EMIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA FROM FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA

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Migration from Italy to Australia is characterized by a barely discernable start, at the end of the 19th century, followed by an unremarkable flow in the next decades which suddenly changed, however, after the Second World War, becoming a real phenomenon, albeit not a mass one. This is the situation of the Italians in Australia, at different moments in time: just under four thousand in 1891; a little over eight thousand in 1921; twenty-six thousand seven hundred in 1933. (1) These numbers were the result of a growing tendency at the beginning of the 30s, due to the effects of the United States migration policy which culminated in a quota system. The numbers are rather low in absolute terms and are counterbalanced by the data recorded by the 1981 census, which established the Italian community at 603,241 individuals, equal to 4.1% of the Australian population, of which 282,784 were born in Italy and about 258,733 and 61,724 respectively second and third generation Italians. (2)

Such a considerable increase in the number of Italians in Australia was the effect of the mass emigration which took place after the Second World War and that allowed the Australian population which had been born in Italy, which in 1947 amounted to thirty-three thousand six hundred individuals, to reach one hundred and twenty thousand and two hundred and twenty-eight thousand people, in 1954 and 1961 respectively. (3) The increase in the migrant flow sprung from the convergence of complementary needs: on the one hand those of Australia, which following the turnaround in migration policy that took place in 1947 (which partially derogated from the White Australian Policy, traditionally hostile towards non Anglo-Celtic immigration, often in a persecutory manner) opened its borders to workers from all European countries; on the other hand those of Italy, which in order to reduce the number of unemployed to avoid a growth in social tensions, literally built golden
bridges for those willing to leave the country. The result of this good-will in the matter of international movement of labor was an agreement of assisted emigration, signed on 29 March 1951, which permitted and facilitated the emigration of about forty-four thousand Italians until 1964, the year in which it was no longer in force. However, it must be said that assisted emigration was but one part of a greater migration movement from Italy to Australia, to which free, or spontaneous, or private emigration must be added, which in the same period involved about two hundred and eighty thousand Italians. (4)

Migration from Friuli Venezia Giulia was lost in the national phenomenon until after the Second World War when, following the vicissitudes and the territorial changes on the eastern border, it took on aspects of its own, different from the rest of Italy, and with very different components within itself. So differentiated that it does not seem exaggerated to talk of emigrations from Friuli Venezia Giulia to Australia after World War II, distinguishing three types: that of people from Istria, Fiume and Dalmatia; that of people from Trieste (and, to a lesser extent, from Gorizia) and that of people from Friuli.

The present work will attempt to explain such complexity. After bringing to light the traces left by the people of Friuli, Giulia, Istria, Fiume and Dalmatia, (5) from the origins of Italian emigration to Australia until the Second World War, an attempt will be made to qualify and quantify what have been defined the emigrations from Friuli Venezia Giulia to Australia, also trying to explain the different reasons that in each case led to emigration.

With regard to the migration following their decision to leave and their departure itself, that is, the impact of and settlement in Australia, we will try to summarize the first moments of the migration of Friulians and Giuliano Dalmati (That is those from Gorizia, Trieste, Fiume (which is now a part of Croatia), Pola (In Istria, which is now divided between Slovenia and Croatia) and Zara (in Dalmatia, which is now a part of Croatia) “Down Under”, using models and paradigms gathered
from the emigrants themselves. A series of observations regarding the dynamics of migration from the 60s to now will conclude this work, with a reference to the return of migrants, both before and after the phenomenon known as inversion of the migration balance, which in Friuli Venezia Giulia first happened in 1967, earlier than the national average.

**Friulians and Giuliano Dalmati in Australia from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the Second World War**

There were few Italians during the 1880s in Australia, but amongst them there were a certain number of people from Friuli, who had arrived in Sydney in April 1881 in a group of about two hundred (from both Veneto and Friuli), after an adventurous journey around the Pacific isles. 317 were hired in 1880 by a French con man, landing first on the Bismarck Isles, then in New Caledonia. Decimated by the discomforts of the journey and by the incredible conditions of the places where they were supposedly to find a kind of paradise on earth, the group lost about a hundred companions along the way; the survivors were finally welcomed into the Agricultural Hall, a wool and cereal warehouse in the harbor area of Sydney. From here, they were separated and sent out to work at different places, in an attempt to weaken personal ties and discourage the formation of a foreign enclave in the heart of Australian society, which was then rigorously English-speaking. However, every attempt was in vain, to the extent that in 1885, once the necessary sum had been saved, the colony of Veneto-Friulians bought two hundred and twenty hectares of land near Lismore, in New South Wales, and founded a village, which was naturally called Little Italy and which survived until the Great War. This was a village that had a school, a church and even bowling grounds, were the houses were built in the same style as back home, destined to become, even after its disappearance, the symbol of “Italian resourcefulness in Australia and of the perseverance and sacrifice of immigrants”. (6)
And it is very probable that there were also Friulians amongst the sugar cane cutters hired in Southern Italy in 1891 to be sent to Queensland, to fill the void left by the Kanakis, the indigenous people of the Pacific islands, seventeen thousand of whom were expelled in mass from the country. (7)

An Australian source reporting on the overall number of “Italian males who emigrated to Australia between 1890 and 1940” (8) established Friulian immigration at one thousand people (of which 750 were from the hills of Friuli and 250 from the plain). It was, therefore, a movement of a certain importance compared to the total flow from Italy to Australia, calculated at about twenty-five thousand people, however, it was at the same time very modest when compared to the other migrant directions that in the same years connected Friuli with other destinations and which were followed by hundreds of thousands of people. In 1923 a priest, Father Mambrini, sent to investigate and report to the church on the settlement of about two thousand Italians on the river Herbert, near Ingham, in Queensland reported having seen a group of ten people from Udine. (9)

As for the emigration of Giuliano Dalmati, there are sources that hint at the arrival in Australia of 123 people from Trieste between 1892 and 1899, (10) without however specifying their nationality. Nowadays we can’t, therefore, be sure that they were Italian, because at the time, and until 1918, as we know, the city was part of that multinational entity that was the Austro-Hungarian Empire. We are, instead, given quite a precise mapping of the emigration of Giuliano Dalmati of Italian nationality by the already mentioned report on “Italian males who emigrated to Australia between 1890 and 1940”. According to this document there were 60 individuals from Trieste, 530 from Istria and 40 from the island of Zara. (11) This source, previous data aside, is interesting because of its report, in the part dedicated to Dalmatia, on the migrant movement of this region (part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with the status of independent kingdom, until after the Great War, when it was handed over to the Kingdom of Serbo-Croats and Slovenes) which registered a migrant movement of 3,440 Italian males, by far greater than those originating from Friuli and Venezia Giulia combined.
For the period between the two wars there is other data available, given to us by a table entitled “percentage distribution of Italian emigration towards transoceanic countries and towards Oceania or Australia”. We can therefore calculate the migrant flow from Venezia Giulia between 1920 and 1939 at 1.08% of the national movement, (12) that is about five hundred people out of about forty-eight thousand. Unfortunately, due to lack of information, nothing can be said regarding the existence or the entity, during the same period, of a migrant movement towards Australia of Slovene and Croat emigrants from the territories that passed from Austro-Hungarian to Italian sovereignty. Its importance, in general terms, remains, although it is also difficult to quantify as it has been the object of very different evaluations. (13)

Emigration from Friuli Venezia Giulia after the Second World War: the emigration of People from Istria, Fiume and Dalmatia

The first of three migrant waves from Friuli Venezia Giulia to Australia after the Second World War was, from a chronological point of view, the forced one of those Giuliano Dalmati from the territories administered temporarily by Yugoslavia, then handed over definitively by the peace treaty of 15 February 1947. Mainly, therefore, people from Zara, Fiume and Istria (mainly from Pola), with a smaller number of inhabitants from “Zone B” of the Free Territory of Trieste, from where the mass exodus of the Italian population would begin in the autumn of 1953.

Australia was generous in welcoming Giuliano Dalmati, who had been included in the Australian Displaced Persons Scheme together with other refugees, coming mainly from the USSR and the Balkans: between 1947 and 1952 Australia welcomed a total of over one hundred and seventy thousand displaced persons. (14)

As mentioned before, the turn around in Australian demographic policy took place in 1947, under Immigration Minister Arthur Augustus Calwell. Labor was needed for the Australian economy to restart and grow, there was also a great need for structural interventions (it suffices to note that railway gauges could change from
At the same time, it was necessary to give life to the idea, imperative at the time, of “populate or perish”, the concept of creating a demographic barrier able to resist an invasion of Asian populations, of which there had been a kind of shocking preview with the bombing of the city of Darwin carried out by the Japanese in February 1942. (15) Never mind if Calwell’s objective, that “for every foreign immigrant there would be ten from the United Kingdom” (16), had to be abandoned, settling for Southern and Western Europeans, who anyway, as displaced persons, were so desperate as to accept the clause that obliged them to stay, for at least two years, in jobs assigned by the Australian government.

The migrant movement of displaced persons was managed by a specific international organization, the International Refugee Organization (IRO), which between July 1947 and December 1951 dealt with the emigration of just under nine hundred thousand refugees in sixteen countries, including, as well as Australia: Canada, Israel, the United States, England, France, Argentina and Brazil … (17) The IRO was an international institution based in Geneva and operated from 1947 under a UN mandate. It dealt with the assistance and protection of refugees, then giving assistance with repatriation or settlement in the first welcoming country, as well as emigration to a third country. For the international migrations it used ships that it managed directly, which at the peak of its activity numbered forty, mainly battered old ships, which had been used by the allies for transporting troops during the conflict. (18)

The emigration of refugees from Fiume, Dalmatia and Istria to Australia was but a trickle, lost in the masses of people whose fate is generally identified with the biblical term exodus, and that some authors have more technically defined “anomalous migrant wave”. (19) It is not yet possible to precisely quantify this phenomenon, only give it a rough, reasonable estimate, placed at around a quarter of a million people. (20) It is highly probable that the total number of 3,167 people classified as stateless, supplied by Australian sources, (21) which is usually quoted when quantifying those from Istria and Dalmatia who emigrated to Australia under the patronage of the IRO, is perhaps a gross understatement. This is due to the
difficulty in defining the juridical status of Italian refugees, which led to their classification into misleading categories, such as stateless or Yugoslav, from which it is today difficult, if not altogether impossible, to identify them and include them in the migrant movement originating from Italy.

The fact is that the decision to support the emigration of those from Istria and Dalmatia by the IRO was taken late, only at the end of 1949, as up until that moment it had reservations about their status, considering them refugees, albeit anomalous ones, who had reached their country of choice intending to keep the nationality they had at birth. (22) Therefore the emigration of those from Istria and Dalmatia took place in 1950 and 1951 and was characterized by considerable logistic difficulties: those who signed up for “Down Under” had to abandon the refugee camp where they lived in order to reach one of those managed by the IRO and in which selections and enlisting took place, generally Bagnoli or Cinecittà. They generally left from Naples or Genoa, but often also from the German port of Bremenhaven and frequently, in the weeks before departure, emigrants were forced, once more, to live in a refugee camp close to their port of embarkation. Then came the endless journey, on board the battered old ships that were available to the IRO, such as the Skaubryn, “which is a miracle it held together”, (23) on which passengers had to wash with sea water, or the Hellenic Prince, where, on the trip from Naples in December 1950, all sorts happened: there was a fire; the fridges broke down and the food went off and a rebellion of the desperate passengers was crushed by the crew by using the hydrants on board. (24)

The first phases of the migrant experience must have seemed, to the refugees, the expression of an endless and tormented destiny which they had already experienced in all their journeys, characterized not only by insecurity but also a lack of separate-sex facilities in the refugee camps during selection and enlisting (which would continue in Australia in the centers for emigrants). At a closer look, however, a severing from the past had already occurred, this was already a new life, even in its first uncertain and difficult phases; a life that began in a land which was different and far away from where the emigrants were born, a land that people hoped would be
welcoming and peaceful and were they hoped to grow roots. This is how a refugee from Fiume recalls how he and his family felt upon reaching Australia:

“We reached Melbourne in December of 1950. Our hearts full of hope. We were not asking people to want us, not asking the country to adopt us; we wanted to be part of these people, to say: this is and will be our country, our children’s, and our grandchildren’s’ country.” (25)

Emigration from Friuli Venezia Giulia after the Second World War: the emigration of people from Trieste

In February 1952 the IRO ceased to operate, however, in December 1951 a new organization was founded in Brussels that was destined to take on its role: the provisional Inter-governmental Committee for migrant movements from Europe, which the following year definitely became the Inter-governmental Committee for European Migrations (ICEM) (26). There were thirteen founding members (including Italy and Australia), becoming twenty-six in 1958. ICEM’s main aim was to transfer migrants from overpopulated European countries to countries – mostly overseas – which offered the possibility of organized immigration, added to this were a series of other services, such as recruitment, selection, welcoming and organization of labor. ICEM also offered other services aimed at training emigrants, such as language teaching or professional training.

The ICEM of Trieste played an extremely active role in the assisted emigration to Australia of the candidates residing roughly in the Triveneto region: in order to make all the paperwork for the long and complex selection process easier, it organized a special “Selection assistance service” whose task was to coordinate the Job Centers in each area and the officials of the Australian Commission, who periodically came to Trieste during the selections.

At first, these selections were very strict, taking into account health issues (with quality standards that were so high that more than one case saw candidates turned down only because of a missing tooth) and political views. From this point of
view, the candidate was interviewed in an attempt to establish his or her political leanings, the findings were then cross-referenced with any possible information held by the General Command of the police force in Rome. For security reasons, if a candidate showed support for the Communist Party, he or she was immediately rejected. (27) Only after this phase did the interviews take into account professional aspects and were run directly by the Australian Commission that, in the case of candidates with a specialized profession, demanded that applicants prove their skills. Once this test had been passed, the applicant finally reached the status of potential emigrant, with still a further health test to pass in order to be a tout court emigrant, and wait for the long awaited departure. From numerical data of the Regional Employment Office of Trieste which refers to December 1954 and the whole of 1955, we have an idea of how severe the selection process was and the large number of rejections there were throughout the various phases: of the 9,720 candidates who turned up for the first selection phase, only 5,023 (little over 50%) reached the end of the process and were called for departure. (28)

A fundamental legal factor for the emigration to Australia of residents of the provinces of Trieste, Gorizia and Udine (but also, evidently, of all other Italians) after the Second World War was a bilateral assisted emigration agreement between Italy and Australia, underwritten on 29 March 1951. This was suspended at the end of 1952, following unrest in the emigrant grouping camps of Boneigilla in July and of Sydney in October, caused by Italians frustrated by the difference between the expectations that had led them to leave and the reality they faced, and reactivated partially in March 1954 and completely in December of the same year, finally ending definitively ten years later.

As mentioned before, Italy built golden bridges for those who accepted to emigrate: between June 1946 and March 1951 ten international agreements were reached on emigration, mostly with European countries (Belgium, France, Sweden and Holland …), but also with countries overseas (Brazil, and, as we have just seen, Australia) (29) This was the reflection of an idea of the time, which saw emigration as an economic resource for the well being of those who remained in their country.
Emigrants were therefore considered as rejects, something felt as a painful but inevitable necessity, functional for the good of the country, “for improving the quality of life of the population and reaching a greater equilibrium and stability in the national labor market”. (30) These aims were to be sought at any cost, with no concern, for example, for the social and economic long term damage that derived from giving up so many skilled workers to the international labor market, who could have been employed nationally. However, this was a price governments, with little far-sightedness, were willing to pay, also to ward off threats of political and social disorder. Mariano Rumor, speaking at the III Congress of Democrazia Cristiana (the Christian Democrat party) in Venice in 1949, the one which has been so often quoted because of De Gasperi’s famous speech where the statesman urged people to set off and explore the world, learn new languages in order to emigrate, said:

“The skilled worker – with the ingenious characteristics of the Italians – often reaches the nerve-center of the host country’s economic system, and creates a niche for the employment of new labor”;

not so for unskilled workers, who, on the other hand, on the international labor market were:

“[ …] neither sought after nor desired: a burden on the production system, settling on the very bottom of it and weighing it down with unbearable economic and political problems”. (31)

It could therefore be said that one of the causes that led so many people from Trieste to emigrate to Australia from the beginning of March 1954 was the existence of open migration channels, to which they were almost pushed. This is certainly true, however we still have to go on trying to find out the reasons behind the decision of thousands of people from Trieste, Gorizia and Istria (mostly from zone B of the FTT) to travel across those golden bridges everyone was showing them.

At this point, it is useful to quantify the volume of assisted emigration which began under the aegis of the ICEM from the region of Venezia Giulia from 1954 to
1961, which totaled around nine thousand six hundred departures. Of these, about 5% were from the province of Gorizia, about 21% from the territories conceded to Yugoslavia and more than 67% from the province of Trieste. (32) As far as people from Gorizia were concerned (we will deal with those from Friuli further on), it is reasonable to presume that the predominant factors behind the decision to emigrate were economic, or anyhow connected to the crisis of the labor market. As regards the people from Istria, that is mainly those from the towns transferred with the London Memorandum from “Zone B of the FTT”, already effectively administered by the Yugoslav authorities, to the jurisdiction of Yugoslavia, the reasons were probably the same as those that led their fellow countrymen and predecessors in the migrant wave of 1950 and 1951. As far as the people from Trieste were concerned the final push to emigrate was the result of a complex mix of reasons, of an economic, political and even emotional nature.

First of all, as we have said economic reasons, linked to the effect of the economy felt first and by most people: the labor market. This had been seriously affected by the presence in the city of the bureaucratic-administrative machinery of the Allied Military Government (AMG) destined, as became clear from the autumn of 1953, to leave after a few months. According to a study carried out by the Employment Office of Trieste and referring to a period between 1950 and 1953, there were, on average, about eighteen thousand unemployed out of a population of about two hundred thousand, that is just over six percent. However, a further thirteen thousand virtual unemployed have to be added on to this total, part of what was defined as “hidden unemployment”, which affected all those subjects whose position was linked inexorably to the presence of the bureaucratic-administrative machinery of the AMG in the city: the so called Betfor and Trust employees, who worked in the offices, in the provisioning and entertainment facilities of the English and American armed forces; fire fighters; bomb and mine sweepers. And, most of all, the civil police, the so called cerini, about six thousand five hundred of them, rather disliked by the people of Trieste due to the zeal with which they carried out the tasks gradually given to them by the Allies. So disliked that three agents, accused of
shooting at the crowd during the tragic events of November 1953, were advised to emigrate, which they did by emergency procedure, rushed to London first and then to Fremantle, where they were joined by another 41, who reached Sydney in February 1955. (33)

The news that the AMG was leaving not only wrecked any hope of forming the Free Territory of Trieste but also gave the impression – which in the following years proved to be wrong – that a collapse of the city’s economy was imminent. These suggestions led to a deep sense of loss, leaving thousands of the people of Trieste, who had given their professional support to the Allied Military Government for mainly, it is clear, materialistic reasons, with a deep sense of mistrust. However, it is possible that the support they had expressed was of a wider nature, which encompassed political views too; a support which also rose from the “difficulty people found in totally identifying themselves with the two competing national [and political] identities”, which had given life to “a movement for independence – in favor of the effective establishment of the FTT, which had found considerable support in the city”. (34) I think this is also how the influence of the Cold War on the decision of people from Trieste to emigrate, from the beginning of 1954 and not only, should be seen, as is often observed, in the “anguish, at times terror, of an unknown future” (35). But, also, in the spread of the lacerating political and ideological fight, which was in sharp contrast to the sense of not belonging to such a reality, which also encourages, in those who stand on neither of the two sides, controversial demonstrations, such as the banners “The mother [Italy] arrives and the children leave” on board departing ships, or the coins thrown by emigrants on the docks of the Maritime Station. We must also not forget the consequences of the so-called “hot war”, the war waged and the subsequent peace treaty that, in virtue of the changes that the eastern border underwent and of the exodus, led to the arrival in Trieste of about seventy thousand refugees, whose presence worsened the labor market and housing market crisis.
Could it be said that the supporters of national independence, because of being foreign or, at least, detached from the violent political and national conflict of those years, were the spiritual children of the people of Trieste from the Austrian period? Is it possible to find in them the traces of what Giulio Sapelli has defined “that cosmopolitan inspiration, derived from ideas going beyond the concept of nationality, open to broader horizons” (36)? If so, it may not be too far fetched to say that this inspiration may have had a role in the birth or in the strengthening of the decision to leave for “Down Under”.

One aspect remains to be considered, the influence of which is hard to determine but not necessarily irrelevant. Amongst so many emigrating for economic reasons, or driven by the emotions caused by the political situation, there were those who had been truly bewitched by the idea of Australia, mostly young or very young people, who lived emigration as an adventure, maybe saying to family and friends those famous words “Two years and I’ll be back”, so often mentioned in records.

The assisted emigration of Giulians from the spring of 1954, which involved little over ten thousand people, was only a part of the total migrant movement to Australia. This was accompanied by the so called spontaneous, or free, emigration. It is impossible to precisely estimate the two phenomena together, we are talking about roughly twenty-two thousand departures. (37)

Thanks to the study of the so called Nominal Rolls, the passenger lists of the ships boarded by emigrants under the aegis of the ICEM, we get a precise idea of the nature of assisted emigration. Firstly we can say that the numbers involved were considerable, albeit for a limited period of time. Departures, which began on 15 March 1954, were 2,127 for that year, peaking the following year at 4,380. then the phenomenon began its downward curve, with 1,643 and 879 departures, in 1956 and 1957 respectively, dropping to only 110 departures in 1958. (38) This data alone gives the idea of the progression of the phenomenon, never before seen nor forecast but nevertheless substantial, very similar to a flare up. It amazed both the city and observers, even those we imagine as less inclined to sentimentalism, such as the
communist from Muggia Vittorio Vidali a revolutionary and a political leader, who, on the departure of the first ship headed for Australia with assisted emigration, the Castelverde, wrote the following in his diary:

“People on the Castelverde send signals, farewells, messages with gestures, whistles, shouts, handkerchiefs, portable lamps. No songs, no joy. It looks like they are leaving for war, on a journey towards the unknown and with no coming back. Finally the ship moves, Trieste goes to Australia, who could have imagined it?” (39)

A touching portrait of one of the departures is given to us by the writer from Trieste Giani Stuparich, in an article published in the “Corriere di Trieste” in August 1955:

“All the heart of the city was there, in those farewells, in those pieces of advice, in those final goodbyes: the entire nature of the population of Trieste came through those expressions of people who can be funny even in tears, lively even in tragedy. “I và, I và e noi restemo ... sempre alegri e mai passion” (You go, you go and we remain ... always happy and never passionate), said one worker in a bitter tone, with tears in his eyes. “Andè fioi, feghe onor a Trieste!” (Go my friends, and do justice to the name of Trieste!”), recommended another elderly worker. And an old grandmother! There she was, held up by her relatives, continuously asking whether Rico was on board, where he was, if he had his red scarf around his neck, if he was waving, smiling, and whether that long crossing would be a good one; she would not move even after the ship had set sail and gone over the horizon; people began to leave, amongst comments and regrets; “nonina, la se movi!” (Grandmother! Lets go!), but the elderly woman wouldn’t move, and, her face covered in tears, kept saying “Cossa che me toca veder!” (Why did I have to witness this!). (40)
In most cases (83.3%), the Giulians who left with the assisted immigration, did so from the port of Trieste. However, some left from Genoa (15.3%) and even from Naples (1.4%). (41) As for the division of those leaving according to sex, it was overall almost worthy of Solomon: 56.5% were male and 43.5% female. The substantial balance of this division means that it could not have contributed, in the society losing emigrants, to the phenomenon, known as “feminization”, whose long term effect is to break the equilibrium between the two sexes that is needed for a balanced reproduction of the population. (42)

Further data to take into consideration is that regarding the age of Giulian emigrants, which on average was extremely low: consider that about 55 per cent of them were no older than twenty-five and incredibly about ninety per cent no older than thirty-five. (43) It must be observed that this was caused by the clauses of the bilateral agreement we have seen, which accepted for assisted immigration, apart from some rare exceptions, unmarried men up to 35, unmarried women up to 30, couples up to 35 without children and families over 45 with children. (44) In any case, it worsened, for the area of Trieste, the ageing process destined to have devastating long term effects on the economic and social fabric.

Another important characteristic of assisted emigration from the region of Giulia concerns the professional qualifications of the departing. Male emigrants who went through the selection process were enlisted as skilled or semi-skilled workers in 47.4% of cases and as general labor in the remaining 52.6%. The first category included steelworkers and engineering workers, builders and carpenters, as well as textile, food and printing industry workers. The second category included, as well as a minority of laborers, factory and foundry staff; for construction sites; for mechanical works. (45) It was a real drain of skilled workers, which meant, for the present, the net loss of an investment represented by the “capital required to form the emigrant”, which represents the costs borne by the family and society for education, health care, professional qualification, etc (46) and for the future the start, or the acceleration, of a process of de-qualification of the work force.
Not much can be said about women’s conditions as, if they held professional skills, it may not have been convenient – and was certainly risky – to undergo the selections reserved for workers, it was preferable to apply for emigration as wives, or where possible to embark with the rest of the family. Not many women emigrated with a professional qualification, some did: about 18% of females between sixteen and forty. Most of them were given the title of housemaid, while for those who were employed in factories, most were assigned to the textile sector.

**Emigration from Friuli Venezia Giulia after the Second World War: the emigration of Friulians**

The fact that, as we have mentioned before, the recruitment activities carried out by the ICEM of Trieste, with reference to Australia, concerned roughly the whole of the region of Triveneto, allows us to also focus on the features of assisted emigration from the provinces of Udine and Pordenone.

If we consider that between 1946 and 1958 more than two hundred and thirty thousand people expatriated from Friuli (47), the volume of assisted emigration to Australia – which we can still establish in the period between 1954 and 1961 thanks to the aforementioned Nominal Rolls, that is the passenger lists of the ships that left from Trieste, Genoa and Naples, at about one thousand four hundred departures (48) – immediately suggests that is was definitely a secondary migrant phenomenon.

As for the division of emigrants according to sex, there is not the approximate equality which we observed when studying the emigration of people from Trieste: in fact little under a third, exactly 31% were females.

Analyzing the movement according to territory, we notice that half of the emigrants came from towns that today are part of the province of Udine and half from that of Pordenone (which, as we know, only became an administrative entity later, in 1968). This evidence diverges from data referring to departures for all destinations between 1946 and 1958, according to which 30% of the total migrant movement of Friuli originated from Pordenone and the remaining 70% from Udine; (49) leading us
to believe that, leaving aside the time lag between the two evaluations, the migrant movement from Friuli to Australia, as well as quantitatively irrelevant, also had peculiar characteristics within the global migrant movement. Taking a detailed look at the province of Pordenone, we notice a high degree of participation by a very small number of towns, mostly found in the southern belt of the district, bordering with Veneto: it is sufficient to observe how more than 60% of the total movement of the province originated from its capital and some of these towns, such as Pasiano, Azzano Decimo, Sesto al Reghena, San Vito al Tagliamento and Morsano. The anomaly of the data regarding the localization of departures from the province of Pordenone towards Australia compared to those from the region to all destinations, may be explained by the influence of the bordering area of Treviso, a province from which so many emigrated, in a region which was always heavily involved in the movement of migrants to Australia. Looking at the province of Udine, it is impossible to find an area in which there was a particular concentration of departures; on the contrary, there is data, showing us that people from practically all towns took part in the migrant movement to Australia, albeit in limited numbers, the city of Udine being the only exception, as little under a fifth of emigrants originated from here alone.

As regards the professional qualifications held by selected male emigrants, there was a majority of non skilled workers, in contrast to what we have observed previously for migration from Trieste: more than 70% of individuals. A considerable part of general laborers (little under one out of three) had a qualification in the farming sector, such as farmhands, sugar cane cutters or fruit pickers. Another considerable group of laborers were qualified for construction work on buildings, roads and railways. General factory workers, steel and steel-engineering workers, and electricity industry workers came next, followed, finally, by general workers who we can imagine were destined to one of the most back-breaking sectors: the quarries and mines. Skilled or semi-skilled workers mainly held qualifications that allowed them to be employed in the following sectors: the steel industry, the steel-engineering and electric industry; building and construction and furniture and carpentry. As for the employment situation for women, what has previously been said regarding Trieste’s
migrant movement is also true here: that the embarkation lists are not a reliable source of information for establishing the professional status and aptitude to work of females from Friuli, as it was more convenient for candidates applying for emigration to keep their qualifications secret and be accepted as family members and maybe even travel with their spouses, in order to avoid the professional selections, which were always risky and critical.

The impact of Australia on the Second World War emigrants

If, when analyzing the migrant movement towards Australia and observing the point of departure, that is, Friuli Venezia Giulia, we were led to differentiate the phenomenon and identify three types of migration, we can therefore hypothesize that, upon departure, such peculiarities were destined, if not to disappear completely, then certainly to play a smaller role in the beginning and in the development of the migrant experience. Therefore, the following pages are an attempt to analyze the initial stages of the real migrant adventure, using paradigms which we imagine were shared by all, even though in truth they have been gathered from statements of Giuliano Dalmati who emigrated to Australia, as memoirs of Friulian emigrants to Australia do not exist.

The encounter with Australia was for many, although not for all, as in the case of independent or sponsored emigration where the search for accommodation followed other channels, represented by centers for emigrants. These were accommodation facilities which had once been military camps, or prisoner of war internment camps, used at first to house refugees, and then immigrants. They were located in Bathurst, Liverpool and Greta in New South Wales; Williamstown, Boneigilla, Fisherman’s Band in Victoria and Wacol in Queensland. (50) The impact with the new reality was traumatic and every day life was not spared difficulties and perils:
“We began our journey at Port Melbourne and, after a stop in Seymour, after many hours reached Boneigilla. We immediately saw the barracks of corrugated iron that awaited us. As soon as we stepped off the wagon, we were welcomed by thousands and thousands of flies, a true invasion, it was as if they wanted to eat you alive. […] The food we were given from the kitchen, if you weren’t careful, would be full of worms before it reached your room; most of the food ended up in the dust bin.

Not long after, a measles epidemic broke out, and there were cases of poliomyelitis. Nobody would tell you anything, the ambulance would arrive and take away your children and often you had no idea why”. (51)

The problems that came up first concerned food and language. In almost all statements the memory of how terrible the local food was constantly recurs: mutton, the only and inexorable dish available, cooked and seasoned in its own sebum, the stench of which permeated the air and stuck to clothes,

“This mutton was given to us day in and day out: fried, boiled, roasted and in breadcrumbs; father used to go to the canteen and say: mutton again! And go back to the barracks with a piece of bread”. (52)

It was not always a case of lack of good will, there were times when the cure was worse than the disease:

“A murmur of surprise came up from the crowd of people who had arrived in the canteen. You can imagine people’s faces when they were served pasta in tomato sauce with honey and sugar. The cooks, it goes without saying, were German”. (53)

The camps were also where they came to recruit for work, and no (or a bad) knowledge of English at times could cause misunderstandings:
“After a few weeks, I was called to the job center; after explaining through an interpreter that I had worked in the ship yards of Monfalcone and that I was familiar with ships (which sounds much like sheep in English), I was given the job of shepherd, out near the desert, and they pointed out some nice lakes on the map. […] After talking to other emigrants who had come to visit family still at the camp, it was explained to me that those were salt lakes, not water ones, and that the ships had four legs”. (54)

Finally, men were sent off to do what they had faced an experience as dreadful as emigration for: to work. However, the tasks were back-breaking, in isolated places, subject to the mercy of intolerable climates, men were torn by the separation from their families, who remained in the camps. These were jobs essential for the Australian economy, which however no local worker would contemplate accepting. And here, the true reason Australia had been so generous and welcoming is revealed, here is the motive behind such strong insistence on the two year clause that so many had ignored:

“Adults had signed a two year work contract with the Australian government, they had to work wherever they were sent and do whatever was asked of them. This was because they had come to Australia through an organization called the IRO (International Refugee Organization) and people traveled with identification that qualified them as “displaced persons”, an equivalent of the Italian for political refugee or stateless person. Qualifications were not recognized and one had to accept doing any kind of job, such as fruit picking, or laying down railway tracks, or cleaning toilets. People would work hundreds of kilometers away from their families, and husbands would see there loved ones perhaps once a week”. (55)
This is not to say that things were different for the following wave of immigrants, who had left with the help of the ICEM in the second half of the 50s. They also had to face the difference between virtual reality and the real world, with the added circumstance that the status of skilled or semi-skilled given during the selection process back home did not at all mean that their professional capacities were automatically put to use:

“Unfortunately, another surprise awaited us. There was only manual or factory work: it did not matter if the emigrant was skilled, for example in the mechanical sector or in other professions. Australia needed laborers in order to develop its railways, steel plants, concrete quarries and agriculture”.

(56)

Work could be found in agriculture, such as cutting sugar cane in Queensland, or in big infrastructure works like the Snowy Mountain Hydro Electric Scheme or the Trans Australian Railway. In any case, these jobs were profitable, they could be done for limited periods of time and allowed the workers to save a small capital that would allow them and their families to look for work and a house on their own. They were, however, extremely hard conditions:

“I remember that after staying in the Greta camp for a month, they took me to work on the railway and this was a shock as my wife and three children stayed at the camp while I stayed at the hostel in Villawood; a separation that saddened me considerably. And this was not all: the pay at the railway was 13 pounds a week, of which 5 pounds were withheld for the hostel where I slept, and 5 pounds for where my family slept in Greta, without counting other various detractions”.

(57)
At times, those who looked for work on their own outside the camp were all but bitterly disappointed, possibly because of the difficulty in communicating and making themselves understood:

“This father of mine, with a small English dictionary where he had written the whole itinerary, took the train and set off looking for work at forty and without knowing a word of English. At each station he passed he wrote down the name so as not to get lost. Arriving in Sydney, where we knew a family that had traveled with us, he went round the industrial district and came back, sad because he had not been able to find anything, asking if I wanted to try”. (58)

The situation could become so discouraging as to lead people to suspect that emigrating had been a huge mistake, fueling the desire to go back home:

“Three months after I had arrived they sent me to chop wood in the forest. I swear to you that if there had been a bridge or if the water had been only a meter and a half deep, I would have returned to Italy on foot”. (59)

People had to adapt, and those coming from towns or cities would discover how hard farm work could be:

“At the age of 24 I felt strong enough when the farmers’ agents informed us that many sugar cane cutters were paid up to eight pounds a week, while basic pay was only seven and a half pounds. With my back bent all day to cut the cane, I realized how low the ground was. I only worked in the sugar cane fields for six days”. (60)

Even at the next stage of the emigrants’ professional life, the moment in which, freed from the work contracts we have described, lucrative yet back-breaking and only temporary, a phase in which all people, by privately putting their abilities and
skills on the market, became masters of their own fortunes, it remained a world with little or no social benefits and protections, bristling with difficulties and problems:

“At the time, Australia was an almost primitive country, under certain aspects. Work, yes…but that is all. No social benefits, no health care; one week’s holiday; housing: well that was your problem. People lived in rented houses with up to six families, only one bathroom, one kitchen and one outside toilet, which was practically a tank with no water in that council workers would remove once a week”. (61)

Immigrants were called new Australians by the natives, and such definition alone carried a feeling of mistrust, if not of discrimination, “like being labeled”. (62) However, there were special terms of abuse used to discriminate or offend Italian immigrants (or those from any other country of Mediterranean Europe):

“Our children also suffered at school; while they soon proved themselves in class, their fellow students mocked them by calling them “dago, wog” and if they went to the protestant [school] they were called “catholic wog”. That is why most were ashamed to speak Italian, to not be laughed at”. (63)

Very often, as we have just seen, to defend themselves from the unfriendly treatment they were given, the new Australians reacted with such an obstinate search for assimilation, that they risked losing their own identity. For Giulians, as has been observed, (64) keeping their identity was further complicated by the trouble they had finding a place within Australia’s social fabric, both with respect to autochthonous communities, and with respect to the Italian ones from other regions. People from Trieste saw themselves as bearers of something special, which was also the expression of the importance of the migrant movement of all their fellow citizens, who, first of all, as well as coming from a very urbanized and industrialized area, had in no way left with their belongings stuffed in a cardboard box tied with string, on the
contrary, they had brought with them, as sometimes noted not without malice, the signs of a certain wealth, such as motorcycles and pianos now forever lost.

This aspect of the emigration from Giulia to Australia can be traced, as well as in many statements gathered in memoirs, also to the epilogue of a novel – _Trieste emigrata_, published in 2002 – which ends with the description of the docking in Perth of one of the ships that had left Trieste in 1954, and the arrival of hundreds of Giulian new Australians:

“The whole crew is at work, none of us has ever seen so many of them. A certain number of Australian police and customs officers have joined them, wearing wide rimmed hats, looking as if they are dressed for carnival to the emigrants. The policemen check passports with bad-tempered, hard, frowning faces. They look at these well-dressed beings, without a job, who have traveled thousands of miles to find one in the country where they are the ones who keep order. The faces of these agents are stupefied. Our friends immediately understand that the hardest fight they will have to face will be against prejudice. The agents do not understand, and never will, that one can be well dressed and be poor. For those heads covered by wide-rimmed hats, a poor person should be dressed like one”. (65)

It's worth repeating that the quoted text is a part of a work of literature, however, it is interesting as a statement of the mutual mistrust which permeated the first phases of an encounter between different cultures: the one between Australians and immigrants, exacerbated by the suspicions generated by the fact that they did not look like the stereotype of a desperate person escaping misery; and also the moment Europeans felt thrown into a coarse world, one from which subtleness and complexity seemed banned, clearly to be seen on the perplexed (if not dull-witted) expressions of the police and customs officers’ faces.

Here is another statement, this time gathered from memoirs, of the difficulties in communicating and the misunderstandings that existed between the two cultures:
“There was already, unfortunately, a sense of resentment: Australians, being English or Irish, felt superior to us, even though for many aspects they were inferior to us Giuliano Dalmati emigrants. At the time, for example, men did not wear underwear with their trousers, they still dressed as people did in 1935, while we were always elegant, with more modern clothes, even if at first we had very little to wear. Australians did not use a handkerchief to blow their nose”. (66)

However, relations with the country of destination were not at first always as confrontational for all emigrants from Friuli Venezia Giulia as those we have just read about. This is mostly true for those people who had fled the territories conceded to Yugoslavia: including those from Istria, Fiume and Dalmatia the difficulties in adapting were, as we have said, overcome by the desire to once again have a land where they could plan their future, grow roots and start a new life:

“Then, one day, my wife and I decided that it would be nice to have another child, a child born in this land, in this camp that had given us our first moments of joy, after almost two years of anguish from the exodus to our emigration. So our second son was born, fourteen months after we had first arrived at the camp. We could not have been happier”. (67)

From the 60s to today: emigrations, returns and inversion of the migrant balance

In the years during which the immigrants from the wave of the 50s, having overcome the difficulties and obstacles of settling in the new world, began to consolidate, or had already done so, their role and position, migration channels still linked Friuli Venezia Giulia to Australia. People traveled both ways: there was still emigration (also in the light of another bilateral emigration agreement, reached in September 1967, (68) ) but most importantly, people were beginning to return. The
phenomenon of inversion of the migrant balance first presented itself in Friuli Venezia Giulia in 1967, six years before it did so on a national level, and also concerned the migration to Australia.

As regards the region of Giulia, given the peculiar character of the migrant movement originating from it – very intense, but also very limited in time, similar to, as we said, a flare-up – the tendency to return from Australia appeared strongly and very soon, to the point that in the province of Trieste the migrant balance with Australia was active from 1959 (with 1963 and 1965 as the only exceptions). Between 1955 and 1995, about four thousand emigrants returned to the area of Trieste alone. (69)

As for the region of Friuli, the factors attracting people back to their country were many, often combining with each other: the global recession of the beginning of the 60s; the industrial and tourism development undergone by areas that had once seen a critical exodus; the will to be a part of the reconstruction of the area affected by the earthquake; the judicious laws of the regional administration aimed at encouraging returns. (70) The provinces of Pordenone and Udine saw a smaller incidence of re-entries from Australia than from other countries (such as Switzerland and France), or in any case with respect to the total number of re-entries from abroad. For the six years between 1972 and 1976, the percentage of re-entries from Australia with respect to the total volume of re-entries was 6.4% and 3.2%, respectively. (71)

An interesting perspective to observe the composition of communities of Friulians and Giulians in Australia over the years is given to us by the Register of Italians residing abroad (AIRE). Of course, this information, as it only deals with emigrants who have maintained their Italian nationality, can offer indications concerning more recent migrant movements, while, presumably, it leaves out those concerning more distant periods. This does not mean that the information is of no use, mostly because it allows us to map the presence of citizens of Friuli Venezia Giulia in Australia, province by province and town by town.

In 2005, there were 366 people from the province of Gorizia registered in AIRE; the most represented towns were Gorizia and Monfalcone with over one
hundred registrations. 1,530 people registered are from the province of Trieste, 90% of them from the city of Trieste, as can be expected given the size of the provincial district which, as we know, is only formed by six towns. There are 1,924 registrations of people from the province of Pordenone, and the most represented towns are those already mentioned when describing emigration from Friuli during the 1954 – 1969 period: Pasiano di Pordenone, Azzano Decimo, Pordenone, Sesto al Reghena, Cordenons and San Vito al Tagliamento. The most significant of all is the colony of people originating from the province of Udine, which amounts to 2,195 members and within which the most represented towns are Codroipo, Udine, Tarcento, Gemona and Latisana. (72)
NOTES TO FRANCESCO FAIT’S CONTRIBUTION FOR AMMER “EMIGRATION TO AUSTRALIA FROM FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA”


(4) Ibidem.

(5) From here on, in the text and in the notes, we shall use the term Giuliano Dalmati to mean the peoples of Giulia, Istria, Fiume and Dalmatia together. This may be less precise, but it will assist synthesis and style.


(21) E. F. Kunz, *Displaced Persons: Calwell’s new Australians*, op. cit., page 120.

(22) A. Panjek, *Le fonti dell’emigrazione giuliana negli archivi di Parigi e Ginevra*, op. cit.


(24) V. Facchinetti, op. cit., page 151, (statement by R. Bussetti).


(27) G. Cresciani, *Storia e caratteristiche dell’emigrazione giuliana, istriana, fiumana e dalmata in Australia*, op. cit., page 75.


(33) G. Cresciani, *Storia e caratteristiche dell'emigrazione giuliana, istriana, fiumana e dalmata in Australia*, op. cit., page 75.


(44) National Social Security Institute, *Accordi internazionali per le assicurazioni sociali e l'emigrazione stipulati fra l’Italia ed altri paesi*, op. cit..


(48) All the Nominal Rolls from which the data has been taken, and the other numerical data in the following lines can be found, since the re-organization of the Regional Ministry for full employment, at the Trieste State Archive, in the folders headed “Australia: embarkation lists, 1-7”.

(49) E. Saraceno, Emigrazione e rientri: il Friuli Venezia Giurai nel secondo dopoguerra, op. cit., page 60.

(50) G. Cresciani, Migrants or Mates. Italian Life in Australia, op. cit., page 249.

(51) G. Cresciani, Storia e caratteristiche dell’emigrazione giuliana, istriana, fiumana e dalmata in Australia, op. cit., statement by A. Dugina, pages 140 - 141.


(53) G. Cresciani, Storia e caratteristiche dell’emigrazione giuliana, istriana, fiumana e dalmata in Australia, op. cit., statement by A. Grisancich, page 167.

(54) G. Cresciani, Storia e caratteristiche dell’emigrazione giuliana, istriana, fiumana e dalmata in Australia, op. cit., statement by M. Bertogna, pp 99 - 100.

(55) G. Cresciani, Storia e caratteristiche dell’emigrazione giuliana, istriana, fiumana e dalmata in Australia, op. cit., statement by S. Csar page 136.

(56) G. Cresciani, Storia e caratteristiche dell’emigrazione giuliana, istriana, fiumana e dalmata in Australia, op. cit., statement by M. Stillen, page 205.

(57) G. Cresciani, Storia e caratteristiche dell’emigrazione giuliana, istriana, fiumana e dalmata in Australia, op. cit., statement by C. Perentin, page 193.


(59) G. Cresciani, Storia e caratteristiche dell’emigrazione giuliana, istriana, fiumana e dalmata in Australia, op. cit., statement by M. Bertogna, page 100.

(60) G. Cresciani, Storia e caratteristiche dell’emigrazione giuliana, istriana, fiumana e dalmata in Australia, op. cit., statement by Iginio Ferlan, page 150.

(61) G. Cresciani, Storia e caratteristiche dell’emigrazione giuliana, istriana, fiumana e dalmata in Australia, op. cit., statement by A. Cecchi page 126.


(63) G. Cresciani, Storia e caratteristiche dell’emigrazione giuliana, istriana, fiumana e dalmata in Australia, op. cit., statement by Angelo Cecchi 126.

(64) A. Nelli, L’esperienza migratoria triestina in Australia. L’identità culturale e i suoi cambiamenti, page 90, in Giuliano dalmati in Australia. Contributi e testimonianze per una storia, op. cit.


(68) G. Cresciani, *Storia e caratteristiche dell’emigrazione giuliana, istriana, fiumana e dalmata in Australia*, op. cit., page 64.


(72) Data available at Ammer (Archivio multimediale della memoria dell’emigrazione regionale), http://www.emigrazione.regione.fvg.it