

IDENTITY AND REVOLUTION: THE HISTORY OF THE 'FORTY DAYS' OF MAY 1945

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ABSTRACT

The story of the 'Forty Days' of pro-Yugoslav partisan rule in May 1945 in Trieste sheds light on the significance of the Yugoslav 'experiment' in the immediate postwar period for a range of groups who identified their interests with its future: working-class women, antifascists, anti-nationalists, and communists. It also reveals the contradictions which informed this experiment - a self-conscious cultural anti-nationalism would be manifested within the boundaries of a new political nation, the federated Yugoslavia. Although within the logic of the new government this anomaly presented no contradiction, in practice the new principle of citizenship contradicted shared memories of the past. Between 1945 and 1954 (when Trieste was finally returned to Italy) the contest for cultural legitimacy and political authority had placed the Anglo-American Allies in opposition to the rhetoric and ideals of 'brotherhood', of cooperation, and of the 'italo-slav' hybrid which had briefly challenged notions of ethno-national affiliation. The difficulty of exploring this area is in itself a legacy of the Cold War.

Ključne besede: jugoslovanska vojska, uprava, Trst, 1945

Parole chiave: esercito jugoslavo, amministrazione, Trieste, 1945

The 'problem' of Trieste has been commonly understood to involve the relationship between an urban Italian majority and a rural Slovene ('slav') minority population and the extent of their respective political and territorial sovereignty over the area known as Trieste. It has also involved the problem of how to draw political or national boundaries around ambiguous collective ethnic entities, of how to identify those entities, and of the extent to which rights to political representation should rely upon ethno-national identification. From late 1943, after the collapse of the fascist Italian state, and with the success of pro-Communist partisan units under Slovene authority in the Trieste area, the aforementioned problems also became entangled in the ideological oppositions that were at the heart of the Cold War.

Despite postwar dissatisfactions with a pre-existent political order which had brought Europe twice into

major conflict over issues of nationally defined territoriality, the fixation on 'ethno-national' forms of identification (and with it of Italian and Slovene incompatibility) dominated political arguments about Trieste. It was fundamental to identifying Trieste as a 'problem'. In the setting of post-war confusion it provided a familiar basis for the re-establishment of order which fitted in with British-American fear of the spread of communism and the power of the left in Europe generally.

The significance of the 'slav' to the construction of Cold War Italian identity in Trieste has been complicated and intensified by the month long administration of Trieste by the partisan Liberation Front in May 1945 - a period of communist rule that briefly preceded the British-American government. The 'forty days' as this period is known, has displaced attention from the war itself and from local culpability for fascism: Trieste's most respected historians and intellectuals have represented

the 'Balkans' and 'slavs' as an ever present threat to Trieste's cultural and political identification with *italianità* and Italy.

In the following account of the 'Forty Days' I have approached the end of the Second World War as a time when the fundamental premises of the discursive formations which shape and give meaning to a practical world order were challenged by being thrown into confusion and into question. Our present location, at the end of the Cold War should offer us the opportunity to broadly reflect upon the ways in which institutionally informed assumptions about national identity have been brought to bear on other sites of 'national' conflict, and have been instrumental in shifting the local dynamic of cultural relations, in terms of both gender and ethnicity.

MAY, 1945

The first of May 1945 marked the end of Nazi occupation in Trieste and Venezia Giulia. Plastered on walls and posts, the pro-Yugoslav posters invoking the *Triestini* were used to convey a sense of a world that might be created, of the ideas that were in sway. Written in Italian, like the manifestos that the American officer R.C. Dunlop had read in Monfalcone, they stressed the theme of italo-slovene fraternity and of the brotherhood between the citizens of Trieste and the forces of Marshal Tito. Their language echoed the Romantic portrayals of sacrifice for *patria* that had become common in Trieste after the First World War, but the blood that had been shed in this war was in the cause of brotherhood. They also identified fascism, and the pro-Italian Comitato di Liberazione Nazionale [CLN], as the enemy. They suggested that Trieste's fate now lay within the Yugoslav federation, and that the Allies were to be involved in this scenario's success. For the section of the population who regarded the arrival of the partisan troops as a liberation, these proclamations elicited an enthusiastic response.

For a portion of Trieste's population the day of liberation happily coincided with the traditional day of work and spring celebration, the first of May. Organisations like the Anti-Fašistične Ženske [AFŽ] emerged from their underground roles delighting in the opportunity for festivities, and reporting on the excitement that had led to many women abandoning their housework for a number of days. Demonstrations, manifestations of

solidarity for the new pro-Yugoslav government, as well as against it, were daily events. Unfriendly sources reported that the city seemed to have been 'invaded' by men, women and children coming 'down from the hills'. Perhaps these were peasants familiarising themselves with a city which they already knew as a market place for their goods, or from infrequent visits to city relatives. Costumed in their Sunday best, joined by workers' groups, they carried flags and banners supporting Tito, Churchill, and Stalin - all in the same breath. This was a ritual which rejoined the city centre with its hinterland, and with its suburbs. The accompanying Slovene cry, '*Trst je naš*', 'Trieste is ours', became the symbolic claim of belonging for those groups so long ostracised from Trieste's cultural and political identity, claimed in the name of *italianità*.¹

For some of those who had always been excluded from the Triestine community by dominant histories, and those who had felt politically oppressed by the policies of the Italian regime - whether part of anti-fascist, Slovene, working-class, intellectual, communist, or peasant communities - it must have seemed as if the liberation (in the words of one commentator) had '...transformed a servant people into a heroic people'.² Yet the festive mood, the sense of new beginnings, fought for its place amidst social disorder and death. The first weeks of liberation were marred by local skirmishes, and violent confrontations.³ Triestine chroniclers recorded that on 5 May 1945 'Yugoslav soldiers' opened fire on a CLN organised demonstration bearing Italian flags. Three people were killed. The same day the partisan government would ban outward manifestations of 'nationalist' sentiment - identified as support for the Italian nation-state.

In the period 30 April to 21 May, queues for food in Trieste began at 6.30 in the morning. Triestines were down to a ration of 150 grams of bread a day, 200 grams of meat, 50 grams of liver and scraps, and 300 grams of rice.⁴ An Allied report claimed that the food shortage was such that it compelled 'many Triestini to go foraging in the countryside and women carrying heavy bundles are often seen on main roads'.⁵ The parks, forests and hills surrounding the city of Trieste had been thoroughly scavenged for splinters of wood, for fruit and for nuts. In post-war Trieste day to day survival was a problem, food supplies were often only assured for less than ten days ahead.⁶ The population had

1 See Ennio Maserati, *L'occupazione jugoslava di Trieste (maggio-giugno 1945)* (DelBianco, Udine, 1963), p. 97ff.

2 Mario Pacor, *Confine orientale. Questione nazionale e resistenza nel Friuli Venezia Giulia* (Feltrinelli, Milan, 1964), p. 328.

3 *L'occupazione*, p. 98.

4 'Report on Conditions in Trieste, 17-23 May Copy of HQ 55 (Army) Area Report No. 2, Secret Trieste, War Office [WO] 204/6387, Public Record Office [PRO], London.

5 Copy of Trieste signal sent by Major Smith, PolAd 13 Corps to: ResMin AFHQ Serial 8854, 1/6/45, WO204/6387, PRO.

6 *Svečana predaja civilne oblasti. Izvršnemu odboru mesta Trsta. Delovna konferenca vojaškega in civilnega predstavnštva mesta Trsta* (OOOF, Maribor, 1945), p. 3.



**Partizani in Novozelandski v Trstu pred sodniško palačo 2. maja 1945. (NŠK).
I partigani e i neozelandsesi a Trieste davanti il tribunale, 2. maggio 1945.**

swelled from a pre-war figure of 250,000, to an estimated 400,000 needing shelter and provisions.⁷ Refugees included many slovene Triestines who had left Trieste under fascism, or had been forced to leave, and were now returning to the city.

It was amid this post-war social chaos that the Liberation Front initiatives for long-planned new political, social and cultural order in Trieste were made public. It had installed the Executive italo-Slovene Antifascist Committee [CEAIS] as the local authority, in an attempt to draw the various civilian antifascist voices in Trieste

into a body united under its leadership.⁸ On 13 May 1945, at an evening meeting held against the background of the competition between British-American forces and the partisans for control of Trieste's administration, the new government's inauguration was witnessed and only hesitantly approved by the invited Allied representatives. The command of the Yugoslav Army handed over power to a civilian government which represented both italians and slovenes and was responsible for the Trieste's transition to membership of the Yugoslav state.⁹ This government, based on the

⁷ UAIS, *Trieste nella lotta per la democrazia* (Trieste, Settembre 1945), p. 97.

⁸ The local pro-Italian nationalist resistance groups looked to the OF, and its newly created civil authorities as representing a Slovene, and therefore Yugoslav force, even though its composition was quite diverse. The slovenes had been the first to organise a resistance group in the area while the pro-Italian CLN was still germinating. Most arguments consider the greater discrimination suffered by the slovenes as giving them a greater initiative to organise. Consideration needs also to be given to the popularity for fascism in Trieste and the convenience of an already organised partisan resistance to nazism and fascism in Yugoslavia, and bordering areas. Because of the pro-communist and generally anti-fascist character of the partisans, locals, slovene or italian-speaking, could attach themselves to their cause, particularly through trade union representation. This meant that the Tito-led *Osvobodilna Fronta* did in fact represent a large number of Trieste's working class who might have identified themselves as italian, and even some intellectuals.

⁹ UAIS, *Trieste*, p. 93ff. & Pacor, *Confine orientale*, p. 333 cf. Maserati, *L'occupazione*, p. 66ff published under the auspices of the ISMLTs. Maserati either gets the dates wrong, or there is a major typographical error.

CEAIS, was composed of two bodies, covering the city and the region. The city of Trieste, because of its size and symbolic significance, had the status of a Council. The region Trieste, under the administration of the Regional Liberation Committee for the Littoral and Trieste, known by its acronym, PNOO, would include its rural hinterland, the Karst (*Carso or Kras*), the limestone almost treeless countryside, and the Littoral (*Littorale or Primorje*) along the coastline down to Rijeka/Fiume. The new administration was to be based on local control involving a complicated breakdown of government. This arrangement reflected the decentralised manner in which partisan groups themselves had been organised.¹⁰ All civil power in the city lay with the City Liberation Council, responsible in turn to the PNOO.¹¹ The Trieste Liberation Council was accountable to the PNOO which, in turn, communicated with the Slovene government.

The new civilian government pressed ahead with its institution of what it claimed was democratic rule, grounded in a citizenship which in principle obliterated the political significance of class, ethnic and even gender differences, in full awareness of the animosity that the British and American representatives held for their administration and for their political aims. Their rule in Trieste was to be legitimated through the creation of a new local political and cultural identity 'as a city of mixed inhabitants each with respected rights regardless of their nationality'. This new identity was defined not only as symptomatic of a non-fascist order, but as a safeguard against fascism and racism. According to Fulvio Forti, who had been promoted as the new city administration's Italian secretary, the idealised Triestine would support the new civil authority because they valued the principle of fraternity which it represented.¹² They would recognise that hatred between peoples was 'artificial and horrible', and that it could be understood as the product of historical-cultural forces, the laws of which were now to be rewritten.

The Yugoslav army was to retain some powers in Trieste but the stated aim was to achieve the principle of

an autonomous city and province within a democratic federal Yugoslavia, as its seventh republic.¹³ Administrative autonomy in the setting of a federation, and social fraternity, were to operate as alternatives to nationalism with all its bureaucratic and ideological limitations. But the relationship between the Regional and Trieste Council authorities, between Trieste, Slovenia and the rest of Yugoslavia was quite confused. Trieste was to be autonomous, but as a city it played a central role in the Primorje area administratively, economically, and culturally; the Primorje being part of Slovenia, another republic, so a republic within a republic.¹⁴ The specifics of Trieste's autonomy were vague and conflicting and fitted the improvisatory nature of the initiatives being taken for creating civilian government. They also inspired bureaucratic confusion and uncertainty, and the local abuse of power.

At an everyday level the new administration faced the problems of practical survival in a war-ravaged Trieste. There were difficulties with transport, for bringing supplies to Trieste, as well as courier services linking Trieste to the Slovene capital, Ljubljana, a source of financial aid.¹⁵ The PNOO established fourteen departments or ministries to deal with the situation regionally.¹⁶ Three floors in the People's House (*Casa del Popolo/Ljudski Dom*) previously the 'Casa del Fascio' on the port foreshore housed this administration.¹⁷ All German and collaborators' goods and unoccupied apartments had been requisitioned, programmes for the protection of forests created, and fascist societies dissolved.¹⁸ Tito's new Yugoslavia was to provide raw products, refining, and the loans needed for their regeneration.¹⁹ The finance department had opened up credit institutions and insurance offices. The Social Welfare department had responsibility for repatriating and rehabilitating soldiers and the politically persecuted, for providing information about the missing, allocating and paying pensions and providing food.²⁰ Public soup kitchens were set up distributing a total of 11000 meals daily of which 1500 were free, the remainder subsidi-

10 UAIS, *Trieste*, p. 95.

11 *Svečana predaja civilne oblasti*, p. 9.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 1 & p. 6.

14 Maserati also has difficulty untangling the threads of authority, see *L'occupazione*, p.62ff.

15 'Zapisnik seje preds. PNOO', 16/5/45, Inštitut za Novejšo Zgodovino [INZ], Ljubljana, PNOO 1/i, PNOO Trst.

16 These departments included: industry, commerce and supplies, economics, agriculture forestry and veterinary, finance, transport, navigation, education, construction, health, social welfare, justice, internal affairs, physical education and sport.

17 'Seznam sob in številke telefonov "Ljudskega doma", Mestni Komitet Trst', 16/5/45, INZ 237/ii, Propaganda Komisija.

18 'Report Commission for the Administration of National Property, KUNI [Komisija za Upravo Narodne Imovine]' 559/45, 1945, INZ 77/iii, PNOO-ZVU.

19 'Letter to the Slovene Finance Minister, Ljubljana, 13/5/45', INZ 2/iii, Tajništvo PNOO.

20 UAIS, *Trieste*, p.101; also PNOO za Slovensko Primorje Trst 9/5/45 Komanda Mesta Trst (Prometni Odsek), INZ 5/III, Tajništvo PNOO.

dised.²¹ However, fuel, food and accommodation shortages led to a thriving black market which it was necessary to keep under control. With the possibilities for social anarchy rampant and reports of looting, public order was an obvious concern, as was the Liberation Council's own concern for the 'enemy within' Trieste, and competition from the too evident presence of British and American forces. Policing of the populus was the responsibility of a newly created People's Defence (*Guardia del Popolo/Narodni Zaščiti*). It relied on former partisan units to create a 2,500 strong force under the direct control of the Liberation Council's Department of Interior Affairs.

The Council's tone of authority belied the concern that significant sections of the city population did not support it, and would not reply to its invitations. Bank and office workers were notoriously absent from the ranks of the Council, and while teachers and lawyers were supportive, they were also sensitive to the manner in which the Council operated and the forums in which they were granted a voice.²² Even those involved in the civil administration which was struggling to politically name and culturally place itself were not inclined to speak heroically and confidently amongst themselves. The most striking aspect of the minutes of the meetings of the Liberation Council is the uncertainty which pervaded the discussions bandied back and forth amongst this small circle of personalities, all men, brought in from their experiences in the war, and their varied professional and work backgrounds. Their interjections exude a sense of vulnerability and awareness of the 'unnaturalness' of the position in which they found themselves.

Obtaining the support of the intellectual professional classes, non-communists and, most importantly, those who thought of themselves first and foremost as Italian - on whose behalf Trieste had been governed since the First World War - was regarded by the Councillors as necessary to legitimate their own exercise of power. Ivan Regent, a member of the Council and one of the leaders of the Slovene socialists in Trieste in the inter-war period, insisted that Italian representation was important in order 'to show our new work, namely that this

is not a political matter but a technical matter for Trst...'.²³ There were obvious limits to the forms of political identification within the social and even cultural agenda being promoted by the Liberation Council. Although Trieste was to be a city of citizens called upon only to be 'revolutionary', the desire to establish equal ethnic footings meant that the ethnic principle of representation reigned supreme in the policies of the new administration. Education, for example, was to cater for Italians and Slovenes, both language groups would have their own schools, and responsibility for the education ministry was to be shared between an Italian and a Slovene - the first time, it was claimed, that equal rights in the cultural field between the Slovenes, a majority in the region, and the Italian majority in the city had been recognised.²⁴ Yet, while the special emphasis on Italo-Slovene brotherhood may have liberated those who preferred to avoid the politics of ethnicity, it was simultaneously responsible for placing renewed emphasis on ethnic identity.

The Council, recognising its actions were constantly being observed, felt it had to put to rest fears that it was the instrument of a 'discriminatory and unrepresentative' civil administration. Rather than represent an upheaval of society, an inversion, whereby those at the bottom would now make it to the top, all, it was argued, would have an equal share as far as it was possible.²⁵ The election was to be held within days as an exercise in public relations, affirming what the Council believed was an existing democracy, reflected in their own democratic intentions as representatives of those groups whose political voices had been liberated.

The Council executive acknowledged amongst themselves the historical importance of the 17 May meeting.²⁶ It was to be the first general election in Trieste for over twenty-five years, and the first ever to allow all women the vote. Regent's idea was that a Parliament, or General Assembly, could be created operating under the purview of an elected commission, the *Consulta*, whose job it would be to review the Council's mandate. There was no need for electoral rolls to be drawn up since there would be no secret ballot, and nominees would be voted for by especially invited delegates from

21 UAIS, *Trieste*, p.101.

22 'Seja Osvobodilnega Sveta za Trst', [SOS] 17/5/45, Institut za Narodnostna Vprašanja [INV] 53: Osvobodilni svet za Trst. Sejni Zapisniki 1945.

23 SOS, 15/5/45, INV 53. Regent repeats the same theme at a much later meeting, SOS, 29/5/45, INV 53: 'We wanted to have a Council which was not just made up of workers, but also of experts from all managements. We should not be able to be reproached for not representing the workers on our council. We want to broaden our council with Italians, so that tomorrow no one could say, as they do that in the Trieste council there only sit communists and Slovenes', trans. G. Sluga.

24 UAIS, *Trieste*, p. 111.

25 *Ibid.* Paolo Sema and Claudio Bibalo in *Cronaca sindacale triestina 1943-1978* (Editrice Sindacale Italiana, 1981) argue, somewhat cynically: 'Anzi, gli organi civili si sforzano di dare l'impressione che si tratti d'un potere popolare permanente, duraturo in una situazione definitiva, e lo fanno con un crescendo di attività, di iniziative e di emanazioni di decreti, ordini, regolamenti ecc.', p. 52.

26 SOS, 15/5/45, INV 53. Introduction to the meeting pp. 94-5.

work places, and from the Italian Communist Party, the *Unità Operaia*, the antifascist women and youth groups, both Italian and Slovene, and various independents who were labelled 'democrats'. Despite the claims to a new equality between the sexes, the proportion of female representation was lower, and mostly excluded from the upper echelons of political organisation. Claims to general representation and consensus were alike thwarted by the absence of middle-class Italian support which they most desired and which most eluded them. Overall, out of an estimated participation of 80,000 Triestines, 1348 delegates were to be elected to attend the General Assembly or Parliament of the greater Trieste which would then elect a *Consulta*, and reconfirm and enlarge the Council by eight members.

The election of the *Consulta Civica* and *Consiglio di Liberazione* for Trieste was held at 6 p.m., 17 May 1945, at the Politeama Rossetti Theatre, the Garibaldi Brigade, the Italian Communist partisan unit fighting under Yugoslav command, standing guard. On the stage were the Italian colours and the Trieste halberd, in the middle the Yugoslav and the Allied flags.²⁷ As the orchestra struck up the Garibaldi hymn it was enthusiastically applauded by the audience.²⁸ In the past the hymn had been used to invoke the significance of Italian republican nationalism, but now it was being used to spread the message of fraternity amongst the Italian and Slovene population in their adherence to the Yugoslav state. The Yugoslav national anthem followed.²⁹

For those cynical about the chances of fraternal government, the most significant and resonant speech for the evening was made by Major Giorgio Jaksetich, second in command in Kveder's military administration. Jaksetich was one of those Triestines who knew no

Slovene, spoke only Italian and had studied at the University of Turin.³⁰ He had made contact with Gramsci during his own time in prison for anti-fascist activities. With a history of communist activity, participation in the Spanish Civil War, and periods of exile and internment by the Italian government from 1927 until 1943, Jaksetich had earned himself an heroic reputation. At the time of the Italian armistice, he had joined the *Garibaldi Brigade in the Carso (Kras)*, and was nominated Political Commissar. He became the major protagonist in liaisons between the Italian Garibaldi formations in Venezia Giulia and the Liberation Front.³¹ In 1944, Jaksetich had distanced himself from the local CLN because he believed that it was fighting against the Slovene communists rather than the Nazis. The importance of his speech on the evening of the elections was that it established a strong connection between an international resistance and the new order. Jaksetich's outline of the battle over political ideals in the period of fascism before the war as well as during, in Spain as well as in Italy, aimed to forge a new identity for the local population which went beyond the social frontiers decreed by nationalism and more than twenty years of fascism. The key was the union between Slovenes and Italians who had already fought in Spain, and known exile, imprisonment and struggle.³² Their new task was to build a new Trieste, to 'direct it towards progress', with Tito at the head of their endeavour.³³

The theme of fraternity was the cornerstone not only of the PNOO's programme, but of their claimed achievement. They saw it as distinguishing them from the pro-Italian CLN. The new partisan administration regarded itself as anti-nationalist and the CLN as having encouraged hatred between Slovenes and Italians. Fra-

27 SOS, 15/5/45, INV 53, Štoka, De Stradi. It had already been decided at the meeting on the 15th that when the assembly took place the symbol of the Yugoslav flag would be central but immediately surrounding it would be an Italian, a Slovene, and a Triestine flag, to remind everyone of political and cultural traditions and tensions which the new Parliament wished to represent.

28 In the 1960s, the historian Ennio Maserati argued that of the local population only Slovenes and 'philo-communists' attended this election, even though his use of 'philo-communist' could disguise the Italian presence. But he also claimed that according to a Yugoslav archive, which he corroborated with an oral witness, the British, American, and Soviet military were also represented. In his eyes this counted as a blatant betrayal of Triestines to the occupying Yugoslav forces, *L'occupazione*, p. 68-69; The 'Report on conditions in Trieste 17-23 May Copy of HQ 55 (Army) Area Report No. 2', WO204/6387, suggested a clandestine Allied presence: 'Few Italians attended the meeting at the POLITEAMA ROSSETTI in the evening of May 17th which had very little more success, even though three quarters of the audience were Slavs imported from the suburbs and the surrounding country, and guards were placed on the doors to prevent anyone from leaving before closing time. The outstanding feature of the publicity campaign was the disappearance of Yugoslav flags and TITO's photographs from the streets. Yugoslav flags now fly only from buildings occupied by Yugoslav military and all slogans have been taken from trams and in a few cases replaced by small Italian communist flags pasted on the windows.'

29 *Il nostro avvenire*, 18/5/45, as cited in Council of Liberation of Trieste, [CLT] *The activity of the Council of Liberation of Trieste (from May 17 to Sep 21, 1945) with a short historical introduction*, (Trieste, 1945, English Edition), appendix, p. 55.

30 Biographical details from 'Trial of Giorgio Jaksetich', 13/8/45, Despatch No. 345, British Embassy Rome, FO371 (Foreign Office: General Correspondence after 1906 Political) 48838 [Political (Southern): Yugoslavia] R14593/24/92, PRO.

31 Recently, Jaksetich published an anthology of interviews, with ex-Garibaldini, *La brigata Fratelli Fontanot: Partigiani italiani in Slovenia*, (La Pietra, Milan, 1982).

32 *UAI Trieste*, p. 207-8, from *Il nostro avvenire* 18 maggio 1945, Allegato I. This English translation has interesting linguistic turns of phrase, but it is also significant for its identification of the audience to which the Liberation Front turned in order to gain legitimacy.

33 *Ibid.*, p. 208.

ternity was, for Jaksetich, the one relationship above and beyond class to defy 'history'. As a witness to the events of early May, the British journalist Sylvia Sprigge had perceptively suggested that for those with no vested interest in the pre-existing order, there was something truly exhilarating and self-legitimizing about the idea that history had been defeated, and that the identity of the city, as well of its inhabitants, had been liberated from the burden of the past.³⁴

The result of the election was unsurprising in that the existing Council was confirmed in its role as the executive of the Parliament. The new Liberation Council consisted of eleven 'italian', and seven 'slovene' members, and all born or resident in Trieste. The *Consulta* comprised 80 italians, 36 slovenes, and 1 Albanian, and amongst these 13 women.³⁵ They were named as professors, doctors, writers, bookkeepers, engineers, workers, technicians, artisans, businessmen, students, the 'unoccupied' (usually women), nurses, lawyers, butchers, a 'phonographer', tram conductresses, barbers, electricians, gas workers, innkeepers, and chemists.³⁶ The life stories of those who had been elected to the Council and *Consulta* were also told to authenticate their political position. What counted was previous anti-fascist participation, such as the Spanish Civil War, insurrectionary activity and commitment to the 'democratic' cause.³⁷ The meticulous ethnic, class, political, and occasionally gender, criteria established them less as individuals than as emblems of the representativeness of this new order.

Citizenship was identified through heroism in the resistance to fascism - a role to which partisan women were also making claims - and adherence to the ideal of fraternity in that task, rather than the story of fidelity to *patria* and ethnicity. The life-histories of individuals in this way provided a legitimate and direct link to the new

government, much as the recounting of ethnicity or 'race' had proven claims to membership of the nation in the past. However, the invention of such life-histories was implicated in the increasingly obsessive emphasis on ethnic inclusiveness (that meant including italians) which had replaced ethnic homogeneity (only italians).

Cultural or ethnic inclusiveness did in principle extend beyond the representation of the two key groups that had been identified. There was mostly silence on the Jewish and Greek population, sectors of both the Jewish and Greek communities had recognised the authority of the Liberation Council, and petitioned it for the return of assets confiscated by the Nazis. While the Greek community was usually identified with a pre-war wealthy merchant class, local representatives of the Greek Communist League, EAM, supported the Council.

The touted eradication of discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, and introduction of a new political basis for citizenship, also heralded the right to ethnicity as a private and social identity. It was not only slovenes and italians who would be regarded as 'native and natural inhabitants of Trieste and its hinterland', in principle members of the Liberation Council insisted that it would be possible to hear the voices of all minorities.³⁸ It was possible, in theory, to express Austrian, or even Turkish, identities within the new Yugoslav state.³⁹ The complexities surrounding ethnic rights in the 'new' Trieste were prominent in a reported encounter between Stoka and employees of Lloyd's shipping company which took place on the day of the election. Against a background of cries 'Viva Trieste Italiana', Stoka had rejoined, 'Yes, viva Trieste Italiana, even I say it, but in Trieste not only Italian will be spoken, but also slovene and, with respect, Turkish'. In the new Trieste as part of the federal Yugoslavia, Stoka warned that the song that had been sung in defiance of Austrian imperialism, 'In the home-

34 CLT, *Activity* p. 53-55; The Liberation Council's Rudi Ursich underlined Jaksetich's principles: 'The union, already realised on political ground between the Slovene and Italian peoples, had to pass the fire ordeal, which has had to test the whole and at the same time each part of it... It is absolutely necessary to clarify the atmosphere, it is necessary to remove in a reasonable way the obstacles that consciously or unconsciously interfere between the Italians and Slovenes, it is necessary to show to the world that the common struggle has really generated the indestructible fraternity between the Italian and Slovene elements... There is no future for the city if not in the frame of the fusion of the will of Italians and Slovenes of Trieste.' Ursich also points out that the war forged links between Trieste and the Yugoslav national groups, including the Croats, Dalmatians and Montenegrins of the Yugoslav IV Army, UAIIS Trieste, [italian version], p. 204.

35 'Report on conditions in Trieste 17-23 May Copy of HQ55 (Army) Report on Trieste No. 2', WO204/6387, p. 287/14. Bogdan Novak in *Trieste 1941-1954*, has 82 italians, 37 slovenes, and 1 unknown, p. 173.

36 'Report on conditions in Trieste 17-23 May copy of HQ 55 (Army) Area Report No. 2', WO204/6387.

37 Ursich, 17/5/45, in UAIIS, Trieste, p. 202.

38 There is also evidence of local Jewish groups recognising the legitimacy of the government and appealing to them for help with the restitution of their rights and property, SOS za Trst 26/5/45, INV 53, Jewish Council memo.

39 The local authorities had promised full support to an Austrian Committee of Liberation created by local Austro-philis, whose object was to unite antifascist austrians from Trieste and the coastal region and represent their interests to those local authorities. These members had ID cards which validated their Austrian citizenship. B. Smith Major, Further Memo 7/6/45 WO204/3182 & Main XIII Corps to AFHQ 1-912, 26/5/45 WO204/913.

land of Rossetti only Italian is spoken' [sung in the Triestine dialect], had lost its place.⁴⁰ However, whatever the promise or paradox of the Liberation Council's ambitious cultural pluralism, for those who had struggled in the Second World War to safeguard Italian culture and *civiltà*, the common call by Liberation Front supporters, 'Trst je naš', 'Trieste is ours', threatened cultural subversion. For them, Trieste had not only been claimed in a language other than Italian, but more specifically, using Slavic words.

Underwriting the acclamations of cultural equanimity was the liberationist project of 'national' emancipation that Schiffrer had recognised as paradoxical to the Liberation Front's anti-national claims - which relative to the inter-war period, discriminated in favour of Slovenes. 'National liberation' had not only been a crucial adjunct to the identification of war-time partisan resistance, it was a key platform of post-war communist ideology. The past, however, could not be done away with completely, there was no political or cultural *tabula rasa*. Trieste itself, the city, was still identified by the Council as 'Italian'. They did not consider this problematic since political and cultural entities could also be thought of as distinct forms of identification.⁴¹ Consequently, whatever the eventual possibilities of the hybrid Italo-Slovene cause, in the moment of liberation the partisan cause singled out quite distinctively the separateness of two identities - and ironically accepted the superiority of claims to territorial and cultural relevance made in the name of *italianità*.

The sexually differentiated separation of spheres also complemented the principle of discrete culture identification. In the early days of the May liberation, the partisan women's enthusiasm and hard work seemed to have paid off. With the Liberation Front's staging of elections for a civilian administration on 17 May 1945, some women were part of these delegations as well as being represented by women's organisations affiliated with the Liberation Front and with the Communist Party. As a result, issues concerning equal pay, the provision of subsidised crèches, food prices, and housing, rose in importance. Yet Liberation Committees had few women members, and AFZ membership remained less than representative. AFZ members would spend much of their time trying to involve as many women as possible from

Italian-speaking and middle-class areas, and organising their own conferences separate from the mainly male pro-Yugoslav communist organisations.

While some women did feel that the new order offered personal liberation, the Liberation Council's promise that all would 'finally be arbiters of their own destinies', *padroni* in their own homes, had lacked specificity, and *padroni*, like *fraternità*, was not a word whose meaning commonly extended to women.⁴² When members of the partisan administration decided to make a record of the events of May 1945 later in the same year, the failure to provide a secret ballot in the elections was blamed in part on the participation of women. The official history implied that the continued presence of fascists in Trieste meant that women might be swayed to vote for the right.⁴³ While this might have been an argument the ex-partisan administrators decided upon retrospectively hoping to exonerate themselves, the fear of a potentially conservative female vote in a largely Catholic region, as well as of fascism, was regarded by the partisans as a legitimate argument against more conventional democratic proceedings. This concern with a female 'enemy within' inadvertently allied them with their pro-Italian political opponents.

The primacy of Liberation Council rule constituted for pro-Italians as much an emotional as political issue. They translated the proclaimed antifascist objectives of epuration to be anti-Italian in their real intent, claiming that the pro-Yugoslav forces had arrested 6000 persons in Trieste and neighbouring Gorizia, later releasing 4,150; and 1850 had been deported of which 1150 had never returned. In addition to the rumoured massive deportations - the officially organised aspect of the Yugoslav-coordinated *caccia al fascista* - was the concern that the communist partisans were burying their opponents in mass graves utilising the *foibe* around Trieste, natural abysses dotting the Carso countryside.⁴⁴ Just as in Istria in 1943, Nazis were said by the locals to have thrown antifascists, and now partisans, it was being rumoured, redefined as all 'slav', had killed and thrown their nemesis, the Italian middle-class.

On 31 July 1945, *The Times* carried a story from Rome entitled 'Foiba di Basovizza'. The Venezia Giulia Allied Military Government had begun excavating a foiba on the basis of stories being spread about the

40 'Velina relativa a una seduta della direzione dell'UAIS e ragguagli politici riguardanti gli impiegati del Lloyd redatti dall'UAIS, 17/5/45', Istituto per la storia del movimento di liberazione nel Friuli Venezia Giulia [ISMLFVG] XXX/2294.

41 At the same time the local union movement, *Sindacati Unici*, was reorganising to form a single labour organisation for both Italians & Slovenes, with specific sections for clerks & intellectuals, Novak, Trieste 1941-1954, p. 175.

42 UAIS, *Trieste nella lotta per la democrazia* (Trieste, 1945), p. 92.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 94.

44 In 1943, an uprising of Slovenes and Croats against Italian fascists culminated in the murder of hundreds in Istrian foibe according to Fogar 'Venezia Giulia', p. 104-5. See Broad, 'Central Mediterranean to FO, 11/9/45, FO371 48953 [Political (Southern):Yugoslavia] R15448/15263/92; Basovizza Incident 9/8/45 FO371 48836 [Political (Southern):Yugoslavia] R13413/24/92; See also Situation Summary 9-15 August, Sullivan, 24/8/46 FO371 59359 [Political (Southern):Yugoslavia] R12770/3/92, PRO.

bodies of missing New Zealand soldiers being found in pits in Basovizza, a slovene village on the outlying hillsides of Trieste on the road to the Slovene border. The article claimed that while this information was false, Tito's troops had certainly carried off at least 3000 italians when they withdrew from Trieste and the western part of Venezia Giulia. A later investigation of the foiba in question revealed no evidence of a mass grave. Eight bodies and dismembered corpses were found, but their 'nationality' and cause of death was unknown. An Allied Committee investigating complaints against the Liberation Council in 1945 reported that although there was no evidence to support the allegations of mass graves, 'without doubt' during the 'Yugoslav occupation' many thousands of persons were thrown down foibe.⁴⁵ These were assumed to be persons who had been employed in the fascist security organisations - the *Questura*, *Pubblica Sicurezza*, *Guardia di Finanza*, *Carabinieri*, *Guardia Civica* - as well as italian antifascists. The Committee reported that one of the witnesses, a woman, 'after describing what she saw added with relish "and how the Fascists screamed".' Don Malalan, a priest from neighbouring locality, also admitted to the Committee that mass killings had taken place. The Committee described Malalan as a 'fanatic pro-slav', and 'bitterly anti-Italian'. He was quoted as having supported the incident on the grounds of its legality, claiming that at the time there was a great deal of confusion, and many people were suspected of being traitors or spies for the Germans. All the prisoners, he added defensively, had been tried and were dead before being thrown into the Basovizza foiba.

On 2 May Malalan had visited Basovizza to officiate at a burial of partisans because the local priest was absent. While there he noticed that in a nearby field there were about 150 civilians 'who were recognisable by their faces as members of the QUESTURA' facing the wrath of a populace determined to have their revenge. Officers of the Yugoslav IV Army questioned and tried the prisoners in the presence of all the populace. As soon as one of the alleged fascists was interrogated, four or five women would rush up and accuse them of having murdered or tortured one of their relatives, or of having burned down their houses. The accused were then butted and struck by the soldiers and eventually always admitted the crimes ascribed to them. They were then all shot.

On 3 May 1945 Malalan was again at Basovizza and witnessed 250 to 300 civilians and about 40 German soldiers being executed in the same place. Don Sceck of Cognale, described by the Committee as a 'rabid anti-

Italian' had refused to administer sacraments to some of the prisoners on the grounds that it was not worthwhile. Malalan claimed that Sceck had administered last rights to one victim from Trieste's *Pubblica Sicurezza* but not without berating the prisoner at the same time: 'You have erred until now, you have amused yourself by torturing the slavs... The punishment about to be given you has been full deserved.'⁴⁶

In the turmoil, uncertainty and confidence of the liberation of Northern Italy from Nazi occupation, large sections of the population had been known to disappear, a consequence of long-built up acrimony and hatred against fascists, and the opportunities for personal settling of accounts. Although members of the Liberation Council and PNOO endeavoured to maintain their integrity around an often contradictory agenda of fraternity and anti-fascism, the consequences of this agenda were in many ways outside of their direct control. Enemies of fascism could not ignore that its policies had directly juxtaposed the superiority of Italian culture to 'slav' non-culture. Jozé Pirjevec, a Trieste historian, has evoked the sense of anti-Italian sentiment that this liberation let loose. He tells the story of an italian artisan who for years forbade his slovene wife to speak a single word of her own language in his presence. On 1 May 1945, hardly had the partisans begun to enter the city than she took the white, red and green flag which had gagged her for so long, and burned it in the stove.⁴⁷

Popular resentment and vengeance were exacerbated by the Liberation Council's official approach to the questions of incarceration, of epuration and of justice. Their members saw the fight against fascism as stretching back before the Second World War. Fascism had not merely been transported to Trieste with the Nazis in 1943, it was a home-grown phenomenon. They assumed that the Nazis had been able to rely on local collaborators in their work, those who had been loyal all along to Mussolini, who had willingly enacted discriminatory policies against the local slovene population, and had possibly participated in the setting up of a concentration camp, Risiera San Sabba, on the outskirts of Trieste, to which fellow partisans had fallen victim. The PNOO argument rationalising the absence of a secret ballot had implied as much. The obverse of the heroic portrayals of those who had fought fascism, was the convenience of a continuing fascist - at times defined as italian nationalist - presence within Trieste that had to be dealt with and purged. Trieste may have been liberated from Nazi occupation, but the war against fascism, as this group insisted, was not yet over. The difficulty of both apportioning blame and of deciding a criterion for

45 Investigating Committee Venezia Giulia, Report, 27/9/45, Pt. 2, 'Yugoslav Atrocities', FO371 48953 R21055/15263/92, PRO.

46 *Ibid.*

47 Pirjevec, 'Gli sloveni a Trieste: 1945-1947' in *Trieste 1941-1947* (Edizioni Dedolibri, Trieste, 1991), p. 127.

rehabilitation lay at the basis of a potentially exclusive as well as inclusive means of civic identity. Not only was the validity of an anti-fascist past open to manipulation (occasionally permitting the inclusion of fascists under a new guise) but it could only survive as long as the history of the resistance itself could continue to be told as a moralistic tale. If any moment had tainted the partisans' claims to the absolute higher moral ground it was their advocacy of epuration which reinforced their increasingly manichean sense of the political contest at hand.

The process of epuration of the enemies of the new order, and implicitly, of the people, was, in principle, to be carried out in an orderly and legal fashion by the new authorities. The PNOO created a separate Propaganda Commission to deal with what it regarded as decades of fascist indoctrination. Vigilance against continuing 'fascist' practices was maintained by appointing delegates in industrial concerns to represent the new authority's interests and report on suspected 'fascists'.⁴⁸ Businesses and industries were to be purged at all levels of 'fascist' workers and managers. Those arrested on suspicion of fascist practices were to be dealt with through a popular court, the *Tribunale Popolare*.

Although it took steps to repeal all fascist laws based on racial, national, and social inequality, even the new government's mode of organisation drew unfavorable comparisons with fascist populism (a criticism made, for example, by the CLN). A PNOO official tabling a report on the state of the pro-Yugoslav press, found herself acknowledging (and dismissing) fascist associations evident during a celebration of Tito's birthday, which she witnessed at a Trieste factory. Some workers were resisting the acclamation of Tito, 'since it all reminds them of fascism'.⁴⁹ It was not just the lack of worker enthusiasm for Tito which concerned her, but the fact that it might go noticed by an outside observers. In the mind of defensive supporters of the new regime, this invisible audience was made up of English journalists who were ready to pounce on any evidence of the Council's failures, or lack of popularity.

Some members of the Council acknowledged that they were not completely satisfied with the effectiveness of their system of justice, in some cases, the spirit of

vengeance had taken over. At a Council meeting for 25 May, Comrade Ferlan charged that their aim of including a greater number of italians in the government was being hindered by the process of epuration. There were too many arbitrary arrests, and more caution was needed. His message was conciliatory; 'It is true', Ferlan contended, 'that we have also suffered a lot, but it would not be right if we now executed reprisals. I appeal to the slovene comrades, that they mediate with the responsible authorities, and in that way facilitate the co-operation of italian elements'.⁵⁰

Leading figures in the Council, however, were in fact more sensitive to the ways in which persecution could be interpreted as ethnically motivated.⁵¹ The locally constituted People's Guard may have been responsible for the incarceration of all those who had abused anti-fascists and slovenes in the name of a fascist Italy - and may have even enrolled ex-fascists to do so - but it worked with the Yugoslav Fourth Army which oversaw the arrests of fascist police and security forces and war criminals, and the Yugoslav secret police, OZNA, which dealt specifically with political crimes.⁵²

Protests, some originating from within the government's own institutions, the Public Prosecutor's office, and from the Higher People's Court for the Slovene Littoral, were also directed at the Council, and plagued the Council's authority. Stories abounded of partisan patrols making random arrests without warrants: people, cows and cars had been taken away without authorisation.⁵³ The PNOO itself called for increased control of army units, and limited powers of detention for the People's Guard.⁵⁴ On 29 May, the Public Prosecutor for Trieste, Dr. Stanko Peterin, sent a report to his counterpart for the Slovene Littoral.⁵⁵ His letter outlined what he regarded as the worrying problem of the number of people coming to his office complaining about their missing friends or relatives who had been arrested and whose whereabouts were now unknown.⁵⁶ Frantic petitioners queried the detention of friends for long periods without reason, or without trial. They were even turning to the Allies for help, which meant that the Allies had fuel for their propaganda against the PNOO and Trieste Liberation Council.

48 Maserati, *L'occupazione*, p. 74.

49 'Kratko poročilo o Propagandnem delu v Trstu' INZ 237/ii, (n.d.), trans. G. Sluga.

50 SOS 25/5/45, INV 53.

51 Novak, Trieste, p. 184.

52 SOS 26/5/45, (2) 'Problemi, ki se nanašajo na sodišče', INV 53. There was also a separate category for those referred to as 'arrested lately', and who had to be released because of the threat to the Council's credibility.

53 'Javni Tožilec za mesto Trst M2/45 v Javnemu Tožilcu za Slovensko Primorje', Izredno Poročilo, Trst, 29/5/45, INZ 29/iii, Upravno Politične Komisije pri PNOO.

54 Komanda II Sektorja Narodne Milice - Odsek za javni red, Trst, 1/6/45. INZ 73/i: 'Predmet, navodilo za delo', NZ II Sektor.

55 Peterin was also a professor in International Law and the History of International Relations at the University of Ljubljana, Jean-Baptiste Duroselle *Le Conflit de Trieste 1943-1954* (Editions de l'Institut de Sociologie de l'Université libre de Bruxelles, 1966), p. 14.

56 'Javni Tožilec za mesto Trst...' 29/5/45.



*Prizori iz jugoslovanskega Trsta. (NŠK).
Momenti della "Trieste jugoslava".*

Just as Peterin had recognised, the makeshift offices of the British and American forces which had set up a competing authority in the city were besieged daily with complaints, requests and denunciations.⁵⁷ The Allies complained to the Council that slovenes were judging italians, rather than antifascists judging fascists. The Council objected not only because these accusations delimited its field of representation to 'slovenes', but because, as Ursic was almost too quick to explain: 'Many still do not understand the reason for all these arrests, we cannot forget that we were downtrodden for all those years'.⁵⁸

No matter how much Ursic protested that the propaganda which labelled the Council 'murderers and hunters of italians' was not true, images of hatred, and the

fear of the *foibe* obsessed the italian-speaking intellectual population, tainted the legitimacy of the Liberation Council, and marred the relationship between italians and slovenes in Trieste and Venezia Giulia.⁵⁹ Historians otherwise hostile to the Liberation Councils, such as Bogdan Novak, have pointed out that a large number of those arrested were slovenes, and of the deported only two-fifths came from Venezia Giulia. However, for italian nationalists the meaning of the forty-two days following 1 May 1945 was significant because it symbolised the expected cultural as well as political threat of slavs to *italianità*. The 'Yugoslav occupation', or as one Italian resistance CLN poster extolled, the *sagra carnevalesca*, sufficed as a metonymic expression re-writing the history of antifascism, and of the Second

57 The AMG were also competing in dealing with the food shortages, the black market, and labour regulations. SOS Trst 17/5/45, INV 53; 'Improvvisa interruzione della seduta del Consiglio di Liberazione. Storica giornata al municipio di Trieste', INZ 237/i 'Seznam članov preds. PNOO 1945'. Propaganda Komisija.

58 SOS 21/5/45, INV 53. The Allied military presence in Trieste was assuming authority to hear complaints about these arrests made by the local population, SOS 26/5/45.

59 Seja Skupštine OS, 29/5/45, INV 53.

World War as characteristic of the ongoing clashes between italians and slavs for rights to Trieste.⁶⁰ But even the figures, let alone the ethnic and political make-up of victims continue to be contested.⁶¹

To a certain extent the activities of the Council and PNOO were irrelevant to its destiny. The invisible audience that was constantly addressed by supporters of the Council played a more potent role in determining the Council's legitimacy, as did the activities of the Allied forces and of the Yugoslav state, now firmly in Tito's reigns. On the one hand the italian middle-class (whose support the Council craved) expected the new authorities to behave in a brutal and anti-Italian manner. On the other hand, the British and American Allied forces were seeking grounds upon which to establish their own authority over that of the partisan government.

In the city of Trieste the competing Allied administration and intelligence services unabashedly asserted their presence and authority. New Zealand soldiers patrolled a section of the foreshore, and a half dozen small ships of the British Royal Navy were tied up at the quay, with one lone destroyer sitting expectantly in the harbour. Even discussions between Tito and Alexander took little notice of the local authority.⁶² By 21 May 1945, only three weeks after Liberation Front rule had been assumed, Tito had agreed to conditions for the future of Venezia Giulia outlined by the Supreme Allied Commander, Field Marshall Alexander.⁶³ A few days later the members of the Allied Military Government-in-waiting had arrived in the city incognito. The Belgrade agreement, signed by Tito and Alexander on 9 June, allowed for the establishment of Allied Military Government in Venezia Giulia west of the Morgan line and in Pola, with the rather vague condition that use would be made of those existing civil administrations which could be regarded as functioning satisfactorily.

In Trieste, even among the Liberation Council, rumours were rife, feeding uncertainty and the sense that all was not under control, even though the Tito-Alexander agreement supposedly stipulated the retention of the new administrations. Complaints of disappearances, repression, and anarchy dominated the Council and PNOO's own agenda as did the urgency of widening their popular base. But italians involved in the Liberation Front government (described by the historian Ennio Maserati as limited in number and for the most part belonging to the professional bourgeoisie and the middle classes) were the target of CLN sabotage and recrimina-

tions, of attacks published in underground papers, and of intimidation by terrorist activities. The aim was to create panic amongst those italians who were cooperating with the Liberation Councils, and to deter further cooperation.⁶⁴

The Anglo-American forces were increasingly prone to representing the Liberation Council as an organ for both Yugoslav nationalist and communist imperialism, definitions against which the Liberation Council laboured unsuccessfully. In the context of their political aims of inclusion within Yugoslavia, even if for the proclaimed purpose of creating a more localised and 'anti-nationalist' form of government, it became almost impossible to fend off criticism that they were 'slavs', nationalists, and imperialists.

Those critical of the Council saw it as a mirror-image, rather than antithesis, of the Nazi order that had immediately preceded it - another form of occupation. The 'occupation' was the antithesis of normal Triestine politics and society. Mass disappearances, local cases of summary justice in the 'liberation' period in the Venezia-Giulia region, were regarded not merely as symptomatic of the violence of the opposition between fascism and anti-fascism, or communism, but of the fundamental differences between italians and 'slavs'. Whatever the Liberation Council's internal difficulties and failures, growing hostilities between Soviet ambitions and the Anglo-American expectations of the new Europe, mapped out culturally and economically as part of the West, meant that those opposing Trieste's inclusion in Yugoslavia would interpret its Liberation government as an inversion, the most carnivalesque of all possible options for its future - because it represented the desires of a slav peasant population, rather than the legitimate citizens of Trieste, the pro-Italian urban male.

LIBERATION TO OCCUPATION

The meaning of May 1945 is no simple matter, even during the forty-two days (to be precise) of pro-Yugoslav rule. The Liberation Council was constantly having to respond to the ways in which it was actively being defined by those inherently opposed to its existence, and the invisible audience it itself imagined had lain siege to its credibility. With the war all but over it found the most suspect basis of its administration was the very principle of 'brotherhood' which it pronounced both in the tradition of communist internationalism and solidari-

60 1946 poster, see also 'L'Italia ritornerà nella Venezia Giulia', *Libera parola* No. 1, ISMLTs XLIII/xii.

61 For an illuminating outline of the historical treatment of these disappearances see Galliano Fogar, 'Venezia Giulia 1943-1945: Problemi e situazioni', in *Trieste 1943-1947* pp. 93-124.

62 Floyd E. Weidman, 'Informal report based on visit to Trieste 10-13 May', Secret, Air Corps for Brigadier Gen. Chas. M. Spofford, the Assistant Chief of Staff, Allied Forces HQ G-5 Section APO 512, 14/5/45, WO204/3182, PRO.

63 C.R.S. Harris, *Allied Administration of Italy 1943-1945* (London, HMSO, 1957), p. 342.

64 Maserati, p. 64-5.

ty, and as the solution to the 'problem of Trieste'. Its enemies were identifying communist rule as alien through its association with a slav presence and the unnaturalness of Italian support for a Yugoslav state. It was the CLN which most effectively employed a familiar and 'realistic' world-view to press home its own cause of an Italian Trieste.

Embittered by the partisans assumption of local control and being forced into opposition, the CLN rallied to publicise its position on the 'Yugoslav' occupation: It established its own headquarters in the civic library, and the parish of Sant'Antonio Nuovo in the city centre - making plain their association not with the 'popular' but with culture, and, increasingly, the Roman Catholic church.⁶⁵ The 'Italian' citizens of Trieste were invited to exercise their *alta civiltà*, to distance themselves from the barbarism of the 'Yugoslavs', and thus to remain 'padrone of their own destiny'. The CLN call to Triestini was generally a call to an Italian, mainly male, urban citizenry, focussing on the working classes and the intellectuals, with the occasional specific reference to women as 'mothers'. Those not included in their definition of Triestine were allocated to the borders as 'alien'. It was logical they claimed, that even Turks or Arabs might seek exile in 'our city', but it did not give them the right to claim it as Turkish or Arabic.⁶⁶

The end of the war had seen the world turned upside down, what was needed, claimed the CLN in a flamboyant assertion of its cultural supremacy, was a renewal of perennial values:

*"However negative and contradictory was fascism, all ideas, ineluctably, have been fulfilled in the burning fire of a reality which has positively purified souls and spirits, freeing them from illusions and fortifying the aristocratic ideal of the nation, the faith in a unique religion which will never die."*⁶⁷

The anti-slav cause of the pro-Italian resistance in Trieste led in late 1945 to the expulsion from its ranks of one of the founder members of the Action Party, along with the historian Fabio Cusin, for favouring 'a rapprochement with the slavs'.⁶⁸ After May 1945, the Action Party newspaper *La Voce Libera* consistently argued for Trieste's return to Italy on the grounds that Italy represented *civiltà* and Yugoslavia stood for barbarie, and for the *civiltà delle foibe*, that Trieste represented the border between Western liberty and Eastern oppression.⁶⁹

These themes of a millenarian Italian civilisation and of Trieste as the centre of the radiation of a superior culture were deeply entrenched in nationalist ideology.⁷⁰ The defence of Trieste against a cultural threat justified not only fascists and collaborationists, but also unified the pro-Italian resistance movement. In balancing out the end of an Italian Trieste over the means utilised, the patriotic resistance could reduce fascism to an aberrant political phenomenon alien to the inherent traditions of the Italian nation-state and even accept its place in defending Trieste from slav influence.

The public relations work of both the CLN and the PNOO in the post-June period gave rise to popular versions of the resistance. These included accounts of the actual moment of the 'liberation' of Trieste in forms that could be circulated amongst the Allied forces, the British Foreign Office, the American State Department, the Peace Commission, and anyone who was willing to give them a hearing. As with the Liberation Council's own faith in the proclamations of popular rule, fraternity and 'democracy', the CLN strove to legitimate its own claims through historical and cultural continuities and traditions, integrated through the repetition of the question of origins, of who had got there 'first', whether in relation to the Roman period, or the May government.

The idea that pro-Yugoslav rule represented an inversion of the world's order was emphasised in the CLN's literature, particularly that addressed to the Allies. The inversion relied on a negation of the principles of history, geography, and ethnography. The situation in 1945 was interpreted as a contest between Tito and the 'Yugoslav communists' on the one hand and Italy on the other. The meaning of the forty-two days following 1 May 1945 took on significance in the context of its threat to *italianità*. Yugoslavia was a federation of three races who had fought each other brutally. By inserting Venezia Giulia into that system it could be expected that in a short time the region would also lose its demographic *qualità* and its *civiltà*, and become deformed, barbarian, and sequestered from the 'world'. Events during the forty-two days, the stories of disappearing citizens and of the *foibe*, were offered as proof.⁷¹

The local administration itself could not avoid (and ultimately itself fell victim to) these fundamental criticisms. They competed with the authority of an intelligentsia who held a keen sense of the historical and po-

65 Novak, *Trieste*, p. 188.

66 'Dal giorno dell'occupazione jugoslava,' n.n., n.d., ISMLFVG XXX/2286 (2) p. 9. Compare this with Franc Stoka's speech declaring Trieste a place where even Turkish could be spoken in chapter 2.

67 'L'Italia ritornerà nella Venezia Giulia', *Libera parola*, No. 1, Trieste, giugno 1945, p. 14.

68 Report No.17, 2 November 1945, 'Trieste AIS D Section Secret Report', WO:204/6400, PRO.

69 Cited in Luciano Biecker, Roberto De Rosa, Silvano Benvenuti, 'La stampa', in *Nazionalismo e neofascismo nella lotta politica al confine orientale 1945-75* (ISMLFVG, n.d.), p. 29, 33.

70 *Ibid.*, p. 29.

71 See also 'L'Italia ritornerà nella Venezia Giulia', *Libera parola* No. 1, ISMLTs XLIII/xii.

litical implications of their roles as witnesses. Pier Antonio Quarantotti Gambini, the librarian-cum-director of the Municipal Library, kept a diary during the post-war period that he would later publish as *Primavera a Trieste*. Much of the book is about Trieste itself, about the nature of what was under threat and why the partisans had to be regarded as occupiers rather than liberators. Not even the Nazi occupation has been written about with such animosity. The narrative of *Primavera* situates the events of May 1945 as part of a much longer plot of historical and cultural threats posed by 'slav' barbarians against the *civiltà* of Italian Trieste.⁷² Gambini charged that Triestines could not welcome the Yugoslavs as liberators because their aims were to detach Trieste from Italy, and unlike the Anglo-Americans, to stay for ever.⁷³ Triestines and Istrians had been Italians for centuries, despite the presence of Slavs. It was the job of people like him to make sure that all Italians and non-Italians (which did not include 'Slavs') were made aware of this reality.⁷⁴

Gambini's was the first of a flood of literary interpretations of the resistance and liberation- which included Gian Stuparich's autobiography. Silvio Benco, associated with the newspaper *Il Piccolo* in the fascist period, also kept a diary of sorts written between 1 June and 1 August 1945, which was published in 1946 as 'A Contemplation of Disorder'.⁷⁵ His record of the newly liberated Trieste echoes Gambini's preoccupation: the threat to an Italian social order. The forty-two days were the anti-climax of the battle with the Nazis, and Tito's 'Balkan' soldiers were even more threatening than the occupying force that they had replaced. Described as Bosnians, Montenegrins, sporting long beards, and Turkish slippers with only one thought in mind - not to capture the Germans but to vent their rage on citizens - they tore Italian flags from windows, and raised the flags of another country, they defaced walls with their Slav writing. Rows of peasants were brought in from the Carso to celebrate, singing in Slav. Totally exasperated by events, Benco asserted that not even in the twenty years of fascism, nor in the 500 years of Austrian dominion, nor in the battle against Austria, had Trieste suffered such a crude deformation of its will and invasion of its

sentiments. 'Could I', he asks, 'an Italian from Trieste, have in my soul any other image of the present which was not one of a universal disorder?'⁷⁶ As an Italian Benco argued that he had no other perspective from which to view the 'occupation' than as carnival, an inversion of the order of things.⁷⁷

Carlo Schiffrer echoed the assumptions of cultural opposition which lay behind these themes of disorder in *Historic Glimpse at the Relations Between Italians and Slavs in Venezia Giulia*, published in 1946, the same year that he participated in international peace talks on the area's future in the capacity of historical expert for the Italian government delegation.⁷⁸ The monograph traced the continuity of the Roman population of Venezia Giulia, presenting 'Slavs' and 'Italians' in the region as antagonists: 'The two nations who are disputing the region could not be more different', Schiffrer wrote, 'because one is an URBAN nation and the other a RUSTIC one.' He presented the ethnography of Slavs - an 'amorphous multitude' - as the antithesis of 'vital' Italian culture. As in the *Venezia Giulia* 'survey', history and geography were interrelated in a narrative of 'national' oppositions:

"For the Italian, sentiments, traditions, education lead to extend the 'holy soil of the fatherland' as far as the mountain-range of the Alps [...] And if within these limits there are rustic populations of another tongue, the psychology of the Italian, derived from a thousand years old traditions [sic], finds it quite natural that the country must follow the lot of the towns and not the other way about. The more so, as a similar solution seems to him more than justified by history, by his own undisputed past predominance, by his own culture which is more antique and richer than that most recent one of the slave [sic] populations."⁷⁹

For Schiffrer the period of the Risorgimento culminating in Garibaldi made Italian nationalism good. The East, by contrast, had a 'narrow' culture, so that, 'sentiments and affections of a narrow nationalism multiplied [sic] themselves' and were the essential facets of 'Slav' and Balkan identity. The superior vitality of Italian culture would work its own effect. We find masculine *italianità* prevailing in Schiffrer's description of

72 Gambini, *Primavera a Trieste* (Edizioni Italo Svevo, 1985), p. vi.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 22.

74 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

75 Silvio Benco, *Contemplazione del disordine* (DelBianco Editore, Udine 1946).

76 *Ibid.*, preface p. 7.

77 See also Giulio Cervani's description of the liberation period as a crisis, 'a humiliating disorder'. May 1945 had seen 'an overturning of history and politics', whereby the economic and ethnic groups which had until then been in the position of subalterns found themselves in control, (Preface to Maserati, *L'occupazione*, p. 8). In 1953 Diego De Castro published, *Trieste. Cenni riassuntivi sul problema giuliano nell'ultimo decennio*. For him the 42 days could be encapsulated in the mode of Coceani and Benco as a time of the *foibe*, of massacres, arrests, deportations, and the subversion of all Trieste's civilissime institutions.

78 Schiffrer, *Historic Glimpse at the Relations Between Italians and Slavs in Venezia Giulia*, (Trieste, 1946).

79 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

'mixed' marriages'. He contended that 'in these families as a rule' 'italian sentiments, language and culture' tends to prevail because the husband was most often italian. The 'slav' was feminine, weaker, assimilable, without the resources for resistance. As carriers of ethnicity, the nomadic 'slav' female population entering the city to find work had no selves to assert, and they aided the subjugation of 'slav' ethnicity. For Schiffrer their lack of identity meant also that the women could be manipulated and used against the sincerity of male italian patriotism. Somewhat paradoxically, Schiffrer expounded in his work both the likelihood of the assimilation of slavs by Italian culture and the inauthenticity of slav pretensions to assimilation, exemplified by bilingual slovenes who could never become authentic italians. The political impact of Schiffrer's analyses remained however unambiguously influential. Upon the publication of *Historic Glimpse*, Conte Sforza, the Italian Foreign Minister, commended the work as exposing a lively yet dispassionate understanding of the relationship between 'an urban civilisation like the italian and the slovene masses'.⁸⁰ AMG praised Schiffrer as 'a reputable and objective statistician and ethnologist'; while he was secretary of the Italian Socialist Party in Venezia Giulia, AMG authorities declared him 'one of the few local politicians who has an enlightened attitude towards the slovenes' and were happy to bestow upon him a range of positions in the bureaucracy, including Vice-President of the British-American Zone and head of the department of Social Welfare.⁸¹

With no certain resolution of the Trieste 'problem' in favour of Italy, in 1948 Triestine historian Attilio Tamaro published *Two Years of History 1943-45*. All actions, motives were to be judged in the context of a 'slav' peril and the ultimate calamity which befell Trieste, the 'forty days' of 'slav occupation': 'the most shameful, humiliating, saddest scar and insult that the *italianità* of the city ever suffered in the long millennia of its existence'.⁸² In that same year, the ex-Mayor, Bruno Coceani, published his own testimonial to the 'forty-days', *Mussolini, Hitler, Tito at the eastern gate of Italy*. He described his city as being the subject of the heights of terror: 'The slavs abandoned themselves to their predatory and vindictive instincts ... more than during any other domination undergone by the city, the usurpation, the oppression, the violence were all the worse for the lack of *civiltà* of the occupiers.'

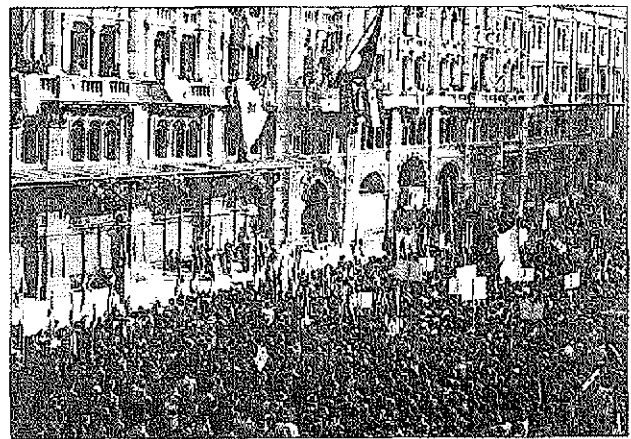
In this war of words, factions within the pro-Italian intelligentsia and press most provoked by the

'occupation' employed rhetorical strategies which it hoped would be effective in the pursuit of international support. Some of the most degrading assaults against the partisans as 'slavs' were reserved for women who had actually donned uniforms and participated in a conventionally male sphere. The 'drugarizza', the female partisan, was a favourite object of ridicule for italian nationalists. The following excerpt, from *Il Grido dell'Istria*, published in 1946 at a time when Istria, in accordance with the accepted provisional postwar peace settlement, was under Yugoslav trusteeship, highlights the crude nature of these attacks:

*"[the drugarizza is] an animal that belongs to the human species, of the female sex; as a result of special living conditions and of practices contrary to nature, it is facially, corporeally, and spiritually transformed. In that transformation what was most delicately feminine becomes a monstrous being, huge and muscular, masculine. Its spirit harmonises with its body and accumulates all that is most vile and ferocious in human nature."*⁸³

Il Grido portrayed young men and women joining the ranks of the partisans out of lascivious desire for love. The result was that while 'beautiful women', who could obviously find enough satisfaction at home, stayed away, ugly women responded enthusiastically. Once garbed in a military uniform, the latter became increasingly animal-like and ceased menstruating. Neither women nor men, they took on the characteristics of foxes, wolves and pigs.

By daring to challenge the monopoly of male concerns in the post-war, antifascist Triestine women dis



*Prizori iz jugoslovanskega Trsta. (NŠK).
Momenti della "Trieste jugoslava".*

⁸⁰ Letter from Conte Sforza to Schiffrer, Rome, 7/1/46, ISMLTs.

⁸¹ Broad to Mason, 12/10/51, FO 371 95425 (Political: Trieste 1951) RT10111/215, PRO.

⁸² *Due anni di storia 1943-45*, p. 654. *Mussolini, Hitler, Tito alle porte orientali d'Italia* (Cappelli Editore, Bologna, 1948), p. 314.

⁸³ Cited in C. Colummi et al., *Storia di un esodo: Istria 1945-1946* (Trieste, 1980), p. 143.

turbed the power relations established in traditional gender arrangements. Wariness of left-wing political action by some women was consequent upon the realisation that they, like blue-collar workers and slovenes, had little vested interest in a social order that had kept them politically powerless. Gambini, Benco, and *Il Grido* may have pronounced an extremist position, but they shared with English and American observers and the urbane italian intelligentsia a sense of natural national, class and gender order. In the perceived absence of a significant cultural and political history of their own, women, workers and 'slavs' were seen to have in common a propensity to start afresh, obliterating all that went before.

CONCLUSION

The story of the Liberation Front sheds light on the significance of the Yugoslav 'experiment' in the immediate postwar period for a range of groups who identified their interests with its future: working-class women, antifascists, anti-nationalists, and communists. It also reveals the contradictions which informed this experiment - a self-conscious cultural anti-nationalism would be manifested within the boundaries of a new political nation, the federated Yugoslavia. Although within the logic of the new government this anomaly presented no contradiction, in practice the new principle of citizenship contradicted shared memories of the past. The theoretical application of 'brotherhood' had to deal with left over and continuing resentments, especially for those who identified themselves as italian partially through opposition to a Balkan 'slav' culture and the interna-

tionism of Bolshevism, and those who associated their slovene identity with oppression under the Italian state.

Between 1945 and 1954 (when Trieste was finally returned to Italy) the contest for cultural legitimacy and political authority had placed the Anglo-American Allies in opposition to the rhetoric and ideals of 'brotherhood', of cooperation, and of the 'italo-slav' hybrid which had briefly challenged notions of ethno-national affiliation. But the Liberation Council's own agenda in May 1945 revealed basic contradictions at the heart of its emancipatory project, including an acceptance of existing forms of cultural hierarchy, of the importance of ethnic identity, and of practiced gender norms. A diversity of political concerns and antagonisms that could otherwise have been understood in terms of class, or gender, or even ideology were effectively subsumed by the national dimensions of culturally defined struggle.

Any account of the Liberation Front is now dependent on the (post-Bosnian war) revisions of the history of Yugoslavia. In theory the separation of the notion of 'citizenship' from 'nationality' which was the basis of Liberation Front (and Yugoslav) policy aimed to renew the relationship between italians and non-italians, especially slovenes (with some separate gesturing to the place of women). Yet, inter-nationalism is so closely identifiable with communist aims, that 'fraternity' has been marked as inauthentic in comparison with the authenticity of national forms of identification which recent political analyses have portrayed as suppressed by the ideological hegemony of Marxist-Leninist rule. The difficulty of exploring this area is in itself a legacy of the Cold War.

POVZETEK

Zgodovina "Štiridesetih dni" projugoslovanske partizanske uprave maja 1945 v Trstu osvetljuje v obdobju takoj po vojni pomen jugoslovanskega "eksperimenta", ko je v njem videla svojo priložnost za poistovetenje interesov vrsta skupin ljudi: delavke, antifašisti, antinacionalisti in komunisti. Hkrati to obdobje razkriva nasprotja, ki so napovedovala, da se bo eksperiment - zavesten kulturni antinacionalizem - uresničil znotraj meja nove politične države, federativne Jugoslavije. Čeprav to nasprotje v logičnih mejah nove oblasti ni pomenilo kake posebnosti, so se nova državljanska načela v praksi izkazala kontradiktorna z uveljavljenimi v preteklosti. Med letoma 1945 in 1954 (ko je bil Trst naposled vrnjen Italiji) je boj za kulturno legitimnost in politično oblast potisnil angloameriške zaveznike v opozicijo proti retoriki o idealih "italijansko-slovanskega" (hibridnega) "bratstva" in sodelovanja, ki pa so le bežno kljubovali zamislim o etno-nacionalni zvezi. Težave z raziskovanjem tega področja so tudi rezultat zapuščine hladne vojne.