

EMIGRATION FROM FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA TO VENEZUELA

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Compared to other trans-oceanic destinations, European emigration to Venezuela became an important phenomenon only after the Second World War. From the 1870s to the end of the Second World War, Italian emigration existed but was never considerable. There is evidence of Friulians taking part in such migration, but there is none of Giulians having done so.

“You must know, Sir, that last year we had managed to save a little money in the hope of many ships coming to load coffee after the harvest; so we thought that for a small sum we would be able to return, if not to Italy at least to some part of Europe to get closer to home; and we had hardly collected 400 Lire and at the start of February we went to Caracas to the Consul to advise us, and so he could direct us and we told him of our situation, that we are brothers one in the Military and the other about to be enlisted, and that we are willing and wanting to go to Italy if we had sufficient means with our money and his help to reach our homeland, and fulfil our duties as citizens, and perhaps he would have had the means to get us on board a ship, through an agent or Captain known to him, that as well as our money we were willing to work on the ship; and he replied that he knew nothing of this situation. The only advice he could give us was that he knew of an Italian merchant ship in La Guayra which with 80 Lire would take us to Italy.”

This passage is taken from a letter¹, exciting in its contents and interesting in its form, also for the methods it uses for the purposes of *captatio benevolentiae*, such as the use of capital letters and the emphasis it places on the writers’ desire to return to their

¹ Gino and Alberto from Caporiacco, 1877 – 1880. *Coloni friulani in Argentina, Brasile, Venezuela, Stati Uniti*, Published by Chiandetti, Reana del Rojale, pages 186 – 188.

homeland in order to enlist in the army². They were two brothers, Gio Battista and Basilio Bravin, from Castello (possibly Castello d'Aviano), who in May 1978 wrote to their mayor from Venezuela, implicitly telling their story of a disastrous migratory experience, recounting their failed attempts to set sail and return, or at least come closer to home. From Caracas to La Guayra, from La Guayra to “Porto Cabello”, from Porto Cabello to La Minda de Aroa. Even if there are no other sources on the migratory experience of the Bravin brothers, the despondency that is clear from the pages of the letter depicts a situation very similar to many others whose protagonists – although victims may be a more suitable word – were hundreds of other Italian emigrants, mainly recruited in the Alpine and the North Eastern areas of the country. In 1874, during the government of president Antonio Guzman Blanco, there was an attempt to regulate the enlisting of European settlers through a legislative decree, the 14th January 1874 decree³, which promised advantages and guarantees: a free journey and accommodation upon arrival in the country, medical care, religious freedom, freedom in teaching and other constitutional guarantees; a guaranteed job offer, with no obligation to accept; no customs duties on personal objects and tools could be brought from the country of origin; the creation of a General Immigration Directorate and other bureaucratic organizations, etc. The decree was full of good intentions and presented excellent prospects for a rosy future, it was circulated throughout Europe by propaganda that failed to mention the reality of the Venezuelan colonies, situated mainly in areas that were climatically and agriculturally inhospitable, or the penalising clauses of contracts, such as the limits imposed on those people wishing to

² Reflections and comments on emigrants' letters can be found in: E. Franzina, *Merica! Merica! Emigrazione e colonizzazione nelle lettere dei contadini veneti e Friulians in America Latina 1876 – 1902*, Published by Cierre, Verona, 1994, pages 17 – 66 and F. Micelli, *Stagioni, luoghi e parole: le lettere di un emigrante contemporaneo (1905 – 1915)*, Municipalities of Codroipo, Regional Authority for Migrants' problems, Centro Studi Storici Menochio in Montereale Valcellina, Edizioni Biblioteca dell'Immagine, Pordenone, 1997.

³ The decree can be found in M. Tannini, *I primi documenti dell'immigrazione Italiana nel Venezuela (secolo XIX)*, in V. Blenghino, E. Franzina, A. Pepe (edited by), *La riscoperta delle Americhe. Lavoratori e sindacato nell'emigrazione italiana in America Latina 1870 – 1970*, Published by Teti, Milano, 1994, pages 428 – 430.

return home – which were those possibly faced by the Bravin brothers – due to fact that they had automatically become Venezuelan citizens upon entering the country⁴.

Due to the influence of French sailing companies and to an emigration agency in Marseille, Depas & C., at least until 1895 – the year in which the company “La Veloce” began to offer a regular monthly connection between Genoa and La Guayra - Italians departed mainly from Marseille, Le Havre and Bordeaux. The crossings were interminable, as was the case of 72 emigrants from Northern Italy who docked in La Guayra on 14th February 1877 after a long journey of 75 days on board the *Matthieu* – Arengo a small French vessel⁵.

Although the intentions of the Venezuelan government were good, reiterated with a further decree of 28th March 1878 establishing colonization transit centres in La Guayra and Porto Cabello, the country was able to attract only a small number of people, a few thousand. This is little more than a trickle when compared to the migratory flows that in the same years connected Italy to Argentina and Brazil and involved hundreds and thousands of people. This trickle dried up following an international event that de facto ended immigration at the beginning of the 20th century, and this despite the fact that, after the fall of General Guzman Blanco, his followers – Juan Rojas Paul (1888 – 1890); Joaquin Crespo (1892 – 1898) and Cipriano Castro (1899 – 1908) – followed the trend set by their predecessor in the attempt to colonize and modernize the country by using European settlers. In 1902, in order to protect their citizens’ interests, in a crisis due to the recent civil wars, Germany, Great Britain and Italy blocked Venezuelan ports with battle ships. There were uprisings in the country, leading the government to pass a law on foreigners that, among other consequences, blocked emigration from Italy. This never recovered, despite the dispute being resolved by Italy with Castro’s representatives, on 13th February 1903, in Washington.

⁴ On the negative effects of the contracts in question, N. Messina, *Aspetti e problemi dell’emigrazione italiana in Venezuela e Messico (1876 – 1879)*, in *Studi Emigrazione*, XIV, 45, 1977, page 109.

⁵ *Op.cit.*, page 119.

Official statistics of Italians in Venezuela at the end of the so-called “pre-oil era” (1830 – 1926) set figures almost identical to those of 1881 and 1891, which had been respectively 3,237 and 3,030: due to the fact that the data is limited to the head of families, the 3,009 Italian immigrants recorded are, however, but a part of the existing Italian community that, wives and children included, would have amounted to approximately 15,000 units⁶.

During the following years, due to the demographic policy of Fascism, the migratory movement toward Venezuela, already limited, reduced further. In fact, after the lull caused by the First World War, although emigration to foreign countries in Italy had recovered between 1921 and 1925, starting from the following two years it was damaged by the new demographic, migratory and territorial organization policy implemented by the regime. One of the cornerstones of the new policy was the reduction of emigration to foreign lands, combined with the intent to channel it into inter-regional mobility, directed mainly towards the industrial areas of Milan, Turin, Genoa and towards the region of Lazio, and, in a second stage, towards Africa and Albania⁷.

Therefore, in the decades preceding the Second World War the official numbers for the Italian community in Venezuela remained essentially constant: in 1936 there were 2,652 Italians and 3,137 in 1941, equal to about 5.76% and 6.38% of the total of those born abroad respectively⁸. The Italians reaching Venezuela in this first phase of the migration were mainly involved in commerce and worked in the urban services sector, as they principally settled in the northern areas of the country, which had a higher degree of urbanization (the Federal district of Caracas, Miranda and Carabobo), where they contributed – albeit in small numbers, as we have seen – to the growing modernization. However, there were also Italians who pushed on into the

⁶ P. Cunill Grau, *La presenza italiana in Venezuela* (Published by the Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, Turin, 1996, page 82.

⁷ O. Gaspari, *Bonifiche, migrazioni interne e colonizzazioni (1920 – 1940)*, in P. Bevilacqua, A. De Clementi, E. Franzina (edited by), *Storia dell'emigrazione italiana Partenze*, Published by Donzelli, Rome, 2001.

⁸ P. Cunill Grau, *La presenza italiana in Venezuela*, cit., page 265.

Llanos area, the great alluvial plains of the southern region, and there were also Italian merchants who “engaged in the most disparate trade along the shores of the Orinoco and its tributaries in Ciudad Bolívar, in San Fernando de Apure and remote villages such as Guasdualito, defying malaria, bandits and the lack of communication routes (apart from rivers). Other Italians could be found in Maracaibo and in the Andes, attracted by the coffee trade, and in the eastern provinces of Cumaná and Maturín.⁹

Emigration of Friulians and Giulians after the Second World War: a story yet to be written. Attempts to quantify the migratory volume and factors that attracted people to Venezuela.

After the paralysis caused by the Second World War, once peace had been achieved, relations between countries were finally restored and borders opened. Little time would pass before a considerable migratory movement would again leave Europe, directed not only to the United States and Argentina, as had been the case at the beginning of the century, but also towards Canada, Australia and Venezuela. It was a migration in many cases planned and managed by the very same countries involved, with the help of international organizations, sometimes through bi-lateral agreements. This was the case of an emigration that involved workers with a rather high average rate of professional qualification, to the point that it is sometimes referred to – with a certain exaggeration - as the “engineers’ emigration”; this emigration in many cases was aimed at re-forming nuclear families abroad, through reuniting programs, sometimes defined – not without a certain emphasis - as “wives’ ships”¹⁰.

The new Italian emigration after the Second World War was directed – as far as trans-oceanic movements were concerned – towards countries with a tradition of

⁹ V. Cappelli, *Nelle altre Americhe*, in P. Bevilacqua, A. De Clementi, E. Franzina, *Storia dell’ emigrazione italiana. Arrivi*, Published by Donzelli, Rome, 2002, pages 107 – 108.

¹⁰ A. Martellini, *L’emigrazione transoceanica fra gli anni quaranta e sessanta*, in P. Bevilacqua, A. De Clementi, E. Franzina, *Storia dell’ emigrazione italiana Arrivi*, Published by Donzelli, Rome, 2002, page 377.

receiving immigrants, such as Argentina, the United States and Canada, but also towards new destinations until then less important, such as Australia and Venezuela. Of the total migratory movement from Italy of little under four million emigrants during the fifteen years between 1946 and 1960, this is how they were allocated between the countries of America and Oceania which were mainly concerned: about 475,000 people to Argentina; little over 400,000 to the United States and slightly less to Canada; about 360,000 to Australia; little under 250,000 to Venezuela.¹¹

As can be seen, the Caribbean country became, if not a dominant one, an important destination for Italian emigration. However, the participation and the role of Friulians and Giulians in the national movement, though certainly important, still need to be investigated, as this has failed to attract the attention of researchers in the field. It is no coincidence that one of the few monographs on the subject is (happily) titled *Un'esperienza migratoria trascurata: i friulani in Venezuela*.¹² One of the difficulties with conducting research is that (at least in light of the perspective one has using Italy as an observation point) emigration towards Venezuela is intrinsically difficult to study by using archive sources. This is because, having been a predominantly spontaneous emigration, that is not assisted, there is little evidence of it in the

¹¹ Op. cit., page 373.

¹² J. Grossutti, *Un'esperienza migratoria trascurata: i Friulians in Venezuela*, in *Studi in ricordo di Guido Barbina*, Udine, 2001, pages 535 – 550. The book just quoted is one of the few but evidently not the only one. P. Pagnacco, *Dal Friuli al Venezuela. Diario di un viaggio*, Udine, 1958 and S. Gentilizi, *Emigrants in Egitto, Argentina, Venezuela e Canada*, Rovereto in Piano, 2003, should also be remembered. Two theses are also worthy of mention: R. Schirotti Zontone, *Un aspetto particolare dell'emigrazione in Venezuela: il rientro a Buja*; C. Mestroni, *Emigrazione in America Latina: il caso di Mereto Tomba*.

As far as a general study of Italian emigration to Venezuela is concerned, the following is an essential bibliography: AA. VV., *Itala gente. Protagonistas del trabajo italiano en Venezuela*, Papi, Roma – Caracas 1980; G. Bafile, *Inchiesta a Caracas*, Sellerio, Palermo, 1989; G. Bafile, *Passaporto verde*, Editorial Greco, Caracas, 1985; P. Cunill Grau, *La presenza italiana in Venezuela*, cit.; D'Angelo Giuseppe, *Il viaggio, il sogno, la realtà. Per una storia dell'emigrazione italiana in Venezuela (1945 – 1990)*, Edizioni del Paguro, Salerno, 1995; R. Pineta, *Italo – Venezolanos. Notas de inmigración*, Oficina Central de Información, Caracas, 1967; G. Rocchetti, *Il Venezuela e l'emigrazione agricola italiana*, Vallecchi, Firenze, 1975; M. Vennini De Gerulewicz, *Italia y los italianos en la historia y en la cultura de Venezuela*, U.C.V., Caracas, 1980.

bureaucracy of public entities and institutions, central or peripheral, who had a say in the matter of migratory movements after the Second World War, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (which had a General Directorate for Emigration and maintained contacts with Italian embassies and consulates in Venezuela and Venezuelans in Italy) or the Ministry of Labour and Social Security (which had an Internal Occupation and Migrations Central Directorate and was widespread throughout the national territory through the Provincial Offices of Work and Maximum Employment). One way of making up for this could be to use alternative sources, first of all oral ones, the most volatile, which could be established both in Venezuelan territory, as far as emigrants who have permanently settled are concerned, and in the region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, as far as those who have returned home are concerned, as long as one acts quickly.

Before trying to quantify the volume of migrations from Friuli Venezia Giulia to Venezuela, it is necessary to note that there are some sources that considerably underestimate the phenomenon. For example, as far as departures from Friuli are concerned, one suggests that, in the seven years between 1951 and 1957, 254 people left Friuli, out of a total cross border movement of just under 85,000 emigrations.¹³ This seems a considerably small amount, and indeed other sources suggest different numbers. As for the four years between 1950 and 1953, data collected by the Institute of Statistics in Rome enable us to establish the number of emigrants from Udine at 2,059, from Gorizia at 55 and from Trieste at 203.¹⁴ If, based on the same data, we focus our attention on the province of Udine, looking at a wider range of destinations, we notice that the situation underlined at the beginning as a characteristic aspect of Italian emigration to Venezuela, that this was certainly an important destination but

¹³ O. Lorenzon, P. Mattioni, *L'emigrazione in Friuli*, Udine, 1962.

¹⁴ Data taken from: Istituto Centrale di Statistica (*Central Statistics Institute*), Rome, Tipografia Fausto Failli, 1955. The data contains both the movement of people who emigrated for work or to avoid the draft, and those who emigrated for tourism, business or other reasons. The former are "citizens who permanently transfer their residence abroad to perform a profession, art, trade, or to join family members or for any other reason"; the latter are "citizens who, maintaining their residence in Italy, travel abroad temporarily to perform a profession, art, trade, or to join family members living there."

never a dominant one, repeats itself. The 2,059 Friulians who emigrated to Venezuela represent 12.7% of the 16,169 emigrants with trans-oceanic destinations: other countries are prevalent, such as Argentina, Australia and most of all Canada, with 5,784 departures (35.7%). From 1958, following internal political events in Venezuela – which we will look at – involving the Italian community there and which therefore reflected on migratory movements, the province of Udine registered an inversion of the migration balance, due mainly to the prevalence of register office registrations over cancellations. This was something that characterized all the following decade: in the 1960–1970 period in Udine there were 486 cancellations and 732 registrations for Venezuela.¹⁵

Certain areas of Friuli saw more departures towards Venezuela than others, these were mainly in the “area of Spilimbergo (Arzene, Valvasone, Spilimbergo, San Giorgio della Richinvelda), the Val Cosa and Val d’Arzino (Travesio, Castelnuovo del Friuli, Pinzano al Tagliamento and Vitio d’Asio) and Val Meduna in the current province of Pordenone and, in the province of Udine, the arc that extends from San Daniele to Tricesimo and Cassacco, with the centre in Buia.”¹⁶

But why were what was a still considerable number of emigrants from Friuli Venezia Giulia attracted to Venezuela? That is to say why – once the painful decision to leave home and family and emigrate had been taken – was Venezuela the choice? A determining factor could have been the various limits to immigration set by other destinations, with a more established migratory tradition, after the Second World War: for example the barriers created by the quota system in the United States, or the case of Argentina, where control over the money families sent home was real, and not theoretical as in Venezuela, and so on. However, it is certain that ties existed between

¹⁵ Summarised data: Istituto Centrale di Statistica (*Central Statistics Institute*), *Annuario di statistiche del lavoro e della emigrazione* Rome, Tipografia Fausto Failli, 1961 – 1971 editions (the data for 1963 is missing). This is against the trend for the movement in the provinces of Trieste and Gorizia that registered 54 cancellations and 31 entries and 30 and 19 respectively.

¹⁶ J. Grossutti, *Un’esperienza migratoria trascurata*, cit., page 544.

Venezuela and Italy, those organizational and bureaucratic means through which governments carry out migratory policies, as well as international organizations that support such actions in different ways. So there was, in Venezuela, an entity created ad hoc in August 1938, the *Instituto Tecnico de Inmigracion y Colonizacion* (The Technical Institute for Immigration and Colonization), which was replaced in October 1948 by the *Instituto Agrarion Nacional* (National Agricultural Institute) for the management and channelling of assisted immigration. It became formally responsible for all foreigners entering Venezuela with an immigration visa, who gathered in the welcoming centres of El Trompillo near Valencia, Barracos de Sarria in Caracas and the nearby borough of San Pedro de Los Altos, they received a credit to cover the cost of the trip and were given free room and board in the above-mentioned centres for a period of up to fifteen days.¹⁷

The creation and the functioning of an authority in charge of overseeing assisted immigration was the result of a process whose intermediary stages – in the case of Venezuela – were the legislation on the subject of migration and, before this, the definition of a demographic policy intended to give immigration a fundamental role, the starting point of which was a favourable and dynamic economic situation. Everything began with an economic turning point, during the long dictatorial government of Juan Vicente Gomez, which lasted 27 years and ended with his death in December 1935: the country's production changed from a predominantly agricultural one to a considerable expansion of oil drilling. The “discovery” of oil in Venezuela is conventionally dated to 1878, when the *Compania Minera Petrolia de Tachira* began work in the field of La Alquitrana, however, extraction effectively began only at the beginning of the 20th century. The first oil field in Western Venezuela was discovered in 1914, in the lagoon of Maracaibo, which was followed by other discoveries in the same area. Thanks to the extraordinary abundance of this source of energy in the Zulia area, the Caribbean country was able to place itself second amongst oil producing countries (the United States being first) and first

¹⁷ P. Cunill Grau, *La presenza Italiana in Venezuela* cit., pages 268 – 269.

amongst exporting countries as early as 1928.¹⁸ On the wave of the dynamic economic growth achieved thanks to the oil industry a migration policy was already beginning to take shape with the government that followed Gomez's, that of president Eleazar Lopez Contreras (1935 – 1941), which in the framework of the economic and administrative program known as *Programa de Febrero*, linked the question of immigration to that of reforms and colonization, passing two laws that would regulate these matters for decades, which were sometimes modified - even considerably - but always valid: the *Ley de Inmigracion Y Colonizacion* (Immigration and Colonization Law) of 1936 and the *Ley de Extranjeros* (Immigrants Law) of 1937. The first – not without racist connotations, as it reserved the right to immigrate white people of “white Arian or Caucasian race, not Semitic”¹⁹, also expressly excluded “gypsies”, who were grouped into a non-productive category, together with “peddlers” and “sellers of cheap goods”²⁰ – aimed at recruiting farm labour who could be entrusted with the colonization of the country. For this purpose a visa with no deadline, the immigrants visa, was granted, and the spirit of the law wanted a stable and permanent integration of immigrants into the economic and social fabric of Venezuela.

The *Ley de Extranjeros* disciplined entry into Venezuela of foreign citizens providing the concession of the *transeunte* visa, awarded to those coming on business and holding a work contract or an invitation from family members. Such a visa lasted one year, after which it could be renewed or converted into a resident visa.²¹

¹⁸ Op cit., pages 239 – 240.

¹⁹ D'Angelo Giuseppe, *Il viaggio, il sogno, la realta ...* (cit., page 22.

²⁰ *Guida per chi emigra in Venezuela*, Italiani nel mondo Rome, 1958. This is how the guide listed other “categories of people excluded” from emigration to Venezuela: people over 60 unless called by family members already immigrated; people sentenced to life or forced labour or with more than one sentence pending; invalids, “the mentally impaired”, idiots, those weak in mind or spirit, beggars, the homeless, and generally all those unable to provide for themselves or who risked being a burden on social care; people preaching or practicing ideologies contrary to the Constitution or the government of the Republic.

²¹ The *Ley de Extranjeros* also regulated the concession of the transit visa (awarded to those who were passing through the country and stayed for no more than 48 hours) and of the tourist visa (which lasted a maximum of six months).

The hope of directing emigrants from Europe to Venezuela remained compromised by the effects, also felt in this field, of the Spanish Civil War first and then the Second World War, but were rekindled once this had ended, especially at the end of the 1940s, when migratory movements grew exponentially.²² The two years between 1947 and 1948, and above all the policies of the government of the Military Junta – in power between 25th November 1948 and 2nd December 1952 – and General Marcos Perez Jimenez’s government, which lasted until 23rd January 1958, were fundamental. The latter, in the name of the “*Nuevo Ideal Nacional*” (New National Ideal) doctrine, founded on a technocratic and progressive model based on an authoritative exertion of power, gave impulse to the development of the transport network and of public construction. Such a policy had important demographic implications, which materialized in a strong support of immigration, preferably if from Spain, Portugal and Italy. Therefore, a policy defined as “open doors” was pursued in the field of immigration, aimed at increasing the population in order to industrialize and urbanize the country and modernize and increase agricultural sustenance production.

Finally, a very important role in the organization and management of migratory movements towards Venezuela was held by two international organizations active in the migration sector, first the IRO (International Refugee Organization) and then the ICEM (Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration). Thanks to the support of the IRO, from 1st July 1947 to the 31st December 1951 just under 16,000 refugees emigrated to Venezuela.²³ Thanks to the support of the ICEM, in the period between February 1952 and December 1957, 29,235 people emigrated to Venezuela, most of which (over 85%) were from Italy.²⁴

²² There were 11,633 immigrants in 1946, 22,623 in 1947, 71,168 in 1948. Between 1949 and 1952 there were 78,000 on average increasing further in the following years: 102,687 in 1953, 113,610 in 1954, 137,416 in 1955, 132,216 in 1956 and 150,361 in 1957. Source: D’Angelo Giuseppe, *Il viaggio, il sogno, la realta*, cit., page 31.

²³ *International Refugee Organization*, Emigration from Europe, 1952, s.l.

²⁴ *Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration*, Statistical Report, December 1957, s.l.

Effects of Venezuelan migration policy on Italian immigration. Factors leading to deportation from Friuli Venezia Giulia. Certain aspects of the emigration of Giulians and Friulians after the Second World War.

Despite the existence of such a vast and branched out network able to give support to assisted emigration, the great majority of immigrants preferred to reach Venezuela with the *transuente* visa, that is through free and spontaneous emigration. In fact, the total number of immigrants who reached the country through assisted emigration was a minority: the Instituto Agrario Nacional (National Institute of Agriculture) sponsored 38,107 entrances from 1949 to 1960²⁵, equal to only about 15% of the total migratory movement.²⁶ The Italian migratory movement was no exception to this trend. If we look at the data for the 1952 – 1957 period, we can see there were only 25,621 out of 161,559 immigrants with an immigrant's visa, that is only 15.6%.²⁷ Emigrating to Venezuela as an immigrant was not convenient, both because the procedures for the visa were long and complicated and there was no guarantee one would get it, and because of the obligations the candidates accepted, which basically extended throughout their whole life and that of their loved ones. The Agricultural Statute of 1949, in fact, established that the colonizing fee be paid by the immigrant over the course of 25 years and that the settler had to work the patch of land personally, together with his ascendants and descendants, as long as the latter were older than sixteen and both had “sufficient agricultural ability”.²⁸ It is logical, therefore, that people preferred to leave with a *transeunte* visa, which, furthermore, was also easy to obtain if one was willing to seek the help of obliging helpers. Available archive sources tell us exactly how easy it was to get one through false work contracts, which could even generate a kind of trade, as was denounced in

²⁵ P. Cunill Grau, *La presenza italiana in Venezuela*, cit., page 275.

²⁶ D'Angelo Giuseppe, *Il viaggio, il sogno, la realtà*, cit., page 81.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, page 128.

²⁸ *Guida per chi emigra in Venezuela*, cit., page 19.

September 1949 by the Workers' Free General Confederation in a letter to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security:

“Despite the current economic depression, Italian workers continue to arrive, mainly general labourers, holding a legal work contract, a contract which has been underwritten by other obliging Italians already resident, when they have not been paid sums that reach from 40 to 70 thousand lire! The result is that these people arrive here with no means, so there are long lines both at the Casa d'Italia, and the Archbishop's Palace, where an Emigration Office scarcely functions.

This fact could become a social and moral problem, as these people, forced by need, could stray and commit acts, whose effects would then be felt by the whole Italian community.”²⁹

The interventions by the Labour Ministry and the Foreign Ministry to solve the problems above must have had little effects if – as it seems – the practices mentioned became the norm. In 1957 the Labour Ministry again noted:

“For this purpose keep in mind this inconvenient aspect of our emigration. Individuals with no job, seduced by the mirage of a sudden, imaginary fortune, reach Venezuela as adventurers. They have deceived the authorities in order to obtain a passport, declaring they have a professional skill they haven't got. And so it is that these people, the inconsistency of their skills unmasked by events and discredited for any real job, are forced, when they have no other intelligent option to help them survive, to live by regrettable ways or criminal actions, even risking going to prison,

²⁹ Letter of 3rd September 1949 of the Liberal federation of Italian Workers, signed by the union's Confederate Secretary Luigi Morelli, to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, State Central Archive, Rome, Ministry of Labour and Social Security, General Division for Employment and Labour, envelope 449.

or being deported. Therefore, it is absolutely fundamental that the Foreign Ministry certify the professional qualifications of candidates applying for emigration.”³⁰

The same document contained strong criticism of the “specialized workers” arriving en masse in Caracas from Italy:

“The Italian – Venezuelan Patronage for the Assistance of Immigrants communicates to the Roman authority a misunderstanding to be resolved without delay. It seems from certain statistics that there is in Venezuela a level of unemployment even amongst the highly specialized workers, a lot of whom are idle. This is true, but what “specialized” does this data refer to? This is really the case of such subjects who, as mentioned above, determined to leave their country whatever the cost, led people to believe they are something they are not. It is common knowledge that 98% of these “specialized workers” are phoney. Of course honest and well-paid jobs are denied to these subjects. They are already, sadly, famous in this country where these self-proclaimed “specialized” workers are mockingly referred to as qualified or graduates from Guaria that is the port of entry into Venezuela.”

After a careful examination of these sources, taking into account a certain dose of alarmism shown by institutional organizations understandably worried about the consequences of a flow that must have seemed out of control, what emerges is the success of a migratory current very different from the one envisioned by Venezuelan authorities during planning phases, mostly because colonizing programs were scarcely followed. The expectations of reviving a decadent agricultural production with new energies and innovative working methods were not met. We have seen how difficult the conditions that settlers (including their family members) had to put up with were, and there was a further element complicating people’s perceptions of this new experience, this was the acclimatizing centres that preceded settlement in the

³⁰ Express letter of 26th October 1957 from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Office for Emigration, to the Ministry of Labour and Social Security, same placement as the previous footnote.

agricultural colonies. The result was that settlers moved away from the destinations they had been assigned to, concentrating in the country's major cities, mainly in the capital, dedicating themselves to jobs that certainly had nothing to do with farming.

While Italian emigration was not channelled into agriculture, it found no direct occupation in the oil sector either, an industry which, already in 1950, was defined by Italian ministerial sources as “saturated by foreign elements”.³¹ Urban centres attracted immigrants, generally unqualified: farmers, labourers and in some cases craftsmen: “the city transformed them into merchants, builders, industrialists.”³² Italians were concentrated, from a geographical point of view, in the urban and industrial areas of the Federal District and of the States of Miranda, Zulia, Carabobo and Aragua. In the Federal District they worked mainly in construction; in Miranda they operated in the service sector, where they established commercial agencies and different types of businesses, particularly transport ones, and they opened hotels, guesthouses and barber shops, or they dedicated themselves to manufactures, opening bakeries, shoe factories or machine shops; in Zulian they found employment in the oil industry; in Carabobo they worked in the services sector opening barber shops, beauty salons, hotels, restaurants and guesthouses, or in construction and transport companies, small commercial activities and warehouses; finally, in Aragua Italians worked mostly in construction thanks to the urban growth of Maracay and other centres.³³ The trend in Italian immigration (but also in the case of the Spanish and Portuguese) was to centralise, giving rise to what would be known as the phenomenon of “macrocephaly”. It is enough to mention the case of the capital, where between 1948 and 1957 over 600,000 immigrants settled.³⁴ The great majority of Italians lived in the cities: according to data supplied by the Immigration Office of

³¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Office for Emigration, *Notizie Utili per chi emigra in Venezuela* (Useful information for those emigrating to Venezuela) (printed pamphlet with handwritten date 29th December 1950), same place as previous footnote.

³² D'Angelo Giuseppe, *Il viaggio, il sogno, la realta...*, cit., page 39.

³³ P. Cunill Grau, *La presenza Italiana in Venezuela*, cit. pages 292, 294, 296, 297.

³⁴ D'Angelo Giuseppe, *Il viaggio, il sogno, la realta...*, cit. page 79.

the Italian embassy in Caracas in 1966, of the 170,000 Italians present in the country, 90% lived in the cities, of which: about 96,000 in Caracas, 14,000 in Maracaibo, 8,000 in Macay and 5,000 in La Guaira.³⁵

As for the regional composition of Italian emigration to Venezuela, there is a definite predominance of people from the southern regions, such as Campania, Sicily and Puglia. Data on central Italy is also relevant, most of all the Abruzzi. As a whole, the south and the islands supplied 60% of Italian immigration, the centre 25% and the north the remaining 15%.³⁶

The ICEM's role in family reunion programs was very important, collaborating with Italian authorities in matters concerning emigration and giving considerable contributions to the emigrants' travel expenses; contributions that at times even reached 75% of the cost of the trip, leaving the emigrant to pay for the rest on his own. Re-forming nuclear families abroad did not always yield positive results, and the existence of privileged channels to achieve it, such as the financial and logistical assistance of ICEM, could create situations where people agreed to these family reforming programs hastily and without much thought. This is how in 1957 the Foreign Ministry expressed itself against – even condemned – labourers and general workers reuniting their families abroad:

“On the other hand, with regards to the recalling of the emigrant's family members, the problem should be considered with carefully by those persons who belong to the, let us say, lower working categories. A worker, who has not spent at least 2 or 3 years here, who therefore does not have a considerable knowledge of this environment, allowing him to avoid all situations that could lead to unemployment, a worker who accepts the hardships of a job that is not well defined, as can be that of a simple labourer, with a daily salary of 9-12 Bolivares, who moreover risks being without a

³⁵ Opposite cit., page 138.

³⁶ P. Cunill Grau, *La presenza Italiana in Venezuela*, cit., pages 267 and 285.

job for a few months, would make a great mistake if he reunited his family. We have seen these people's families suffer from unemployment and the great difference, here in Caracas, between low wages and the high cost of living. Cases such as this are not uncommon. Some, who end up underestimating the cost and not putting the free journey given by the ICEM to use, are usually solved with a ticket back home paid for by the Consulate but these returning emigrants cause the Italian State considerable damage. Recently arrived unskilled workers must be warned against reuniting their families until their situation has improved."³⁷

We have therefore seen an Italian emigration characterized by the presence of unskilled workers and by the fact that it was predominantly a free one, meaning not assisted. Italians preferred to reach the Caribbean country by their own means, paying for the journey out of their own pockets and counting on the chance of finding a place to stay, even with no guarantee of finding work.

The great migratory wave from Italy dried up in 1957, as the beginning of the following year, on 23rd January 1958, saw the fall of Perez Jimenez's government, which happened amid great tensions that involved the Italians and that ended the "open door" policy. The hostilities towards the Italians were, in a way, a response to the widespread support of the Italians for the electoral law of November 1957 which for the first time gave foreigners the right to vote, and for the support given to Perez and his "new national ideal" policy and ideology. The demographic policy based on immigration from Europe was also ended, not through legislative modifications but through a simple administrative act through which, on 18th July 1953, Venezuelan consuls abroad were informed they would only be able to give entry visas for family reunions to spouses, children and parents of immigrants already resident.³⁸

Friulians and Giulians who decided to emigrate after the Second World War were, when considering Venezuela, influenced by the impressions and invitations that we have referred to. The reasons for leaving their homes were, however, different. As far

³⁷ Express letter of 26th October 1957 of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, cit.

³⁸ P. Cunill Grau, *La presenza Italiana in Venezuela*, cit., pages 277 and 278.

as emigration from Friuli is concerned, the reasons were economic, connected to the post-war crisis which began with the imposition of war damages on a system that was structurally weak and had no financial or material resources. Emigration towards Venezuela, which was characterized by a predominance of male emigrants, seems to satisfy the paradigm according to which, in the area with the greatest incidence of cross-border mobility – the mountainous zones of Udine and Pordenone and the hills around Udine – the youngest and most active elements emigrate leaving pensioners, housewives and minors to work the land, providing for their own sustenance with the fruits of their labours while possible investments (such as purchasing land, farming machinery, construction materials...) were made with the money sent from abroad.³⁹ As far as the migration of Giulians is concerned, identifying the factors that led people to leave is more complex, as economic analyses are not enough, due to the presence – better still dominance – of historical, geographical and political factors. Paolo Rumiz, a writer and journalist from Trieste, wrote:

“I really do not understand why the verb “to go” is an intransitive one, and does not have a passive form. When I think about all these masses in movement, including tourists, there is one thing they all have in common: the passivity of their movement. They suffer it, they do not search for it. They should therefore be able to define their nomadism like this: saying, “well, I am been gone”, “I am gone”. They should be able to use this grammatical mess to express how their movement was decided elsewhere.”⁴⁰

Rumiz writes about recent emigrations, but what he says could be perfectly valid for the emigration of Giulians after the Second World War, which was greatly influenced by the coercive mechanisms generated by the endless post-war years that lacerated –

³⁹ E. Saraceno, *Emigrazione e rientri. Il Friuli – Venezia Giulia nel secondo dopoguerra*. Publishing cooperative Cooperativa editoriale “Il campo”, Udine, 1981. Paes 30 and 37.

⁴⁰ P. Rumiz, *Spostamenti di popolazioni e questioni di comprensione*, in C. Donato, P. Nodali, A. Panjeck, *Oltre l’Italia e l’Europa. Ricerche sui movimenti migratori e sullo spazio culturale*, Published by the University of Trieste, Trieste, 2004.

not only physically – the eastern borders. This is true both for Istrians, people from Fiume (Rijeka) and Dalmatian refugees who, in the various waves that followed each other from the spring of 1945 to the autumn of 1954, emigrated abroad unable to or unwilling to settle in Trieste or anywhere else in the Italian Republic, and for those from Trieste who, from the spring of 1954, left the city in the thousands, to emigrate mainly, but not only, to Australia.⁴¹

A book of articles written by Gaetano Bafile, an Italian journalist who emigrated to Venezuela, recounts the adventures of a Giulian in a more romanticised way, so that one is tempted to elevate them to symbolise the loss of self that often accompanies the migratory experience, even more critical if one came from a place that no longer exists, like the city of Fiume, or rather that exists but is not the same place one left from. We know only the initials of this Giulian, E. Z, and we are told how he left “his Venezia Giulia”, his wife and sons, to arrive in Venezuela at Christmas 1950. In Macuto, following an accident at work he lost consciousness and – upon awakening – also his mind: “the boundaries of folly had opened for him, swallowing him”. He therefore sought refuge in the jungle, where he lived as a savage for seven months, finally ending up in a madhouse where he began treatment:

“Even though shrouded in mist the idea began to take shape in his mind that was supposed to bring him back to normality. I have to get better, he told himself, I have to get better. And, with an unexpected tenacity he began to look back, at his past, at the incredible effort to recall places and events and reshape, piece by piece, what had until yesterday been his existence. Who am I? He asked himself, who am I?”⁴²

The final unravelling of the story, the happy ending, highlights the narration’s fable-like development, with the emigrant’s return home, back to his wife, “who might

⁴¹ A. Paniek’s volume *Ricostruire Trieste. Politiche e pratiche migratorie nel secondo dopoguerra*, Edizioni Università di Trieste, 2006, uses unpublished sources and raises very interesting questions on the migratory role of Trieste after the Second World War.

⁴² G. Bafile, *Passaporto verde*, cit. page 174.

never know that her spouse was returning from a holiday of insanity”. E.Z.’s story could have been imagined by Pirandello, for the existential repercussions that it contains, but also by Ionesco, for the complications, this time bureaucratic, caused by the problems the unfortunate emigrant had using the consular repatriation paid for by the Italian authorities, as he had never opted for Italy, even though he was born in Fiume.

We still know very little of the professional lives of emigrants to Venezuela from Friuli Venezia Giulia. For example, we know that in the period from July 1950 to December 1951, 256 Giulian refugees were able to emigrate to Venezuela thanks to the IRO.⁴³ Or that, between 1953 and 1958, 331 Giulians (of which 126 refugees) emigrated to Venezuela this time with the help of the ICEM. The majority of Giulians whose emigration was assisted by the ICEM were house workers: 125 “workers requested as housemaids” and 136 “house workers (single or married or couples with no children)”.⁴⁴

Some documents found in the archives tell us how the Italian authorities were very worried about the morality of the women sent to Venezuela as housemaids, a morality that had to be certified as much as possible upon selection:

“With regards to this we assure that future selections of said personnel will be carried out with the usual caution, certifying previous occupations as much as possible and excluding single women under 30, as suggested by this Ministry.

As far as air transportation is concerned, we understand the considerations that suggest this quicker yet more costly form of transport. However, we consider that if when on board ship some of said workers will cause inconveniences due to low morality, they will act no differently once flown to their destination. Unfortunately,

⁴³ A. Panjeck, *Ricostruire Trieste...*, cit page 109.

⁴⁴ *Relazione annuale dell’Ufficio del Lavoro di Trieste*, not dated (but probably 1956), Archivio di Stato di Trieste, Ufficio Regionale del Lavoro e della Massima Occupazione, b. 375, f. 1631.

the means to conduct a pre-emptive investigation on morality are limited, and would only reveal the worst of the incidents, those that have caused police interventions.”⁴⁵

Whether these were lies and preconceptions or founded worries, they did not affect housemaids from Giulia at all. This is how the document above ended:

“We therefore leave any further communication on the matter, awaiting the definitive results of the two groups of housemaids recruited by the ICEM in Trieste and whose origin and composition has nothing in common with the personnel recruited by the Labour and Maximum Employment Offices in the other provinces of the Republic.”⁴⁶

Many Friulians who emigrated to Venezuela worked in the building trade, especially in Maracaibo, often establishing companies: Natale and Santo Fornazier and Celeste Albino Uasso, the first emigrated in 1949 and the other two in 1951, founded “Constructora F y B”; Guido Freschi, emigrated in 1950, founded “Constructora de Viviendas”; Leon Elias, emigrated in 1951, “Construcciones Petroleras”. Still in the building sector, worthy of mention is Giorgio Simonutti from Udine, who emigrated in 1948, he was a designer and builder of the urban infrastructures of various residential areas of Maracay, of the seaside resort of Palma Sola and of the important neighbourhoods of El Marquez and the Urbina in Caracas and then in 1978 he founded the company “Inversiones Grusi”. However, the entrepreneurship of Friulians could also be seen in other industries, such as the food industry, where worthy of notice are, for example, Ermanno Stefanutti, founder in 1956 of the “Embutidos Stefanutti & Compania” in the residential quarter of La Yaguara in

⁴⁵ Letter of the 23rd November 1953 from the Labour and Social Security Ministry to the Foreign Affairs Ministry, Archivio Centrale di Stato (Central State Archive), Rome, Ministero del Lavoro e della Previdenza Sociale (Labour and Social Security Ministry), Divisione Generale Collocamento e Manodopera (Placement and Labour General Division), busta 449.

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

Caracas, and Giovanni Greggio, founder in 1958, still in Caracas, of “Pasteleria La Ducal”.⁴⁷

Starting from the 1960s the great emigration of Italians (and therefore also of Friulians and Giulians) to Venezuela came to an end. From 1958 to 1968, in the provinces of Udine and Gorizia there were 1,832 entries and 1,262 cancellations in the register office, which shows how re-entries overtook departures by 570 units.⁴⁸

The middle-eastern crisis of 1973 opened a period of great expansion for the economy of Venezuela, which was however based not on economic growth but on the inflation of oil revenues: the price of crude oil went from 3.71 dollars a barrel in 1973 to 11.25 in 1975, determining a sudden surge in foreign trade. These years saw the end of European immigration and an exponential growth of the intercontinental one, originating from Chile, Argentina, Ecuador, the Dominican Republic and Peru, but mostly from Colombia. In 1981 the population of Colombian origins represented almost half (47.5%) of the total number of foreigners present on Venezuelan soil.⁴⁹

At the beginning of the '80s the Venezuelan economy was hit by a serious recession whose repercussions were, amongst other things, inflation, which reached 18,000% between 1983 and 1997.⁵⁰ In the five years between 1989 and 1993 there was a small boom of re-entries into Friuli Venezia Giulia from Venezuela, reaching the considerable figure of 265 units.

According to data from AIRE (the register of Italians residing abroad) in 2005 there were 2,756 Friulians and the Giulians in Venezuela divided according to the province they had left as follows: 1,330 (48.3%) from Udine (predominantly from the Municipalities of Udine, Gemona del Friuli, Buia, Tarcento and Codroipo); 1,046

⁴⁷ P. Cunill Grau, *La presenza italiana in Venezuela*, cit. pages: 244; 372; 343; 358.

⁴⁸ Elaboration of data present in the table Entries and cancellations from and to Venezuela in the provinces of Udine and Gorizia and J. Grossutti, *Un'esperienza migratoria trascurata*, cit., page 548.

⁴⁹ D'Angelo Giuseppe, *Il viaggio, il sogno, la realta ...*, cit., page 34.

⁵⁰ J. Grossutti, *Un'esperienza migratoria trascurata*, cit., page 548. For a deeper look at the topic of re-entries: J. Grossutti, *I rientri in Friuli da Argentina e Brasile, Uruguay e Venezuela (1989 – 1994)*, Regione Autonoma Friuli Venezia Giulia, Ente Regionale per I Problemi dei Migranti, Arti Grafiche Friulane, Tavagnacco, 1997, and F. Micelli, *Emigrazione di ritorno e identita regionali: il caso friulano*, in *La riscoperta delle Americhe. ... cit.*, pages 428 – 430.

(38%) from Pordenone (predominantly from the Municipalities of San Giorgio della Richinvelda, Vito D'Asio, Pordenone, Spilimbergo and Travesio); 278 (10.1%) from Trieste (almost all from the Municipality of Trieste, as only two originated from other municipalities) and finally 100 (3.6%) from Gorizia (predominantly from Gorizia and Monfalcone).