Private life and intercultural practices in Habsburg Istria

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Historical Perspectives on Transnationalism and Intercultural Dialogue in the Multilingual Adriatic Littoral

Introduction

- intercultural practices and relationships in the private family sphere play a great role in the formation of hybrid cultural identities
- mutual influences between the private and public spheres, between individual and collective identities
- lack of research on intimate intercultural relationships in a historical context due to lack of sources and methodological nationalism
- family archive collections, newspapers

Newspapers: gender, the family and national feelings

- *Polaer Tagblatt* no. 1021, 8.9.1908. – letter of (German, female) reader on front page: “Das Nationalgefühl der deutschen Frau”
- response to feuilleton with the same title from *PT* no. 1017, 3.9.1908. – criticises German women for being “obtuse” (*stumpfsinning*) with regards to German national interests, for not having strong German national feelings and expressing them in public
- political context: Italian wives often managed to persuade their German husbands to vote for the Italian national-liberal party (“German officers becoming Irredentists”)
- connection between gender relations and everyday practices of family life on one hand and national feelings and political participation on the other
- values and practices of Italian and Slavic families as an example to follow

German vs. Italian/Slavic gender roles & family life

GERMAN

- separate social lives for women & men – politics discussed in the tavern
- needs of husband/family come before woman's needs
- even upper-class women do all housework themselves
- women wear simple clothing
- expression of woman's talents discouraged

ITALIAN/SLAVIC

- whole family involved in social life together
- acceptable for woman to devote time to herself
- "lower" tasks left to servants
- women are elegant, more luxurious clothing
- husbands proud of their wives' talents


A. Kaun, Pola, Via Kandler
CAFFÈ MIRAMAR
Gelati
Caffè Miramar Pola
Casa Epi 12
Saluti e baci da me e Melli

Feminism and national discourse in a multicultural city

- German women too busy with family duties, not encouraged to develop their capacities, don't participate in social life and discussions of political matters
- German men are also "decidedly less national" than men of other nationalities: they take foreign wives more often and are easily culturally influenced by them
- using national ideology as a tool in advocating a feminist agenda
- the multicultural milieu of Pula allowed German women to have a distance from and to critique the values and practices of their culture of origin and encouraged a positive and accepting attitude towards Italian and Slavic culture

Women and the Croatian national movement

Slavic/Croatian reading club in Pula (*Čitaonica*):

- Croatian language lessons for Italian-speaking Croats – primarily for young women (*Naša sloga* no. 45, 4.11.1909.)
- women publicly reproved for speaking Italian/German at the reading club, their male relatives held responsible (*Naša sloga* no. 48, 29.11.1894.)
- reading clubs in Pula are more of a men's social venue, although there were active female members

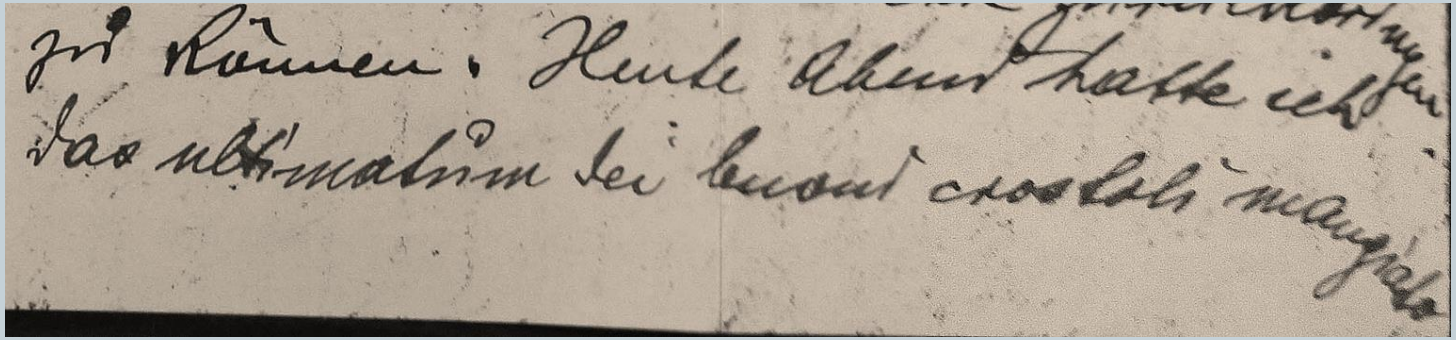
- traditional gender roles →← involving whole community in national movement
- research topic: traditional role of women → less involvement in the national movement → more intercultural everyday practices?

Family archives: private correspondence in multilingual families

- Wruss Family Collection, State Archive in Rijeka
- correspondence between Rudolf Wruss and Emilie Uršič
- period: 1898-1901
- 3 languages: German, Italian, Slovenian
- bilingual Croatian-Italian and Slovenian-German

Switching from German to Italian

- Rudolf switches to Italian:
  - when writing to someone else who doesn't speak German
  - when *mentioning* someone who he associates the Italian language with
  - for no apparent reason

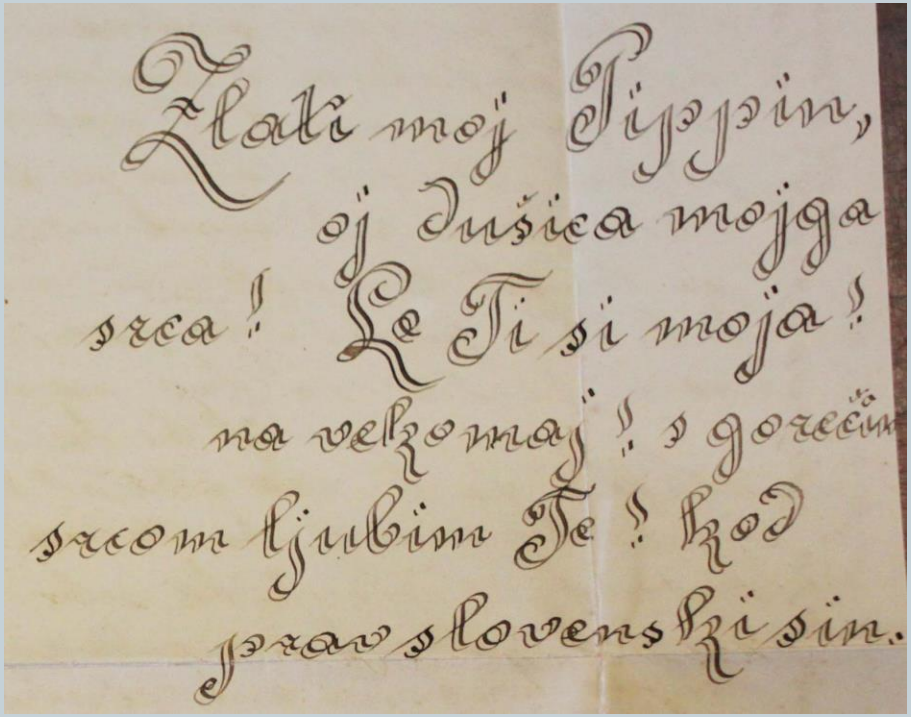


"Heute Abend hatte ich das ultimatum dei buoni crostoli mangiato."

Italian as expression of affection

- enjoys using Italian – the language of people dear to him
- use of Italian as an expression of affection
- development of an affectionate relationship toward the Italian language
- Italian and Slovenian words used to address each other affectionately in a German text (*mein bel tessoro*, *mein angelo*, *zlato*, *srček*)

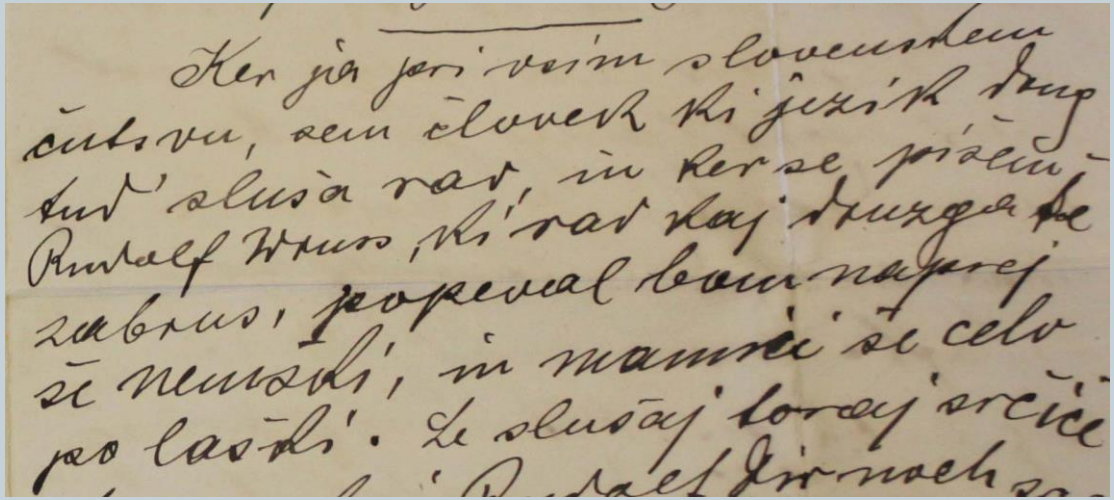
National feelings and romantic feelings


Zlati moj Pippin,
oj dušica mojga
srca! Le Ti si moja!
na veljomaj! s gorečim
srcom ljubim Te! kod
prav slovenski sin.

"My golden Pippin, oh soul of my heart! You are mine! forever! with a burning heart I love You! like a real Slovenian son."

- private + public sphere, individual + collective identity

Patriotism + preference for German



"Because I with all my Slovenian feelings, am a man who enjoys hearing other languages as well, and because I spell my name Rudolf Wruss, if anyone would like it otherwise I'll send you flying, I will sing first in German, and to my mother only in Slovenian."

- neither nationalist nor nationally indifferent – cosmopolitan nationalist

Potential research questions

- effect of intercultural intimate relationships on people's language attitudes and on the emotional value that certain languages have for them?
- how and to what extent can communication in an intimate relationship affect the use of particular languages in the public sphere (and vice versa)?
- role of changing language attitudes in the dynamics of cultural exchange on a broader social scale?

Thank you for your attention!