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The editorial initiative we present comes from the obvious lack of a journal, in Italy, concerning the history of Central and Eastern Europe during the Modern Age, this despite its fundamental role in the history and culture of that part of the continent, wrongly considered distant and peripheral.

Quite the contrary is true, in fact. Main objective of the journal is to create a space for reflection and discussion on topics pertaining to Central and Eastern Europe, but also relations with Continental Europe, encouraging dialogue between scholars and experts in the field, and between different approaches of scientific research.

The Editorial and Scientific Board

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BALD ISLAND: A REVIEW

ABSTRACT

The English translation of an Italian manuscript on the imprisonment of Italian migrants in socialist Yugoslavia suggests numerous reflections not only on what happened there and then, but on the entire history of Italian political migration into Sovietized Europe before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

KEYWORDS: Yugoslavia; Soviet Union; Warsaw Pact; Goli Otok; Concentration camps; Refugees Camps.

About ten years ago, Claudia Sonia Colussi Corte's diary on her father's imprisonment in a Yugoslav concentration camp was published in the "Autobiographies" series of the Archivio Diaristico Nazionale of Pieve Santo Stefano, the largest Italian documentary center of and on "personal" writings¹. The author was born in Isola Vicentina, but in 1946 Cherubino Colussi, who in the meantime had started working in the Monfalcone shipyards, decided to go to Yugoslavia and contribute to the construction of communism. The family therefore moved to Lussinpiccolo (Mali Lošinj) on the island of Lussino (Lošinj), now Croatia, which is also the native place of Cherubino, who had lived there until he was eighteen.

His decision was not isolated and over 2,000 workers, some with families, left Monfalcone to contribute to the revolutionary cause. However, in the newly formed Yugoslav republic those arrivals were viewed with suspicion. They strengthened an Italian-speaking minority, frowned upon due to what had happened during the fascist "Ventennio". Furthermore, the Monfalconese's loyalty to the Soviet Union was feared, because the conflict between Joseph Stalin and Josip Tito had become insurmountable and Yugoslavia had been expelled from the Cominform (1948).

Cherubino Colussi had in the meantime found work in the Lussinpiccolo shipyard and wanted to stay there even when, in 1949, his wife Antonietta asked him to leave. Unfortunately, her husband didn't listen to her, just as he hadn't listened to her when he decided to move to Yugoslavia. The woman thus found herself projected into a nightmare and in February 1951 she was woken up by the police. The authorities allowed her and her daughter to return to Italy, but without giving any explanations about Cherubino's fate. After almost a year at Isola Vicentina, Antonietta finally learned that her husband, like many people from Monfalcone, had been accused of being an enemy of the Yugoslav people and sentenced to imprisonment on Goli Otok (Bald Island). This was a large bare rock in the northern Adriatic, transformed into a concentration camp. Having learned of Cherubino's conviction, Antonietta

1 Claudia Sonia Colussi Corte, *Il segreto dell'isola nuda* (Udine: Forum Edizioni, 2015).

returned with her daughter to the island of Lussino, where she found work in the fish processing plant. She hoped to be close to her husband, but she only managed to see him in 1954 and for just 15 minutes.

In her daughter's journal, the frustrating wait in Lussinpiccolo and the very short visit to Goli Otok are well described. However, in 1955, when Stalin died, some prisoners were amnestied and Cherubino was able to return to his family. After months of patient treatment, he was able to talk about the torture, the hunger, the illness (an untreated duodenal ulcer, because the small infirmary on the island had no instruments and medicines) in the concentration camp. He died in 1961 without having renounced his ideals, as attested by a poem published in the appendix of his daughter's journal.

The manuscript deposited in the Archivio Diaristico has a strong impact and appeared in a crucial year for migrations in Croatia: in July 2015 was planted the large metal fence that separates this nation from Hungary and Serbia and keeps out the refugees of the so-called "Balkan route"². A few years later Claudia's daughter, who moved to Calgary, suggested translating the journal into English and this version was created for the Giuliano Dalmato Club of Toronto by Konrad Eisenblicher, another native son of Lussinpiccolo³. The comment of Eisenblicher, very well known for his works on the Italian Renaissance, but also on the Julian diasporas⁴, and the pages of Giuricin, president of the "Istria" culture club of Trieste, explain to the reader the coordinates in which to frame the memorial, first the reasons and results of the Monfalcone's exodus.

The story and the imprisonment of those workers have been carefully studied in our century⁵; they also inspired a more general reflection on the migratory exchange

2 Various studies are available on the subject but see *Rapporto di ricerca. La Rotta balcanica 5 anni dopo*, edited by Luisa Chiodi e Raffaella Coletti (Roma: CESPI, 2021). For a recent picture: Tommi Siviero, "Balkan Migrant Route Still Active Despite Falling Numbers", available at <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/01/17/balkan-migrant-route-still-active-despite-falling-numbers-frontex/>.

3 Claudia Sonia Colussi Corte, *The Secret of Bald Island*, with an introduction by Aleksandra Sojanovic and a postscript by Ezio Giuricin (Toronto: Club Giuliano Dalmato di Toronto, 2023).

4 Konrad Eisenblicher, ed., *An Italian Region in Canada: The Case of Friuli-Venezia Giulia* (Toronto: MHSO, 1998), and *Forgotten Italians: Julian Dalmatian Writers and Artists in Canada* (Toronto: UTP, 2019). See also his translation of Arrigo Petacco, *A Tragedy Revealed. The Story of the Italian Population from Istria, Dalmatia, and Venezia Giulia, 1943–1956* (Toronto: UTP, 2005), and "Il ricordo del paese natale nelle opere degli scrittori giuliano-dalmati emigrati in Canada", *Ateneo Veneto*, 195 (2007), 97–113.

5 Marco Puppini, "Il "controesodo" monfalconese in Jugoslavia tra Trattato di Pace e Risoluzione del Cominform", in *Il mosaico giuliano. Società e politica nella Venezia Giulia del secondo dopoguerra (1945–1954)*, ed. Id. (Gradisca d'Isonzo: Centro isontino di documentazione storica e sociale Leopoldo Gasparini, 2003), 65–94; Andrea Berrini, *Noi siamo la classe operaia. I duemila di Monfalcone* (Milano: Baldini Castoldi Dalai, 2004); Anna Di Gianantonio, Tommaso Montanari, Alessandro Morena, and Sandra Perini, *L'immaginario*

between Italy and Yugoslavia (forced and otherwise)⁶ and on the fact that that of the Monfalconesi was not the only Italian experience of support of the Republic of Yugoslavia⁷. An impressive literature is also dedicated to Goli Otok. The Italian entry on Wikipedia lists many novels, short stories and plays in various languages about the island prison, while the English one lists documentaries and films dedicated to it. On Bald Island, it is possible to read some historical-political essays in Italian, starting with two by Giacomo Scotti, a Neapolitan communist who migrated to Istria in 1947 and still resides there⁸. Some authors, in addition to quantify the number of political prisoners on the island (at least 30,000 according to Scotti), have also explored the memory of that concentration camp⁹. Finally, Scotti again tried to understand the reason for the arrests of the Monfalcone's people and found traces of an attack against Tito organized by the Soviets with the support of the Communist Federation of Trieste; this attempt would have definitively compromised the fate of the Italian communists in Yugoslavia¹⁰.

Alongside these two research ideas, we can glimpse others. For example, one could reflect on the migrations of many left-wing militants of that time towards communist Europe. Not everyone pays for their choices as dearly as the people of Monfalcone and some are even treated well. Prague welcomes the partisans wanted by the Italian police after the revenges of the immediate post-war period and the Red Brigades on the run after the Moro crime¹¹. A group of Italian communists also moved to the

imprigionato. Dinamiche sociali, nuovi scenari politici e costruzione della memoria nel secondo dopoguerra monfalconese (Monfalcone: Consorzio Culturale del Monfalconese –Istituto Regionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione nel Friuli-Venezia Giulia, 2005); Alfredo Bonelli, *Fra Stalin e Tito. Cominformisti a Fiume, 1948–1956*, ed. Franco Cecotti (Trieste: Istituto Regionale per la Storia del Movimento di Liberazione nel Friuli-Venezia Giulia, 1994); Luigi Lusenti, *Una storia silenziosa. Gli italiani che scelsero Tito* (Milano: Edizioni Comedit, 2014).

- 6 From Raoul Pupo, “L'esodo forzoso dall'Istria”, in *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana*, eds. Piero Bevilacqua, Andreina De Clementi, and Emilio Franzina, I: *Partenze* (Roma: Donzelli, 2001), 385-96, to 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).
- 7 Gloria Nemec, “Braccia per il socialismo. Italiani al lavoro volontario nella Jugoslavia post-bellica”, in *Corpi al lavoro*, eds. Alessandro Casellato, and Gilda Zazzara (Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2015), 31-49.
- 8 Giacomo Scotti, *Goli Otok: Ritorno all'isola Calva* (Trieste: Lint, 1991), and *Goli Otok. Italiani nel gulag di Tito* (Trieste: Lint, 1997).
- 9 Orietta Moscarda Oblak, “Le memorie contrapposte di Goli Otok – Isola Calva”, *Quaderni del CRSR*, 18 (2007): 69-101; Luigi Giuricin, *La memoria di Goli Otok –Isola Calva* (Rovigno: Centro Ricerche storiche di Rovigno, 2007); Gian Mario Villalta, *L'isola senza memoria* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2018).
- 10 Giacomo Scotti, *Il gulag in mezzo al mare. Nuove rivelazioni su Goli Otok* (Trieste: Lint, 2012).
- 11 Giuseppe Fiori, *Uomini ex. Lo strano destino di un gruppo di comunisti italiani in*

Golden City during the 1950s to take care of a clandestine radio station aimed at the Peninsula¹². However, in communist Europe, beyond superficial internationalism, migrants, especially if political, are looked at with suspicion and often persecuted¹³. It is believed that they are spies or can exacerbate divisions by propagating views that conflict with those of the dominant communist group¹⁴.

A fourth working theme could serve to frame the persecution of the Monfalconesi in the context of the expulsion from Yugoslavia of the Italian-speaking nuclei on the islands and along the Dalmatic coasts. Here, however, we enter the mined territory of the Julian-Dalmatian diaspora and of the anti-Italian “vengeance”, which led to the tragedy of the foibe (natural sinkholes of the Karst Region, where the Yugoslav communists buried their adversaries)¹⁵. Beyond today’s political exploitation of these events, i.e. the foibe and the Julian exodus used in contrast to the memories of the Holocaust or of the European resistance¹⁶, a very bad page in Italian history opens. The Julian-Dalmatians who fled to the Peninsula were relegated to poorly served refugee camps and forced to expatriate again (so they arrived in Canada and Australia, bringing with them the Julians and Triestines who were already Italian citizens at the time)¹⁷. In fact, Italy did not want to help those who, although

Cecoslovacchia (Torino: Einaudi, 1993); Philip Cooke, “Da partigiano a quadro di partito: l’educazione degli emigrati politici italiani in Cecoslovacchia”, *Ricerche storiche*, 101 (2006): 9-38, and “Italian Political Emigration to Czechoslovakia”, in *The Italian Diaspora after the Second World War*, eds. Gaetano Rando, and James Hagan (Bivongi: International AM Edizioni, 2007), 273-84; Fernando Orlandi, “A Praga, A Praga!”, in Roberto Bartali, et al., *Le vene aperte del delitto Moro* (Firenze: Edizioni Polistampa, 2009), 119-159.

12 Paola Oliva Bertelli, *Praga, radio clandestina* (Milano: Terre di mezzo, 2008).

13 For the striking case of the Soviet Union, see Elena Dundovich, Francesca Gori and Emanuela Guercetti, *Gulag. Storia e memoria* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2004), and *Italiani nei lager di Stalin* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2006).

14 This does not mean that migrations were not resorted to, especially from other communist countries, but that they were strictly controlled (and exploited): Alena K. Alamgir, “‘Inappropriate behaviour’: Labor control and the Polish, Cuban, and Vietnamese workers in Czechoslovakia”, in *Labor in state socialist Europe, 1945–1989: Contribution to a history of work*, ed. Marsha Siefert (New York: Central University Press, 2020), 99-119, and Sara Bernard, “The regulation of international migration in the Cold War: a synthesis and review of the literature”, *Labor History*, 64/4 (2023): 330-57.

15 The bibliography is enormous, for an introduction: Raoul Pupo, *Il lungo esodo. Istria: le persecuzioni, le foibe, l’esilio* (Milano: Rizzoli, 2005), and Enrico Miletto, *Novecento di confine. L’Istria, le foibe, l’esodo* (Milano: Franco Angeli, 2020).

16 Giacomo Scotti, *Dossier foibe* (San Cesario di Lecce: Manni, 2022); Emilio Franzina, *La guerra delle foibe. Un inghiottitoio delle memorie con (due) divise* (Asiago: Odeonlibri, 2024).

17 For the refugee camps: C.R.P. Centro Raccolta Profughi. *Per una storia dei campi profughi istriani, fiumani e dalmati in Italia (1945/1970)* (Trieste: IRICI, 2004). For migration to Australia: Francesco Fait, *L’emigrazione giuliana in Australia (1954–1961)* (Udine: Ente regionale per i problemi dei migranti, 1999); *Giuliano-*

Italian-speaking, came from across the border. Italian officials underlined in various intergovernmental meetings the poverty of their nation, irreparably wounded by the war, and the impossibility of helping “foreign” refugees¹⁸. Furthermore, the police believed that those immigrants were possible communist spies or members of the Ustasha movement (we have very rich documentation on the matter¹⁹). The forces of the Italian left condemned them collectively as fascists (if Italian-speaking) or Ustasha (if Croatian)²⁰. If we then investigate the right-wing or centrist press of the time, we see how the former feared, in the same way as the police, Tito’s infiltration

Dalmati in Australia: contributi e testimonianze per una storia, ed. Gianfranco Cresciani (Trieste: Associazione Giuliani nel mondo, 1999); Viviana Facchinetti, *Storie fuori dalla storia. Ricordi ed emozioni di emigrati giuliano-dalmati in Australia* (Trieste: Lint, 2008); Gianfranco Cresciani, *Trieste goes to Australia* (Lindfield: Padana Press, 2011). For migration to Canada: Konrad Eisenblicher, “I Giuliano-Dalmati in Canada”, *Italian Canadiana*, 9 (1993), 31-45; Viviana Facchinetti, *C’era una sVolta. Storie e memorie di emigrati giuliano-dalmati in Canada* (Trieste: Dalmati nel mondo, 2006); Claudio Antonelli, *Espatrio, fedeltà, identità. Omaggio all’Istria e al Canada* (Bagno a Ripoli: Edarc, 2007).

- 18 Archivio centrale dello Stato (Roma), Ministero dell’Interno, Direzione Generale di Pubblica Sicurezza, Divisione Affari Generali Riservati, Cat. A16, Stranieri ed ebrei stranieri, AA.GG. (1930–1956), busta 23: IRO. Comitato misto PCIRO, Sedute plenarie (riunioni) 1947–1948, e busta 24, fasc. 26: Comitato Misto PCIRO. Sedute plenarie 1948-1950.
- 19 In Archivio dell’Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell’Esercito (Roma) see the case of a Croatian prostitute active in Rome, mistakenly considered the key element of an organization that would have seen Tito spies and Ustasha fugitives collaborate, while in reality she limited herself to having exponents of both groups as clients: serie RGPT, 327, Fuoriusciti croati in Italia – 1945, Titolo 1, sottotitolo 10, Pratica 24, anno 1945, Jugoslavia. Costituzione di un comitato anti Tito a Roma.
- 20 For a very well-known example: Piero Montagnani, “Profughi”, *L’Unità*, 30 XI 1946. In the last years, a controversy arose over this article (see <https://www.wumingfoundation.com/giap/2019/02/bufala-unita-1946/>), in which several leftist intellectuals tried to show how the author didn’t have any prejudice against the “Istrians”. In fact, Montagnani didn’t just condemned them, but all the refugees who fled Europe under Soviet control. We could ascribe his position to the grip of Stalinism on the Italian Communist Party and to the context of the Cold War, after all even a fine thinker like Gianni Rodari expressed himself against the “Istrians” in his years at *L’Unità*, the newspaper of PCI. However, we should reflect on the lack of communist empathy, even in Western Europe, towards refugees and migrants. These were considered possible cover for the anti-communists and in any case part of that “reserve” army used by the capitalists to depress workers’ wages. In addition to the articles in the communist newspaper we can consider those in *Avanti!* and *Paese Sera*, extending this framework to the entire Italian left. This position was so encysted that it lasted well beyond the disappearance of the PCI: Maria Letizia Zanier, “Destra e sinistra di fronte agli immigrati: identità politica o conflitto di interessi?”, in *Stranieri in Italia. Assimilati ed esclusi*, eds. Asher Colombo, and Giuseppe Sciortino (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2002), 283-315.

and did not love refugees as a category, despite declaring that they wanted to help those who had been expelled from the territory now Yugoslavian. The second in turn thought that it was necessary to look after Italian citizens first and only in a second time after those coming from across the border.

In short, Claudia Sonia Colussi Corte's autobiography invites various possible research. Among other things, another one emerged from an email exchange with Eisenblicher. Many of Colussi's fellow believers and prisoners remained faithful to communist ideas like him. Why didn't they renounce ideals so tarnished in Yugoslavia and throughout Warsaw's Europe? How did they manage to still believe in revolutionary palingenesis in the face of the oppression of workers by the communist bureaucracy? And here we can also think of all those who had to flee Yugoslavia, even though they were not Italian. Recent studies have highlighted the many departures of Croats and Slovenians and how they led to the social and regional redesign of what are now the Croatian and Slovenian republics²¹. The various exoduses due to communist dictatorship deserve to be discussed, also because they led to the conflict between those who left and those who remained. Even today, the latter accuse the former of having abandoned them²².

Reading this short autobiography can inspire a series of reflections on the Croatian and Slovenian history after the II World War, as well as the history of other Warsaw Pact countries. The translation of it, by Eisenblicher, also makes this text available to a wider audience than the Italian-speaking one and enriches the knowledge of the desperate lives in Tito's concentration camp (and in the country)²³. Furthermore, it provides us with some glimpses into the personal and family lives of those "knights of the ideal": images that are not always appreciable today, when one naturally wonders why those militants were so ready to make their families pay the price for their political shortsightedness. After 1948, how could anyone believe they could remain in Yugoslavia while continuing to assert their trust in the Soviet Union?

21 Katja Hrobat Virloget, "The 'Istrian Exodus' and the Istrian Society that Followed it", *Dve Domovini—Two Homelands*, 4/9 (2019): 163-79. On other escapes from that area and on its repopulation: Aleksej Kalc, "The other side of the 'Istrian exodus': immigration and social restoration of Slovenian coastal towns in the 1950s", *Ibid.*, 145-61, and Igor Jovanović, "Illegal migration from the Croatian part of Istria from 1945 to 1968", *Ibid.*, 181-96; see also Sandi Volk, *Esuli a Trieste* (Udine: Edizioni KappaVu, 2004).

22 See works by Pamela Ballinger, from *History in Exile: Memory and Identity at the Borders of the Balkans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), to *The World Refugees Made: Decolonization and the Foundation of Postwar Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), passing through "Remapping the Istrian Exodus: New Interpretive Frameworks", in *At Home but Foreigners: Populations' transfers in 20th century Istria*, eds. Katja Hrobat, Catherine Gousseff, and Gustavo Corni (Koper, Univerzitetna založba Annales, 2015), 71-93, and Gloria Nemec, "The Hardest Years: Private Stories and Public Acknowledgement in the Recollections of Istrian Italians, Either Exiled or Stayed Behind", *ibid.*, 141-59.

23 The autobiographical novel *Martin Muma* (edited by Mario Sami. Vicenza: Ronzani, 2023) by the Istrian poet Ligio Zannini, who was in the same prison, was also published recently. The novel was written clandestinely during and after imprisonment.

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