

original scientific paper  
received: 2002-09-13

UDC 323.1(497.4/.5-14):930

## IMPERIAL IDEOLOGIES OF PEOPLEHOOD IN HABSBURG – AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO PEOPLES AND NATIONS IN ISTRIA

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper argues that modernist studies in nationalism, focusing on the nationalist interpretations of 'peoplehood' as they have developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, have largely omitted that 'the nation' has been part of peoples' imagination and political ideologies ever since the upcoming modern world system in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. This article focuses on alternative imaginations and interpretations of 'the nation' as they have developed in the imperial discourses of Venice as well as of the Habsburg Empire. Special focus is given to the way, in which the Habsburg ethnographers have discussed and conceptualised the Istrian peoples and suggests that those 'imperial visions' are still part of the repertoire of identity in Istria today.*

**Keywords:** ideologies of peoplehood, imperial visions of nationhood, Habsburg Empire, Venetian Republic; collective identities in Istria

## IDEOLOGIE IMPERIALI DI POPULISMO NELL'IMPERO ASBURGICO – UN APPROCCIO ALTERNATIVO PER LO STUDIO DELLE POPOLAZIONI E DELLE NAZIONI IN ISTRIA

### SINTESI

*Il presente articolo sostiene che gli studi modernisti sul nazionalismo, concentrandosi sulla decostruzione delle interpretazioni nazionaliste di 'nazionalità' (nationhood) del XVIII e XIX secolo, hanno spesso omesso che il concetto di 'nazione' era già parte delle ideologie politiche sin dallo sviluppo del sistema-mondo moderno discusso da Wallerstein. L'articolo si concentra sulle visioni ed interpretazioni alternative di 'nazione' elaborate nei discorsi imperiali veneziani ed asburgici. L'articolo presenta in particolare le concezioni e le rappresentazioni dei popoli istriani elaborate dagli etnografi asburgici e suggerisce che tali 'visioni imperiali' fanno ancora parte del repertorio dell'identità attuale dell'Istria.*

**Parole chiave:** ideologie del populismo, visioni imperiali di nazionalità, Impero asburgico, Repubblica di Venezia, identità collettive in Istria

Over the last decades, the concept of the 'nation' has been often discussed as an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1984) constructed in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries by cultural and political elites. According to Gellner, nationalism – that is, a political ideology whose modernity is generally unquestioned "invents nations where they do not exist" (Gellner, 1964, 168). According to Hobsbawm, it is even "pointless to discuss nation and nationality except in so far as both relate to the territorial and especially the nation state" (Hobsbawm, 1990, 10). Considering, however, exclusively 'modern' nations as they were and are imagined over the last two centuries, these influential modernist studies have largely ignored that 'the nation' has been part of people's imagination long before 'modernity'. This paper will investigate how nations have been imagined otherwise than in terms of the nation state. It will concentrate especially on the imperial discourse of nations, as it has developed since the 16<sup>th</sup> century and as it has co-existed with 'nationalist' visions of the nation in the Habsburg Empires up to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

There is no doubt that there is a fundamental difference between the way 'nations' are imagined by Empires and the way they imagine themselves. The difference might in fact be so fundamental, that it is legitimate to define the modern nation – as Gellner, Hobsbawm and other scholars of nationalism do – as radically new and different in kind. In fact, during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, 'the nation' seems to turn from a category describing the cultural *diversity* of *other* peoples, into a category defining the *specificity* of a people from *within*. It also changes from an imperial category of cultural, social and political inequality into a platform for emancipation. Despite these and other fundamental differences in imagining nations, I argue, there is a measure of continuity: the way peoples were imagined by the 'imperial other' must have necessarily informed and influenced the way they were imagined and constructed by emerging national elites from within. By investigating the imperial ideology of peoplehood, this paper discusses the modern nation not as an 'invention' but as an outcome of negotiation and contention between imperial and the nationalist images of the world and its peoples.

### Discovering Diversity

The growing interdependence of the consolidating world-system especially since the discovery of the New World in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Wallerstein, 1974) led to an increasing demand for an explanation of the diversity of the world's peoples, cultures, languages, religious beliefs and so on. Certainly, descriptions about cultural diversity are much older,<sup>1</sup> but the discovery and colonisation of overseas territories changed the European perspective of seeing 'the Other' by confronting the European powers with an earlier, supposedly unimaginable cultural diversity, which puzzled the European elites and necessitated a new perspective from which to consider those people as well as their own relation to them (Todorov, 1982; Anderson, 1984).

Trying to make sense of the newly discovered 'otherness', the nation, which existed as a vague and by no means clearly defined idiom to refer to groups of "strangers" (Hobsbawm, 1996, 27), appeared as a handy cognitive tool to grasp the phenomena; and the bible gave an authoritative explanation for the existence of the multitude of nations into which the world was 'obviously' divided: the biblical story of Noahic dispersal and the idea that his three sons and their wives were the ancestors of all peoples remained "inescapable facts of ancient history well into the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century" (Kidd, 1999, 35).

Not only did the classification of the world's people into the descendants of Ham, Japheth and Sem offer an authoritative explanation for people's diversity, it also legitimised the hierarchically ordered inequality between them: according to the biblical account, Noah had cursed his son Ham to serve his brothers (Genesis 9, 24-27). It seemed convincingly evident, then, to consider the colonised peoples as the cursed progeny of Ham,<sup>2</sup> while the European elites generally defined themselves as offspring of Japheth<sup>3</sup> (Kidd, 1999, 29f.). Although the biblical origins of the nation were secularised by scientific theories in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the hierarchical order of the 'peoples' remained an intrinsic feature of most categories (such as nation, ethnic group, race, clan or tribe) applied to describe cultural otherness.<sup>4</sup>

1 Military reports had analysed their adversaries' political systems and war strategies, crusaders had brought accounts about other peoples back into the European centres, travellers and merchants had told stories about 'strange' and far away places long before 'modernity'. Those narrations about 'other peoples' fluctuated according to ideological, strategic or simply sensational reasons – as Gurevič points out, and as Eco has brilliantly portrayed in his book 'Baudolino' – most often between observations and invention (Gurevič, 1985; Eco, 2000).

2 Once formulated, theological ethnography helped to 'make sense' of the cultural diversity of the newly discovered peoples and to legitimise existing privileges of the rulers over the ruled also at home. Kidd points out that the peasants of Poland were considered as much the cursed descendants of Ham as were the peoples of Africa and the Americas (Kidd, 2000, 29f.).

3 The patrimony of Sem was – as the name tells – associated with the 'Semites'.

4 This hierarchical inclination does not surprise if one considers that the image of the world was based on an hierarchical order where, "[...] all relationships are vertical, running from above to below; all beings are distributed on various planes according to their degree of perfection which depends on their relative proximity to God" (Gurevič, 1985, 70).

### Venice and the Discovery of Its Peoples

The discovery of new territories and peoples was not limited to the New World: Woolf points out e.g. that the Republic of Venice enlarged its territories by 35% between 1570 and 1630 (Wallerstein, 1974, 216). The conversion from a republic of merchants and sailors to one which ruled peasants and extensive stretches of land as well, forced Venice to acquire a different perspective on itself and to 'imagine' the peoples now under its rule. Throughout the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Republic developed an imperial discourse which was based "on the articulation of an imperial imbalance, emphasising the challenge of backwardness and development, the value of civilisation over barbarism, the anthropological classification of the Slavs, [...] and the ascription of national identity in an imperial context" (Wolff, 2001, 7f.). The inhabitants of the new territories in the Dalmatian Hinterland were defined as "Dalmatians, Morlaks, Illyrians, as well as Albanians and Bosnians, Serbs and Croats and especially Slavs" (ibid.), but none of these categories was clearly defined and the various classes of allegedly distinct peoples often overlapped and merged. Furthermore, the new categories cut across and mixed emic visions and divisions of belonging (local, socio-professional, corporate etc.) so that attempts to classify the existing cultural differences in the Southern provinces into 'ethnic' or 'national' categories resulted in considerable confusion and sometimes contradicting taxonomies (Kidd, 1999, 61). But in a sense, the confusion created by the attempts to classify the Dalmatian peoples into 'nations' did not really matter: for the Venetian elites, the categorisation of 'the Other' served to confirm their own imperial superiority. In this perspective, the impossibility to categorise these peoples of the periphery into clear-cut communities, added to their exoticism, strengthened imperial fantasies about them and helped to imagine the Southern provinces as "Venice's America, [...] close at hand, just across the Adriatic, replete with savage tribes and civilising missions" (Wolff, 2001, 5).

Under Venetian rule, Istrian coastal towns were not the subject of the new national discourses. The relations between the imperial centre and its coastal allied bases were well defined by tradition and institutional practices, and there was no need to conceptualise them in a new national form. The hierarchising discourse which Venice applied to its peripheries in the South, was instead projected from the Istrian coastal centres unto their own rural hinterland, where the Istrian elites discovered their own civilising mission along with their own 'exotic' peoples, which – in accordance with impe-

rial discourse – were imagined increasingly as 'Slavs'. Only after the disintegration of the Republic in 1797 and with the integration of Istria into the Illyrian provinces and finally into the Habsburg Empire were they subjected to national and ethnic classification by the new political centres.

### Habsburg and the Discovery of Istria

Although Trieste and parts of Istria had been part of the Habsburg lands ever since the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the first discernible interest the Empire showed in the region dates from the 1719, the year in which Trieste was declared the Empire's free port.<sup>5</sup> When Venetian Istria was integrated into the Empire in 1813 the peninsula's economic life had already gravitated towards the growing Trieste. Economically, the region was of interest above all as a supplier of food and labour for Trieste, and could therefore have been considered exclusively as part of the latter.<sup>6</sup> From a geo-political point of view, however, it was of great strategic importance for the southeastern policy of the Empire and consequently attracted the imperial center's direct interest with Pola/Pula, which became the empire's military harbour in 1848. In the following years, the railway connection between the Habsburg imperial centre and its Istrian periphery was opened, making the region accessible to representatives of the Empire as well as to tourists and travellers of all kinds.

The first inventory of the Istrian peninsula by the Habsburg administrators, made between 1817 and 1825 (Sošić, 2001, 71f.), showed that the region was among the poorest regions of the Empire. The evaluation was unequivocal – nobody doubted the backwardness of the peninsula, which was further highlighted by the contrasting modernity of Trieste, which was one of the most vital and modern cities of the monarchy. Over subsequent years Istria turned – along with Dalmatia, Bosnia and other Southeastern European regions – into "a representative model of underdevelopment" (Wolff, 1994, 9).

In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the first ethnographic inquiries were conducted in Istria, as elsewhere in the Empire, in order to establish the linguistic and cultural composition of the Habsburg's peoples (Czoernig, 1855). While the 'national question' was already a well-established issue on the political and social agenda of the Empire, the majority of the Istrian population – that is, its rural masses – still defined themselves according to old patterns where territorial affiliation, marriage-circles, socio-professional membership, family genealogy and so on were of much greater social relevance than belonging to a 'nation' or even a language

5 The declaration was a clear sign of the Empire's determination to modernise its economic course and its infrastructures, administration etc. with it. Trieste became Habsburg's project of modernity and quickly turned into the new regional as well as imperial centre, which attracted thousands and thousands of new settlers and administrators.

6 The region was, in fact, perceived increasingly as the trade town's 'natural' hinterland.

group (Moritsch, 1991, 49; Cole, 1985). In other words, while the nation was doubtlessly part of people's imagination regarding *other* people, it was still an unimagined category of self-ascription for large parts of the population. As many other peripheral regions of the Habsburg territory, Istria, which appeared to an outsider as a multitude of microcosms (s. Apollonio, 1998; Ivetic, 2000 et al.), puzzled and intrigued the imperial observers and members of the rising national elites alike. Although the motivations were different, both of these tried to re-interpret and classify the cultural variety of Istria according to 'national' categories.

### Classifying Cultural Diversity

The Empire's administrative representatives generally saw the Istrian cultural mosaic as atavistic and as a historical remnant, which fit in perfectly with the desolate economic and infrastructural 'backwardness' of the region. Comparable to the interpretation of ethnic groups in the United States of the 1960's (Glazer, Moynihan, 1973), the multitude of 'nationalities' was seen as a remainder of the past which was expected to disappear in the process of modernisation. Various factors – the necessary organisation of a common public imperial sphere, the continuous integration of an ever greater number of segments of the population into the common political and economic realm, the new laws on election, the language rights given in the 1860s and 70s to 'all nations of the Empire' made it necessary to simplify the complex and puzzling world of existing local, social and corporate identities. In the census of 1880, the majority of the "ethnic nuances" detected in the first ethnographic investigations in the 1850s (Czoernig, 1855) had been summed up by the administration as 'Italians', 'Slovenes' and 'Serbo-Croats' – "as they did not know how to handle otherwise the amount of mixture and hybridity" (Stradner, 1897, 101). Not only nationalists, but the Empire's administrators as well classified the Istrian peoples in increasingly homogenised 'national' groups and it is, in fact, hard to determine if the national movements had informed the administrative categories or vice versa. It is, however, certain that the very Habsburg bureaucracy institutionalised the categories in terms of which the people would increasingly model their sense of belonging, loyalty and identity well before the arrival of the 'nation state'.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Istria had turned into a region of contesting ideologies of peoplehood: the Italian elites in Trieste and elsewhere increasingly imagined Istria as Italian, stressing that the rural, predominantly Slav hinterland belonged 'naturally' to the urban, historically Italophone centres; whereas the Slav elites (Croats, Slovenes, Serbo-Croat, Illyrian, Yugoslav

etc.) in Zagreb, Ljubljana, Trieste and elsewhere increasingly stressed the Slav character of the peninsula, insisting that the italophone urban centres were but islands in the Slav lands to which they were 'naturally' supposed to belong. For the Habsburgs' representatives, finally, the Italians, Slovenes and Serbo-Croats were simply subjects of the Empire and as such an integral part of the imperial mosaic of peoples. In a scenario of increasing national conflict, where tensions between 'Italians' and 'Slavs' increasingly coined the political and social atmosphere even in the Istrian coastal towns,<sup>7</sup> the Habsburg centre offered an 'alternative' interpretation of the national paradigm, which will be further investigated in the following sections.

### The Empire's Ideology of Peoplehood

Parallel to the homogenisation of differences in cultural and linguistic categories by the imperial administration as well as by nationalist movements, Habsburg ethnography, established as a discipline at the Habsburg universities directly in the after-math of 1848, developed a different image and 'imagination' of the Empire's peoples, focusing on their multiplicity rather than on their uniformity. In 1855, Karl von Czoernig published the already mentioned ethnographic maps (Czoernig, 1855), where Istria was presented as a mosaic of cultures, languages and peoples. In the same spirit of ethnographic inquiries, the Archduke Rudolph had in the 1880s initiated the publication of *Die österreichisch-ungarische Monarchie in Wort und Bild* (The Austrian-Hungarian monarchy in word and picture), a series of 24 volumes about the Empire's various regions and peoples, among which a special volume was edited in 1891 about Istria and the Littoral. In 1894, the Society of Austrian Folklore was founded in Vienna and one year later, the Museum of Austrian Folklore, which included also Istrian products, opened its doors under the guidance of Michael Haberlandt and Wilhelm Hein. These 'ethnographic projects' were by no means isolated scientific enterprises, but enjoyed the vivid interest of educated circles of the Empire: the Ethnographic Society numbered about a thousand members at the end of its first year already. Among them featured "scholars [...] artists, nobility [...] high-ranking officers and civil servants [...] prelates of the Austrian clerical institutions and monastic orders ...teachers, clergymen and priests... who live in closest contact with the native people and know them best" (Haberlandt, 1895 in: Schindler, 1992, 63). They were supposed to give an 'authoritative' and accurate picture about the Empire's people, which again was to be diffused via popular publications, exhibitions and other educational measures to the public at large.

7 By the turn of the century, the attempt to fix bilingual inscriptions at a public building in Piran, for example, had to be accompanied by military protection (Veiter, 1965, 43).

The representation of the multitude of imperial nations and nationalities – investigated and popularised by such ethnographic projects – was supposed to give legitimacy and scientific authority to the dominant imperial structures: the smaller the ethnic components of the Imperial national mosaic, the more colourful were the ethnic maps, and the more the Empire would therefore appear to be the 'right' political organisation for the "true people" (Johler, 1997, 345f.). The fact that the members of the Imperial family acted as patrons of these ethnographic projects was a sign – albeit a symbolic one – that the Empire recognised and appreciated the variety and multitude of its peoples. Imperial acceptance was supposed to encourage national groups to seek their 'natural' centre in the Empire (and not in the nation) and to augment or restore imperial coherence and stability (Johler, 1998, 45ff.). Besides their timely specificities, the idea behind these different 'ethnographic' projects shows many parallels with today's discourse on multiculturalism: The simple fact of knowing about the multitude of cultures and nations was seen as the very basis of tolerance and understanding among the 'nations' and as a necessary condition for the unity and the stability of the common state. The ethnographic projects thus aimed to produce this knowledge and to spread it among the peoples of the Empire in order to inform and educate the masses about the cultural variety of the Empire as well as about the cultural specificities of its constituent parts.

### Imperial Images of the 'Real' Nations in Istria

Unlike some of his colleagues, who emphasised language as a sufficient indicator for determining people's national belonging, Czoernig presented nationality at the Vienna statistical congress in 1857 as a property of a group which resulted from an complex interaction of language use, customs, physical characteristics and what one might call mentality (Arel, 2002, 95). Nationalities and nations consequently had to be classified and investigated on the basis of careful ethnographic observation and research. From this point of view the great visible cultural variety of the its population turned Istria "as small as it might be" into "one of the most interesting regions of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy" (Moser, 1909, 24).

Unlike the bureaucratic authorities, the ethnographers considered the ethnic diversity of the Istrian population not as an administrative problem that had to be resolved and eliminated on the road to modernity, but rather as a scientifically precious testimony of former times, which had to be studied, analysed and documented for posterity. In accordance with the pre-

dominant evolutionist theories of the time, different nations, people, races, tribes and so on were understood as representing various stages of the development of humankind.<sup>8</sup> The peoples of Istria as well as of other parts of South Eastern Europe were considered authentic 'primitive Europeans', whose investigation would supply the still missing cultural and historical link between African 'primitive people' on the one hand and 'modern European man' on the other. Consequently, by examining the cultural variety of Istrian peoples, the ethnographers not only expected new insights into the specific cultural composition of its Southern region, but also into the general history of mankind.

Although ongoing modernisation, especially in and around Trieste, continued to impoverish and standardise the 'true primitive folk culture', ethnographers believed that in the backwardness of the Istrian hinterland there were still "clear traces" which allowed "to recognise, to explain and to portray the real people, whose primitive economy reflects a primitive way of life and an aboriginal state of mind, in its natural form," (Haberlandt in: Wörner 1997, 400). Furthermore, this 'strictly academic' interest was often clearly tinged not only with imperial overtones but also with a prevailing nostalgic view of primitive life: the 'true people', untouched by modernity and its decadent influences, seemed not only a fascinating relic of bygone times, but also a desirable alternative to present and future.

The interest and nostalgia with which the Habsburg ethnographers viewed the life of Istria's rural population, comparing their moral strength with the decadence of modern urban life, reveals the parallels between the imperial ethnographers and nationalists anywhere at the time: throughout Europe intellectuals had discovered peasantry as the moral and historic foundation of 'their' people and nation. Whilst, however, national ethnographers investigated the lives of 'their' peasants and collected and analysed the artefacts of 'their' people, giving historical authenticity and continuity to their specific national projects 'from within', the Viennese ethnographers pursued an imperial and distinctively anti-nationalist project: what nationalists celebrated as a 'national revival' seemed to them a distinctively modern phenomenon, if not a 'modern invention', which could not claim a seemingly timeless history. They declared the folk art, to which the national movements referred in order to prove the specificity of 'their' nation, to be "nothing else than peasant-ised and rural-ised bourgeois art" (Haberlandt, 1911, 190). According to the Habsburg ethnographers, modern national movements were not so much revitalising dormant nations as destroying authentic 'true' peoples by deforming and transforming their 'real' life-style and their 'authentic' nature. The

8 Edward B. Tylor's *Researches into the Early History of Mankind and the Development of Civilisation* was published in 1865 in London, his influential *Primitive Culture* in 1871.

very success of national ideologies and movements was interpreted by them as a clear sign of ongoing impoverishment and decline of the 'primitive' nations and nationalities. Investigating the remains of these populations in peripheral zones, far away from the influence of the state and urban life, the Habsburg ethnographers hoped to find a "principle which goes beyond nationalities" (Haberlandt, 1859, 1). This principle would allow them to prove the fallacy of modern nations and to prove that the national movements were but ideological constructs assembled by modern political and cultural elites.

### The Istrian Nation(s) – Integrated Cultural Diversity

This mixture of scientific approach and ideological orientation might explain why Habsburg ethnographers insisted on stressing the coexistence of a multitude of ethnic groups and nations in Istria. Stressing the diversity of ethnographic variations, and especially the hybrid mixtures between them, Habsburg ethnographers offered an alternative to the contesting national discourses – which presented Istria as either Italian or Slav – by deconstructing the seemingly compact 'national groups'. This framework, being ideological as well as scientific, also explains why the Habsburg ethnographers, although insisting on the cultural diversity of the countless 'ethnic nuances', did not investigate all of them equally. Their interest focused on the 'truly authentic people', whereby 'authenticity' was defined by a blend of peripherality and antiquity, that is, by their very 'backwardness' in space as well as in time. The 'real people' were characterised furthermore by their *lack* of political mobilisation and 'national' awareness. The Istrian coastal towns, which were already spaces of national quarrels between Italians and Slavs, had therefore simply disqualified for ethnographic research. The Italians, predominantly town-dwellers, were considered only of ethnographic interest where it seemed possible to trace a direct line back to the 'Romans'. The majority of the Italian communities were, instead, considered as "sons of Italian immigrants" (Stradner, 1897, 111), which could consequently not claim any kind of 'authenticity'. The main attention was thus focused on the hinterland and there on the most peripheral communities with their predominantly Slavic speaking population.

The ethnographers' pet ethnic group were the *Tschitschen*, "a Romanian or Croat-Romanian mixed people" living in the very Istrian Hinterland, which "called themselves Vlachs" but referred to by their neighbours as "Čiči" (Stradner, 1897, 111).<sup>9</sup> In 1891, Spinčić declared the Tschitschen's far-reaching assimilation to the surrounding Croats "in life-style, occupation, costume (including the nomenclature of various dresses), in custom and habits". Only the inhabitants of

the village of Žejane, he notes, still speak "a Romanian ('čiribirish') language, loaded by more than a third with Croat words" (Spinčić, 1891, 212).

The "mysterious Tschitschen" (Stradner, 1897, 111), who can be considered as the late Istrian counterpart of the Dalmatian Morlakks, which had puzzled and attracted European intellectuals throughout the 17th and 18th century (s. Wolff, 2001, 126ff.). The travelers and ethnographers of the 19th century turned such 'Rumanians' into the subject of manifold and sometimes contradictory descriptions. What was common to all, however, was the emphasis on the Tschitschen's backwardness, their poverty and their marginality, in short: their 'primitiveness'. Re-formulating these qualities with the new ethnographic vocabulary of 'peoples', 'nations' and 'ethnic groups', the socially and economically underprivileged Tschitschen were turned into the quintessential 'real people', which the ethnographers had hoped to find, and at the same time became the prototype of the 'Istrian' as such. The Tschitschen were, however, not only 'imagined' as a truly authentic primitive people; due to the attention they had received among the ethnographically interested circles of the Empire, this 'imagined community' was institutionalised: in 1888 a school was opened, which was supposed to "save" the "Rumanians" of the Čepik Lake "from the further threatening Slavisation" (Stradner, 1897, 111).

It is interesting to see, how the Tschitschens were 'slavised' in the ongoing investigations of the Habsburg ethnographers. In 1897, Stradner still points to their "beautiful Roman heads", which distinguished them clearly from the "other Slavs" and which he interpreted as a proof of their Rom(ani)an ancestors (Stradner, 1897, 110). In 1909 Moser, on the other hand, points to their "distinct facial traces and their curved eyebrows" which for him were a clear sign of their "far Mongolian origin" (Moser, 1909, 26f.). This change of interpretation and perception reflects the changing mental geography of backwardness: while the ethnographers had initially searched for the foundations of the Europeans in (Roman) antiquity, that is in *time*, they later increasingly searched for them in the contemporary 'Slavic' peripheries, that is, in *space*. It is hard to say if this change of categorisation in Istria was informed by former Venetian imperial discourses, which – as mentioned above – had coined the perspective of the Istrian elites in regard to their Hinterland, or by the fact that the Slavs were considered as more 'loyal' subjects of the Empire than the Italians, which were increasingly attracted – or thought to be attracted – by 'their' nation state founded in 1860. Although the Tschitschens as the prototype of the 'true Istrian people' were more and more 'slavised' in ensuing ethnographic descriptions, they were never considered simply as 'Slavs' but as a 'mixed people', a co-

9 Moser refers to this group also as Čičen, Chichii as well as Ciribirzi (Moser, 1909).

notation which seemed to fit for the peninsula's rural populations in general. The imperial ethnographers were puzzled and fascinated by the hybridity of the Istrian peoples, where "the most contrasting nationalities merge. One can find not only croatised Serbs and serbicised Croats, but also croatised Vlachs, furthermore italianised Croats, who have partly even forgotten their mother tongue [...] elsewhere you can meet croatised Italians [...] and finally a hybrid mixture, with Italian costumes, Slavic customs and a language which is a melange of Serbian and Italian words" (Czoernig jr in: Stradner, 1897, 111). The ethnographic writings of the time therefore not only portray a variety of distinct and specific Istrian 'peoples', but also the image of an Istrian people, to which the ethnographers ascribed a common origin, common customs, artifacts, culture, mentality and so on.<sup>10</sup> By foregrounding the diversity of Istrian peoples and conceiving Istrians as their summation, Habsburg ethnographers in fact represented Istria as a melting pot and the Istrians as the 'real' as well as the 'ideal' Habsburg people, one that was at once culturally mixed and manifold united in its adherence to the Empire.

The image Habsburg ethnographers developed of "their" Istrian province was therefore all but coherent. They constructed both Istrian diversity and unity – but they neither *invented* the peninsula's cultural diversity nor did they invent *nations*. They rather highlighted and reinterpreted existing discourses of difference and diversity. By reformulating social categories of practice and experience in the new national vocabulary, however, they gave (albeit on very flimsy grounds) 'scientific' and 'objective' legitimacy to the 'imagined' national communities.

With the Empire's decline, the imperial discourse of 'true peoplehood' lost its authority and could be either ignored or silenced as outdated 'imperial ideology'. But the essentialised imaginings of 'otherness' were readily taken up, re-evaluated and re-used by the national elites and states who took power in Istria during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Italian nationalists, for example, could refer to Habsburg writings in order to show the 'primitiveness' and 'backwardness' of Istrians, thus legitimising the Italian civilising mission over the peninsula's rural populations. At the same time, Yugoslav ethnography was able to take up the ethnographic collections and writings in order to prove that the 'authentic Istrians' were Slavs, giving 'scientific' and 'objective' legitimacy to their claims on Istria.

As for 'the' Istrian people who the Habsburg ethnographers had constructed as the 'ideal people' in the Empire – multicultural, a-national and hybridised – it was silenced as an official category of belonging after the end of the Empire. Under the ensuing Italian rule, the cate-

gory 'Istrian' was radically nationalised. Although the reference to a multicultural 'Istrianity' did survive as social experience and practice in everyday life, the 'Istrian' was now, at least officially, Italian. After World War II, Tito officially addressed 'the' Istrian people, again referring to the trans- or a-national connotations of the term, trying to bridge the national rifts which the two world wars, as well as ideological and the violent conflict over Istria's 'national' affiliations had left behind among the Istrian peoples. The post-war exodus from the region, however, seems to suggest that many Istrians did not believe in a possible 'common peoplehood' that time.

### Istrianity – An Alternative Ideology of Peoplehood in Today's Europe

'Istrianity' was institutionalised as an optional regional category in the Yugoslav census in the 70's and triumphantly revived with the Slovene and Croatian 'political spring' in the 80's. Many Istrians – whether intellectuals or not – now uphold the notion of an historical Istrianity which had been dismembered into ill-fitting, extraneous national categories by nationalist ideologies. Istrianity is now presented as the real, 'authentic nature' of the Istrian people, who was forced into national classifications by the nationalising policies of the Habsburg, the Italian and the Yugoslav state. Much of today's discourse on 'Istrianity' is still reminiscent of the writings of Habsburg ethnographers, with the fundamental difference that today the Istrians speak up for themselves. Today, Istrianity is defined 'from within'.

As in the last century, however, the concept of a trans-national or a-national Istrianity is framed by a clear political project: the region's ambition to join the European Union. In a way, the once idealised people of the Habsburg Empire at this juncture presents itself as the ideal *European* people. As in the past, however, Istrianità as an alternative ideology of peoplehood is not uncontested: As a border-transcending, hybrid, cultural and national 'melange', 'the' Istrian people fit perfectly into a Europe imagined as an association of *regions*. By contrast, a Europe imagined as a collection of *nation-states* projects its ideal people(s) as citizens, that is as Italians, Slovenes and Croats, willing to co-operate peacefully with the citizens of their neighbouring states. Which of the 'imagined communities' will be conceived as more real, more primordial and essential in the future and whether the Istrian population will imagine itself as 'Istrian' or as 'Italian', as 'Slovene', 'Croat' or other, will also depend on how a united Europe will imagine "it's" peoples and on how this imagination will inform the institutional structures in which collective identities are essentialised in public discourse and social practice.

10 Emilio Frauer, for example, refers the origins of the Istrians to the Colches, Bildermann claims their Celto-ligurian origins, Hoernes traces them back to Illyrians and so on (Stradner, 1897).

*Istria on the Czornig's ethnic map (1855).  
Istra na Czoernigovi etnični karti (1855).*

## IMPERIALNE IDEOLOGIJE LJUDSTEV V HABSBUŠKI MONARHIJI – ALTERNATIVNI PRISTOP K LJUDSTVOM IN NARODOM V ISTRI

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### POVZETEK

Avtorica članka razmišlja, kako so modernistične študije o nacionalizmu, ki so osredotočajo izključno na nacionalistične interpretacije "nacionalnosti", kot so se razvijale v 18. in 19. stoletju, bolj ali manj zanemarjale "alternativne" vizije ljudstev in narodov, razvijajočih se v povezavi z utrjevanjem cesarstev in držav v 16. stoletju. Članek na osnovi domneve, da je bil "narod" del ljudske domišljije dolgo pred "sodobnostjo", raziskuje odnos političnih elit v Benetkah in habsburški monarhiji do "istrskega ljudstva". Razpravlja o "imperialnih vizijah" nacionalnosti, ki so obstajale pred in naposled skupaj z nacionalističnimi interpretacijami o tem, kaj narod je in kaj bi tudi moral biti. Avtorica meni, da so takšne "imperialne vizije" močno vplivale na način, kako so si nacionalne elite zamišljale narode in kako so se narodne identitete razvijale v 19. in 20. stoletju, ko so ljudje zahtevali pravico, da se opredelijo in pokažejo, kako si "zamišljajo" sami sebe. Čeprav so te alternativne vizije nacionalnosti izgubile svojo veljavo ob zatonu habsburške monarhije, pa so – vsaj tako domneva avtorica članka – vendarle del repertoarja Istranov, kar zadeva njihovo identiteto, in so zatoj na voljo za novo razlago skupnih identitet v Evropi. Članek zagovarja misel, da analiza alternativnih ideologij nacionalnosti odpira nove možnosti za razumevanje zapletenosti istrske stvarnosti in tudi za preučevanje nacionalizma na splošno, s tem da se razširi diskusija o "modernem narodu", tako da nanj ne gledamo več zgolj kot na "iznajdbo" nacional(istič)nih elit, marveč bolj kot na izid pogajanj in spora med "imperialnim" in "nacionalnim".

**Ključne besede:** ideologije ljudstev, imperialne vizije nacionalnosti, habsbuški imperij, Beneška republika, skupne identitete v Istri

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