

## Introduction – Identity in Flux

The present volume of *Tabula* collects the proceedings from the conference “Identity in Flux”, organized by the Department of History and held at the Faculty of Humanities in Pula in May 2015. The conference was the first in a series entitled “Past, Present, Future”, launched with the aim of tackling relevant and controversial issues in contemporary Europe by providing the historical context for their emergence and explaining the patterns of behaviour that are common to different historical eras and are still relevant today.

Identity is a complex phenomenon that has always had far-reaching implications for everyday life. Both personal or group identity can be either immutable or very fluid, changing within a lifetime or over generations, and it can have different layers. A wide variety of factors can be employed to define it: age, race, gender, ethnicity, religion, geography, education, political inclinations and so on. It is, however, undeniable that humans use identity to make sense of their own place in the world and as a guideline for their behaviour. Greeks, Romans and *barbaroi*, Christians and pagans, Crusaders and infidels, Catholicism and Reformation, nation states and composite empires, ideologies and pan-Europeanism are just some samples of the numerous identities that have shaped our history and still contribute to the debate over what identity means in the European Union and the globalized world. The authors of the papers in this volume address the topic of identity from ancient history to modern times from a number of different perspectives, from international diplomacy to local microhistory, from the secular to religious spheres. The papers are presented in chronological order with two main sections: premodern and contemporary.

The section on pre-modern history begins with two papers dealing with Late Antiquity and the crisis in the Roman Empire. Veronika Wieser’s “‘Like a safe tower on a steady rock’. Widows, wives and mothers in the ascetic elites of Late Antiquity” focuses on female members of the Roman aristocracy who renounced the material and embraced the spiritual at a time when the Empire was in decline. She aims to sketch the range of new opportunities that may have followed the conversion to asceticism while also reflecting on the more conventional models of womanhood that were still present. In his paper “The last legions: The “barbarization” of military identity in the Late Roman West”, Vedran Bileta reassesses theories that link the fall of the Empire to the growing dependency on barbarian manpower. By using the concept of the “barbarian” in political, rather

than ethnic terms, he shows that “barbarization” was a way for the Roman state to maximize its resources and bolster its defences. The section on medieval history consists of four papers. In “The Franks in the Early Ideology of Frederick Barbarossa (1152-1158)”, Vedran Sulovsky argues that Frederick created the cult of Charlemagne to serve as the ideological foundation of his rule. He considers the Emperor a shrewd politician who skilfully alternated between various identities in order to suit his political agenda. In a philosophical fashion, following in the footsteps of Huizinga, Maja Jović discusses the aspects of Christian humanism in her paper “Travel, leisure, boredom and the Middle Ages”. The author carefully navigates the ambiguity surrounding these concepts. The challenges facing local political figures against the backdrop of religious and political upheavals are the topic of Silvie Vančurová’s “The lower nobility in the Kingdom of Bohemia in the early 15th century, based on the example of Jan Sádlo of Smilkov.” Her case study exemplifies the rise of politically engaged lower nobility in medieval Bohemia. Valentina Zovko analyses the elusive and ambiguous language of diplomacy in “Communication and political identity formation: Dubrovnik’s first ambassadors to the Sublime Porte”. She argues that the authorities of the City used verbal constructs to form the identity of Dubrovnik, but remained very pragmatic about the whole process. Two papers represent Early Modern era. Milorad Pavić’s “Perceptions of the Eastern Adriatic in the travel literature of the Early Modern period” shows how stereotypes regarding the region were slowly abandoned as more accurate information made its way westward. The paper focuses predominantly on Italian travel books of the period. Marianna Birnbaum’s “Iberian Jewish identities after 1492” details the different strategies employed by Jews forced to convert or leave Spain after the Edict of 1492. The fates of these refugees are eerily reminiscent of our present and they show how patterns of behaviour remain similar across time and space.

The section on contemporary history begins with three cases of regional identities and their relationship to different national and historical frameworks. In her paper “Constructing borderland identities in Romania and Bulgaria: the case of interwar Dobruja (1912–1939)”, Ana-Teodora Kurkina focuses on an example of border and state-building disputes in the Balkans. She argues that, in spite of attempts to make Dobruja even more national than non-contested regions, identity debates had very little impact on the population and mainly targeted the elites of the two countries, as well as external powers. Markus Wurzer’s paper “Betwixt and between. The hybrid identity of a South Tyrolean *Bersagliere* in the 1935–1936 Italo-Abyssinian War” analyses the South Tyrolean

identity through the experiences of Andrä Ralser, who served in the Italian army in the mid-1930s. Based on the soldier's diary, the article demonstrates the dynamic, relative and hybrid character of identity, entangled within linguistic, territorial, military and religious indicators. The third region is brought to focus by Eva Posch and her paper "Negotiating 'Istrian-ness' in tourist historiography: Observations on the discursive formation of a regional identity". She uses tourist historiography as a source for different conceptualisations of Istrian regional identity, and identifies new patterns of contextualisation regarding the Croatian, Slovenian and Italian historical and cultural heritage. Departing from sub-national regional concerns, Albert Bing's paper "State and identity: Controversies of identity change in the 1990s Croatian society" tackles the restructuring of contemporary Croatian national identity in the years of "accelerated history". He focuses on national homogenisation, humane resettlement and ethnic cleansing during the war in Croatia, particularly within the context of Croatian-Serbian relations. The series of contemporary topics ends with a philosophical analysis of the idea of cosmopolitanism. In his paper "Cosmopolitan identity – historical origins and contemporary relevance", Marin Beroš argues that the old understanding of cosmopolitanism is too narrow to be entirely valid at the onset of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Therefore, he places it in the context of social belonging that crosses politically imposed boundaries, and links it to the legal and political framework, ethical ideal and vision of justice, as well as the type of identity choices made by individuals.

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