was also facing hardship at that time. Most refugees, especially those from the first waves, left without any concrete plan for their new lives in Italy: they were just escaping Yugoslavia for an unpredictable future. The economic push factor is an incomplete explanation of the exodus’ reasons.⁴⁵ The Yugoslavian perspective stressed the alleged biases of some Italian groups as well as their general inability to understand and appreciate the revolutionary changes taking place

⁴⁴ Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 192.

⁴⁵ Pupo, 194.

in Yugoslavia.⁴⁶ Early attempts to write about the exodus, however, came already during the existence of Yugoslavia: the Rovigno's Centre for Historical Research (Centro di ricerche storiche di Rovigno), established in 1968 by the Italian minority, started to debate the topic. Rovigno's researchers published some reviews of the early Italian historiographical works and novels about the exodus.⁴⁷

Did the Yugoslavian authorities want to get rid of the Italian population? This is the intentionalist approach, often embraced by the exiled associations and Italian nationalists in general. Four Italian members of the European Parliament, affiliated with the right-wing Alleanza Nazionale, presented a written question to the European Commission in March 1996. They wrote:

Can the Commission, an ever-vigilant guardian of human rights, at least express its moral condemnation of this genocide perpetrated against the defenceless Italian population, which is tragically recorded in history as the first ethnic cleansing operation by armed bands of nations which now arrogantly aspire to join the European Community?⁴⁸

The use of "ethnic cleansing" was also embraced by Italian authorities at the highest level: Giorgio Napolitano, the President of the Republic, in 2007. During the February 10 Remembrance Day, he described the foibe massacres as "a movement of hatred, bloody fury" that "took on the sinister connotations of an ethnic cleansing",⁴⁹ provoking a diplomatic crisis with Slovenia and Croatia.⁵⁰ The use of this term is rejected by historiography.⁵¹ The concept of "cleansing" can be in the first

⁴⁶ Franko Dota, 'Dal tabù all'errore: la storiografia croata sulle foibe e l'esodo istriano', *Passato e presente: rivista di storia contemporanea* 85, no. 1 (2012): 159–76, <https://doi.org/10.3280/PASS2012-085010>; Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 192–93.

⁴⁷ Luciano Giuricin, 'L'esodo istriano, fiumano e dalmata nella storiografia croata', in *Esodi: trasferimenti forzati di popolazione nel Novecento europeo*, ed. Marina Cattaruzza, Marco Dogo, and Raoul Pupo, Quaderni di Clio. N. S (Napoli; Roma: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 2000), 279–85.

⁴⁸ 'Ethnic Cleansing in the 1940s Perpetrated against the Italian Community Living on the Adriatic Coast', Pub. L. No. E-0644/1996 (1996), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-4-1996-0644_EN.html.

⁴⁹ "Vi fu dunque un moto di odio e di furia sanguinaria, e un disegno annessionistico slavo, che prevalse innanzitutto nel Trattato di pace del 1947, e che assunse i sinistri contorni di una pulizia etnica", 'Intervento del Presidente della Repubblica, Giorgio Napolitano, in occasione della celebrazione del "Giorno del Ricordo"'.

⁵⁰ Focardi, *Nel cantiere della memoria*, 221; Federico Tenca Montini, 'The burning border. A comparative study of the problem of Trieste and other territorial issues confronted by Italy after defeat in the Second World War', *Radovi Zavoda za hrvatsku povijest Filozofskoga fakulteta Sveučilišta u Zagrebu* 51 (1 January 2019): 249, <https://doi.org/10.17234/RadoviZHP.51.18>.

⁵¹ Ballinger, *History in Exile*, 282–83; Fonzo, 'Use and Abuse of History and Memory', 66; Gobetti, *E allora le foibe?*, 37–46; Pupo, 'Due vie per riconciliare il passato delle nazioni?', 253; Tenca Montini, 'Confini stridenti. Nazionalismo antisloveno e giorno del ricordo', 131; Vallerin, 'La memoria delle foibe e dell'esodo giuliano-dalmata. Le

instance connected to the physical elimination of the Italians, and thus connected to the foibe massacres; however, the existence of an intentional Yugoslavian plan for the mass emigration of Italians would also validate the claim of the occurrence of an “ethnic cleansing”. Many elements, however, can not fit the existence of an intentional plan. The decision-making process of Yugoslavian authorities is not yet clarified by historiography, and it is probable that various levels of rule (federal, national, and local) took conflicting decisions in those years. It is a fact that Yugoslavian authorities tried to delay or hinder the departure of Italians on multiple occasions. The problems especially emerged with peace treaty “options”, that they initially processed, often rejecting the request or accepting the option of some members of the same family and rejecting the others’. Those obstacles were openly addressed by the exiled newspapers.⁵² The complete depopulation of those areas and the departure of specialised workers were not beneficial to the reconstruction of the country; some young Italians were forced to remain, as in the paradoxical case of Giuseppe Bulva, a self-defined “fascist” that spent his life in a socialist state since he could not leave Fiume.⁵³ In some instances, illegal attempts to leave for Italy turned into tragedies, as in the case of twelve young people from Cerreto killed by border guards.⁵⁴ On the other hand, the “counter-exodus” proved that Yugoslavian authorities could even welcome the arrival of Italians.

The third approach, the functionalist one, is therefore the most explored by the more recent historiography. There was one important policy proclaimed by the Yugoslavian authorities: the “Italian-Slavic brotherhood” (“fratellanza italo-slava”). Even without considering the Italian minority, Yugoslavia was designed as a multiethnic state. The “Italian-Slavic brotherhood” aimed at showing how the new regime was different from fascism, not suppressing the minorities but promoting their cultural expression—various Italian-language newspapers were established.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, “brotherhood” is apparently at odds with “ethnic cleansing” and expulsion. Thus, it is important to investigate how it is possible that the former had a result similar to the latter. The “Italian-Slavic brotherhood” was elaborated during the Resistance, in contrast to other voices calling for drastic solutions against the Italians; it appeared on posters and walls in the Julian March in the aftermath of the war. It should have meant “the development of equality and brotherhood among the Croatian and Italian people of Istria”, in the context of a plurinational state for which “unity and

rivendicazioni della destra italiana e il dibattito nelle istituzioni europee’, 111–12; Zamparutti, ‘*Brava Gente* and the Counter (Re)Public of Italy’, 7.

⁵² Among several accounts, see the case of one family from Albona in June 1948: ‘Difficile Uscire Dal “Paradiso”’, *Difesa Adriatica. Settimanale Dei Giuliani e Dei Dalmati*, 24 June 1948.

⁵³ Gobetti, *E allora le foibe?*, 53.

⁵⁴ Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 159–60.

⁵⁵ Orlić, *Identità di confine. Storia dell’Istria e degli istriani dal 1943 a oggi*, 139.

brotherhood” of all the national groups under Tito’s rule was a key goal. The “Italian-Slavic brotherhood” was a selective integration strategy aimed at certain components of minority society involved in building communist Yugoslavia. These were the “honest and good Italians” willing to accept their new minority condition, decline their national identity, subordinating it to the goals of the new socialist state, and mobilise for the annexation by Yugoslavia.⁵⁶

The “brotherhood” was not just a propagandistic tool, as for long the Italian historiography and the exiles’ circles claimed.⁵⁷ The problem, however, is that these policies aimed at a minority of the minority, and the large concentration of the Italian industrial workers was in Monfalcone and Trieste, two cities that were not integrated into Yugoslavia with the 1947 Treaty. The disappointment towards the Yugoslavian regime policies, the presence of Slovenian and Croatian nationalism, and the final blow of the 1948 Cominform crisis removed any further sense to the “brotherhood”, and the Italians that remained were an absolute minority, and a part of them did not leave for the obstacles created by Yugoslavia in the options and emigration.

The reasons behind the exiles’ choice are varied but easier to discuss in comparison to the authorities’ stance on the matter. Many explanations for the decision to leave their cities and villages are provided by a sizable corpus of newspapers, books, memoirs, and interviews produced by the exiles. The problem, therefore, is not the lack of material but rather the agglomeration of those memories around some narrative cores. Both in contemporary accounts and in the memory of the exodus after decades, the political element of their choice was highlighted or used by the organisations of the exiled people or by external actors. Nationalism and anti-communism are widely present in the exiles’ narratives, but the decision whether to emigrate had multiple roots, it was not merely a political choice in all the instances. Egidio, an exile from Rovigno, asked about the motivation of his family’s choice to leave, addresses this problem:

Well, it was the economic issue there. I think, and people from my region may not agree, that the biggest push that made so many leave was the economic one. I want to say this: everyone is sorry to pass under another state, but under Austria we had been a hundred years!⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Abram, ‘Integrating Rijeka into Socialist Yugoslavia’; Orietta Moscarda Oblak, ‘La crisi istriana del secondo dopoguerra: dalle opzioni al Cominform (1947-1951)’, *Italia Contemporanea*, no. 287 (2018): 248–57; Oliva, *Profughi*, 81–83; Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 103–12; Tatjana Šarić, ‘Istria Between Yugoslavia and Italy: The Position of Youth, 1945–1954’, *History in Flux* 4, no. 4 (15 February 2023): 161–79, <https://doi.org/10.32728/flux.2022.4.7>.

⁵⁷ Moscarda Oblak, ‘La crisi istriana del secondo dopoguerra’, 249.

⁵⁸ “Eh, lì è stata la questione economica. Io penso, e magari non saranno d'accordo i miei corregionali, che la spinta maggiore che ha fatto partire tanti è stata quella economica. Voglio dire questo: a tutti dispiace passare sotto un altro stato, però sotto l'Austria eravamo stati cento anni!”, Miletto, *Con il mare negli occhi*, 177.

Many other witnesses blame the violence against Italians, connecting the exodus to the foibe massacres:

Let's say that the fear of vengeance, the physical fear of death given by the definition of Italian-fascist, played a big role in leaving.⁵⁹

But there are instances of an opposite perception:

But let's say that, in my opinion, many people left, but there was nothing, it was more worry than anything else. People felt Italian and wanted to leave. They also wanted to leave because they were afraid of the Croats, but it was an absurd fear because nothing happened to those who stayed. The fear was a kind of collective panic, I believe. A panic that broke out at the end of the war, even if I think that war is war and there was a kind of revenge, that is, maybe those who helped the partisans took revenge, maybe it happened sometimes that someone disappeared, but it was the war, but then it was over quickly. Anyway, it was panic and fear, but truly, those who stayed there were then all right.⁶⁰

The connection between the foibe massacres and the exodus was overemphasised, but it is still a signal of the perception of insecurity and the postwar episodes of violence⁶¹. The Italians of Istria experienced a traumatic transition due to the removal of the ruling class and key figures from the local society. The condition of privilege enacted by the fascist regime was then reversed. Years of regime propaganda surely had some effect on the perception of Italians: they had to accept being ruled by the “inferior” Slavic groups.⁶² The Yugoslavian authorities reciprocated the sentiment of

⁵⁹ “Diciamo che ha giocato molto nell'an-dar via la paura delle vendette, la paura fisica di morire data dalla definizione di italiano-fascista”, Glauco from Parenzo, Miletto, 150.

⁶⁰ “Ma diciamo che secondo me molti sono andati via ma non c'era niente, era più allarme che altro. La gente si sentiva italiana e voleva andare via. Voleva andare via anche perché aveva paura dei croati, ma era una paura assurda, perché quelli che son rimasti gli ha mica fatto niente nessuno eh! La paura era una specie di panico collettivo io penso. Un panico che è scoppiato alla fine della guerra anche se secondo me la guerra è guerra e c'è stata una specie di vendetta, e cioè magari chi aiutava i partigiani si vendicava, magari capitava a volte che qualcuno spariva, ma era la guerra, ma poi comunque è finito subito nel giro di poco. Comunque era panico e paura, ma davvero quelli che son rimasti lì sono poi stati bene”, Arnaldo from Fiume, Miletto, 136.

⁶¹ Raoul Pupo, ‘Orientamenti della piu recente storiografia italiana sull’esodo istriano’, *Annales, Series Historia et Sociologia* 10, no. 1 (2000): 186.

⁶² Katja Hrobat Virloget, ‘Urban Heritage between Silenced Memories and “Rootles” Inhabitants: The Case of the Adriatic Coast in Slovenia’, in *The Routledge Handbook of Memory and Place*, ed. Sarah De Nardi et al. (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 167–68.

suspicion towards the Italians, in some cases seen as the ruling class, or stuck to nationalist and fascist ideas:

At one point, we finally left too, because we saw that it was impossible to live that life there. Because we were considered reactionaries, fascists, saboteurs, and capitalists—in short, all the worst words that could exist—do you understand? A way to send us on our way because it pleased them to take my house, my vineyard, so it was. And then, basically, I was an untrustworthy person.⁶³

The stalinist climate until 1948 created a sensation of fear felt even by Italian members of communist organisations, as in the case of Sergio from Rovigno:

We felt like rats in a cage. We went to sleep, not knowing whether we would wake up in bed the next morning or be arrested. As people disappeared, we felt that the circle around us was tightening. It was only a matter of time.⁶⁴

The religious and teachers were replaced by regime organisations and a training system that attenuated the ties of the Italian national group with the motherland. This led to a collective crisis of identity; the Exodus can thus partly be seen as the collective refusal of accelerated modernization led by communist state power.⁶⁵ In the words of the remained Italian Anita:

In Dignano, they knocked down a chapel dedicated to Our Lady, at the entrance to the town, to make a park and build a war memorial. They could have done it somewhere else. But it was decided to build it right there, almost in defiance to emphasise that they were in charge, in power to do and undo as they pleased. Expressing a religious feeling, going to church became dangerous. Even baptisms were celebrated in secret.⁶⁶

⁶³ “Un bel momento siano andati via anche noi, perché abbiamo visto che è impossibile vive-re quella vita là. Perché eravamo [considerati] reazionari e fascisti e sabotatori e capitali-sti, insomma tutte le parole peggio che potevano esistere, capisce? Un modo per mandar-ci a spasso perché faceva loro piacere [prendermi] la casa, la mia vigna, questo era. E poi praticamente io ero una persona non affidabile”, Aldo from Grisignana, Nemeč, *Un paese perfetto*, 320.

⁶⁴ “Ci sentivamo come topi in gabbia. Andavamo a dormire senza sapere se il mattino seguente ci saremmo svegliati nel letto o saremmo stati arrestati. Via via che le persone scomparivano, sentivamo che il cerchio intorno a noi si stava stringendo. Era solo una questione di tempo”, Bernas, *Ci chiamavano fascisti, eravamo italiani*, 57.

⁶⁵ Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 198–204; Valdevit, *Trieste*, 81.

⁶⁶ “A Dignano buttarono giù una cappella dedicata alla Madonna, alle porte del paese, per farci un parco e costruirci il monumento ai caduti. Lo potevano fare da un'altra parte. Ma fu deciso di edificarlo proprio lì, quasi a spregio per sottolineare che erano loro a comandare, in potere di fare e disfare a piacimento. Esprimere un sentimento religioso, andare in chiesa divenne pericoloso. Addirittura, i battesimi venivano celebrati di nascosto. Piccole violenze quotidiane che siamo stati costretti a subire negli anni”, Bernas, *Ci chiamavano fascisti, eravamo italiani*, 73.

Even taking into account all those reasons, the decision to leave was never easy, and there were some pushes to remain: De Gasperi never showed enthusiasm for the solution of a mass exodus, and the Trieste and Capodistria bishop Antonio Santin affirmed that he would have preferred to see the Istrian clergy at its place.⁶⁷ Older people tended to resist the decision to leave the homeplace. They represented a consistent number of those who remained, even when the children and grandchildren left.⁶⁸ In the case of Pola and other territories that witnessed a high percentage of options for Italy, the departure of the majority of the neighbours and the disintegration of the economic and social framework pushed decisively towards the departure of those who were the most reluctant to take this decision.

3. The exodus in the European context

The Istrian-Dalmatian exodus is far from unique as a migration process in 20th-century Europe; it is one of the many movements caused by the world wars. In recent years, historiography has paid more attention to refugees and deportees, and the 20th century earned the epithet of “century of refugees” due to the social and demographic relevance of the phenomenon. The contemporary figure of the “refugee” emerged with the post-World War I migrations, and the century ended with renewed attention on the topic due to the tragic events of the Yugoslav Wars.⁶⁹

The two Italian historians Antonio Ferrara and Niccolò Pianciola used the formula “the Age of forced migration” in their 2012 overview of deportations and “exoduses” from the Crimean War (1853) and Stalin’s death (1953). Other authors wrote about the century of “removal” and the “Age of demographic engineering”.⁷⁰ Ferrara and Pianciola applied the definition of “exodus” for:

Those instances in which a group of inhabitants was induced to leave the political boundaries of the territory in which they lived due to pressure exerted by the controlling government, either in terms of direct violence or deprivation of rights, especially in correspondence with a radical political change affecting inter-state relations (war conflicts, collapse and, state-building). In such circumstances,

⁶⁷ Valdevit, *Trieste*, 81.

⁶⁸ see the case of Italia Giacca Zaccariotto, Francesca Fantini D’Onofrio, Italia Giacca Zaccariotto, and Mario Grassi, *L’esodo nei ricordi dei giuliano-dalmati di Padova: 1943-1954* (Venezia: Alcione editore, 2013), 95; the case of Elvia Fabianich's family, Bernas, *Ci chiamavano fascisti, eravamo italiani*, 127; Maria's family, Miletto, *Con il mare negli occhi*, 34.

⁶⁹ Audenino, *La casa perduta*, 9.

⁷⁰ Ferrara and Pianciola, *L’età delle migrazioni forzate*, 385.

forced migration was not the clear initial objective of the government in question, nor did the latter organise it; the end result was, however, the almost total emigration of the group.⁷¹

Forced migrations in those one hundred years totalled more than 30 million people, nearly half of them in Central Europe between 1944 and 1952.⁷² Why was the impact of World War II so tremendous? As Tony Judt recounts in “*Postwar. A History of Europe Since 1945*”, after World War I, Western policymakers were already disillusioned by the perceived failure of the League of Nations and minority clauses in the Versailles Treaties. At the time, the national questions were mostly addressed by inventing and adjusting borders while leaving populations largely undisturbed, creating large pools of ethnic minorities in the new states. National minorities outside the boundaries of the state turned into a perfect tool for revisionism and then war. Consequently, after 1945, there was a shift in approach: while borders largely remained intact, populations were relocated instead, with few exceptions.⁷³

The 280.000 Istrian-Dalmatian exiles were then just a fraction of the millions that faced the same and harsher fates in that period. A comparison with other “exoduses” and expulsions that took place in the same area in other times (diachronic comparison) or in other areas of Central Europe but at the same time can help to contextualise the phenomenon. The comparison is not meant to belittle the importance of the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus: whatever the share of the entirety of the migrations of those years, the fact that almost the entirety of a national group left the area is still the crucial element determining the historical relevance and the legacy of that exodus.

The diachronic comparison is particularly relevant, because it involves the same ethnic group (Italian and Slavic, mostly Slovene) and the same states (Italy and Yugoslavia, but with different political regimes) after a World War (the First) and a peace treaty (the 1919 Saint-Germain-en-Laye Treaty) that modified the border. The outcome was the opposite of the 1947 Peace Treaty: in World War I, Italy was on the winning side, and it expanded at the cost of the dissolving Austro-Hungarian Empire. Italy acquired a German-speaking majority region, the South Tyrol/Alto Adige on the north, but also the vast multiethnic area on the east. Italy did not receive all the territories promised by the Allied

⁷¹ “Quei casi in cui un gruppo di abitanti fu indotto a fuoriuscire dai confini politici del territorio in cui viveva a causa di pressioni esercitate dal governo che lo controllava, sia in termini di violenza diretta sia in termini di privazione di diritti, soprattutto in corrispondenza di un radicale mutamento politico che investiva le relazioni tra stati (conflitti bellici, crolli e costruzioni di stati). In tali circostanze la migrazione forzata non era il chiaro obiettivo iniziale del governo in questione, né tantomeno quest'ultimo la organizzò; il risultato finale fu comunque l'emigrazione quasi totale del gruppo”, Ferrara and Pianciola, 18.

⁷² Ferrara and Pianciola, 399.

⁷³ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 27.

powers in the 1915 Treaty of London but still gained Trieste, Gorizia, Zara, and the whole Istrian peninsula (and, later, Fiume). These cities and the Istrian peninsula were far from homogeneously Italian. The mountainous areas east of Gorizia and Trieste, in particular, included vast Slovene-majority zones; with this transferral, Italy gained more than 400.000 Slavic inhabitants.⁷⁴ Shifting the perspective away from the Italian side, the Slovenes could complain about the loss of one-third of their ethnic territory and a quarter of their total population assigned to the hostile Italian state instead of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes.

During Fascism, the Slavic minority was not granted the same legal protection that the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes conceded to the far smaller Dalmatian Italian minority, around six thousand people.⁷⁵ Other accounts report that despite the relative better condition, between 10 and 12 thousand Italians—one third of them autochthonous, not recently migrated—moved from Yugoslavian Dalmatia to the new Italian exclave of Zara, or they moved further to Venice and to the rest of Italy.

The Slavs that found themselves on the wrong side of the border in the Italian Julian March suffered repression since 1923; these policies triggered their emigration. The first groups were teachers and civil servants, considered not aligned to the Italian administration, and then professionals expelled from the registers of their profession, seamen, and students.⁷⁶ Economic emigration to South America (primarily Argentina) was openly encouraged by Italian authorities to reduce the non-Italian population of the annexed regions.⁷⁷ Clandestine political emigration went on during the 1930s, strengthening exiled groups in Yugoslavia.⁷⁸ The quantification of those flows is challenging because the Italian sources did not distinguish the ethnic composition of the emigrants; some left Italy illegally; and there were many seasonal migrations, especially to other European countries. An “official” quantification of the interwar Slavic emigration from Italy was established at 100.000 people, in a similar fashion to the “350.000 Istrian-Dalmatian exiles” repeated by Italian nationalist historiography and authorities. The 100.000 figure originates from the investigation of the Slovene anti-fascist activist Lavo Čermelj. Among the 100.000 Slavic emigrants, 70.000 moved to

⁷⁴ Kacin Wohinz and Pirjevec, *Storia degli sloveni in Italia*, 30.

⁷⁵ Kacin Wohinz and Pirjevec, 35.

⁷⁶ Aleksej Kalc, ‘L’emigrazione Slovena e Croata Dalla Venezia Giulia e Il Suo Ruolo Politico’, *Annales. Annali Di Studi Istriani e Mediterranei* 8 (1996): 26.

⁷⁷ Kalc, 26–27; Pietro Purini, ‘L’emigrazione Non Italiana Dalla Venezia Giulia Dopo La Prima Guerra Mondiale’, *Qualestoria. Rivista Di Storia Contemporanea* XXVIII, no. 1 (2000): 33–54.

⁷⁸ Kalc, ‘L’emigrazione Slovena e Croata Dalla Venezia Giulia e Il Suo Ruolo Politico’, 28.

Yugoslavia, and 30.000 moved to Latin America.⁷⁹ The estimate was criticised by the Italian Carlo Schiffer. His estimate is 17.496, but he only considered the area of Yugoslavia annexed by Italy after the 1941 invasion, while many other emigrants were elsewhere. According to Italian diplomatic authorities, in 1934, the number of emigrants moving to Yugoslavia was 50.000. Pupo defines 100.000 as a “political figure”.⁸⁰ Not only Slavs emigrated following the transfer of Istria from the Austro-Hungarian empire to the Kingdom of Italy. In 1918-1919, between 15 and 17 thousand German-speaking residents, along with other 15 thousand people of other ethnic groups left the peninsula. Similarly, 6.850 Hungarians, 3.800 Slavs and 1.750 German-speaking residents left Fiume.⁸¹

Looking at events contemporary to the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus, it is clear that the Italian emigration was neither unique nor the most relevant in terms of numbers. Two other nations, Germany and Hungary, participated in the attack and partition of Yugoslavia and found their minorities subject to hostility and formal expulsions after the defeat of Axis power. Germans in Yugoslavia were nearly half a million before WW2: after the war, they were either expelled or sent to work camps. They practically disappeared as an ethnic constituent of Yugoslavia.⁸² Forced migrations in Central, Eastern, and Southern Europe between 1944 and 1952 encompasses not only the already cited nationalities (Italians, Germans, Hungarians) but also Poles, Ukrainians, Slovaks, Albanians, and Turks.⁸³ The Istrian-Dalmatian exodus—the authors used the 270.000 people estimate—accounted for less than 2% of the European postwar migrations, using a very gross (and questionable) calculation. In any case, the movements involving German people are on the scale of millions: eight from Poland and nearly three from Czechoslovakia.

The case of the ethnic German expellees is particularly significant: Germany and Italy were allies and both had imperial expansion towards Eastern Europe. The German plans were much more extended than the Italian ones: century-old settled German communities could be found in a variety of places in Eastern Europe, especially along the Danube river (Donauschwaben), but even as eastwards as the

⁷⁹ Marta Verginella, ‘Specchi di confine. Contributo alla discussione sulle pratiche della memoria di confine nell’area nord-adriatica’, *Italia Contemporanea*, no. 298 (June 2022): 263–64, <https://doi.org/10.3280/IC2022-298019>.

⁸⁰ Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 188.

⁸¹ Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 36.

⁸² Francesca Cavarocchi, ‘Gli spostamenti forzati di popolazione nel contesto europeo del secondo dopoguerra’, in *Quattro lezioni sul Confine orientale. Espulsione e abbandono delle terre istriane e dalmate dopo la seconda guerra mondiale*, ed. Giorgia Giusti (Mantova: Istituto Mantovano di Storia Contemporanea, 2020), 33; Ivan Crkvenčić, ‘Emigration of Italians and Germans from Croatia during and Immediately after the Second World War’, *Društvena Istraživanja-Časopis Za Opća Društvena Pitanja* 9, no. 45 (2000): 19–39.

⁸³ Ferrara and Pianciola, *L’età delle migrazioni forzate*, 366.

Volga river. Massive plans of colonisation, connected to the concept of “Lebensraum”, drove Nazi plans eastward and once occupied large portions of Europe. The local German communities gained power under the Nazi occupation, through the subjugation and expropriation of other groups, but following the retreat of the German front westwards, they either fled or became targets for revenge.⁸⁴ In different waves, and with some degree of violence, ethnic Germans were for the most part formally expelled by different states, and their number, between 12 and 14 million, posed a challenge for the authorities of the two new German states, reaching 30% of the population in some regions (Schleswig-Holstein). The expellees eventually reached the goal of peaceful integration, but in the immediate postwar period they suffered acute indigence, episodes of hostility from the locals, and they became a factor of political turmoil.⁸⁵

Finally, the uniqueness of the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus could be further contextualised in comparison with another contemporary migratory movement that involved a return of Italians to Italy, namely from the African colonies and the Dodecanese (Greek islands). This return attracted far less attention from historians and politicians, and the topic came recently under the attention of historiography.⁸⁶ This migratory movement did not involve autochthonous populations close to the Italian peninsula but former colonisers. After World War II, Italy lost its African colonies (Libya, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, keeping a mandate on Somalia until 1960) and the Dodecanese islands in the Aegean Sea. A 1949 International Refugees Organization report (“Italy and the Problem of Foreign Refugees”) stated that “over 200,000 Italians came back from the colonies alone: 94,000 from Libya, 45,000 from Eritrea, 12,000 from Somaliland, and 55,000 from Abyssinia”.⁸⁷ Another estimate is that 320.000 to 380.000

⁸⁴ Davide Artico, ‘L’espulsione dei tedeschi dalla Polonia’, in *Naufraghi della pace: il 1945, i profughi e le memorie divise d’Europa*, ed. Guido Crainz, Raoul Pupo, and Silvia Salvatici (Roma: Donzelli, 2008), 59–74; Audenino, *La casa perduta*, 21–34; Andrew Demshuk, *The Lost German East: Forced Migration and the Politics of Memory 1945–1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 33–62; Raymond M. Douglas, *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); Rainer Schulze, ‘Forced Migration of German Populations During and After the Second World War: History and Memory’, in *The Disentanglement of Populations*, ed. Jessica Reinisch and Elizabeth White (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2011), 51–70, https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230297685_3.

⁸⁵ Douglas, *Orderly and Humane*, 301–25; Michael Schwartz, ‘Assimilation versus Incorporation: Expellee Integration Policies in East and West Germany after 1945’, in *Vertriebene and Pieds-Noirs in Postwar Germany and France*, ed. Manuel Borutta and Jan C. Jansen (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 73–94, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137508416_12.

⁸⁶ Ballinger, *The World Refugees Made*.

⁸⁷ Pamela Ballinger, ‘Borders of the Nation, Borders of Citizenship: Italian Repatriation and the Redefinition of National Identity after World War II’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no. 3 (2007): 722.

Europeans repatriated from Italian colonies from 1945 to the early 1990s.⁸⁸ Their numbers are comparable to the Istrian-Dalmatian exiles, but the impact of the former is just a fraction of the latter in terms of historiographical research, associative activity, and presence in the public discourse and memory.

⁸⁸ Andrea L. Smith, ed., *Europe's Invisible Migrants* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003), 32.

Chapter 3. The planned exodus from Pola

1. Pola after May 1945 and the debate about the mass exodus

Day by day, we move towards complete desolation and the dreariest desert. Seeing the centre of the city at certain times of the day, it seems that we have returned to the times of the war [...] In the midst of so much torment, in the midst of these painful detachments and tragic disintegrations, the positive and unifying element remains the historical and moral value of our gesture, the spiritual greatness of the exodus, our dedication to the homeland. But these are values that go beyond us and our city, they are values that history will judge, that posterity will immortalise: for this higher cause, we are left with the sad legacy of witnessing the slow, gradual death of our Pola until the very end.¹

These solemn words appeared in *L’Arena di Pola*, the city’s pro-Italian newspaper, on February 18, 1947. At that time, the city was progressively depleting; thousands of its inhabitants had already left, and more were about to leave. This was a collective choice, a “dedication to the homeland”, a sacrifice—according to the article’s grandiose rhetoric. The reasons for the exodus were indeed more complex, but it is unquestionable that almost the entirety of Pola’s population made this choice. Why did a city decide to sacrifice itself and face the difficulties of a new life in exile, despite neither being openly forced to do so nor escaping war events? Or, in the words of *The New York Times*, “Pola offers the strange spectacle of a town that is being evacuated under the pressure, not of war, but of peace”.² This paragraph addresses the political developments that finally led to the departure of almost all the prewar population.

The outflow of Pola citizens did not start in 1947. As for Zara, the Allied bombings in June–July 1944 pushed the Nazi authorities to displace part of the population to the Friulian plain (San Daniele,

¹ “Ci si avvia di giorno in giorno verso la completa desolazione e il deserto più squallido. A vedere il centro della città in talune ore della giornata, sembra di essere ritornati ai tempi della guerra [...] In mezzo a tanto strazio, in mezzo a questi dolori distacchi e a queste tragiche disgregazioni, rimane come elemento positivo ed unificatore il valore storico e morale del nostro gesto, la grandezza spirituale dell’esodo, la nostra dedizione alla Patria. Ma sono valori che superano noi e la nostra città, son valori che la storia giudicherà, che immortaleranno i posteri: per questa causa superiore resta a noi il triste retaggio di assistere fino all’ultimo alla lenta, graduale, morte della nostra Pola”, ‘Desolazione’, *L’Arena di Pola*, 18 February 1947.

² Anne O’Hare McCormick, ‘Population of Pola Is Leaving; Last Hope Gone in Trieste Deal’, *The New York Times*, 9 January 1947.

Cividale del Friuli, Tavagnacco).³ This measure was quite ineffective; many returned spontaneously to Pola. Some of the initially displaced individuals, however, did not return, either during or after the war, making them the city's first exiles.⁴

The Italian Resistance movement organised in the city was rather weak.⁵ The Yugoslav troops entered Pola on May 5, 1945, when the German departure was still ongoing.⁶ As happened in other Julian March locations, the Slavic population from the suburbs and the countryside went to the city to celebrate the victory and, in some way, their conquest of the city by their fellow Slav partisans. On the other side, part of Italian population was disoriented; many witnesses focus on the sense of fear for the outsiders—the Slavic partisans—displaying traditions alien to urban Italians:

So, we came to the arena, and there were these people dressed as they could—really, really funny, let's say—dancing the kolo inside the arena [...] People did not welcome them well, not at all. Then, the fear took over: some people disappeared, and nobody knew anything anymore.⁷

On the contrary, those were days of celebration mainly for another part of the Italian population, mainly those who engaged in the Resistance movement and for those who were aligned with the Croatian-led communist party. The city administration was therefore taken over by the “Oblasni narodni odbor Istre”, the People’s Regional Committee for Istria.⁸ The Yugoslavian administration did not last long: the June 9 Belgrade Agreement turned the city into an exclave of the Anglo-American occupation zone A. Most Italians were enthusiastic about the arrival of the British 167th Infantry Brigade on June 18, since in the previous forty days hundreds of people were taken away by the Yugoslavian authorities for political motives and never came back. At the same time, industrial materials were seized from the Arsenal and shipped to other Yugoslavian regions.⁹

³ See the case of Regina Cimmino, displaced to Asiago from August 1944 to September 1945, returned to Pola, and then definitively exiled in January 1947, Regina Cimmino, *Quella terra è la mia terra. Istria: memorie di un esodo* (Padova: Il Prato, 1998).

⁴ Giuseppe Orbanich, ‘Da Pola a Pula (1940-1947)’, *Quaderni* 17, no. 1 (2006): 301–6; Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 69–72.

⁵ Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 64–69.

⁶ Molinari, *Istria contesa*, 65–66.

⁷ “Allora, siamo arrivati nei pressi dell'arena, e c'era questi vestiti come potevano—molto, molto divertenti, se vogliamo—che ballavano il kolo dentro l'arena [...] [La gente] non li accolti bene, no, no. Anche perché è subentrata la paura: c'è gente che è sparita e nessuno sa più niente”, ‘Intervista Ad Otello S.’, ISTORETO, 20 June 2008, <http://intranet.istoreto.it/esodo/trascrArchos.asp?link=FD9372>.

⁸ Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 76–78.

⁹ Molinari, *Istria contesa*, 67–69; Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 78–84.

Seeking to find a middle ground between the opposing sides of the conflict, the Allied Military Government (AMG) made an immediate effort to build good relations with the local population. This was not an easy task: the political landscape of the city was divided between the pro-Italian side and the pro-Yugoslavian side. It was a national and ideological divide at the same time, although not strictly national: there were Italians rooting for the assignment of the city to Yugoslavia. The division was reflected in the duplication of committees, organisations, labour unions, and newspapers. For example, there were two former partisans' associations: the pro-Yugoslav Associazione Partigiani Giuliani (APG) and the pro-Italian Associazione Partigiani Italiani (API).¹⁰

The AMG established a local council; they excluded from it the pro-Yugoslavian Comitato Popolare di Liberazione (CPL) whereas they co-opted the representatives of the reconstituted Italian political parties. The Italian parties then created a National Liberation Committee (CLN) on August 11, 1945. During the Resistance in Italy, the CLNs coordinated the antifascist political parties. Pola's CLN only operated in the postwar period. Four parties took part in it: the Partito d'Azione (PdA), the Partito Socialista Italiano (PSI), the Democrazia Cristiana (DC), the Partito Liberale Italiano (PLI). The CLN stood on the pro-Italian side, and communists were not part of it, as was the norm for the CLNs.¹¹

The pro-Italian CLN created a newspaper, *L'Arena di Pola*, directed by Guido Miglia. Despite being pro-Italian, the editorial line was open to dialogue with the opposite side, aiming at a sort of "third way", openly condemning fascism and Italian chauvinism. However, this line created internal friction.¹² The newspaper of the pro-Yugoslavian side was *Il Nostro Giornale*, edited by the Italian-Slav Antifascist Union (Unione Antifascista Italo-Slava, UAIS). It had a far less multifaceted line, being merely a militant publication with a tendency to simplify: Italy was constantly portrayed as being still fascist.¹³ The Italian Ministry for Foreign Affairs funded a clandestine broadcaster, Radio Venezia Giulia, which operated in Venice under the direction of the writer Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini.¹⁴

Pola's future was at stake at the Paris Peace Conference. On March 21, 1946, the Allied Commission visited Pola and the pro-Italian faction perceived its mobilisation as a success.¹⁵ Over the summer,

¹⁰ Colummi et al., *Storia di un esodo. Istria 1945-1956*, 165–73; Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 90–91.

¹¹ Colummi et al., *Storia di un esodo. Istria 1945-1956*, 163–65; Miletto, *Novecento di confine*, 143–44; Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 93–98.

¹² Colummi et al., *Storia di un esodo. Istria 1945-1956*, 173–79; Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 96–97.

¹³ Colummi et al., *Storia di un esodo. Istria 1945-1956*, 179–82.

¹⁴ Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 87; Volk, *Esuli a Trieste*, 117.

¹⁵ Colummi et al., *Storia di un esodo. Istria 1945-1956*, 181–85; Molinari, *Istria contesa*, 73–74; Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 99–102.

however, the outlook worsened: the Peace Conference was heading towards the French line that would have assigned Pola to Yugoslavia. On 26 June 1946 there was a general strike against this outcome. On July 3 the CLN decided to create the Exodus Assistance Committee (Comitato di assistenza per l'esodo) and opened a pre-registration for the exodus: in twenty days 9.946 families signed up, totalling 28.058 people. This list became an informal plebiscite for Italy: it was intended as a signal to the Peace Conference, but it also pushed the Italian government to seriously consider the eventuality of a mass exodus. On July 4 *L'Arena di Pola* published the headline "Either Italy or Exodus".¹⁶ In the words of the exile Lino Vivoda:

In Rome, they did not realise the dramatic nature of the situation and continued to procrastinate. On the other hand, one could not overlook the fact that more than twenty-eight thousand Pola citizens had declared in writing that they intended to leave the city if it was assigned to Yugoslavia.¹⁷

The pro-Italian organisation established connections with the Italian state through the Venezia Giulia Office, established on January 6, 1946; it later merged into the Border Zones Office (Ufficio Zone di Confine, UZC), an office established by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers.¹⁸ Antonio De Berti was one of the key figures in the Italian government's political work for Pola. De Berti was a Julian antifascist, first elected to the Chamber of Deputies for the Istria district in 1921; he returned active in politics after the armistice, and he operated in Rome, tied to the government circles. He was a member of the social-democratic Partito Democratico del Lavoro and worked in close contact with Alcide De Gasperi and Ivanoe Bonomi. Since the Julian March could not vote in the June 1946 Constituent Assembly elections, De Berti acted in Rome as an unofficial representative for Pola.¹⁹

In July 1946, the CLN sent a memorandum to the Ministry of the Interior. The Venezia Giulia Office was asked to study the modalities for the "complete transplantation of an entire city", hoping for the construction of another Pola elsewhere. The Vice-Prefect Giuseppe Meneghini was commissioned to create a plan for an organised exodus. The plan involved finding suitable naval means—the ships "Toscana", "Monte Cucco" and "Città di Messina"—and warehouses for safe transfer of people and

¹⁶ Colummi et al., *Storia di un esodo. Istria 1945-1956*, 195–200; Kosmač, 'Building Italianità in Northern Adriatic', 5–7; Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 136–38; Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 185.

¹⁷ "A Roma infatti non si rendevano conto della drammaticità della situazione e continuavano a tergiversare. D'altra parte non si poteva non tenere conto che oltre ventottomila cittadini di Pola avevano dichiarato per iscritto di voler abbandonare la città nel caso che venisse assegnata alla Jugoslavia", Lino Vivoda, *Quel lungo viaggio verso l'esilio: Pola - Ancona - Bologna - La Spezia* (Imperia: Istria europea, 2008), 5–6.

¹⁸ Kosmač, 'Building Italianità in Northern Adriatic', 3–4; Volk, *Esuli a Trieste*, 64–66.

¹⁹ Colummi et al., *Storia di un esodo. Istria 1945-1956*, 167; Miletto, *Novecento di confine*, 144; Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 94–98.

goods. Refugees would have been sent to northern Italy through Venice, to central Italy through Ancona, and (few) to the south through Brindisi. Special trains were scheduled to take the exiles from the port cities to the inland; some camps would have served as sorting centres. The Pontificia Commissione di Assistenza (PCA), a Vatican charity organisation for direct aid to refugees and POW, was involved in the scheme; the hospitality for the Julians in Italy was partly organised by Church networks. Meneghini's plan was ready for the beginning of October 1946.²⁰ In the meanwhile, the plan was kept secret to avoid any negative influence on the decision-makers in Paris.²¹

The sensation of siege (Pola was a Zone A exclave) and the fear for the future took a concrete shape on August 18. On that day Vergarolla beach was bustling with activity as swimming competitions were underway. Suddenly, at 2.15 pm, twenty-eight mines, torpedo warheads, and other deactivated remnants exploded, claiming the life of 65 people and injuring more. The responsibility was never established, but the suspicion of a Yugoslavian plan to scare Pola's population immediately emerged—an involvement considered likely by some historians.²² In the exiles' memory, the Vergarolla massacre was a further confirmation of the choice to leave the city, as recount Lino Vivoda:

We decided to leave after the Vergarolla tragedy. My brother Sergio was one of over a hundred victims of that massacre. He was just a child. He was eight years old. He was ripped to pieces by mines left unattended on the beach, triggered at night by OZNA [the Yugoslavian political police]. We could not stand it, we could not stay. With Vergarolla it was not only Sergio who died. It was the whole town, its history, its inhabitants who closed their eyes forever. We decided to leave. Soon, like an unstoppable contagion, Pola would be emptied out.²³

During the autumn of 1946, the atmosphere of unrest mounted. The Peace Treaty signing was scheduled for the beginning of February; this news spread the fear that the Yugoslavian takeover would occur immediately after it. There was the fear of violences, based on the memory of the foibe massacres and exacerbated by the Vergarolla incident. The shutting down of some industries created mass unemployment, worsening social unrest. In one instance, the planned transfer to Trieste of the

²⁰ Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 279–98.

²¹ Kosmač, 'Building Italianità in Northern Adriatic', 6.

²² Pupo, *Adriatico amarissimo. Una lunga storia di violenza*, 218–22; Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 253–61.

²³ "Noi decidemmo di partire dopo la tragedia di Vergarolla. Mio fratello Sergio fu una delle oltre cento vittime di quel massacro. Era solo un bambino. Aveva otto anni. Finì dilaniato dalle mine lasciate incustodite sulla spiaggia, innescate nottetempo dall'OZNA. Non ce l'abbiamo fatta a resistere. A restare. Con Vergarolla non fu solo Sergio a morire. Fu l'intera città, la sua storia, i suoi abitanti a chiudere per sempre gli occhi. Decidemmo di partire. Di lì a poco, come in un contagio inarrestabile, Pola si sarebbe svuotata", Bernas, *Ci chiamavano fascisti, eravamo italiani*, 101.

“Sansa” mill’s equipment was opposed by the pro-Yugoslavian faction. The move would have deprived Pola of a source of employment and income, in favour of the Anglo-American controlled Trieste. On January 3, a demonstration resulted in clashes with the police and three protesters killed.²⁴

2. The Toscana steamboat

The Italian government did not take an official stance in favour of the exodus until the end of 1946. Meneghini's plan and the presence of Pola's delegates in Rome caused controversy within the government coalition in October. Emilio Sereni, the communist minister for Postwar Relief, requested clarification. The Italian government finally endorsed the exodus on January 3, 1947.²⁵ Starting from this date, the Exodus Committee in Pola stamped the “exodus certificate”, and the Julian Refugees Committee (Comitato Profughi Giuliani) in Trieste granted the certificate to those who left outside the government-run means of transport. Six thousand people are estimated to have left before January 3—three thousand of them being ethnic Slavs.²⁶ The Council of Ministers further discussed Meneghini’s plan on January 8, 1947; the process itself started with the transfer of properties on January 23, 1947.²⁷

The bishop Ferdinando Baldelli, president of the Pontificia Commissione di Assistenza (PCA), visited Pola at the beginning of February, giving some instructions for the forthcoming beginning of the mass exodus.²⁸ *L’Arena di Pola* published on February 2, an article titled “Italy's generosity towards the exiled sons of Pola”. The article specified the allowance established for the refugees for the first three months in Italy (300 or 200 lire per day), and a one-time payment (3.000 or 1.000 lire) at the moment of the boarding on the “Toscana”.²⁹

According to the plan, the “Toscana” ship had to transport the refugees to Venice and Ancona. This steamboat was inaugurated in Bremen, Germany, in 1923, serving as a means of combined transportation for both cargo and passengers. It was acquired by the Italian government in 1935 for the purpose of transporting troops during the Ethiopian War, and subsequently it was used in the

²⁴ Orbanich, ‘Da Pola a Pula (1940-1947)’, 323–24; Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 234–37; *L’Arena di Pola* put the blame for the turmoil on the pro-Yugoslavian organisations, see ‘Sangue in via Dignano’, *Arena Di Pola*, 4 January 1947.

²⁵ See the report of the meeting of the interministerial committee, ‘Solidarietà Della Nazione Con La Nostra Città’, *L’Arena Di Pola*, 5 January 1947.

²⁶ Kosmač, ‘Building Italianità in Northern Adriatic’, 13; Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 312–13.

²⁷ Kosmač, ‘Building Italianità in Northern Adriatic’, 10.

²⁸ Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 238–39.

²⁹ ‘Generosità Dell’Italia Verso i Figli Di Pola Esuli’, *L’Arena Di Pola*, 2 February 1947.

Spanish Civil War. During World War II, it played a crucial role in the evacuation of Italian refugees from Libya and the Aegean region. It served as a hospital ship, locating people left behind after shipwrecks, rescuing hundreds of survivors, and transporting twenty-eight thousand sick or injured people. After the Pola exodus, it transported Italian emigrants to Australia, also from Trieste. It was decommissioned in 1961.³⁰ In less than thirty years, the ship witnessed Italian imperialism, war troubles, decolonisation and emigration. The pictures of the “Toscana” became the symbol of the Pola exodus, and, by extension, of the whole Istrian-Dalmatian exodus.

The “Toscana” left Pola for the first time on Sunday, February 3, at 7 a.m. Due to unfavourable weather, only 916 refugees—rather than the expected two thousand—boarded the ship.³¹ The steamboat arrived at 4 p.m. in Venice, welcomed by authorities and groups of other Julian refugees; part of them were immediately directed to the trains for other locations across Italy, such as Genova, Chiavari, Vicenza, Vercelli, Bergamo, Trento, Catania, and Fertilia.³²

The second round took place on February 7, this time with over 2.000 refugees, prompted by the impending signing of the Peace Treaty and fears of a Yugoslavian blitz on the city, despite the fact that the sovereignty transfer was scheduled to take place in a few months. The third shift had a troubled history: it was scheduled to depart on February 10, the day of the peace treaty signing, but the Anglo-American authorities' curfew prevented it from leaving.³³ In fact, on February 10, Brigadier Robert de Winton, the commander of the British 13th Infantry Brigade in Pola, was shot and killed by Maria Pasquinelli, an Italian volunteer for the Exodus Committee. Pasquinelli, a fervent and long-time devotee of fascism, believed that the Treaty had caused injustice to Italy, and she sought to exact revenge. She was tried in Trieste, condemned to life imprisonment, and then pardoned by the Italian President of the Republic in 1964; she immediately became a heroine for Italian nationalists.³⁴

On the day of the Treaty's signing, however, Pasquinelli's action enhanced the atmosphere of fear; during the boarding procedures of the third convoy, shots were fired onboard with no victims, and

³⁰ Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*; Paolo Valenti, *Toscana: la nave dei due esodi*, *Le navi di Trieste* (Trieste: Luglio editore, 2009).

³¹ ‘Un Comunicato Del Comitato Dell’Esodo. La Partenza Del “Toscana”’, *L’Arena Di Pola*, 4 February 1947; ‘I Primi Duemila Profughi Polesi Giungeranno Domani’, *Il Mattino Del Popolo*, 2 February 1947, sec. Cronaca di Venezia.

³² ‘I Primi Profughi Da Pola Sono Giunti a Venezia’, *Il Mattino Del Popolo*, 4 February 1947, sec. Cronaca di Venezia.

³³ Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 312.

³⁴ Spazzali, 266–75; Pupo, *Adriatico amarissimo. Una lunga storia di violenza*, 222–26; for Pasquinelli's biography see Enrico Miletto, *Le due Marie: vite sulla frontiera orientale d'Italia*, Saggi (Brescia: Scholé, 2022).

rumours of a bomb attack arose during the journey.³⁵ This rumour is reported by Lino Vivoda, although he travelled with the following convoy:

By evening, boarding operations have just concluded [...]. Rumours spread that they were looking for two suitcases of explosives that an agent of the OZNA (Tito's secret police, the one that had also caused the Vergarolla explosion) had brought on board, according to Civil Police Agent Franzese, who had recognised him while he was leaving the ship. [...] It was later known that the steamship was to be blown up in the middle of the Adriatic, after the allied warship escorting the "Toscana" had left the ship and reached international waters. One of the numerous mines, still floating at the time, would have been the cover-up justification for the horrendous misdeed that would have repeated, amplifying the crime committed at Vergarolla.³⁶

On February 15 left the fourth convoy, the first directed to Ancona. Discontent was expressed among the refugees as a result of the change in destination; they were compelled to accept the new arrival port and endure a lengthy journey to reach their designated locations in northern Italy. Therefore, a special railway connection was organised for them.³⁷ The fifth convoy (February 21) transported just one thousand people, half of the previous one, both because of adverse weather conditions and because of the rumour that the Anglo-American forces were no longer leaving Pola in the wake of a possible revision of the Peace Treaty. Based on a telegram sent by the CLN to the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Spazzali claims that the rumour was most likely propagated by the pro-Yugoslavian faction.³⁸

At that point, the exodus was already halfway over: on February 22, *L'Arena di Pola* published the headline "The exodus' operation cycle is closing", stating that already 15.000 had people left and approximately 10.000 were expected to leave.³⁹ On February 26, the "Toscana" headed towards Ancona for the second time; the seventh convoy left for Venice on March 2. On March 7, the "Città di Messina", one of the ships used to transport the exiles' furniture, also transported some families to

³⁵ Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 276–77.

³⁶ "Verso sera, le operazioni di imbarco si sono appena concluse [...]. Si sparge la voce che sono alla ricerca di due valigie di esplosivo che un agente dell'OZNA (la polizia segreta di Tito, quella che aveva provocato anche lo scoppio di Vergarolla) avrebbe introdotto a bordo, secondo quanto affermato dall'agente Franzese, della Civil Police, che lo aveva riconosciuto mentre lasciava la nave. [...] Si seppe poi che il piroscafo sarebbe dovuto saltare in mezzo all'Adriatico, dopo che la nave alleata da guerra di scorta al Toscana avrebbe lasciato la nave, raggiunte le acque internazionali. Una delle numerose mine, allora ancora vaganti, sarebbe stata la giustificazione di copertura dell'orrendo misfatto che avrebbe ripetuto, amplificandolo il crimine compiuto a Vergarolla", Vivoda, *Quel lungo viaggio verso l'esilio*, 21–22.

³⁷ Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 322.

³⁸ Spazzali, 322–23.

³⁹ 'Il Ciclo Delle Operazioni d'esodo Si Sta Chiudendo', *L'Arena Di Pola*, 22 February 1947.

Brindisi and Taranto in Apulia.⁴⁰ On the same day, the “Toscana” arrived in Venice carrying 690 refugees as well as five coffins, including those of World War I heroes Nazario Sauro and Giovanni Grion. Political organisations, trade unions, and civil and military authorities all welcomed the remains.⁴¹ The ninth convoy on March 15 pointed—it was the third time—to Ancona with approximately seven hundred refugees. On this occasion, ten Italian partisans were forced to board and leave the city by the British Civil Police; shots were fired on board, and two were wounded, but the reasons for this clash are still unknown.⁴² The “Toscana” finally left Pola for the last time on March 20, with less than four hundred people. At that stage, most of the exiles preferred the scheduled maritime service to Trieste. The “Toscana” completed 10 transfers between Pola and Venice, or Ancona. Spazzali compiled the following table of departure dates and refugee numbers:⁴³

Date of departure	Port of arrival	Boarded refugees
February, 3	Venice	916
February, 7	Venice	2.103
February, 11	Venice	1.443
February, 15	Ancona	2.153
February, 21	Venice	1.030
February, 26	Ancona	996
March, 2	Venice	1.583
March, 8	Venice	690
March, 15	Ancona	711
March, 20	Venice	384

⁴⁰ Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 325.

⁴¹ ‘Altro Scaglione Di Profughi è Giunto Ieri a Venezia’, *Il Mattino Del Popolo*, 8 February 1947, sec. Cronaca di Venezia.

⁴² Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 327; the news is reported also by the *L’Arena di Pola*, see ‘La Polizia Preleva i Partigiani Di Scorta a Sauro e Grion e Li Costringe a Imbarcarsi Sul “Toscana”’, *Arena Di Pola*, 14 March 1947.

⁴³ Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 329.

The “Toscana” was able to transport almost a thousand patients, including those with heart conditions, the disabled, and critically ill patients, thanks to a hospital staff of six doctors and fifteen nurses.⁴⁴ A baby was born—and baptised—during the first journey, as the newspapers widely reported.⁴⁵

Besides Sauro and Grion's remains, many families unearthed their loved ones and hid the bones in their luggage, according to a reportage by Indro Montanelli published on the *Corriere della Sera*.⁴⁶ Pola's exodus involved other cultural and symbolic aspects, such as artworks and monuments, like Dante's and Emperor Augustus's statues. The nationalist organisation Lega Nazionale was particularly involved in those operations.⁴⁷ A printed sketch circulating among Pola exiles fantasised about a sailboat carrying away the Arena, the Roman amphitheatre of Pola.⁴⁸ The fear of entrusting cultural heritage to the “inferior and barbaric” Slavs had racist overtones.⁴⁹ Many exiles decided to symbolically bring some parts of Pola with them, such as a handful of dirt or stones.⁵⁰ They also removed all the furniture, including decorative objects,⁵¹ from their houses, and they even took with them the keys. A witness recalled how, once boarded on the “Toscana”, the exiles threw the keys into the sea.⁵²

3. The departure from Pola and the arrival in Italy through newspapers

⁴⁴ Spazzali, 331–32.

⁴⁵ ‘L’arrivo Del “Toscana” in Bacino San Marco’, *Il Gazzettino*, 4 February 1947; ‘Primo Scaglione Di Profughi Giunto per Mare a Venezia’, *La Stampa*, 4 February 1947; Leone Comini, ‘Venezia Accoglie i Polesi Giunti a Bordo Del “Toscana”’, *Il Tempo*, 4 February 1947.

⁴⁶ Indro Montanelli, ‘Eccoli a Bordo Del “Toscana” i Polesi Che Fuggono in Italia’, *Corriere Della Sera*, 13 February 1947; according to a later article, seventy dead were transported in this way: such a detailed count seems unlikely, but it still remains illustrative of the contemporary exodus’ narratives, see Elio Zorzi, ‘130.000 Metri Cubi Di Pola Si Sono Rifugiati in Italia’, *Corriere d’Informazione*, 17 May 1947.

⁴⁷ Orlić, *Identità di confine. Storia dell’Istria e degli istriani dal 1943 a oggi*, 145–46.

⁴⁸ “Uno schizzo riprodotto a stampa distribuito tra i profughi di Pola come “ricordo della nostra cara vecia Pola” mostra, sullo sfondo sommario del porto, dar vela al vento un bragozzo, che quasi affonda sotto il peso dell’anfiteatro romano, dell’Arena di Pola, mentre si trasferisce anch’essa in più spirabil aere”, Zorzi, ‘130.000 Metri Cubi Di Pola Si Sono Rifugiati in Italia’.

⁴⁹ Wörsdörfer, *Il confine orientale*, 269–70.

⁵⁰ Even Arena's stones, as reported by *Il Gazzettino*: “Così, prima di abbandonarla, si recano in pellegrinaggio muto e devoto all’Arena, dove raccolgono un frammento di pietra millenaria, o un po’ di terra da portare nell’esilio”, ‘Pola Città Morta’, *Il Gazzettino*, 19 January 1947.

⁵¹ Objects such as crystal elements from a marble stair, see Glaucio Dinelli's account, Fantini D’Onofrio, Giacca Zaccariotto, and Grassi, *L’esodo nei ricordi dei giuliano-dalmati di Padova*, 63.

⁵² Enrico Miletto, *Istria allo specchio: storia e voci di una terra di confine* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2007), 170.

The other waves of the exodus were protracted in time and were the result of many individual and family choices; they were not a government-planned transfer.⁵³ On the contrary, Pola's exodus produced some distinctive images, made headlines in Italian newspapers, and even received coverage from international media.⁵⁴ The opinion, according to Spazzali, was “univocal and basically anti-communist”, except for a few cases. Patriotism and anti-Yugoslavian and anti-communist rhetoric are effectively common to the majority of newspapers—the right-wing, the moderate, and the catholic ones. Anti-Slavism emerged in right-wing newspapers, triggered by concern for the Slovenians taking part in the exodus, as in the case of the Isonzo valleys.⁵⁵ This interest was thus mainly driven by the political conjuncture. Still—Spazzali adds—,

The general patriotic intonation was limited to describing the departure of the refugees, touching all the chords of sensitivity dear to moderate readers of the time, but they did not follow their subsequent itinerary of transfer and precarious settlement. Once in Italy, they disappeared from the pages of the newspapers and were sometimes viewed with distrust, if not ideological hostility, while their departure was decidedly more spectacular and representative of the wrong that Italy suffered with the Peace Treaty, without understanding the fact that it was a direct consequence of a war unfortunately declared and tragically lost, nullifying the sacrifice of the previous conflict.⁵⁶

A survey of the newspapers published during the two months of the Pola exodus confirms the attention devoted by the Italian press to the exodus and to the “Toscana” journeys. This was possible thanks to the Anglo-American control over Pola.⁵⁷ However, this attention can be partially attributed to the national mourning that accompanied the signing of the Peace Treaty on February 10. News about the population leaving the Julian March can be found before the first “Toscana” convoy on February 3. *Il Gazzettino* published on January 30 a report from Milan:

⁵³ Except for World War II displacements, as in Zara's case

⁵⁴ Antonio Maria Orecchia and Lorenzo Giudici, *La stampa e la memoria: le foibe, l'esodo e il confine orientale nelle pagine dei giornali lombardi agli albori della repubblica*, Fonti (Varese: Insubria University Press, 2008), 18.

⁵⁵ *Il Gazzettino* reported on the issue, see ‘Già Duemila Slavi “Bianchi” Sono Arrivati a Gorizia’, *Il Gazzettino*, 1 February 1947; ‘Slavi Bianchi Affluiscono Sul Natisone e Sull'Isonzo’, *Il Gazzettino*, 20 February 1947; ‘Inchiesta Sugli Slavi Bianchi’, *Il Gazzettino*, 21 February 1947.

⁵⁶ “La generale intonazione patriottica si limitava a descrivere la partenza dei profughi, toccando tutte le corde della sensibilità cara ai lettori moderati del tempo, ma non seguiva il loro successivo itinerario di trasferimento e di precaria sistemazione. Giunti in Italia, scomparivano dalle pagine dei giornali e talvolta erano visti con diffidenza se non ostilità ideologica, mentre la partenza era decisamente più scenografica e rappresentativa del torto che l'Italia subiva con il Trattato di pace, senza farsi una ragione del fatto che era diretta conseguenza di una guerra sciaguratamente dichiarata e tragicamente persa, vanificando il sacrificio del conflitto precedente”, Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 315.

⁵⁷ Miletto, *Istria allo specchio*, 141.

Refugees from the Julian March also continue to arrive in Milan; most of them come from Pola. They claim that all the Italians are leaving the Julian towns, but that the complete exodus will require another two months because the scarcity of means of transport is a great obstacle. One of the greatest worries is the fear that the allied troops will leave those areas before all the Italians are displaced because it is not known what might happen next and who will be able to guarantee the exodus of those who are delayed. Quite recent experiences of foibe, deportations, etc. amply justify these fears.⁵⁸

On the same day, the Milanese *Corriere della Sera* published a report from Pola by Giuseppe Silvestri under the title “Pola slowly dies”.⁵⁹ The article opens with a description of the “Toscana”’s hold and the busy preparation of packaging. Silvestri uses grandiose rhetoric, depicting even a spiritual ground for the choice to leave Pola: “never, perhaps, in the history of the world has there been such a case, that a city is abandoned almost simultaneously by all its inhabitants, in order to save above all one thing, indeed only one thing: the soul”.⁶⁰ The journalist insists that the population of Pola is leaving voluntarily a city where the Slavic element is alien: “The only Slavic thing that can be seen in Pola are the red inscriptions with which Tito's partisans marked the walls of the Venetian Castle during the forty days of their occupation”.⁶¹

In those days, the right-leaning Roman newspaper *Il Tempo* devoted multiple articles to Pola’s exodus, written by the reporter Vero Roberti. The first, published on January 30,⁶² describes the arrival in Trieste of a steamboat from Pola and the sensation of happiness expressed by the exiles; a man told his child, “Bepi, we have finally arrived in the safe land!”⁶³. On the following day, from Pola, he described the death of the city “house by house” and the people’s tears “dried by the bora wind”.⁶⁴ The sight of a city getting ready to depart is said to have astounded the British, who “have

⁵⁸ “Anche a Milano continuano ad arrivare i profughi dalla Venezia Giulia; in maggior parte vengono da Pola. Essi affermano che tutti gli italiani lasciano le città giuliane, ma che l'esodo completo richiederà ancora due mesi di tempo, perché di grande ostacolo è la scarsità dei mezzi di trasporto. Una delle preoccupazioni maggiori è il timore che le truppe alleate lascino quelle zone prima che tutti i cittadini italiani siano sfollati perché non si sa che cosa potrebbe poi accadere e chi potrà garantire l'esodo di quelli che hanno ritardato. Esperienze piuttosto recenti, dove si parla di foibe, deportazioni, ecc. giustificano ampiamente questi timori”, ‘Anche a Milano Arrivano Profughi’, *Il Gazzettino*, 30 January 1947.

⁵⁹ Silvestri, ‘Pola Muore Lentamente’.

⁶⁰ “Mai, forse, nella storia del mondo si è verificato un caso eguale, che una città venga abbandonata quasi contemporaneamente da tutti i suoi abitanti, per salvare soprattutto una cosa, anzi una cosa sola: l'anima”, Silvestri.

⁶¹ “La sola cosa che di slavo si può vedere a Pola, solo le scritte rosse con cui i partigiani di Tito hanno segnato i muri del Castello veneto, durante i quaranta giorni della loro occupazione”, Silvestri.

⁶² Vero Roberti, “‘Siamo in Terra Salva’ Gridano i Polesi Abbracciandosi’, *Il Tempo*, 30 January 1947.

⁶³ Reported in Venetian dialect, “Bepi, semo finalmente rivà ne la terra salva!”, Roberti.

⁶⁴ Vero Roberti, ‘Pola Muore Casa per Casaa’, *Il Tempo*, 31 January 1947.

not yet understood the meaning of the exodus”.⁶⁵ On February 1, the report included conversation with the local population.⁶⁶ A young woman stated, “Write to your newspaper that we Italians in Pula asked for nothing more than a plebiscite. They would not grant it to us; now we will do the plebiscite: let us all leave!”.⁶⁷ The exiles’ words contain some narratives of the exodus that remained central in the memory of the exodus decades after: “They have not wanted to understand us in Italy yet; but we do not want handouts, we just want to work”.⁶⁸

On February 1, the Turinese newspaper *La Stampa* reported on the thousands of Istrian refugees travelling through Rome by train from Trieste or Ancona to the south of Italy, as well as the difficulties faced by relief organisations and authorities who were discovered to be unprepared.⁶⁹ The Bolognese catholic newspaper *L’Avvenire d’Italia* published on February 2 the declarations of bishop Baldelli about the planning of the exodus;⁷⁰ on Bologna’s news page is reported the plea of the local bishop for a warm welcome to the refugees, calling for the mobilisation of priests and all the devotees, and the announcement of a PCA-run refreshment point at the train station.⁷¹ The Bolognese conservative newspaper *Il Giornale dell’Emilia* (the rebrand of *Il Resto del Carlino* between 1945 and 1953) also sent a reporter to Pola, Federico Zardi. He published six reports, one per day between January 31 and February 5, describing the atmosphere of mourning in the Istrian city and reporting about the farewell celebration, the night ball “Veglione Tricolore”, organised by the Lega Nazionale.⁷² Zardi blamed the exodus on Yugoslavian repression even more explicitly than his colleagues did: “Why do they leave? The answer is pretty simple: out of fear”.⁷³ And this fear is openly portrayed as:

⁶⁵ “I britannici non hanno ancora compreso il significato dell’esodo. Stentano a credere; e assistono all’animazione dei polesani con una leggera punta di meraviglia”, Roberti.

⁶⁶ ‘Altri 20.000 Istriani Accorrono a Pola Verso l’Italia’, *Il Tempo*, 1 February 1947.

⁶⁷ “Scriva pure così al suo giornale, che noi italiani di Pola non chiedevamo altro che il plebiscito. Non ce l’hanno voluto concedere; ora lo facciamo noi il plebiscito: partiamo tutti!”, ‘Altri 20.000 Istriani Accorrono a Pola Verso l’Italia’, 20.

⁶⁸ “In Italia non ci hanno ancora voluto capire; ma noi non vogliamo elemosine, vogliamo soltanto lavorare”, ‘Altri 20.000 Istriani Accorrono a Pola Verso l’Italia’.

⁶⁹ Renato Caniglia, ‘Il Dramma Dei Profughi’, *La Stampa*, 1 February 1947.

⁷⁰ ‘Gli Esuli Da Pola. Mons. Baldelli Illustra Le Preordinate Previdenze’, *L’Avvenire d’Italia*, 2 February 1947.

⁷¹ ‘Aiutiamo i Profughi Giuliani! Fervido Appello Del Cardinale al Clero e al Popolo Dell’Archidiocesi’, *L’Avvenire d’Italia*, 2 February 1947.

⁷² Federico Zardi, ‘La Veglia Dei Polesani Mentre Continua l’esodo’, *Il Giornale Dell’Emilia*, 3 February 1947.

⁷³ “Perché partono? La risposta è molto semplice: per paura”, Federico Zardi, ‘Perché Lasciano Il Focolare i Ventottomila Di Pola’, *Il Giornale Dell’Emilia*, 2 March 1947.

Fear of the “foiba”. The twenty-eight thousand people of Pula leave because they believe that beyond the circle that now divides them from Zone B, 280 foibe—one for every hundred—are waiting for them, with their long and narrow mouths half-closed, to swallow them up. It might not be within the first day or the first month, not all at once, but it certainly would be.⁷⁴

On February 4, newspapers reported the first arrival of the “Toscana” in Venice. *Il Tempo* wrote: “seeing Venice after eight hours of journey, the exiles all flocked on deck to greet the land of their homeland with cheers”, and “Venetians from the steamers, the gondolas, and banks reacted with equal fervour”.⁷⁵ The warm welcome is also reported by the Venetian newspaper *Il Gazzettino*: “a swarm of boats, packed with people, crowded around the sides of the ship for the entire evening and responded with emotional demonstrations to the cry of ‘Long live the Italian Pola’ shouted by the exiles”;⁷⁶ in Venice, “organisations and private individuals collected money and clothing to make the Pola brothers' rough departure from their home less painful”, and the municipality allocated two million lire for the refugees.⁷⁷ Furthermore, upon their arrival, “The refugees were greeted by the Prefect and the managers of the aid organisations”.⁷⁸ Newspapers also devoted space to the following arrivals.⁷⁹

Other articles followed the path of the exiles into Italy, travelling by train. For example, on the February 4 evening edition of *Il Gazzettino*, on Padua's local page:

⁷⁴ “Paura della ‘foiba’. I ventottomila di Pola partono perché credono che al di là del cerchio che oggi li divide dalla zona B, 280 foibe — una per ogni cento — li aspettino, con le loro strette e lunghe labbra socchiuse, per inghiottirli. Non sarebbe forse entro il primo giorno o il primo mese, non tutti in una volta, ma certo sarebbe”, Zardi.

⁷⁵ “In vista di Venezia dopo otto ore di navigazione, gli esuli si sono tutti riversati sul ponte a salutare con delle effusioni la terra della loro patria” and “I veneziani dai vaporini, dalle gondole e dalle rive hanno risposto con pari effusione”, Comini, ‘Venezia Accoglie i Polesi Giunti a Bordo Del “Toscana”’.

⁷⁶ “Un nugolo di imbarcazioni, gremite di popolo, ha fatto ressa per tutta la serata attorno ai fianchi dello scafo e ha risposto con commosse manifestazioni al grido di ‘Viva Pola italiana’ lanciato dagli esuli”, ‘L’arrivo Del “Toscana” in Bacino San Marco’.

⁷⁷ “A Venezia è intanto tutta una gara di enti e privati per raccogliere denaro ed indumenti per rendere meno penoso ai fratelli polesi il crudo distacco dalla loro casa. Mentre le associazioni benefiche hanno preparato pacchi di viveri e generi di conforto la Giunta Comunale ha stasera reso noto che per i profughi verranno stanziati due milioni”, ‘L’arrivo Del “Toscana” in Bacino San Marco’.

⁷⁸ “I profughi sono stati salutati dal Prefetto e dai dirigenti delle organizzazioni di assistenza”, ‘L’arrivo a Venezia’, *Il Giornale Dell’Emilia*, 4 February 1947.

⁷⁹ For the second convoy: ‘Altri Duemila Polesi Sono Sbarcati a Venezia’, *Il Gazzettino*, 7 February 1947; for the third convoy: ‘L’esodo Di Pola Imposto Da Una Clausola Del Trattato’, *Il Gazzettino*, 13 February 1947; for the sixth convoy ‘Il Secondo Contingente Di Profughi Polesi Giunti Ad Ancona’, *Il Popolo*, 28 February 1947.

“Refugees from Pola keep passing through our station. By midday, 414 of them had arrived, and during their stay, they were comforted with loving care and food supplies by the Red Cross nurses and the volunteer maids of the Pontificia Commissione di Assistenza”.⁸⁰

From the same train station, on February 11, Padua’s local page of *L’Avvenire d’Italia* reported:

The voice of a loudspeaker asks: “Refugees from Pola?” — “Yes, fugitives from Pola”. They are few today, huddled in the railcars, in the corners of the compartments: mothers, children, who in the peaceful unconsciousness of sleep, run with the train towards a life of pain and hardship, little creatures already marked. All facial features are characteristically Italian: our race, our blood, our speech, our pain, and our misery. We suddenly find ourselves powerless in front of them and would like to do something, do a lot, and do more. Instead, we are content not to say useless words, to offer what we have, what the Pontificia Commissione di Assistenza has given us: biscuits, fruits, and warm milk. They accept and give thanks.⁸¹

Il Messaggero di Roma recounted the arrival in Rome of fifteen orphans from Pola on February 4; the subheadline specifies “They all had their parents killed by the Slavs”.⁸² The article calls for the municipality’s intervention in favour of those needy orphans and the 120 more that were expected to arrive.

In the exiles’ memory, however, the narrative of the indifference and silence overlooks the actual attention that Pola’s exodus got. In a 1991 article on *L’Arena di Pola*, Fulvio Farba recalled the images of the “Slavija” ferry boat in Pola’s port carrying civilians escaping the Dubrovnik siege by the Yugoslav People’s Army, during the Croatian War of Independence. He stated he saw those images on television, and this sorrowful vision reminded him of the departure of the “Toscana” from the same port, lamenting the lack of the same coverage for the Italian exile:

⁸⁰ “Per la nostra stazione continuano a transitare i profughi di Pola. Sul mezzogiorno ne sono arrivati 414, i quali, durante la sosta, sono stati confortati con affettuose attenzioni e generi vittuari da parte delle infermiere della Croce Rossa e delle signorine volontarie della Commissione pontificia di assistenza”, ‘I Profughi Di Pola Affettuosamente Assistiti a Padova’, *Il Gazzettino*, 4 February 1947, *Gazzettino Sera* edition, sec. Cronaca di Padova.

⁸¹ “La voce di un megafono chiede: “Profughi di Pola?” — “Sì, fuggiaschi da Pola”. Sono pochi oggi, ranicchiati nei vagoni, negli angoli degli scompartimenti; mamme, bambini che nella serena incoscienza del sonno corrono col treno incontro ad una vita di dolore e di stento, piccole creature già segnate. Tutte fisionomie caratteristicamente italiane, razza tipicamente nostra, sangue nostro, parlata nostro, dolore e miseria nostri, nostri. Noi ci troviamo ad un tratto impotenti di fronte a loro e vorremmo fare qualcosa, fare molto, fare di più. Ci accontentiamo invece di non dire parole inutili, di offrire quello che abbiamo, quello che la Pontificia Commissione di Assistenza ci ha dato: gallette, frutta, latte caldo. Essi accettano e ringraziano”, ‘Profughi Da Pola’, *L’Avvenire d’Italia*, 11 February 1947, Padova edition, sec. Cronaca di Padova.

⁸² ‘Quindici Orfani Di Pola Sono Giunti Ieri a Roma’, *Il Messaggero*, 5 February 1947.

And for those people that the “Toscana” took to Venice and Ancona, there was neither press outcry nor newsreels; few paid attention to them, and some only did so to denigrate, to insult, and even mock them; particularly notable in these operations were the communists who blocked the distribution of some warm milk for the exiled children on the train from Ancona to La Spezia; it happened at Bologna station, it was cold and snowy there too, but the comrades demanded and obtained the immediate departure of the train.⁸³

The article echoes the widespread perception of being silenced victims that permeates most witness testimonies and the public discourse regarding the foibe and exodus. This feeling emerges even from the pre-exodus sources: in the December 24, 1946, *L’Arena di Pola*, the words of an unnamed socialist are reported: “Paris has betrayed us; New York has ratified the evil barter. We are going to wander. Where? Italy, which we love so much, does not feel our pain, does not feel our tragedy”.⁸⁴ However, Farba’s point about the lack of newsreels is particularly non-factual. The Incom news agency—which replaced Istituto Luce in the postwar period—wanted to document Pola’s exodus. The Moretti Film company then organised a mission to the Istrian city; they arrived from Trieste on February 8;⁸⁵ on the 28th, the director, Enrico Moretti, left for Rome with more than 20 km of negative.⁸⁶ Part of this material was then published first as a one-minute and half segment of the weekly newsreel *Settimana Incom* number 44, and then in number 46.⁸⁷ In the latter instance, it was the first time of a single-subject *Settimana Incom* edition; the eight minutes were all devoted to Pola.⁸⁸ The film contains nationalist rhetoric and anti-Slavic racism. The Slavs are presented as aliens to the

⁸³ “E per quella gente che il Toscana portò a Venezia ed ad Ancona non ci furono né clamori di stampa né cinegiornali; pochi si occuparono di loro, ed alcuni lo fecero solamente per denigrarli, per offenderli ed anche per irridarli; in queste operazioni si distinsero particolarmente i comunisti che bloccarono la distribuzione di un po’ di latte caldo per i bambini esuli, che si trovavano sul treno che da Ancona li portava a La Spezia; successe alla stazione di Bologna, c’era freddo e neve anche la, ma i compagni pretesero ed ottennero anche l’immediata partenza del treno”, Fulvio Farba, ‘Una Nave a Pola’, *L’Arena Di Pola*, 7 December 1991.

⁸⁴ “Parigi ci ha traditi; New York ha ratificato il malvagio baratto. Andremo a ramingo. Per dove? L’Italia, che tanto amiamo, non sente il nostro dolore, non vive della nostra tragedia”, ‘La Città in Pena’, *L’Arena Di Pola*, 24 December 1946.

⁸⁵ ‘La Moretti-Film a Pola’, *L’Arena Di Pola*, 8 February 1947.

⁸⁶ “Addio, Mia Cara Pola” Della Moretti Film’, *L’Arena Di Pola*, 28 February 1947.

⁸⁷ Miletto, *Istria allo specchio*, 142; ‘Per Rimanere Italiani l’esodo Di Pola’, *La Settimana Incom*, 9 February 1947, Archivio Luce, <https://patrimonio.archivioluce.com/luce-web/detail/IL5000009899/2/-58860.html>.

⁸⁸ Giulia Mazzarelli, ‘L’Italia del secondo dopoguerra attraverso i cinegiornali della Settimana INCOM (1946-1948)’ (PhD Thesis, Cagliari, Università degli Studi di Cagliari, 2010), 78–82, https://iris.unica.it/retrieve/e2f56ed8-4546-3eaf-e053-3a05fe0a5d97/PhD_GiuliaMazzarelli.pdf.

city: “The Lion of St. Mark will be chiseled, succumbing to foreign inscriptions and emblems”.⁸⁹ A sense of urgency is conveyed. An old woman states: “The important thing is to leave, the important thing is to hurry, to be on time”.⁹⁰ Two previews of the film were organised, one at the Rivoli Cinema in Rome, raising funds for the refugees (260.000 lire); another in the presence of DC Constituent Assembly member Fausto Pecorari. The National Film Industries Board guaranteed the coverage of the main Italian cities, funding the production of additional film reels.⁹¹

⁸⁹ “Il Leone di San Marco sarà scalpellato cederà alle scritte e agli emblemi stranieri”, *L'esodo degli italiani da Pola*, La settimana Incom, 1947, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hWRjMVX1Mo0>.

⁹⁰ “L'importante è partire, l'importante è far presto, fare in tempo”, *L'esodo degli italiani da Pola*.

⁹¹ Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 316.

Chapter 4. The political debate about Pola exodus

1. The confrontational Tommaso Giglio's reports from Pola

It is crucial to consider the political environment of those early months of 1947 in order to understand the political implications of Pola's exodus. During Pola's exodus, the PCI, the PSI, and the DC were together in a coalition government.¹ In January, the PSI suffered a breakaway: Giuseppe Saragat's moderate faction opposed closer links with the PCI and formed the PSLI (Partito Socialista dei Lavoratori Italiani).² Consequently, the second De Gasperi cabinet, in office since July 1946, collapsed. Newspapers widely reported on political negotiations that took place in the final days of January. The talks finally led to the appointment of the third De Gasperi cabinet on February 2. The DC was part of the government with the president and six ministers; the PSI and PCI both had three ministers. The previous PCI Minister for Postwar Relief, Emilio Sereni, became Minister of Public Works; Postwar Relief lost the status of independent ministry, and its competences were split between other ministries. The Minister for Postwar Relief was in charge of providing assistance to the Istrian-Dalmatian exiles, among other groups like veterans and former partisans. That means that, just prior to Pola's mass exodus, the communist Sereni was ousted from a position that enabled him to deal with the exiles' assistance. The removal, thus, had political significance; those handling the exodus were predominantly DC members. The three-party cabinet, however, did not last long. In May 1947, PSI and PCI left the government. The pro-Western Italian positioning in the Cold War made it no longer possible for De Gasperi to share the government with the communists and their socialist allies.³

In the first months of 1947, the press had to deal with the fallout from a lost war—a conflict that began on the aggressor side and ended as both a liberation and a civil war. The 1947 Treaty was regarded by almost all the press as an “imposition” on Italy, but hardly could it have been otherwise.⁴ What differentiated the various political positions was the different emphasis on the responsibilities of fascism for the lost territories and the other consequences of the peace. Antifascist parties that took part in the Resistance movement controlled the government and most of the Constituent Assembly, and many newspapers represented the line of those antifascist parties, or they were edited by the

¹ Simona Colarizi, *Storia politica della Repubblica. 1943-2006, partiti, movimenti e istituzioni.*, 4th ed. (Editori Laterza, 2011), 34–36.

² Di Capua, *Il biennio compromissorio, maggio 1945/aprile 1947*, 418–36.

³ Colarizi, *Storia politica della Repubblica. 1943-2006*, 37–39.

⁴ For PCI's position see Karlsen, *Frontiera rossa*, 155–59; ‘La Firma Del “Trattato”’, *Rinascita*, February 1947.

former CLNs. The antifascist consensus, nonetheless, was not the only voice present. In the 1946 elections, The Front of the Ordinary Man (Fronte dell'Uomo Qualunque) challenged from the right these positions.⁵ Although not openly neofascist—the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) concurred in the following 1948 national elections—“anti-antifascist” sentiments were circulating in the Italian public opinion, and moderate and right-wing newspapers gave space to those voices.⁶ International politics was heading towards the Cold War, and the Italian Communist Party was openly aiming at the government, working on a joint list with the Italian Social Party for the 1948 elections. Numerous victories in the 1946 municipal elections attested to the “social-communist” left's strength, and the possibility of a leftist majority in the nation sparked anti-communist sentiment that was evident in some segments of the press.⁷ Thus, Pola's departure was just one more contentious issue that the anti-communist forces could raise in this context. It was not too difficult to frame the anti-communist narrative: Italians were escaping a socialist (at the time, Stalinist) regime, and the PCI was ambiguous about the border delimitation with Yugoslavia because of its ties to the global communist movement and the internal debate among the Julian March's Italian communists.

L'Unità was the official newspaper of the Italian Communist Party. In 1947, it was published in four editions: the national one in Rome; the Northern Italy one in Milan, the Piedmontese one in Turin, and the Ligurian one in Genoa.⁸ The second page was devoted to local news; the first page was largely shared between the different editions. *L'Unità* sent the reporter Tommaso Giglio to Pola at the beginning of January, and he produced three articles. Those articles have some contentious elements, and the journalist is often quoted in the exiles' publications and memoirs as proof of the communists' hostility.⁹

In the February 5 edition, the first of Giglio's articles was published under the title “Scorched Earth in Pola Due to the Allies' Will”.¹⁰ The journalist put the blame on the Anglo-American forces for the push towards the exodus, since they give the impression they are leaving Pola “as one would abandon a fortress in wartime” and they “create waves of panic in the population”. Giglio described Pola's state of unrest at the beginning of the year, with supply chains becoming unstable, factories closing,

⁵ Colarizi, *Storia politica della Repubblica. 1943-2006*, 24–26.

⁶ Cristina Baldassini, *L'ombra di Mussolini. L'Italia moderata e la memoria del fascismo* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2007); Filippo Focardi, *La guerra della memoria. La Resistenza nel dibattito politico italiano dal 1945 a oggi* (Bari-Roma: Laterza, 2005), 20–23.

⁷ Colarizi, *Storia politica della Repubblica. 1943-2006*, 24–26.

⁸ Mario Grandinetti, *I quotidiani in Italia 1943-1991* (Milano, Italy: Franco Angeli, 1992), 274–75.

⁹ ‘Il Silenzio Di Giglio’, *L'Arena Di Pola*, 12 December 1992.

¹⁰ Tommaso Giglio, ‘Terra Bruciata a Pola per Volontà Degli Alleati’, *L'Unità*, 5 February 1947.

and unemployment rising rapidly. He then devoted the core of the article to the January 3 clashes for the mill, giving a connotation of heroism to the protestors and the victims of the police repression. In his narrative, this crackdown on the workers (indeed, the pro-Yugoslavian faction) was the beginning of a strategy to push the population towards the exodus: “At first, they began by prosecuting and condemning some of the workers arrested that day, then they continued with a series of acts of violence, moral pressure, false promises, and threats to drive more and more segments of the population to the exodus”.¹¹ His search for an exogenous cause of the ongoing exodus follows on: “The Allies are keen to neutralise the economic importance of Pola, to turn this city into a point of friction between the Italian and Yugoslav peoples, and some political parties support them, because they hope to speculate on the misery and misfortunes of those they force to abandon their city”.¹²

The following article, published on February 7, openly claimed the existence of an “exodus machine” giving the exodus certificates to everyone, even those who did not ask for it.¹³ “It is clear that thousands of these people inserted by default on the lists will never leave” Giglio wrote, adding that according to other journalists, at least 25 thousand people would have left, but “such figures are at least risky at a time when the real exiles still number only a few hundred”.¹⁴ This prediction was quite poor: more than 25 thousand people left Pola in the end. At that point, Giglio’s aim was to downplay the reach of the exodus. He used as a case the number of exiles on the first Toscana journey, lower than expected: “After 24 hours of solicitations, pleas, implied threats, and gruesome tales of foibe, 750 people had boarded instead of the planned 3.000”.¹⁵ He then drew a parallel with the emigration from Pola that followed World War I as a result of the Italian occupation. An outflow that took place, but with different roots, scale, and effects. As in the first article, he claimed a conspiracy aimed at the destruction of the economic potential of the city, leaving the burden of reconstruction to the Yugoslavian authorities. Within this logic, the economic downfall should have worked as an incentive

¹¹ “Prima si è incominciato col processare e condannare alcuni degli operai arrestati quel giorno, poi si è continuato con una serie di violenze, di pressioni morali, di false promesse e di minacce per spingere all’esodo sempre più vasti strati della popolazione”, Giglio.

¹² “Gli alleati hanno bisogno di neutralizzare l’importanza economica di Pola, di trasformare questa città in un punto di attrito tra il popolo italiano e quello jugoslavo ed alcuni partiti politici li appoggiano, perché sperano di poter speculare sulla miseria e sulle sventure di coloro che essi stessi costringono ad abbandonare la propria città”, Giglio.

¹³ Tommaso Giglio, ‘La Fabbrica Dell’esodo’, *L’Unità*, 7 February 1947.

¹⁴ “Naturalmente è chiaro che migliaia di queste persone “iscritte d’ufficio” nelle liste non partiranno mai”, “che cifre di questo genere sono per lo meno azzardate in un momento in cui gli esuli reali sono ancora poche centinaia”, Giglio.

¹⁵ “Dopo 24 ore di sollecitazioni, preghiere, minacce larvate e lugubri racconti di foibe, erano salite a bordo 750 persone in luogo delle 3000 preventivate”, Giglio.

to the exodus: those who wanted to stay had to survive in harsh conditions until the transfer of the city to the federal republic. He closed the article with the mention of the brief arrest of the bishop, Raffaele Radossi, who was found in possession of several identity cards. During the arrest, some photos of Radossi with relatives of high-ranked fascist officials were found. The mention of the alleged fascist connection of the bishop matched one of the main themes of the Yugoslavian propaganda. The article was published in a slightly different version on the Northern Italy edition of *L'Unità*. There, it had a more confrontational tone, directed against the *L'Arena di Pola*'s reporters, who were accused of getting drunk and thus writing lies.

On February 12, came the third of Giglio's reports from Pola, under the title "The propaganda says: we will burn Pola".¹⁶ The scenario of Pola's destruction can indeed be found in the press.¹⁷ However, the aim of the article was to blame the Anglo-American administration for the climate of fear in the city. He criticised De Berti's promise for the construction of a city under the name of Pietas Julia for Pola's exiles. He also cited Fausto Pecorari, the DC vice president of the Constituent Assembly, and his pledge to provide the most generous government assistance to refugees. Those promises, however, turned out to be false: "Jobs for all! The workers were told that in Italy, where there was terrible unemployment, work would be given to all those with exodus certificates. A group of exiles was promised accommodation in the best hotels in Grado, but instead, when they arrived in the town, they saw that only barracks had been prepared".¹⁸ The exiles' reception in Italy is portrayed as deficient and falling short of the expectations set up to prompt the exodus. Thus, the exodus is portrayed as blackmail against the popular classes rather than as a spontaneous plebiscite for Italy; they had no choice but to leave Pola in order to avoid unemployment and the total disruption of normal life in the city. Giglio details:

It also promised to give a sum of 15.000 lire to each person who boarded the steamboat taking them to Italy. No one here in Pola knows whether this sum will actually be delivered, but it is certain that a rumour has spread in recent days that the subsidy will be raised to 40.000 lire. There are unemployed people who leave precisely because, after so much suffering and days of hunger, the possibility of receiving that money is their last hope of continuing to live. The CLN in Pola understands these things

¹⁶ Tommaso Giglio, 'Dice La Propaganda: Bruceremo Pola', *L'Unità*, 23 January 1947.

¹⁷ "Se potessero, raderebbero al suolo la loro città, dalle costruzioni moderne ai ruderi romani, per non lasciare nelle mani degli occupatori il frutto del lavoro di generazioni e le vestigia della civiltà latina", 'Gli Jugoslavi Troveranno a Pola Solo Terrore', *Il Gazzettino*, 23 January 1947.

¹⁸ "Lavoro per tutti! Ai lavoratori si fa sapere che in Italia, dove esiste una terribile disoccupazione, si darà lavoro a tutti coloro i quali si troveranno in possesso del certificato d'esodo. A un gruppo di esuli fu promesso di alloggiare nei migliori alberghi di Grado e invece, quando essi arrivarono nella città, videro che erano state preparate soltanto delle baracche", Giglio, 'Dice La Propaganda: Bruceremo Pola'.

very well and has decided that extraordinary provisions of food and clothing will be given to the unemployed who wish to leave.¹⁹

The three Giglio's articles did not go unnoticed. The API, Pola's pro-Italian partisans' association, issued a blunt press release criticising Giglio and distributed it to Italian newspapers:

A hack, a certain "comrade" Giglio Tommaso, wrote an article on the Pula exodus a few days ago, claiming that he had been sent to this city as a correspondent for the newspaper L'Unità. It seems strange how the opinions and remarks of this "comrade" differ from those of so many of his colleagues [...]. Whilst all the correspondents were astonished and moved by the spirit of our proud Pola and Istrian people and sent their newspapers photographs and articles that, to authentic Italians, they have touched and still touch the hearts, comrade Giglio, who came here secretly (if he came at all), like a hitman, wanted to throw one more stab at the heart of our people by telling shameful lies, completely distorting the truth about the exodus and the situation of our unfortunate city, thus betraying his country, if this is Italy, in order to support the imperialistic aims of the foreigner, poorly concealed by the red flag of progressivism. We can understand certain party directives, and we can understand the secrecy of certain press outlets about our tragedy, but it is inconceivable that an Italian should have reached such a point of sectarian fanaticism to the point where he forgot that he belongs to the common fatherland and spouted vitriol on its miseries. We want to say just two blunt words, in the Istrian style, to "comrade" Giglio: You suck!²⁰

Giglio's reports were most likely inspired by his contacts with the pro-Yugoslavian forces in Pola and their propaganda machine. On February 15, 1947, *L'Arena di Pola* published an article claiming that Giglio had never visited pro-Italian organisations, only pro-Yugoslav ones.²¹ Therefore, the exiles are called to remember the communists' words once in Italy:

Instead, it is opportune to point out such messengers to our people, so that they will remember them on the other side; and not only Tommaso Giglio and Palmiro Togliatti, but all those Italians who, devoid of all scruples and a minimal moral conscience, did not respect even Pola people's tears, not

¹⁹ "Inoltre si promette di consegnare una somma di 15.000 lire ad ogni persona che si sarà imbarcata sul piroscafo che dovrà portarla in Italia. Nessuno qui a Pola sa se questa somma viene consegnata veramente, ma è certo che in questi giorni si è diffusa la voce che la sovvenzione sarà portata a 40.000 lire. Ci sono disoccupati che partono proprio perchè, dopo tante sofferenze e giorni di fame, la possibilità di ricevere quel denaro costituisce la loro ultima speranza di continuare a vivere. il C.L.N. di Pola capisce benissimo queste cose ed ha stabilito che erogazioni straordinarie di viveri e di indumenti siano destinate ai disoccupati che desiderano partire.", Giglio.

²⁰ 'L'A.P.I. Di Pola Risponde a Giglio', *L'Arena Di Pola*, 18 February 1947; also published in the Trieste newspaper *La Voce Libera*, 'L'A.P.I. Di Pola Risponde a Giglio', *La Voce Libera*, 20 February 1947.

²¹ 'Figura Immorale', *L'Arena Di Pola*, 15 February 1947.

even the agony of this sacrifice, [and they act so] for their selfish and not very clean propaganda purposes.²²

On February 25, an article further built the feeling of opposition between exiles and communists, an opposition that could spill from the local context in Pola to the Italian communists.²³ The unknown author²⁴ stated: “If certain people in Italy intend to perpetuate the spirit of bitterness and revulsion cherished by the local progressives towards the exiles from Pola and Istria, we feel it is our duty to warn them clearly as of now that we do not fear them”.²⁵ The faith in Italianness and the claim of a return of Istria to Italy should be a factor of strength; the article goes on: “We will not be intimidated if the various “Togliatti” of Italy, servants of the foreigner, call us fascists or nationalists”,²⁶ but the insult is sent back to the Yugoslavians: “similar epithets should be applied to their eastern neighbours who, in homage to the principles of progressive justice, have swallowed a territory that the communists themselves implicitly recognise as Italian”.²⁷ On the contrary, the exiles should be witnesses to the crimes of fascism: “They will call us fascists, and we will reply that the important thing is not to be fascists; we will make them understand that the exiles represent the constant revenge of the vanquished on the victors; we will be for them a constant reminder of what the systems of ‘Lebensraum’, ‘new order’ and ‘will to conquer’ assimilated so well by their eastern neighbours, create in the world”.²⁸

²² “E’ invece opportuno additare ben bene alla nostra gente simili messeri, perché sull’altra sponda se ne ricordi; e non solo di Tommaso Giglio e di Palmiro Togliatti, ma di tutti quegli italiani che privi di ogni scrupolo e di un minimo di coscienza morale, non hanno rispettato neanche il pianto dei polesi, neanche lo strazio di questo sacrificio, per i loro interessati e poco puliti fini propagandistici”, ‘Figura Immorale’.

²³ ‘Non Li Temiamo’, *L’Arena Di Pola*, 25 February 1947.

²⁴ The article is signed “d.s.p.”; those initials were not traced back to a specific author

²⁵ “Se certa gente in Italia intende perpetuare di fronte agli esuli da Pola e dell’Istria lo spirito di acredine e di ripulsa caro ai progressisti locali, noi sentiamo il dovere di avvertirli chiaramente fin d’ora che non li temiamo”, ‘Non Li Temiamo’.

²⁶ “Non ci spaventeremo se i vari “Togliatti” d’Italia, servi dello straniero, ci chiameranno fascisti o nazionalisti”, ‘Non Li Temiamo’.

²⁷ “Analoghi appellativi si applichino ai loro vicini di oriente che, in omaggio ai principi della giustizia progressistica, si sono pappati un territorio che gli stessi comunisti implicitamente riconoscono come italiano”, ‘Non Li Temiamo’.

²⁸ “Ci diranno fascisti e noi risponderemo che l’importante è non esserlo; faremo loro intendere che gli esuli rappresentano la costante vendetta dei vinti sui vincitori; saremo per loro un costante ricordo di che cosa i sistemi dello “spazio vitale”, “dell’ordine nuovo” e “della volontà di conquista” assimilati tanto bene dai vicini di oriente, creano nel mondo”, ‘Non Li Temiamo’.

2. The debate on the press: Togliatti, Longo and the communist local newspapers

The animosity of *L'Arena di Pola* and Italian anti-communist newspapers was naturally directed towards Palmiro Togliatti, too. He was the PCI secretary, and he was already the protagonist in November 1946 of the failed parallel negotiation with Tito that backfired as a propaganda move. But he intervened directly on the matter of Pola's exodus with an opinion article on *L'Unità* on February 2 under the title "Why evacuate Pola?".²⁹ Togliatti challenged the belief that the PCI was against the interests of the country by expressing concern about the potential disappearance of the Italian-speaking population from Pola. He contended that the movement does not appear to be a spontaneous decision but rather to have the support of specific people and organisations—clearly the DC-affiliated ones. Furthermore, the departure of Italians from Pula may provide ammunition to those who claim it was artificially italianised after 1918. Togliatti highlights that such population transfer operations are usually negotiated between parties for mutual benefit, but in this case, there seems to be no valid reason for the evacuation. In the absence of a comprehensive evaluation of the implications, the mass exodus choice leads to the unnecessary sacrifice of the Italian identity: "If the Italians abandon Pola, Pola will no longer be an Italian city. And why should it no longer be one? Because two deputies and some nationalist agitators from guess-which-party decided so?".³⁰ Togliatti then mentioned the migration of Italian workers from Monfalcone to Yugoslavia (the "counter-exodus") and how the combination of the two movements is a "disorganisation of two centres of Italianness" and ultimately harms Italy. He closed with a reference to the fascist repression of Slavs and how it gave rise to nationalist tendencies in the Yugoslavia Resistance movement. Nationalism was one of the core matters:

The evacuation of Pola, in essence, is an act of exasperated national struggle. Among those who inspire it, there are undoubtedly good Italians in good faith, but there are also undoubtedly people who have an interest in fuelling the dispute between Italians and Slavs and exacerbating the conditions in order to keep a hotbed of discord burning over there. And perhaps there are also those among our Pola's people who are thinking of exile for a few years, only to return in the wake of an army, during or at the end of another war!³¹

²⁹ Palmiro Togliatti, 'Perchè Evacuare Pola?', *L'Unità*, 2 February 1947.

³⁰ "Se gli italiani abbandonano Pola, Pola non sarà più una città italiana. E perché non deve più esserlo? Perché così hanno deciso due deputati e alcuni agitatori nazionalisti di non so quale partito?", Togliatti.

³¹ "Lo sgombero di Pola, in sostanza, è un atto di esasperata lotta nazionale. Tra coloro che lo ispirano vi sono senza dubbio buoni italiani in buona fede, ma vi è senza dubbio anche gente che ha interesse ad alimentare la lotta tra italiani e slavi ed esacerbare le condizioni, per mantenere acceso laggiù un focolaio di discordia. E forse non mancano tra i nostri polesani anche quelli che pensano all'esilio per alcuni anni, per poi tornare al seguito di un esercito, nel corso o alla fine di un'altra guerra!", Togliatti.

Togliatti proposed a different model, difficult to implement, but the only route to peace:

The Italians of Istria have a task today as part of our nation: — not to leave their cities and dream about impossible revenges, spreading the poison of hatred between nations, but to stay in their place and become a bridge and link between two peoples, two states, two civilisations.³²

This stance was part of the difficult standing of the PCI in front of the peace treaty and the Trieste question: on one side, PCI was partly in favour of the treaty, repelled nationalism, revanchism, and anti-Slavism, and it had ideological ties with Tito's party; on the other side, PCI could not completely ignore the national interest, if only as a matter of consensus, and they did not favour a Yugoslavian annexation of Trieste, differently from some local communist activists.³³ It made sense for PCI, given the context, to paint Pola's departure as the result of an unwise decision made against the interests of the country and to hold the DC (as well as the Anglo-American forces) responsible. This was not enough, however, to avoid severe criticism from moderate and right-leaning newspapers.

Pola's CLN sent to Italian newspapers a comment on Togliatti's articles. According to the letter, government officials did not exert any influence on Pola's mass exodus. Instead, the government's stance was determined by the will of the Pola's citizens and humanitarian reasons rather than political goals. It then outlined the extensive abuses carried out by the Slavs and argues that people in Pola would not be able to preserve their Italian identity if they stayed in the city for just a few months. The letter, or a summary of it, was reported in Italian newspapers.³⁴ Drawing from this, *Il Tempo* published a provocation directed at Togliatti, in the February 4 edition:

Togliatti cannot understand such things [why people are leaving Pola] and therefore he recalls the fascist atrocities against the Slavs (not the foibe, though), and insinuates that the exiles are planning to return to Pola with an army, during or at the end of another war! Since, returning from Belgrade on a failed mission, he sang us the delights of the Titine democracy, it is logical that he should now tell Pola people to stay in their hometown to experience it, to indeed act as a bridge and link “between two populations, two states and two civilisations”. However, a compromise can be reached: let us immediately organise a campaign to keep in Pola those Italians who want to leave and to bring back

³² “Gli italiani d'Istria hanno oggi come parte della nostra nazione un compito: — non quello di venirsene via dalle loro città e andar sognando rivincite impossibili e spargendo il veleno dell'odio tra le nazioni, ma di rimanere al loro posto e diventare ponte e anello di congiunzione tra due popoli, due Stati, due civiltà”, Togliatti.

³³ Karlsen, *Frontiera rossa*.

³⁴ ‘Il C.L.N. Di Pola Risponde a Togliatti’, *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, 4 February 1947; Demetrio Garzia, ‘Lasciamo Pola per Non Morire’, *Il Mattino d'Italia*, 4 February 1947; ‘Risposta Dei Polesi All'on. Togliatti: Perché Abbandoniamo Pola’, *Il Nuovo Giornale d'Italia*, 5 February 1947.

those who have already left. On one condition, however: that Togliatti becomes mayor of Pola, the only one capable of proving the pessimists wrong.³⁵

Il Gazzettino released a debunking of the counter-exodus of Monfalcone workers cited by Togliatti: “It is about a few hundred already compromised people”.³⁶ On the following day, *Il Gazzettino* reported that five out of seven families that moved from Monfalcone to Pola immediately decided to go back: “We thought—said a family head—that only the rich and the fascists were leaving the city, but we could see that all the people, even the humblest workers, are about to go into exile”.³⁷

The communist newspaper *L’Unità* went back to Pola’s question on February 14 with an article by Luigo Longo, a prominent figure in the PCI, under the title “Who deceived our Pola’s brothers?”.³⁸ The article opened with a description of the crowds of Julian refugees wandering from city to city. In the article—no surprise—Longo endorsed Giglio and Togliatti’s viewpoint on the real motivation for the exodus:

It has been said: It is the “titine” scare that drives our compatriots out of Istria; it is the social regime of the Yugoslav Republic that drives them away. We reply: It is the campaign of anti-Slavic lies, it is the solicitations and promises made by the Italian envoys (by the Commissione Pontificia? by the government?) that started and swelled the exodus movement. Jobs, accommodation, assistance, and every facility were announced to anyone leaving. All sorts of promises were made without knowing whether they could be fulfilled. In a nation where the homeless and unemployed number in the millions, it will not be easy to find housing and work for tens of thousands more.³⁹

³⁵ “Togliatti certe cose non può comprenderle e per questo rievoca le atrocità fasciste contro gli slavi (niente foibe, però), e insinua che gli esuli si ripromettano di tornare a Pola al seguito di un esercito, nel corso o alla fine di un’altra guerra! Siccome, rientrando da Belgrado in missione fallita, ci cantò le delizie della democrazia titina, è logico che ora dica ai polesi di rimanere nella città natia per farne l’esperienza, per fare anzi da ponte e anelli di congiunzione “tra due popoli, due Stati e due civiltà”. A un compromesso tuttavia si può venire: organizziamola subito la campagna per trattenere a Pola gl’italiani che vogliono andar via e per farci ritornare quelli che se ne sono già andati. Ad una condizione, però: e cioè che sindaco di Pola diventi Togliatti, l’unico in grado di sburgiare i pessimisti”, ‘Togliatti Sindaco Di Pola’, *Il Tempo*, 4 February 1947, sec. Disco Rosso.

³⁶ ‘Non Esiste Un Esodo Da Monfalcone All’Jugoslavia’, *Il Gazzettino*, 5 February 1947.

³⁷ “Credevamo—ha detto un capofamiglia—che solo i ricchi e i fascisti lasciassero la città, ma abbiamo potuto osservare che tutto il popolo, anche il più umile lavoratore, si appresta ad andare in esilio. Ciò chiarisce molte cose che fino ad oggi sono state per noi incomprensibili”, ‘Fuori Le Bandiere per Il 20 Febbraio’, *Il Gazzettino*, 6 February 1947.

³⁸ Luigi Longo, ‘Chi Ha Ingannato i Fratelli Di Pola?’, *L’Unità*, 14 February 1947.

³⁹ “Si è detto: È il terrore “titino” che caccia i nostri connazionali dall’Istria, è il regime sociale della Repubblica jugoslava che li spinge alla fuga. Rispondiamo: È la campagna di menzogne antislave, sono le sollecitazioni e le promesse fatte dagli inviati (dalla Commissione Pontificia? dal Governo?) italiani che hanno avviato e ingrossato il movimento di esodo. Si è annunciato lavoro, alloggio, assistenza, e ogni facilitazione a chiunque partiva. Si sono fatte promesse di ogni

The author introduced the problem of the reception of refugees in a post-war crisis-ridden Italy. He furthermore adds that the blame should be placed on who promised the best possible reception in Italy; the unfortunate exiles are not at fault, but they deserve pity and help:

But it is now useless to complain: refugees are arriving by the thousands. They think that the promises made will be kept. Instead, so far, they have found nothing but cold and hunger, because those who had made them the promises have not bothered to arrange for their implementation. Refugees are not responsible for the manoeuvres and deceptions of those who drive them to flee, for the harm done to the Italianness of their native places and to themselves. They are our brothers, doubly unfortunate because they have abandoned everything they hold dear and because they now need everything. They must therefore be met with our affectionate and fraternal solidarity.⁴⁰

Longo then identified new targets for his argument against the DC: the foreign refugees, many of them with an opaque, fascist collaborationist record from World War II; hotels and villas, used only during the touristic season and thus possibly subject to confiscation; the emptied buildings of the ousted monarchy:

There are several camps in Italy for foreign refugees set up and maintained with hundreds of millions of liras paid by the Italian state. Well, it is absurd and inhuman that, while Italian refugees suffer cold and hunger, there are comfortable and heated accommodations for foreign refugees, the majority of whom are Fascists, Cetnics, and Ustašas. They should be confined to a smaller space, unwelcome guests should be removed, and some camps should be vacated to make room for refugees and homeless Italians. There are numerous holiday resorts, numerous hotels and villas that are deserted and only inhabited for a few weeks a year; the government should seize these unused buildings and make them available to those seeking shelter. There are castles and palaces of the deposed monarchy with thousands of empty rooms, halls, and lounges—a true insult to current housing needs. Occupy these facilities, open them up to refugees, invalids, and children in need of hospitality, care, and education.⁴¹

sorta, senza sapere se era possibile mantenerle. In una nazione nella quale i senza tetto e i disoccupati si contano a milioni, non sarà facile trovare alloggio e lavoro per altre decine di migliaia di persone”, Longo.

⁴⁰ “Ma ormai è inutile recriminare: i profughi arrivano a migliaia. Essi pensano che le promesse fatte saranno mantenute. Invece, finora, non hanno trovato che freddo e fame, perché chi aveva fatto loro le promesse, punto si è preoccupato di predisporre l’attuazione. I profughi non sono responsabili delle manovre e degli inganni di chi li spinge a fuggire, del male fatto alla causa dell’italianità dei loro luoghi natali e a se stessi. Essi sono fratelli nostri, doppiamente sventurati perché hanno abbandonato tutto quanto avevano di più caro e perché ora abbisognano di tutto. Essi perciò devono incontrare la nostra affettuosa e fraterna solidarietà”, Longo.

⁴¹ “Vi sono in Italia numerosi campi per profughi stranieri costituiti e mantenuti con centinaia di milioni versati dallo Stato Italiano. Ebbene, è assurdo e inumano che, mentre profughi italiani soffrono il freddo e la fame, esistano alloggi comodi e riscaldati per profughi stranieri, in maggioranza fascisti, cetnici, ustascia. Si restringano costoro in uno spazio minore, si allontanino gli ospiti poco graditi e si lascino liberi alcuni campi per far posto ai profughi e agli italiani

The accusation of being anti-national was thus sent back to the accusers. Longo indeed closed with a call for assistance and solidarity for the “Istrian brothers”. This article sparked reactions, this time directly from the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, which denied claims of encouraging the exodus and stated that the government would have rather preferred Pola’s population stay in its city. Minority rights’ protection clauses were asked for them during the Peace Conference, but the people’s free choice to leave was stronger than anything else, and therefore the government organised the transport and the assistance.⁴² Longo therefore wrote a reply, published on *L’Unità* on March 1.⁴³ Longo interpreted the government's initial opposition to the exodus as proof of its incorrect nature, as PCI claimed. Yet he points out the contradiction with the government activity in Pola:

The exodus was prepared, stimulated, encouraged—almost imposed—through months of work. The Venezia Giulia e Zara Office worked on it, dependent on the Cabinet of the Ministry of the Interior, which is directed, with considerable resourcefulness, by Prefect Micali. The two deputies, Pecorari and Carignani, who always spoke and promised on behalf of the Presidency of the Council, contributed to this with speeches, articles, and promises. Above all, the Pontificia Commissione di Assistenza worked on it, dependent on the Vatican, which was perhaps the one that handled and directed the entire operation, and under whose orders, with telegrams from the Presidency of the Council, the Prefects of Upper Italy were placed.⁴⁴

Pecorari and Carignani were two DC members of the Constituent Assembly, and they were effectively involved in the exodus planning long before February 1947; the Vatican-instituted PCA was also a

senza tetto. Vi sono numerosi luoghi di villeggiatura, numerosi alberghi e ville deserte e abitate solo per poche settimane all'anno; provveda il Governo a requisire questi edifici inutilizzati e li metta a disposizione di chi cerca un ricovero. Vi sono castelli, dei palazzi della spodestata monarchia con migliaia di camere, sale e saloni vuoti, vero insulto ai bisogni attuali di abitazione. Si occupino questi locali, si aprano ai profughi, agli invalidi, ai bambini che abbisognano di ospitalità, di cure e di educazione”, Longo.

⁴² For the full statement see ‘De Gasperi e Pola’, *Il Mattino Del Popolo*, 15 February 1947; ‘Il Nostro Governo per i Profughi Di Pola’, *Libertà*, 15 February 1947; ‘L’esodo Dei Polesi Non Fu Voluto Dal Governo’, *Il Tempo*, 15 February 1947; the statement was also reported by *L’Avvenire d’Italia*, ‘Furono i Polesi a Non Voler Rimanere’, *L’Avvenire d’Italia*, 15 February 1947.

⁴³ Luigi Longo, ‘Per i Fratelli Istriani’, *L’Unità*, 1 March 1947.

⁴⁴ “L’esodo è stato preparato, sollecitato, incoraggiato, imposto quasi, mediante un lavoro di mesi. Vi ha lavorato l’Ufficio della Venezia Giulia e Zara, dipendente dal Gabinetto del Ministero degli Interni, che è diretto, con notevole larghezza di mezzi, dal Prefetto Micali. Vi hanno contribuito, con discorsi, articoli e promesse, gli onorevoli Pecorari e Carignani, che sempre parlarono e promisero a nome della Presidenza del Consiglio. Vi ha lavorato, soprattutto, la Commissione Pontificia di Assistenza, dipendente dal Vaticano, che forse è stata quella che manovrò e diresse tutta l’operazione, e ai cui ordini, con telegrammi della Presidenza del Consiglio, furono messi i Prefetti dell’Alta Italia”, Longo.

crucial part of the exodus and reception organisation. Longo in this way highlighted the responsibility of a specific area of the DC-PCI-PSI coalition government; on the other side, the communist-led Ministry for Postwar Relief was excluded from the organisation:

There was a body in Italy that was supposed, due to its purpose and facilities, to gather, accommodate and assist the Italians of Istria who voluntarily left their homes: it was the Ministry of Postwar Relief. But it was precisely this Ministry that was jealously kept in the dark about everything that was being prepared and that, right at the time of the greatest influx of refugees, was even dissolved.⁴⁵

As in the previous article, Longo called on the government to provide the best assistance to Pola exiles and reiterates the point about “foreigner fascists” hosted in Italy, also pointing to the concurrent emigration to Italy of anti-communist Slavs in the Julian March. The issue of “foreigner fascists”—former pro-Axis or collaborationist soldiers escaping countries of the Socialist Bloc—was not new for *L’Unità*. On November 30, 1946, Pietro Montagnani published an article under the title “Refugees”.⁴⁶ The article addressed “the hierarchs, the black bandits, the torturers, and profiteers who have found refuge in the cities”,⁴⁷ in particular those escaping Yugoslavia: “Among these undesirables must also be placed those who escape the just punishment of Yugoslav popular justice and who present themselves here as victims, the same who were executioners”.⁴⁸ Montagnani, then, added that:

But from the Italian cities still under dispute, not only the criminals who come to our country—the criminals who do not want to pay the price for the crimes they have committed—but also thousands and thousands of honest Italians, our true brothers, and their tragedy moves us and makes us reflect. Victims of the infamous fascist policy, straws caught in the whirlwind of resentment that it has unleashed, they are induced to flee, urged on by the phantom of a terrorism that does not exist and is stirred up for partisan speculation.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ “Vi era un organo in Italia che avrebbe dovuto, per la sua finalità e attrezzatura, provvedere a raccogliere, ospitare, assistere gli italiani dell’Istria, che volontariamente abbandonavano le loro case: era il Ministero dell’Assistenza Post-bellica. Ma è stato proprio questo Ministero che è stato gelosamente tenuto all’oscuro di tutto quanto si preparava e che, proprio nel momento di maggior afflusso di profughi, è stato addirittura sciolto”, Longo.

⁴⁶ Piero Montagnani, ‘Profughi’, *L’Unità*, 30 November 1946.

⁴⁷ “I gerarchi, i briganti neri, i seviziatori ed i profittatori che hanno trovato rifugio nelle città”, Montagnani.

⁴⁸ “Nel novero di questi indesiderabili, debbono essere collocati anche coloro che sfuggono al giusto castigo della giustizia popolare jugoslava e che si presentano qui da noi, in veste di vittime, essi che furono carnefici”, Montagnani.

⁴⁹ “Ma dalle città italiane ancora in discussione, non giungono a noi soltanto i criminali, che non vogliono pagare il fio dei delitti commessi, arrivano a migliaia e migliaia italiani onesti, veri fratelli nostri e la loro tragedia ci commuove e ci fa riflettere. Vittime della infame politica fascista, pagliuzze sbalestrate nel vortice dei rancori che questa ha scatenato

Once more, *L'Unità's* articles drew a distinction between the “foreigner fascists” (including war criminals) and the “honest Italians”, while still denying the existence of a climate of terror created by the Yugoslavian authorities, relegating those fears to “partisan speculation”. This article was published two months before the beginning of Pola’s exodus; nonetheless, it is one of the most quoted articles in the contemporary debate around the exodus, used as evidence of the communist hostility towards exiles.⁵⁰ The article, however, is always quoted in a reduced version, excluding the paragraph about “honest Italians”, inducing the idea that the “fascists” Montagnani targeted were the Istrian-Dalmatian exiles as a whole. According to a blog post written by the historical research group “Nicoletta Bourbaki”,⁵¹ this misleading interpretation became widespread after the inclusion of the Montanari article’s shortened version in Pupo’s 2005 essay “Il lungo esodo”.⁵²

The debate about Pola’s exiles also took place in the regional press. The Bolognese communist newspaper *Il Progresso d'Italia* published an opinion article on February 6 under the title “Tears on Cue for Pola’s refugees”.⁵³ The climate of national mourning for the exodus was depicted as a hypocritical ruse of the political right. Pola’s exodus is told to be triggered by the escape, in the previous months, of the fascist circles of the city; their aim was to create a “dead city” and reinforce the equation between Italian and “chauvinist, pro-fascist” in front of democratic Yugoslavia. In this way, the exodus of the whole population was encouraged and planned:

Today, by appealing to feelings and resentments that are partly justified and partly fictitious, all of Pola's citizens of Italian origin have been persuaded to move, creating a moral impossibility for them

essi sono indotti a fuggire, incalzati dal fantasma di un terrorismo che non esiste e che viene agitato per speculazione di parte”, Montagnani.

⁵⁰ Bernas, *Ci chiamavano fascisti, eravamo italiani*, 15; Carla Isabella Elena Cace, *Foibe ed esodo. L'Italia negata. La tragedia giuliano-dalmata a dieci anni dall'istituzione del Giorno del ricordo*, I libri del Borghese (Roma: Pagine, 2014), 63; Mirco Carloni, ed., ‘Per ricordare un giorno non basta. L’esodo giuliano dalmata nelle Marche’ (Quaderni del Consiglio regionale delle Marche, February 2018), 20, https://www.consiglio.marche.it/informazione_e_comunicazione/pubblicazioni/quaderni/pdf/244.pdf; on the press: Piero Tarticchio, ‘Le Tappe Della Vergogna’, *L’Arena Di Pola*, 30 August 2009; Ruggero Botterini, ‘Le Vergognose Affermazioni Negazioniste Di Sandi Volk’, *L’Arena Di Pola*, 26 February 2010; Antonio Ballarin, ‘Tempo Di Passaggio’, *L’Arena Di Pola*, 30 March 2019; Giuseppe De Lorenzo, “‘Tornate a Casa Vostra’. Quando La Sinistra Sputava Sui Profughi Istriani’, *Il Giornale* (blog), 10 September 2015, <https://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/tornate-casa-vostra-quando-sinistra-cacciava-i-profughi-perc-1169028.html>.

⁵¹ Nicoletta Bourbaki, ‘L’Unità e Gli Esuli. Un Palese Falso, Necessario Alla Liturgia Del Giorno Del Ricordo.’, Medium, *Nicoletta Bourbaki* (blog), 14 February 2019, <https://nicolettaborbaki.medium.com/unita-e-gli-esuli-f669deec3b3b>.

⁵² Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 207–8.

⁵³ ‘Lacrime a Comando Sui Profughi Di Pola’, *Il Progresso d'Italia*, 5 February 1947.

to coexist with the Slavs. Then they are abandoned like dogs. The committees have already fulfilled their assistance task.⁵⁴

Once again, the focus was on how Pola's population has been deceived and then abandoned. The conservative Bolognese newspaper *Il Giornale dell'Emilia* published on February 8 a letter written by Pierina Alessandrino, who is presented as a victim of imprisonment under the Nazi authorities.⁵⁵ The letter referenced specific names and events of Yugoslavian repression to debunk the notion that "deportations and killing through foibe pits" are merely propaganda devices used to frighten the population. People were leaving Pola "because they have experienced how graceful Yugoslavian rule is, because they have seen and heard, and paid for at their own expense, what is called (but is not) progressive democracy".⁵⁶ According to the author, the exiles were conscious they were going to face "misunderstandings and misery, hunger, and the immense grief of the abandonment of everything dear"⁵⁷ just to live free; their tears were bloody tears.

The communist newspaper *Il Progresso d'Italia* actually did not devote much attention to Pola's exodus besides the confrontational commentary—rather, it reported about the refugee camps in Bologna.⁵⁸ Catholic, moderate, and right-wing newspapers dealt more often with the exodus, and this is an indication of how they were more comfortable writing about the topic, while it was a sensitive point for the left. The same cannot be true when analysing the local left-leaning newspaper in Venice, *Il Mattino del Popolo*, owned by the local PCI federation until mid-1947.⁵⁹ *Il Mattino del Popolo* covered the arrival of the Toscana in Venice with multiple articles⁶⁰ but also dealt with the political implications of the exodus. On February 12, for example, it published a report from Pola by Tommaso Giglio, written on the same days as his controversial articles on *L'Unità*.⁶¹ Giglio mentioned the

⁵⁴ "Oggi, facendo leva sui sentimenti e risentimenti in parte giustificati e in parte fittizi, si è riusciti a far muovere tutti i polesi di origine italiana, creando loro l'impossibilità morale a convivere con gli slavi. Poi li si abbandona come cani. I comitati hanno già assolto il loro compito di assistenza", 'Lacrime a Comando Sui Profughi Di Pola'.

⁵⁵ Pierina Alessandrino, 'Lacrime Di Sangue', *Il Giornale Dell'Emilia*, 8 February 1947.

⁵⁶ "I Polesi vengono via da Pola perché hanno provato come graziosa sia la dominazione jugoslava, perché hanno visto e sentito e pagato a proprie spese, quella che vien chiamata (ma non è) la democrazia progressista", Alessandrino.

⁵⁷ "L'incomprensione e la miseria, la fame e il dolore immenso dell'abbandono di ogni cosa cara", Alessandrino.

⁵⁸ 'Saranno Costruiti Dei Villaggi per Ospitare i Profughi Sinistrati', *Il Progresso d'Italia*, 28 January 1947, sec. Cronaca di Bologna; 'Vivono in Stanze Senza Vetri Che Sembrano Delle Camerate Militari', *Il Progresso d'Italia*, 2 February 1947, sec. Cronaca di Bologna.

⁵⁹ Grandinetti, *I quotidiani in Italia 1943-1991*, 200.

⁶⁰ 'I Primi Profughi Da Pola Sono Giunti a Venezia'; 'Altro Scaglione Di Profughi è Giunto Ieri a Venezia'; 'Il Terzo Arrivo Di Profughi Da Pola', *Il Mattino Del Popolo*, 13 February 1947.

⁶¹ Tommaso Giglio, 'C'è Chi Resta a Pola', *Il Mattino Del Popolo*, 12 February 1947.

existence of an alleged counter-exodus “from America, Monfalcone, and Venice, many Italians made their way to the Istrian city”;⁶² he praised the people who chose to stay in the city, emphasising their crucial role in preserving Italian identity, and he even broached the subject of future border revision with Yugoslavia:

We must be grateful to these people who remain, because they can truly be a bridge between us and Yugoslavia, not only, but they will be a card in our hands when, tomorrow, we can set out on the path of direct agreements with the Yugoslavian people and ask for the revision of the borders on the basis of those ethnic principles that were so little taken into account in the drafting of the peace treaties. In our opinion, an Italian staying in Pola, is one more card we could have in the game of politics: there is a greater probability that a peaceful revision of the borders could be achieved tomorrow. Being able to maintain the Italian linguistic and ethnic integrity of Pola will be of great benefit to our national policy.⁶³

Giglio's tribute to Pola citizens who chose to live under Yugoslavia or who relocated to Pola could be interpreted as a way to criticise the majority of those departing during those weeks. On the same day, the socialist newspaper *Avanti!* published an article similarly reproving the exiles' choice, rhetorically asking whether they ever considered the possibility of coexistence with the Yugoslavian state instead of “abandoning the trench”.⁶⁴ As for *L'Unità*'s article, Giglio states that those leaving were deceived by propaganda, and he did not call for discrimination against exiles, once in Italy. On the contrary, he wrote: “Those who leave must be welcomed by us as brothers. We know that they will further aggravate the serious internal hardships in our country, but we will do everything we can to help them”.⁶⁵ Other articles made a stronger case for solidarity with the exiles. For instance, on

⁶² “Dall’America, da Monfalcone e da Venezia molti italiani si avviano verso la città istriana”, Giglio.

⁶³ “Noi dobbiamo essere grati a queste persone che restano, perché potranno veramente costituire un ponte tra noi e la Jugoslavia, non solo, ma saranno, una carta nelle nostre mani quando, domani, potremo metterci sulla via degli accordi diretti col popolo jugoslavo e chiedere la revisione delle frontiere in base a quei principii etnici di cui si è tenuto così poco conto nella stesura dei trattati di pace. Un italiano che resta a Pola, a nostro parere, è una carta in più che noi potremmo avere nel gioco politico, è una probabilità maggiore che domani si possa giungere ad una pacifica revisione delle frontiere. Riuscire a mantenere l’integrità linguistica ed etnica italiana di Pola potrà essere di grande giovamento ai fini della nostra politica nazionale”, Giglio.

⁶⁴ ‘Pola-Pulj’, *Avanti!*, 12 January 1947.

⁶⁵ “Coloro che partono devono essere accolti da noi come fratelli. Noi sappiamo che essi accentueranno ancora di più i gravi disagi interni del nostro Paese, ma faremo di tutto per poterli aiutare”, Giglio, ‘C’è Chi Resta a Pola’.

February 2, an article portrayed the upcoming exodus as tragedy that had its roots “in fascism and the fascist policies”.⁶⁶ There is a call for national unity in solidarity in front of this tragedy:

Thousands of men, women, and children, driven by national passion, come with us. No Italian can fail to feel and understand this passion. And every Italian must make his or her own active contribution so that the pain of the refugees is less cruel, and thus they start feeling among brothers in their own country. It would be a serious matter if anyone were to belittle this sense of solidarity by speculating, for partisan aims, on the pain and sacrifice of these victims of fascism. It would betray the spirit of national solidarity that, in the saddest hours, must unite a people; it would worsen the conditions through which democratic Italy can rise again.⁶⁷

The speculation for “partisan aims” can be read as a reference to the use of the Pola’s exodus for anti-communist narrative. Furthermore, the article called on the government to act in favour of the exiles, with the DC as the implicit target of the petition:

The action of every Italian must be supported by the government bodies, which are responsible for arranging the material conditions for the reception of refugees. We are certain that everything has been arranged by all the competent bodies, thus the promises made to the unfortunate population of Pola begin to be fulfilled as soon as they disembark. This is a serious problem that cannot be solved with generic words of affection and solidarity alone.⁶⁸

There, the idea that the government—intended as its DC component—is not doing enough started emerging. Just three days later, a first article on the issue appeared: “Difficulties begin for Pula's refugees”.⁶⁹ The accommodations meant for the exiles in Senigallia were reportedly already occupied by Slovene and Croatian refugees. The delay in providing housing raised questions about a more

⁶⁶ “La tragedia della popolazione italiana di Pola, che per restare nella comunità nazionale abbandona le proprie case ed emigra fra dolori e sacrifici, ha le sue cause nel fascismo e nella politica fascista”, ‘I Profughi Di Pola’, *Il Mattino Del Popolo*, 2 February 1947.

⁶⁷ “Migliaia di uomini, di donne e di bambini, sospinti dalla passione nazionale vengono con noi. Nessun Italiano non può non sentire e non comprendere tale passione. Ed ogni italiano deve portare il proprio fattivo contributo perché il dolore dei profughi sia meno cocente, perché essi comprendano di sentirsi fra fratelli, nel proprio Paese. Grave sarebbe se da qualche parte si volesse sminuire tale senso di solidarietà speculando, per fini di parte, sul dolore e sul sacrificio di queste vittime del fascismo. Si tradirebbe lo spirito di solidarietà nazionale che nelle ore più tristi deve unire un popolo; si aggraverebbero le condizioni attraverso cui può risorgere l’Italia democratica”, ‘I Profughi Di Pola’.

⁶⁸ “E dovere di ogni italiano deve essere sostenuto dall’azione degli organi di Governo, preposti alla preparazione delle condizioni materiali d’accoglimento dei profughi. Noi siamo certi che tutto è stato predisposto; da tutti gli organismi competenti, perché le promesse fatte alla disgraziata popolazione di Pola comincino fino dallo sbarco ad essere mantenute. E’ un problema grave che non si risolve soltanto con parole generiche di affetto e di solidarietà”, ‘I Profughi Di Pola’.

⁶⁹ ‘Incominciano Le Difficoltà per i Profughi Di Pola’, *Il Mattino Del Popolo*, 6 February 1947.

general lack of planning. On February 6, an article by the newspaper's director, Ugo Arcuno, attacked the "Christian" newspapers *Il Gazzettino* and *Il Popolo* for their proximity with "fascists and qualunquisti" narratives on the Pola question.⁷⁰ Furthermore, Arcuno denounced the attempt to recruit the exiles in the "reactionary" movement, thanks to the dismay they were going to face after a poor reception in Italy. The author, however, declared that this attempt was going to fail, as it failed with veterans and partisans:

[This ploy] failed because the veterans and partisans, like the honest Julians and respectable Poleses, after a brief examination of the situation, were and are destined to persuade themselves that the Italian working population is much more on their side than the patriots who tried, and are trying, to exploit the misery of the Italians in order to foster the rebirth of something that looks quite similar to fascism. This game succeeded in 1922; it was doomed to failure in 1947 and the following years.⁷¹

3. The anti-communist framing

The anti-communist use of the Pola question emerges from the articles devoted by the moderate and right-wing newspapers to the exile's arrivals in Italy, as described in the previous chapter. The DC's weekly publication *Popolo e Libertà* published on February 9 a cartoon titled "Togliatti and Pola" and captioned "Togliatti wrote in *L'Unità* that the exodus from Pola was an act of exasperated nationalism".⁷² The cartoon represented the communist leader looking askance at a family of exiles (parents and four children) with bowed heads and a sombre look; under the drawing, a line: "The Pola citizen [replies] to Togliatti: do we look like nationalist faces to you?".⁷³ The DC's newspaper aim was to depict the communists as indifferent to the tragedy of poor people, if not ruthlessly hostile to them. On the following issue, on February 16, communist hostility was present through a shocking document: a flyer, distributed in the Monfalcone and Gorizia areas, calling the antifascists for an active ostracism of Istrian exiles.⁷⁴ Some excerpts from the text are:

⁷⁰ Ugo Arcuno, 'Italia e Pola', *Il Mattino Del Popolo*, 6 February 1947.

⁷¹ "[Questo gioco] fallì perché i reduci e i partigiani, come i giuliani onesti e i polesi rispettabili, dopo un breve esame della situazione, furono e sono destinati a persuadersi che la popolazione lavoratrice italiana è accanto a loro assai più dei patriottardi che tentarono e tentano di sfruttare le miserie degli Italiani al fine di favorire la rinascita di "qualche cosa" che assomigli abbastanza al fascismo. Questo gioco riuscì nel 1922; esso è destinato a fallire nel 1947 e negli anni seguenti", Arcuno.

⁷² "Togliatti ha scritto sull'Unità che l'esodo da Pola è un gesto di esasperato nazionalismo", 'Togliatti e Pola', *Popolo e Libertà*, 9 February 1947.

⁷³ "I polesano a Togliatti: — Ti sembriamo facce da nazionalisti?", 'Togliatti e Pola'.

⁷⁴ 'Comunisti Ed Esuli', *Popolo e Libertà*, 16 February 1947.

Who are the Istrian “exiles”? They are those who fear the Powers and Justice of the People, individuals compromised with fascism, black market traders, and starvers of the people. [...] Antifascist Monfalcone must not give hospitality to such riff-raff. [...] Our watchword must be: get the Istrian exiles out of this land! Their hands are stained with the blood of the people. THE EXILES? KICK THEM UP THE ASS!!!⁷⁵

The flyers’ sketch was therefore reproduced: an industrial worker, with a hammer in hand, kicks the back of a man with a suit and a suitcase. The news was also reported in local DC newspapers.⁷⁶ A first instance of this text appeared in the Triestine pro-Italian newspaper *La Voce Libera* on January 15.⁷⁷ *La Voce Libera* attributed the authorship to titine propagandists and added harsh comments on them:

This is the text of a hate leaflet disseminated in Monfalcone by the titine propagandists; it stands as a new document of their level of civilisation. They are scum devoid of heart and brain who have descended to the lowest degrees of bestiality, limited to conceiving every intentionally social manifestation under the sign of hatred, that is, in the most anti-social and anti-human way imaginable.

On January 17, *La Voce Libera* published a reply undersigned by the pro-Italian partisan association API committees of Trieste, Monfalcone, and Grado. The text criticised the anti-exiles flyer, calls for solidarity with the “brothers” from Istria and Pola, and it states that the API is ready to fight potential acts of violence directed against the exiles.⁷⁸ The flyer already circulated before the start of the mass exodus from Pola, but it is unclear since when. No other sources about this flyer—or similar content—were found during the research for this thesis; so far, the only known material is the reports by those newspapers that had an interest in the creation of an anti-communist narrative; further investigation is needed. What seems easier to establish is that the confrontational leaflet was a creation of titine propaganda. Nonetheless, its use by the DC newspapers along the polemic with Togliatti on the Pola question could have led to a shift: from a documentation of the fierce political struggle as the Monfalcone area to a proof of the viciousness of the communists in general, and thus

⁷⁵ “Chi sono gli “esuli” istriani? Essi sono coloro che temono i Poteri e la giustizia del Popolo, individui compromessi con il fascismo, borsaneristi e affamatori del popolo. [...] Monfalcone antifascista non deve dare ospitalità a simile gentaglia. [...] La nostra parola d’ordine deve essere: via da questa terra gli esuli istriani! Essi hanno le mani macchiate del sangue del popolo. GLI ESULI?? PIGLIATELI A CALCIONI NEL SEDERE!!!”, ‘Comunisti Ed Esuli’.

⁷⁶ As in the case of Vercelli’s DC newspaper *La libertà* on February 25, see Miletto, *Novecento di confine*, 190 note 56.

⁷⁷ ‘Manifesto Dell’odio’, *La Voce Libera*, 15 January 1947.

⁷⁸ ‘Solidarietà Partigiana Con Gli Esuli Dall’Istria’, *La Voce Libera*, 17 January 1947.

also of the PCI. But the PCI newspapers never took the same stance of the flyer from Monfalcone, and, at least in words, they were also talking about “brothers from Pola” who deserved hospitality.

The exiles-titines conflict is evident in the pages of the two daily newspapers printed in Pola: the pro-Italian *L’Arena di Pola* and the pro-Yugoslav *Il Nostro Giornale*. During the mass exodus, the first described the exiles’ experience of arrival in Italy in a positive way, highlighting solidarity and brotherhood as components of the nation’s values. The latter published articles describing a poor reception of the exiles in Italy; some of them reportedly went back to Pola due to the dismay;⁷⁹ the same narrative appeared in the Italian-language newspapers published in Capodistria.⁸⁰ *L’Arena di Pola* countered this narrative with multiple exiles’ letters revealing extremely positive experiences of welcome and solidarity.⁸¹ *Il Lavoratore* is another instance of an Italian-language newspaper criticising the exiles’ choice and reporting about a poor reception. Based in Trieste, it was the official publication of the Communist Party of the Julian March (detached from the Italian Communist Party), and thus not representing the line of the PCI.⁸²

In the exiles’ memory, the hostility of the Yugoslavian (or pro-Yugoslavian, in the Julian March assigned to Italy) communists is not detached from the hostility they reportedly suffered due to PCI members. Many witnesses, recalling their arrivals in Italy, mention episodes of intolerance motivated by political reasons. The single most quoted of those episodes, allegedly involving PCI activists, is the theme of the next chapter.

⁷⁹ *Il Nostro Giornale* was not directly read for this thesis; those consideration are based on the reading of *Arena di Pola*’s articles, see ‘Esuli e Commessi Viaggiatori’, *L’Arena Di Pola*, 16 February 1947; ‘Chiare Smentite Degli Esuli Alle Vuote Panzane Delle Gracidanti Cicale Titine Di via Sergia’, *L’Arena Di Pola*, 1 April 1947.

⁸⁰ Alessandra Argenti Tremul, ‘Analisi dell’esodo dall’Istria nord-occidentale da parte della stampa ufficiale dell’epoca’, *Annales, Series Historia et Sociologia* 10, no. 2 (2000): 393–410.

⁸¹ There were almost daily instances in February and March, see ‘Cordialissima Accoglienza Degli Esuli Nel Trentino’, *L’Arena Di Pola*, 16 February 1947; ‘In Ogni Angolo d’Italia i Nostri Esuli Vengono Accolti Fraternamente’, *L’Arena Di Pola*, 27 February 1947; ‘Nelle Varie Regioni d’Italia Gli Esuli Trovano Aiuto e Assistenza’, *L’Arena Di Pola*, 22 March 1947.

⁸² ‘Da Pola a Gorizia. Prime Esperienze e Prime Delusioni’, *Il Lavoratore*, 1 February 1947; ‘Seguaci Di Goebbels. Come Si Monta La Pietà per Gli Esuli.’, *Il Lavoratore*, 1 February 1947.

Chapter 5. A “train of infamy”?

1. A multitude of witnesses

Multiple books about the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus, when dealing with the exiles’ experiences, quote a specific episode: the so-called “train of infamy” (“treno della vergogna”).¹ The train represents a “lieux de memoire”, using Pierre Nora’s definition, an “embodiment of memory in certain sites where a sense of historical continuity persists” that emerges at the time of a break with a past that is gone, at the time of the disappearance of the “milieux de mémoire”, the real environments of memory (Nora 1989). In the case of the exodus’ memory, the “train of infamy” emerged as a core narrative decades after the fact, when the context of the exodus was gone, and many first-generation exiles were no longer alive. It represents a crystallisation of the whole memory of the exodus—especially the traumatic part, the sense of being unacknowledged victims. The train story is not just an episode among many others; it is probably the single most quoted story about the Istrian-Dalmatian exile during the memorial days. In the last years, the episode got countless mentions in the media and authorities’ speeches. Just to name an instance, the President of the Council of Ministers’ ten-minutes official speech on February 10, 2024, devoted more than a minute to the episode.² In 2007, the Bologna municipality, together with the exiles’ association ANVGD (Associazione Nazionale Venezia Giulia e Dalmazia), placed a memorial plaque on the first platform of the train station. The text of the plaque, already mentioned in the introduction, does not explicitly mention the “train of infamy”. There is the mention of “an attitude of initial incomprehension”, and the reference is clearly to the train episode, given the location chosen for the plaque. According to another exile’s association, Unione degli Istriani, the plaque’s text was not explicit enough about the communists’ involvement. Roberto Menia, the Alleanza Nazionale (AN) Chamber of Deputies member who prompted the 2004 “Giorno del ricordo” law, wrote a parliamentary question on the Bologna plaque.³

What does historiography say about the episode? It is mentioned multiple times across essays on the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus. It is present in two 2005 books about the exodus published for a general

¹ The literal translation is “train of shame”

² ‘Giorno Del Ricordo, l’intervento Del Presidente Meloni Alla Cerimonia Presso La Foiba Di Basovizza’, Il Governo, 10 February 2024, <https://www.governo.it/it/articolo/giorno-del-ricordo-lintervento-del-presidente-meloni-alla-cerimonia-presso-la-foiba-di>.

³ ‘Interrogazione a risposta orale 3/00559’ (2007), https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/E-4-1996-0644_EN.html.

audience. In “Profughi”, Gianni Oliva addresses the Communist Party's concern that the exiles—people leaving a socialist state—might have become a significant voting base for moderate parties as part of an anti-communist strategy. This issue is connected to the supposed pull factor for the exodus represented by pro-Italian propaganda. Indeed, it is a pull factor unlikely to be responsible for the most part of the exodus, as the historiography found. In this context, however, this PCI's suspicion towards the exiles could have motivated episodes of hostility, as in Bologna's case. Raoul Pupo in “Il lungo esodo” addresses the question in this way:

The PCI cadres and leadership saw in the refugees from communist Yugoslavia only nationalist elements, if not fascists tout court, fleeing socialism and ready to act as a mass of manoeuvre for the reaction in Italy. These were the same prejudices that were to lead the following year to resounding acts of hostility by communist militants towards the refugees from Pola when they disembarked in Venice and Ancona or settled in some northern regions. At the Bologna station, for example, a train of refugees was stuck on the tracks for hours due to protests by some railwaymen who did not allow rescue and supply operations to take place. Such episodes made their mark on the Istrian memory, they were constantly reinvigorated by the diaspora press, and largely contributed to exasperating the anti-communist orientation of the exiles, which had already greatly risen with the impact of the Yugoslavian regime.⁴

Pupo then quotes the words of a witness, Giovanna B., who was interviewed by Enrico Miletto:

There were people raising fists and calling us fascists, and we could not even get off the train, but we needed some water, and they would not let us off. So my mother told me, “Well, you go, maybe since you're a little girl, they will let you”, and in fact a little boy came with me and they let us come with water on the train. They stopped us for a whole night; we were hungry and thirsty, and they did not let the adults off, it was a terrible thing.⁵

Pupo comments: “Such episodes became engraved in the Istrian memory, continually reinvigorated by the diaspora's publications, and largely contributed to exasperating the exiles' anti-communist

⁴ Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 206.

⁵ “C'era gente che faceva il pugno chiuso così e ci diceva fascisti e non si poteva neanche scendere dal treno, ma noi avevamo bisogno di bere un po' d'acqua e non ci lasciavano scendere. Allora mia madre mi ha detto: “Ma vai tu che forse, visto che sei bambina ti fanno andare”, e infatti mi ha accompagnato anche un ragazzino e ci han lasciato venire con l'acqua sul treno. Ci hanno fermato una notte intera, avevamo fame e sete e gli uomini adulti non li lasciavano scendere, è stata una cosa tremenda”, Pupo, 206; Pupo quoted Miletto's interview to Giovanna B, see Miletto, *Con il mare negli occhi*, 144.

attitudes, which had already grown stronger in the impact with the Yugoslav regime”.⁶ There are indeed multiple exodus’ witnesses recounting the episode. The Piedmontese Institute ISTORETO (Istituto piemontese per la storia della Resistenza e della società contemporanea) carried out a large oral history project with the exiles community in the region starting from 2005. The first results were published in the 2005 book “Con il mare negli occhi: storia, luoghi e memorie dell’esodo istriano a Torino” by Enrico Miletto.⁷ In the following years, the collection was expanded: eighty-four interviews are available on ISTORETO’s website.⁸ The recurrent themes across the interviews are collected in thematic pages. One thematic page covers the arrival in Italy, and it is divided into subsections according to the recurrent stereotypes the exiles had to face, including the “fascist” blame. In five instances, the interviewed exiles mention the Bologna episode. Franco V. from Pola recounted:

And then I have the memory that in Bologna, on a train, we were stopped there, where they would not let us off because there were the so-called red squads from Bologna who would not let you off because we were fascists to them. And then, from there, we went to La Spezia.⁹

When describing his journey to Apulia, Aldo S. from Rovigno stated:

And from Udine, we went to Altamura. And to go to Altamura... I, a former partisan, I got off the train where the sorting was, in Bologna. We got off the train and had to catch another one, and there were railway workers harassing us: “fascists”! But how, I, a partisan, was I taken for a fascist?! Then I had to argue with someone who didn’t believe I was a partisan: “No, you were a fascist, sorry; if you were a partisan, what are you doing here, you should be on the other side”.¹⁰

Another witness, Giulio R. from Pola, recounted:

⁶ “Episodi del genere si impressero nella memoria istriana, rinvigoriti di continuo dalla pubblicistica della diaspora, e contribuirono in larga misura a esasperare gli orientamenti anticomunisti degli esuli, già robustamente cresciuti nell’impatto con il regime jugoslavo”, Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 207.

⁷ Miletto, *Con il mare negli occhi*.

⁸ ‘I Luoghi Dell’esodo in Piemonte. Indice Delle Interviste’, ISTORETO, n.d., <http://intranet.istoreto.it/esodo/testimoni.asp>.

⁹ “E poi ho il ricordo a Bologna su un treno che eravamo fermi, dove non ci lasciavano scendere perché c'erano le cosiddette squadre rosse di Bologna che non ti lasciavano scendere perché noi per loro eravamo fascisti. E poi da lì siamo andati a La Spezia”, ‘Intervista a Franco V.’, ISTORETO, 3 April 2009, <http://intranet.istoreto.it/esodo/trascrArchos.asp?link=FD13551>.

¹⁰ “E da Udine siamo andati ad Altamura. E per andare ad Altamura... Io, partigiano, siamo scesi dal treno dove c'era lo smistamento, a Bologna. Siamo scesi dal treno e dovevamo prenderne un altro, e c'era i ferrovieri che ci maltrattavano: fascisti! Ma come, io partigiano che son preso da fascista?! E allora ho dovuto litigare con uno che non credeva che ero partigiano: no, tu eri fascista, scusa, se eri partigiano cosa fai qui, dovresti essere dalla parte di là”, ‘Intervista Ad Aldo S.’, ISTORETO, 5 October 2007, <http://intranet.istoreto.it/esodo/trascrArchos.asp?link=FD9349>.

I went through the Bologna experience.... Yes, one had to pass through Bologna, everyone passed through there! It's just that they didn't do it with just one train, but with all the trains there. And even in the Marche region, they gave us a nice welcome, huh! Yes, they spat in our faces, they called us fascists. But to three-year-old children, how can you say fascist!? How can you say that? The women then went to ask for water, and they would tell—my mother used to tell me—we won't even give you this! I used to insult them, and I was insulted back. For them, you were leaving the paradise on earth, the paradise of Yugoslavia, the new homeland. Basically, we went away from communism there!¹¹

Two other exiles recalled in their interviews the episode as indirect witnesses: Maria M. from Pola talked about “Bologna, where they did not want to stop the train, that the children were without milk, and all these things then became known”,¹² and Giuliano K. from Fiume told: “When we came, they closed us in the railcars, and they gave the children neither to eat nor to drink, and they do not even give them water in Bologna! The comrades...”.¹³ Other exile’s interviews projects were conducted in Venice,¹⁴ in Padua,¹⁵ and in the Marche region;¹⁶ instances of bad reception can be also found there. Anita Maria Doimi, exiled from Fiume to Venice, recalled that there were “very unpleasant episodes. On a train full of refugees, who were supposed to get off in Bologna, they even forbade them to bring water to the people”¹⁷ and added, about the arrival of Pola’s exiles in Venice: “When

¹¹ “To ho fatto l’esperienza di Bologna... Eh si, dovevi passare da Bologna, tutti passavano da lì! Solo che non è che l’han fatto con un treno solo, ma con tutti i treni lo faceva quella gente lì. E anche nelle Marche ci han fatto una bella accoglienza eh! Eh si, ti sputavano in faccia, ti dicevano fascisti. Ma a bambini di tre anni, come puoi dirle fascista!? Come puoi dirle così? Che le donne andavano poi a chiedere l’acqua e le dicevano—me lo contava mia mamma—non vi diamo neanche questa! Li insultavo, venivi insultato. Per loro andavi via dal paradiso terrestre, dal paradiso della Jugoslavia, dalla nuova patria. Praticamente, siamo andati via dal comunismo, lì!”, ‘Intervista a Giulio R.’, ISTORETO, 20 July 2009, <http://intranet.istoreto.it/esodo/trascrArchos.asp?link=FD14188>.

¹² “Però Bologna, che non volevano fermare il treno, che i bambini erano senza latte e tutte queste cose poi si sono divulgate”, ‘Intervista a Maria Man.’, ISTORETO, 31 March 2008, <http://intranet.istoreto.it/esodo/trascrArchos.asp?link=FD9374>.

¹³ “A noi quando siam venuti ci chiudevano nei vagoni e non gli davano ai bambini neanche da mangiare e bere, e non gli davano neanche l’acqua a Bologna! I compagni...”, ‘Intervista a Giuliano K.’, ISTORETO, 23 April 2010, <http://intranet.istoreto.it/esodo/trascrArchos.asp?link=FD14578>.

¹⁴ Presented in 2014, see Antonella Scarpa, ‘Archivio Del Ricordo - Memorie Giuliano-Dalmate a Venezia’, Comune di Venezia, 14 February 2014, https://www.albumdivenezia.it/LYT.aspx?IDLYT=410&Code=AlbumVE&ST=SQL&SQL=ID_Documento%3D452.

¹⁵ Fantini D’Onofrio, Giacca Zaccariotto, and Grassi, *L’esodo nei ricordi dei giuliano-dalmati di Padova*.

¹⁶ Carloni, ‘Per ricordare un giorno non basta. L’esodo giuliano dalmata nelle Marche’.

¹⁷ “Episodi molto brutti. Ad un treno carico di profughi, che dovevano scendere a Bologna, hanno perfino proibito di portare l’acqua alla gente”, ‘Archivio del ricordo. Memorie giuliano-dalmate a Venezia’ (VENEZIA DOCUMENTA Servizi bibliotecari e Archivio della comunicazione Comune di Venezia, February 2014), 53, https://www.comune.venezia.it/sites/comune.venezia.it/files/cultura/documenti/schede-cultura/veDo_08.pdf.

they left Pola en masse, here in Venice there were boats of communists yelling at the refugees, because they said they were leaving Tito's paradise".¹⁸ Similar experiences are reported about the arrival in Ancona: "We were greeted by the shouts of the communists, who waved their raised fists in response to our waving of tricolour flags, and a line of troops in arms acted as a barrier between the troublemakers and the ship at docking".¹⁹

The Bologna episode can be found in multiple other books about the exodus' witnesses. For example, in Diego Zandel's book:

Claudio, just 11 years old, had found himself on the train loaded with refugees who—having arrived at Bologna station, where special refreshment areas had been prepared by the Red Cross and other humanitarian organisations—had been boycotted by CGIL workers, most of whom were PCI members. These, amidst a barrage of red flags, whistles, and invective, prevented the train from entering the station, prejudicially considering the refugees were all fascists fleeing the socialist paradise. Claudio was thirsty. He remembered trying to get off to at least look for a drinking fountain, but the mass of demonstrators forced him out of fear to get back on the train.²⁰

Fulvio Molinari cites the story of a train headed towards Puglia:

In Bologna, a train convoy with hundreds of exiles stops for a hot meal prepared on the railway station premises by the Pontificia Opera di Assistenza. The railway workers proclaimed a strike. The refugees did not even get off the train and continued on to Altamura, in Puglia, with the three rations of food they had received when they boarded in Pola.²¹

¹⁸ "Quando sono venuti via in massa da Pola, qua a Venezia c'erano le barche di comunisti che sbraitavano contro i profughi, perché dicevano che lasciavano il paradiso di Tito", 'Archivio del ricordo. Memorie giuliano-dalmate a Venezia', 53.

¹⁹ "Ad Ancona fummo accolti dalle urla dei comunisti, che agitavano i pugni chiusi in risposta al nostro sventolio di tricolori e un cordone di truppa in armi faceva barriera tra gli scalmanati e la nave all'attracco", Carla Marcellini, ed., 'Storia e memoria del confine orientale italiano', in *Per ricordare un giorno non basta. L'esodo giuliano dalmata nelle Marche* (Quaderni del Consiglio regionale delle Marche, 2018), 38, https://www.consiglio.marche.it/informazione_e_comunicazione/pubblicazioni/quaderni/pdf/244.pdf.

²⁰ "Claudio, appena undicenne, s'era trovato sul treno carico di profughi che - arrivati alla stazione di Bologna, dov'erano stati preparati dalla Croce Rossa e da altre organizzazioni umanitarie appositi posti di ristoro - erano stati boicottati dai lavoratori della CGIL, in gran parte aderenti al PCI. Questi, tra una marea di bandiere rosse, fischi e invettive, impedirono al treno di entrare in stazione considerando pregiudizialmente i profughi tutti fascisti in fuga dal paradiso socialista. Claudio aveva sete. Ricordava di aver provato a scendere per cercare almeno una fontanella, ma la massa dei dimostranti lo costrinse per la paura a risalire sul treno", Zandel, *I testimoni muti*, 155.

²¹ "A Bologna un convoglio ferroviario con centinaia di esuli si ferma per un pasto caldo predisposto nei locali della stazione ferroviaria dalla pontificia opera di assistenza. I ferrovieri proclamano uno sciopero. I fuggiaschi non

A different witness, Franco Gaspardis from Fiume, who departed with his family in February 1949 when he was ten years old, is mentioned in Jan Bernas' book. The Gaspardis initially came to Trieste and were then relocated to the Laterina refugee camp in Tuscany after a few months. Franco recalls the journey to Laterina as follows:

It was a terrible journey. Crammed to the limit in cattle waggons, in hygienic conditions that were precarious, to say the least. After hours of travelling, we arrived at Bologna station, cold, hungry, and tired. We were scheduled to stop there for refreshments. But a mob was waiting for us; they greeted us with shouts and insults. "Let's block the fascist train", they yelled at us. It wasn't the insults that hurt me, I didn't understand the reason for their contempt, I was only ten years old. It was the red of their flags. That same red of the flags of the titines in Fiume. The same hatred from which we were fleeing. My mother was terrified; I remember asking her, "Mum, but the train was wrong, are we back in Rijeka?". The station switchmen had called a strike, blocking the convoy. They even prevented the Bologna charity ladies from giving us the blankets and milk they had brought us. A despicable gesture that was repeated several times. On the train were mostly women, old people, and children. But for those people, we, fleeing the Yugoslavian communist "paradise", could be nothing more than fascists.²²

Gaspardis is not the only exile from Fiume recalling the episode; Aldo Tardivelli also left in 1948. He spent a few days in temporary camps in Trieste and Udine, and then he was transferred to Laterina by train—through Bologna's station.²³ The Bologna episode is also recounted by exiles who left many years after the mass exodus from Pola. Silva Vellenich arrived in Italy in 1956 and was also hosted in Laterina:

scendono neanche dal treno e proseguono per Altamura, in Puglia, con le tre razioni di cibo che avevano ricevuto al momento dell'imbarco a Pola", Molinari, *Istria contesa*, 84.

²² "Fu un viaggio terribile. Stipati all'inverosimile in carri bestiame, in condizioni igieniche a dir poco precarie. Dopo ore di viaggio, arrivammo alla stazione di Bologna, infreddoliti, affamati e stanchi. Lì era prevista una sosta per rifocillarci. Ma ad attenderci trovammo una masnada di gente, che ci accolse con grida e insulti. "Blocchiamo il treno dei fascisti", ci urlavano. Non furono gli insulti a ferirmi, non capivo il perché del loro disprezzo, avevo solo dieci anni. Fu il rosso delle loro bandiere. Quello stesso rosso delle bandiere dei titini a Fiume. Lo stesso odio dal quale fuggivamo. Mia madre era terrorizzata, ricordo che le chiesi: "Mamma, ma il treno si è sbagliato, siamo tornati a Fiume?". Gli scambisti della stazione avevano proclamato lo sciopero, bloccando il convoglio. Impedirono addirittura alle dame di carità di Bologna di darci le coperte e il latte che ci avevano portato. Un gesto ignobile che si è ripetuto più volte. Sul treno c'erano per lo più donne, vecchi e bambini. Ma per quella gente, noi, in fuga dal "paradiso" comunista jugoslavo, non potevamo essere altro che fascisti", Bernas, *Ci chiamavano fascisti, eravamo italiani*, 137.

²³ Elio Varutti, 'Esodo Disgraziato Dei Tardivelli, Da Fiume a Laterina 1948', *Elio Varutti* (blog), 22 January 2017, <https://eliovartutti.blogspot.com/2017/01/esodo-disgraziato-dei-tardivelli-da.html>.

We left by train in 1956, with the options, together with other Italians. I was with my mother, Giovanna Radman, my sister Grazia, and my brother Mario, we were not fascists, we were normal people. When we arrived at Bologna station, there were some fanatics who shouted "fascists" and threw bottles of milk at us, out of scorn since there were children on the train who needed milk.²⁴

Claudio Bronzin, an exile from Pola, claims to be a primary witness of the Bologna incident in February 1947, while he was on the route to Firenze. Bronzin, however, affirms that the episodes of hostility did not just happen at Bologna train station. The “trains of the fascists” were stopped multiple times by a network of communist rail workers:

This often happened when colleagues (communists, of course) in the stations preceding Bologna warned their colleagues in Bologna that a train was about to arrive with one or more coaches with Julian refugees! Thus, they could enact the infamous blockade!²⁵

These plots were not always implemented: “If in the previous stations non-communist workers were on duty, the warning was not sent”.²⁶ Bronzin recalls in this manner his experience in Bologna:

I saw the warm milk thrown onto the tracks, the one that the Red Cross ladies had prepared for the children on the train, including my almost two-month-old little brother, in the arms of my mother, who had lost her milk meant in the exodus! Misunderstanding....? Political cowardice!²⁷

²⁴ “Siamo partiti in treno nel 1956, con le opzioni, assieme ad altri italiani, eravamo mia madre, Giovanna Radman, mia sorella Grazia e mio fratello Mario, non eravamo fascisti, si era gente normale, quando si arriva alla stazione di Bologna c'erano degli esaltati che ci gridavano 'fascisti' e ci buttavano addosso delle bottiglie di latte, per spregio dato che noi si aveva in treno bimbi che avevano bisogno di latte”, Elio Varutti, ‘Il Tragico Esodo Dei Vellenich Da Pola’, *ANVGD* (blog), 22 October 2021, <https://www.anvgd.it/il-tragico-esodo-dei-vellenich-da-pola/>.

²⁵ “Il tutto succedeva spesso, quando cioè i colleghi (ovviamente comunisti) delle stazioni precedenti a Bologna avvertivano i colleghi di Bologna che stava per arrivare un treno con una o più carrozze con profughi giuliani! Allora scattava l'infame blocco” Reported on the Facebook page “Istria - La Verità”, probably copying paragraphs from other sources such as exiles' magazines. Thus, it is unclear where those words by Bronzin were initially published; his story is available elsewhere, see *La Nazione* website, Fabrizio Morviducci, ‘Esuli Istriani, Quelle Vite Perdute. “Era La Nostra Terra Promessa, Ci Fecero Scappare Via”’, *La Nazione*, 11 February 2024, Website edition, <https://www.lanazione.it/cronaca/esuli-istria-9694261e>; The insertion a Facebook post as a source wants to highlight the relevance of informal sources for the propagation of narratives, “Il Treno Della Vergogna” o “Treno Dei Fascisti”, Facebook page, Istria - La Verità, 4 February 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/184433431616882/photos/a.753517554708464/827459543980931/>.

²⁶ “Se nelle stazioni prima c'erano in servizio ferrovieri non comunisti, non partiva la segnalazione”, “Il Treno Della Vergogna” o “Treno Dei Fascisti”.

²⁷ “Ho visto io gettare sui binari il latte caldo che le Signore della Crocerossa avevano preparato per i bambini nel treno, fra questi il mio fratellino di quasi due mesi, in braccio a mia mamma che nell'esodo aveva perso il suo latte! Incomprensione....? Vigliaccheria politica!”, “Il Treno Della Vergogna” o “Treno Dei Fascisti”.

Among the secondary memories, the exile and former MSI member of parliament Renzo De' Vidovich wrote:

The train that was bringing a painful load of refugees from Ancona to Emilia, Lombardy, and Piedmont was stopped at Bologna station. It was surrounded by communist activists who prevented the Catholic humanitarian associations from bringing some food and water to the “fascist criminals who had escaped Yugoslavian popular justice”. Some containers of precious milk for the children were spilled on the tracks!²⁸

The exile Antonio Zappador, in a 2011 book edited by the exiles' association ANVGD in Modena, recounted a different detail—the signs:

That train full of refugees in Bologna was attacked by hotheads holding signs with the words: “Fascists, all in the foibe” and “Traitors, enemies of socialism”. We did not expect flowers, but neither did we expect rotten eggs, mud, and various vegetables. The doors and windows could not be opened, the Red Cross had prepared refreshment tables, and there were old people and children on the train who had not eaten or drunk for many hours. The demonstrators—what did they want to demonstrate if not their incivility?—overturned the tables with the food and drink and harassed the Red Cross women. The organisation of the barbarians was perfect: the CGIL was in charge.²⁹

This witness, along with many others, stresses the role of the main labour union at the time, the CGIL (Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro) in the organisation of the demonstration. The episode, however, also found a representation in theatres. The singer and actor Simone Cristicchi is a vocal disseminator of the foibe-and-exodus memory, praised by exiles' associations. In a 2015 interview about his musical “Magazzino 18”, inspired by the Trieste warehouse turned into an Istrian-Dalmatian exodus museum, he highlighted how the spectacle deals with the Bologna episode, “when railway and industrial workers threatened to strike if a refugee train stopped in the city”.³⁰

²⁸ Renzo De' Vidovich, ‘Vinta La Censura, Oggi Dobbiamo Combattere La Disinformazione’, in *Foibe Ed Esodo. L'Italia Negata. La Tragedia Giuliano-Dalmata a Dieci Anni Dall'istituzione Del Giorno Del Ricordo*, I Libri Del Borghese (Roma: Pagine, 2014), 13.

²⁹ “Quel treno pieno di profughi che a Bologna fu assaltato da scalmanati che impugnavano cartelli con scritte: “Fascisti, tutti nelle foibe” e “Traditori, nemici del socialismo”. Non ci aspettavamo fiori, ma neanche uova marce, fango e ortaggi vari. Non si poterono aprire le porte e i finestrini, La Croce Rossa aveva preparato tavoli di ristoro, sul treno c'erano vecchi e bambini che da molte ore non mangiavano e non bevevano. I dimostranti, cosa volevano dimostrare se non la loro inciviltà, rovesciarono i tavoli con il cibo e le bevande maltrattando le crocerossine. Perfetta l'organizzazione dei barbari: regia CGIL”, ANVGD Modena, *Il giorno del ricordo: 2011 a Modena* (Modena: Associazione Nazionale Venezia Giulia e Dalmazia, Comitato Provinciale di Modena, 2011).

³⁰ “Quando ferrovieri e operai minacciarono sciopero se un treno profughi si fosse fermato in città”, Luca Bortolotti, ‘Cristicchi: “Narro Pure Di Quando, Alla Stazione Di Bologna, Non Vollerò Il Treno Dei Profughi”’, *La*

All (but one) of the previous mentions of the “train of infamy” are from the 20th century. There is, indeed, an earlier appearance of the story on national media. The Italian scholar and writer Claudio Magris from Trieste published on August 31, 1991, on the *Corriere della Sera* an article connecting recent news from Moscow with some other, apparently unrelated historical events. The “infamous images” are the connection: the Eltsin confrontation with Gorbačëv in the Russian Parliament, a mafia execution in Palermo, both illustrated by photos, and the Bologna episode, without pictures. Magris then describes the Bologna incident as an act of infamy, since “it was infamous not to understand, not to feel—and not to let one's comrades flee—that one could also continue to believe in the red flag by letting those people get off and go get their sandwiches”.³¹ His account shares many common features with the previous ones:

In Bologna, at the station, refreshments were prepared for them by some religious welfare organisations. The communist rail workers, mobilised together with other militants from the party organisations, prevented those wandering people from getting off the train and having something to eat and drink, and threatened to block the most important railway junction in Italy with a strike if the train stopped in the station for too long. Already at the disembarkation in Ancona, and shortly after in Bologna, those homeless fugitives had been greeted with whistles, insults, and a few scuffles. In the eyes of their aggressors, they were fascists because they were leaving Paradise on Earth, a communist country, and therefore, like Adam and Eve driven out of Eden, they must have had good reason to be guiltily unscathed. Just twenty-four hours later, some supplies brought by the military arrived at Parma station.³²

Magris wrote in multiple instances about the Upper Adriatic borderland, and he was personally close to the exiles' circles: his wife, Marisa Madieri, left Fiume in 1949 and wrote a book about her experience, “Verde Acqua”. It is possible that Magris got the story from some oral or printed exiles' source and therefore decided to disclose the story in a national newspaper. Magris's article appears to be the first instance of the “train of infamy” in a major media—until this point of the research, no previous instance was found. In the exiles' press, however, there is one older instance, the earliest found for this thesis. It was published in 1957, ten years after the event, in *L'Arena di Pola*, the newspaper that, after the mass exodus, relocated to Gorizia, and then to Trieste, becoming a periodical

Repubblica, 19 March 2015, Website edition, sec. Bologna, https://bologna.repubblica.it/cronaca/2015/03/19/news/cristicchi_narro_pure_di_quando_alla_stazione_di_bologna_non_vollero_il_treno_dei_profughi_-110946017/.

³¹ “Era infame non comprendere, non sentire — e non far sentire ai propri compagni — che si poteva anche continuare a credere nella bandiera rossa lasciando che quelli scendessero e andassero a prendere i loro panini”, Claudio Magris, ‘Quando Le Foto Parlano d’infamia’, *Corriere Della Sera*, 31 August 1991.

³² Magris; Miletto quoted Magris' article, see Miletto, *Novecento di confine*, 190.

(weekly, and then monthly) for the exiles' community. The exile from Pola, Lino Vivoda, wrote an article about his memories of the exodus on its tenth anniversary, starting from the last winter in Pola, the first convoys, and Pasquinelli's murder.³³ In the final part, he recounted his arrival in Italy. Vivoda framed the events in an explicit and strong political narrative:

Meanwhile, in Italy, the hostility of the social-communist hordes awaited us, aided by the party leaders according to party directives and misled towards us by the venomous correspondence of the Milanese *L'Unità* correspondent Tommaso Giglio. But for the petty bourgeoisie, for the middle classes, our coming was a salutary lesson, a rude awakening from the torpor into which they had fallen because of the politics of Togliatti—the distinguished gentleman in the "double-breasted bleu" who was slowly preparing the advent of the "red paradise" by camouflaging it in pink. Each one of us, like new crusaders, was, by our mere presence, contributing to the mission of detoxifying Italy from the communist poison. And it was us who first raised again the tricolour, we who wore it tightly around our necks when red still prevailed in the districts of Italy where we scattered, and it was a good thing in misfortune because then everyone could see that the exodus was not propaganda but painful reality; we shouted in the face of all that the homeland cannot be renounced. These, of course, are but a few aspects of the influence the exodus had on the revival of national consciousness and can be seen today, ten years after the unhappy date. At the time, we certainly did not think that we would reach the point where we are today, with the edifice of international communism showing the first cracks that wish us a future collapse.³⁴

The exiles are presented, literally, as anti-communist crusaders. This climate of political intoxication came to the surface with the arrival of Pola's refugees, as Vivoda recounts:

³³ Lino Vivoda, 'Minacciarono Uno Sciopero Se Gli Esuli Si Fossero Fermati', *L'Arena Di Pola*, 13 February 1957.

³⁴ "Intanto in Italia ci attendeva l'ostilità delle orde social-comuniste aizzate dai capicellula secondo le direttive del partito e fuorviate nei nostri confronti da quella che era la realtà delle velenose corrispondenze dello inviato dell'Unità milanese Tommaso Giglio. Ma per la piccola borghesia, per le classi medie, la nostra venuta fu una lezione salutare, un brusco risveglio dal torpore nel quale erano precipitate per la politica di Togliatti, il distinto signore in "doppiopetto bleu" che preparava lentamente l'avvento del "paradiso rosso" mascherandolo di rosa. Ognuno di noi, come un novello crociato con la sua sola presenza contribuiva alla missione di disintossicare l'Italia dal veleno comunista. E fummo ancora noi che per primi rialzammo il tricolore, noi che portandolo stretto al collo quando ancora il rosso predominava nelle contrade di Italia dove ci disperdemmo, e fu un bene nella sventura perché così tutti poterono constatare che l'esodo non era propaganda ma dolorosa realtà gridammo in faccia a tutti che alla Patria non si rinuncia. Questi naturalmente non sono che alcuni aspetti dell'influenza che ebbe l'esodo nella ripresa della coscienza nazionale e si possono constatare oggi dopo dieci anni dall'infausta data. Allora certo noi non pensavamo che si potesse giungere al punto in cui siamo oggi con l'edificio del comunismo internazionale che presenta le prime screpolature di buon auspicio per noi di un futuro crollo", Vivoda.

Then, when the red mobs in Ancona rushed to the dock where the Toscana moored to whistle at us and the troops were lined up not to pay us any respects but to protect us. Then, when the freight railcars on which we were travelling were shunted onto the remote tracks of the big stations, thus no one would notice us and in Bologna, where the PCA had prepared a few hot drinks to comfort us, faced with the threat of a strike against our presence, we were sent forward without a break, and we had already been travelling for some twenty hours on the straw, we, tormented by our vicissitudes and anguished by the memory of our abandoned homes, despaired of the future in the face of the spectacle that presented itself to us and the state to which Italy had been reduced.³⁵

Vivoda closes the article by repeating the anti-communist framing: “We did not think that one day we would be able to proudly say: our sacrifice was not in vain, we lost our beloved city, but we contributed to saving Italy!”³⁶ Vivoda can be considered the main witness of the “train of infamy”: because he is a direct witness, he was the first (known) to write about it, and he retold the episode on multiple occasions. When he died in July 2022, *L’Arena di Pola*’s article in his memory mentioned his role as a witness of the Bologna episode, along with his long term commitment to the exiles’ associations.³⁷ The date most frequently cited in the memory of the episode, February 18, 1947, is the date established by Vivoda, who came to Ancona with the fourth “Toscana” convoy and therefore travelled by train to La Spezia. But, as the previous quotations show, other witnesses claim to have gone through the Bologna incident at different times. Was it a single episode or a repetition of episodes that merged into a single “lieu de memoire”?

2. How and when?

The inconsistency in the memories of the episode—different dates and different details—and its vehement anti-communist narrative did not stop it from becoming the most quoted when discussing the exiles’ reception in Italy. Among the literature read and used for this thesis, no single instance of a critical report on the Bologna episode was found, nor was there any comment about the

³⁵ “Allora, quando le masse rosse di Ancona accorrevano al molo dove attraccava il Toscana per fischiarci e le truppe erano schierate non per renderci un qualche saluto ma per proteggerci; allora, quando il treno merci sul quale viaggiavamo veniva smistato sui sperduti binari delle grandi stazioni affinché nessuno si accorgesse di noi ed a Bologna dove la P. C. A. aveva preparato qualche bevanda calda per ristorarci, di fronte alla minaccia di uno sciopero per causa nostra, fummo fatti proseguire in fretta e furia senza alcuna sosta, e si viaggiava già da una ventina di ore sulla Paglia, noi, travagliati dalle nostre peripezie ed angosciati dal ricordo dei focolari abbandonati, di fronte allo spettacolo che ci si presentava, ed allo stato in cui era ridotta l’Italia disperavamo dell’avvenire”, Vivoda.

³⁶ “Né si pensava che un giorno avremmo potuto dire con fierezza: il nostro sacrificio non fu vano, perdemmo la nostra amata città, ma contribuimmo a salvare l’Italia!”, Vivoda.

³⁷ Lorenzo Salimbeni, ‘L’ANVGD in Lutto per La Scomparsa Di Lino Vivoda, Testimone Dell’esodo’, *L’Arena Di Pola*, 29 July 2022.

inconsistencies of the accounts. On the contrary, even the left-leaning historian Erik Gobetti cited the episode in his 2021 pamphlet “E allora le foibe?” about the flaws of the mainstream foibe-and-exodus memory:

Not wanting to deny the strictly humanitarian aspect, the Church and the Christian Democracy (which dominated post-war Italian institutional politics) also used the tragedy of refugees from a communist country in a propagandistic way. The scenario is that of the beginning of the Cold War, the heated political clash between opposing ideological blocs, and the first, decisive, political elections in Italy. It is therefore not surprising that there are also phenomena of rejection by members of the Communist Party. In this sense should be interpreted, for example, the famous episode at Bologna station, where, in February 1947, communist railway workers staged a protest at the arrival of a train loaded with refugees from Yugoslavia.³⁸

The episode also found place across the academic production on the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus. The historian of migrations, Patrizia Audenino, recalled the Bologna episode in her essay on the 20th-century refugees' memories. She remarked how the exiles remember these experiences as evidence of the unwelcoming reception in Italy that produced a lasting wound.³⁹ Enrico Miletto synthesises various episodes of intolerance against the exiles:

At the Verona station, as Alessandra Fusco recounts in her novel, the exiles are received at the cry of "fascists" by "a threatening mob that was crowding around the railcars", at the Ancona port, they could only disembark thanks to two cordons of agents protecting them from a crowd that spat and insulted them. [...] [The episode in Bologna] sedimented in the memory of the exiles refers to what happened at the station of the Emilian city on February 17, 1947, where the train carrying them was "mistaken for a convoy of fascists and their relatives on the run" and was blocked for hours on the tracks by a protest of the railway workers who did not allow any rescue and supply operation to take place.⁴⁰

³⁸ “Senza voler negare l’aspetto propriamente umanitario, la Chiesa e la Democrazia cristiana (che domina la politica istituzionale italiana nel dopoguerra) utilizzano anche in maniera propagandistica il dramma dei profughi provenienti da un paese comunista. Lo scenario è quello dell’inizio della Guerra Fredda, dell’accesso scontro politico fra blocchi ideologici contrapposti e delle prime, decisive, elezioni politiche in Italia. Non c’è da stupirsi quindi che si registrino anche fenomeni di rifiuto da parte di membri del Partito comunista. In questo senso va interpretato, ad esempio, il famoso episodio della stazione di Bologna, dove, nel febbraio 1947, i ferrovieri comunisti inscenano una protesta all’arrivo di un treno carico di profughi dalla Jugoslavia”, Gobetti, *E allora le foibe?*, 70.

³⁹ Audenino, *La casa perduta*, 43.

⁴⁰ Miletto, *Istria allo specchio*, 209.

The Bologna incident is thus presented as one among many. Alessandra Fusco wrote a novel⁴¹ on the basis of the memories of her mother, Bruna Labinaz, who left from Pola in February 1947. The communist mob, however, is placed at the Verona train station.⁴² Bruna Labinaz and her fellow exiles disembarked in Venice, and they were sent to Bergamo. The train route between the two cities did not go through Bologna. Therefore, the “train of infamy” in Fusco’s novel could not be set in Bologna; it was relocated to Verona, a station that lies on the route between Venice and Bergamo. This single instance of the episode in Verona could raise doubts about its veracity since it could have been an adaptation of the most famous Bolognese “lieu de mémoire” to a personal story that did not match it.

Only one historian, Roberto Spazzali, reported more details than the previously exposed witness-based stories. In his 2022 book about Pola’s exodus, he wrote:

There was the heinous episode in Bologna: a convoy of refugees who had been prevented from getting to the refreshment post, and the milk containers were overturned on the tracks. The action, instigated by titine circles in Monfalcone who had preceded the arrival of the train with leaflets branding these people as fascists on the run, had taken the local authorities by surprise. It had all arisen from a deliberate misunderstanding, when a place used as a refreshment point organised by the Italian Social Republic for political displaced persons from central Italy escaping the advance of the war front had been reopened to assist those refugees. It had been easy for the roughest propaganda to associate that episode with this one, causing mayhem and great sorrow among the Julian refugees. To avoid the repetition of other provocations, the archbishop of Bologna decided to personally welcome the next convoy in transit, putting a damper on polemics and thoughtless acts.⁴³

Spazzali adds three elements to the narrative. First, the Monfalconese leaflets, mentioned in the previous chapter, were not only spread in the Julian area, as the newspaper articles reported, but reached Bologna and therefore inspired the local communists. Second, there has been a “deliberate misunderstanding” with the use of facilities previously employed by fascist authorities. It could be investigated whether the facility was used on that occasion for the first time after two years, considering that displaced people and POWs were already going through Bologna before February 1947. Third, the incident triggered a reaction by the archbishop: he personally welcomed the next convoy, and thus it could be argued that the «train of infamy» was a single episode and not repeated in time, as the inconsistencies between witnesses suggest.

⁴¹ Alessandra Fusco, *Tornerà l'imperatore: storia di una donna istriana tra guerra e esodo* (Bergamo: Sestante, 2023).

⁴² Fusco, 135–36.

⁴³ Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 479–80.

Spazzali does not provide archival references for the three statements. For the first point, it could be possible that the leaflet was spread outside Monfalcone and Gorizia areas. If this diffusion was not the result of the Monfalcone activists' efforts, the reports in Catholic newspapers would have anyway widened the leaflet's reach. For the second point, a document in the Bologna State Archive proves that a refreshment point has been active since July 21, 1945, aiding veterans and prisoners of war on their way back home.⁴⁴ Moreover, no source specifies the location of the refreshment point, nor is it possible to establish whether a new one was opened for the Pola's exiles. The third point, the archbishop's intervention, is not proved by newspaper sources: the Catholic newspaper *L'Avvenire d'Italia* would have most likely reported about the archbishop's commitment to the exiles. No source emerges from the consultation of Bologna's Archiepiscopal Archive: the folder with the archbishop Giovanni Battista Nasalli Rocca di Corneliano's private correspondence for 1947 does not contain any mention of the "train of infamy" or any other involvement with the exiles going through the station. In the same folders, indeed, there is material about the exodus: a letter from Cardinal Raffaele Carlo Rossi on January 24, 1947, asking for the diocese to support the PCA in its work for the Julian exiles,⁴⁵ and two letters from Fiume's bishop about a pastoral visit to Fiume's exiles in Bologna.⁴⁶

Spazzali's paragraph on the Bologna episode indeed provides a bibliographic reference to another work of the author. Spazzali took part in a 2003 conference organised by the "Unione degli Istriani". The proceedings were published; a thirteen-pages Spazzali's text covers the reception and distribution of the Julian exiles in Italy.⁴⁷ This work addressed the point of the former RSI refreshment point devoted to the assistance of the Republican Fascist Party's members and their families. Not only in Bologna, but also in Brescia, they were reopened in 1946 for the Julian exiles headed to Central Italy. Spazzali adds:

⁴⁴ Oscar Scaglietti, 'Relazione Sul Funzionamento Del Comitato VI Centro Di Mobilitazione Della Croce Rossa Italiana Di Bologna Nel Periodo 21 Aprile 1945 al 21 Aprile 1946', 1946, Gabinetto di Prefettura, Ultimo versamento, b. 178, ASB.

⁴⁵ Raffaele Carlo Rossi, 'Lettera All'arcivescovo Di Bologna', 24 January 1947, Segreteria Arcivescovile, cart. 278, fasc. 3, "Corrispondenza 1947", AAV.

⁴⁶ Ugo Camozzo, 'Lettera Del Vescovo Di Fiume All'arcivescovo Di Bologna', 12 October 1947, Segreteria Arcivescovile, cart. 278, fasc. 3, "Corrispondenza 1947", AAV; Ugo Camozzo, 'Lettera Del Vescovo Di Fiume All'arcivescovo Di Bologna', 1 November 1947, Segreteria Arcivescovile, cart. 278, fasc. 3, "Corrispondenza 1947", AAV.

⁴⁷ Spazzali, 'In Italia e oltre. Accoglienza e sostentamento nello sventagliamento degli esuli giuliani'.

Thus, it was very easy for communist propaganda to mobilise the masses against the Istrian "fascists" with the episodes we know: stones thrown at the trains, milk and soup spilled on the tracks, hostility towards mothers who were looking for something to eat for their infant sons.⁴⁸

Once again, the “train of infamy” is present as “the episodes we know”. There is an additional detail (soup was spilled on the tracks), but there are no references to prove it. Besides the scholarly resources and the different witnesses’ accounts, a last source deserves an inquiry, not for its trustworthiness but rather for its relevance in the diffusion of narratives: Wikipedia.

There is a Wikipedia page in Italian devoted to the “train of infamy”.⁴⁹ It could be debated if such an episode can fit the criteria of relevance of the encyclopedia,⁵⁰ and this matter was debated in the “Talk” section—the public space of discussion for the contributors—of the article. The page was created on June 14, 2007, and grew over the years. Wikipedia is a project open to everyone’s contribution, even anonymous users, and thus the presence (or lack) of a voice sometimes reflects the mobilisation of some political communities,⁵¹ or individual users highly devoted to a specific topic, as for the foibe-and-exodus memory. Wikipedia is notoriously an extremely popular source of information, and thus the inclusion in Wikipedia of an historical episode or a precise interpretation can have an impact on the general public that a single article or essay can not. The creation of a Wikipedia page devoted to the “train of infamy” definitely boosted the visibility and reach of the episode. In public perception, a topic with its own Wikipedia article is regarded as more relevant. Furthermore, it is likely that many mentions of the episode in newspapers, online blogs, and authorities’ speeches are based on the Wikipedia page rather than bibliographic sources.

The Wikipedia article conforms to the “standard” version of the episode, Vivoda’s one. The incident happened at the Bologna train station, on February 18, 1947, targeting a group of exiles who disembarked in Ancona with the fourth “Toscana” convoy, and were then on their way to Liguria. On the “Talk” section of the page, however, the user “ElCovo” with a 2008 message addressed the problem of the number of occurrences of the episode: “There is a basic inaccuracy in the text: the so-called 'train of infamy' was not actually a single convoy, i.e. the one that in February 1947 carried the

⁴⁸ Spazzali, 109.

⁴⁹ ‘Treno Della Vergogna’, in *Wikipedia*, accessed 8 February 2024, https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treno_della_vergogna.

⁵⁰ ‘Wikipedia: Policies and Guidelines’, *Wikipedia*, n.d., https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Policies_and_guidelines.

⁵¹ Nicoletta Bourbaki, ‘La Strategia Del Ratto. Manomissioni, Fandonie e Propaganda Fascista Su Wikipedia: Il Caso «Jose Antonio»’, *Wu Ming* (blog), 21 February 2017, <https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/2017/02/la-strategia-del-ratto-jose-antonio-su-wikipedia/>.

exiles (mainly from Pola) who arrived in Ancona with the 4th convoy from Pula, it was actually more than one convoy”.⁵² The user then engages with the issue of the few sources available, stating that it is reliable because of 5 points. The first is the “Istituto Luce” film—probably confused with the Settimana Incom newsreel, that actually do not mention the Bologna incident; the second is an essay by Guido Rumici; the third are the direct witnesses, Vivoda mainly; the fourth are “the newspapers of that time” that “reported the news”; the fifth is a official ceremony and a plaque installed at Bologna station. The first point is not valid, and the last three points will be explored later in the text. Regarding the third, the Wikipedia article itself contains a quotation from Guido Rumici, and his 2001 book “Fratelli d'Istria 1945–2000. Italiani divisi” is one of the five in the “Bibliography” section. Rumici’s quotation, however, is not present in that book; the book itself is mostly devoted to the Italian community that remained in Yugoslavia, and does not devote many pages to the reception of the exiles in Italy, nor is the “train of infamy” cited. This is not the only mysterious citation in the article:

L’Unità journalist Tommaso Giglio, later editor of *L’Europeo*, referring to the train carrying refugees, wrote no less than three articles on that day, one of which was titled “Who knows where the fascist train will end up”?⁵³

As seen in the previous chapter, Giglio published in *L’Unità* three reports from Pola in February, but none of them on the day of the Bologna incident (February 18, according to Vivoda’s version). But, more importantly, no article under the title “Who knows where the fascist train will end up?” was found during the research for this thesis. A Google search of that string only returns the same Wikipedia article, and then a multiplicity of newspaper articles and blogs that, seemingly, were written on the basis of the Wikipedia article. The only instance older than the page itself is a September 2004 article by Gian Aldo Traversi on Dossier, a spin-off of the newspaper *Quotidiano Nazionale*.⁵⁴ Since there are no further elements to prove the existence of the article, it is likely that Traversi completely made up the title of the article or copied it from a previous source not available online.

3. Lack of sources

⁵² “Nel testo c’è un’inesattezza di fondo: il c.d. ‘treno della vergogna’ non fu in realtà un unico convoglio, ossia quello che nel febbraio del ’47 caricò gli esuli (soprattutto polesi) giunti ad Ancona con il 4° convoglio marittimo da Pola, si trattò in realtà di più di un convoglio”, ElCovo, ‘Nel Testo c’è Un’inesattezza Di Fondo’, Discussione ‘Treno della vergogna’, *Wikipedia*, 23 October 2008, https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Discussione:Treno_della_vergogna.

⁵³ ‘Treno Della Vergogna’.

⁵⁴ The text, unclear if complete, was published on the Lega Nazionale website, Gian Aldo Traversi, ‘Il Treno Della Vergogna’, *Lega Nazionale* (blog), 25 January 2012, <https://www.leganazionale.it/index.php/trieste-italiana/124-dopoguerra-le-tragedie-dimenticate/913-il-treno-della-vergogna>.

The “train of infamy” is a problematic “lieu de mémoire”: there are relatively few direct witnesses, and they all travelled on different convoys, recounting a similar episode on different dates (from February 1947 to 1956) and even different places (like Verona station). There is an ample amount of details: red flags, signs; the angry mob was booing, insulting, spitting, harassing the female volunteers, pouring out the milk and the soup on the tracks, throwing vegetables, stones, rotten eggs, and mud; the threat of a strike through the speaker, the CGIL planning, and the involvement of some unnamed “communists”. The multiplication of details can be tracked to the presence of many secondary witnesses, or primary witnesses who travelled through Bologna as children, and thus do not have an authentic memory of the episode, but “remembered” it later in their lives, hearing other exiles’ stories. Is there an ultimate core of truth in the many accounts about the “train of infamy”? The main witness, Lino Vivoda, answered this question in the 2008 book titled “Quel lungo viaggio verso l’esilio Pola-Ancona-Bologna-La Spezia”.

Vivoda’s short book, published by his own editorial project “Istria Europa”, has the aim of recounting the story of his journey from Pola to La Spezia, setting a definitive version. He states this goal quite clearly in the introduction:

The present work was inspired by a request from the president of the ADES (Association of Friends and Descendants of Exiles), my friend Pietro Crasti, to have a text describing the journey of the exiles from Pola who faced the communists' hostility in Bologna, so that the members of the meritorious association would have documentary material on which to prepare themselves before addressing the topic during debates, conferences, or presentations in schools.⁵⁵

The transmission of memory—of the “true” memory—is the first concern, and the schools are explicitly mentioned. Vivoda positions himself as the main witness and the custodian of this memory: “For this purpose, I decided to write the account of the trip, as I personally experienced it, and then made it known through an article in *L’Arena di Pola* [...] later taken up by many and today quoted on

⁵⁵ “Il presente lavoro è stato suggerito da una richiesta del presidente dell’ADES (Associazione amici e discendenti degli esuli), l’amico Pietro Crasti, di avere un testo che illustri il viaggio degli esuli da Pola che incontrarono l’ostilità dei comunisti di Bologna, in modo che i soci della benemerita associazione avessero materiale documentativo sul quale prepararsi prima di affrontare l’argomento durante i dibattiti, conferenze o esposizioni nelle scuole”, Vivoda, *Quel lungo viaggio verso l’esilio*, 3.

many occasions”.⁵⁶ Here, he refers to the 1957 article mentioned in the first part of this chapter. Vivoda’s role as “guardian of memory”⁵⁷ is therefore expressed:

Unfortunately, when mentioning the episode, many embellish it with details that do not correspond to reality, such as the throwing of stones against the train windows, which was impossible given that we were travelling in cattle cars with no windows. Also, the fact that milk cans were overturned in Bologna is another inaccuracy: no railwaymen or communist civilians were seen around the stationary train. The communist leaders who ordered the announcement over the loudspeaker committed the villainy, a disqualifying act that shows what intellectual consistency, blinded by political factiousness, they had.⁵⁸

In the book, he then further details the deeds. The train was getting to Bologna, and the exiles were getting ready to get down and eat, but the message from the loudspeakers shocked everyone:

“If the fascists' train stops at the station, the entire Bologna district goes on strike, and we block all rail traffic with the rest of Italy”. The metallic voice that read the statement had the power to astonish everyone. “You son of a bitch”—a male voice cried—“I have been for two years a partisan in the woods and you are calling me a fascist!”. Several police officers in uniform arrived and gestured that they had to leave. “Don't worry,” shouted some soldiers, “we'll take your food to Parma”. The train set off again.⁵⁹

Vivoda’s version, then, denies the presence of an angry mob in Bologna and only keeps the threat of a strike; according to him, the refreshment stop was postponed to the Parma stop, thanks to the army bringing the food there. Vivoda’s publication in 2008 of the “true” story of the train did not seem to

⁵⁶ “A tal fine ho ritenuto di scrivere il racconto del viaggio, come lo ho personalmente vissuto, e poi reso noto attraverso un’articolo su *L’Arena di Pola* [...] poi ripreso e da molti ed oggi citato in molte occasioni”, Vivoda, 3.

⁵⁷ Valentina Pisanty, *I guardiani della memoria e il ritorno delle destre xenofobe* (Firenze Milano: Bompiani, 2020).

⁵⁸ “Purtroppo nel citare l’episodio molti lo arricchiscono di particolari non corrispondenti alla realtà, come ad esempio il lancio di sassi contro i finestrini del treno, cosa impossibile dato che si viaggiava su vagoni bestiame privi di finestre. Inoltre che a Bologna furono rovesciati i bidoni del latte. Altra inesattezza: non si fecero vedere ferrovieri o civili comunisti intorno al treno fermo. La carognata la commisero i capi comunisti che ordinarono l’annuncio con l’altoparlante, atto squalificante che dimostra di che consistenza intellettuale, accecati dalla faziosità politica, fossero forniti”, Vivoda, *Quel lungo viaggio verso l’esilio*, 3.

⁵⁹ “Se il treno dei fascisti di ferma in stazione, tutto il compartimento di Bologna entra in sciopero e blocchiamo tutto il traffico ferroviario con il resto dell’Italia”. La voce metallica che lesse il comunicato ebbe il potere di sbigottire tutti. “Tu mare putana”—urlò una voce maschile—go fato due anni el partigian in bosco e ti me ciami fascista!”. Giunsero numerosi poliziotti in divisa che fecero cenno che si doveva ripartire. “Non vi preoccupate, gridarono i militari dell’esercito, vi portiamo il mangiare a Parma”. Il treno ripartì sbuffando”, Vivoda, 34.

have influenced the course of this “lieu de mémoire” in the exiles’ memory and its public use. In the review of the book published in *L’Arena di Pola*, Piero Tarticchio, wrote: “The exiles’ train stopped on the tracks waiting for the food arranged by Caritas, and it was ignored and abandoned with the most heartless indifference. In fact, the railway personnel proclaimed a sudden strike, forbidding anyone to distribute the food that had been thrown in the trash and the milk cans poured onto the tracks”.⁶⁰ Vivoda’s clarification, apparently, did not even change the opinion of the reviewer of his book.

The additional details are still making the rounds in the written production regarding the exodus and in the speeches given by the authorities on February 10. In particular, one of the most repeated details is the milk poured out on the tracks; it is one of the most infamous actions, since it targeted children “in a state of dehydration”. The repeated mention of the episode has the political goal of showing the alleged evilness of the “communists”. The contemporary stress on the PCI and CGIL role in the incident has the contemporary left as a polemic target rather than those historical institutions. Differently from today, the 1947 CGIL was a unitary labour union; the Catholics and moderates were part of it until the 1948 split.

Vivoda’s book does not provide any source talking about the “train of infamy” older than his 1957 article on *L’Arena di Pola*. Given the climate of national mourning in February 1947, which the left-leaning press was a part of, one could argue that such an ostentatious protest against the exiles must have left numerous traces in the contemporary newspapers. No mention of the episode was found in the national or local press in the February 1947 editions.

Any trace of incidents with the refugees should at first have been reported by the local press. In February 1947, three daily newspapers were printed in Bologna: the *Giornale dell’Emilia*, the name under which *Il Resto del Carlino* was known between 1945 and 1953;⁶¹ *L’Avvenire d’Italia*, a Catholic newspaper printed since 1896;⁶² *Il Progresso d’Italia*, a newspaper controlled by the PCI.⁶³ The latter mostly ignored the exodus from Pola, mentioning it only in a couple of instances. The political alignment of the newspaper made it undesirable to talk about the exodus. Vice versa, the exodus fit the political narrative of the other two newspapers; they widely reported about it.

⁶⁰ Tarticchio, ‘Le Tappe Della Vergogna’.

⁶¹ Grandinetti, *I quotidiani in Italia 1943-1991*, 171–72.

⁶² Grandinetti, 108.

⁶³ Grandinetti, 238–39.

The conservative *Giornale dell'Emilia* dealt with the arrival of the exiles in the city. On February 5, the newspaper reported about the preparation of the refreshment point by the PCA and the local branch of the Postwar Relief Ministry. The previous morning, the point was visited by the city prefect, a representative of the archbishop, and an army general, who were “pleased with the excellent organisation”.⁶⁴ On February 6, the news of the passage through the station of one hundred exiles headed to Sicily and Sardinia was reported: “Food and comfort items were distributed to the refugees”.⁶⁵ Furthermore, on February 9, the *Giornale dell'Emilia* reported about a bigger group—nearly one thousand exiles—going through the train station, headed to southern Italy. In this instance, their presence actually sparked a reaction in the train station, but not a hostile demonstration. Rather, “Some refugees, who arrived in the afternoon, staged a demonstration of Italianness at the station by singing patriotic hymns and waving tricolour flags, warmly clapped by the travellers”.⁶⁶ On February 17, the newspaper announced the arrival of the fourth convoy in Ancona, “fraternally welcomed”. No news about the convoy’s journey was published in the following days, and thus there is no trace of the alleged threat of a strike by the railway workers.

The Catholic newspaper *L'Avvenire d'Italia* widely reported about the exiles’ arrival in Italy, too. Differently from the *Giornale dell'Emilia*, there is news about the passage of the fourth convoy of exiles who were directed to Liguria. The February 20 edition stated:

Yesterday, approximately 2.200 refugees from Pola travelled through our station on their way to various cities. Welcomed by the Commissione Pontificia and fed with hot meals, they continued their journey. All are very grateful for the welcome given to them by the refreshment post of the Pontificia Commissione Assistenza. There is always a pressing call for help at the Pontificia Commissione

⁶⁴ “In previsione del passaggio per la nostra città dei profughi giuliani, la Commissione Pontificia e l’Assistenza Post-bellica hanno allestito alla stazione centrale un accogliente posto di ristoro dove i profughi riceveranno i primi soccorsi. Ieri mattina il Prefetto, il Vicario Generale in rappresentanza del Vescovo, il generale Cerica e il Capo di S.M. hanno visitato il posto di ristoro, compiacendosi per l’ottima organizzazione”, ‘Sono in Arrivo i Profughi Giuliani. I Preparativi per Le Accoglienze’, *Il Giornale Dell’Emilia*, 5 February 1947, sec. Cronaca di Bologna.

⁶⁵ “Ieri sono giunti alla nostra stazione un centinaio di profughi polesi, diretti, per la maggior parte, in Sicilia ed in Sardegna. Ai profughi sono stati distribuiti viveri e generi di conforto. Dopo una sosta di qualche ora, i profughi sono ripartiti per le rispettive destinazioni”, ‘Uno Scaglione Di Profughi Polesi Di Passaggio per La Stazione’, *Il Giornale Dell’Emilia*, 6 February 1947, sec. Cronaca di Bologna.

⁶⁶ “Alcuni profughi, giunti nel pomeriggio, hanno inscenato in stazione una dimostrazione di italianità cantando inni patriottici e sventolando bandiere tricolori, vivamente applauditi dai viaggiatori”, ‘Toccante Dimostrazione Di Profughi Giuliani’, *Il Giornale Dell’Emilia*, 9 February 1947, sec. Sotto le due torri.

refreshment point so that the brothers passing through can be given a welcome worthy of their great sacrifice.⁶⁷

Lino Vivoda was travelling on that train: his recount of the stop postponed to Parma due to the railway workers' threat of strike is incompatible with this article. The only news available affirms that that convoy actually stopped for a meal in Bologna.

In February 1947, *Il Problema Giuliano*, the newspaper of the Julian Committee in Rome, was printed twice per week. In the February 20 edition, there is a report about the arrival of Pola's exiles, and the reception in Venice is described as warm; the article also mentions the refreshment point in "all the major train stations".⁶⁸ The Bologna incident is not mentioned in that edition nor in the following ones. At the same time, *Il Problema Giuliano* engaged in diatribes against Togliatti, Giglio, Sereni, and the PCI in general on a regular basis.⁶⁹ Thus, there would be no evident explanation for the missing mention of episodes of hostility perpetrated by communists.

L'Arena di Pola, still published on a daily basis in Pola, reported in detail the journey of every convoy, including the fourth. No news about organised actions against the exiles can be found during those weeks. On the contrary, many letters sent by the exiles in Italy praised the good organisation of the exodus and the warm receptions. A letter from La Spezia (Vivoda's final destination), written by the exile Giovanni Sironi on March 11 and published on March 19, stated: "We had a good journey, they welcomed us well in every place in Italy".⁷⁰

Finally, assuming that for some reason the hostile actions by the Bolognese communists were not reported by any newspapers, neither the ones that had all the interest in using them for their anti-communist narratives, some traces of the railway workers agitation or strike planning could emerge from the documents produced by the prefectures ("prefetture") and police provincial headquarters

⁶⁷ "Ieri sono passati dalla nostra Stazione diretti in varie città circa 2200 profughi di Pola. Accolti sempre dalla Commissione Pontificia e ristorati con vivande calde hanno proseguito il loro viaggio. Tutti sono gratissimi della accoglienza che loro riserva il Posto di Ristoro della Pontificia Commissione Assistenza. E' sempre pressante l'invito per aiuti al Posto di Ristoro della Commissione Pontificia per poter dare ai fratelli di passaggio una accoglienza degna del loro grande sacrificio", 'Transitati Da Bologna Altri 2200 Profughi Di Pola. Affettuosa Assistenza Della P.C.A.', *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, 20 February 1947, sec. Sotto le due torri.

⁶⁸ 'La Spola Del «Toscana»', *Il Problema Giuliano*, 20 February 1947.

⁶⁹ 'Ancona per i Fratelli Polesi', *Il Problema Giuliano*, 6 February 1947, sec. Diario dell'esodo; 'Nessun Rimpianto per La Postbellica', *Il Problema Giuliano*, 9 February 1947; 'Il Parecchio Di Giolitti e Quello Di Togliatti', *Il Problema Giuliano*, 12 February 1947.

⁷⁰ "Il viaggio l'abbiamo fatto bene, ci hanno accolto bene in tutte le località d'Italia", 'Gli Esuli Sbugiardano Ancora Una Volta i Veri Responsabili Dell'esodo Nella Nostra Città', *Arena Di Pola*, 19 February 1947.

(“questure”). A survey in the Bologna and Parma state archives returns no evidence for the “train of infamy”.

In the Bologna state archive, the private correspondence of the prefect, Giovanni D’Antoni, returns some interesting insights on Bologna’s political situation in the first month of 1947. There is also a sub-folder titled “Assistance to Julian refugees”. The documents stored there cover a variety of issues: the refugee camps established in Bologna; the local Julian Committee; the Postwar Relief offices; telegrams from institutions in Rome; the arrival of refugees in the province; and the refreshment point at the train station. Among all the documents, there is no single mention of problems with the stop on Bologna of the exiles’ convoys. On the contrary, the head of Bologna’s firefighter’s department sent a note to the prefect on January 31, thanking for the reception on behalf of a group of firefighters and their families, exiled from Pola.⁷¹ On March 1, the director of the Bologna section of the Pontificia Commissione di Assistenza, Mons. Gilberto Baroni, sent a note to the prefect D’Antoni thanking him for his personal donation of 60.000 lire to the PCA. Also, thanks to this money, “the refreshment point [...] has been assisting for more than a month the poor exiles, who appreciate it with emotion”.⁷² The problems of the exiles’ appear then to not be connected with the train station, but rather with the conditions of the refugee camps. A note written on July 9, 1947, by the prefect and sent to the Postwar Relief offices informed that the exiles coming to Bologna often did not find accommodation in the refugee camps and thus slept outdoors, in the train station or its proximities.⁷³

In the Parma state archive the material found during the research for this thesis did not return much information about the exiles’ reception. The minutes of the meetings of the Provincial Committee for the Postwar Relief (Comitato Provinciale dell’Assistenza Post Bellica) did not return any mention of problems with the Pola exiles’ convoys. It is mentioned that on May 17, 1947, a train with 1.200 Pola exiles coming from Ancona and headed to northern Italy stopped in Parma station; a meal was distributed to all of them by the “Casa del Reduce” and thus the Committee approved the refund of 54.000 lire to this institution.⁷⁴ An interesting hint appears in the public policy folders of the prefect.

⁷¹ ‘Nota Del 31 Gennaio 1947 Dal Comandante 14° Corpo Vigili Del Fuoco al Prefetto Di Bologna’, 9 July 1947, 31, Gabinetto di Prefettura, Ultimo versamento, b. 183, Assistenza ai profughi giuliani, ASB.

⁷² “Detto punto di ristoro [...] va attuando da oltre un mese una assistenza che i poveri esuli apprezzano con commozione”, ‘Nota Del 1° Marzo 1947 Dal Direttore Della Pontificia Commissione Di Assistenza al Prefetto Di Bologna’, 1 March 1947, 1, Gabinetto di Prefettura, Ultimo versamento, b. 183, Assistenza ai profughi giuliani, ASB.

⁷³ ‘Nota Del 9 Luglio 1947 Dal Prefetto Di Bologna Agli Uffici Locali Dell’Assistenza Postbellica’, 9 July 1947, 9, Gabinetto di Prefettura, Ultimo versamento, b. 183, Assistenza ai profughi giuliani, ASB.

⁷⁴ ‘Verbale Della Seduta Del Comitato Provinciale Dell’Assistenza Post Bellica Del 19 Maggio 1947’, 19 May 1947, Gabinetto di Prefettura, b. 61, ASP.

A February 5 note from the police head to the prefect informs about the posting of a contentious mural poster. The poster, whose authors were unknown, accused the local communists (including some mayors) of smuggling wheat into Yugoslavia “to reward Tito for taking the Julian March away from us and filling the foibe with Italian corpses”.⁷⁵ This is just a spare hint of the climate of political tension in February 1947 and the existence of anti-Yugoslavian propaganda. Although it is still to be investigated, by whom was it planned, and how did it intersect with the debate on Pola’s exodus

In the Central Archives of the State are stored the monthly reports about the political and economic situation of the province sent by the prefects to the Ministry of the Interior. Among those, the Bologna prefect’s report about February 1947 did not highlight any problem connected to the arrival of the exiles: “during the month, public order was not disturbed at all”.⁷⁶

The archival research thus revealed some element of complexity in the reception of the Istrian-Dalmatian exiles in Italy and some connected humanitarian and political problems, but in no instance, at this point of the research, something similar to the “trains of infamy” appeared. This “lieu de mémoire”, in conclusion, is an unclear story with a strong underlying political narrative, thanks to which it became so successful—one of the main stories retold every February 10.

⁷⁵ ‘Segnalazione Del Questore al Prefetto Del 5 Febbraio 1947’, 5 February 1947, 7, Gabinetto di Prefettura, b. 22, ASP.

⁷⁶ ‘Relazione Politico-Economica Della Provincia per Il Mese Di Febbraio 1947 Del Prefetto Di Bologna’, 1 March 1947, Ministero dell’Interno, Fascicoli correnti, 1947, b. 34bis, ACS.

Chapter 6. Unwelcomed refugees?

1. Other political incidents

The Bologna incident is characterised by a severe lack of sources, and in general, the witnesses' accounts leave many questions open. The background, the protagonists, and the implications of this episode are unclear, as if the episode took place without being entangled in a historical context. It is not possible, at this point in the research, to definitively establish what happened to the convoy of exiles that travelled from Ancona to La Spezia (and other locations in Liguria) on February 17 and 18. On the other hand, the newspaper articles used in the previous chapters did not provide evidence for the other hostile demonstrations that Pola's exile had to face—those during the mooring of the “Toscana” in Venice and Ancona. These episodes represent a sort of appendix to the “train of infamy”: the exiles were targeted by communist protesters in the ports, and then during the train journey to their final destination, as two parts of the same plot. Vivoda recounted his arrival at Ancona with those words:

When the ship was finally docked at the long quay, I saw that a line of soldiers were lined up along the entire length, carrying bayoneted rifles. They must be there to do us honours, I thought. In the meantime, all the people crowded on the side of the ship had begun to greet us with open arms, and many were waving the tricolour flags they wore around their necks like scarves to protect themselves from the freezing temperature. Then something unexpected happened. From behind the ranks of the soldiers, among the people crowded along the pier, a group began to shake their raised fists in the communist salute, and suddenly the chant “Bandiera Rossa” was raised. Evidently not everyone had come to greet their brothers from the other side and offer them solidarity. There was a general astonishment among the people on board. A quick silence fell over everyone, then came the reaction. Whistles, jeers and taunts were directed towards the group singing the communist anthem. [...] And, in response to the troublemakers on the quay, the hymn 'Fratelli d'Italia', which everyone knew from having sung at the top of their voices in Pola during the Italian demonstrations against the titines, was loudly raised from the ship. After a while, the communists left in a daze, perhaps expecting the exiles to sing fascist anthems.¹

¹ “Quando la nave fu finalmente attraccata al lungo molo vedemmo che su tutta la lunghezza era schierata una fila di soldati con in spalla il fucile a baionetta innestata. Saranno lì per renderci gli onori, pensai. Intanto tutta la gente assiepata sul fianco della nave aveva incominciato a salutare con le palme delle mani aperte e molti agitando le bandiere tricolori che portavano al collo come sciarpe per difendersi dalla gelida temperatura. Allora successe un fatto inaspettato. Da dietro le fila dei soldati, tra la gente assiepata lungo tutto il molo, un gruppo incominciò ad agitare i pugni chiusi nel

With this paragraph, Vivoda created a contraposition between a minority of communist troublemakers and the majority of the population that came to greet the exiles. When the communists left, three musicians, with an accordion, a violin, and a mandolin, started a performance. They played the popular Istrian song “La mula de Parenzo”.² The political confrontation did not stop there, however. Vivoda also told the case of a group of exiles being harassed in an inn next to the port: "Here are the fascists fleeing Tito's proletarian justice, arrived with the ship docked at the quay", they heard.³ A brawl then followed, and the police brought the exiles back to the ship.

Such episodes—scuffles in inns between groups of outsiders (the exiles) and communists, or whoever had reason to dislike the newcomers—seem likely to have happened, since they only required some misunderstanding or some animosity on one of the sides and not political planning, as the “train of infamy” incident would have required. These fights could have also left traces in the police reports. The Ancona state archive is yet to be consulted; a corroboration of the accounts of fights between exiles and communists was found in the State Central Archive. The monthly report of the Ancona prefect for the month of March mentions:

In the evening of March 15, on the occasion of the arrival of the last group of refugees from Pola, a few minor incidents occurred, due to an exchange of views for and against Tito between refugees and communists. The prompt intervention of the public force, which was present in the port area, was able to prevent further consequences.⁴

Unfortunately, Ancona’s February monthly report is missing. This, at least, in the State Central Archive; the Ancona state archive could store a copy of those reports and much more police reports.

saluto comunista e all’improvviso si levò il canto “Bandiera rossa”. Evidentemente non tutti erano venuti per salutare i fratelli dell’altra sponda e porgere loro solidarietà. Vi fu uno sbigottimento generale tra la gente che stava a bordo. Un rapido silenzio calò su tutti, poi ci fu la reazione. Fischi, sberleffi, pernacchie furono indirizzati verso il gruppo che cantava l’inno comunista. [...] E, in risposta agli esagitati sul molo, dalla nave si alzò a gran voce l’inno “Fratelli d’Italia” che tutti conoscevano per aver cantato a squarciagola a Pola durante le manifestazioni italiane contro i titini. Dopo un poco, i comunisti se ne andavano scornati, forse si aspettavano che gli esuli cantassero inni fascisti”, Vivoda, *Quel lungo viaggio verso l’esilio*, 26.

² Vivoda, 26.

³ “Ecco i fascisti che fuggono la giustizia proletaria di Tito, arrivati con la nave attraccata al molo”, Vivoda, 30.

⁴ “Nella serata del 15 marzo, in occasione dell’arrivo dell’ultimo scaglione di profughi polesi, si è verificato qualche incidente di lieve entità, per scambio di opinioni pro e contro Tito tra profughi e comunisti. Il pronto intervento della forza pubblica, presente nella zona portuale, è valso ad evitare ulteriori conseguenze”, ‘Relazione Sulla Situazione Politica, Economica, Annonaria, Sull’ordine e Sullo Spirito Pubblico e Sulle Condizioni Della Pubblica Sicurezza Nel Mese Di Marzo 1947 Del Prefetto Di Ancona’, 3 April 1947, 2, Ministero dell’Interno, Fascicoli correnti, 1947, b. 34, ACS.

Two of the three arrivals of the Toscana in Ancona took place in February, on the 16th (Vivoda's one) and on the 26th.

The February monthly report by the prefect of La Spezia also devoted some paragraphs to the arrival of the exiles.⁵ La Spezia was a location of arrival for many exiles, since those working at the military arsenal in Pola had the chance to find employment at the Ligurian city's arsenal. The prefect, however, noted that "the welcome given to the exiles from the local population was rather cold and not free from some degree of hostility".⁶ The text then describes the attempts to display anti-Istrian posters in the shipbuilding workers' canteen, which had to host the exiles for some days. The posters, "carrying some phrases by Mazzini, Cavour and Togliatti about the non-Italianness of Istria"⁷ were first removed, and then, at the second attempt, covered by Italian flags. The prefect explained the hostility with those words:

Basically, there is a widespread belief, particularly among those belonging to left-wing parties, that the refugees were forced to leave the city because they harboured fascist sentiments: hence, the aforementioned hostility, which is compounded by the circumstance that, as they are destined to be gradually employed by the local Maritime Military Arsenal and in other jobs, they reduce the job opportunities of the numerous unemployed, in relation to the mediocre state of the local economy.⁸

In this paragraph, it is possible to see a confluence of political prejudice and a more general fear of the newcomers stealing job opportunities from the locals. The "fascist exiles" prejudice, although not officially endorsed by the PCI, could have worked in some local context in which there were large masses of unemployed and a weak economy. The duress makes it appealing for political actors to use

⁵ 'Relazione Mensile Sulla Situazione Politica, Sullo Spirito Pubblico e Sulle Condizioni Della Sicurezza Pubblica Del Mese Di Febbraio Del Prefetto Di La Spezia', 10 March 1947, Ministero dell'Interno, Fascicoli correnti, 1947, b. 36, ACS.

⁶ "L'accoglienza ad essi riservata dalla popolazione locale è stata piuttosto fredda, e non scevra, qualche volta, di una certa ostilità", 'Relazione Mensile Sulla Situazione Politica, Sullo Spirito Pubblico e Sulle Condizioni Della Sicurezza Pubblica Del Mese Di Febbraio Del Prefetto Di La Spezia'.

⁷ "Riportanti frasi di Mazzini, Cavour and Togliatti circa la non italianità dell'Istria", 'Relazione Mensile Sulla Situazione Politica, Sullo Spirito Pubblico e Sulle Condizioni Della Sicurezza Pubblica Del Mese Di Febbraio Del Prefetto Di La Spezia'.

⁸ "In sostanza, è diffusa la convinzione, particolarmente in coloro che sono iscritti a partiti di sinistra, che i profughi siano stati costretti ad abbandonare la città perché nutrivano sentimenti fascisti: onde, l'accennata ostilità, cui concorre la circostanza che, trattandosi qui destinati per essere gradualmente assorbiti dal locale Arsenale M.M. e in altri lavori, essi vengono a ridurre le possibilità di impiego dei numerosi disoccupati, in rapporto al modesto tono dell'economia locale", 'Relazione Mensile Sulla Situazione Politica, Sullo Spirito Pubblico e Sulle Condizioni Della Sicurezza Pubblica Del Mese Di Febbraio Del Prefetto Di La Spezia'.

the discontent against a group with special safeguards, and that was the case of Pola's exiles: they were a potential scapegoat.

A general resentment against the arrival of exiles, who had priority in job recruitment in some instances, is also reported in another location. Public servants had the right to be relocated in Italy, and in one instance, in the communist-led Savona municipality, this raised a refusal to hire the exiles.⁹

The investigation around the arrivals of the "Toscana" can be easier than the search for mentions of the Bologna exiles' train stops. There is an abundance of reports in national and local newspapers for every arrival of the steamboat. The "Toscana" moorings in Venice and Ancona were much bigger news than just a scheduled stop of a single train, an event that only left the already mentioned four-sentence article on *L'Avvenire d'Italia*, one of the three Bologna's newspapers.¹⁰

Ancona's local newspaper, *La Voce Adriatica*, reported on February 18 about the first arrival of the exiles in the city port.¹¹ The article, however, does not mention any group of communists waiting for the exiles at the quay. The presence of left-wing activists in Ancona port was actually mentioned once. *Il Popolo*, the DC newspaper, published on the Marche region local edition on February 20, an article about the first arrival of the "Toscana".¹² The text mentions the solidarity, brotherhood and the relief efforts, as all the other accounts of the event do.

A paragraph, however, adds a new element: "not long before" a ship, named "Gorizia" transported "other brothers, to whom false propaganda had ended up making believe true what had no connection with truth".¹³ On that day, the left monopolised the welcoming of this other undetected group: there were red flags everywhere, the women of the Unione Donne Italiane (UDI) were engaged in the relief, and cabinet members belonging to "extremist parties" came from Rome for the occasion. It should be identified who arrived in Ancona with the "Gorizia" and why this other group received that attention from the left. For the "Toscana" arrival—the article went on—there were only tricolour

⁹ Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 528.

¹⁰ 'Transitati Da Bologna Altri 2200 Profughi Di Pola. Affettuosa Assistenza Della P.C.A.'

¹¹ 'L'ospitalità Anconitana Ha Commosso i Polesi', *La Voce Adriatica*, 18 February 1947, sec. Cronaca di Ancona.

¹² Lamberto Clementi, 'L'arrivo Del "Toscana,, Nel Porto Di Ancona', *Il Popolo*, 20 February 1947, sec. Corriere delle Marche.

¹³ "Ad un altro arrivo assistemmo or non è molto. Un'altra nave portante un nome caro al cuore di ogni italiano — Gorizia — ed ora slavizzato, ci ha reso su queste stesse banchine altri fratelli, ai quali una falsa propaganda aveva finito per far credere vero ciò che con la verità non aveva alcuna attinenza", Clementi.

flags on the quay—“all the rest would have been superfluous”.¹⁴ The article did not mention the presence of the communist agitators described by Vivoda; on the contrary, *Il Popolo* described a climate of harmony. As for the “train of infamy”, it would appear odd if the Catholic newspaper deliberately chose not to report the communists’ demonstrations against the exiles, despite engaging in regular confrontations with PCI about Pola’s question.

Il Popolo article, furthermore, suggests that the arrivals of compatriots were an occasion to perform political actions; the presence or absence of determinate groups had political significance. For example, the arrival of an Italian POW from Yugoslavia on the following day was announced by *La Voce Adriatica* on February 25, and it is reported that the Military Command in Ancona “invited the city authorities, the representatives of the political parties, the veterans, and relief organisations to take part in the arrival”.¹⁵ There is an open call for the intervention of the political parties, and it is therefore possible that these occasions were stages of political struggles.

There is one act of hostility found in the sources that could resound like the “train of infamy”, since it was perpetrated by the railway workers in Vercelli (Piedmont). *L’Avvenire d’Italia* reported on February 7 that the communist railway workers forbade the posting of welcome and indication signs prepared by the PCA for the Istrian exiles.¹⁶

No further sources were consulted to verify this article. Some references to the railway workers’ meddling, and its consequences, could have left some traces in the Vercelli state archive. *L’Avvenire d’Italia* article on the Vercelli incident can have a double-faced impact on the interpretation of Bologna’s episode. On one hand, it suggests the actual existence of hostility towards the exiles among the railway workers, most likely the unionised railway workers with communist ideals. On the other hand, it becomes more difficult to understand why the same newspaper would report a small act, such as the removal of some signs, and nothing about a more serious action, such as those of the “train of infamy”.

¹⁴ “Questa volta nessuna messo in scena; una sola bandiera sul molo: il tricolore. Le altre sarebbero state di troppo”, Clementi.

¹⁵ “Invita le autorità della città, le rappresentanze dei partiti politici, delle organizzazioni combattentistiche ed assistenziali ad intervenire all’arrivo”, ‘Un Altro Scaglione Di Reduci Dalla Jugoslavia Giungerà Domani’, *La Voce Adriatica*, 25 February 1947, sec. Cronaca di Ancona.

¹⁶ ‘Progressivi Del Vercellese Contro Gli Esuli Giuliani’, *L’Avvenire d’Italia*, 7 February 1947.

Another instance of anti-exile hostility in Vercelli emerges from the Ufficio Zone di Confine archive: a letter from the local PCA branch reported by Enrico Miletto's 2012 book "Senza più tornare".¹⁷ The placement of refugees in employment has been prevented by Vercelli's Chamber of Labour, which threatened a strike. In this case, it could be questioned where the boundary between the political hostility against the "fascist exiles" and the reaction to an unwelcome competition in the labour market was.

L'Avvenire d'Italia article about the Vercelli train station sabotage also disclosed that in another Piedmontese province, Biella, the mayor had a meeting about the reception of the Istrian exiles.¹⁸ Most of the mayors in the province were communists and socialists; they denied the possibility of hosting exiles in their municipalities, and vice versa, the DC mayors affirmed their willingness.

2. A long-time hostility for multiple factors?

The exiles had to face various episodes of discrimination. Some discriminations had a political ground, others were driven by the competition on the labour market, and the two could have intertwined in some instances. For reasons that reside in the sphere of the politics of memory, the politically motivated act of hostility became the most cited in the exiles' memory. It could be argued that the right-wing sponsorship of the exiles' memory boosted the circulation of precisely those stories that show communists in a bad light.

The grounds for prejudices against the Istrian-Dalmatian exiles, however, do not limit to those two categories. There was also a prejudice that could be defined as "anthropological": the fear of the different, the fear of the newcomers who bring different traditions. In some cases, the local population perceived a linguistic, if not ethnic, difference with the Istrian-Dalmatians.¹⁹ The exile Mafalda Codan Sirna, in a 2005 letter to *L'Arena di Pola*, recounted what she heard when she won a position as schoolteacher in San Vito al Tagliamento: "Another Slav who came to take our positions".²⁰ Cultural misunderstandings led to recurrent sexist prejudices against the exiled women.²¹

¹⁷ Enrico Miletto, 'L'esodo giuliano-dalmata: itinerari tra ricerca e memoria', in *Senza più tornare: l'esodo istriano, fiumano, dalmata e gli esodi nell'Europa del Novecento*, Laissez passer (Torino: SEB 27, 2012), 80.

¹⁸ 'Progressivi Del Vercellese Contro Gli Esuli Giuliani'.

¹⁹ Enrico Miletto, 'L'esodo e i Profughi Giuliano-Dalmati Nell'Italia Del Dopoguerra', *Qualestoria* 51, no. 1–2 (2023): 309–10, <https://doi.org/10.13137/0393-6082/35533>.

²⁰ "Ecco un'altra slava che è venuta a portarci via i posti", Mafalda Codan Sirna, 'Giorno Del Ricordo', *L'Arena Di Pola*, 31 March 2005, sec. Lettere in redazione.

²¹ Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 211–12.

Besides the different reasons for discrimination, the time frame of the attention towards the exiles' reception can be widened from the first months of 1947, as do the sources used until this point, to the postwar years in general. The attention for the exodus peaked in February 1947, due to the signing of the Paris Treaty and the organised exodus from Pola, but the exodus took place for nearly ten years, starting from the end of the war. In February 1947, the exodus from Pola was framed in the contemporary political framework and media discourse around it; this framing, however, was sensibly different one year before and one year after. In 1948, two major events that could have impacted the exile-communist relationship took place: first, the April 1948 general elections defeat of the PCI-PSI joint list, pushing the prospect of communists in government further away; second, the June 1948 Tito-Stalin split, with the Italian communists taking Stalin's side. A closer investigation could show if, at some level, PCI tried to frame the exiles as victims of the titoist deviation, after Tito's expulsion from the orthodox communist international movement. Or, on the contrary, the reciprocal stereotype existing between exiles and communists was already too deeply rooted, and the PCI could not recruit to its cause any significant portion of the exiles' community.

Some of the exiles' personal narratives mention the 1948 elections as a point of tension. Enrichetta Dario was hosted in a refugee camp in Mantova, a city where the communists were strong. She told that after the 1948 elections:

Since the Christian Democrats had won also thanks to us refugees, then the Mantuan communists threatened us to death, the police came to us, inside the refugee camp, they dispensed weapons... The soldiers actually gave weapons to my brothers, I remember well, to my father, to the other men, for defence...²²

This story, if confirmed by other sources, would prove an escalation of the potential violence between the communists and the exiles that was even more serious than the "train of infamy". A similar story of violence, set in a Taranto refugees camp, is retold in an article published on *La nuova Voce Giuliana*, an exiles' magazine:

The witness account of one [exile in Taranto] highlights the dangers faced by the Istrian community on the eve of the 1948 political elections: after being hanged 'in effigy', as they used to say in the 19th century (a puppet was hanged with the words "polesani fascisti"), the communists even attempted to storm the refugee village by military force. The state, officially, did not defend them. The police did

²² "Avendo vinto la Democrazia Cristiana anche grazie a noi profughi, ecco, allora i comunisti mantovani ga minaciado de morte noi, la polizia xè vegnuda da noi, dentro in campo profughi, ga dispensado le armi... I soldati proprio ga dado le armi ai miei fradei, me ricordo ben, a mio papà, agli altri uomini, per difesa", Fantini D'Onofrio, Giacca Zaccariotto, and Grassi, *L'esodo nei ricordi dei giuliano-dalmati di Padova*, 46.

not dare; the exiles were only saved thanks to the intervention of the guys from the San Marco Battalion, who, weapons in hand, were determined to resolutely defend the exiles from the attack.²³

The article then mentions the “train of infamy”, reinforcing the role of a reference point for every narrative about the hostility towards the exiles. Another episode connected to the 1948 electoral campaign is the pun made by Eros de Franceschini. He was the secretary of the Genoese Chamber of Labour and gave a political speech in Camogli (Genoa province) in support of the PCI-PSI joint list. De Franceschini, according to the version published by the exiles’ newspaper *Difesa Adriatica* said: “In Sicily there is Giuliano the bandit, and here in the north, there are the Julian bandits, all those Julians who left Trieste to come and spread propaganda against communism”.²⁴ The pun was built on the name of the Sicilian bandit, Salvatore Giuliano, and the Julian exiles are presented as overall bandits. This episode is present in the exiles’ memory in different forms: it is possible to read in *L’Arena di Pola* that Togliatti said that line²⁵ or that the line was written on a banner hanging in La Spezia.²⁶

Togliatti’s assassination attempt by an anti-communist student on July 14, 1948, raised enormously the level of political tension in the country. Among the many acts of violence on that day and the following, *Difesa Adriatica* reported in the July 29 edition that the headquarters of the Venezia Giulia and Zara provincial committee of Forlì were attacked and devastated by protesters and an angry mob burst into the Piombino refugee camps shouting “death to fascists”.²⁷

²³ “La testimonianza di uno di loro evidenzia i pericoli corsi dalla comunità degli istriani alla vigilia delle elezioni politiche del 1948: dopo essere stati impiccati “in effigie”, come si diceva nell’Ottocento (un pupazzo veniva impiccato con la scritta “polesani fascisti”), i comunisti tentarono addirittura di assaltare manu militari il villaggio dei profughi. Lo Stato, ufficialmente, non li difese. La polizia non osò tanto; gli esuli si salvarono solo grazie all’intervento dei ragazzi del Battaglione San Marco i quali, armi in pugno, si dimostrarono decisi a difendere con decisione gli esuli dall’aggressione”, Giuseppe Parlato, ‘Gli Esuli a Taranto e Nella Terra Ionica’, *La Nuova Voce Giuliana*, 16 April 2021.

²⁴ “In Sicilia c’è il bandito Giuliano e qui nel nord ci sono i banditi giuliani, tutti quei giuliani cioè che hanno lasciato Trieste per venire a fare opera di propaganda contro il comunismo”, ‘Banditi Giuliani’, *Difesa Adriatica. Settimanale Dei Giuliani e Dei Dalmati*, 3 June 1948; also see Francesca Salvatore, ‘Stranieri e senza patria. Dalla cattiva accoglienza all’integrazione: il caso della città di Taranto’, *Eunomia. Rivista semestrale di Storia e Politica Internazionali* 9, no. 2 (2020): 158, <https://doi.org/10.1285/I22808949A9N2P153>.

²⁵ “Palmiro Togliatti arrivò addirittura a definire gli esuli, in un comizio pubblico a Genova, ‘banditi giuliani’”, Gianni Strasiotto, ‘Nella Ricostruzione Il Futuro Delle Nostre Terre. Parla l’ultimo Sacerdote Esule Vivente Nella Diocesi Di Pordenone’, *L’Arena Di Pola*, 24 February 2011.

²⁶ “A La Spezia su’n feston impicà in strada iera scritto: ‘La Sicilia ha il bandito Giuliano. La Spezia ha i fascisti Giuliani’”, Bruno Segon, ‘Sarà Cussi Bele Anca Le Stele de l’Australia’, *L’Arena Di Pola*, 28 September 2008.

²⁷ ‘Oggi Il Bastone, Domani Il Mitra? La Sede Del Comitato Di Forlì Devastata Durante Lo Sciopero Generale’, *Difesa Adriatica. Settimanale Dei Giuliani e Dei Dalmati*, 29 July 1948.

3. Acts of solidarity from the left

The historian Raoul Pupo, when citing the Bologna episode in his 2005 book “Il lungo esodo”, adds the following remark about PCI’s stance on the Pola’s exodus issue: “It is remarkable to note, in this regard, that the awareness of the damage that could be caused to the party by hostility towards the Istrian refugees was by no means absent from the PCI leadership”.²⁸ He then mentioned a guidelines letter sent by the vice-secretaries of the PCI, Luigi Longo and Pietro Secchia, to the local party structures. The document, also cited by Enrico Miletto,²⁹ is held by the Fondazione Gramsci archive in Rome in a folder named “Pola’s question,” composed of a dozen letters. Longo and Secchia’s letter is titled “Guidelines for the political works towards the Pola and Julian March refugees”³⁰ and dated February 18, 1947.³¹

The letter opens with the same narrative seen in Giglio and Togliatti’s articles on *L’Unità*: there was a political campaign directed by chauvinist elements, people with links to the government in Rome, and Allies’ personnel to instigate terror in the Italian people and make them leave. The refugees in Italy are in a tragic condition, but Longo and Secchia wrote:

Our party and the mass democratic organisations cannot disregard the situation of these fellow compatriots. We must first of all bear in mind that even though among the Giulian refugees there are fascist elements or those compromised in fascist actions, the mass is composed of people of good conscience deceived by false nationalist propaganda and therefore susceptible to being won over to democracy.³²

The democracy they refer to is the PCI cause; the exiles, then, are not irremediably lost to the anti-communist side, they can still be turned to the “democratic” side. The letter follows:

If we merely told them that they were wrong to leave their homes, we would reduce ourselves to a fruitless and non-human negative position. This would mean, in practice, abandoning these refugees

²⁸ “È singolare notare, al riguardo, che la consapevolezza dei danni che sarebbero potuti derivare al partito dall’ostilità nei confronti dei profughi istriani non era affatto assente ai vertici del PCI”, Pupo, *Il lungo esodo*, 207.

²⁹ Miletto, *Novecento di confine*, 190–91.

³⁰ Luigi Longo and Secchia, ‘Direttive per Il Lavoro Politico e Assistenziale in Direzione Dei Profughi Di Pola e Della Venezia Giulia’, 18 February 1947, Archivio Mosca, microfilm 134, “Questione Pola”, Fondazione Gramsci.

³¹ On the same folder there is a draft of the letter dated February 15, 1947.

³² “Il nostro partito e le organizzazioni democratiche di massa non possono disinteressarsi della situazione di questi nostri connazionali. Bisogna anzitutto tener presente che se fra i profughi giuliani vi sono elementi fascisti o compromessi in azioni fasciste, la massa è composta di persone in buona fede ingannate dalla falsa propaganda nazionalistica e perciò suscettibili di essere conquistate alla democrazia”, Longo and Secchia, ‘Direttive per Il Lavoro Politico e Assistenziale in Direzione Dei Profughi Di Pola e Della Venezia Giulia’.

to themselves and thus throwing them into the arms of reaction, which would exploit their resentment for political purposes and turn them into a mass of manoeuvre against our Party and democracy.³³

The two PCI leaders then called for “an action of political clarification and practical solidarity” towards the exiles in order to make them understand who the culprits of their tragedy were. A list of six guidelines follows. The party organisations must first identify the comrades among the exiles. Then the party must stand by side with the exiles in their claims for accommodation and work, claiming the contribution of the well-off people, not the workers; to this purpose, villas, hotels, and empty flats should be claimed. The party should also claim special quotas for exiles’ hiring in factories and public works. The fifth point is about the allocation of uncultivated land, and the last one touches on the return to the original locations of the post-WW1 immigrants to the Julian March. The closing paragraph points to the exploitation of the exiles against the PCI and then calls for a press and propaganda campaign to defuse that ploy. The points of the letter resounded in the articles that appeared in the leftist press already examined in the third chapter—two of them published on *L’Unità* by Luigi Longo himself.

At this stage of the research, no reaction to the Longo-Secchia letter was found. It could be investigated whether the letter sparked an internal debate in the PCI sections and, above all, if any local organisation engaged in that political work towards the exiles and their needs. As for now, there are some scattered stories of the positive attitude of PCI’s local administrators towards the exiles. In Venice, the communist mayor Giovanni Battista Gianquinto welcomed the first Toscana convoy; this fact is reported by *L’Arena di Pola*.³⁴ The Venice municipal council held a special meeting on February 3, 1947, and allocated two million lire for the exiles’ reception.³⁵ On February 5, *Il Gazzettino*, the conservative Venice newspaper, wrote: “Displays of affection were shown by Venetians of all areas and political colours, while the city’s municipal council, whose majority is social-communist, unanimously voted for a document in which it sent its greetings to the Italian brothers”.³⁶ In Venice, the left-leaning *Unione Donne Italiane* (UDI) was engaged in providing assistance to the exiles.

³³ “Se a costoro ci limitassimo a dire che hanno fatto male ad abbandonare le loro case, ci ridurremmo a una sterile posizione negativa e non umana. Ciò significherebbe, in pratica, abbandonare questi profughi a se stessi e quindi gettarli nelle braccia della reazione, la quale sfrutterebbe il loro risentimento a scopo politico e ne farebbe una massa di manovra contro il nostro Partito e la democrazia”, Longo and Secchia.

³⁴ ‘Il Primo Viaggio Compiuto Dal “Toscana”’, *L’Arena Di Pola*, 6 February 1947.

³⁵ ‘Il Comune Di Venezia per i Profughi Di Pola’, *Il Mattino Del Popolo*, 4 February 1947.

³⁶ “Manifestazione di affetto si sono avute da parte di Veneziani di ogni area e colore politico, mentre il Consiglio Comunale della città, la cui maggioranza è social-comunista, ha votato all’unanimità un o.d.g. nel quale invia il proprio saluto ai fratelli Italiani”, ‘I Profughi Polesi Lasciano Venezia Ospitale’, *Il Gazzettino*, 5 February 1947.

Gianquinto was not the only communist mayor who personally welcomed the exiles. Turin's communist mayor, Celeste Negarville, met a group of exiles at the "Casermette" refugee camps and listened to their appeals.³⁷ In the communist stronghold of Livorno, the exiles found collective solidarity.³⁸ In another Tuscany location, Peccioli (Pisa's province), the PCI and PSI party sections both donated ten thousand lire to the *Il Tirreno*, as a letter from an exile in La Spezia to the Arena di Pola reported in March 1947. The Istrian newspaper emphasised the news, choosing the title «Communists are helping our exiles, too», despite the recurrent confrontational tone against the PCI.³⁹ Right-wing parties and newspapers, however, frequently promoted the fundraising campaigns. In Bologna, for example, donations for the exiles were collected by both the Fronte dell'Uomo Qualunque⁴⁰ and the Partito Liberale Italiano.⁴¹

In January 1948, Florence municipal council deliberated the distribution of woollen blankets and subsidies to the refugees in conditions of pressing need: the mayor was communist, and the majority of the council was left-leaning. La Spezia municipality, also ruled by PCI, created a soup kitchen for the Istrian-Dalmatian refugees. In Turin, with the communist Celeste Negarville as mayor, the Istrian-Dalmatian children received free books and notebooks. Similar initiatives have been enacted by DC administrations.⁴² Those examples were in contrast with the previously mentioned hostility towards the relocation of Istrian-Dalmatian public servants in the communist-led Savona, reported by Spazzali. In this instance, the municipality also brought up budgetary concerns along with a purported political bias. It could be investigated whether the budgetary issues were an honest concern, and the political affiliation of the administration instigated the suspicion of a politically motivated refusal, or whether the economic reason was just an excuse for the anti-exile prejudice.⁴³

In the archive of another leftist municipality, Bologna, there are some records of the hiring of exiled public servants: an electrician and a technician from Fiume, an office worker from Umago⁴⁴, and two primary school teachers from Fiume and Sussak⁴⁵. Those records, however, do not contain any comment or hint about the political implication of those hirings. Therefore, they can neither prove

³⁷ 'Ieri Notte Sono Giunti Altri Duecento Profughi', *La Stampa*, 19 February 1947, sec. Cronaca cittadina.

³⁸ Miletto, 'L'esodo e i Profughi Giuliano-Dalmati Nell'Italia Del Dopoguerra', 309.

³⁹ 'Altra Lettera Da La Spezia: Anche i Comunisti Aiutano i Nostri Esuli', *Arena Di Pola*, 21 March 1947.

⁴⁰ 'Per i Profughi Di Pola', *Il Giornale Dell'Emilia*, 9 February 1947, sec. Cronaca di Bologna.

⁴¹ 'Aiutiamo i Profughi Giuliani! Fervido Appello Del Cardinale al Clero e al Popolo Dell'Archidiocesi'.

⁴² Miletto, *Novecento di confine*, 188.

⁴³ Spazzali writes about a politically-motivated excuse; he quotes a document in the Ufficio Zone di Confine archive, that has been not consulted for this thesis, Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*, 528.

⁴⁴ 'Atti Della Giunta, Gennaio-Febbraio-Marzo 1947', 1947, 268–71, Atti della Giunta, ACB.

⁴⁵ 'Atti Della Giunta, Gennaio-Febbraio-Marzo 1947', 310–11.

the existence of the hostility of Bologna's administration nor the occurrence of active solidarity with Istrian-Dalmatian refugees.

The overall picture is therefore multifaceted. The relationships between the PCI and the exiles' community changed across space and across time. Single episodes, often presented with incomplete and politically-biased accounts, cannot answer the question.

Conclusion

The Upper Adriatic is a borderland, a point of contact between the Romance, Slavic, and Germanic cultures. This area went through the emergence of nationalism in the 19th century and through the dramatic phases of the 20th century, in a similar manner to other European borderlands. The history of this region is a complex subject. This borderland is also a periphery, and the history of the peripheries is normally more difficult to grasp from the centre of the nation. This is the case for Italy: Trieste is geographically and culturally distant from most of the country. In the last 20 years, however, two related historical episodes set in the “eastern border” became a central feature in the Italian politics of memory: the foibe massacres and the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus.

The first chapter introduced the Italian narratives of Upper Adriatic history, according to which the Italian roots are ancient, and the Slavic culture is inferior. The chapter acknowledged the influence of opposing nationalisms in historiography and the presence of racist perspectives that have shaped interpretations of the region's history; therefore, it discusses the shift towards a transnational perspective to portray Istria's history as multicultural rather than solely defined by national struggles. A brief account of Upper Adriatic history is presented, with a focus on World War II, the Peace Conference, and their aftermath in the region.

The second chapter focused on the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus. Under this name is included a multiplicity of migratory movements across a large timespan (from 1943 to 1954 and marginally even later) and over a wide area (from the Julian Alps to Zadar). Multiple waves can be identified, each with specific features. The exodus peaked around 1947, and so did the attention devoted to it by Italian politics and media. Seen in the European context, the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus is just one among many other forced and non-forced population movements, and it is far from the biggest in numbers. The Italian population (with a quota of Slavic population) decided to leave for a variety of reasons. Some were escaping direct acts of retaliation (such as the foibe massacres), others could not bear the sense of terror imposed by the new Yugoslavian power. For many, the postwar economic depression was the push to leave seeking a better life, and the same could be said for the disruption of the previous society brought by the instauration of a socialist regime. In some cases, the pro-Italian sentiment and the perspective of a life under a Slavic country were enough to leave everything. Lastly, a portion came to the decision seeing that the majority of the neighbours were leaving, irreparably modifying the social structure of the village or city. It is impossible to find uniform and simple ground for the exodus, but the sedimentation of memory tended to privilege some aspects, especially the fear of the foibe and the dedication to the Italian motherland.

The third chapter analysed the case of the planned and state-run exodus from Pola. It accounted for approximately 10% of the overall exodus, but it is by far the most known and investigated wave of the exodus since it occurred under special circumstances: the exiles left a city under Anglo-American control in a short time (most of the population left in February and March 1947) after some months of public debate. It was a collective and conscious choice, taken with some degree of interference by the Italian government. Pola's exodus was widely reported in the Italian media, and it is possible to read several reports about the exiles' journeys.

Pola's exodus also sparked political controversies, the subject of the fourth chapter. The event was used as anti-communist propaganda by the Catholic, moderate, and right-wing press and politicians; on the other side, the PCI stance was difficult, due to their ideological affinity to the Yugoslavian regime, from which the exiles were fleeing. The communist press in part devoted scarce attention to the exodus, in part used the arguments of Yugoslavian propaganda (especially in Tommaso Giglio's articles), but never openly encouraged the discrimination of the exiles. Vice versa, there are instances of calls for solidarity, and the hardships faced by refugees are blamed on the DC.

The fifth chapter dealt with the most famous episode of hostility against the exiles: the "train of infamy". A multitude of accounts were reported, often contradicting themselves, to outline the narrative about this «lieu de mémoire». The common core of the different accounts concerns a communist demonstration at Bologna's train station against a convoy of Pola's refugees. The train left Ancona, headed to Liguria, and went through Bologna on February 19, 1947. One of the key witnesses, Lino Vivoda, denied the presence of an angry mob: according to him, there was just the threat of a strike in case the exiles stopped for a refreshment and the exiles had their meals in Parma. There is no record of demonstrations or sabotages in the contemporary press; on the contrary, *L'Avvenire d'Italia* reported the stop of the train at the station and the refreshment service. Archival research in Bologna and Parma state archives and in the Central State Archive did not provide any evidence for the "train of infamy".

The sixth chapter collected different instances of prejudices against the exiles, some of them politically motivated and based on the antagonism between groups of exiles and groups of communists. Some of those episodes, however, are based on single witnesses' accounts or articles, and thus would deserve a closer investigation. The prejudices against the exiles were not only political: some were grounded in the labour market competition brought by those newcomers, others on the perception of a cultural, or even ethnic, difference between the Istrian-Dalmatians and the local population. Finally, some instances of solidarity and positive attitudes of some communists towards

the exiles further complicate the answers to the overall interactions between the exiles and the communists.

This thesis leaves many questions open. The first aim, the historical reconstruction of the Bologna episode, could not be fulfilled due to a lack of sources. It is yet to be established whether this episode did take place at all, took place notwithstanding the lack of contemporary sources (which should thus be explained), or similar events took place and the witnesses confused over details, merging into an inaccurate story. Further archival investigation in Bologna, but also in other cities touched by the journey of the exiles, can lead to additional details and the eventual presence of police reports on anti-exile demonstrations. Documents produced by the PCA, the Red Cross, or other organisations involved in the exiles' reception can provide more information about their relief work. An important archival collection has not been consulted for this thesis: the "Ufficio Zone di Confine" collection, part of the archive of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers in Castelnuovo di Porto.¹ References to this archival collection can be found in recent works dealing with the exile's reception.²

In the case of a complete lack of contemporary sources about the "train of infamy", it would therefore be even more interesting to trace the story of this narrative. The only reference point, at this stage of the research, is Vivoda's 1957 article on *L'Arena di Pola*. Was this episode ever mentioned in a text before? How many times was it mentioned between 1957 and Magris' 1991 article on the *Corriere della Sera*? Did the story circulate in the exiles' reunions in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s? An answer could probably be found in the exiles' newspapers and other kinds of publications, looking at the myriad of projects, often on a small scale and short lived.³ The archives of the exiles' associations, as well as the personal archives of the exiles and their descendants, could be another valuable source of information.

Another field open to investigation is the overall attitude of the PCI towards the Istrian-Dalmatian exiles. This thesis relied on articles in the communist press during the Pola exodus; other articles dealing with the exiles, even years after 1947, are yet to be found. There is a single folder with a dozen documents about the Pola exodus in the Fondazione Gramsci's PCI archive in Rome. Mentions

¹ Maria Maione, Silvia Re, and Carlotta Cardon, 'Ufficio per Le Zone Di Confine. L'archivio', *Qualestoria* 38, no. 2 (2010).

² Miletto, 'L'esodo giuliano-dalmata: itinerari tra ricerca e memoria'; Miletto, *Le due Marie*; Spazzali, *Pola, città perduta*.

³ Ninety-one titles are listed by Vivoda, see Stelio Spadaro, Lino Vivoda, and Stefano Cosma, eds., *Sintesi storica delle Associazioni istriane, fiumane e dalmate in Italia e delle Associazioni italiane nei territori ceduti dal 1947 a oggi* (Mariano del Friuli: Edizioni della Laguna Anvgd Gorizia Mailing List Histria, 2011); also see Audenino, *La casa perduta*, 93–94.

of the exodus or the exiles could be found in the archives of the local PCI federations. It is still to be established if the Longo-Secchia memo on the political work for the exiles sent to the federations in February 1947 sparked internal debate and encouraged PCI's initiatives in favour of the exiles. The stance of the other parties could be further investigated, too.

The stereotype of the “fascist” Istrian-Dalmatian exiles could have been reinforced in public perception by the actual connections between individual exiles, or politicised groups among the exiles, and fascist circles. These would not make the stereotypes true: in a group as large and diverse as the Istrian-Dalmatian exiles' community, it is possible to find individuals with a large variety of political ideas; some exiles were members of leftist parties.⁴ But, given their personal stories—some became exiles precisely to flee from a socialist country—it was most likely that an exile found congeniality in right-wing circles, in the name of nationalism and anti-communism.⁵

The stereotypes of the “fascist exile” and of the “exiles-hater communist” could have been just stereotypes at the beginning, as shown by instances of antifascist exiles (some of them former partisans) and communists sympathetic towards the Julian-Dalmatian refugees. Still, over the course of years, the two stereotypes could have been mutually reinforced. Decades later, the right mastered the foibe-and-exodus memory; vice versa, for the left, this memory became a sort of skeleton in the closet, a matter of apologies and reconciliation efforts. This last interpretation, however, is a reduction that resides in the field of memory politics: the role of history is the reconstruction of the actual path that drove the exiles' memory to the political right and created the ground for the “train of infamy” as an exemplary anti-communist tale. To this purpose, it would be worth studying the story of the relations between the MSI and the exiles' associations. The exiles' associations, of course, were not a monolith; there have always been different groups, with different political stances. The controversy around the “train of infamy” plaque between ANVGD and Unione degli Istriani is a flagrant proof of a conflicted world. A part of the exiles' world was—and still is—more rooted in nationalist and hardline stances. Another part proved more open: it started a dialogue with those Italians who remained in Istria, initially seen as traitors,⁶ and showed a positive attitude towards the reconciliation

⁴ Livio Dorigo recounted that he was a PSI member in Varese, see Bernas, *Ci chiamavano fascisti, eravamo italiani*, 86.

⁵ See the troubles caused by “fascists and right-wing Julians” at Padua University in 1946, according to the account of Amerigo Clocchiati, PCI local secretary at the time, Amerigo Clocchiati, Amerigo Clocchiati, *Cammina frut*, 2. ed (Milano: Vangelista, 1973), 429–36.

⁶ Ballinger, *History in Exile*, 238–44.

with Slovenia and Croatia in the framework of their EU and Schengen integration, giving up revanchist claims.⁷

In general, more attention could be devoted to years of “silence” about the foibe-and-exodus nexus between the 1950s and the 1990s. The evolution of the exiles' memories and the MSI-exiles relationship throughout these decades has not yet been detailed; the available historical accounts of the exiles' associations are mostly written by insiders.⁸ Another factor to investigate, often overlooked, is the relationship between the Istrian-Dalmatian exiles and the repatriates from Italian colonies. As Pamela Ballinger notes, the former group received considerably more historiographic attention and more space in Italian memory politics.⁹

The reading of Andrew Demshuk's volume “The Lost German East: Forced Migration and the Politics of Memory, 1945–1970”¹⁰ suggested a comparison between the memory of the German expellees and the Italian exiles.¹¹ Demshuk looked at the Heimatvertriebene's diaries, travel reports, circular letters, and gatherings, investigating how they came to terms with the loss of their homeland. This process created a “Heimat¹² of memory” and a “Heimat transformed”: the majority of the expellees decided to “reside in memory”, renouncing the revanchist idea of a return to their land, already transformed into another place (this was the sensation of those travelling to the Polish

⁷ Stefano Lusa, ‘Gli italiani di Slovenia e Croazia: dalla crisi della Jugoslavia comunista alla prospettiva dell'integrazione europea’, in *La questione adriatica e l'allargamento dell'Unione europea*, ed. Franco Botta, Italo Garzia, and Pasquale Guaragnella (Milano, Italy: Franco Angeli, 2007), 63–87; Vivoda, *Quel lungo viaggio verso l'esilio*, 46–47; ‘Schengen, Anvgd: “Torna unita l'italianità adriatica”’, *La Voce del Popolo. Quotidiano dell'Istria e del Quarnero*, 13 December 2023, Website edition, <https://lavoce.hr/attualita/schengen-anvgd-torna-unita-litalianita-adriatica>.

⁸ Marino Micich, ‘Incontro all'esilio. L'associazionismo degli esuli istriani, fiumani e dalmati durante la seconda guerra mondiale e nei primi anni del dopoguerra (1943-1949)’, *Fiume. Rivista di studi adriatici* 31 (2015): 19–50; Spadaro, Vivoda, and Cosma, *Sintesi storica delle Associazioni istriane, fiumane e dalmate in Italia e delle Associazioni italiane nei territori ceduti dal 1947 a oggi*; some hints can be found in the anthropological studies on Trieste's exiles, see Ballinger, *History in Exile*; Pontiggia, *Storie nascoste. Antropologia e memoria dell'esodo istriano a Trieste*.

⁹ Ballinger, *The World Refugees Made*, 211–12.

¹⁰ Demshuk, *The Lost German East*.

¹¹ The comparison of these and two more groups was done by Patrizia Audenino, see Audenino, *La casa perduta*; a comparison between the German expelled and the French “pieds-noirs” returning from Algeria was the object of a collective volume, see Manuel Borutta and Jan C. Jansen, eds., *Vertriebene and Pieds-Noirs in Postwar Germany and France: Comparative Perspectives*, Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

¹² German for “homeland”.

Silesia)¹³ and irreparably lost. These findings are at odds with “previous analysis of expellee memory hampered in part by overdependence on the politicized viewpoint heavily published by expellee leaders”. It could be investigated whether this divergence exists in the Italian case. A further point of comparison can be seen in the reactions of the Heimatvertriebene and the Istrian-Dalmatian exiles, respectively, to the signature of the Warsaw Treaty in December 1970 (between the German Federal Republic and Poland)¹⁴ and the Osimo Treaty in November 1975 (between Italy and Yugoslavia). This comparison could contribute to the comparison between the Italian and German politics of memory.¹⁵

The Istrian-Dalmatian exiles saw their traumatic story of exile and loss finally recognised in the public sphere, thanks to the 2004 “Giorno del ricordo” law. Since then, a series of initiatives have promoted their memory; this series culminated in 2024 with the “Train of Remembrance” (“Treno del ricordo”), a mobile train-cars museum dedicated to the history of the Italian “eastern border”.¹⁶ The government-promoted initiative recalls the train journey of the exiles through the country; in October 2023, the parliament approved an update on the 2004 law further promoting the “remembrance travels” for students.¹⁷ The cultural significance of those initiatives and their similarity with other memorial practices can be the subject of another study.

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¹³ Demshuk, *The Lost German East*, 4; also see Cecilia Molesini, “‘We Should No Longer Sit on Packed Suitcases’: German Expellees’ Emotions in Post-War West Germany”, *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d’histoire*, 2023, 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13507486.2023.2239860>; Alessandra Vigo and Cecilia Molesini, ‘Re-Enacting Community Belonging through Emotions and Memories: German Expellees’ and Italian Repatriates’ Circular Letters’, in *Reimagining Mobilities across the Humanities* (Routledge, 2023), 110–22.

¹⁴ Demshuk, *The Lost German East*, 232–62.

¹⁵ Focardi, ‘Il passato conteso. Transizione politica e guerra della memoria in Italia dalla crisi della prima Repubblica ad oggi’; Sierp, *History, Memory, and Trans-European Identity*; Tommaso Speccher and Gianluca Falanga, ‘Commemorare vuol dire capire: come la Germania ricorda i suoi esuli’, *Valigia Blu* (blog), 14 September 2021, <https://www.valigiablublu.it/germania-storia-nazismo-esuli-memoria/>.

¹⁶ ‘Al via Il Treno Del Ricordo, in Memoria Dell’esodo Giuliano-Dalmata. Da Trieste a Taranto, 10-27 Febbraio 2024’, *Trenitalia*, 9 February 1947, <https://www.fsitaliane.it/content/fsitaliane/it/media/eventi/2024/2/9/treno-ricordo-esodo-giuliano-dalmata.html>.

¹⁷ Adriana De Conto, ‘Ddl foibe, via libera del Senato. La commozione di Menia: “Giorno storico, mai più negazionismo”’, *Il Secolo d’Italia*, 3 October 2023, <https://www.secoloditalia.it/2023/10/ddl-foibe-via-libera-del-senato-la-commozione-di-menia-giorno-storico-mai-piu-negazionismo/>.

the train journey of the exiles through the country.¹⁸ In October 2023, the parliament approved an update on the 2004 law further promoting “remembrance travels” for students.¹⁹ The cultural significance of those initiatives and their similarity with other memorial practices can be the subject of another study.

The memory of the Istrian-Dalmatian exiles, despite a relatively recent revival, is becoming more and more a memory of the descendants of the first generation of exiles every year. The “Toscana” completed its journeys seventy-seven years ago. This consideration does not make the topic of migrations in the Upper Adriatic a matter just for history. That borderland experienced once again the journey of refugees in recent decades, with the effect of the Yugoslav Wars (1991-2001) and the Balkan Route in the last decade. Trieste is currently a relevant point of transit in this migration flow.²⁰ The story of the modern migrants crossing the frontiers in the Upper Adriatic is quite distant from the story of the exiles, but some of the spaces are shared. The Alpe Adria hostel hosted Istrian-Dalmatian refugees, and between 2015 and 2016 hosted asylum seekers mostly from Afghanistan and Pakistan.²¹ Trieste’s Silos served as a precarious accommodation for the exiles who reached the city in the mid-20th century and still serves for this purpose with nowadays migrants.²²

¹⁸ ‘Al via Il Treno Del Ricordo, in Memoria Dell’esodo Giuliano-Dalmata. Da Trieste a Taranto, 10-27 Febbraio 2024’.

¹⁹ De Conto, ‘Ddl foibe, via libera del Senato. La commozione di Menia’.

²⁰ ‘A Trieste Il Sistema Di Accoglienza Si è Inceppato’, *Il Post*, 13 September 2023, <https://www.ilpost.it/2023/09/13/trieste-accoglienza-migranti-rota-balcanica/>.

²¹ Altin, ‘Museografie e memorie dei campi profughi istriani’, 230.

²² Elena Testi, ‘Tende, Migranti e Topi L’umanità Si è Fermata al Silos’, *Domani*, 21 February 2024.

Riassunto in italiano

L'oggetto della tesi è l'accoglienza degli esuli giuliano-dalmati in Italia, in particolare durante l'esodo organizzato da Pola dei primi mesi del 1947. Nella memoria degli esuli ci sono costanti riferimenti alla mancata accoglienza, se non aperta ostilità, che hanno dovuto affrontare nel momento dell'arrivo in Italia e in alcuni casi per tutta la vita. L'ostilità viene soprattutto imputata ai militanti del Partito Comunista Italiano, che tacciavano gli esuli di essere dei fascisti in fuga dalla Jugoslavia socialista. L'episodio più conosciuto è il cosiddetto "treno della vergogna", avvenuto il 18 febbraio 1947. In quel giorno, un treno con profughi da Pola avrebbe dovuto fermarsi nella stazione di Bologna durante il tragitto da Ancona a La Spezia. Nella memoria degli esuli, quella sosta per un pasto caldo non avvenne a causa della minaccia di sciopero da parte dei ferrovieri comunisti; a seconda delle versioni, ci fu anche un gruppo di manifestanti che insultò i profughi e tirò oggetti al treno. La ricostruzione di questo episodio è l'obiettivo della tesi, assieme alla sua contestualizzazione nel dibattito politico sull'esodo da Pola. Le fonti consultate sono i quotidiani dei primi mesi del 1947 e documenti di archivio dell'epoca, assieme alle fonti per la memoria come le testimonianze degli esuli e la pubblicistica delle associazioni degli esuli. La ricostruzione dell'episodio presenta varie incongruenze e una generale di fonti contemporanee. Altri episodi di solidarietà o mancata accoglienza dipingono un quadro più complesso, e viene messa in esame in particolar modo l'effettiva posizione dei comunisti di fronte all'esodo.

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