To ensure normal administrative order, and for the population’s greater comfort?

Aspects of postwar transition in the political district of Volosko-Opatija*

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On January 8, 1919, Lieutenant Colonel Giuseppe Pavone assumed the office of civil commissioner of the Volosca-Abbazia/Volosko-Opatija political district. On that day, Pavone sent a message to all district municipalities, demanding cooperation from all institutions so that “…my effort is facilitated, and our joint effort directed solely and efficiently to ensure normal administrative order in the quickest time possible, and for the greater comfort of the population.”¹ Though aware of obstacles and difficulties, Pavone displayed a very strict view of state control over recently occupied territories: “Justice and honesty are the norms of behavior toward everyone inside the orbit of the concept of the sovereign power of the State which does not admit exceptions and does not tolerate weaknesses. Weakness is as guilty as abuse.”² The main issue was not that an allegedly righteous state would not admit of any countervailing power, or allow exception to its sovereignty, or even that normal administrative order and the comfort of the population were goals to be achieved. Rather, the problem was which state, and with which forms of rule, was to perform these duties, and further what the notion of normalization meant. For Pavone, there were no doubts: “…our effort will quickly provide the result the Patria expects…”³ In Pavone’s vision, normalization was associated with the concept of undisputed Italian nation-state sovereignty enacted by a military officer. However, this concept was not shared among all parts of the population residing within the district formerly subsumed within the Austrian Littoral and which the Italian military had just occupied at the end of 1918.

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² “(…) l’opera mia sia facilitata e la nostra opera comune sia unicamente ed efficacemente diretta a conseguire nel più breve tempo possibile un assetto normale per l’amministrazione ed il maggior benessere per la popolazione”. DARI-608, Općina Veprinac, Comune di Apriano, Box 31, N. 24, Commissario civile del distretto politico di Volosca, 8 gennaio 1919, Assunzione di carica.

³ “(…) l’opera nostra darà in breve il risultato che la Patria si attende (…)” IDEM.
As in many other regions of central and eastern Europe, November 1918 in the Austrian Littoral did not mark the end of all hostilities and bring calm and undisputed peace.\(^4\) Surely, formal armed conflict ended, and the rate of postwar violence in the Julian March was modest compared to other European regions.\(^5\) Bloody massacres of local populations fortunately did not occur. And, yet, the state of war and uncertainty did not cease at the end of 1918. In the immediate postwar weeks, people experienced two attempts at state transition in some parts of Istria. At the end of October 1918, Habsburg imperial authorities were replaced by self-proclaimed national councils or public safety committees. Just a few weeks later, depending on the place, such bodies were dismissed by the occupying Italian army.\(^6\)

In areas where Croatian and Slovene nationalists were better organized or outnumbered Italians, this double power shift was particularly problematic. Almost from the beginning of occupation, the Italian military presence was perceived as an illegitimate foreign power dismantling the legitimate local Slovene, Croat, and Serb (SCS) national councils who in turn considered these lands already incorporated to the newly declared South Slav state. For instance, in the largest Istrian city Pola/Pula, the local SCS national council protested the Italian army occupation, considering the city to be part of “Yugoslavia” and thus not subject to armistice conditions between the Entente and former Austria-Hungary.\(^7\) In addition, the presence of the Italian state on these territories did not have international recognition since, despite the territorial promises made in the Treaty of London, only the peace talks were to sanction definite state borders. Regardless, once the Italian military had arrived, the process of annexing these lands into the Italian Kingdom immediately began. This transition was characterized at first by the presence of a military administration (November 1918–July 1919), followed by a specific civil administration that lasted even after the Treaty of Rapallo (November 1920) had sanctioned the official annexation of these territories to Italy.\(^8\)


\(^7\) IDEM, 356-357.

Among the features that marked this transition, perhaps the most prominent was the placement of authorities representing the Italian nation-state onto these contested territories. Indeed, a secondary feature of their appearance was the implementation of nationalizing policies over a multinational and multilingual population. Yet, less emphasis has been given to the actuality of the implementation of Italianization policies. Further, we also do not know much about the actors who pursued such policies at the local level in the immediate postwar years. A lack of local-level transition studies—including studies that focus on the implementation and efficacy of nationalization policies—is not a historiographic gap for this area only. In the Istrian case, there is a tendency to assume a straightforward line between the Italian liberal state and fascist state. Such a view overlooks the character of the first period of Italian occupation and the impact this experience had on society vis-à-vis the establishment of new state institutions.

Recent research has started to alter our received view. Some new publications focus their attention on forms of pre-war and post-war violence and the role the Italian military played in the region’s political radicalization. Others paint a picture of how the implementation of a new state eager to eradicate the Habsburg past led to trauma both on the part of the implementers and on the part of the peoples who experienced the implementation. Italian nationalists’ anxiety about supplanting Habsburg norms quickly and efficiently led to a massively disruptive incursion on locals’ daily lives, triggering increased political mobilization on the part of both fascist Italian nationalists as well as counter-movements by Croat and Slovene nationalists in the Julian March.


10 Gabor Egry, Negotiating Post-imperial Transitions. Local Societies and Nationalizing States in East Central Europe, MILLER-MORELON, Embers of Empire, 15-16.


13 Marco BRESCIANI, Lost in transition? The Habsburg Legacy, State- and Nation-building and the New Fascist Order in the Upper Adriatic, in: Maarten VAN GINDERACHTER / Jon FOX (Eds.), National Indifference and the
Less explicit in these considerations are typologies of state transition, which may further illuminate the ways in which the Italian military participated in the introduction, construction, and perception of the Italian state in these territories. Conversely, there has not been serious recognition of the extent to which extraordinary measures were adopted by the Italian military in order to govern the areas where they were present. Indeed, by not addressing the issue of Habsburg imperial management of the area through a wartime state of emergency—including the consequent suspension of civil rights and the wartime crisis of state legitimacy—14—it is rather challenging to think about the postwar period in the Julian March as a new period with a new state of exception. Apart from the emergence of fascism, political radicalization, and an exacerbated nationalities conflict, an important issue in the historical analysis of state transition is the role of the new state and its relation to local society in shaping a new normality in a postwar situation.

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Focusing on the former Austrian Littoral, and particularly on the Margraviate of Istria and the political district of Volosca-Abbazia, I will contextualize some policies implemented by Italian authorities predominantly during the first year of occupation. The paper will shed light on the role of state-administrative changes in state transition in the area, the treatment of alleged or real political opponents, the importance of changes to educational policy, and actions towards civil servants. By examining these features and the actors involved, I will provide insight into how the Habsburg Empire disappeared in Volosca-Abbazia and, concomitantly, how the Italian state was implemented. Framed in this way, this paper will discuss continuities and ruptures between the Habsburg imperial and Italian national states, with a view to developments during the wartime situation as well as the conceptualizations and degrees of normalization in the postwar period.

The Volosca-Abbazia district is an area particularly suited for such an analysis, for at that time it was a predominantly Croatian- and Slovene-speaking area,15 with well-developed

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15 Census data are not unproblematic, and they should be approached critically. Here, I am simply pointing out that, according to the Austrian census of 1910, the entire district was populated by 54,500 inhabitants, 88% of whom were (Serbo-)Croatian- and Slovene-speakers (judging by the category of Umgangssprache, or the language
and significant prewar Croatian associations and political organizations located in the district seat. Indeed, it was an area where civil society’s reactivation in the last months of 1918 determined the creation of a Slovene, Croat, and Serb national council in Volosko-Opatija. This short-lived national council, an attempt at local political organization with broader state-building horizons, was interrupted by the arrival of Italian military authorities in late 1918. This uncertainty was further followed by a new provisional postwar issue, namely a new border; The district was now lying directly on the armistice line shared with the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, a neighboring state unrecognized by Italy. It was an area almost entirely lacking in Italians, with potential annexation by the South Slav State prevented by the presence of the Italian military, despite international limitations on control over the district. In this way, the situation of Volosca-Abbazia serves as one among many examples of how the wartime situation did not magically disappear at the local level overnight. After the experience of Habsburg wartime mobilization, requisitions, and hunger, the war exhausted and predominantly South Slav-oriented population, who then had to reckon with wartime Italian institutions—institutions that brought neither calm nor a liberal state administration to the area. Instead, the end of the war meant normalization achieved through the integration of the territory into the Italian state through the mechanism of military occupation.

The Ambiguities of Normalization

During the First World War, the highest authority for the territories occupied by the Kingdom of Italy was the Supreme Command of the Military General Staff, under whom a General Secretariat for Civil Affairs was responsible for the provisional administrative organization of the occupied zones. Still, in case of instant necessities, military commanders and their troops could take urgent actions to make the local administration function. This wartime ruling model, wherein the aforementioned authorities could rule by notifications and decrees, held sway in the former Austrian Littoral territories that were occupied by the Italian military in November 1918.

of everyday use). 2% of the population used Italian in this way. Spezialortsrepertorium der Österreichischen Länder, VII. Österreichisch-Illyrisches Küstenland. Wien 1918, 59. It ought to be noted that these numbers don’t tell us much about bilingualism, individuals’ self-identification, or people’s social practices. These numbers do show us that fewer Italians—interpreted minimally as the conviction of people to declare themselves as speakers of Italian—lived in this district as compared to other parts of Istria.


However, there were some restrictions. The 1907 Hague Conventions set guidelines that any occupying state—as Italy was in this case—could not enact radical administrative-territorial transformations. Thus, the Italian occupying authorities more or less maintained the existing Austrian administrative-territorial divisions and offices: the chief of the Italian Military General Staff appointed a military governor in place of the Austrian civil imperial governor (Statthalter), but with broader prerogatives, such as the supervision of public security. Istrian political districts (politische Bezirke) continued to be under the Italian military governor’s authority. As was the case in other political districts, Volosca-Abbazia preserved its status as a district, while its district captain (Bezirkshauptmann), now called a “civil commissioner” (It.: Commissario civile), was in charge of the administrative unit. In these administrative terms, the Margraviate of Istria, placed under a commissioner during the war by Habsburg authorities, continued to exist, but now with the appointment of a new Italian-appointed commissioner.

While the aforementioned developments seemed to be proof of an administrative-territorial continuity, an unequivocal change took place: the Austrian Littoral (Österreichisches Küstenland) was rebaptized into the Julian March (It. Venezia Giulia). The symbolic renaming—a name that displayed the area’s exclusively Italian character—indicated that a process of integration into the Kingdom of Italy had begun once the Italian military had occupied the area. The process is even more evident when examining events and transformations at the local level in this period.

Before the arrival of the Italian army, at the end of October 1918, the Slovene, Croat, and Serb National Council District Committee (Kotarski odbor Narodnog vijeća) of Volosko-Opatija took charge of the district, replacing the Austrian district captain with their own chief (načelnik). A few days later, an Italian fleet arrived at the district seat. The newly established South Slav authorities were tolerated until additional Italian army units reached the area. On November 13, an Italian colonel discharged the SCS National Council, assumed garrison command over Volosca-Abbazia, and appointed as acting district captain the former district captain of Veglia/Krk, who was forced to retire during the war and settled in Abbazia/Opatija.

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18 CAPUZZO, Dal nesso asburgico alla sovranità italiana, 16-58 and KORLEVIĆ, Uprava i sudstvo u Istri od 1918. do 1945.,19-25. Two political districts formerly belonging to Carniola and Carinthia were also added to the Julian March, partially changing the previous administrative borders.
19 ŠEPIĆ, Istra uoči konferencije mira, 350, 358, and 374.
Two weeks later, Italian military authorities imprisoned three South Slav leaders for not obeying occupational authorities. After over two months of imprisonment and acquittal by trial in front of the military court in Trieste, the South Slav leaders were still facing internment to Sardinia, so in 1919 they crossed the armistice line and reached the new Yugoslavia.21

The leading role in consolidating the Italian presence, at least in the coastal area of the district, was assumed by a military figure lacking any civil appointment—the Volosca garrison commander. The circumstances in the district were, however, far from uniform. Alongside the Volosca garrison commander, on November 17 an Italian army captain was appointed civil commissioner of the Castua/Kastav municipality. While the district was still lacking a district commissioner, Captain Umberto Sala, despite being appointed commissioner of a municipality, collected data on the situation from the district’s different coastal municipalities, writing detailed reports to the Governor.22 Sala’s appointment, and his overstepping of previously demarcated administrative boundaries—as well as the actions carried out by the Volosca garrison command—illustrate the extent to which Italian actors were, unsurprisingly, disoriented inside the Habsburg imperial administrative framework. But, even more, they displayed the significant role that the military played in the first postwar weeks, a role that continued to be relevant even inside the district’s main civil office.

In January 1919, the office of the Volosca-Abbazia district civil commissioner was assumed by Lieutenant Colonel Giuseppe Pavone (1876–1944), a professional military officer, commander of arditi—Italian army assault units renowned for their ruthless and fearless battle engagement. In the immediate postwar weeks, Pavone oversaw Trieste’s POW camp and imposed order in a highly unstable atmosphere of potential mutiny.23 Pavone’s military background and his lack of connections with local Istrian society was not something exceptional in the case of figures appointed as district commissioners in the Julian March.24 Yet, it should be noted that this feature differed with the occupational regime in Venezia Tridentina, where in the Alto Adige some trentini were appointed within the same level of former Austrian

23 VISINTIN, L’Italia a Trieste, 17.
24 For the list of civil commissioners: IDEM, 53. Here captain Umberto Sala is erroneously listed as Volosca commissioner.
institutions. This suggests that the Julian March was probably considered more disputed than the Italian-occupied and to-be-annexed parts of south Tyrol. Both in the Julian March and Venezia Tridentina, certain parts of the population could be considered hostile to the Italian authorities. But, arguably, the Venezia Tridentina was a more certain territorial gain—with Austria clearly on the defeated side—while the borderline contention with the Serb, Croat, and Slovene Kingdom in the Julian March pushed Italian forces to appoint military officers rather than civil servants or Italian locals to these administrative offices. Such an impression is reinforced by what happened in Volosca-Abbazia and Pavone’s continuity in office. More than one proposed border line between Italy and the SCS Kingdom assigned eastern Istrian—i.e., the district of Volosca-Abbazia or its parts—to the South Slavs state. At the same time, Pavone remained in charge of the district well beyond the transformation of the military into the civil administration of the Julian March, acting as district commissioner until March 1920. With uncertain and disputed borders, and with a problematic Fiume/Rijeka nearby, military control over the territory was more important than the introduction of civil state administration.

As shown by the installation of Captain Umberto Sala as Kastav’s civil commissioner, the establishment of Italian state presence in the former Austrian Littoral was not limited to the level of the political district. The lack of systematic analyses of district commissioners’ appointments and of municipal administration reshuffling in the Julian March does not enable one to make a strict comparison with Italian policies in Alto Adige. This would, however, allow the scholar to claim whether some patterns of annexation were more widespread than others.

Focusing on the municipal level, it could be argued that the areas controlled by Slovene and Croat parties suffered from a higher level of distrust and consequently a higher degree of municipal administration reshuffling and commissioners’ appointments. In the municipality of Pinguente/Buzet—controlled by a Croatian national faction before the war—a local Italian was appointed mayor at the end of 1918, replaced later by special commissioners.

27 It should be noted that there were different periods of municipal commissions in the Julian March and the Alto Adige part of Venezia Tridentina. While commissions occurred in the Julian March during the military occupation, in Alto Adige this occurred during the civil administration in 1920 and in 1921. DI MICHELE, L’italianizzazione imperfetta, 78, 96-100.
November 1918, the municipal board was changed twice by Vice Admiral Cagni, first by appointing a board made of Croatian and Italian representatives, which was then replaced a few days later by a solely Italian board.\textsuperscript{29} Yet, the commissioner appointments were not limited to Croatian-oriented municipalities. In Capodistria/Koper, the mayor, appointed by a local Italian-oriented municipal board created at the end of October 1918, substituted the Habsburg wartime commissioner and was reconfirmed in his place by Trieste military governor. Due to internal disagreements with the municipal board, the mayor at the end of 1919 resigned and a special commissioner was appointed.\textsuperscript{30} Likewise, in Dignano/Vodnjan, the wartime commissioner Steiner was replaced by local Italians, but here already in July 1919 an Italian officer was appointed commissioner by occupying forces.\textsuperscript{31} Still, the pattern of distrust towards Slovene and Croat administrations can be seen in the case of municipalities within the Volosca-Abbazia district as well.

Before the outbreak of the First World War, two coastal municipalities within the Volosca-Abbazia district were controlled by Italian-oriented national figures, but during the war they underwent some alterations. In Moschienizze (later Moschiena)/Mošćenice, a Croatian-affiliated figure was appointed acting mayor, replacing the Italian one, while in Laurana/Lovran, a municipal board appointed in wartime weakened Italian control. In these two cases, following the Italian occupation, the local military command appointed Italian-oriented locals to restore the pre-war national-political balance.\textsuperscript{32} In other municipalities, five out of six non-Italian-controlled administrations were assigned new commissioners. The appointment of commissioners for these municipalities reveals authorities’ inclination towards Italian nationalism, understood in part as a mistrust of non-Italian nationalities.

And yet there was no truly systematic nationalizing approach since nationalization was only one among a swath of driving forces. In the municipality of Apriano/Veprinac, the wartime Croatian mayor left his place before the arrival of the Italian army and in the second half of December 1918 the municipal board, considered to be averse to the new occupying authorities, was disbanded. However, the five new appointees to the board, among whom at least a few

\textsuperscript{29} Darko DUKOVSKI, Talijanska okupacija Istre 1918-1920, in: MANIN, Talijanska uprava na hrvatskom prostoru i egzodus Hrvata (1918.-1943.), 120-121.

\textsuperscript{30} Silvia BON, Dal ribaltòn dell’Austria-Ungheria all’avvento del fascismo. Capodistria, ottobre 1918 - dicembre 1922, Quaderni Rovigno CRS, 28 (2017), 17-18, 23 and 44-45.

\textsuperscript{31} Paola DELTON, Dignano del primo dopoguerra nella relazione circa la gestione finanziaria del comune di Dignano del commissario straordinario magg. Armando Sechi Pinna (19 agosto 1920), Quaderni Rovigno CRS, 27 (2016), 293-334.

\textsuperscript{32} DARI-616, CDVo, Box 42 (old signature), 1-IV-1919, Questioni varie politico-amministrative, Elenco delle rappresentanze comunali, Municipio di Laurana and Municipio di Moschienizze, 23.11.1919.
labelled as Croats, were considered unfit for the task. Thus, the commander of the infantry division on site appointed an army lieutenant as civil commissioner in January 1919. A month later, the same officer was appointed by the Governor as special commissioner, and the municipal board was disbanded.

A similar pattern can be seen in district’s hinterland. In the first month of the Italian occupation, in Matteria/Materija, the wartime mayor remained in place. In Castelnuovo/Podgrad, the prewar mayor reassumed his office in November 1918. However, the Slovene mayors demonstrated a lack of interest in their offices, were not collaborative with Italian authorities, and so were considered averse to the new authorities, so in March 1919 they were replaced by Italian army officers acting as special commissioners. Quite the opposite was the case with the municipality of Jelsane (later Elsane)/Jelšane, where the wartime acting mayor, a Slovene—twice proposed to be removed and once even shortly imprisoned—actually remained in office until the 1922 municipal elections. Diametrically opposite to Jelšane was Kastav, as we saw, another municipality with few Italian inhabitants, which received a new commissioner already in November 1918. An interesting story occurred in Klana, a distinct tax locality that was part of the larger Kastav municipality, where a military commander at the end of 1918 appointed a local Croatian as new president of the administrative council. The composition of the administrative council, aside from two resigning members, remained unchanged until May 1920 when the Italian authorities appointed a new administrative board, again made up of locals.

33 Members of a Provisional Administrative Board, probably those appointed in December, are mentioned in January 1919, while the same figures, with hard to read handwritten notes on political-national affiliation, are mentioned as part of an Advisory Board in March. The previously mentioned body was never effective; rather, the civil commissioner had assumed the control over the municipality. DARI-616, CDVo, Box 42 (new signature), 1-I-1919, Amministrazioni comunali, Comune di Apriano (Veprinac), Comando della 61’ Divisione di Fanteria, Stato Maggiore al Commissario Civile di Volosca, Oggetto: Tenente Zaglio comissario civile di Apriano, 9.2.1919 and 1919 and DARI-608, Općina Veprinac, Comune di Apriano, Box 31, 1919, Unnumered files, Foglio d'intimazione dal Municipio di Apriano, 8.3.1919, Giunta consultiva.

34 DARI-616, CDVo, Box 42 (new signature), 1-I-1919, Amministrazioni comunali, Comune di Apriano (Veprinac), Protocollo della seduta straordinaria della Giunta provvisoria amministrativa, 19.1.1919 and DARI-608, Općina Veprinac, Comune di Apriano, Box 31, 1919, Unnumbered files, Foglio d'intimazione dal Municipio di Apriano, 8.3.1919, Giunta consultiva.

35 DARI-616, CDVo, Box 42 (new signature), 1-I-1919, Amministrazioni comunali, Comune di Castelnuovo d'Istria and Comune di Matteria and Box 42 (old signature), 1-IV-1919, Questioni varie politico-amministrative, Amministrazione civile nei territori occupati dal R. Esercito, Minuta del Commissario civile al Segretario generale per gli affari civili, 2.4.191.

36 DARI-616, CDVo, Box 42 (new signature), 1-I-1919, Amministrazioni comunali, 1919, Comune di Jelsane and 1920, Comune di Jelsane.

Finally, the municipality of Volosca-Abbazia—the seat of the political district—obtained a commissioner in January 1919 by removing the Croatian mayor who had served in that post for over the past twenty years.\textsuperscript{38} In short, most of the municipalities were substantially reshuffled by the beginning of 1919, and then put under the control of military officers—i.e., reserve officers (captains) and career officers (majors)—that had to act as civil administrators, disabling or restricting locals’ political representation and preventing a return to prewar norms of municipal operation.

One’s national political affiliation with Croatian or Slovenian parties certainly played an important role in the decision to install certain commissioners in the municipality. However, as the cases of Kastav and Jelšane demonstrate, other elements were considered. Likely, Captain Sala was instantly appointed commissioner of Kastav for strategic reasons, since the municipality was on the demarcation line bordering the populous and soon disputed Fiume/Rijeka, and on its territory lay an important railway station, connecting the region with both Ljubljana and Trieste. Conversely, the less populous Jelšane was considered to be without specific economic or strategic importance, meaning it could be left to a Slovene mayor even if the authorities considered him untrustworthy.

Indeed, the real site of nationalization was the coastal area surrounding the district seat and the district seat itself. These were zones that, from the perspective of local Italian nationalists and Italian officials, needed to be Italianized as soon as possible since they were considered intrinsically Italian territories. Local Italian political associations played an important role in consolidating and enforcing a vision of the Italian coastal character that was to be recovered.\textsuperscript{39}

These administrative transformations and in particular the discharge of SCS national councils—which are considered examples of the Italian state’s illegal alteration of the 1907 Hague Conventions and an avoidance of the clauses of the Villa Giusti armistice\textsuperscript{40}—demonstrated a flexible and extensive interpretation of armistice norms by Italian authorities.

\textsuperscript{38} DARI-616, CDVo, Box 42 (new signature), 1-1-1919, Amministrazioni comunali, Comune di Volosca-Abbazia, Verbale di consegna, 4.1.1919 and Agneza SZABO, Andrija Stanger, istaknuti hrvatski političar i zaslužni prosvjetni i kulturni djelatnik and IDEM, Andrija Stanger, eminente politico croato e benemerito operatore scolastico e culturale, Časopis za povijest Zapadne Hrvatske 2 (2007-2008), No. 3, 59-71 and 177-191.

\textsuperscript{39} See the news on the municipal signboard, now in Italian (again) after the political change of power in 1895. Da Volosca. L’Azione, 6.01.1919, 2. On the binary of “Slavic countryside versus Italian cities”, see Marta VERGINELLA, Il paradigma città campagna e la rappresentazione dualistica di uno spazio multietnico. In Contemporanea, XI, 4, 779-792.

\textsuperscript{40} Budislav VUKAS, Talijanska okupacijska politika u Istri 1918.-1920. s gledišta međunarodnog prava, in Ivan MILOTIĆ/ Budislav VUKAS (eds.) Habsburgovi i Istra u pravu i povijesti. Motovun, 2019, 245- 265, specifically 251-253.
By early 1919, the authority of the Habsburg state was considered dead, and the Italian state, through the army—i.e., the General Secretariat for Civil Affairs and the Military Governor—now exercised authority. As we saw, institutional competences were not officially altered. Rather, only the people in charge of previously existing institutions had changed. And while this issue displayed a clear attempt by a new state to order enforcement over the region, a side effect of this process was the usurpation of locals’ political representation. Since new municipal elections were organized only in 1922—preceded up until then by the appointment of some municipal boards with advisory roles—this deficiency was not resolved at the end of the war. Italian municipalities’ postwar alterations thus resembled a continuity with the war years, when some municipality boards were appointed by the Austrian district captain, indicating that 1918 was not a turning point for democracy and the rule of law (or the lack thereof). In fact, the Italian occupation acted as an even stronger constraint, since the special commissioners that had been appointed by Italian forces did not have any connections to or even knowledge of the local situation and, further, were often frequently replaced military officers, and only later civil servants. Indeed, lack of a clear return to prewar “normality” is even more noticeable in the sometimes-violent treatment of those parts of the population considered potentially hostile to the new state.

Postwar State Violence

Internment was a preventative means largely adopted by the new Italian military authorities as an extension of wartime legislation to the newly controlled Julian March. Targets of internment policies were two groups: former Habsburg soldiers and potential threats to public and political order. The latter included alleged or actual revolutionaries (that is, socialists and communists)—which, notably, were almost completely absent in the district—and the representatives, supporters, or alleged supporters of the South Slav state (far more numerous in the district). The various groups, obviously, could overlap. In the specific case of the Volosca-Abbazia district, one hundred and four people, all men, were interned by the Italian authorities until August 1919. Of those interned, only eight were released by the time a list of interned and imprisoned was

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41 VISINTIN, L’Italia a Trieste, 48–49

drawn up by the district authorities. These numbers are mainly the result of a wave of internments in April 1919, a period of high tensions between Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes because of the diplomatic standstills occurring at the peace talks in Paris.

Yet, the consequences of international friction affected the life of some people well beyond the spring months. Among those interned in April 1919 was Antonio Kosmina, the tribunal courier of Castelnuovo/ Podgrad, who was held in the fortress of Gardolo in Trentino until March 1920. Following a request from his family, Kosmina was freed, but not allowed to return home. Instead, Kosmina was confined to his native village in the district of Sesana/ Sežana, from where he returned home only in May 1920 after his wife’s further appeal to the authorities. There were no noteworthy reasons, remarkable political engagements, or specific charges that led to Kosmina’s long journey home. Kosmina was simply imprisoned by orders of the Italian XVI Army Corps, grouped together with other civil servants from Castelnuovo/ Podgrad and former Austro-Hungarian soldiers labeled as dangerous. Despite broad accusations, the district commissioner refused to release Kosmina in December 1919. That Kosmina was not a dangerous element became evident by the report of the new special commissioner of Castelnuovo/ Podgrad from May 1920. The commissioner suggested that Kosmina should be rehired since internment was only a preventive measure against former Austro-Hungarian soldiers of Slovene nationality, and in the case of Kosmina, such a measure was too harsh and undeserved since he was “a former gendarme, a dutiful individual, observant to duty, used to Austrian discipline.” Recognition of Kosmina’s usefulness led him to maintain employment in another Italian state court after annexation.

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43 DARI-616, CDVo, Box 43 (old signature), 1-V-1920, Internati prigionieri, Specchio Numerico e Nominativo prigionieri e internati civili e militari, Elenco numerico dei prigionieri ed internati (Table without date, probably November 1919)

44 DARI-616, CDVo, Box 43 (old signature), 1920 I-V, Internati prigionieri, Lettera K, Documents on Kosmina Antonio.


46 Kosmina Antonio from Comeno (today Komen, in Slovenia) is listed in 1928 as usher in the Court of Postumia, in: Bollettino ufficiale del Ministero della giustizia e degli affari di culto, Vol. 49, Roma, 1928, Supplemento al n. 38, 27.09.1928, 11, unter <https://books.google.hr/books?id=EQ6iBjD6LAYC&pg=PA704-IA11&dq=%22kosmina+antonio%22&source=bl&ots=youzy0NgO&sig=ACfU3U1-390RE1grVVKSIJQKkHH24OD_FQ&hl=it&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjYjTjPf0AhVChIsKHRg1BB4Q6AEwAnoECAoQAQ#v=onepage&q=%22kosmina%20antonio%22&f=false>, 15.10.2020.
But civil servants were not the only endangered social group, and Kosmina’s destiny was shared by the humbler residents of Jelšane. Antonio and Giovanni Iskra, former Austro-Hungarian soldiers considered political suspects as other men from Jelšane, were interned at the same time as Kosmina. The liberation of the two brothers in March 1920 was due to the request of their old, sick, widower father, who needed them to work the fields. Both the Iskra and Komina cases testify to the persistence of exceptional wartime measures during the postwar months—and how long the road towards normalization was. In this sense, postwar Italian-occupied Istria has some similarities with Alsace-Lorraine’s postwar experience, where special commissions, headed primarily by French military figures, classified individuals’ loyalties to remove potential or alleged threats to French authorities. In addition to internments, an elevated number of district residents were still imprisoned, whether in territories controlled by Italy or in other states. According to the same source counting the interned, roughly 240 out of 600 war prisoners were still not home by August 1919, producing labor shortages in rural areas that needed people for undelayable agricultural work.

Besides internments, crossing the armistice line out of fear was not an uncommon phenomenon. While only three teachers were registered as interned in the Volosca-Abbazia district, at least eighteen teachers moved to Yugoslavia, most of them in April and May 1919, or fled away already at the end of 1918 and beginning of 1919. As we shall see, the phenomenon of teachers crossing the line was a complication that could be transformed into an opportunity. Along with teachers, Italian authorities mistrusted Croatian and Slovene priests, marking them as another threat. However, internment—or merely the fear of internment—

47 DARI-616, CDVo, Box 43 (old signature), Municipio di Jelšane. Elenco dei internati, 24.8.1919. A note written in pencil states “ex-military” next to the names. The Iskra brothers were probably interned by order of the military for the same reason as another Jelšane settler, Pozar Giuseppe, who was considered dangerous by the Italian occupation. IDEM, Lettera P, Pozar Giuseppe.

48 DARI-616, CDVo, Box 43 (old signature), 1920 I-V, Internati prigionieri, Lettera I, Documents on Antonio and Giovanni Iskra.


50 DARI-616, CDVo, Box 43 (old signature), 1-V-1920, Internati prigionieri, Specchio Numerico e Nominativo prigionieri e internati civili e militari, Elenco numerico dei prigionieri ed internati.

51 An additional eight did not show up after the armistice, while six resigned or retired. DARI-618, Consiglio distrettuale scolastico, Kotarsko školsko vijeće u Voloskom 1872-1924, Box 56, N. 154, Minuta al Commissario generale civile di Trieste, Volosca, 12.6.1920. In September 1919, the number of teachers that had escaped was estimated to be around thirty, quoted in IDEM, Box 53, NR. 200/20/Sit., Commissariato Civile del Distretto politico di Volosca alla Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri e all’Ufficio Centrale per le nuove Province, 26.09.1919.

52 According to Klen, in April 1919 four priests from the district were on an interment list, of whom only one was sent to Sardinia (two fled, and one was spared for health reasons). Danilo KLEN, Neki dokumenti o svećenstvu u
created problems in other spheres of life. For instance, the only pharmacist in Laurana/Lovran was interned, leaving the municipality without easy access to medicine. The physician from Castelnuovo/Podgrad, who also served two other municipalities, abandoned his office out of fear, though he was not on the interment list. Italian military authorities in these cases faced another emergency, namely, overseeing a population that lacked adequate access to healthcare. They only way they could solve this—as in Castelnuovo—was to appoint conscripted army physicians to these posts.

In order to ensure control over and order among a potentially hostile population, the new Italian authorities did not limit themselves to internments. Preexisting Habsburg legislation on eviction was another legal tool used by occupying forces to rid themselves of problematic elements. For instance, the district inspector of Volosca-Abbazia for Croatian schools was to be dismissed and evicted, but crossed the armistice line, leaving behind his wife and daughter. In November 1919, they too were ordered to be evicted. Of all options to control the population, internment and eviction were certainly the most extreme measures that targeted specific parts of the population and produced fear.

Yet, there were other forms of intimidation adopted to exercise control over the population. At the end of March 1919, a report from the Italian military intelligence service recommended that troops should frequently drive armored vehicles with machine guns through the district, especially in Castua and Matteria—as was done during the first days of the Italian occupation of Volosca—to discourage any violent activity against the Italian presence. Furthermore, an infantry regiment command that had settled on the coast issued an order in February 1919 which threatened to take local elders hostage if any acts of sabotage or hostility were carried out by unknown parties. Thus, fear was another important factor in ensuring that the local population obeyed the new state.

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53 DARI-616, CDVo, Box 46, 4 Sanità ed Igiene, 1919, Minuta del commissario al governatorato, 3.5.1919 and Il municipio di Laurana al commissario, 31.03.1919.

54 DARI-616, CDVo, Box 48, 6-I-1919, Scuole e insegnanti, 6-I-a, Insegnanti, Il Commissario Generale Civile della Venezia Giulia al Commissario Civile di Volosca, Famiglia Bunc, 25.11.1919.


The demarcation line between Italy and the South Slav state became another issue, displaying how the military occupation controlled, or at least tried to control, the population’s everyday movements. Before the war, the southeastern part of the district bordered on two different administrative units of the Kingdom of Hungary: the *corpus separatum* of Fiume and Croatia-Slavonia. After November 1918, these former state-administration borders were not fully respected and subject to different occupational authorities, interfering with daytime migrations in a region whose economic center was Fiume. The situation of confusion was palpable in a few settlements officially part of the municipality of Kastav, and therefore parts of the Volosca district. After the occupation, these places were located between the armistice line (the line reached by the Italian army according to the Villa Giusti armistice) and the control line (the line where Italian troops were quartered as part of the Interallied occupation). According to the civil commissioner of Volosca, these villages were under the jurisdiction of the Julian March, a directive not followed by those on the Interallied side. In May 1919, in Cantrida/Kantrida—a small locality adjacent to Fiume—some *osterias* organized festivities without permission. There, the carabinieri’s discipline had loosened (“*si davano alla bella vita*”) and people from Fiume freely arrived. Everything passed through Cantrida without any control by the agents. The angry district commissioner demanded order, and described the settlements as “a triangle that is almost outside the law.”

The triangle the district commissioner referred to was the territory between pre-1918 Habsburg administrative units and post-1918 military occupation units, a legal, economic, and bureaucratic mess, without a define border. This did not stop some enterprising locals from smuggling goods into Fiume. But, on the whole, the new border mostly created issues for locals that even the military command was forced to address. As a case in point, take the emotional distress experienced by schoolchildren in the small village of Trampi. In November 1919, after a reorganization of school districts (*circondario*), the children of Trampi were obliged to attend a more distant school and, what is more, were “crying, afraid of crossing the demarcation

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57 DARI-22, Izvanredni komesarijat Kastva, Commissario straordinario di Castua, Box 850, 3-Passaporti e permessi, 1919, N. 662, Il Commissario distrettuale di Volosca al Comando Compagnia CC.RR. Volosca, al Commissario civile Castua e per conoscenza al Comando CC.RR. Corpo interallato Fiume, 10.5.1919.

58 “Ciò vale per tutti gli altri paesi del triangolo che è quasi fuori legge” in DARI-22, Izvanredni komesarijat Kastva, Commissario straordinario di Castua, Box 851, 8-Ordine pubblico, 1919, N.734, Il Commissario civile pel distretto politico di Volosca al Commissario comunale di Castua e Al Comando Compagnia CC.RR. Volosca, 21.05.1919.
In this case, the authorities desisted and provided an exemption for the schoolchildren. However, the parents had to renew this exemption the following year.\textsuperscript{60}

Due to the Italian military presence, a return to prewar circumstances was not easily achieved. Indeed, the Italian occupying forces enacted military measures over civilians, interning locals sometimes only on the basis of broad allegations. Driven by an aim to secure undisputed Italian state control over the area, such measures fostered fear and uncertainty, forcing Croatians and Slovenes to emigrate from these areas. This process of migration fueled further uncertainty and challenges both for the local population and the new authorities. In the sphere of education, policies adopted by the occupying forces demonstrated how postwar normalization diverged greatly from the prewar situation. Indeed, they also display how challenges could have been transformed into opportunities.

\textbf{“Repair the unjust treatment of Italian schools by the former regime”}

The Italian authorities’ initiative in the sphere of education was also driven towards a return to normality and order. Notions of normality and order, however, meant standardizing the existing Italian language schools in the Julian March with those in the rest of Italy, and promoting education in the Italian language. Yet, these initiatives were limited by a state of provisional administration and sovereignty not fully achieved. The territories were not officially part of Italy, and for both political and practical reasons the former imperial institutions could not be entirely set aside.\textsuperscript{61} Still, the target of the newly arrived Italian state, represented by the Italian army, was to dismantle the local Habsburg heritage. This antagonism, justified by an appeal to the \textit{Risorgimento} tradition and to the effects of the long-lasting war, materialized in the immediate prohibition of former Habsburg state symbols and in the ban on some practices attributed to the former empire. The Habsburg double-headed eagle had to be removed from all signage, even if it was not so simple to remove. In January 1919, a report from the General Secretariat for Civil Affairs stated that, in many offices and school directorates, there were specimens of certificates for school news with large double-headed eagles as part of their iconography. These images had to be removed, the report declared, and the text “Austro-

\textsuperscript{59}“I loro figliuoli piangono, avendo paura di oltrepassare la linea d’armistizio”, in DARI-618, Kotarsko školsko vijeće u Voloskom 1872-1924, Box 54, N. 348, Dirigenza della scuola al commissario distrettuale, Srdoči, 26.11.1919.

\textsuperscript{60} IDEM, Box 55, N. 50, Dirigenza della scuola al commissario distrettuale, Srdoči, 3.2.1920.

Hungarian Monarchy”—written in Italian for Italian schools, bilingual in others—would be substituted by “Royal Italian Army.” The most emblematic visual symbol of the specific situation of education in the immediate postwar period were the school report cards, headed rather by the inscription of an occupying army than that of a state. Another minor and still important symbolic change was introduced into the grading system. While the former Habsburg school marks went from 5 to 1, the Italian marks, ranging from 1 to 10, had to be adopted. The result was, at least in the municipality of Kastav, misunderstandings or deliberate obstructions by teachers that infuriated the civil commissioner. A calendar with new national-monarchic festivities (queens’ and king’s birthday) was also introduced, and Croatian- and Slovene-language schools had to remove pages praising the Habsburg dynasty from their textbooks. Conversely, Italian-language schools were to receive new books altogether. The realization of this last point was, again, indicative of the discord between reality and theory, norm and praxis. According to the civil commissioner, the pages that had to be ripped out of the textbooks attracted the attention of schoolchildren—they wanted to see exactly what the new authorities did not want them to see.

However, the biggest changes occurred in religious and linguistic instruction. By directive of the Governor from December 10, 1918—an order that arrived in Volosca only at the beginning of January—during that school year in the Italian civic and rural schools, religion became optional, religious services as school duties were abolished, the German language was replaced by the same number of mandatory hours of Italian, while in the civic schools it was reduced to two, transferring the remaining hours to the history of Italy. Moreover, in their singing lessons, pupils were instructed to sing Italian national hymns. Maximum importance in all classes had to be given to the teaching of patria geography and the history of the Italian

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63 GIRON, Klana za vrijeme talijanske okupacije, 93 and DARI-618, Kotarsko školsko vijeće u Voloskom, Box 53, N.172, Dal commissario straordinario di Castua al Comissario Civile di Volosca, and minuta alla Direzione della scuola popolare di (Tutte le scuole), Volosca, 29.05.1919.

64 GIRON, Klana za vrijeme talijanske okupacije, 93; DARI-616, CDVo. Box 850, 2-Scuole, 1919, N.375, Commissariato civile del distretto di politico di Volosca, Oggetto: Calendario scolastico, 26.03.1919 and Box 48, 6-I-1919, Scuole e insegnanti, 6-I-c, Disposizioni varie in materia d'insegnamento, Copia R. Governatorato della Venezia Giulia Ufficio Affari Civili, Oggetto: Modificazione nell'insegnamento della storia, 23.01.1919.


66 DARI-618, Kotarsko školsko vijeće u Voloskom, Box 53, N. 200/20/Sit., Commissario del distretto politico di Volosca alla Presidenza del Consigli dei Ministri e all'Ufficio Centrale per le nuove Provice, 26.09.1919.
Evidently, the existing Italian-language schools were slowly transforming to become schools like those in the Kingdom of Italy, despite the limitations of the provisional administration and the retention of the institutions of the Habsburg educational system.

The Italian-language schools were, however, almost a negligible component of Volosca-Abbazia’s educational network: there were only two such schools in the prewar period, and after the Italian occupation this number rose to four. Thus, additional instructions followed for public non-Italian schools. On January 11, 1919, the Governor ordered modifications to Croatian- and Slovene-language schools, declaring that German language instruction had to be abolished in the school where it was previously mandatory, generating confusion in the offices of some municipalities. Since there were no Italian-language schools in Castelnuovo, the municipal office asked for further instructions: should the German language be substituted with Italian, and should religious services, as school duties, also be abolished for non-Italian schools as they had been for Italian schools? The civil commissioner replied by repeating the directive that, for Croatian- and Slovene-language schools, the only modification to be made was the abolition of German language instruction where it was mandatory. There was no mention of what to do with the Italian language. The disposition regarded German as a mandatory rather than elective subject, so the municipality of Castelnuovo wrote once more in February, asking for more information about whether Italian should be a mandatory or an elective subject for Croatian- and Slovene-language schools.

The civil commissioner then wrote a letter to all municipal administrations in order to clarify the instructions. For Croatian and Slovene schools, the only modification was to abolish German language instruction in those schools where it had been mandatory or elective. Instead of the German language, the Italian language had to be taught as a mandatory subject. The most important order pointed out, however, that communications with the district had to be written in the Italian language. While the last point was clearly an imposition of Italian language onto the functioning of the school administration, the other dispositions were still not quite clear—was Italian mandatory instead of German language, or was it mandatory for everyone? The civil

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67 DARI-618, Kotarsko školsko vijeće u Voloskom, Box 64, N. 1/2-19, Il R. Governatore della Venezia Giulia alla Giunta Provinciale dell'Istria, Trieste e per conoscenza ai Commissari civili, 10.12.1918. Attached the program.

68 DARI-618, Kotarsko školsko vijeće u Voloskom, Box 64, N.22, 1919, R. Governatore della Venezia Giulia al Commissario civile per l'Istria e per conoscenza ai Commissari civili, Oggetto: Programmi delle scuole croate, Trieste, 11.01.1919.

69 IDEM, Al Commissariato civile distrettuale politico di Volosca, Municipio di Castelnuovo, 22.01.1919; Minuta del Commissario all’Ufficio comunale in Castelnuovo, 27.1.1919 and Municipio di Castelnuovo al Commissario civile, 3.2.1919.

70 IDEM, Minuta A tutte le dirigenze scolastiche del distretto politico di Volosca, 15.2.1919.
commissioner’s report on the 1918/19 school year illustrates accurately how Italian language indeed became mandatory: “The teaching of Italian language has been introduced in all the schools, where before the redemption [of the territory] the teaching of German was compulsory, and voluntary also in almost all the others.” However, despite widespread Italian language teaching across the district, the results were described as miserable, especially among Croatian and Slovene teachers in opposition to the new changes. The teaching of the Italian language was only the tip of the iceberg, since it was a measure adopted to accustom the population to their new, official state language. Still, one could maintain other aspects of instruction in their respective languages. Other measures were much more driven towards nationalization.

By order of the Military Governor, three private schools and a kindergarten of the Saint Cyril and Methodius society, as well as the private popolare and civic German language schools, were closed in the district in January 1919. The closure of the private schools was an opportunity for Italianization. One of the schools associated with the Saint Cyril and Methodius society was almost immediately reactivated as an Italian-language school by the appointment of a soldier by a division commander settled in the area. The pupils of the closed schools, when not attending school at all, started to attend the Italian language schools. Yet, these schools did not have enough teachers and enough space for the influx of new students. At the end of January 1919, the district commissioner Pavone informed the Governor that four schools had closed due to teachers that abandoned their positions because of their hostility to the Italian occupation. As in the case of the closed private schools, the commissioner viewed the Croatian teachers’ departure as an opportunity: the teachers could be replaced by more loyal elements that knew the language of instruction, but who also knew the Italian language. In addition to primary schools, the civil commissioner turned his attention towards the municipal Croatian lower gymnasia in Volosca. The gymnasium had stopped working in April 1919 after its teachers fled to the neighboring SCS Kingdom. Pavone recommended that two Italian language teachers be sent there before the school was entirely closed down. Furthermore, the General

71 “L’insegnamento della lingua italiana fu introdotto in tutte le scuole, dove prima della redenzione era obbligatorio l’insegnamento del tedesco, e spontaneamente anche in quasi tutte le altre” in DARI-618, Kotarsko školsko vijeće u Voloskom, Box 53, N. 200/20/Sit., Commissario del distretto politico di Volosca alla Presidenza dei Consigli dei Ministri e all’Ufficio Centrale per le nuove Provincie, 26.09.1919.

72 IDEM, Box 64, N.6-1-19, Minuta dell’ordine di chiusura alla Direzione SS. Cirillo e Metodio e Direzione scuola popolare e cittadina tedesca, 19.1.1919.

73 DARI-616, CDVo, Box 48, 6-I-1919, Scuole e insegnanti, 6-I-1919 b, Scuole, Scuole dei SS. Cirillo e Metodio e private. Municipio di Apriano al commissario di Volosca, 6.3.1919.

74 DARI-616, CDV, Box 48, 6-I-1919, Scuole e insegnanti, 6-I-a, Insegnanti, Minuta del commissario al Governatore, Scuole Italiane, 29.1.1919.
Secretariat for Civil Affairs notified the district that it had soldiers with the necessary legal qualifications to teach, asking lower officials to request them. In the case of the district, the civil commissioner replied that seven teachers were needed: three to enlarge existing Italian schools, two to open two new Italian schools, and two to teach non-Italians. These were small numbers, still testifying to the slow, ongoing process of strengthening Italian linguistic presence in the area.

Kindergartens were also a good example of such practices. In the municipality of Volosca-Abbazia, in May 1919, an Italian kindergarten was inaugurated on the initiative of the XXVI Army Command, and the civil commissioner allocated a consistent sum for that purpose. In Laurana/Lovran, the prewar Lega Nazionale kindergarten was reactivated by the municipality, again with donations by the civil commissioner. The commissioner Pavone asked the governor for further funds to reopen another one in the Moschienizze/Mošćenice municipality. Kindergartens were considered among the most efficient means of assistance and propaganda work: for the commissioner, they were useful and accepted by the population. On one side, kindergartens promised to take youth off the street, while on the other side they provided the possibility to educate the young in a patriotic—Italian—way.

All the Italianizing efforts mentioned here did not interrupt normality from the perspective of Italian authorities. Rather, they were restoring an alleged (national) normality that had been lost. This is quite evident by Pavone’s June 1919 report to the Governor:

To repair the unjust treatment of Italian schools by the former regime, it will be necessary to allow them the same development that their importance requires. The pressure made by leading spheres to dissolve Italian schools succeeded once before, if we consider the fact that citizens—as soon as they felt free—overcrowded Italian schools so much so that it was necessary to provide new classrooms and new teaching forces, adapting private residences and recalling military teachers.

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75 DARI-618, Kotarsko školsko vijeće u Voloskom, Box 64, N. 739, Minuta del Commissario civile Volosca al Comando supremo. Segretario generale per gli Affari civili, 24.02.1919.
76 DARI-616, CDVo, Box 46, 5-II Istruzione e beneficenza, 1919, Minuta del commissario al Governatorato, 6.5.1919.
77 “Per riparare all'ingiusto trattamento usato dal cessato regime alle scuole italiane sarà necessario dare alle stesse quello sviluppo che richiede la loro importanza. La pressione esercitata dalle sfere dirigenti per sopprimere le scuole italiane riuscì evidente prima quando si consideri che i cittadini appena sentiti liberati fecero affollare talmente le scuole italiane che fu necessario provvedere a nuove aule e nuove forze insegnati, addattando abitazioni private e richiamando maestri militari.” In DARI-618, Kotarsko školsko vijeće u Voloskom, Box 53, N. 215,
The commissioner and the new authorities viewed, through a national lens, the former Habsburg state as nationally discriminatory against Italians and perceived themselves as bearers of national justice, i.e., normality. From this perspective, overcrowding was not merely a symptom of the population’s adaptation to new circumstances and a response to the closure of other schools. Rather, it was an expected, if imagined, outcome of liberation.

Still, authorities were aware that new pupils were not definitively won over to the nationalist cause. As a school teacher in the newly established Italian school in Draga di Moschienizze/Mošćenička Draga wrote: “If treated too harshly, they [the pupils] could return to the Croatian school.”\(^7\) Hardly anyone familiar with this part of Istria—a region of “authentic hybrids”\(^8\) —could be surprised that there were clear traces of national indifference.\(^9\) An awareness that national indifference existed and could be exploited was evident since the beginning of the occupation, at least according to a civil commissioner’s report from Castua/Kastav. Following talks with leading local Italians in the district, Sala wrote that rural dwellers of some municipalities, although Croatians, send their children to those schools where they obtain greater material advantages. Accordingly, the commissioner proposed to provide Italian schools with school meals, clothes, shoes, and books.\(^1\) This final element sheds important light on the fact that the process of Italianization was partially possible thanks to the local population, which ranked material benefit ahead of supposed national loyalty.

While the population’s adaptation could sometimes function for kindergartens or elementary schools, secondary education was a different—and real—issue. With the Croatian gymnasium’s closure, and aside from the Croatian-language school for teachers in Kastav, there was no other high school in the Volosca-Abbazia district. This gap exposed the pitfalls of Pavone’s approach to normalization. The price of limiting Croatian-language education meant sacrificing secondary education almost entirely in the district, and fostering locals’ orientation, at least for those Croatians able to afford it, towards the SCS Kingdom. An Italian-language

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81 DARI-616, CDVo, Box 42 (new signature), 1-1-1919, Amministrazioni comunali, 1919, Comune di Castua, Regio Commissario civile di Castua, Relazione politica ed amministrativa del Comune, 27.
technical high school was inaugurated in Abbazia/Opatija only after the official annexation in 1921, well beyond the beginning of peacetime.\textsuperscript{82} Overall, the educational situation was far from ideal. Compared to some other Istrian districts—in particular Pola/Pula, which suffered from the extensive closure of Croatian-language schools and the opening of Italian-language alternatives—school conditions in the Volosca-Abbazia district were at least acceptable.\textsuperscript{83} Volosca-Abbazia was indeed the only district that kept almost all of its public schools open, regardless of the language of instruction. Yet, behind this façade lay lessons reduced to half-day sessions, and teachers with simultaneous appointments to multiple schools. Here, too, the postwar situation was still far away from being normal in the prewar sense of the word.

**Civil Servants**

If schools were a site of slow nationalization, the treatment of the former civil servants shows that the establishment of a new state required time and was not prone to accept indistinctly all those of the former regime. An instant purge of all former Austrian officials did not happen, and it remains an open question how many former imperial bureaucrats maintained their offices until the fascist seizure of power. During the first months of occupation, former Habsburg civil servants were asked to fill out a questionnaire and, if they were not particularly involved with or suspected of hostile activity (whether pro-Habsburg or South Slav), they remained in place. Still, civil servants’ positions were precarious. Besides arbitrary labeling, the military governor could remove anyone for arbitrary reasons of “public interest.”\textsuperscript{84}

The lack of a declaration of allegiance was not so awkward, since the Italian state’s presence in the region was still provisional, and the requirement for former Habsburg civil servants to take an oath of allegiance was introduced by law only in January 1922 and was a mere extension of the existing Italian formula.\textsuperscript{85} Alongside the pledge, another crucial requirement was the acquisition of Italian citizenship. Satisfying both of these requirements were problems that emerged with looming annexation. Yet, in the first months of the occupation, at least in Trieste, committees that oversaw purges of state officers and of the most important companies were created.\textsuperscript{86} Besides these short-lived purges, reports from the Italian

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{82} Amir MUZUR, Liburnijski mikrokozam. Studije, osvrte, afekti. Opatija 2003, 60.
  \item \textsuperscript{83} Mate DEMARIN, Hrvatsko školstvo u Istri između dva svjetska rata, 45-56, 60-61.
  \item \textsuperscript{84} D’ALESSIO, Talijani i Hrvati u Pazinu, 166-168.
  \item \textsuperscript{85} DI MICHELE, L’italianizzazione imperfetta, 116.
  \item \textsuperscript{86} VISINTIN, L’Italia a Trieste, 29-30.
\end{itemize}
military intelligence service office, Informazioni Truppe Operanti (ITO)—which were written by local irredentists who fought as Italian army volunteers—were keen to label and denounce leading figures of the Croatian and Slovene communities as dangerous, asking, at a minimum, for their removal.

In April 1919, the ITO office asked for the removal of Adolfo Lunacek, a postal officer in Volosca-Abbazia district, and many teachers there, because they were considered local Yugoslav leaders.\(^{87}\) (At least in the case of Lunacek, we are sure that he was interned in Sardinia.\(^{88}\)) Thus, the main issue in the immediate postwar period was the arbitrary concept of hostility and the actors involved in evaluating civil servants. As we saw previously in the Kosmina case, an irrelevant political figure suspected by the military endured months of interment, and despite the mistreatment still maintained his position as civil servant. Arguably, Kosmina was not a highly ranked servant, and he lacked public visibility.

A partial understanding of the phenomenon of confirmation is provided by numeric lists provided to the Governor. In July 1919, the civil commissioner of Volosca sent a list of personnel of the former Austrian regime to be confirmed as part of the district commissariat, and the agricultural, tax, and technical offices. Of the thirty-five names in the list, seventeen of them were labelled, by nationality, Croatian, with seven Slovene, eight Italian, and three German. Only three (two Croatians and one Slovene) were not confirmed.\(^{89}\) That nationality was not the main characteristic in confirming personnel is evident by the fact that the clerks in the technical office were left completely untouched: there were eleven menders, of whom zero were Italian; two even declared that they knew only Croatian. On the other side, a restricted list (the district commission, agricultural office, and school supervisors) dated October 1919 lists the same twelve names as in July, but registers seven new, or recent, employees.\(^{90}\) The new ones, as can be imagined, were all—except one—labelled Italian. Yet all declared themselves to be trilingual, at least to some extent. From the same files, it is evident that, earlier in 1919, some civil servants—like the supervisor for the Slovene and Croatian schools—left their positions and crossed the armistice lines in April 1919, or, in some cases, were simply interned.

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\(^{87}\) KLEN, Talijanska vojna obavještajna služba u bivšoj Julijskoj krajini 1919. godine, 168.

\(^{88}\) Archivio di Stato di Trieste (ASTS), Regio Governatorato poi Commissariato Generale Civile per la Venezia Giulia (RCGC), Affari generali, I-48-bis, Box 164, Uffici postali, 1920-1924, Fascicolo Lunacek Adolfo.

\(^{89}\) ASTS, RCGC, Atti di Gabinetto (1919–1922), Box 9, 2-5, Elenco del personale e varie, Volosca, Elenco del personale del cessato regime non ancora confermato in carica.

\(^{90}\) IDEM, Elenco del personale attualmente in servizio al N 016899 del 4/10/1919.
In the following years, employees’ confirmation requests and information about civil servants was gathered with nationality as a category playing an important, but not always decisive role. For instance, Giovanni Pockai, a clerk in the post-telegraphic office in Abbazia, was labeled as someone of “Slovene nationality,” but uninterested in politics, incapable of conducting propaganda against the Italian presence, having a serious temper, and active in his duties. Therefore, in December 1919, the local carabinieri proposed that he be confirmed in his position.91 As Pockai’s evaluation displays, the two other relevant factors in the decision were his political attitude—understood in this context as specific attitudes or feelings towards Italian annexation, Italian authorities, and also the potential to provoke disorder—and morality. Morality proved to be a loose factor, at least for those labeled Italian. The tax clerk Pietro Raicich was considered a devout wine drinker, but a good employee and sympathizer of the Italian cause.92 Similarly, Enea Tomassich of Italian nationality was suspended for a love affair and transferred to another district, but soon returned to Volosca and was able to maintain his original office.93 Further, Carlo Mahnic, a Castelnuovo court official probably of Slovene nationality—who also shared Raicich’s passion for wine—was seen as unproblematic, and was thus labeled by the civil commissioner in Catelnuovo as harmless and without any political affiliation.94

Political affiliation was indeed the most decisive characteristic, yet it could intertwine or overlap with nationality and sometimes even with morality. Aside from these evaluated characteristics, it should not be overlooked that, besides the carabinieri, there were multiple authorities invested in evaluating civil servants. Further, these evaluations continued through 1920. For teachers requesting confirmation in office, the district commissioner requested that municipalities and civil commissioners file a report on their political and moral attitudes in May 1919. Yet, those entrusted to evaluate civil servants were not locals (that was rather an exception), and in most municipalities—particularly those with comprehensive state institutions (e.g., district offices, courts, schools, and postal offices)—that function was carried out by someone formally commissioned by the Italian authorities. Thus, there was not a prominent role played by locals in the selection process for civil servants, and specifically not

94 IDEM, Giudizi, N.6, Mahnic Carlo, R. Commissario straordinario di Castelnuovo d'Istria, 23.05.1919.
by those of Croatian and Slovene political affiliation or background. A complete nationality-based purge seems not to have happened and, further, the situation was sometimes ambiguous in relation to the category of nationality. Possibly, some civil servants were kept because authorities were convinced that Italy held a superior civilized status, that is, had a state and a culture that could easily integrate if not completely assimilate and Italianize the Slavic population. Surely, an attempt to nationalize the most prominent and representative state offices took place. Indicative here is the issue of the Italian-language school inspector. Before the war, given few Italian-language schools, the district of Volosca-Abbazia did not have its own school inspector, relying rather on the inspector from the Lussino/Lošinj political district. In January 1919, an Italian-language school inspector, chosen from influential local Italian figures, was appointed. The inspector for Croatian- and Slovene-language schools, as we saw, was threatened with dismissal and eviction, so he crossed the armistice line.

The Achievement of (De-)Normalization?

In March 1920, lieutenant colonel Pavone was replaced as district commissioner by a professional Italian civil servant. Leaving his office, Pavone wrote the following to all municipalities in the Volosca-Abbazia district:

Together, we have reconstructed the basis for a normal administrative, civil, and political life under the aegis of Italian thought, which is a thought of faith, liberty, fraternity; in the orbit of the sanctity and invulnerability of the Patria made sacred by the suffering, the pain, the blood, the fallen in war, and of those who endured and suffered for human redemption.  

Pavone’s remarks recount the preparation for the future annexation of the district to the Italian nation-state, a process that had to be undisputed. However, a normal administrative, civil, or political life was not achieved due to his leadership or during his time in office. After the departure of Pavone, Italian authorities were still operating within the former Habsburg imperial institutional framework, and the Julian March was not yet officially annexed to the Italian Kingdom. In the last months of Pavone’s supervision of the district, citizens interned by military

95 “Abbiamo insieme ricostruite le basi della normale vita amministrativa, civile e politica sotto l'egida del pensiero italiano che è pensiero di fede, di libertà, di fratellanza; nell'orbità della santità e della invulnerabilità della Patria fatta sacra dagli stenti, dal dolore, dal sangue dei caduti in guerra e di quanti altri soffrirono e patirono per la redenzione umana” Commissario del distretto di Volosca a tutti i municipi, 17.03.1920, in DARI-608, OV, Box 32, N. 394.
authorities, sometimes without specific charges, were still being returned to their homes. Advancing Italianization had transformed or was transforming the educational system, sometimes reorienting the choices of the local population, and, yet, the district’s seat remained almost without a high school in any language.

During Pavone’s time in office, civil servants were subject to political, national, and moral evaluations in order to maintain their positions, a process that was still ongoing in the months after his departure. Neither political nor administrative elections were organized during this period. The municipalities in the Volosca-Abbazia district were mostly assigned commissioners after the occupation and remained under a military or civil commissioner well after the formal Italian annexation of these territories. Instead of normalization, the first years of the Italian state’s presence generated further animosity rather than merely bringing peace and a shared notion of normalization. The district commissioner’s devotion to the Italian state, and the Italian authorities’ promotion of a new civil religion—“a form of sacralization of a collective political entity,”96 in this case the Italian nation—were not shared by a population that had alternative views on national allegiance. Certainly, the civil commissioner’s view was endorsed by pro-Italian local forces, and for them the Italian army was a liberating force, restoring an allegedly just national balance. Yet, it was not simply a polarization between two clearly-defined and compact national groups—or between two mutually exclusive perspectives on the nation-state—that enhanced animosities. The duration of the transition, which pointed toward an unpredictable outcome, fueled uncertainty. The still hypothetical possibility of another overthrow of power, an additional transition, kept both tensions and hopes alive. Despite uncertain territorial acquisitions, the occupying Italian military force acted as though annexation was imminent and irreversible, performing in advance as defenders of the homeland.97 Through such policies, the military favored pro-Italian supporters, driving a forced transition of a territory to a new nation-state apparatus, one toward which some locals harbored doubt. The transition’s duration, the exceptional military administration, and the lack of recognition for un-Italian national organizations undermined democratization and increased the furrow between supporters of the Italian and South Slavs state projects. Illustrative of those animosities, and the character of the first few months of the Italian presence in Volosca-Abbazia, is Pavone’s mention in a Croatian-language Istrian paper two years after his departure.


Reporting on the farewell of Volosca’s civil district commissioner in 1922, the weekly *Stara Naša Sloga* positively evaluated this figure in comparison with evil state administrators, mentioning Pavone explicitly.98

From today’s perspective, it is not hard to claim that the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1919 marked the opening of an inevitable process of Italian nationalization, carried out further and more violently by the fascists and the fascist regime that followed. Nevertheless, the focus of this research can be adjusted to observe other actors and features of the immediate postwar Italian state presence in the Julian March. Not only does this subject the role of Italian authorities in the emergence of political violence and the rise of fascism to closer scrutiny, but also opens the issue of continuities between a wartime state of exception under the Habsburgs and the emergence of a new, postwar state of exception extended by the occupying Italian state. Surely, by the end of 1918, there was no easy path back to prewar normality or peace.

ABSTRACT

To ensure normal administrative order, and for the population greater comfort?
The aim of this article is to provide insight into the disappearance of the Habsburg Empire and the establishment of the presence of the Italian state in the Istriian district of Volosca-Abbazia (Volosko-Opatija). The focus of this article is on the role of state-administrative changes, the treatment of alleged or real political opponents, the importance of changes to educational policy, and actions towards civil servants in the area’s transition out of the Habsburg imperial framework. Through the continuities and ruptures between the Habsburg Empire and the new Italian national-state authority, with a view to developments during the wartime situation, the concept and degree of normalization in the postwar period are discussed.

98 Promjene u političkoj službi, *Stara Naša Sloga*, Trst, 2.11.1922, 2.