

**ARTICLE**

# National indeterminacies at the periphery of the Habsburg Monarchy: Nationalisms versus multi-ethnic identities in Fiume/Rijeka and Trieste, 1848–1867

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## Abstract

In the 1848–1867 period, the Habsburg Monarchy was shaken by the first waves of nationalism. Yet in the case of the Habsburg port cities of Fiume/Rijeka and Trieste, contended by several different opponents, Italian and Croatian nationalisms had to face centuries-long traditions of municipal autonomy. In both cities, municipalism and attachment to the House of Habsburg were particularly strong and were coupled with local urban identities that defied national forms of identifications, insofar as they were ethnically and linguistically hybrid. Nationalist activists sought to exploit ethnic and linguistic elements as markers of defined national identities, yet without widespread success. The final demise of the Habsburg Monarchy in 1918 has been generally taken as proof of the cogency of nationalist discourse, especially the Italian, in the region. However, the northern Adriatic rim points to the forcefulness of Habsburg multinationalism and the existence of ethnic hybridity, which provided effective bulwarks against nationalisms for decades.

## KEYWORDS

Fiume/Rijeka, Habsburg Monarchy, multilingualism, nationalism, Trieste

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

The north-eastern Adriatic, or Julian Region, has been the bone of contention of Italian and Slavic nationalists from the end of the 19th century and throughout the 20th. During the Second World War, the region, today divided between Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia, witnessed innumerable deaths as a result of what has been perceived as ethno-national strife, often concomitant with Fascist or Communist ideology (see Cattaruzza, 2011; Sluga, 1996). To this day, the northern Adriatic rim is widely seen as a border region with clear-cut national and ethnic distinctions, which have been superimposed on the 19th century. Yet, as Ballinger (2011: 56) emphasized, historiography has centred on “a reductive view of the Adriatic that sees it principally through the narrow prism of competing Italian and Slavic nationalist claims,” while, as Ivetic (2019: 7) illustrated, the *homo adriaticus* category is “a *forma mentis* and a paradigm in the name of cultural openness,” which with its ebb and flow has characterized the history of the Adriatic through time.

Here, on the geographical peripheries of the Habsburg Monarchy yet at the centre of its economy and imperial imaginations, up until the Great War national identities and allegiances were not the rule, similar to elsewhere in the Monarchy (see, for example, Cohen, 1981; Sondhaus, 1990; King, 2002; Kirchner-Reill, 2012; Judson, 2016). Language practices in the Habsburg Adriatic are indicative of forms of identifications that defied modern national categorizations. These are reflected in different uses of literary and vernacular languages, bearing directly on local identities, which were not necessarily Italian or Slavic, but often hybrid, since intermarriage was frequent and languages featured steady contamination. Widespread use of literary Italian, on the one hand, and of spoken Venetian (with its Triestine and Fiuman versions), on the other, has been taken by historians as evidence for assimilation to the idea of an Italian culture of the numerous people who used either language (even studies that are steeped in the appreciation of Adriatic multinationalism are premised on this assumption; see, for example, Pupo, 2019: 9).

Yet the histories and identities of the two main cities of the region, Trieste and Fiume/Rijeka, did not follow a process of gradual integration into the Italian nation state.<sup>1</sup> As Klingler (2018: 12) observed, while Italian historiography, “steeped in Romanity, municipalism, and Italianness,” was limiting for the understanding of Trieste's history, it was even more so for the history of Fiume. For its part, “Jugoslav [historiography] has actually cancelled the history of Fiume, reducing it to a denationalized port (Klingler, 2018: 12).” Trieste and Fiume were both early Austrian acquisitions, experiencing only very brief spells of Venetian rule, and remained part of the Habsburg Monarchy until 1918 (Kramer, 1954: 90; Corsini, 1980). While Trieste had spontaneously joined the House of Habsburg in 1382 in order to eschew Venetian ambitions over the eastern Adriatic (Vivante, 1984 [1912]; Sondhaus, 1994: 669; Cole, 2014: 218), Fiume had been united to Austria since 1465 and in 1776 was granted to Hungary by Maria Theresa as a *corpus separatum*, that is autonomous entity, of the Hungarian crown, retaining the municipal privileges that it had been enjoying for centuries (Evans, 2006: 28).

Nevertheless, given Venetian hegemony over the Adriatic and the eastern Mediterranean, their populations had adopted a Venetian dialect as their *lingua franca*, on which later irredentist claims of the cities' Italian character rested (Cole, 2014: 218–220).<sup>2</sup> However, use of Italian implied neither adoption of Italian culture nor of Italian national sentiments, at least for the simple reason, too often overlooked, that an Italian national culture had still to come into existence after Italian unification (see De Mauro, 1963; Duggan, 2007). On the contrary, its use reflected the nature of *linguae francae*, which, as Huntington (1996: 61) discussed, are “a way of coping with linguistic and cultural differences, not a way of eliminating them. [They are] a tool for communication not a source of identity and community.” While the local *lingua franca* did not materialize into national identifications until the end of the 19th century, it was instrumental for channelling ethnic and cultural diversity into the Triestine and Fiuman hybrid milieu, which in the process assumed Latin, Slavic, and Germanic features.

Yet studies of 19th-century Trieste are still steeped in its portrayal as a culturally Italian city in which the bourgeoisie, precisely because it used Italian as its linguistic medium, was Italian, notwithstanding limited support for Italian nationalism which derived from a “calculated strategy,” as Millo (2007: 74) put it (for other similar approaches, see Ara, 1994; Capano, 2018). This misapprehension rests on what Judson (2014: 62) has described as the

historiographical belief in the existence of “language-based cultures ... [that] produced different national societies in the twentieth century.” As the Habsburg Adriatic shows, the process was not so straightforward, all the more so since the various forms of “national indifference” described by Zahra (2010), that is, bilingualism, intermarriage, and localism, to name but a few, were particularly cogent in the region. The histories of both cities, claimed by Italian and Slavic nationalists, are steeped in the historiographical tradition which Kömer (2017: 272) has described as “based on the teleological assumption, which accepts national unification as the inevitable outcome of a predefined historical process.” To the contrary, this study seeks to explore the dynamics whereby nationalist discourses emerged in a multi-ethnic region where ethnic hybridity and inter-ethnic coexistence had been in place for centuries.

The discussion centres on ethnic hybridity and language practices in the Habsburg Adriatic in the face of emerging nationalisms, by looking at the cases of Fiume and Trieste from 1848 until the 1860s, the two port cities of the Hungarian and Austrian parts of the Habsburg Monarchy, respectively. The aim is to shed light on the vigour of local and regional identities, often hybrid, in synthesizing Slavic and Latin cultural and linguistic elements as opposed to promoting novel national identities endorsed by nationalist publicists and activists. The interdisciplinary approach is rooted in historical research and anthropological concerns in its focus on multi-ethnic coexistence and multilingualism as lasting bulwarks against nationalist ideologies. The analysis first focusses on the language question in Fiume amid the 20-year long Croatian occupation of the city, starting in 1848, and later Fiuman attempts to restore Hungarian protection, for which the retention of Italian as the official municipal language was fundamental in order to emphasize Fiuman distinctiveness from the Croatian hinterland. The discussion then examines early Italian nationalist propaganda in nearby Trieste in 1848 and the implications of the language question in the 1850s, which, paradoxically, undermined the cogency of Italian nationalists' claims.

While the idea of an Italian culture especially in the Habsburg Adriatic is a contested notion, the same does not apply to the Croatian. A “Croatian political nation” constituted by the feudal aristocracy of Slavonia ruling over a homogenous Catholic Slavic population that shared in the use of the Croatian *kajkavian* dialect had existed under Hungarian patronage as part of the Habsburg Monarchy since 1527 (Gross, 1981). It had spanned Slavonia, the area of Zagreb and the Croatian Littoral, that is the Lika region north of Zara/Zadar, coinciding *grosso modo*, and with the exception of Istria and Dalmatia, with present-day Croatia. Also, the notion of a Croatian national state still under Habsburg rule but free from Hungarian encroachments had emerged amongst Croatian elites in the late 18th century as part of the Illyrian movement (Drakulic, 2008: 540). As coeval documents show, a distinction between the various Catholic South Slavs into Croats proper, Slavic Dalmatians, and Slovenes had been in place at least since the late 18th century (Carmichael, 1996), although Italian sources tended to refer to these through the umbrella term “Slavs.” In Croatia, Slavonia and the Kvarner, the language spoken was Croatian, although in the Kvarner the dialect resembled Slavic-Dalmatian, which was spoken as far south as Dubrovnik and had significant Venetian influences, as local administrators noted (Municipal delegations of the Kvarner 1850). Consequently, while referring to “Italian” per se can be misleading (also in view of the similar propaganda unleashed by irredentists, D’Annunzio’s legionnaires, and Fascists), in the Fiuman context, to speak of “Croatian” does not imply essentialist notions of ethnicity, which nonetheless emerge in historiographical efforts to legitimize the Croatian incorporation of Dalmatia (see, for example, Drakulic, 2008; Gross, 1979). This article is steeped in the deconstruction of Italian nationalist narratives, but neither the Slovene, since in Trieste Slovene nationalism was a later development in response to Italian national rhetoric, nor the Croatian, given the different context of Dalmatia with respect to the Fiuman.

## 2 | FIUME OR RIJEKA? THE CITY OF ITALIAN-SPEAKING CROATS

In 1867, Hungarian journalist Adolf Sternberg, who had first visited Fiume before 1848, marvelled at the fact that Fiuman Hungarian patriotism had become renowned in Hungary during the 20-year period that separated him from his first visit to the port city. Although the “language, customs, and lifestyle [in Fiume] were foreign [to him],” he commented with delight that “love for the common fatherland had developed to a superlative degree”

(Sternberg, 1867). At the same time, Sternberg was surprised to notice the difference between Fiume proper and its outskirts to the north-east, beyond the river Rječina. He attributed the difference to the fact that this was “the Croatian part of Fiume, and the difference [did] not appear only in the different language but also due to a different architecture of the houses [and] the layout of its city quarters,” thus proving a significant Slavic presence there (Sternberg, 1867). Although he acknowledged the presence of Slavs in general on the coast, he did not refrain from calling the gulf of Kvarner—the gulf separating Istria from Dalmatia, on whose northernmost point Fiume is located—“the Hungarian sea” (Sternberg, 1867), which did not imply ethnic affiliation but allegiance to a multi-ethnic Kingdom of Hungary.

Reminiscing about the military band playing the Hungarian Rákóczy march in Fiume, he concluded his piece manifesting his dream of “all the parts of the Kingdom from the Carpathians to the Adriatic” singing the Hungarian anthem irrespective of their language (Sternberg, 1867). Such hope seems contradictory insofar as it does not chime with the attempts at Magyarization of the Hungarian part of the Habsburg Monarchy endorsed by central authorities in Budapest, and thus the imposition of the Hungarian language on other nationalities. However, the Fiuman context highlights the complexity of multi-ethnic relations also in the Hungarian half of the Monarchy, which “have too often been reduced to sterile debates over the campaign of linguistic Hungarianization waged by the Hungarian state and its local officials” (Nemes, 2012: 29–30). In Fiume, support for Hungary implied a guarantee for the preservation of the city’s autonomy as *corpus separatum* and special status as free port in the face of Croatian aims over the city. Although these tributes of loyalty that Fiumans paid to their Hungarian protectors were sarcastically ridiculed by Croats (see, for example, *Il Cittadino*, 1867: 30–31), local Hungarian sentiments embodied the reality of allegiances, naturally out of interest, beyond national affiliations.

An anonymous Fiuman supporting annexation to Croatia expressed his consternation at his fellow citizens’ enthusiastic support for Hungary. He did so in the *Lettere di un Fiumano sulla questione di Fiume* (A Fiuman’s letters on the question of Fiume), published by the Triestine paper *Il Cittadino*, which was in favour of the Italian annexation of Trieste and strived to uphold “the principle of nationality also for Fiume” (*Il Cittadino*, 1867: 27), thus showing support for the attachment of the latter to Croatia, since it was not the *Ausgleich*, or Austro-Hungarian compromise of 1867, but the later Croatian-Hungarian settlement of 1868 that resolved the question in favour of Hungary and Fiuman autonomism. In this public letter aimed at the Italian-speaking audience of the Littoral, the anonymous Fiuman author presented arguments for the annexation of Fiume to Croatia, as the pre-eminent question was “the territorial integrity of the [Croatian] kingdom” (*Il Cittadino*, 1867: 21; see also Sirotković, 1975). Although arguing that compared to Hungarian rule union with Croatia would be a better means to guarantee Fiuman autonomy, at the same time he put forward the idea that Fiume’s autonomy had to give way to union with Croatia, on the ground that “autonomy of a province, even if complete and real, must cede to the principle of nationality” (*Il Cittadino*, 1867: 6). For, “nobody can deny the fact that Fiume,” so the author reiterated, “had been Liburnic land, Slavic, and therefore Croatian land” (*Il Cittadino*, 1867: 19).

He did concede that in Fiume, there were Italian families, contributing to about a thousand people of the total population of the city. Yet they had settled there from elsewhere and therefore, according to him, the adoption of the Italian language in Fiume would be an imposition “on the majority of Fiumans, who [were] of Croatian nationality, preventing them from using their mother-tongue” (*Il Cittadino*, 1867: 19). As evidence for this, the author cited the fact that throughout the city, even imprecations against the Croatian state were voiced in Croatian, “since [Fiumans did] not know any other language” (*Il Cittadino*, 1867: 9). The very same song that stated that Fiume was Hungarian and that Croats should leave the city was paradoxically chanted in Croatian, as it recited “Reka je majarska” (*Il Cittadino*, 1867: 9–10), that is “Fiume is Hungarian,” *Reka* standing for the Slavic version of Fiume before the standardization of the name in *Rijeka*. Given that Fiumans were of Slavonic stock, the author asserted that “union with Croatia would be a return to the motherland” (*Il Cittadino*, 1867: 23). The appeal exercised by Italian culture was consequently reduced to the regional commercial ties with the Italian peninsula, since Fiume was “a purely mercantile city, which,” as the author argued, “because of its situation, conduct[ed] the majority of its trade with nearby Italy – enticed by the material gains ensuing from the latter” (*Il Cittadino*, 1867: 11). As a consequence,

Fiume, through “several Italian families that had settled [there], learnt the customs of the cultured and civilized Italians” (*Il Cittadino*, 1867: 11). Therefore, “that attachment to one’s own nation, which,” in line with nationalist ideology, he maintained, “form[ed] the cornerstone of every political development, amongst the Fiumans had gradually disappeared” (*Il Cittadino*, 1867: 11).

He mocked Fiumans, who “at public gatherings, show[ed] up wearing the Hungarian national dress, but apart from the word *eljen* [that is ‘to pay’], [did] not understand a jot of the Hungarian language” (*Il Cittadino*, 1867: 30–31), thus implying that Fiuman attachment to Budapest was based merely on economic considerations. He could not understand “how Fiumans [could] show such enthusiasm for Hungary, whose land ... have never seen, with whose people they have no relationship, if rare, and whose language is as unknown to them as Chinese” (*Il Cittadino*, 1867: 30–31). He also wondered what reasons there were for opposing union with Croatia and supporting instead that with Hungary, questioning what he defined as Fiume’s “illusory municipal autonomy” (*Il Cittadino*, 1867: 5). The author could not approve of the position of Fiuman autonomists, insofar as, “they believe[d] that the most appropriate means to preserve autonomy [was] to yield to the domination of a *foreign nation*” (*Il Cittadino*, 1867: 6). He even stated that if the upholders of Fiume’s autonomy “had been sincere and fair, if someone had saddled themselves with the task of educating the less intelligent people, if the authorities ... had been able to make the nation respected and instil a sense of nationality in the Fiumans, [he was] convinced that the situation of Fiume would now be completely different from the present one” (*Il Cittadino*, 1867: 14). For, according to him, Fiumans had “sacrificed the sentiment of nationality” to material interests (*Il Cittadino*, 1867: 21).

Yet the events of 1848 appeared to justify local wariness of identifying with the Croatian nation. With the Croat takeover of the city and the removal of the Hungarian administration, Jelačić, Ban of Croatia, aimed at integrating the port city within the Kingdom of Croatia. To this end, flags sporting the Slavic tricolour were waved throughout the city on November 10, 1848, when the suppression of the Viennese revolution was celebrated in Fiume with the display of the national colours of the South Slavs, with “the red, white, and blue flag on the municipal banner,” as ordered by the Ban (*Telegrafo della Sera*, 1848). The display of the Slavic colours was seen as a token of Slavic support for the cause of Habsburg absolutism, “whose existence South Slavs had been drawn to support and prolong,” against the Hungarians, and, at the same time, as evidence for the sympathies of the city of Fiume for the Slavic cause, which were considered as “natural, by virtue of its geographical position and ethnic affinity” (*Telegrafo della Sera*, 1848). Furthermore, 2 months earlier, on September 14, the Ban had the first Croatian National Congress held in Fiume, with the overt aim of asserting the Croatian identity of the city (*Telegrafo della Sera*, 1848).

However, even the main Slavic paper of Dubrovnik, *L’Avvenire*, which, although published in Italian, was premised on its support of the unification of Dalmatia with Croatia, recounted that Fiume had unwillingly followed the Croatian cause (for the Dalmatian press, see Švoger, 2006). As a contributor to *L’Avvenire* maintained, all the eastern Adriatic shores were Slavic. According to him, it was not true that “the coasts [of Istria were] inhabited by Italian people” (*L’Avvenire*, 1849: 117). “On all the coast,” so he maintained, “from the river Isonzo to Albania, the Slavic race exclusively lives, with the exception of a few families that are really Italian” (*L’Avvenire*, 1849: 117). Yet the only two cities that could not be considered entirely Slavic were Trieste and Fiume. While “Trieste [did] not have any nationality, because all nationalities live[d] there and all languages [we]re spoken,” the contributor admitted that “Fiume had been forced to join the Croatian cause” (*L’Avvenire*, 1849: 117).

As a Fiuman newspaper explained, in the gulf of Kvarner, the clash between Croatia and Hungary in 1848 had been superimposed on local rivalries between Bakar and Fiume over the status as principal port of the region (*L’Eco di Fiume*, 1857). The nearby town of Bakar, about 10 miles to the south-east of Fiume, retained some relevance thanks to its shipyards. Yet it had not been granted the same privileges as Fiume and Trieste. The *Avvenire* (1849: 117) even described Bakar as “a hotbed of Croatian sentiments.” As a matter of fact, the people of Bakar had been active in the Croatian occupation of Fiume in 1848 (*Telegrafo della Sera*, 1848). The population of Fiume was pressured to join the Croatian cause by the National Guard of Bakar (*L’Eco di Fiume*, 1857), which constituted the vanguard of the Croatian troops that took possession of Fiume, as recalled by Giacich (1861), a Fiuman physician active in local politics and opposed to Croatian encroachments in his city. The Fiuman observer described them as a

rubble of peasants from nearby villages of the interior, which he portrayed as “a multitude of villagers wearing red caps,” together with the National Guard of Bakar, “armed in various and strange ways (Giacich, 1861).” The discomfited Giacich (1861) recalled the distant times when these very same people “humble and industrious, would obtain their livelihood in [that] very square, which they [now] invaded with so much insecurity but also ... insolent arrogance.”

About a decade after the events of 1848, a correspondent, who ran a monthly column on local questions, entitled *Vagabondo fiumano* (Fiuman wanderer), joined by other fellow citizens, visited an inn in Bakar where he found a portrait of the inn-keeper, armed with a rifle and pistols, carrying an inscription which read “the leader of the National Guard of Bakar at the occupation of Fiume on 30 August 1848” (*L'Eco di Fiume*, 1857: 40). The view of the painting annoyed the Fiuman, as, according to him, it perpetuated “the unhappy municipal challenges between the two sister cities” (*L'Eco di Fiume*, 1857: 40). The rivalry had been exacerbated by what he dismissively termed recent “divergencies of opinion over the planning of a Croatian railway,” since both cities were amongst its possible terminals. The public exhibition of the painting was perceived by the Fiuman as an offence to the neighbouring Fiumans as well as an obstacle to the future “long desired harmony” (*L'Eco di Fiume*, 1857: 40). Consequently, the fact that the people of Bakar proved susceptible to Croatian nationalist stirrings might well point to the constructed nature of nationalism as originating in vested interests rooted in local rivalries.

Allegedly, Croatian authorities which had severed Fiume's ties with Hungary in 1848 began implementing measures aimed at suppressing the city's autonomy after the relative calm of the 1850s, for which the introduction of Croatian in schools and the administration was given as proof (Giacich, 1861). In early February 1861, the appointment as municipal commissar of a man who had become unpopular in town for his ambiguous behaviour of 1848, which led to the removal of Hungarian authorities and the incorporation of Fiume to Croatia, had caused people to take to the streets (Giacich, 1861). They asked for the appointment of another man who was considered more fit for service. The Croatian Ban acceded to the requests and provisionally had certain Giovanni Martini appointed. Lord Bloomfield (National Archives, 1861), British ambassador at Vienna, reported that “the incident at Fiume may be the signal for other similar proceedings,” pointing to its unsettling novelty for the Monarchy as a sign of incipient widespread dissatisfaction with the Vienna authorities, due to their inability to bind Croats to the decrees sanctioning the rights pertaining to the various nationalities of the Monarchy. Croats were accused of defying these by supposedly not respecting the language and culture of Fiume through the introduction of Croatian in the city's public life. At the same time, while denying allegations of Italian leanings, Giacich (1861) caustically wondered whether “these were the first steps that Croatian wisdom took to approach Fiumans ... [and whether] they were coherent with the promise made to [nearby] Dalmatians to respect the Italian language.”

If the preservation of Fiuman autonomy and municipal privileges were premised on the conservation of the Italian language, which Hungary was said to have guaranteed notwithstanding its policies centred on the Magyarization of the other Hungarian lands, accusations of Fiuman support for Garibaldi and a future Italian state were unfounded and had been invented in order “to exert rigour and pressures to [the autonomists'] detriment” (Giacich, 1862: 5). The introduction of Croatian in the local administration and education were seen as a threat by that part of the urban elite that professed Italian not only as its own language but also as the medium of the entire city. However, reliance on newspapers should not lead us to believe in the trope of an Italian Fiume subjected to Croatian oppression, a perspective that would chime with the widespread nationalist Italian rhetoric of 1919 (see, for example, *Per il Diritto italico di Fiume*, 1919; *Fiume: The Rights and Duties of Italy*, 1920, which were drafted and signed by hundreds of professors and students of the universities of Bologna and Rome, respectively). Although several of the urban administrators during the 20-year period of Croatian rule did remain culturally, if not originally, Italian, they still represented a minority. As a matter of fact, well into the previous decade, the cultural identity of the city still appeared to be unspecified even in the eyes of upholders of the Italian language. Not only foreign observers but also local opponents of Croatian rule concurred that the city was in fact Slavic and not intrinsically Italian, contrary to Italian nationalists' later conjectures.

Writing about the supposed rift within the city into opposing parties as exposed by a correspondent of the Trieste paper *Il Cittadino*, which had already shown support for the Croatian annexation of Fiume, Ludwig von Südenhorst, chief editor of the newly born *Gazzetta di Fiume*, argued that if there was a second party besides the autonomist, the latter being loyal to Hungary, there was the attempt “to form it out of those employees who, having arrived after 1848, intruded in the administrative territory of Fiume, but this [would] never have the right to be called a Fiuman party, as in this there were only Croatian employees come from outside and not Fiuman citizens” (*Gazzetta di Fiume*, 1867b: 50). Such was the conviction of the chief editor who directed the newly born paper, heir to the previous *Gazzetta di Fiume*, the last political paper to be shut down by Croatian authorities in 1861 (*Gazzetta di Fiume*, 1867a), which its editorial board had defined as “decidedly municipal, autonomist, and supporting civic aspirations” (Giacich, 1861).

It was in this Fiuman context that Charles Laver, who became British consul at Trieste in 1867, set a considerable part of his novel “That Boy of Norcott’s.” The protagonist’s adventures took place within the commercial class of the city, amongst leading traders and their employees. The picture that is offered is one of a Slavic-German world whose members nonetheless identified as “Fiumani” (in Italian in the text) (Laver, 1869). Although a fictional account, the novel appeared to be in line with previous descriptions of the urban environment. During his travels in the eastern Adriatic in 1848, Andrew Archibald Paton, who would become British consul at Dubrovnik in 1862, briefly stopped at Fiume. There, he observed that the population of the city spoke Italian and Slavic indifferently and that nowhere “is the great question between the Magyar and Slavic nationalities discussed with more complete impartiality than at Fiume; for if the natives of this city [were] Slavs by national sympathy, their material interests [were] much dependent on the Magyars” (Paton, 1849: 211–212). His description of Fiume’s population, numerically smaller and still less affected by immigration than the Triestine, was echoed a decade later by Giacich in the *Almanacco Fiumano*, a periodical published in Italian from 1857 to 1860.

Here, Giacich (1860: 41) wrote that “with the exception of immigrations, [Fiumans were] indeed of Slavic origin and stock,” yet Italian was their language. He presented his city as having “special conditions” that made it necessary to conciliate “official decrees, the various relations between the neighbouring peoples, trade, the various businesses, and the navy” (Giacich, 1860: 41). This necessity made it foremost “to promote, for the moment at least, the cultivation of three languages: the Slavic, the Italian and also the German” (Giacich, 1860: 41). The choice of teaching these three languages in the context of Fiume had to be in line with their respective relevance in relation to the benefit for the city and the obligations towards the different nationalities. These obligations were, he maintained, “not to be neglected or even less stifled” (Giacich, 1860: 42). To confirm that Italian was not indigenous to the city, he stated that “if there is a strong interest in the Italian language, the desire to obtain the means for its study should be similarly strong; quite the contrary, its development remains little and imperfect, like that of an exotic plant that does not adapt well to a foreign land” (Giacich, 1860: 42). The weakness of the endeavours made to diffuse the Italian language within the local population had led to a situation in which

“after centuries, neither a pure language nor a distinct dialect was attained to, while the Slavic language maintains its own characteristic features that the unfolding of polyglottism could not disperse ... Notwithstanding such unfavourable conditions, the Slavic language persists, as there are no neighbourhoods, lands or naturalized families where it is more or less known or used. The same does not apply to Italian, since, lacking a good, specific, old school, one immediately detects in dialogues and writings a language that smacks of something different to Italian; one notes phrases, accents, and the syntax of Slavic origin and character with, sometimes, German notes” (Giacich, 1860: 42).

Although in Fiume and surrounding towns, “people, with the exception of immigration, are clearly of Slavic origin and race,” he also maintained that “nevertheless, extensive use is made of the Italian language, and in some places of the vernacular [that is Venetian], since time immemorial” (Giacich, 1860: 43). This phenomenon was the reason for

the use of Italian “in courts, theatres, in the majority of written texts and correspondences ... as if it was one's own language, while the Slavic, mother-tongue of many, [was] disregarded” (Giacich, 1860: 43). Yet, the author lamented, Italian was not taught satisfactorily in the schools of Fiume. Since language teachers of the multi-national Empire were required to know two languages, there were no native Italians who knew both German and Slavic, “but a lot of Germans and Slavs with some knowledge of Italian” (Giacich, 1860: 45–46). Giacich ended his piece by taking Trieste as the example to follow. There, schools had hired native Italian teachers hailing from the Italian peninsula, who were thus more suitable for the instruction of the language, “although” Giacich argued, “in that town, claimed by many as Italian, [the measure] should not have appeared that necessary” (Giacich, 1860: 47). His concluding remarks emphasized an even greater need for similar measures in Fiume, since, compared to Triestines, Fiumans, he discussed, “[were] farther from Italy, of different stock to it, and more heterogeneous than the Italian elements” (Giacich, 1860: 47). Through Giacich's piece, we see Fiumans' perceptions of Trieste as reference point for Fiume, a city with similar conditions and which did not appear as intrinsically Italian. Rather, Italian culture had to be transplanted also to Trieste from the Italian peninsula.

By 1867, the local gymnasium had been Croatian for 6 years, during which the Italian language was not taught publicly (*Gazzetta di Fiume*, 1867c: 54). We see, thus, the autonomists' emphasis on their right to use the Italian language not as a token of their Italian nationality, or originating from their desire to join the newly formed Kingdom of Italy after 1861, but as an unmistakable feature of the uniqueness of the city of Fiume amidst other Croatian cities. Knowledge of Italian was not the premise for an Italian national identity of the city. Actually, as the local paper *Gazzetta di Fiume* (1867c: 54) noted, the neglect of instruction in Italian had meant pupils' grasp of the language insufficient for work, all the more so since in Fiume “in any branch of activity they were to be employed, they [had] to use largely that language.” Eventually, the paper argued, Fiumans would be forced to “call foreign employees from Dalmatia or Italy for local needs” (1867c: 54), thus also alluding to the fact that in Dalmatia the Italian language was not imperilled. In the specific Fiuman context, the systematic adoption of Italian as defining local identity was part and parcel of the attempt of the commercial and intellectual elites to set the city apart from the Croatian hinterland and thus assert cultural reasons, based on language, for its economic distinctiveness (see endnote 2).

### 3 | THE ETHNIC AMORPHOUSNESS OF TRIESTE AND THE NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITIES

If in Fiume the active choice to retain the Italian language served as a marker of the municipal specificity and historical autonomy of the city, notwithstanding the overwhelming Slavic-speaking majority of the population, some upholders of the Italian language in Trieste—in the face of the perceived Slovene and German pressure—used arguments that set Trieste into the context of the Venetian revolution of 1848 and a future Italian nation, thus promoting Italian nationhood against Habsburg rule, perceived as foreign, and going beyond the endorsement of Triestine autonomy. On March 23, 1848, Giovanni Orlandini, former editor of the local paper *La Favilla*, which had previously advocated multi-ethnic coexistence, led an assault on the government palace, in the name of an “Italian Trieste” (Kirchner-Reill, 2012: 175–176). Yet the raid resulted in a brief riot that was soon quelled by the joint effort of the *Landwehr* (territorial militia) and Trieste National Guard, under participation of parts of the wider populace (see Kirchner-Reill, 2012: 176). Although Orlandini's ideas were not yet popular in Trieste, they were harbingers of the irredentist discourse reintroduced in 1861 by Pacifico Valussi, another former editor of *La Favilla*, and reinvigorated with the repetition of similar arguments in the following decades by irredentists. His rhetoric has been deemed by Italian historiography as proof of the inherently Italian character of the city, which material interests prevented from spreading across wider sections of the population (see page 3). Hence Orlandini's relevance, insofar as he represents, together with fellow journalist Francesco Dall'Ongaro, the first case of local irredentist agitation.

In the aftermath of his defeat, Orlandini issued a manifesto to the Venetians, who had just succeeded in temporarily seceding from Habsburg rule, in which he explained the failure of the insurrection in Trieste. Venetian



revolutionaries had expressed their belief that Trieste had served the Austrian cause (Vivante, 1984 [1912]: 32–33). Orlandini (1848) presented himself as “Triestine by birth, and therefore Italian,” thus appearing to speak and act on behalf of the entirety of Italian-speaking Triestines, who were, according to him, the real Triestines. Those who did not comply with his wishes were targeted as traitors and non-Triestines, claiming that “the Triestine people [were] Italian” (Orlandini, 1848). Similarly, Dall’Ongaro (1848) reiterated that “the Triestine people [were] an Italian people,” while “Slavs live[d] only on the outskirts.” What then of the thousands of Slovenes and other Slavs, the Greeks and Jews, who were Triestines, being autochthonous or having migrated to the city, like several Italian speakers themselves? Orlandini (1848) claimed that the failed Triestine revolution had made throughout Venice “a bleak impression regarding the national sentiments of the Triestine people,” which, according to him, was an inaccurate picture, since he claimed that the governor of the Littoral “had money distributed to some idlers with whom all the royal employees, spies, and some Austrian lordlings domiciled in Trieste joined forces.”

Although the ideal of the Italian nation went alongside that of the resurrection of the old Venetian republic, insofar as he advocated “the absolute freedom of Trieste from *any rule*, its brotherhood with the Republic of Venice, with unfortunate Istria, and the valiant Dalmatians” (Orlandini, 1848), the fundamental Slavic component of Istria and Dalmatia was altogether excluded and dismissed. Orlandini (1848) concluded his invocation to Venice hoping that “these facts [would] make known to ... Venetians that the sentiments of the Triestine people are Italian, that with tears of joy the news of [Venice’s] regeneration were greeted, and that that people were led astray for a moment by false insinuations and its wretched part was bought by monetary corruption,” ending the manifesto with “Hail S. Marco, Hail the Republic, Hail Italy, Hail Trieste.” A few days later, some Triestines involved in Orlandini’s movement beseeched Venetians to empathize with them since they “could not, unfortunately, proclaim [their] redeemed nationality,” providing one of the first instances of “redemption” narrative in what would be later addressed as the “terre irredente” (unredeemed lands) of the Adriatic rim (Triestini, 1848).

In Dall’Ongaro’s case too, resentment against Austrian rule proved stronger than the idea of a shared sense of identity across the Adriatic, which he had previously endorsed (see Kirchner-Reill, 2012). Notwithstanding Habsburg rule, which he described as steeped in “the unhappy practice of Germanizing [the Triestine] people,” he claimed that “Trieste remain[ed] Italian” (Dall’Ongaro, 1848), ignoring the fact that only 40% of households had surnames originating in the Italian peninsula, as the census of the population of Trieste (1850) would soon show. At the same, he controversially added: “Triestines, Italy does not need you. Italy has two ports, one on the Mediterranean and one on the Adriatic ... Will you prefer to be, as you already were, the humble servants of Austria with the advantage of becoming the Hamburg of the Adriatic? Here is the destiny the Italy harboured for you. Italian papers ... already wished you this: Italian arms will help you achieve it, glad ... to repel the common oppressor out of domains that are not his.” And, again, Dall’Ongaro reiterated: “People of Trieste, it is not time yet. We do not want justifications or excuses” for the failure of the Italian revolution there, testifying to the fact that purported sentiments of Italianness and the wish to forsake Austria had not caught on throughout the city, but were the preserve of few activists, however persistent. He concluded the proclamation with “Hail Trieste, Hanseatic city! Hail the Hamburg of the Mediterranean!” when a few lines above he had criticized such cosmopolitan identity which he deemed to have been imposed on Trieste by its Germanic oppressor, thus suggesting that his cosmopolitan and mercantilist project for Trieste as capital of a multinational Adriatic had come to falter in the face of his new commitment to the Italian national cause (see Kirchner-Reill, 2012: 113–114).

In the same months, Pietro Kandler (1848), local historian of Istrian and Triestine antiquities, backed the institution of provincial diets for Trieste and Istria to be held in what he considered the main language of the region, namely, Italian, something that he did not foresee would cause problems amongst different nationalities. Yet desire for autonomy did not imply secessionist projects or a possible union with a yet to be formed Italy (Sondhaus, 1994: 674). Kandler’s support of autonomy for the north-eastern Adriatic did not prevent him from considering patriotism in Trieste as equal to being a “true” Triestine and Austrian (see Kandler 1848: 180; Rumpler, 1997: 295). Kandler was fully aware of Trieste’s pre-eminent role in Adriatic trade as a city dominated by the Italian language. However, use of Italian was only a cultural aspect resulting from a cosmopolitan arrangement that did not bind Trieste to the Italian

peninsula. Kandler was firm in his belief that Trieste was Austrian. Nevertheless, although Trieste's Littoral was "Austrian Littoral, to merge it all in the German language [was] impossible" (Kandler 1848: 179). To change the language relations in the Littoral, so that to give a prominent role to the German language, would alienate the rest of the population and undermine the interests of the Monarchy. As in the past, in the recent events, Trieste had not sided against the dynasty. In March 1848, "all the eastern shore of the Adriatic followed Trieste's destiny," but things would change if the language of the city was suppressed, as it was likely to happen in the case of a republican Germanic Confederation replacing Habsburg rule in the city, which would irreparably transform the nature of the city and the whole eastern Adriatic (Kandler 1848: 180). The premise for Trieste's prosperity was its position as "province of transition between the Adriatic and the Mediterranean with the provinces of the interior" (Kandler 1848: 180). If such transition was sought outside Trieste, negative consequences would follow not only for the city but also for the Empire. The existence of different linguistic groups had to be preserved, he argued, since this preservation of diversity was "necessary in countries of transition [and] ... in a sea-port" (Kandler 1848: 180).

Although in favour of the Italian language as the main medium of cross-cultural communication for Trieste, Kandler and Mauroner did not intend to eradicate the other cultures and nationalities of the city. An anonymous contributor to the official bulletin of the Trieste National Guard went even further in defining the nationality of Trieste. Whilst some had defined it Slav, German, or Italian, the nationality of Trieste, so the contributor discussed, was cosmopolitan (*La Guardia Nazionale*, 1848). If nationality were to be defined by language, "then, as a consequence, since in Trieste Italian, French, English, German, Illyrian or Slavic, Turkish, Arabic, etc. etc. [were] spoken ... and since Trieste has a port whose waters are part and parcel of all the earth - it results that the nationality of Trieste is cosmopolitan" (*La Guardia Nazionale*, 1848). The contributor enumerated the customs and habits of the city that distinguished it from the cities of the rest of Europe. Triestines are "English, because [they] eat *roast-beef*, French because [they] follow French fads and sometimes get drunk with champagne, German because [they] drink beer and among [them] the *Kaiserkipfel* were introduced, ... Slavs as [their] peasants are Slavs" (*La Guardia Nazionale*, 1848). Therefore, Trieste's position as a civilizational crossroad had moulded the city into a cosmopolis. However, the anonymous contributor was fully aware of the steadfast opposition of some who intended "to divide the world as they wish, as if it were an orange, with the purpose of retaining the juiciest slices for themselves" (*La Guardia Nazionale*, 1848). These concluding lines to the excerpt are telling of the situation of the city in 1848, in which nationalism had already emerged but was still seen as the preserve of few men who pursued their own specific interests through the espousal of nationalist ideals, an understanding of the incipient phenomenon of nationalism that mirrors Stefan Zweig's (1943) and the nuanced present-day recent accounts of nationalism in the Monarchy (see, for example, Judson, 2006).

In this context, Niccolò Tommaseo's dramatic change in 1848, from his previous involvement in Trieste as a Dalmatian publicist working towards inter-ethnic collaboration, underscores the propagandistic effort of early nationalists in revolutionary 1848. The Austrian Lloyd, the steam navigation company to which the fortunes of the city had been tied since its inception in 1833, had become the object of Italian animosity, since it represented a bastion of loyalty to Austria (Coons, 1980). However, in 1847, this fact did not prevent Tommaseo, who would become the leader of the Venetian revolution the following year, from requesting, and obtaining, help from the Lloyd in aid of his fellow-citizens in Šibenik, which had been hit by a famine. Having obtained the sum of 2000 florins, he thanked and blessed "the Slav and the Greek, the Jew and the Armenian, the Italian and the transalpine," by which he also recognized Trieste as a city "that, inhabited by people of different stocks, promise[d] to be a precious ring of trust and intelligence between several nations" (Tommaseo, 1847: 149–150), thus running counter to the very same claims of Trieste's *Italianità* (Italianness) expressed by his soon-to-be fellows in Venice, Orlandini and Dall'Ongaro.

Yet, notwithstanding previous assumptions of the numerical majority of Italian people in the city, later arguments in favour of Trieste's Italian character actually undermined such claims. Following von Czoernig's estimates of the ethno-linguistic composition of the Habsburg Monarchy, a local teacher (Tedeschi, 1862) claimed that there were only 8,150 Germans out of 520,000 people in the Littoral, the rest being Italians and Slavs. While lamenting the preponderance of German gymnasia in the region, with only half a gymnasium in Italian at Capodistria/Koper, and none

in Slavic, he dismissed the absence of Slavic gymnasia arguing that Slavic had “not yet reached a sufficient pitch of completeness,” while the Italian language was “mother to European culture” (Tedeschi, 1862). The conviction of the superiority of Italian culture and the indeterminacy of the Slavic was a recurring theme of Italian-speaking intellectuals and publicists. Yet the supposed Italian character of Trieste derived from the fact that “some few claim [the city] to be wholly Italian,” the Croat publicist Abel Lukšić (1865: 7) maintained, “perhaps because they often hear the Italian sound on the street and in the mouths of the majority of the people.” However, this was not proof of the Italian identity of the city. For example, that the municipal paper *La Frusta* (1848), Habsburg loyalist yet advocating an Italian identity for Trieste, blamed the government for sanctioning the introduction of three languages in Trieste’s schools, so that people could not speak Italian correctly, bears evidence for the existence of a local urban culture of which the adoption of Italian language was not a natural consequence, but had to be implemented through consistent education. The essential role of education in contributing to the spread of Italian was emphasized by another newspaper, the *Diavoletto*, a decade later.

The paper *Diavoletto*, widely attacked for its pro-Habsburg positions by that part of the press supporting Italy, explicitly proved its culturally Italian sentiments against the nationalist German press that lamented the fact that German had not been introduced to Trieste’s courts on the occasion of the Austrian reoccupation of the city in 1814, after the spell of Napoleonic rule. A correspondent of the *Ost-Deutsche-Post* argued that in Trieste “the Italian element is already preponderant enough and that ... Trieste will cease to feel and think in German,” to which the contributor to the *Diavoletto* (1859), an anonymous teacher, reacted with surprise. The contributor observed that the absence of German in courts “was not due certainly to partiality in favour of Italians” (*Il Diavoletto*, 1859). Here, however, his position conflicted with that of pro-Italian activists abhorring Habsburg rule. For he went on to argue that while opposition to the use of Italian in Trieste was an injustice, the Austrian government had “emanate[d] a fair law that recognize[d] that unquestionable right ... which Italian Tirol, although constituting part of the German Confederation, [had] always enjoyed and still [did] so.” The piece cannot be taken as a mere pro-Habsburg propagandistic article. There is much more to it. It shows that the supranational principle was well and alive still in 1859 notwithstanding the acceptance of belonging to a supposed Italian culture during the wars of Italian independence.

Yet, at the same time, it demonstrates how far this Italian culture to which men of letters adhered was actually a contested and problematic form of identification that was the preserve of intellectuals, teachers, and journalists, that is men dealing with literary language in their everyday lives. For, arguing against another claim of the *Ost-Deutsche-Post*, that there were not sufficient Italian teachers in Trieste and that these had to be imported from Venetia, he stated that “if that were true, that Trieste could not provide any now, besides Venetia,” the city could rely on “Italian Tirol, Istria, and Dalmatia, of which especially the last [had] been the cradle of eminent minds and [had] provided with teachers the gymnasia and universities of Austrian Italy and also of the other Italian provinces” (*Il Diavoletto*, 1859). Furthermore, as a matter of fact, “the Archbishopric gymnasium in Split, alma mater of Foscolo and Tommaseo, boasted a better standard of Italian than that spoken by the majority of the Italian states” (Vrandečić, 2000: 82). Therefore, the whole argument defending the *Italianità* (Italianness) of Trieste faltered in the face of the recognition of the fact that Italian high culture had to be imported to Trieste from elsewhere in the Adriatic. The process by which Italian culture was gradually and consistently introduced into Trieste from the former Venetian possessions precedes and reflects the Italianization of Fiume in the early 1900s, which was triggered by the arrival of several Italian-speaking journalists and publicists from Zara/Zadar (see, for example, Jeličić, 2018: 77).

In view of the contested *Italianità* [Italianness] of Trieste on the eve of Italian unification, Orlandini and Dall’Ongaro’s claim in 1848 that Triestines were an Italian people seems to have reflected more their wishes than the actual situation in the city. Still in 1872, the local paper *El Buleto*, written in the Triestine dialect, wondered how it could be possible to pretend that the “lower classes spoke the beautiful and pure Italian,” when they were barely literate (Gerolini, 1872: 1). With sarcasm, the author captured the phenomenon whereby some espoused the Italian national cause for personal ambitions, “in order to be Father of the Country,” noting that those who maintained that use of the dialect would only result in further ignorance, were “Triestines, and want[ed] to be staunch Italians and moreover even liberals” (Gerolini, 1872: 1). At the same time though, he attacked his previous collaborator Gaspar

Martellanz, who had started a new paper “written half in dialect and half in the sweet language of *zakai*” (Gerolini, 1872: 1), that is the local derogatory epithet for Slovene, thus ridiculing that Slavic language and Martellanz’s endeavour to use the local dialect.

The case of Martellanz exemplifies the entwining of what would later be standardized into national cultures and the local urban setting of Trieste personified by fluent use of its dialect. A proponent of the *Zedinenja Slovenja* (United Slovenia), the Slavic nationalist programme aimed at the formation of a united Slovenia under the Habsburgs, besides being the editor of the Slovene-language paper from Trieste *Tržaški Ljudomil*, published in 1866—for which he used the Slovene version of his surname, that is Martelanec—he was also editor of other local papers written in the Triestine dialect, such as *El Zavatin de Trieste* of 1872. Hence, contrary to Valussi’s nationalist claim that Slovenes “remain[ed] Slavs as long as they remain[ed] barbarians [and] follow[ed] the natural law of the assimilation of dispersed fragments of incomplete nationalities into compact and grand nationalities of old birth and thriving life (Valussi, 1861: 24),” it seems more appropriate to argue that Slavs did not necessarily assimilate to Italian culture, but to the local Triestine, of which they were part and parcel.

## 4 | CONCLUSION

The northern Adriatic, with the Triestine and Fiuman contexts, lays bare the existence of identities that were different from national forms of identification, thus providing “a unique laboratory for studying interethnic relations” (Gross, 1978: 69). For the majority of people, these identities were local, regional, and often hybrid. At the crossroads between the Latin, Slavic, and Germanic cultures, it was not modern-day nationalities, namely, the Italian, Slovene, Croat, and Austrian that met, but several local municipal and regional identities which were also bound up with the centuries-old territorial subdivisions between the Habsburg Monarchy and Venice. The different sources here analysed provide clues for arguing that national identities were just the preserve of restricted groups of publicists and activists, whose views were not shared by wider sections of the population. And if these national identities were perceived as a compelling reality by some, they could well coexist with local identities, which at given historical circumstances they came to defy and oppose.

Yet emphasis has been generally put on conflicts between nationalities, when in fact “traditional forms of self-identification [constituted] forms whose social power was often far more compelling than that of nationalism” (Judson, 2005: 1). National forms of identification and ethnic strife, which figure so often in national historiographies of the region, did not appear to be the rule in the Habsburg Littoral well into the 1860s. Things would gradually change to a certain extent in the following decades only with the arrival of economic recessions, rising social tensions, the intensification of Italian interests in the eastern Adriatic, and the exacerbation of anti-Habsburg propaganda. These were accompanied by intense nationalist propaganda that, from the second half of the 19th century, was “reinforced and directed from outside – from Italy, from the Croat or Slovene, even from Serbian capitals and newspapers” (Gross, 1978: 87).

It was not yet about the Croat, Slovene, or Italian nations, but local and regional identities that were ethnically hybrid and had been so for centuries, something that even after the Second World War would make it difficult for international observers to classify the national affiliation of Istrian refugees fleeing their homeland in the face of the Yugoslav occupation (see Ballinger, 2012). The complexity of identities defying national and ethnic affiliations, widely considered as unaltered through time, has been reiterated by anthropological research. As late as the second half of the 20th century, ethnic identities in the northern Adriatic rim were still situational and embedded in the local geographical context irrespective of the wider national identities that had come into existence (Gross, 1978). Consequently, historical evidence and anthropological analysis point to a picture that is significantly at odds with the cultural homogenization endorsed by nation states and which is centred on historical accounts that, as Applegate (1999: 1159) put it, in the European context have “been closely interwoven with the making and legitimating of nation-states.”

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Present-day Croatian Rijeka is here referred to as Fiume, since the official name of the city was Fiume until the Yugoslav takeover in 1945.
- <sup>2</sup> Italian and Venetian were adopted as the *linguae francae* not only along the Dalmatian coasts, but also throughout the eastern Mediterranean, partly mirroring the previous geographical extent of the *Sabir*, the *lingua franca* par excellence (Schuchardt, 1909). This a-national role of Italian can be better understood if considering that the Russo-Turkish treaty of Kuchuk Kainardji of 1774 was drafted in Russian, Turkish, and Italian, Italian being the language to which the signatories would resort in settling disputes arising from differing versions (Davison, 1990: 33–36). Even the British explorer Richard Burton, while testing his camouflage as a Muslim in Egypt in 1853, resorted to a deliberately broken Italian with a British official who did not know Arabic (Burton, 1893 [1855]: 27).

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