

The «little history» of an Italian murdered in Rio Grande do Sul

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Introduction

The story told here is a «small» piece of history, in the sense that it involves ordinary men who have left few traces behind them – not enough even to identify its protagonists. It is narrated through Italian documents, since some humble Italian family put forward an official request to the Italian government asking for help in the search for a relative emigrated they had lost contact with. Some were more emphatic in making their claim, making use of a famous lawyer, others more unassuming, presenting their case in uncertain Italian, or in the bureaucratic style of some willing municipal official who aided illiterate families. Incomplete as this sources may be, however, we have enough to highlight how Liberal Italy was not prepared to protect its emigrants. More than this, at times there emerges an actual indifference to the emigrants, regarded by the Foreign Ministry, and often also by the consular network, as ex-Italians, former citizens lost to their homeland. This article traces the human experience of emigrants who had lost, or almost lost, all contact with their families in Italy.

The context

The location of the tragic events narrated here is the *gaúcho* territory, between the Paraná and Uruguay rivers, and to the east in the southern part of the State of Rio Grande do Sul. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, this territory was an interesting destination for Italian immigrants. It was a migration stimulated by Brazil's immigration policies, which in the mid-1880s had introduced the

winning formula of prepaid travel to Europeans in order to attract the workforce necessary for the agricultural colonisation of the country. The most highly prized destinations were naturally the ports of Rio de Janeiro and Santos, along with the coffee growers in the state of São Paulo, who secured the vast majority of the workforce. Likewise, in the most southerly regions of Brazil, the foreign ports of La Plata and Montevideo, in addition to the Rio Grande port, played a significant role in recruiting immigrant workers (Petrone Schorer, 1985; De Boni, 1987-1990; Trento, 2000; Franzina, 1995).

For Italians who had grown up with the memory of the Risorgimento, the Rio de La Plata area held another distinct attraction. It was one of the destinations for the Italian political emigration of the Mazzinians, and furthermore it was where Giuseppe Garibaldi, known as the Hero of Two Worlds, first bestrode the stage of battle (Ridley, 1974, pp. 47-104; Scirocco, 2011, pp. 40-124). Many Mazzinians, and Garibaldi himself, fought in the so-called *Revolução Farroupilha* (the Ragamuffin War: 1835-1845), the republican uprising for the secession of the Rio Grande do Sul from imperial Brazil; and they then went on to fight in the civil war in Uruguay, as part of the Italian Legion (from 1843) (De Leão Dornelles, 2010; Candido, 1964). What is more, the Italian communities that had settled in the area in the early nineteenth century constituted a ready haven for newly arrived immigrants, whether they decided to remain in Argentinian or Uruguayan territories; or whether they preferred to benefit from the opportunities offered by Brazil, especially in the south of the country, where the *fazendeiros* were not present to exercise control over the workers, thus providing better salaries and conditions. Indeed, in 1888, the abolition of slavery led to an increase in demand for coffee plantation workers, whilst in the same year reforms of Italian law led to the sanctioning of freedom of emigration (Grassi Orsini, 1983). The flux of Italian immigration therefore increased significantly to the extent that in the space of a dozen years, up to the start of the twentieth century, over 900,000 Italians arrived in Brazil (Trento, 1989; Slomp Giron, and Herédia, 2007; De Boni, and Costa, 2011). This influx was facilitated by Brazil's Glicério Law, active between 1890-1894, which further increased the practice of free transport from European countries to Brazil. Almost 100,000 of these new European immigrants settled in Rio Grande do Sul, particularly over the years 1891 and 1892, when even the most conservative estimates show that Italians constituted 58 per cent of the entire immigrant workforce in the Southern State (Ciapelli, 1905, pp. 73-76; Venerosi Pesciolini, 1914).

The economic turmoil of those years however, following the proclamation of the First Republic in 1889, corresponded to social and political instability that affected all of Brazil and which took on dramatic tones that rang warning bells throughout international diplomacy.

In Rio Grande do Sul between 1890 and 1893, there were eighteen successive governments, which represented the various factions within the Partido Republicano Rio-Grandense. When the presidency of Júlio de Castilhos seemed to be tightening its grip, between 1893 and 1895, the state became the stage of a civil war that erupted between republicans and federalist forces, who opposed the centralism of the republicans in Rio Grande, and who had support in Uruguay and Argentina (Love, 1971; Jatahy Pesavento, 1983). The conflict was characterised by atrocities and by the widespread custom of slaughtering and mutilating prisoners (Chaves Flores, 1996; Barcellos Guazzelli, 2004), grisly practices common to the *maragatos*, the federalist faction hostile to the government, and also the armed bands of *pica-paus* («woodpeckers», in reference to their outfits), organised by the governments of Júlio de Castilhos (Wasserman, 2004; Rocha da Silva, 2011).

In total, in the thirty-one months of civil conflict, in the State of Rio Grande there were twelve thousand murders (in a population of around one million people). Amongst the victims, several dozen Italian immigrants were also slain. It is worth noting that the Italian communities in Rio Grande do Sul were traditionally sympathetic to the federalist cause, or at least, they did not explicitly side with de Castilhos's republicans, as did other ethnic groups of immigrants. The political disputes in the State of Rio Grande, therefore, made relations difficult between immigrants of Italian origin and the authorities. The issue even managed to rouse Italian diplomacy, which had always been rather weak and poorly equipped to defend its emigrants. Following laborious negotiations, the Italian government and the Brazilian federal government signed a protocol on 12 February 1896. With the agreement, Brazil conceded a lump-sum indemnity of 4,000 *contos de réis* (the official exchange rate being 3.5 million gold Italian liras) to Italian immigrants, or their descendants, injured by the violence and unlawful acts of the various combatants and of the police attributable to the legitimate government, throughout the period of civil wars (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 1953; De Boni, 1985).

From the Italian perspective, the presence of compatriots amongst the victims of the federalist war encouraged to rethink to the functions of its diplomacy, to safeguard the interests and dignity of Italian emigrants. This was a first step towards a new direction in Italian politics regarding emigration. The next step the creation of the *Commissariato Generale dell'Emigrazione* (Commissioner-General of Emigration) in 1901. One of the first initiatives of this new Italian agency for protecting emigrants consisted of sending an inspector to the state of São Paulo, the state most interested in the pre-paid emigration of Italian peasants, recruited by *fazendeiros*. The findings, edited by the commissioner for emigration Adolfo Rossi, were very critical of the working conditions of Italians (Rossi, 1902), inducing the Foreign Minister Giulio Prinetti to issue a

decree on 26 March 1902 forbidding the subsidized enlistment of emigrants in the plantations of Brazil.

This is the context in which the «little histories» of the Italian migrants recounted here took place. The events intertwine and interlink, not least in terms of the similar surname of both protagonists – Rizzo and Rizzi – that diplomatic bureaucracy tended to confuse. They were, furthermore, rather alike as men, in that they had travelled toward the *gaúcho* territories with their bags packed full of hope; but their fates were very different, and the most tragic of epilogues saw one of the men killed with brutal violence in the rural inland area of Rio Grande do Sul.

The adventures of an Italian carter

Giovanni Rizzo (or Rizzi) emigrated from Italy towards his presumed destination of Montevideo on an unknown date in the early 1890s. He was around 45 years of age, a robust man of larger stature than most of his fellow travelers. He knew how to read and write, and he had some money with him that he intended to invest in creating his own business. He did not feel cut out to be a plantation worker, so he stayed away from the recruiters for the *fazendas*. He thought he would work for himself as a transporter or a merchant, offering his services to the isolated agricultural colonies and fulfilling, in time, his dream of emigration. For some time, he travelled up the Uruguay River, along the border with Argentina. He owned horses and he made use of them to transport furniture inland from the long navigable road, so that he could do some trade, and probably some smuggling (Axt, 2002; Dorfman, 2009, p. 126). We know that at the beginning of 1892 he stopped at Belén, a border town in the Salto region of Uruguay, and that he started working as a charcoal burner for Mincol del Monte (in Argentinian territory); in reality, the local community had rented him a wood from which he could cut down trees to make charcoal. The work was very tiring and not sufficiently financially rewarding. Rizzo then took on another Italian, Domenico Cappelletti, as a helper. Rizzo delegated all of the charcoal work to Cappelletti in order to concentrate on working in transport. He transported his own charcoal, but the most interesting jobs were transporting goods for third parties that Italian traders already residing in those areas commissioned from him. His main clients were the Zama brothers, two small traders from Lombardy, who accommodated Rizzo in their own home in Belén and who periodically sent him over the border into Argentina, to Villa Libertad (now Chajari) (Donadio Varini, 1992), where they supplied the Italian community with general provisions. After seven or eight months, the entrepreneurial project of charcoal delivery was failing and Rizzo abandoned it. Even the cross-border commerce turned out to be too risky and poorly remunerated, so Rizzo obtained

a passport in Salto for travel to Brazil. Then he asked the Zama brothers to write character references to introduce him to the Italian community in the rural heartlands of the Rio Grande do Sul. He collected his 30–40 *mil-réis* of savings (around 40–50 Italian *lire*), loaded up his two horses and departed on a journey of over 200 kilometres, which, should it rain, could take many days.

In Brazil, Rizzo resided in the Jaguari settlement; a recently constituted allocation of land, established (1877), along the river of the same name, in an area traditionally inhabited by the indigenous *Guaranis*, in the São Vicente district, along the important flow of traffic between Santa Maria and Uruguaiana, on the border with Argentina. In 1889, the construction of a new town in the settlement was initiated, and this rapidly attracted ten or twelve thousand people, the majority of whom were European immigrants from Germany, Poland, and Italy who were seeking their fortune as settlers, workers, or entrepreneurs in the construction, transport, or commerce industries. Amongst the members of the settlement in Jaguari was another Zama brother, Arduino, who welcomed Rizzo into his home in Santiago do Boqueirão, the main village in the area, and gave him work as a transporter. This was a bustling and busy region, full of opportunity, but in the early 1890s, the proximity of the Uruguayan border also made the area a somewhat dangerous one, particularly due to the early infiltrations of the *maragatos*. The representatives of the republican government in Porto Alegre, who presided over the area, were members of the provisional forces of de Castilhos, the *pica-paus*, who enjoyed significant autonomy from central powers but who colluded closely with local notables, and were frequently the instrument of their abuses.

In that area, Rizzo fell under suspicion due to how he spoke – witnesses say he employed a mixture of Italian, Lombard dialect, and Spanish, with only a few words of Portuguese² – and, what’s more, he owned two splendid horses that attracted the eye of the captain of the *pica-paus*, Ignazio Gomes. For his own part, Rizzo probably showed his brusque disposition and perhaps even uncouth language in his reply to Gomes, who had offered to buy his horses. What is certain is that Rizzo did not express himself with the necessary obsequiousness when he demanded his rights before the director of the agricultural settlement in Jaguari, Severiano da Almeida de Souza, after the night, around the middle of November 1892, that his precious horses were stolen from him. Rudely rejected by the director of the settlement, who had ordered him to make do on his own, Rizzo rashly decided to threaten Gomes directly.

At this point, the accounts become confused. The consular representatives in Porto Alegre – governed from May 1891 by Edoardo Compans di Brichanteau – and the journalists from the *Corriere cattolico* – an Italian-language newspaper based in the State’s capital – who were the first to reconstruct the facts (18 December 1892), gave different nuances to the accounts, while agree-

ing on the substance and the tragic epilogue of the tale. Rizzo was taken by a handful of paramilitaries under the instructions of Gomes. He was «bound at the wrists, the arms and the neck», to the extent that in the space of a few hours he had turned black and swollen»,³ he was held in the Jaguari settlement, in the blacksmith's home – an Italian by the name of Berlatto – and the following day dragged to the prison in Santiago do Boqueirão. During the transfer, Rizzo met two fellow Italians who he implored for some food, and who gave him some bread. From that point on, there are no more witness accounts of the unfortunate Italian. The authorities, when they were interrogated on this matter by the Italian consul towards the middle of December, confirmed the arrest of Rizzo (calling him Rizzo or Rizzi indifferently), due to a disturbance caused in the community and furthermore that he was suspected of being a wanted assassin in Uruguay. They maintained, however, that the prisoner had managed to escape from prison and vanished from sight.

The reality was far more dreadful. Further witness accounts demonstrate with certainty that Rizzo did not arrive at the prison, but that he was taken by four soldiers under the command of the captain of the *pica-paus*, Firmino G. Soares, to a camp a few kilometres outside the inhabited area and that there he was horribly tortured and killed. This occurred between the end of November and the first days of December 1892. The record of the brutal torture that is here reported and translated below comes from the Genoese newspaper «Il Secolo XIX». It was widely reported in the local Italian-language press and in other inquests held by the Italian consular authorities:

After having dragged him into a fenced-off property belonging to Soares, they threw him to the ground and tightly bound him, and then they castrated him. Then they cut off one of his arms and pulled of one of his legs, then, still not satisfied, those four hyenas cut out one of their victim's ribs whilst he was still alive, roasted it, and forced into his mouth, forcing him to eat it! They ended their torture of this poor man by severing his head and throwing it far from his body.⁴

The description is so barbaric as to seem impossible, and perhaps it is possible that some sadistic details were added to make the story more shocking; however, this account chimes with witness statements collected by the investigators and the press. Furthermore, the description is a useful one in terms of helping us to understand the climate of intimidation imposed at that time by the various armed forces present in that unstable area on the border of Rio Grande do Sul.

The Italian consul, Brichanteau, attributed the episode to the federalist civil. His theory was fully shared by the Italian ambassador Salvatore Tugini, who wrote about the matter to the Foreign Minister Benedetto Brin in his report of 22 December 1892, also detailing that an analogous case had befallen another

Italian who had been tortured by police in Porto Alegre.⁵ The president Júlio de Castilhos himself had candidly confessed to the Italian consul that the state was in such a chaotic and disastrous condition that they had been forced to enlist brigands and criminals in order to ensure the survival of the president and institutions, with the collateral damage that this decision brought with it.⁶ Both the consul and Tugini agreed when reporting the sorry events to Rome that some form of manifestation of strength on the part of the Italian government was necessary to safeguard the Italian community. They proposed, for example, to have naval vessels carry out manoeuvres in the ports of Rio Grande do Sul or even the seizure of a Brazilian merchant vessel as hostage until those culpable for the crimes were punished. The diplomats, however, were rather indecisive on whether to use the opportunity to establish a ban on emigration to Brazil; a measure that was deemed to be useless in ending the violent practices that were rooted in the socio-political situation of the Rio Grande do Sul rather than in a well-established hostility towards Italians. This, at least, was the explanation offered by the diplomatic staff.⁷ The Italian community in the area, however, was of a different opinion. The community intended to denounce the hostile environment in the Jaguari settlement, and the aggression of the local authorities: indeed, to these ends they collected a petition of over four hundred signatories to send to the consul. They were dissuaded in their efforts by threats from the paramilitaries. This climate of intimidation would also have made the investigative work of the consular agents rather difficult, not to mention the identification of the victim.

In the weeks that followed, the difficulties in getting to the bottom of the homicide, in obtaining any form of punishment or reparation for the wrong committed, was felt by the whole community, and these difficulties gave rise to explicit criticism of the Italian Consul himself. Di Brichanteau was not well regarded by his settlement, particularly as he had been accused of having an aristocratic disrespect for Southern Italian immigrants (Santoro de Constantino, 1991, 272-73), and he was considered to be far too close to the president Júlio de Castilhos, who was a frequent guest in the consul's private dwelling. On this occasion, however, the protest made by the large Italian settlement (over 6,000 people) against their consular authorities, accusing the authorities of inertia, inability, and cowardice, developed into a street demonstration that took place on 5 February 1893 in Porto Alegre, on the burial of Rizzo's remains. Around a thousand of the demonstrators assaulted the Italian consulate, some armed with revolvers, and many armed with knives or clubs. They intended to expel the «turncoat Frenchman» – this was Compans di Brichanteau, who had been born in Savoy when it was still part of the Kingdom of Sardinia – and replace him with the vice consul Giosuè Notari, a diplomat from Southern Italy who was greatly noted for his character and helpful nature.⁸ It is probable that agitators

sent by the Rio Grande do Sul government had been planted in the crowds to fan the flames of anger in the demonstrators. The government had contested di Brichanteau's decision to turn to the federal army for support in carrying out an inquest that the local authorities did not know how – or perhaps had absolutely no wish – to undertake.

The consul's decision to recourse to the army had, however, shown itself to be useful, since it was the intervention of General Pego, commander of the military district, that allowed Rizzo's remains to be collected, a good two months after the homicide had taken place. Furthermore, it was the very same military inquest that brought to light the four individuals presumed responsible for the massacre: that is, Gomes and Soares, the two captains of the *pica-paus*, the director of the Jaguari settlement, de Souza, and Major Aranques da Rocha, the secretary of the settlement.⁹ None of these men, however, were ever taken to court or punished.

The main political outcome was that the consul, Compans di Brichanteau, fell into disgrace, not only in the eyes of the Italian settlers but also in the opinion of the new ambassador from Rome, Renato De Martino. It would appear that the government of the Rio Grande itself had stipulated the removal of the undesirable consul as a condition for accepting the protocol agreement of 1896, which called for the previously mentioned cumulative indemnity of 4,000 *contos*.¹⁰ With traditional diplomatic tardiness, di Brichanteau was first sent to São Paulo in September 1893 and then was called back to Europe in November 1896.

From an investigative perspective, however, the inquest supported by the consulate and undertaken by the military into the episode in Jaguari contained some crucial lacunae: the victim was not able to be identified beyond a reasonable doubt, starting with the surname which some said to be Rizzi and others remembered as Rizzo, both of which are very common in Italy. The photographs of the tortured cadaver, the death mask that was made, the verification of the sparse personal effects on the body, did not allow for definitive identification. Unfortunately, president de Castilhos had promised the 50 *contos* (over 60,000 Italian liras) to the relatives of the victim only if they could be identified with absolute certainty. The caution exhibited by the Rio Grande president seemed in part to be justified, given that there were frequent fraudulent attempts to misappropriate compensation offered by Brazil to Italian immigrants who declared themselves injured, or whose family declared them to have been so. However, it also probable that the conditions attached to the offer of compensation concealed a malign attempt to deceive, and further increase the difficulties of, the Italian consul who was first a friend, then an adversary, and an often-arrogant interlocutor. The case, then, remained open. In addition to there being no penal retribution for the guilty parties, there was also the risk that there would not even be a diplomatic solution in favour of the relatives of the victim.

The identification of the victim in Italy

This already complicated situation became even more so in Italy. While there were not many members of staff in the Foreign Ministry who were concerned with finding the identity of the victim, there were many dozens of Italian families with the surname Rizzo or Rizzi who had a relative that had emigrated to the area. It was only right that the fate of a relative should be known, and the possibility of compensation for the victim's death was an added incentive. Many claimants, whether out of cynicism or driven by poverty, made claims of kinship in the sorry affair. Following the laborious and poignant operations to ascertain the identity of the next of kin and his heirs offers us the opportunity to turn up other interesting stories regarding the lives and adventures of Italian immigrants in the area of the Rio de La Plata estuary.

The news that the slaughtered Italian was called Giovanni Rizzo or Rizzi first appeared in Italian Foreign Ministry documents in mid-January 1893; the dispatch had arrived from the inquest carried out by General Pego and was confirmed by the Rio Grande authorities. A passport granted in Uruguay with only the name of «don Juan Rizzo», and without any further personal details, was found amongst the papers that the victim left, but this document never reached the Italian authorities. The additional witness statements collected by the consulate in Jaguari did not fully tally with each other: the majority said he came from Lombardy but they spoke of different cities and provinces, while others said he came from Veneto (Treviso) or from Genoa. Embellishers and profiteers added other, discordant details. In order to identify the rightful heirs, the Italian Foreign Ministry circulated a notice to the prefectures, dated 20 July, 1893, providing the few sketchy and confused details that they had collected, including that the victim had left a wife and three children in Italy – this, at least, was what he had cried out to his persecutors in the hope of obtaining their mercy.

Amongst the dossiers collected by the Italian Foreign Ministry that presented claims to kinship with the unfortunate victim, one case in particular attracted our attention. This case concerns a Giovanni Rizzi from Sondrio whose family, in the person of his wife Luigia Joli, sought help from an important lawyer, Giuseppe Marcora, a radical member of parliament who had been elected to the council in Sondrio and who was to be a future president of the Italian Chamber of Deputies. Between 1893 and 1898, Marcora sent the authorities a series of highly articulate memoirs from which we can draw a detailed and multifaceted portrait of *this* Rizzi. By necessity, however, these memoirs were attempts at finding elements of connection with the ephemeral details relating to the murdered man in Jaguari.

The Rizzi married to Luigia Joli was born in Sondrio on 27 July 1826; his father was from Genoa. The couple had three children, only one of whom was still alive at the time of the events in Jaguari, Enrico (born in 1852). In order to provide for his family Giovanni had worked as a carter (carrying goods with his horse-drawn carriage) between the towns of Colico, Dongo, and Gravedona in the Alto Lario area (Lake Como), transporting coal. An idealistic, generous, and healthy man of ardent patriotic feelings, in 1859 he «took on and carried out [...] revolutionary propaganda activity against the Austrian government»,¹¹ on the brink of the second war of independence, which was to see Lombardy annexed to the Kingdom of Sardinia. In 1860, however, he decided to abandon his family to find better work, firstly in Switzerland, then in Liguria, where he worked as a manual labourer, and a small contractor for road repairs. In 1872, when he made contact with his son for the first time in years, he seemed to have found a stable position; he had established himself in Sestri Levante and owned twenty or so horses that he rented out. Through his contact with his son he probably found out about the pitiful conditions his wife was living in and from Genoa, in 1874, he sent her the last 500 Italian *lira* of her dowry that he still possessed. Following this, he obtained work as a pieceworker in the construction of the railway line between Parma and La Spezia, where his son also obtained permanent employment. In 1881, however, with his entrepreneurial dreams dashed for the moment and his job lost due to his temper, Giovanni Rizzi paid a final visit to his wife and then emigrated once more, this time to the south of France, where he stayed until mid-1886, maintaining sporadic written contact with his son. His son Enrico once again found work for him on the railway lines where, this time, he behaved himself to the extent that the engineer Neri, section head of the *Mediterranea* (the Mediterranean railways Company) recommended him to the management of Calderai&Feltrinelli who employed him in 1890 in the construction of a stretch of railway in Cefalù, in Sicily. «Inclined to an adventurous and wandering life»¹², despite his advancing years (he was 65 at this point), Rizzi was considering emigrating once more, first to Egypt and then on towards the Americas via Marseille. To this end, on 14 July 1892, he asked his son for a free rail ticket – of the kind granted to railway employees – to the French border. He did not collect his ticket, however, and according to the family's hypothesis, he boarded a boat in Palermo or Messina and sailed to South America.

Up to this point, Marcora had been ably packaged the hypotheses, the evidence, and the deductions made by the Rizzi-Joli family in a dense exchange of notes, deductions, and counter-deductions with the Foreign Ministry. Later, however, following on from the Italian-Brazilian agreement of 1896, a compensation payment of 50 *contos* to the family of the murdered victim in Jaguari was agreed, and a further detail was added: that the sum of money was only

available until February 1898. At that point, the pressure intensified. The local authorities in Sondrio supported the «saintly cause» of the (presumed) widow Joli with the Foreign Ministry; Marcora personally wrote to the Foreign Minister Emilio Visconti Venosta, who had, for that matter, been a Member of Parliament for Sondrio province, and encouraged the other Member of Parliament for the Valtellina, Luigi Credaro, to lend his support.¹³ This authoritative backing had some effect. The Public Prosecutors in the Court of Appeal in Milan judged the memoirs written by Marcora, and on at least three occasions, rejected it.¹⁴

Entrusting the examination of the records to a tribunal effectively constituted an act of some solicitude in relation to the various personalities who had become involved in the matter; but the truth was that the Foreign Ministry staff had highlighted some crucial weak points in the Rizzi-Joli case. The most relevant contradiction was certainly the relative age of the victim, which even the rushed medical examination of the victim's remains and the witness statements in Brazil agreed on as being around 45 years old, whereas the husband of Luigia Joli would have been around twenty years older. Neither did the date of the presumed departure from Sicily towards America coincide with the statements collected about the victim's life, which showed that he had stayed for much longer than just four months along the Rio Uruguay. Furthermore, Marcora's counter-arguments were invalidated by various topographic and geographic errors concerning the location of the drama, to the extent that in some of the maps that he had included, he confused Santiago do Boqueirão in Santa Maria, with Boqueirão do Leão, more than 350 km to the south-east of the state. The absence of accurate scale maps in calculating the distances travelled when evaluating the movements of the presumed Rizzi made the calculations entirely inaccurate.

There were also other contenders. Dozens of claims from relatives arrived at the Foreign Ministry that were, for the most part, entirely fanciful or blatantly false. Only eight claims were given further consideration, none of which were as substantially documented as the Rizzi-Joli claim upheld by Joli's lawyer Marcora, but that nonetheless contained other intriguing stories of emigration and loss of contact with families at home in Italy. They were the tales of other carters and charcoal burners by the name of Rizzi and Rizzo (the surnames are also interchangeable in these dossiers), mainly Lombard, but not only, who had disappeared while in pursuit of the «emigration dream».

We will limit ourselves here to list these dossiers according to the categories of plausibility assigned to them by the Foreign Ministry. Following further and more extensive examination, another two dossiers were excluded as unfounded and irrelevant. One was of a 57 year-old Giovanni from the province of Padua, whose family had not heard from him but who then, in 1894, was confirmed to be still alive. The second case concerned a certain Cesare, a 35 year-old from

the province of Catanzaro, a single man who emigrated to Buenos Aires in 1888 and who was found to be still living in that area of Argentina.

Amongst the «applications that it seemed necessary to exclude for the numerous contradictions therein», there was the Rizzi-Joli case and a further three cases. One concerned a Giovanni Leonardo from Grosio (Sondrio), who was a 67-years-old bachelor, and who the Prefecture of Sondrio had already excluded in a report of 13 December 1897. Another man from the Valtellina, Giovanni Pietro from Novate Mezzola, who was 54 and emigrated to the Americas in 1868, was rejected because he was unmarried and considerably shorter than the Jaguari victim. Finally, a Giovanni from Genoa was also rejected; his documentation, however, was somewhat ephemeral, beginning with his date of birth being provided as «around 1860».

The Foreign Ministry took only two cases into serious consideration. One application concerned a Giovanni Ignazio who was 47, born in Erba (near Como), tall and well-built, and of greater than average strength, who, before emigrating, had been a carter in Dongo, on Lake Como. This Giovanni, however, had never married and did not have a family. Indeed, it was a second cousin who made the claim for compensation. The application that perhaps came the closest of all to the picture built up of the victim through the investigations, was that of a 41-year-old carter from Grassobbio (Bergamo), baptised as Fedele but commonly known as «don Giovanni», who married in 1874 and emigrated to Argentina. The claimant was the brother-in-law, as the wife in question had also emigrated in 1893, to Buenos Aires, taking with her their three children, only one of whom was registered as the daughter of the couple.

Definite proof, then, was not apparent in any of the claims. New investigations and new witness interrogations were necessary in La Plata, Concordia, and Montevideo. The network of consulates worked busily on these but with scant results. In the meantime, the indemnity for the Jaguari murder had inexorably expired and was not renewable; none of the eight cases, investigated by the Foreign Ministry, were deemed worthy of the indemnity beyond reasonable doubt, as the pact with Brazil had imposed.

The Rizzi-Joli family continued to insist right up to the spring of 1901, benefitting from the support of influential people and the weighty collection of proof, facts, and conclusions. New claims by the family were regularly considered as unconvincing by the Foreign Ministry staff. Furthermore, no new circumstances emerged, and the only way to move forward would have been for the Foreign Ministry to accept that the Rizzi-Joli case had a claim to part of the residual sum of 4,000 *contos* paid by Brazil in 1896 for injured Italians. The Rizzi-Joli family attempted this, but without success.

In Italy, the organisation responsible for overseeing the correct practice for accessing the compensation offered by the pact between Italy and Brazil was

a specially created Royal Commission. This commission ceased its activity in July 1897, after having examined 500 requests, of which only 438 were deemed worthy of the indemnity.¹⁵ The sum of money available was not disbursed in its entirety and a notable remainder of 892 *contos* was registered. This remainder represented 22 per cent of the total sum, thus demonstrating the difficulty in ascertaining beyond reasonable doubt the fate of Italian emigrants in Brazil. In May 1899, a new Ministerial Commission was created, tasked with deciding the use of this remaining sum, which was, for the most part, allocated to Italians injured over the course of the *revolução federalista* between 1893 and 1895. The relatives of the murder victim in Jaguari, however, even if they had been identified with certainty, would not have been included in this final distribution of compensation, as the enactment of the Italy-Brazil pact explicitly excluded all other controversies for which an *ad hoc* sum had been allocated, as was the case with the carter in question.

Epilogue

The gruesome case of the unfortunate «don Juan» Rizzo, then, remained unsolved. Perhaps his relatives had simply forgotten about him, or did not have the means to put forward any detailed claims.

As for the other story we have highlighted, involving Giovanni Rizzi, husband of Luigia Joli, this at least had a happy conclusion. In the summer of 1892, he had not left for the Americas but, in fact, had gone to Africa. True to his individualist and selfish character, he only decided to contact his family in July 1901, when he sent word that he was convalescing in a convent in Algeria and that he was preparing to return to Italy, where at the sprightly age of 75, this adventurous migrant intended finally to settle down in his son's home.¹⁶

The events in Jaguari, together with other analogous cases that took place at that time, at least contributed to rousing diplomatic action; the relations between Italy and the Rio Grande do Sul, and with Brazil itself, were characterised by tension (Cervo, 1991, pp. 55-86).

Above all, Italy needed to develop the administrative tools and skills necessary to monitor and protect its emigrants; and to do this, it had to develop the right kind of mentality, and also had to develop the right policy.¹⁷ In the United States of America, for example, the demands of immigrant Italians had enabled a more efficient and active development of the consular network, in close contact with local authorities and the immigrant communities themselves. The government's attitude was, however, different in relation to emigrants to countries in Latin America. Various prejudices were held towards those who chose these destinations, and often other prejudices existed relating to the political instability and diplomatic unreliability of the countries to which they

emigrated – countries, it was thought in Rome, with which it was hardly worthwhile engaging in arrangements more effective for the protection of emigrants.

In this perspective, the events narrated here take on a more meaningful significance, based on inaccurate and contradictory reports though they may be. Moreover, while a certain lack of clarity may be a constant element in the personal destiny of each individual emigrant, the ambiguous indications inherent in such events can still not allow them to be neglected by the historian.

Note

- ¹ Unless otherwise indicated the information used for this reconstruction comes from documentation in the following archives: Archivio storico diplomatico-Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Rome (ASD-MAE), Serie z-Contenzioso, folder 78, file 1371; and Civiche raccolte storiche–Museo del Risorgimento, Milano (CRS), Archivio Giuseppe Marcora, folder 67.
- ² This information, which is not further elaborated elsewhere, is contained in the work notes of the lawyer Marcora in CRS, Archivio Giuseppe Marcora, folder 67.
- ³ ASD-MAE, Serie z, Contenzioso, folder 78, file 1371, quotation from Statement by the consular agent A. Jannelli, from Santa Maria, of 30 December 1892 (original text in Italian)
- ⁴ «Un italiano torturato in Brasile», «Secolo XIX» (Genoa), 30-31 March 1893 (original text in Italian), citing the newspaper *Il Corriere Cattolico: Periodico religioso, politico, letterario* (Porto Alegre), of 18 December 1892.
- ⁵ ASD-MAE, Serie z, Contenzioso, folder 78, file 1371, Report by Ambassador Salvatore Tugini from Petropólis of 22 December 1892.
- ⁶ ASD-MAE, Serie z, Contenzioso, folder 78, file 1371, Report by Compans di Brichanteau of 28 December 1892.
- ⁷ See the letters by the Italian ambassador to Rio de Janeiro, Tugini, on the following dates 6, 7, 13 and 27 January 1893, and the letters of reply by the Foreign Minister Brin of 17 and 24 January, 13 February, 4 May, in Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 1998, *ad indicem*.
- ⁸ ASD-MAE, Serie z, Contenzioso, folder 78, file 1371, Report by Compans di Brichanteau from Porto Alegre, on 8 February 1893. The vice consul Giosuè Notari reached Porto Alegre in June 1891 and remained there until the end of September 1893.
- ⁹ ASD-MAE, Serie z, Contenzioso, folder 78, file 1371, Reports by the Legazione d'Italia to Italian Foreign Ministry, from Petropólis, of 13 January and 5 February 1893.
- ¹⁰ See the letter by De Martino of 3 October 1896 to Emilio Visconti Venosta and the following replies by the Minister in Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 1953.
- ¹¹ CRS, Archivio Giuseppe Marcora, folder 67, citation from Luigia Joli, *Risposta alle riserve del Ministero degli Affari Esteri: Allegato A*, 25 May 1898, p. 10; it is a manuscript dossier dictated by the lawyer Giuseppe Marcora.
- ¹² Joli, *Risposta alle riserve del Ministero degli Affari Esteri*, cit., p. 25.

- ¹³ ASD-MAE, Serie z, Contenzioso, folder 78, file 1371, see the draft responses of the minister Visconti Venosta to the requests made by Credaro (9 December 1896) and Marcora (6 February 1897), see also the letter from Sondrio municipal authorities to the Foreign Minister (19 December 1898).
- ¹⁴ ASD-MAE, Serie z, Contenzioso, folder 78, file 1371, conclusions of the acting head of the Procura Generale (Director of Public Prosecution's office) in Milan, of 5 March 1897 and of 4 April 1898, and the conclusions of the Procuratore Generale, of 1 February 1899.
- ¹⁵ ASD-MAE, Serie z, Contenzioso, folders 52, 57-58 and 60, contains the documents pertaining to the first and second inquest cited in the text.
- ¹⁶ ASD-MAE, Serie z, Contenzioso, folder 78, file 1371, letter from Enrico Rizzi to the Foreign Minister, dated 20 August 1901.
- ¹⁷ I analyze in detail the Italian emigration policies in Soresina, 2016.

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