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## ANXIOUS »ITALIANS«: SECURITY AND WELFARE IN THE UPPER ADRIATIC, 1918–1924

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### ABSTRACT

*This article suggests that cultural trauma and insecurity fueled pervasive anxiety in the former Habsburg Adriatic Littoral in the wake of WWI and affected the development and implementation of social welfare policies. In the Italian successor state's eastern border provinces, the creation of a secure and stable society relied on authorities' ability to include and support individuals and on individuals' ability to negotiate their place as citizens and to define themselves as worthy of state assistance.*

**Keywords:** anxious populations, Adriatic Littoral, interwar period, social welfare, citizenship, precarity

## GLI »ITALIANI« IN ANSIA: SICUREZZA E PREVIDENZA SOCIALE NELL'ALTO ADRIATICO, 1918–1924

### SINTESI

*Questo articolo sostiene che il trauma culturale e l'insicurezza hanno alimentato un'ansia pervasiva nell'ex litorale adriatico asburgico all'indomani della Prima guerra mondiale e hanno influenzato lo sviluppo e l'attuazione delle politiche di assistenza sociale. Nelle province di confine orientali dello Stato italiano successore, la creazione di una società sicura e stabile si basava sulla capacità delle autorità di includere e sostenere gli individui e sulla capacità di questi ultimi di negoziare il proprio ruolo di cittadini e di definirsi degni dell'assistenza statale.*

**Parole chiave:** popolazioni ansiose, Litorale austriaco, periodo interbellico, assistenza sociale, cittadinanza, precarietà

Owing to their “ancient Italianness,” Trieste/Trst, Istria/Istra, and Dalmazia/Dalmatia/Dalamcija<sup>1</sup> should be treated as an integral part of victorious Italian state not as a part of a conquered territory or vanquished state in dissolution, wrote Mayor of Trieste Alfonso Valerio in May 1919 (ASTs, CGC–VG, Gab., busta 17).<sup>2</sup> Valerio petitioned Italian negotiators at the Paris Peace to remind them of the irredentist aspirations (passions which he had shared) that had enticed Italy into war and to convince them that the former Habsburg Adriatic provinces were comprised of lands, populations, and resources that were “truly Italian.” His entreaty also reflected anxiousness – a permeating sense of unease that those in the former Habsburg Adriatic Littoral, occupied as Venezia Giulia, would not be sufficiently Italian to fit into the Italian nation and successor state.

War-weary populations in the Adriatic provinces assigned to Italy in the Paris Peace agreements and subsequent treaties faced a chaotic and contested landscape. International disagreements over borders, the allocation of resources, and the status of property in the new Italian lands quickly soured individuals’ jubilation and relief at the cessation of war hostilities, and anxious populations faced an uncertain future. The Italian state similarly faced uncertainties as anxiety fueled affective politics and on-going instability and violence. Economic distress strained fragile cultural and social community bonds, and demobilization, dislocation, and economic hardship impeded the development and function of political policies and networks designed to insure social welfare. Italy administered the formerly Habsburg Adriatic lands as the territory of Venezia Giulia, Zara/Zadar, and, after 1924 Fiume/Rijeka. The local populations’ access to social welfare and services relied on national and local authorities’ ability to parse legal requirements and interpret the stipulations of the peace treaties in the context of their inclinations to integration. Social welfare needs cast in the mold of Habsburg subjecthood had to be framed and reframed in disjunctures of transition from the Habsburg Monarchy to first Liberal and then Fascist Italy. The creation of a secure and stable society relied as much on individuals’ ability to secure a place in the emerging society as on the state’s ability and willingness to provide that space inside Italian borders. Pervasive anxiety induced the Italian government to soothe ontological security concerns through negotiation with local authorities and new citizens. But, this search for ontological security was not simply a question of return to stability and normalcy. As Christopher Browning and Pertti Joen-

niemi have suggested, it required “adaptability, i.e. openness toward and the ability to cope with change” (Browning & Joenniemi, 2017, 32).

#### ANXIOUS POPULATIONS

Scholars have debated the anxiety’s usefulness as an analytical category (Hunt, 1999), nonetheless it is an attractive concept to examine deep causal processes in the aggregation or amplification of individual responses to social insecurities or change. Since the 1950s, scholars like Franz Neumann have explored anxiety’s role in shaping political action and identity politics (Neumann, 1957). Since 2000, and particularly since 9/11, anxiety has evolved as a category of analysis in the context of ontological security and the contours of affective politics in uncertain, performative or “anxious” contemporary, neoliberal states (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020). Although social scientists most often associate anxiety with contemporary, post-World War II states and with modernization, capitalism, the post-colonial experience and understandings of alterity, “anxiousness” has certainly long permeated politics in unstable or uncertain political environments. In the wake of World War I, where populations emerged from imperial subjecthood under the Habsburgs, Ottomans, and Russians and “lost their stabilizing anchor” (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020, 246), omnipresent anxiety may have been the greatest obstacle to social cohesion in the reconstruction of peacetime society.

Defined as a sense or mood of unease, nervousness, or discomfort and associated with uncertainty oriented toward the future, anxiety is a “diffuse, unpleasant and vague sense of apprehension that exists prior to and relatively independent of any given actual threat” (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020, 241). Giddens has linked it to cognitive and emotional disorientation and a lack of faith in “the coherence of everyday life,” whereas he sees fear, by contrast, as an emotional response directed at a “specific threat” and with a “definite object,” that prompts urgent, adaptive action (Giddens, 1991, 37–38, 43–45). Fear lay at the core of violent action and reaction which, in the Adriatic borderlands, fed cyclical ethnic and economic based violence. Existential anxiety had to be addressed in political and social practice and was the aim of Italian social welfare policies and practices that evolved after 1918 in the new territories.

After World War I, in the volatile atmosphere where the successor states of Italy, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (or the South Slav state), and the short-lived Free State of Fiume came together at the

1 In the Adriatic region, the multiplicity of placenames reflects the complex ethnic and national history of the region. For clarity, place-names here are listed first as they appear in the documents and then in other languages used at the time or in use today.

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crossroads of the ethnically German, “Slavic” (Slovene and Croatian), and Italian worlds, authorities taking charge in Italy’s “new territories” sought to assure disquieted populations of the benefits of Italian sovereignty while, at the same time, trying to deal with rising nationalist and ethnic conflict related to the collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy and the need to reconcile contradictory nationalist calls for assimilation and international promises to respect the rights of ethnic minorities (Cattaruzza, 2017, 83–122; Apollonio, 2001).<sup>3</sup> The extension of social welfare, networks, benefits, and policies to protect those most vulnerable became a proving ground of the Italian government’s earnestness and a measure of its successes and failures in integrating borderland populations.

While scholars recognize that “everyday” violence (Ebner, 2011) associated with military and paramilitary actions (Klabjan, 2018) provoked fear that played an important role in escalating conflict and counterviolence in the Adriatic territories, on-going anxiety based in the diffuse sense of cultural trauma rather than the threat of physical harm governed the new authorities’ response to social insecurity. In April 1920, Trieste’s political commissioner warned authorities in Rome of the dangers of the unsettled “general political situation.” Citing the “nervousness and hyper-sensibility that agitates all social classes,” he blamed agitation on the “new economic conflict,” and he feared that, “[g]iven the decidedly antinational elements (socialists, slavs, and austrophiles), a general political movement in the Kingdom could, here in Trieste and I believe in Venezia Giulia, assume not only a socialist Bolshevik, but a preeminently antinational and separatist character” (ASTs, CGC–VG, Gab., busta 85). Measures could be taken to target insecurity associated with present circumstances, but their effects in alleviating future-oriented anxiety were less clear. And, the question of who was responsible for developing and implementing policy for the long term remained, writ large.

#### SOCIAL WELFARE

After World War I, Italian authorities in the new provinces of Venezia Giulia had to restore the civil bureaucracy and establish clear lines of authority in the new environment of Italy. The Italian government pledged in 1916 to preserve Austrian social welfare benefits in Trieste, Tyrol, and other Habsburg lands in the event of annexation (Ferrera, 2018, 108–111). But, competing interests and aims as well as contradictory impulses to conserve existing laws, policies, and practices in the name of stability and to introduce Italian norms to hasten integration marked the administrative transition, overseen by Italian military occupation

authorities from November 1918 to July 1919 and then by the General Civil Commissioner until official (*de jure*) annexation in January 1921 (Apollonio, 2001; Capuzzo, 1992; Bresciani, 2021, 186–190).

Most Central European successor states emerged with national agendas from the fragments of defunct multi-national empires, but in the Upper Adriatic the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, a new multi-ethnic state, emerged alongside the established Kingdom of Italy. Borderland populations shared the experiences of the former Habsburg Adriatic Littoral and awaited decisions of international negotiators to settle their fate, but from the Armistice in November 1918 to the annexation of Fiume/Rijeka in February 1924, in lands presumed to be destined for inclusion in Italy integration rather than formation of statal systems was of paramount concern. Individuals trying to anticipate Italian expectations, maneuvered to define and redefine themselves and sought to navigate the uncertainties of competing systems of extant laws and practices, treaty requirements, and new regulations.

Before World War I, Italy’s “patchy, hazy” social welfare system was underdeveloped in comparison to that of other European states (Pavan, 2019, 837), including Cisleithan Austria, which had developed on models of Bismarckian social insurance with Swiss style labor protections influenced by Catholic social views (Obinger, 2018, 69–70). World War I triggered reform in Italy, particularly after 1916 when the state coordinated nationwide relief efforts to ensure that wartime damages, casualties, and other losses did not destabilize the home front. Mobilized against a common enemy and influenced increasingly by Catholic politics, the population responded to state intervention in the time of national emergency. By 1917, compulsory old-age and disability insurance were introduced (Pironti, 2020, 194–197). The wartime Italian Ministry of Military Assistance continued to function until November 1919, when the General Directorate in the Treasury Ministry took over its responsibilities (Pavan, 2019, 856). For those in “old Italy,” transfer to civilian bureaucracy was a nightmare of red tape and led to delays in receiving benefits. For new citizens in the borderland, it created an even worse tangle of regulations and requirements.

Inhabitants of the New Provinces struggled to navigate systems of Italian social welfare that took three forms: charity (*beneficenza*) rooted in the traditions of the church and generally private or church-based with aims to benefit or assist the individual directly; social assistance (*assistenza sociale*) based in liberal economies and industrial society with aims to alter society by providing state-monitored public assistance; and social insurance or social security

3 While Italy considered autochthonous “non-Italians” as ethnic minorities, in parts of the new provinces Slovenes and Croatians constituted a majority of the population.

(*previdenza sociale*) conceived in the interests of the state and based on calculations of societal risk designed to manage aggregate liabilities (Horn, 1988, 397–400). These categories of assistance were superimposed on extant Habsburg frameworks and manipulated to fit expectations of populations in the provinces transitioning to Italian control.

No matter how complex or confusing the social welfare system appeared or which measures, regulations, and programs appeared to be in force, a greater problem confronted individuals living in the borderland. Access to welfare systems and social benefits required proof of legal eligibility, and many seeking assistance found evidence of identity and verification of legal status elusive. Anxious individuals seeking proper legal documentation and facing an uncertain future in Italy confronted equally anxious local authorities unsure of how to proceed in the new and dynamic political environment. In Venezia Giulia, individuals had a one-year grace period following the Paris Treaties' coming into force to regularize citizenship and secure claims to property and benefits, but borders continued to shift until 1924, requiring regular monitoring and reconsideration based on individuals' circumstances, place of residence, and place of birth. Furthermore, due to wartime dislocations, basic services remained haphazard and disorganized. In Trieste, the largest urban center in the new Adriatic provinces, it was the Fascist government that finally coordinated urban services in 1923, organizing the welfare system with the division of the city into eight police and health services districts (ASTs, PT, UC VI, busta 21).

#### REFUGEES, AID, AND REPATRIATION

In the wake of war, authorities' immediate concerns focused on repatriation of dislocated individuals and the provision of emergency aid to military refugees as well as civilians in the Adriatic provinces and particularly the port city of Trieste. The Armistice in November 1918 precipitated a refugee crisis in the eastern Adriatic provinces as tens of thousands of Italian soldiers and prisoners of war released by the Austrians made their way to the Adriatic coast to seek transport to the Italian peninsula. In the immediate crisis that lasted nineteen days, the American Red Cross provided more than 700,000 meals to demobilized soldiers in hastily constructed camps in the city's port zone. Until the dangers of winter had passed in March 1919, Red Cross "*beneficenza*," continued to provide food, clothing and necessities, to populations in the Adriatic provinces including poverty stricken villages on the Istrian coast and war stricken provinces of eastern Italy as well as devastated communities around the Piave (Bakewell, 1920, 189–201).

But "*beneficenza*" could not meet the needs of those living in, repatriating, or migrating to the new Italian Adriatic provinces, who required more permanent forms of social assistance or social insurance. Some had voluntarily left the Adriatic zone during the war and could rely on personal resources; others had fled in the panic of wartime or had been forcibly removed and required aid to re-establish their lives. At the onset of hostilities Habsburg officials expelled or interned tens of thousands of Italian citizens (*regnicoli*) working and living in the Habsburg Adriatic Littoral, targeting them as "enemy aliens." In addition, thousands of "Italian" Habsburg subjects judged unreliable or disloyal were interned (Caglioti, 2019, 130–139; Stibbe, 2019, 66–76). Many sought to return to their prewar communities at the cessation of hostilities.

To enforce order, increase stability, and reduce social liabilities, occupation authorities limited access to the new border territory. Scholarly attention has focused on the ethno-cultural character of authorities' decisions to allow re-entry to the borderlands, citing evidence of the ethnic transformation of Venezia Giulia in the years immediately following the war, the immigration of 40,000 from Italy to the new provinces, and the contours of nationalist political violence in the region (Purini, 2002; Cecotti, 2001; Bresciani, 2021; Koren Testen & Paradiž Cergol, 2021; Reill Kirchner et al., 2022). But territorial realities also played a significant role. Returning Italians (*regnicoli*) expelled from the Habsburg Littoral at the beginning of the war sought return as internal Italian migrants. Former Habsburg subjects in the South Slav State or other successor states had to cross an international border to return. For occupation authorities permission to repatriate was a socio-economic tool to limit state liabilities. Authorities generally welcomed back those with means and the well-connected, while the less fortunate had a more difficult time (Hametz, 2013, 795–797). They encouraged servants, assured of posts to with the return of employers and their families, to migrate or remigrate from the Italian peninsula (Koren & Paradiž, 2021), but discouraged those without assured means of support, particularly young men without local ties seeking employment. In a February 1919 memo, distributed in some 200 copies to various Italian ministries and to each prefecture in the Kingdom, military occupation authorities begged officials in "old Italy" to disabuse small merchants and industrialists, travelling salesmen, and diverse workers of "fantasies of quick earnings" and to dissuade travel of those whose "presence is not necessary or at least cannot be useful" (ASTs, CGC–VG, Gab., busta 35).

As David Horn suggests, welfare measures entailed a "set of social priorities" that revealed "operations of power" and "cultural constructions of categories"



(Horn, 1988, 396). Italian authorities' ethno-cultural aspirations played a role in "categorizing" populations, but they identified "enemies" for their potential threat to the social fabric rather than on the grounds of ethnic association. As Eric Weitz has suggested for Weimar Germany, the "nervous tension" associated with economic crisis and unpredictability could not be quantified but was "very real" and pervasive anxiety was heightened by the struggle to identify "enemies" who profited at society's expense (Weitz, 2018, 136–137). Italian authorities denied Francesco Lukovic, formerly an official in the district of Pisino/Pazin (now in Croatian Istria), permission to return to Trieste in February 1919, because as Lieutenant Colonel Celoria noted, "the entire population hated him, Italians and Slavs alike." His "Slavic nationality," may have contributed to making him an object of suspicion, but his strong pan-Germanist sympathies tied him directly to the former enemy. His crimes including intimidating those unwilling to buy Austrian war bonds and absconding with funds from the sale of seized Austrian property earmarked for distribution to the poor (Hametz, 2013, 797–798; ASTs, CGC–VG, Gab., busta 35) further implicated him. Lukovic did not pose a violent or nationalist threat, but he violated the public trust and plundered public coffers.

Attempts to reweave the social fabric to increase social welfare and safety included facilitating emigration. Military authorities recommended facilitating former Austrian railway employee Mario Adrario's emigration to Austria. Military commander Arduino Garelli found no grounds to arrest Adrario, who was denounced for making threatening comments on a train travelling the Trieste – Santa Lucia (Venice) line. Adrario purportedly boasted that he had disseminated anti-Italian propaganda and that the phone line in the tunnel between Podbrdo and Bistrica could be used to pass intelligence to Yugoslav officials (ASTs, CGC–VG, Gab., busta 36). The tenor of the overheard remarks marked Adrario as an "enemy," as Alexander suggested, someone to be blamed for the wartime trauma and the continuing uncertainty that it provoked (Alexander, 2004, 15). Public suspicions of Adrario, a native of Podbrdo in the Slovenian Littoral near the Austrian border, demonstrate the high level of societal tension and "collective trauma" in the Adriatic provinces after the war. Understood as a cultural crisis that shakes a society to its core and coalesces in a shared narrative of social suffering (Alexander 2004, 8–15), cultural trauma was reflected in the pervasive mood that reflected the memory of wartime destruction and violence, internment, and dislocation, but also in continuing social and labor unrest, economic hardship, and memory of suffering that manifest in "barbed wire" disease and shell shock (Manz et al., 7–12).

Government response to a derailment in May 1919 on a branch rail line to the Carpano-Vines (Krapan) mine near Albona/Labin reflected official and public anxiousness in the tense atmosphere that marked the Red Biennium in Italy and throughout Europe. Military authorities arrested two railway workers on the scene, leading to a showdown between worker's federation president Comich and police Captain Aimò, "known for his somewhat excitable character." On investigation, Major Filiberto Dalmazzo found a brakeman and a machinist negligent in the accident and no intentional threat to public safety. However, he underlined that the workers' arrest had been justified given the "known discontent" of labor at the nearby mine, and he urged greater calm and "maximum delicacy" in future relations between the director and workers (ASTs, CGC–VG, Gab., busta 41).

In the immediate aftermath of the war, railways in the province of Trieste were a locus of violence. The parastatal nature of the transport system made it a particular target of labor action related to continuing unemployment and economic hardship. Police responded to reports of shots fired at trains, sabotage, and obstructions of rail traffic at small stations and between stations where the "unknown culprits" proved difficult to identify (ASTs, CGC–VG, Gab., busta 111). Restoration of regular rail traffic was intimately tied to the government's ability to provide postwar relief. In January 1919, the military command in Trieste prioritized the restoration of regular rail service as one of the four major initiatives for social assistance, along with providing emergency health and medical care, offering identification and location services, and providing food aid (ASTs, CGC–VG, Gab., busta 41).

Port security and the restoration of port traffic were likewise regional and international priorities. The Magazzini Generali or Central Warehouse Authority in Trieste, the para-statal entity that controlled port activity, called repeatedly on Italian military authorities to provide additional personnel and resources to ensure the safety of the port (ASTs, CGC–VG, Gab., busta 15). The sequestration of Trieste's merchant marine as assets of the Monarchy, the dissolution of preferential Adriatic tariffs and special customs arrangements, and Trieste's concurrence with other Italian ports caused significant economic distress and anxiety (Jangakis, 1923, 71–78). Of more immediate concern in terms of social welfare was the war-damaged port infrastructure, which impeded the flow of international aid, and insufficient port security, which eroded international actors' trust in the port's efficacy for aid distribution. The Magazzini Generali and local government's attempts to increase stability through what Browning and Joenniemi have called "securitization" (Browning & Joenniemi, 2017, 33), instead fed the traumatized public's anxieties. Perceived as a crackdown on labor and a political power play, increased policing fueled labor agitation.

## CITIZENS?

Despite the new occupation authorities' inability to stabilize the local economy or deal effectively with rising ethnic tensions in the post-World War I nationalist environment, and while Italy appeared, as RJB Bosworth suggests, to be the "least of the Great Powers" in the international arena (Bosworth, 1979), many in the Adriatic provinces accepted Italian sovereignty as the preferred option in the contest between the South Slav and Italian successor states. For some, Italy was the only viable, legal option. Others chose Italian citizenship based on ethno-national affinities, language, family ties, or pragmatic political and economic considerations. While considerable ink has been spilled on the weakness, fragmentation, and failures of the Risorgimento state, Italy offered what Giddens has identified as "security of being" (Kinvall & Mitzen, 2020), which rested, at least in part, on established systems of laws and government developed in the liberal tradition (Fabbri, 1931). While this did not directly guarantee access to social welfare and benefits, it did instill confidence that social insurance or security would be available to those in the Italian state.

Italian citizenship offered greater, or at least more established, protections than citizenship in new successor states like the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. "Clauses Relating to Nationality" in the Paris Peace treaties of Saint Germain and Trianon outlined eligibility, requirements, and rights of citizenship for those in all of the successor states to the Habsburg Monarchy. But, those in Italy had additional guarantees and protections grounded in Italian citizenship laws of 1865 and 1912 and in citizenship practices developed over decades before World War I (Donati, 2013). And, as a victor state, Italy enjoyed special latitude in Articles 70 and 71 of the Treaty of Saint Germain, which included limitations on full right (*plein droit* or *pieno diritto*) citizenship acquisition not afforded to other states. Most in the Adriatic provinces received full rights of citizenship automatically based on birthright and residence in the lands assigned to Italy. Further provisions, which outlined processes for election or option,<sup>4</sup> offered latitude and a measure of self-determination to individuals, but these were predicated on a mixture of rights by birth (or soil) and rights by inheritance (or blood) that caused considerable uncertainty and anxiousness (Hametz, 2021; Hametz, 2019). Statal relations

relied as much on individuals' willingness or desire to embrace the nation as on the state's willingness to embrace them (Fortier, 2021, 403–404), and while the contours of Italian authorities' decisions have been understood in the context of nationalizing tendencies and persecution of non-Italians, in the interwar period economic concerns and concerns for security, stability, and community welfare were at least as important in determining individuals' status.

Determining who was a citizen of Italy had implications with respect to state liabilities. For example, the Citizenship Commission in Trieste, one of several local bodies created in the eastern borderlands to adjudicate cases of uncertain or contested citizenship after the expiry of the one-year grace period designated in the treaties for the settlement of claims, queried the Ministry of the Interior in 1924 with respect to the status of Vojeslav (or Ermanno) Ipavec. Born in 1890 in Prosecco/Prosek, a village outside Trieste, and with official residence (*pertinenza*) in Gargaro/Grgar in Gorizia, Ipavec gained *pieno diritto* citizenship in Italy automatically under the provisions of Saint Germain. In 1921, he moved to Maribor to for a teaching position, a state post in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Triestine civil servants wondered if acceptance of the position constituted a "tacit declaration" of option for the South Slav state, especially as Ipavec was of "Slavic nationality" (ASTs, PT, UC, busta 3457), and they asked if they could strike him from the citizenship rolls in Trieste. Such "housekeeping" of official records coincided with nationalizing and standardizing aims of the Fascist government, but it also could reduce state liabilities that required care for citizens abroad. In Ipavec's case, the Interior Ministry, relied on international law, and informed the local authorities that citizenship granted automatically could not be revoked (ASTs, PT, UC, busta 3457).

In the new borderland, both Italy and the South Slav State sought to limit financial liabilities and responsibility for social welfare, pension or insurance payments. Cases were particularly tricky for those born or with official residence in parts of Dalmatia and Istria that remained contested.<sup>5</sup> Recent discussions of acquisition of citizenship have tended to focus on national questions from the perspective of the Monarchy and the definitions, meaning, and implications of the loss of Habsburg *Heimatrecht* (Reill Kirchner et al., 2022). But legally, the basis for the treaty stipulations rested in western notions of *pertinenza* not understandings of *Heimatrecht*.<sup>6</sup>

4 Election applied to those born and resident in part of the Habsburg Adriatic Littoral assigned to the South Slav State who claimed to be part of the Italian minority or wished to be considered Italian. It required application to Italian authorities. Option afforded those born outside of the Habsburg border provinces (generally outside the Littoral) an avenue for citizenship that required formal renunciation of foreign ties, the ability to meet linguistic, residency, and/or property requirements, and in some cases the payment of a fee.

5 Territorial arrangements in the former Habsburg Adriatic Littoral remained fluid in the interwar period until the Rome Accords of 1924.

6 The text of St. Germain makes this explicit in Article 70, which refers to "*pertinenza*" both in French indicating *personne ayant indigénat* and in German indicating *Personen die das Heimatrecht* (St. German Treaty, 2022).

Italian authorities' disposition of citizenship cases reflected desires to foster stability and community well-being, to ensure individuals' security, and to minimize threats to the state. Members of the Citizenship Commission in Pola/Pula, the former Habsburg naval port at the southern tip of Istria, asserted that in their work determining individuals' fitness for Italian citizenship in contested or unclear cases "clemency constitute[d] a permanent danger to the State." Heightened anxiety relating to the safety of the national community resulted in securitised citizenship policies (Bassel et al., 2020, 261–262), and authorities justified particular "scrupulousness" and "rigor" in decision making given the continued presence of pro-Austrian elements (including ethnic Croats, Serbs, Hungarians and Austrians), the agitation of Bolshevik leaning elements in the shipyard, and the potential for violence due to "huge stocks of munitions and defensive materiel" in the former naval stronghold (ASTs, PT, Gab., busta 333).

While the government sought to limit liabilities and promote stability, individuals sought to retain or gain benefits. Continued uncertainties and on-going questions related to citizenship and treaty requirements evoked a panicked and angry response from local officials in Trieste when the Ministry of the Interior in Rome reminded them that local power to adjudicate citizenship under the treaties would expire in January 1922. An official bulletin put out by the Civil Commission of Venezia Giulia in March 1922 clarified and updated procedures for gaining citizenship, identifying groups vulnerable to contested citizenship including those domiciled in communities in the New Provinces but born outside the new borders, those who lost domicile rights (*pertinenza*) in the New Provinces as a result of their work (on behalf of the former Monarchy), married, widowed, and divorced women, children under 18 years of age, and orphans and children of unknown parentage or widows (L'Osservatore Triestino, 1922). Regularizing the status of women and children, and particularly of widows and orphans of pensioners ("worthy of maximum consideration"), was of particular importance to the local citizenship commission in Trieste, which urged "in the name of justice, equity, and humanity" that "subsidies, subventions, and grants continued to be paid" until such time as their citizenship could be regulated or defined (ASTs, PT, UC, busta 3455).

Women were vulnerable to vicissitudes of state policy in what Isabell Lorey has argued are the gendered aspects of "government precarization," the embedding or instrumentalizing of insecurity as a function of the government's tendency to assume and cater to the normative "bourgeois" male citizen (Lorey, 2015). In October 1918, the Italian legal conception of families was significantly expanded and the family defined in broader, more secular terms allowing for "de facto" attestation of family status outside of marriage

(Pavan, 2019, 840–841), but women and the families and children remained reliant on men and remained constrained by dependent citizenship (tied to father's or husband's status) and gendered expectations incorporated into the treaties. Anxiety resulted not only from government attempts to "sift citizens," as Eric Lohr has labelled the process of ascertaining fitness and assigning access to citizenship on the dissolution of empire (Lohr, 2012, 138–145), also from gendered expectations for "proper behavior" that affected women's access to state assistance.

Women's dependent citizenship extended to all aspects of legal status. In the Adriatic provinces, it affected their ability to repatriate, and permission to return relied on the status and reputation of their husbands or fathers rather than on women's own background or circumstances (Hametz, 2013, 794–799). Government efforts to minimize strain on social welfare networks meant restricting a woman's right to return, if she were likely to require public assistance. The families of employees of Lloyd Triestino Shipping transferred to Vienna at the beginning of the war returned in July 1919, despite having spent the war in an enemy capital. Wives of men without clear means of support and widows faced considerable difficulties if they did not have automatic claims to citizenship and were not native to the region.

In terms of citizenship acquisition, unsettled cases arose from conflicting aspects of international agreements, national legislative interpretations, and local administrative understandings. The status of women like Giovanna Lemut was unclear. A widow born outside the new provinces who gained *pertinenza* on marriage and then automatic citizenship from local authorities on that basis in 1921, was then disqualified by national clarifications of the treaty requirements sent to Trieste in 1922, which required election or option for those widowed before their husbands gained Italian citizenship. Erminia Francovig had declared her intention to opt for Italian citizenship in 1921 but withdrew the petition for fear that that she would forfeit pension payments being paid to her by the Czecho-Slovak state. Czechoslovakia did not recognize her claim to Czech citizenship, and so she became stateless. Local authorities working with the citizenship commission and finance office noted in 1922 that in "not a few cases," widows and orphans were ignorant of which laws pertained and were misled by arbitrary or erroneous advice and actions by local administrators (ASTs, PT, UC, busta 3455).

Perhaps the most complicated and vexing questions regarding citizenship and eligibility to social welfare in the Adriatic lands related to the Free State of Fiume/Rijeka. Uncertainty regarding the status of its citizens and their access to resources contributed to anxieties throughout the region from 1920 to 1924. While emphasis has been on Gabriele D'Annunzio's

theatrics, Benito Mussolini's machinations in Italian takeover and annexation, and the cultural Italianization of Fiume/Rijeka in the period from 1918 to 1924, in legal terms, as in the popular imagination (Reill, 2020; Jeličić, 2020), Habsburg norms and laws remained in force and the basis for local practice in the absence of a clear international solution. The Free State carved from Hungarian or Transleithan territory was governed by the Trianon Treaty Treaty of Trianon, 2022). Italy and Hungary did not share a border after the war, so the treaty provided no clear grounds for reciprocal border relations. The treaties' nationality clauses referred to recognized nationalities of the former Habsburg Monarchy, but Fiumians were never designated a nationality. The clauses, therefore, did not include them. The Free State's anomalous status rendered women and children particularly vulnerable due to the lack of guidance for their protection and care and the lack of resources necessary for investment in social welfare systems. By 1923 Fiumian citizenship statutes came into force based on the Santa Margherita Accords (Accordi di Santa Margherita, 1923) between Italy and the South Slav state. In the following year, authorities in Venezia Giulia received 380 cases of contested or uncertain citizenship to adjudicate (ASTs, PT, UC, busta 3455), before definitive annexation to Italy in 1924 resolved the situation.

The case of Egone Premuda, who inquired in 1924 about his citizenship, reveals the legal conundrums that Italian officials faced. Born in Fiume in 1890, Premuda acquired residence in Trieste in 1912, and served as a surveyor for the Istituto geografico militare in Florence. Living in Fiume after the war, he sought Italian citizenship. Because he had acquired domicile in Trieste after his birth and was not born in a territory that was transferred to Italy by the treaties (Fiume's fate was left open), he (and those like him), despite clear Italian national associations were at a disadvantage to "Slavs or Germans" in territories transferred to Italy or the South Slav State (ASTs, PT, UC, busta 3455).

#### WIDOWS AND PENSIONS

Due to their vulnerable status, widows and orphans are particular liabilities for states, but they also offer opportunities as "instruments of governing," who help to mold the social order and articulate the state's expectations (Fortier, 2021, 398). State coffers opened wide for widows of "martyred" irredentist volunteers recognized as national heroines. Italian military pensions were introduced in 1895 for active-duty career personnel (Pironti, 2020, 191). In 1912, pensions and special supplements for veterans were included in the state pension system (Ferrera, 2018, 103). The terms of the Paris Peace entitled war widows to social benefits. Bonus payments, first provided in 1921, demonstrate the state's "moral gratitude" (Pironti, 2020, 202). To

memorialize the "martyr" Cesare Battisti, an irredentist agitator from Trent who enrolled in the Italian Alpine troops and was executed by the Austrian military for high treason, Italian authorities awarded his widow Ernesta Bittanti an extraordinarily annual payment. In Venezia Giulia, several volunteers' families were nominated for grants. These included mothers like Elisa Sanson, who lived in desperate economic circumstances and whose son Virgilio Sanson had enrolled in the Italian infantry, served in the Aviation Corps, and died in service in 1918, and was remembered as a "splendid figure of a worker, inspired by great love for the Fatherland." But, widows were generally the ones singled out to receive supplemental payments. Authorities wholeheartedly supported a grant to Nina (Caterina) Sauro (née Steffè), widow of the noted naval captain Nazario Sauro, famed as the martyr of Istria. A native of Capodistria (Koper) and father of five, Sauro had volunteered for the Royal Italian Navy, spied on Austrian naval forces for Italy, was captured on an Italian naval mission and executed for treason in August 1916 (ASTs, PT, Gab., busta 33).

Lidia Bugliovaz, the widow of Francesco Rismondo, presented a more complicated case. Rismondo, a noted irredentist, sportsman, and cyclist (bersagliere) volunteer distinguished for his service in the taking of San Michele on the Italo-Austria front in 1915, hailed from "a well-known and esteemed" family in Spalato/Split. Gabriele D'Annunzio celebrated his martyred memory in the "Assumption of Dalmazia," an allusion to Rismondo's heroism for Italy, uncertain end, and the failure to retrieve his corpse. Rome offered Bugliovaz an additional 6000 lire per annum on her 500 lire per month pension (effectively doubling her yearly pension) to honor the sacrifice of her husband. But, local police and officials balked. The Prefect of Trieste reported in December 1922 that the police found her "moral conduct a bit uncertain." She wore "expensive and elegant clothing" that appeared "incompatible with her modest resources." Further, authorities pointed out, using delicate and seemingly euphemistic terms, she "demonstrates a certain philosophy which doesn't leave a good impression." The Fascist state recognized her with the supplement nonetheless (ASTs, PT, Gab., busta 33). The shift in emphasis from state priorities to meet immediate needs and counter pervasive anxiety, and from emphasis on beneficenza or charity to social insurance and emphasis on molding the state was evident in the Fascist daily *Il Popolo di Trieste's* reporting on the award in 1923. "For the Widow of Francesco Rismondo" read the headline on 9 January, and the article did not even mention Bugliovaz by name. Under Fascism, women were valued increasingly as social resources. Even widows' benefits were decreased as they were pulled from the workforce by demographic policies that promoted home and motherhood (Pironti, 2020, 210).



## SUSPICION AND SUBVERSION

Catarina Kinvall and Jennifer Mitzen suggest that in response to anxiety, states increasingly assert safety or certainty in a singular, often linear, reading of the nation, history, culture, and people. As individuals struggle for legitimation and begin to turn on “others” or “outsiders,” far-right parties gain momentum in the exclusionary model of state building characteristic in the rise of authoritarianism (Kinvall & Mitzen, 2020, 241–244). In Italy, initial enthusiasm for comprehensive and universalist social welfare plans ebbed, and reform slowed and stalled after July 1921 (Pavan, 2019, 863–864) as political fractiousness, particularly on the Left, weakened the government; the middle classes aligned with big business; and Italy moved toward fascism. By 1923, fascist authorities had stoked the pervasive sense of apprehension to transform local associations that had provided community and social assistance into subversive organizations in a process that Isabell Lorey has labeled “government precarization.” Precarization, a “steering technique” employed by the government, seeks to balance insecurity with minimal safeguards to maintain a threshold of social vulnerability that the state can harness against those whose vulnerability has been enhanced through “othering” processes (Lorey, 2015, 40). In February 1923, Police Commissioner Filippo Montalbano targeted 42 “Slovene, Croat, German and subversive associations” in Trieste. The list included professional organizations from those serving commercial traders, industrialists, and lawyers to those representing agricultural and railroad trade unionists and workers’ organizations. Choral groups and literary societies, whose membership was viewed as hostile to or incompatible with Italian nationalist aims, were targeted as were leisure organizations including six Sokol chapters and the Balkan cycling society, associated with ethnic advocacy and paramilitary training, and the Alpinista organization cited for “reformist, masonic tendencies.” The Italian Republican Party and affiliated associations and church and philanthropic groups associated with ethnic minority populations or Catholic politics also appeared on the list. Surrounding communities including Mavhinje/Malchina, Gabrovizza/Comeno, Sežana/Sesana, and Nabrežina/Nabresina provided their own lists; indeed, the Vice-Prefect of Komen/Comen included a note explaining that cultural organizations were a front for subversive activities to undermine Italianizing efforts (ASTs, PT, Gab., busta

31). The Fascist repression of traditional aid societies, organizations, and institutions disrupted individuals’ lives and narrowed options for social services and activities, enhancing precariousness and forcing reliance on emerging Fascist social welfare networks.

## CONCLUSION

In the Adriatic lands, the Italian state’s extension of social benefits and welfare intended to align the new provinces with “old provinces” of the pre-World War I Liberal state and to alleviate anxieties through “normalization” or standardization of social relations had the effect, instead, of accentuating the distinctions between the peninsula and the newly annexed territories of the former Habsburg Adriatic Littoral. Instead of easing security threats by providing a sense of state control and a clear path for acceptance and assistance by the state, Italian policies and expectations limited or constrained individuals seeking to navigate social, political and cultural disruptions in the postwar environment. The state’s rigidity isolated and antagonized populations either unable or unwilling to adopt “normative” Italian identities. Social welfare policies, which relied on conformity to Italian nationalist ideals, polarized and alienated autochthonous populations, increasing social anxieties and cultural tensions. They fed suspicion of and resistance to government intervention in all of its forms, including in social welfare policies designed to ameliorate postwar suffering.

At the same time the multiplicity of identities of border populations caused anxiety for the state, exacerbating uncertainties related to the integration of new territories and populations, which included “minoritized” ethnic and restive political elements. A concurrence of factors related to wartime disruption and postwar instability exacerbated tensions and created volatility in central governing structures and on the state’s peripheries. The resulting insecurity led the Italian government, particularly as the influence of fascists and Fascism increased, to accept and even embrace precarization or social *insecurity* as part of the fabric of social normality. Anxiety became a tool of governance wielded through central structures and woven into social welfare policies that accustomed those in the borderland to antagonism and erupted in the development of the violent and oppressive border fascism that convulsed the Adriatic lands in the inter-war period.

ANKSIOZNI »ITALIJANI«: VARNOST IN BLAGINJA  
V ZGORNJEM JADRANU, 1918–1924

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## POVZETEK

*V nekdanjem Avstrijskem primorju je italijanska država s širjenjem socialnih podpor in blaginje še povečala razlike med polotokom in na novo priključenimi ozemlji nekdanjega habsburškega Avstrijskega primorja, kar je omejilo zmožnost oblasti in posameznikov, da si izborijo varno mesto v nastajajoči italijanski družbi. Namesto da bi pomirile zaskrbljenost zaradi nestabilnosti in upoštevale potrebe po večji varnosti, so italijanske socialne politike in pričakovanja, oblikovana v etnično-nacionalnem kontekstu in odraz ekonomskih težav, povečale napetosti in zaskrbljenost v zvezi z integracijo v italijansko državo. Politike in prakse repatriacije in državljanstva so odražale pravne sisteme in državne prioritete, ki so v medvojnem obdobju marginalizirale najranljivejše in povečale negotovost prebivalstva Jadrana. Državni poskusi integracije novih ozemelj in prebivalstva, ki so vključevali „manjšinske“ etnične in restriktivne politične elemente, ter vse bolj omejujoče in represivne politike ob prehodu italijanske liberalne države v fašizem so zaostrovali napetosti in krepili družbeno nestabilnost. Anksioznost je postala sredstvo upravljanja, obvladovano prek centralnih struktur in vtkano v politike socialnega varstva, ki so prispevale k razvoju nasilnega in represivnega obmejnega fašizma, ki je v medvojnem obdobju pretresal jadranske dežele.*

**Ključne besede:** anksiozno prebivalstvo, Avstrijsko primorje, medvojno obdobje, socialna blaginja, državljanstvo, prekarlost

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