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## ARTEFACTS AS MEDIATORS THROUGH TIME AND SPACE: THE REPRODUCTION OF ROOTS IN THE DIASPORA OF LUSSIGNANI

*Enrico Maria Milič*

In 2007, as part of my research on Italians originating from the island of Lussin (today known by the Croatian name of Lošinj), which lies in the Adriatic Sea between Italy and the Balkans, I looked through a book of old photographs that illustrated the life of Italians on the island before their postwar exile. In the introduction, the editor, an elderly woman from Lussin, stated:

I have been the 'curator' of this photographic book about old times, but there is a need to credit the many, so many Lussignani and friends of Lussignani who helped me in so many generous ways. How could I name all of them? But I remember and thank all of them. Flipping through these pages we will feel again united and we will relive our past. (Hreglich Mercanti 2000: 3)

These words reflect the main argument of this chapter: that artefacts that constitute human living spaces have the potential to influence people's sense of their past and present selves.<sup>1</sup> This topic was one of my most important concerns during my research between 2007 and 2009 amongst Italians originating from Lussin.<sup>2</sup> During this period, I attended several events organized by them, both on the island and in Trieste, where numerous Lussignani have settled. I conducted forty mostly unstructured and semi-structured interviews, paying specific attention to the interviewees' interactions with artefacts and photographs relating to the island.<sup>3</sup> As

Elizabeth Edwards has noted, photographs should not just be regarded as unproblematic visual documents of past times, but rather as ‘multi-sensory objects, which in turn elicit multi-sensory responses that shape and enhance the emotional engagement with the visual trace of the past’ (Edwards 2010: xx).

Emotions are indices of what is important to humans (Oatley and Jenkins 1996: 122). During my fieldwork, I perceived expressions of ‘interest’ and ‘attention’ in my informants as emotional engagement (Milton 2005a: 33), taking cues from their ‘postures, inflections of the[ir] voice, [and] facial expressions’ (Milton 2005b.: 223). These emotional pointers led me to understand that memories of and claims to the island were partially fed through multi-sensorial engagement with publications such as the photographic book. In addition to verbal references to emotion words and evocative stories, they gave me a more complete view of their engagement with their own past and the past of others originating from the island.

### Discourse and the Experience of Rootedness

The production of publications containing memories of ‘old times’ on Lussin must be analysed against the background of Italy’s involvement in the Second World War and postwar Yugoslav politics. During the Second World War, the island formed part of fascist Italy, but – as with other islands in the Kvarner region – it was claimed by Yugoslavia after the war. The new Yugoslav state-socialist regime that supplanted twenty years of fascism was marked by anti-Italian nationalism, which resulted in an exodus of the island’s mainly Italian speaking people. According to historians, from 1945 to 1954 between 190,000 and 350,000 left in an often violent context of political turmoil, and ethnic and social revenge (Nemec 1998, 2003; Pupo 2000, 2004; Rumici 2001). The majority of these considered themselves Italians and many relocated to the new Italian Republic, just beyond the new border with Yugoslavia. Others settled in the rest of Italy, moved to other European countries, or migrated to Australia, the United States and elsewhere.

Hreglich Mercanti (quoted above) was one of the many Lussignani who settled in Trieste. Her book of photographs, entitled *Ricordando Lussino* (‘Remembering Lussin’), contains pictures and text about prewar Lussin, and the publication is one of many produced by the island’s diasporic community. These publications include the main focus of this chapter, the quarterly journal *Lussino: Foglio della Comunità di Lussinpiccolo*, known as *Foglio Lussino* for short. This journal is published by a Trieste-based formal organization of exiles from Lussin, the Community of Lussinpiccolo (*Comunità di Lussinpiccolo*), founded in 1998. It is an A4-size, full-colour journal, varying between forty and eighty pages per issue, and is freely distributed to about 2,000 addressees, thanks to the voluntary contributions of diasporic Lussignani.

A dominant and emotionally evocative discourse in these various publications centres on notions of ‘rootedness’ and deserves particular attention. Licia Giadrossi-Gloria Tamaro, president of the Community of Lussinpiccolo and chief editor of *Foglio Lussino*, has frequently used the term ‘roots’ to argue that it is crucial to keep the past alive. She has emphasized, for example, the need to ‘reconstruct our roots, far-away from home’ (*ricostruire le nostre radici lontani*) (Giadrossi-Gloria Tamaro in issue 24 of *Foglio Lussino*, 2007: 1). Roots keep plants and other vegetation firmly in the soil, and are essential to their survival, so the metaphor suggests that staying connected to the island is quite ‘natural’, and essential for Lussignani well-being and survival.

The call for the reconstruction of roots by some Lussignani has a wide reach; their publications, and in particular *Foglio Lussino*, are distributed all over the world. These textual artefacts are read, looked at and touched by members of a global diaspora who, it will become clear, increase their sense of belonging to Lussin when engaging with the texts and photographs.

My analysis builds on anthropological studies that have explored diasporic connections to homelands (Malkki 1992; Clifford 1994; Tweed 1997; Rapport and Dawson 1998; Friedman 2002; Ballinger 2003, 2004). I explore the capacity of an object, the diasporic journal, to trigger and transmit memories of the past, providing an artefactual focus for transnational identification.<sup>4</sup> As several scholars have demonstrated, artefacts can express and evoke strong emotions (Miller 1987; Gell 1998; Navaro-Yashin 2007), and emotions may be politicized in specific historical and social contexts (Svašek 2006, 2007). I take inspiration from the analytic framework of Svašek (2005), who has explored emotional processes as discourses, practices and embodied experiences. I will show that the idea of rootedness does not only create knowledge about Lussignani subjectivity but also arises from and reinforces embodied memories and imaginations of loss of and yearning for the island.

In this chapter I argue that it is necessary to move beyond approaches that analyse ‘rootedness’ as a textual metaphor (Malkki 1992; Ahmed 2004; Ballinger 2004), and add a perspective that takes bodily and sensorial experiences into account (Csordas 1990). I will show that *Foglio Lussino* functions as an emotional agent that has extended the capacity of the Lussignani to communicate beyond the immediacy of a shared time-space framework.

## Losing Lussin

The Yugoslav Census of 1945 recorded 1,989 Italians and 972 Croats in the municipality of Lussin, named after its main town, Lussinpiccolo (Mali Lošinj in Croat). Sixteen years later, the number of Italians recorded had declined to 75 while Croat numbers had risen to 3,354 (Argenti

Tremul et al. 2001).<sup>5</sup> After the absorption of Lussìn by Yugoslavia, its Italian schools and the local association representing the Italians of the island were closed by the authorities. The elderly Lussignani I spoke with stressed that the new regime did not welcomed any display of attachment to Italy and its languages, Italian and Venetian. The many houses left abandoned by the exiles were taken over by newcomers from the Yugoslav mainland.

The social equilibrium between the two communities that had lasted at least a couple of centuries was overturned. The bourgeois strata of the island, almost entirely made up of old families of sea entrepreneurs and captains speaking Venetian, quickly disappeared. Croats became the leading ethnic group and hid much of the visible evidence of Italian-Venetian presence. They destroyed monuments, and removed Italian road signs, and even today references to the Italian past are often embarrassingly absent in publications by local historians and tourist agencies.<sup>6</sup>

For those Italians who left, the loss of their homeland was a shocking experience. They had to mediate 'a lived tension' and were faced with 'the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering/desiring another place' (Clifford 1994: 311).<sup>7</sup> The few Italian Lussignani who decided to stay found themselves destabilized as the changing landscape triggered feelings of homelessness. As Ballinger notes, even today they admit to having 'a sense of an interior displacement, an exile of the heart and mind, if not the body' (Ballinger 2003: 220). Under these new political circumstances, the Lussignani had to reorganize their social life, either away from the homeland or in a completely new context on the island.

After having resettled elsewhere, the diasporic Lussignani made efforts to keep in touch through family and other networks, gathering periodically, often meeting up in Lussìn or in other localities around the world. As I have already said, over the last twenty years in particular, publications about Lussìn have started circulating, creating a media-connected transnational community. These books and journals not only serve as a platform for communication, but – in the form of photographs of pre-exile Lussìn – they are also material realities that are added to other material memories of the island. In the homes of most Lussignani, particularly those of the first generation, I saw many objects referring to the past. Ballinger found the same in the homes of Italian exiles from Istria, who 'attempt[ed] to relocate and re-create Istria not just mentally ... but also in their new dwellings' (ibid.: 172). She reports a variety of objects and images – including photographs, paintings, stones taken from the homeland, fragments of the family home's foundation, or vials of seawater. Similar practices have been explored in other studies of exiles, such as Cubans in Miami (Tweed 1997) and Sudeten Germans in Bavaria (Svašek 2002).

## The Transgenerational Transmission of Feelings

In the case of the Lussignani, the generation of those who left the island has inevitably entered its last years, which adds a matter of urgency to their cause. The transmission of Italian Lussignani identity to the younger generation has become a key preoccupation for some. When the founder of the Community of Lussinpiccolo, Giuseppe Favriani, died in 2005, the new president, Licia Giadrossi-Gloria Tamaro, stated in *Foglio Lussino*: 'The life of our Community continues not just because of the will of Giuseppe Favriani who provided [us with a] conscience and urged all of us to research the historical and cultural truth of Lussin. It is because of all of us: we want to continue, to search for and share knowledge about our roots' (Giadrossi-Gloria Tamaro 2006: 1).

In April 2007, Licia said to me that she actually had no real recollection of her departure from the island: 'This is my experience, but I am already a person that didn't live through the exodus, I lived it through the account of others'. I encouraged her to recall her knowledge of her family's departure from Lussin, at which time she was two years old. Visibly moved, she stated:

These are very old memories for me ... I remember the dolphins that went down the side and past the boat ... This is for me an unconscious memory, as now, when I think about it, I can't remember it ... Obviously it has been a pain too big, that of losing both of my parents in an accident, hit [in Trieste] by an army truck driven by a drunk Englishman.

She referred here to the postwar presence of British and American soldiers in Trieste. At the end of April 1945, almost all the north-eastern Balkans became part of Communist Yugoslavia, while the main city of the region, Trieste, and a tiny strip around it, was ruled from 1945 to 1954 by the Anglo-American Allied Military Government. In 1954 Trieste was again incorporated into Italy. Continuing her story, Licia recalled how, at the end of the 1990s, she moved back to Trieste from Cortina, where she had spent a great part of her life. In Trieste she intensified contact with friends of her father, who showed her photographs of him attending the Nautical School in Lussin. She began meeting a larger group of Lussignani whom she characterized as 'interesting persons, well educated, enterprising'. They kept telling her about life on the island, and the stories helped her to familiarize herself with her deceased parents' past. In 1998, she formalized her engagement, deciding to join the Community of Lussinpiccolo. She explained: 'I joined and it has been a passion, a really interesting discovery for me as I retrieved my roots'.

Her second-hand knowledge about the island turned into lived experience once Licia began participating in the physical world of the exiles. Emotional interaction was vital. She made new acquaintances, interacted with them, listening to their recollections, and engaged with

material objects and images relating to the past on the island. Physical co-presence and interaction with the artefacts thus enabled her to resonate the experiences of others in her own body, finding roots beyond her own past experiences.

### Experiencing Roots through *Foglio Lussino*

But what do Lussignani mean when they say they care about their 'roots', and how does the journal give space to individual voices? Konrad Eisenbichler, son of two Italian exiles from Lussin and an academic working in Canada, was asked by the journal what Lussinpiccolo (the main town of the island) represented for him:

It is my roots, the place where I was born, light and heat. After all, I am a Lussignano, independent of the fact that they assign different citizenship to me. Lussin is my most important point of reference. I was much too young at the time of the exodus and so I didn't experience directly that period and the reasons for our departure as my parents did. I can understand their pain but my perception of the island is completely different from theirs: it is open, engaging and passionate. (Eisenbichler 2009: 2)

Like Eisenbichler, many Lussignani use the discourse of roots to refer to a sense of belonging to a well-specified place (the island), to identify social roles (for Eisenbichler his relationship with his parents) and identities (his citizenship), to point to a dynamic emotional attachment ('different from theirs', 'light', 'heat', 'engaging', 'passionate') and to the political quality of the latter ('open', which I understand here to mean a sense of being 'inclusive' and 'open to diversity').

Following Safran (1991), Clifford has suggested that a diasporic, 'collective identity' is defined by the relationship between 'a history of dispersal, myths/memories of the homeland, alienation in the host (bad host?) country, desire for eventual return, [and] ongoing support of the homeland' (Clifford 1994: 305). Eisenbichler's words reveal the complex emotional dimensions of diaspora formation where the second generation may have a quite different emotional attachment to the homeland than their parents, creating a new relationship with the place of origin. This makes the notion of 'collective' misleading. Eisenbichler does, however, feel empathy for his parents, and uses the journal as a platform to express feelings for the place where, like his parents, he was born. His words are intended to move younger generations who were born away from the island. Connecting older generations with younger ones, material objects such as *Foglio Lussino* play an important role as what Nora has termed 'places of memory' (*lieux de memoire*), a concept that identifies a history that 'rests upon what it mobilizes' or, better, provides a medium of 'carnal attachment to ... faded symbols' (Nora 1989: 24).

## Objects as a Focus of Research

Numerous scholars have demonstrated that artefacts are often mediators of belonging, memory and identification (Nora 1989; Fabian 1996; Forty and Küchler 1999). My own theoretical interest in and methodological preoccupation with objects influenced the dynamics of fieldwork as I systematically encouraged interviewees to give voice to comments about the material reality surrounding them.

In April 2007 I met Gianni Piccini, an exile from Lussìn who was in his seventies. Before the exodus he was a labourer in a shipyard in Lussìn. After his exile, he became an employee in the Italian state-run railway in Trieste and is now retired. I explained I would like to know about his life story and his relation to Lussìn. When I entered his home in Trieste, he and his wife Eleonora Zerial warmly welcomed me, offering coffee, cake and ice-cream. The friendly behaviour of Gianni and Eleonora was partly expressed through several artefacts that were displayed in their living room. All the items related to their life, whether a collection of poems by their son or one of the several books, texts and images relating to people and places of Lussìn. Their friendliness was aimed at making me comfortable and at making me understand what they had gone through. In other words, they extended their selves through the working of artefacts (Gell 1998).

Rather tellingly, the initial attempt to constitute a relationship between us was founded very little on words and much more on objects and displays of feelings. Touching, opening and commenting on the objects in front of me and placing them in my hands lit up Gianni's face. A few minutes later Eleonora took down a picture of a sunny seascape in Lussìn to show to me. Gianni pointed out that this was one of the places where he used to swim with friends when he was young. At times I sensed that Gianni was particularly moved after handing me an object, and that, while watching me interact with it, he seemed to wait for an empathic reaction.

When I asked him directly what *Foglio Lussino* meant to him, he did not really have an answer. This stood in sharp contrast to his passionate handling of the journal as an evocative artefact. He was obviously bothered about his verbal silence because he rang me the next day. With an emotional tone in his voice, he explained that he had thought about it and had come up with a reply: 'The journal ideally deletes the space and the present. It is a *trait d'union*. It permits communication with people, it erases the distances within years, the kilometres'. For him, *Foglio Lussino* was a nexus allowing people to enter an imaginative and sentimental context created by themselves and other members of the diasporic group. As such, it was a space where he could feel and share the embodied presence of the island, something that had already been highlighted the day before through his focused bodily engagement with the journal.

## The Island as *Mise en Scène* for the Memories of Lussignani

Analysing the work of the American photographer Shimon Attie, the psychologist Jeanne Wolff Bernstein has demonstrated how photographs can create a potential space in which past and present can suddenly come alive, blurring the relationship between subjects and objects. Producers of photographic representations infuse them with their own subjectivity through selection and approach, creating a 'transitional realm' where 'the spectator is given a wide realm of to-and-fro movements between past and present that permits the creation of an object world that did not exist before' (Bernstein 2000: 347).

In this section, I shall show how photographs published in *Foglio Lussino* provide a transitional experience, aiming to trigger a specific emotional effect. Every issue includes old photographs, such as shots of the school classes of the old Lussin Nautical School, smiling Lussin sea captains, and past events such as marriages within the community. Paintings of old ships as well as aged postcards of Lussin are also recurrent items in the journal. One can find images of documents from the Habsburg era or the period under the Italian government as well as recent photographs covering several themes. The latter category of images includes shots from a summer reunion of exiles and their descendants having fun on some beach or scenic images of the beautiful landscapes and towns on the island.

The representations of present-day island life never show Croatian inhabitants. This is not surprising because, as Bolton has suggested, photographs can be 'methods for producing an alternative reality' (Bolton 1989: xi). The journal is also selective in other ways. The editor of the journal, Licia Giadrossi-Gloria Tamaro, told me she avoids pictures of people on the cover and instead usually chooses reproductions of old postcards or glorious landscapes of today's Lussin. She explained: 'If you favour one person or another, then you could trigger envy: I'd prefer not to'. Furthermore, she reckoned that avoiding photographs of people on the cover creates a more 'ageless' publication, accessible to various generations.

During an interview in June 2009, I asked Licia to choose three images in the journal that she considered representative of the community she leads. One of these pictures (Figure 7.1) shows a bird's-eye view of the town of Ossero (Osor), placed in between the islands of Lussin and Cherso (Cres).

Licia found the picture in a book published 'for tourists, and sailors in particular'.<sup>8</sup> She had herself contributed to this book, and stated: 'That's a wonderful, intriguing book, because it has very good quality pictures of wonderful places like Ossero that I have visited ... But this picture ... moves me, because here [in the journal] I know that there is a story behind it'. It shows, she said, 'Ossero, with its beauties and with its tragedies'.

The photograph offers multiple vantage points on the past, as Licia explained: 'In the text [that accompanies the photograph in the journal] we honour the deceased, and that's it. But the photograph of Ossero implies



Figure 7.1: The cover of *Foglio Lussino* 27, September 2008: the town of Ossero. Courtesy of *Foglio Lussino*.

a broader story, that of Ossero, an old Roman city of 25,000 inhabitants, then abandoned because of malaria, now with 300 inhabitants'. An explanation of these deceased is to be found in the article printed next to the picture, which mentions the recent ritual commemoration of twenty-eight Italian soldiers killed in April 1945 in Ossero. These men were killed by partisans and were officially commemorated on the island for the first time in July 2008.<sup>9</sup> The community of exiles made a particular effort to find the names of all those killed, and called for their exhumation in the name of their 'forgotten sacrifice for the country'. But as Licia makes clear, the photograph was intended to imply a 'broader story'. In the view of the editor and of many Lussignani, the history of Ossero, now with a Croatian majority population, should be linked to its Roman origins. Roman culture is seen as strongly connected to that of contemporary Italians, as opposed to the Slavic heritage of Croatian culture. Roman heritage, in other words, indexes the right of Italians to be acknowledged as rooted here.

Some of my informants could read local history into the image, associating Ossero with its Roman past and with the soldiers who were slaughtered as they defended their country. Both the connection to Roman (or pre-Italian) history and an Italian past of suffering reinforced the notion of the island as an 'Italian' space, potentially triggering feelings of sadness and anger about the 'injustice' that precipitated exile. While this was the aim of the journal's editorial board, this does not mean that they necessarily achieved their aim. Many of my informants said they normally skipped the articles, paying attention to the photographs rather than the text, which meant that to some extent they had the freedom to create other fantasies. Without the accompanying text, the pictures steered viewers towards feelings of nostalgia, pride and love for their homeland. Memories evoking sadness and anger about their loss were, however, always potentially present.

Licia's second example (Figure 7.2) was an image of a gentle storm (*neverin*) hitting the seafront of Lussinpiccolo.

The picture was taken before the war by Mario Lussin, one of a family that owned a photographic shop on the island. Mario Pfeifer, a descendant of the photographer, and who now lives in Milan, contacted the editor of *Foglio Lussino* via the internet and offered to share the picture with the readers of the journal. When I asked Licia what kind of emotions the picture triggered in her, she replied:

Memories, I would say. Because it also portrays the house where my grandfather lived [after the war]. I went there several times, and I remember the storms, all the ships jumping because of this weather. When it was sunny, I remember that. Sometimes my cousin and I threw water from the window to people that were passing by on the seafront. We were young...

In Licia's last example (Figure 7.3), she showed me two pictures which showed contrasting conditions of the building of the old Nautical High School of Lussin.



Figure 7.2: The cover of *Foglio Lussino* 29, April 2009: a gentle storm hitting the seafront of Lussinpiccolo. Ó Lošnjak Museum.

The school educated many bourgeois Italians on the island who went on to be employed as sailors or in other sea-based activities. The school is thought to have been the cornerstone of the fortunes and culture relating to the sea among the Italians of Lussin. As the right-hand shows, the current building has become a ruin in recent decades. Again I asked the editor what she and other Lussignani felt, seeing these two images. She replied:

Anger, because of the [Croatian] wish to disregard all Italian or Venetian memories. In a place like this, such a precious thing ... has been only now been bought by an Austrian company that is going to make a four-star hotel, changing its dimensions. The end of this building marks the end of Italian and Venetian symbology. Nautical culture started [to be taught] here with the fall of the Republic of Venice, in 1797.

Licia's responses clearly indicate that exposure to the images as material realities is intended to feed feelings of rootedness, of belonging to the island.

### The *Storia Minima* of Lussignani

The conservation and reproduction of relevant images of the past as a source of identity is a preoccupation for many communities wanting to reproduce their roots. Many communities, aware that social oral memory is vanishing

Verso il 1840 si diffuse il convincimento che solo un Istituto Nautico pubblico avrebbe potuto soddisfare le esigenze di un centro marinaro in continuo progresso. Le istanze in merito trovarono accoglimento tre lustri più tardi, nel 1855, 150 anni fa. Il 17 gennaio di quell'anno veniva istituita la Scuola Nautica statale. Condizioni per esservi ammessi erano una sufficiente conoscenza dell'italiano e delle operazioni aritmetiche nonché un biennio di navigazione. La Scuola ebbe sede prima nell'edificio della Scuola Elementare sul piazzale del Duomo, poi nell'edificio del Comune e, infine, dal 1875 e fino alla sua chiusura del 1948, nell'edificio costruito sul piazzale all'angolo fra la Piazza e Prico.

In questa Scuola, prima privata e poi pubblica, si formarono capitani e armatori così preparati e intraprendenti da far crescere la marina libera di Lussino fino a superare, nel decennio 1860-1870, per numero di bastimenti e tonnellaggio, quella di Trieste. Con il nascere e progredire della navigazione a vapore questi capitani e armatori si trasferirono progressivamente a Trieste il cui porto, nel decennio 1930-1940, raggiunse Marsiglia al primo posto nel Mediterraneo. A Trieste le principali Compagnie di Navigazione, i Cantieri di Monfalcone, la prima Compagnia di aviazione civile italiana vennero fondate e appartennero ai Lussignani. Erano dei Lussignani le maggiori partecipazioni azionarie nelle Compagnie di Assicurazioni triestine. Erano pure lussignani gran parte dei più apprezzati Comandanti, Ufficiali e Marinai della Flotta mercantile triestina.

Due anniversari quindi, per noi Lussignani importantissimi: 200 anni dall'inizio a Lussino dell'istruzione nautica e 150 anni dalla fondazione della Nautica statale lussignana. Per ricordarli la nostra Comunità sta predisponendo la ristampa dei volumi pubblicati per due anniversari della Scuola statale, a Lussino nel 1905 per il 50° e a Trieste nel 1955 per il 100°. A Trieste perché nel 1955 si stava completando il nostro Esodo. La nostra Nautica era stata chiusa nel 1948, dopo 140 anni d'insegnamento ininterrotto nella nostra lingua italiana. Da Eroi tanti Suoi allievi sono caduti e tanti hanno combattuto per la Patria Italiana. Tutti hanno scelto con fierezza la via dell'Esodo.

Dal 1960 è stata aperta a Lussino una Scuola che prepara alle professioni marinare secondo l'ordinamento jugoslavo e croato. Scuola di lingua croata condotta da insegnanti croati che, salvo forse per la tecnica nautica, non possono in alcun modo considerarsi i continuatori degli insegnanti italiani che hanno determinato il prestigio della nostra Nautica. Oggi, salvo pochissime unità, insegnanti e alunni della Scuola croata sono figli e nipoti degli occupatori slavi. Tutto ci è stato rubato, la nostra isola, le nostre case, i nostri beni. Volevano anche, intenzione la più grave e offensiva, che rinnegassimo la nostra identità italiana. Ci siamo difesi, alcuni di noi sono stati uccisi, fucilati o annegati, in grandissima maggioranza abbiamo affrontato l'Esodo. Ora vogliono appropriarsi anche delle nostre gloriose tradizioni dicendo che sono anche le loro e sottintendendo così che tutti noi siamo di origine slava. Presentano infatti la loro scuola come la continuazione della nostra che, lo ripetiamo, non aveva niente a che fare con la loro. Solo ed esclusivamente agli allievi che in 140 anni si sono formati nella nostra Nautica italiana è dovuto il prestigio che Lussino ha raggiunto nel campo armatoriale, cantieristico, marittimo e anche sportivo velico. Durante tutto il secolo austriaco lingua d'insegnamento e materia principale era l'italiano. L'Austria rispettava la nostra identità latino-veneta e le nostre lingua e cultura. Durante i trent'anni italiani la nostra Nautica portava il nome dell'eroe istriano Nazario Sauro. Il Suo eroismo è stato d'esempio per



tutti noi. Non vogliamo fare la guerra. Vogliamo solo sia scrupolosamente rispettata la verità storica. Questo è lo scopo della nostra Comunità. Vorremmo non fosse dimenticato.



Figure 7.3: From *Foglio Lussino* 17, February 2005: the left-hand picture shows the Nautical High School of Lussin, as it was before the Second World War; the right-hand picture, shot recently by staff of the journal, shows the current condition of the building. Courtesy of *Foglio Lussino*.

and that '[written] history [will] soon sweep them away' (Nora 1989: 12) are absorbed in the preservation of artefacts triggering perceptions of their life world, and for some this becomes a political goal. As noted earlier, this viewpoint holds true when we look at the text that accompanies cover-page images in *Foglio Lussino*, for these always involve political statements or deeply politicized views of history.

The journal also includes articles that give voice to individual memories. In the words of editor Licia: 'I want the Lussignani to speak, I want to remain aloof, I wish to print unpublished stories ... I don't want to print news. I don't want to publish news items. At most, news items should be a trigger [of memories]. I'm interested in each and everyone's *storia minima*'. The texts of these *storia minima* (minimal stories) sent in by readers occupy the vast majority of the pages of the journal. The stories focus on the personal reminiscences of many, memories of a past that is revitalized as they are shared through the publication. Usually, the texts are personal accounts by exiles from Lussin or their descendants. They tell anecdotes about specific individuals, families or groups of people from the island, providing an account of lived experiences or a sequence of life episodes. The stories include accounts of events during an author's youth on the island, and narratives about other elderly Lussignani or those who have just passed away.

These texts usually occupy one page or less and can be read in two or three minutes.<sup>10</sup> To take one example of a *storia minima*, the following recalls a secret escape from the island during the years that followed the Yugoslav take-over. The Yugoslav authorities banned many Italians from leaving the country in the first decade after the war. Some Lussignani tried to reach Italy by leaving at night in small boats, a dangerous undertaking as one risked being shot by Yugoslav patrols. The text is a letter sent to *Foglio Lussino* by Claudio Delise, an exile now residing in France and published in issue 21 of the journal:

I was at my brother's, who shared *Foglio Lussin* 7, September 2001, with me. I am not able to express all my pain in reading the fate of my friend Mario Fillinich, one of those killed in Lischi in 1956 when trying to escape to Italy. In Lussin, they all knew that they hadn't been lucky and that, maybe, they had been made prisoners, but not that they were killed. I remember an episode: we were kids, playing 'guards and thieves' in Cigale (a beach on Lussin) ... Mario Fillinich hid behind a wall ... [All of a sudden] my brother Luciano appeared with lion-hearted courage with Mario over his shoulders. He had kind of fainted. We brought him to the beach, threw some water over him and then he came round. I tell you this without knowing that, later, he would be barbarously killed. His mother died from the pain. (Delise 2006: 31)

Once again, we can see that the journal helps people create connections that go back and forth through time, reminding readers of the existence of other Lussignani, updating them about their fate and creating a notion of imagined community through transnationally distributed stories. The style

of the *storia minima* is very personal and gives the sensation of emotional co-presence and dialogical interaction. This is very different from most newspaper stories, in which journalists write in the third person and attempt to provide emotionally detached accounts of facts for anonymous readers.

### Presenting an Alternative History

Michael Carrithers has identified two main genres in verbal production: narrative thought and paradigmatic thought (Carrithers 1992: 76–117). Paradigmatic thought is characterized by generalizations, where there is only one truth summarizing all experiences. Examples of paradigmatic thought are abstract discourses about religion, the history of historians and other ideological discourses, like those that imply the existence of a nation as a collective entity. By contrast, narrative thought is based on personal stories about individuals that implicitly call for the empathy of readers towards the characters of the story, and an eventual identification with them.

It may be clear that if readers can empathise with other readers and authors through *Foglio Lussino*, this does not happen by chance but by a careful politics of emotions on the side of the journal's editors. In Licia's view, the *storia minima* produce counter-knowledge that undermines official history:

I remember there was a great lack of communication covering the experiences and the lives of the exiles. They have always been taken for granted by Italian politics and by the winners [of the Second World War]; those are the definitely the Resistance and the Left ... Therefore there was the need to tell ... your own personal stories to others. It is a historical, minimalist claim of lived experience, to also get a moral acknowledgement of a life choice that the Italian Republic almost dismissed.

Licia thus challenged mainstream ideological views of history, using the journal to allow Lussignani to claim personal, concrete connections to the island. It is again important to emphasize that her attempts have been politically motivated. *Foglio Lussino* has supported political interpretations of its *storia minima* on its covers, pushing the narratives closer to a paradigmatic genre of thought, reinforcing a perspective on the past that ignores the voices of Croats on the island. The editors have also defended their position by claiming historical objectivity. The editors have, for example, presented stories of secret escapes and suffering as historical facts that need to be addressed by the Italian and Croat governments. Based on these facts, the leaders of the exile community have demanded economic compensation for the loss of property they and their families incurred as a consequence of the advent of Yugoslavia and its take-over of Lussin.

Interestingly, however, only a few of my interviewees emphasized their interest in political goals and compensation. Most of the older Lussignani I spoke with used the journal not as a political tool but rather as a medium for gaining access to other Lussignani and exchanging information and feelings about their past on the island.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have analysed the reproduction of the roots of a diasporic community through a specific artefact, the journal published by a Trieste-based group of exiles from the Adriatic island of Lussin. The analysis has demonstrated that Lussignani discourses and experiences of roots claim emotional attachment to a place where the social life of their community developed before their expulsion from Lussin. Roots are also seen in the empathic identification of Lussignani with other members of their community, which has strengthened feelings of belonging to a single transnational diaspora.

I described how individual Lussignani have appropriated objects and images that index their connection with their homeland – not just to mark space symbolically but also to create well-being. This behaviour can be understood when one is able to grasp the emotional dimensions of exile as felt by the exiles themselves. While the artefacts act as emotional agents, their effect depends on the emotional dispositions of their owners, who use them to create a nexus through time and space, satisfying an urge to feel united and connected to the past. When this happens, objects create new perceptions of spaces and times and the distinction between subjects and objects become increasingly blurred.

While an emphasis on rootedness in the homeland has not necessarily led to chauvinistic standpoints, the socially constructed memories of place legitimated by the journal potentially reproduce and invites exclusivist bonds with, and claims to the past of, the homeland. Objects like the journal can, in this sense, produce counter-knowledge that undermines official history by giving voice to individual views. Alternatively, these voices may be used to make claims in the name of an imagined community. Crucially, the knowledge produced in the *Foglio Lussino* is knowledge based on embodied actions and interactions that contrast with mainstream journalism and history. It is embodied knowledge about past lived experience with which the old Lussignani can easily empathise.

The birth and social life of the journal has depended upon the capacity of younger generations of Lussignani to identify through empathy with the life worlds of the first generation of exiles. It has allowed some of their offspring and other sympathisers to make an experiential leap, aiming to understand the Lussignani and their urge to remain linked to their homeland.

## Notes

1. Many thanks to Maruška Svašek, who has been more than a guide in the thinking and writing of this chapter. I am also grateful to Paul Tout for his English skills.
2. In this chapter I prefer to employ the Venetian variant of the place name of the island, Lussin. Although the Italian Lussino is almost always employed in the text of the journal which is the object of my study, I prefer the Venetian Lussin. The latter is the name of the island used in everyday oral communication by the islanders still living on the island and by many exiles in the diaspora. Moreover, using Lussin better safeguards my distance from Italian and Croatian nationalisms using, respectively, Lussino and Lošinj. Besides the name of the island, when using a place name for the first time, I give both the Italian and Croat versions if they are available. I subsequently employ Italian place names as they are those usually used by the people under study. It should be noted that the name Lussin is used in the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.
3. This chapter is based on fieldwork conducted intermittently between April and August 2008, and examination of the journal *Foglio Lussino* in June 2009. A draft of the chapter was submitted to some of my most important interviewees in summer 2008 for comments and revisions. My interviewees include Lussignani in the diaspora and also several old Lussignani who did not leave the island and go into exile.
4. In interaction with people, objects are invested with meanings that reflect and assert who we are (Fabian 1996; Svašek 1996, 2007; Attfield 2000).
5. I provide these data to give a general idea of the phenomenon. The data of the censuses before, during and after the Yugoslav period contain many ambiguities and are obviously influenced by the political pressures on respondents and on those designing and interpreting the questionnaires. Some of these ambiguities are highlighted by Argenti Tremul et al. (2001).
6. The most blatant misrepresentations in public life overlooking the exile of Italian-Venetians from the island after the Second World War. Other contemporary practices concern the Croatization of history and language. In Lussin, for example, the baritone Josef Kaschmann (1850–1925) and the naturalist Ambrogio Haracich are referred to (in books, brochures and on statues) as Croats and appear with Croatized names (Josip Kašman, Ambrož Haračić). According to my informants, there is historical evidence that suggests that these scholars could not have identified themselves as Croatian nationals. One-sided interpretations are not confined to the reconstruction of history. To Croatize the names and surnames of families originating in Lussin, the spelling is changed. For example, on the official website of the public Lussin Tourist Agency, ‘Cosulich’, the name of the Venetian family of ship-builders, has become ‘Kozulić’. When the island was part of Yugoslavia this practice was widespread, and my interviewees claimed that such practices still occur today.
7. Similarly, the Istrian novelist, Claudio Tomizza, has written about the moment he left his home-town in the early 1950s: ‘When the terms of the exodus expired, I made an opposite reasoning: the soul of things, of places, of memories, was transferred over there, on the other side. And I left, knowing or just fearing to locate myself in a space in between, neutral and difficult, and so many times I would have felt being a stranger, even to myself’ (Tomizza 2001: 33). Tomizza claimed mixed cultural origins and lived his life between Trieste and his hometown, a place which staged a similar exile to that of Lussignani.
8. The image is taken from Magnabosco (2007).
9. The soldiers killed in Ossero came from all over Italy, and were part of the military unit known as X Mas. Between 1943 and 1945, the unit acted independently of Italian regular forces. After the collapse of fascism in 1943, there were two states ruled in the name of Italians: the monarchy in the south and the Italian Social Republic, governed by Mussolini, in the north. X Mas, formerly a special unit of the

Italian army, deserted both and autonomously focused their actions on the north-east borders of the Italian monarchy, fearing the occupation of these territories by Yugoslav troops. X Mas has become historically infamous for its brutal war crimes, carried out in the name of the 'defence of the country'. The stories in *Foglio Lussino* that mention X Mas do not give a broader historical context but make a connection with Italianness and the state of Italy. One of my interviewees provided an interesting reflection on this absence of context (cf. Ballinger 2004). In the last years, the Italian national debate about the Second World War has in many regards cleared fascism and its supporters. The frequent result is that the partisans and Allied troops are now considered no more worthy of commemoration than those who were considered to be 'on the wrong side'. However, it must be noted that the stories about the X Mas soldiers killed in Ossero do not represent the vast set of stories gathered in the journal that have no direct connection to nationalist discourses.

10. *Storia minima* revives in written form some aspects of 'the art of storytelling' (Benjamin 1968). Benjamin regarded storytelling as a performance, crafted for a community of listeners (cf. Spector 1998). As an editorial policy, the choice to include *storia minima* is reminiscent of the emphasis of much recent social-science literature on the inclusion of the voice of the informant, a reaction against earlier styles of detached scientific writing. As Clifford noted: 'Since the seventeenth century ... Western science has excluded certain expressive modes from its legitimate repertoire: rhetoric (in the name of "plain", transparent signification), fiction (in the name of "fact"), and subjectivity (in the name of "objectivity"). The qualities eliminated from science were localized in the category of "literature"' (Clifford 1986: 5). The recent emphasis on alternative modes of writing that counteract more detached mass-media narratives has also occurred in communication studies. There is, for example, a huge debate about the radical difference of narrative approach bloggers take in contrast with much journalism in the mainstream media (Weinberger 2006). In a way, *Foglio Lussino* can be compared to blogs as a comparable reaction to mainstream knowledge broadcast by media and well-established institutions of education. For similar arguments on blogging, see also Milič, Marchetto and Costa (2008). It must be noted, however, that the charge of many exiles against biased mainstream representations of history can be ironically reversed against them. Quite often, Lussignani in the diaspora reinforce alternative readings of history through their personal stories that are similarly biased. According to Ballinger (2003: 44) and Sluga (2001: 176), a memory without shades of grey has been built for decades during the Cold War by the ghettoized work of regional historians, unable to escape from ideological (Western block versus Eastern block), 'ethnic', and national boundaries and perspectives. In Sluga's words, 'Western historians who have uncritically accommodated those representations and narratives' have been partly responsible (ibid.: 176).

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