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‘Trieste Nazione’ and its geographies of absence

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The aim of this introductory essay is to offer a broad overview of the histories and geographies of Trieste stressing, in particular, the ways in which interpretations of Trieste’s past have been structured by a distinct set of tropes; a distinct set of geographical imaginations. I will argue that it is only by engaging with these recurrent tropes, with these recurrent geographical imaginations, that we can begin to understand the ways in which the city represents its past—and its present. In this sense, the aim of this essay is to provide some necessary historical—but also ‘ideal’—context for the more empirical investigations of the city’s contemporary and historical geographies that make up this special issue.

Key words: Trieste, identity, nation, Europe, geography of absence.

Trieste’s horizons

The creation of modern Trieste by the House of Habsburg as a sort of Mitteleuropean St Petersburg of the Mediterranean was an extraordinary urban experiment. For over two and a half centuries, the city was theatre to some of the key tensions, anxieties, but also hopes and aspirations of European bourgeois modernity. Still today, Trieste continues to present itself as the most ‘European’ of Italian cities. Studying Trieste today is thus both a challenging and fascinating enterprise: not only for its history as a unique geo-political and geo-economic ‘laboratory’, but also because the fragile and complex identitary horizon upon which the Triestine ‘urban experiment’ was inscribed, while producing a genuinely cosmopolitan urban society at a particular moment in time, at the same time

paved the way to some of the darkest and bloodiest national(ist) territorialisations in Europe. Trieste is often described and represented today as a noble widow, a melancholy theatre of decline, the embodiment of the memory of a magnificent imperial project whose echoes still mark the city’s identitary discourses. This sense of a composed decadence haunts the city in countless ways and leaves some visitors with the nagging sensation of something that could have been, but has not and perhaps never will (that which Jan Morris (2001) terms ‘the Trieste effect’). As I will argue in this introductory overview, the geography of Trieste today can be seen as a complex geography of absence, shaped by some of the most tragic individual and collective dramas of the twentieth century and some of the most strident manifestations of the contradictions

of European modernity—from the birth of nationalisms to the profound crisis of the European subject. With this in mind, I will highlight how the idea of Trieste should be conceived not as the mark of some unachieved, incomplete identity, a failed project, but rather how such ‘geographies of absence’ can unveil to us an often forgotten face of European modernity.

The aim of my comments here is to provide a broad-based introduction not simply to the history of the city but, even more importantly, to the ways in which interpretations of Trieste’s past have been structured by a distinct set of geographical imaginations. I will argue that it is only by engaging with these recurrent geographical imaginations that we can begin to understand the ways in which the city represents its past—and its present. In this sense, the aim of this essay is to provide some necessary historical context for the more empirical investigations of the city’s contemporary and historical geographies that make up this special issue. The histories I recount here will necessarily be partial: my reconstruction intends to offer merely a very broad overview of some key moments in the city’s past and, especially, their dominant interpretation, considering the ways in which certain processes, events and even individuals have been incorporated into particular readings of the urban past, and how these have come to embody a particular understanding of Trieste’s ‘identity’. The literature with which I will engage will, accordingly, be partial and limited predominantly to the mainstream Italian-language sources that have inscribed the ‘official’ history of the city. The interpretation offered here is also, nonetheless, the fruit of my own particular experience of Trieste where I was born and spent most of my life—and where I continue to be part of the local political and intellectual scene.

I will structure my discussion of what I term Trieste’s ‘geographies of absence’ around three tropes, three geographical imaginations that have marked a large part of its history and that still today define the city’s unstable, unaccomplished identity, three routes that bind the history of Trieste with that of the modern bourgeois subject. Firstly, the concept of ‘Trieste Nazione’—the ideal of the cosmopolitan city born with the foundation of the Imperial ‘emporium’ but one that persists still today in the (self)representations and practices of the Triestini; secondly, the unique role of the ‘national question’ in the definition of the ‘territorial’ geographies of the city; thirdly, Trieste’s idealised ‘geographies of absence’ that have imagined the city with respect to some far-off reference point, some future, unreachable, historical and geographical horizon, an endlessly deferred, never-accomplished destiny; that is, the idea of Trieste ‘as a mirror of the heterogeneity and contradiction of [European] modernity and [its] lack of any central foundation or unity of values’, to cite Ara and Magris (1982: 4).

‘Trieste Nazione’

In 1719, Charles VI proclaims Trieste a free-port: in the glimpse of an eye, the city is transformed from a provincial sea-town into a booming hub, key locus in the grand Imperial project of expansion into the Adriatic and the opening of new trade-routes to Asia (Finzi, Panariti and Panjek 2003). Indeed, throughout the eighteenth century, Trieste’s fortunes are closely tied to the transformations of the Austrian state. Maria Theresa’s ascent to the throne and the inauguration of a series of fundamental institutional reforms from 1841 on leave a profound mark on the city: in the new political imaginary of the Theresian era,

Trieste is assigned a key role as the Imperial commercial emporium and Mediterranean outlet (Dubin 1999; Purvis 2009, this issue; Rumpler 2003).

The traditional municipal structure is thrown upside down by the series of new Imperial privileges that draw to Trieste countless 'foreigners' and Imperial functionaries. Lacking both the capital as well as the necessary skills to guide the transformations taking place before their eyes, the traditional Triestine urban patriciate is soon stripped of their political and economic power (Negrelli 1978). Their influence does not disappear entirely, however: indeed, it is precisely out of the encounter between the 'old Trieste' and the booming internationalising city that the complex identity of modern Trieste is born, a distinct 'urban spirit' of a new city entirely dedicated to commercial and mercantile activities (Finzi and Panjek 2001; Gatti 2001).

Already at the end of the 1700s Trieste is a bourgeois modern city, and a privileged laboratory for the complex political and social transformation of the Monarchy into a 'modern' state (Rumpler 2003). Its new urban elite comes from all corners of Europe and the Mediterranean, and coalesces around the newly founded Stock Exchange that becomes, in many ways, the symbol of the new Triestine bourgeoisie (Millo 2001, 2003). Alongside the traditional Italian core (and its traditionally Slovenian-dominated peripheries—see Kacin-Wohinz and Pirjevec 1998; Merku 2001; Verginella 2001) appear a series of new neighbourhoods, bringing together Jews, Greeks, Levantines, Illyrians, Austrians, Germans and Italians (see Catalan 2001). It is here that the myth—and reality—of Trieste as a 'cosmopolitan city' is born (see Cervani 2006). The Triestine 'emporium' attracts adventurers and men of fortune but also free-masons and countless others who find here

a rare freedom of religious expression and belief, consented by the Theresian reforms (Negrelli 1978). Trieste becomes an oasis of religious tolerance where a variety of 'nations' co-exist; 'nations' in the pre-modern sense of the word, that organise themselves around economic and ethnic principles, and exert a key role in regulating the immigration flows that continue (and will continue all through the 1800s) to expand Trieste's population, making it the third largest city of the Empire (Faber 2003). What emerges is a veritable corporative structure, within which the various 'nations' see it to their mutual benefit to open up to ever-increasing collaboration (Andreozzi 2003; Ferrari 2001). The French occupation from 1809 to 1813 also leaves an important political mark on the city and its municipal ambitions. As Austria resumes control over the city, Trieste is subjected to a series of centralising and 'Germanising' reforms, enacted by Joseph II throughout the Empire. Although the 'Germanisation' imposed by Austria is largely bureaucratic and a-national, the Empire's centralising pressures evoke a paradoxical reaction in Trieste: a revival of the very same old municipal tradition that was fast disappearing in the pluri-national dynamism of the new emporium. The 'spiritual heritage' of the old Triestine urban patriciate is revived by the generation that immediately succeeds the old elite, and it is this ambiguous (and consciously reconstructed) 'heritage' that will come to form a key pillar of the city's modern identity (Gatti 2001; Millo 1989).

It is on the heels of this idealised reconstruction that the first half of the nineteenth century witnesses the emergence and consolidation of the idea of 'Trieste Nazione' and all its associated myths (Negrelli 1978). This is a key period in the development of the city: Trieste is beautified by a variety of new artistic and

architectural projects and begins to invest in earnest in its cultural life, as befits a growing bourgeoisie. The urban merchant class—whose interests no longer correspond directly to those of Vienna, as they largely did in the first decades of the free-port—increasingly begins to articulate its needs and aspirations, also in the cultural and political realm. These ambitions find little room in the absolutist political climate of Francis I and Metternich's Austria, however, and the Triestini become growingly disaffected with Vienna's centralising policies (Rumpler 2003). This disaffection is not only true of the city's liberal-minded financial and commercial elite, but also extends to the whole bourgeoisie, in even its most conservative components. In the attempt to somehow capture the evanescent essence of its multiple identities, the new merchant city 'without a past' begins to search for potential roots and, drawing on the work of local historian Domenico Rossetti, a certain idea of Trieste's 'special' historical mission begins to emerge and affirm itself. The autonomist pretensions of the Trieste bourgeoisie are thus cloaked within a distinct 'municipalist' (and Italianising) myth propounded by Rossetti (1815). The city's pluri-national financial and mercantile elite adopts wholeheartedly Rossetti's 'urban patriotism' as an ideal able to unite all of Trieste's inhabitants, even if most of its members do not share any of the Rossettian myth's historical or political roots (Negrelli 1978).

This 'experiment' is also strongly conditioned by a rapidly changing European political context of which the Triestine elite is acutely aware. Their political and identity choices are closely bound to—and influenced by—a broader reflection regarding the relationship between the 'cultural' nation and the 'political' nation that dominates European (and, in particular, German) intellectual

debates in those years.⁴ The concerns of Trieste's urban elite thus turn to a consideration of the relationship between the Adriatic city and its Danubian/Central-European hinterland, and it is this reflection that will decisively mark the future of Trieste, culminating in the national conflicts that will tear it apart in the century that follows (see Agnelli 2005; Apih 1988; Rumpler 2003).

The (re)invention of the municipal myth is also a response to these concerns. The growing Triestine bourgeoisie needs a single, unifying model able to capture all of the city's diversity under one ideological umbrella: a 'civilisational model' attractive to all Triestini, capable of activating new identity myths and a new political and geographical imaginary. In the work of Rossetti and his followers, Trieste is represented as a special 'homeland' (*patria*): a unique city where two great European civilisations—the Italian and the German—meet. In this imaginary, Trieste represents itself as an exceptional European laboratory, able to absorb all foreigners, irrespective of their nationality, religion or provenance (see Rossetti 1815; Negrelli 1978). Trieste becomes a 'way of being', of thinking, of working. As a 'crucible of difference', the city presents itself as an antidote to the national(ist) passions that seem to be raging all across Europe (Agnelli 2005; Finzi 2001a, 2003; Finzi, Panariti and Panjek 2003).

The heterogeneous migrant community thus finds a common sense of purpose in Trieste's liberal bourgeois tradition—or at least in its ideal representation. But there is another important element of integration: the Italian language and, in particular, the local dialect, a variant of the colonial-Venetian dialect spoken across the Eastern Mediterranean that offers the new-comers a key tool of communication—and assimilation (Finzi 2001b; Pellegrini 2001). The arrival of new migrants thus does not

appear to produce a radical rupture with the past: if anything, it seems to confirm continuity with the language of the old Italian municipality, while enriching this latter with new expressions and influences. The dialect remains as the distinctive mark of the city, the only patrimony shared by all of its inhabitants. Trieste, Schiffrer (1946) would claim, 'is a cosmopolitan Italian city that straddles the confine between the Italian, Slavic and Germanic linguistic and cultural realms'.

As a city lying on the margins of the vast Habsburg Empire, 'cosmopolitan' by virtue of its vocation as a pluri-national commercial emporium and shipping port and 'Italian' by language, the idea of the distinctiveness of Trieste gradually takes hold (Ara and Magris 1982). In those years, Trieste also affirms its role as an economic powerhouse. Many of the city's commercial and mercantile elite become financiers and in a short time come to exert a veritable monopoly over the Empire's nascent insurance industry. The birth of the Assicurazioni Generali and the Riunione Adriatica di Sicurtà (RAS)—still today two of Europe's leading insurers—marks this new found dominance. The foundation of the Lloyd Austriaco, under the political patronage of Baron von Bruck, further confirms Trieste's new role. The Lloyd, an insurance and shipping company, comes to stand for the totality of Trieste's economic interests, with the fortunes of the company becoming in many ways one with the fortunes of the city (Finzi, Panariti and Panjek 2003; Negrelli 1978). Trieste, in turn, comes to embody the city of rampant bourgeois capitalism par excellence, relatively free of the ties of the state; a city that does not think of itself in territorial terms but as a maritime city, as an Adriatic and Mediterranean 'cosmopolitan capital'.

Baron von Bruck also founds the *Giornale del Lloyd*, and the newspaper rapidly becomes

the voice of the city's financial, commercial and industrial elite and an active promoter of Imperial political and economic aspirations in the East. Its philosophical and geopolitical project for a greater Mitteleuropa sees in Trieste not only the ideal site for the 'production' of the new 'Mitteleuropean man', destined to transform the fortunes of the Old Continent, but also imagines the city as a perfect starting point for the construction of a new axis between Central Europe and Asia, seen as a necessary counter-balance to the 'Atlantic leanings' of Western Europe. In the mid-1800s, Trieste thus comes to be re-invented as a key Mediterranean 'bridge' and a vital 'gate' to the East: the Empire seeks commercial ties with Asia, and Trieste, with its cosmopolitan tradition and links, appears the ideal site from which to launch the new Imperial adventure (Agnelli 2005).

The increasingly important role of Trieste in the broader geoeconomic and geopolitical transformations taking place in Europe renders the tortured question of the city's identity even more pressing. It is at this point in time that the concept of 'Trieste Nazione' rapidly captures the imagination of the urban elite and becomes an extraordinarily important reference point for all of Triestine society (Negrelli 1978). Reacting against the increasingly centralising politics of the House of Habsburg, but also as a response to the stirrings of new political nationalisms all across Central Europe, Trieste's pluri-national elite finds its unity around the ideal of a 'Triestine nationality', an ideal uniquely able to capture contemporary the presumably 'cosmopolitan' character of the city in those years (Rumpler 2003).

The idea of 'Trieste Nazione' is, nonetheless, predicated upon the identification of a specific 'cultural nationality' of the city: as the dominant element amongst the elite, as well

as within the city as a whole is Italian (at least in linguistic terms), it is to Italian culture that the city inevitably draws (Finzi 2001b). The Triestino dialect becomes further consolidated as the urban lingua franca, acting also as an affirmation of the city's particularism and opposition to the centralising forces of the Empire. The affirmation of Trieste's Italian cultural identity is accompanied by a (re)assertion of the city's 'municipal' specificity, assuring economic and political unity within. The idea(l) of the 'Trieste Nazione' serves precisely this aim: framing a distinct 'way of life' and social interaction, an ideal(ised) peaceful co-existence of diverse national communities that recognise themselves within the Triestine imaginary as a single, urban 'nation' (Andreozzi 2003).

The city's elite is also heavily influenced by the 'pragmatic' conception of the Austrian state (see Magris 1996) and it is this conception that lies, indeed, at the heart of the (geo)political idea of Mitteleuropa that, again, exerts an important influence on Trieste's municipal politics in the mid-1800s (see Agnelli 2005). The proposals for federalist solutions that begin to circulate within the Monarchy after 1848 find their echo in the idea of the Trieste Nation as well: seen as a pragmatic 'economic' choice, embodying an 'organic unity of interests'. The idea(l) of the 'Trieste Nazione' presents itself, indeed, as a theoretical alternative both to the nation-state principle, as well as to the new imagination of the (now) Dual Monarchy, united around the figure of the Emperor and politically constituted by the connective tissue of the Imperial bureaucracy (Agnelli 2005).

In Trieste, the (re)discovery and affirmation of a distinct urban 'nationhood' does not necessarily signify a desire of independence and is not aimed at the creation of a new nation-state: in this imaginary, the nexus

between state and nation is broken in favour of a 'municipal federalism' that guarantees the rights of all nations (Negrelli 1978). On the eve of 1848, the city's elite pushes for a recognition of Trieste's distinct 'nationality' by means of a status that would give the city even wider autonomy. Trieste's requests are but just one facet of a process of profound reorganisation of the Empire in those years in an attempt to counteract the dangers of violent forms of nationalism by granting a variety of privileges and autonomies to the Empire's different 'peoples' (Cattaruzza 1998; Kann 1977). The emergence of a new Slavic nation at its doorstep and the growth of German and Russian influence increasingly place Trieste at the centre of the processes re-shaping Europe's political map (Ara and Magris 1982). The city occupies a key locus, at the cross-roads between three different 'civilisations': the Italian, the Germanic and the Slavic. Also because of this position, the Triestine 'laboratory' requests special recognition of its 'national' status, without in any way subverting its loyalty to the Empire of which it forms part. Trieste is—and wants to remain— Austrian, Italian but above all, a cosmopolitan *città di mare*.

The territorial imperative and the triumph of nationalism

The year 1848 in Europe also marks a watershed for Trieste and its cosmopolitan imagination. It is not my aim here to provide a detailed historical account of the ensuing shifts something that many other scholars have already done. I will, rather, try to identify some of the key reasons behind the progressive disintegration of the cosmopolitan project of the 'Trieste Nazione' and the triumph of territorial nationalisms.

The decades following 1848 are a time of great transformation within the Habsburg Monarchy: the Empire adopts a new constitution, loses several segments of 'Italian' territory (a loss that is profoundly felt in Trieste) and, above all is torn by a growing tension between the proponents of further Germanisation and stationalisation, and those supporting the ideals of a 'Mitteleuropean' federation. At the same time, the Empire's many peoples see in the new revolutionary ideals a path towards the affirmation of their unique political and cultural identities and eventual self-determination. Metternich's conservative and centralising policies had done surprisingly little to temper such expectations and so, in the aftermath of 1848, Austria finds itself struggling both with the demands of a rapidly expanding and increasingly radicalised working class—as well as with the nationalist demands of new non-German intellectual elites (Rumpler 2003; see also Kann 1977).

Trieste is not immune to this social and political ferment, and the decades after 1848 are decisive in shifting its identitary horizons from a cosmopolitan and Mediterranean perspective to a national-territorial understanding. The idea(l) of the 'Trieste Nazione' begins to lose its ideological appeal among the Triestine elite and the two pillars upon which it was based—the municipal autonomous tradition and Italian cultural hegemony—soon take on very different meaning (see Millo 2003). The idea(l) of the 'cultural nation' upon which Triestine urban distinction was based is transformed into the idea(l) of the 'political nation' and 'Italianness' becomes a defensive strategy and a new unifying locus in the political climate into which the Adriatic city finds itself thrust in the second half of the nineteenth century (Sestan 1998). It is in these years that the cartographic imperative of the nation-state takes hold of the official rhetoric

of 'Italian Trieste'—as too in the emergent, and antagonistic, Slovenian imaginary of the city (see Schiffrer 1946). Such cartographic, territorial understandings affirm themselves in distinction to the previous cosmopolitan tradition which, although it does not altogether disappear and continues to structure the everyday practices and exchanges of many Triestini, becomes increasingly marginalised in the official political rhetoric (Foschiatti 2006). Ara and Magris note how already by the mid-1800s, Trieste was

split between Italy and Austria, divided between spiritual longing and self-interest, in a permanent state of tension; a tension perceived by its most avid observers as irresolvable, for the very identity of the city, its historical role and material well-being were linked precisely to the dual reality of Italian cultural and spiritual belonging on the one hand and economic 'Austrianism' on the other. The contrast between these two constituted the drama but also the vitality—indeed, the very condition of existence—of Trieste. (1982: 49)

The on-going tensions with Vienna are further exacerbated by the loss of free-port privileges, a move perceived by the Triestino economic elite as tantamount to treason (see Rumpler 2003). This change is rendered even more significant by the progressive transformation of Trieste from a Mediterranean emporium to a modern industrial port, precisely in those years. It is not only an economic and social transformation but one that also has profound impacts on Trieste's self-representation as a *città di mare* (Cattaruzza 1995). Trieste's economy and (self) representation are also influenced by the birth of the Kingdom of Italy (1860–1861) and, after 1866, the scission with the Veneto which now comes to form part of the new Italian state. The 'loss' of the

Veneto, on the one hand, gives support to a variety of irredentist movements calling for Trieste's unification with the (Italian) 'motherland'; on the other, accentuates the Triestine sense of isolation within the Empire (Ara and Magris 1982). It should be noted, nonetheless, that the simmering conflict with Vienna is, in many ways, also a rhetorical strategy on the part of the urban political elite, cleverly aimed at obtaining further concessions, for the ties to the Monarchy are considered insoluble and essential for the survival of the city. Indeed, although Vienna strips Trieste of free-port privileges, it invests heavily in the city as part of its new 'Eastward' strategy, seeing Trieste as an ideal 'bridge to the Orient', in particular with the opening of the Suez Canal. And it is Imperial support that allows Triestine shipping and insurance companies to expand internationally, making Trieste one of the economic powerhouses of the Monarchy (see also Finzi, Panariti and Panjek 2003).

But another series of factors contribute to fundamentally shift the ideal horizon of the Triestine elite in those years. The long-standing feud between the city and the centralising pressures of the Monarchy is eclipsed by the emergence of a growing tension between the Italian majority and an increasingly visible and politically organised Slovenian minority (see Schiffrer 1946). The emergence of a Slovenian bourgeoisie and a set of Slovenian cultural and educational institutions becomes a key concern for the Italian elite, preoccupied with maintaining the national balance of the city but also its existing socio-economic structure (see Negrelli 1978; Verginella 2001). It is in response to such perceived threats that a new form of (politicised) national consciousness is born.

The year 1848 marks, indeed, a key shift in the relationship between 'Italians' and 'Slavs', in Trieste as well as the whole of the eastern

Adriatic (Cattaruzza 2007; Schiffrer 1946). The urban bourgeoisie see themselves at the forefront of a battle for national survival, threatened by what are perceived as new 'Slavic' territorial and cultural ambitions, perceived as a threat not only to the established social order but to the very survival of the Adriatic city. The Triestine Slovenian community that is rapidly growing in number and influence in the city, as well as in its immediate hinterland, begins to question the historical process of the assimilation of various 'nations' into the Italianised cosmopolitan city, arguing for the need of conserving its own distinct national identity (Ara and Magris 1982). For centuries, the Slovenian community had lived on the outskirts of Trieste (Merku 2001) with an only minimal role in the life of the city—limited largely to the ecclesiastical realm and that of a small nobility that owned land and property in the Slovenian areas. Through the 1800s, however, Trieste's booming fortunes begin to attract increasing numbers of Slovenians that flock to the city and its immediate peripheries (see Verginella 2001). Alongside the pluri-national merchant and commercial class that comes to make up the cosmopolitan and bourgeois Trieste of those years, a new migration appears, predominantly made up of labourers from the immediate surroundings of the city.

The history and class composition of this migration will strongly mark future relations between Italians and Slavs in the city, also in terms of a functional and ideological divide between the urban and rural worlds. In contrast to what occurs in many other cities of the Empire that take on the 'national' character of their surrounding areas, in Trieste the Slovenian population amalgamates itself into the urban melting-pot, at least initially. The 'disappearance' of the Slovenian element into cosmopolitan Trieste undergoes

a sharp shift after 1848 with the progressive 'nationalisation' of Slovenian consciousness. This shift is not only true for those Slovenians living within the Adriatic city, however: in the last part of the nineteenth century,

all of the Slovenian nation looked to [Trieste] as a key reference point in the struggle for national independence, not only because of its prestige as a wealthy and modern city but also because it was the major 'Slovenian' city of the time: taking into account both the city and its immediate surroundings, Trieste had a much higher Slovenian population in 1910 than Ljubljana. (Ara and Magris 1982: 51)

In the Slovenian representations of the city, a new geographical imaginary emerges, a national-territorial reading of Trieste:

in the political rhetoric of the day, as later in Slovenian historiography, cities were considered as 'belonging' to—and the expression of—their hinterland; it is in the countryside that the original, authentic, uncontaminated nature of a territory resides. Trieste, lying at the centre of a predominantly Slovenian area, an Italian urban island in Slovenian territory, could not be divided from the lands that surround it. (Ara and Magris 1982: 51)

The Adriatic city thus takes on the role of 'natural' spiritual capital of the nascent Slovenian nation, its 'capture' a key aim of national self-determination. The urbanised Slovenian elite strives towards this aim through the creation of a number of important cultural and economic institutions and the formation of an alternative set of political ideologies that run parallel to the dominant Italian(ising) discourse (Verginella 2001). And while throughout the mid to late 1800s Triestine entrepreneurs continue to seek

Slovenian labourers for their booming industries, thus contributing to shifting the demographic balance within the city, the urban elite begins to increasingly worry about the Slovenian presence—and begins to frame the Slovenian community as its 'national' adversary, using the putative Slovenian 'threat' as a mobilising factor for the Italian majority in the city (Valdevit 2004).

While only a minority of the Triestine elite are drawn to Italian territorial irredentism tout court, the governing class begins to move progressively to a politics of 'national defence' conceived in an anti-centralist but, above all, anti-Slavic key. The 'national question' becomes also a means of extending consensus among the young Italian intelligentsia, increasingly drawn to the imaginary of the new Italian state across the Imperial border (see Vivante 1912). Rapidly the 'national question' is turned into a common preoccupation, shared by the majority of Italian Triestini, and all political life in the city is polarised around the Italian–Slovenian 'national' divide (Schiffrer 1946; Valdevit 2004; Valussi 1972). What was previously a socio-economic divide becomes a 'national' question and two new political subjects emerge, in inevitable and irreconcilable conflict, each with its own vision for the future of the Adriatic city. The ideals of the 'Trieste Nazione' are definitively left behind, giving way to a tension that produces a profound social and political rupture in the city, a rupture that will only begin to smooth over in the last decade of the twentieth century (see Sluga 2001).

With the progressive radicalisation of the conflict, even the old 'cosmopolitan' elements of the city's elite end up allying themselves with the Liberal-National Party that monopolises the political debate in the city as the pre-eminent defender of the Italian 'national

question' (Negrelli 1978). A similar development can be observed on the Slovenian side as well, and soon the two 'national' parties, both purporting to represent the entirety of their national communities, succeed in subordinating all politics in Trieste to a play of 'national' interests (Sapelli 1990; Schiffrer 1946). In such a dualistic dialectic, other voices, such as that of the fast-growing Socialist party, disappear; the working class also becomes polarised along 'national' lines and the Socialist programme holds only a relatively limited appeal (Apih 1991; Cattaruzza 1998).

On the eve of the First World War, the conflict between the two sides becomes increasingly harsh: for most Triestine Italians, the defence of the Italianness of the Adriatic now appears possible only through a political-territorial union with the Italian state, whatever the economic price for the city; on the other hand, the growing nationalism of the Slovenes, bolstered by what are perceived as anti-Italian politics on the part of Vienna, is increasingly predicated on a negation of the exclusive Italianness of Trieste (Schiffrer 1946). All of the contradictions of the nationalist conflict explode with the Great War: 1918 signals the rupture of Trieste from the world to which it had belonged for centuries, a world which saw in the city the symbol of the economic unity of the Danubian basin, that brought it prosperity, that made it a truly 'European' city. But 1918 also marks, more broadly, the definitive victory of the logic of the nation-state over the cosmopolitan ideal.

'Trieste italiana'

Trieste's 'return' to its putative 'Motherland' is a complex and difficult process. After a period of initial enthusiasm, very soon Italy

is perceived as a bureaucratic centralising regime that further exacerbates tensions in the city between Italians, Austrian sympathisers and Slovenes (see Visintin 2000). Trieste seems in no way prepared to make the transition from its long-cultivated myths of nationhood to the harsh realities of 'being Italian' (Schiffrer 1992). The city's elite remains firmly bound to memories of its glorious past and finds refuge, once again, in an exasperated and aggressive politics of 'national defence' against the supposed 'Slavic threat' (Valdevit 2004). In the new national(ised) context, Trieste is suddenly reduced to a second-rank peripheral city of a state that does not know what to do with it; that sees it predominantly as a problem to be 'fixed' to be 'Italianised'. The city plunges into a deep identity crisis, but also into economic decline, giving rise to a series of misunderstandings with 'that Italy', misunderstandings that will long persist in the collective imaginary of many Triestini, still up to today. The city's principal industries are nationalised; the majority of the German-speaking population leaves and the prestigious German schools are closed down. As Trieste's Mitteleuropean and cosmopolitan physiognomy appears to unravel, the dominant preoccupation for the city's elite remains the 'national question', with a further radicalisation of the divide between 'Italians' and 'Slavs' (Fogar 2005). The triumph of the territorial imperative indeed overwhelms the city in the decades that follow, leading to what Ara and Magris (1982) term 'Trieste's darkest hour': the years of the Second World War, the Nazi and later Yugoslav and Anglo-American occupations, and the city's post-war humiliation and marginalisation, when Trieste is reduced to simply the 'Trieste Question'—a geopolitical pawn in post-war power politics whose lot is no longer in the hands of its citizens (De Castro 1981).

But let us return briefly to the inter-war period, to understand how the national question is transformed from a defensive politics to an aggressive and expansionary project. It is important to note that Fascism, although initially an ‘imported’ phenomenon, finds fertile ground in Trieste, presenting itself as the logical successor to the Liberal-National Party and so capturing the monopoly of national(ist) politics in the city. The State now holds monopoly over national consciousness, and begins to enforce the territorial imperative through increasingly violent forms of persecution of Trieste’s Slovenian community, whose political and cultural organisations are forced into hiding, preparing the ground for the conflict that will tear the city apart at the end of the Second World War (Pahor 2008; Valdevit 2004).

Paradoxically enough, the Fascist policy of the ‘Italianisation’ of Trieste and of the Western Adriatic forces the Triestini to take note of the important ways in which their own lot is tied to that of their Slavic neighbours. At the same time, the violent affirmation of ‘Italianness’ by the Fascist regime radicalises the conflict between the two sides even further, serving to reinforce and consolidate the feeling of national distinctiveness among the Slovenes and, in the long run, irreparably weakening the Italian presence in the Adriatic (see Pupo 2005). The territorial imperative, taken to its extreme consequences, thus sets the stage for a sort of final solution to the tensions that grip the city, reducing the ‘Trieste problem’ to a ‘national’ question, so much so that soon, for both sides, the other’s very political existence becomes intolerable. Alongside the radicalisation of the national conflict, the Italian regime’s stipulation of the 1938 Racial Laws against the Jewish presence strikes a further blow at the very structure of the city and its governing elite. The Triestine bourgeoisie

finds itself the victim of the very same ‘national’ historical destiny that it strove so hard to make possible: the city is lacerated in its very being, with the expulsion of the most important part of its economic, political and cultural elite by a nationalising state that it had not too long ago welcomed and supported (Ara and Magris 1982).

For the Slovenes, watching the formation of the new Yugoslav state just a few kilometres away from Trieste, and subject to growing persecution by the Fascist regime at ‘home’, the conquest of Trieste becomes an increasingly indispensable condition for their nation’s liberation and self-determination. During the years of the Second World War and especially during the immediate post-war period, the Triestine Slovenian community consolidates its hopes of national and social emancipation, closely allied with the platform of the Communist Party for whom Trieste’s ‘distinctiveness’ could be preserved only thanks to the guarantees of national autonomy provided by the Yugoslav state (Kardelj 1946, 1953). Tito’s Yugoslavia advances, indeed, a powerful territorial argument: the Italian presence in the Adriatic is an artificial, colonial phenomenon, with no reason of being; the principal coastal cities of the region (Trieste among them) ‘naturally’ belong to their surrounding (Slavic) countryside. While recognising Trieste’s linguistic and cultural ‘Italianness’, the Yugoslav geographical imaginary places the city firmly within the Slavic-Adriatic world. The Italo-Slavic conflict thus enters into its final phase. With the collapse of the Third Reich, strategic decisions must be taken regarding the ‘national’ future of Trieste and the Venezia Giulia region (Sestan 1998). The region’s fortunes are

gravely compromised by a mix of complex internal as well as international fortunes, both political

as well as military-strategic: the moral-historical weight of the Fascist period; the Italian defeat in the war and the promises made by Western powers, Great Britain in particular, to Yugoslavia ...; the full support granted Tito not only by the Soviet Union but also by Italian Communists; the advance of Yugoslav partisans who, by the last days of the war, controlled large part of the Julian territory and, for forty tragic days in May and June of 1945, Trieste itself. (Ara and Magris 1982: 149)

The idea(l) of 'Trieste Nazione' appears to be erased once and for all, as are the city's bourgeois and cosmopolitan aspirations. In many ways, Trieste's loss is also the loss of a unique European laboratory and of an altogether different, non-exclusivist and non-territorial, idea of the nation. Following the violence of first Nazi and later Titoist occupations, at the end of the war Trieste witnesses the exodus of thousands of Italian refugees from Yugoslav-occupied Istria (Pupo 2005). Most of the refugees settle in Trieste, long considered by the Italians of the Adriatic as their natural 'regional' capital. Their arrival almost doubles the population of the city but also revives the national question coloured, for the refugees, by a loss of homes and belongings and the forcible expulsion from the places of their birth. The Anglo-American occupation that lasts from 1945 until 1954, while maintaining Trieste in the sphere of Western influence (and, eventually, restoring the city to Italian control), creates a long-lasting and uncertain political and cultural limbo. The city is suspended between two worlds, belonging to no single state, with no control over its own destiny, at the mercy of the vagaries of international geopolitics (see De Castro 1981).

The political and cultural debates of the post-war years are inevitably constrained by the Cold War order within which Trieste becomes truly a 'borderland', the last outpost

of the West before the Iron Curtain. The national question is revived, this time as a reactionary defence of the 'Italianness' of Trieste at the borders of the Communist East, with an Italian state that sees the city more as a problem than as a resource (Valdevit 2004). In fact, it is the national question that dominates the first democratic elections following Trieste's return to Italy in 1954, and mainstream Triestine political discourse is framed around a familiar set of dichotomies—Italian/Slavic, Democratic/Communist—albeit also in paradoxical opposition to the Italian state, perceived as 'foreign' and distant (see Cecovini 1968). The life of the city, once again appears paralysed within the territorial imperative, this time one dictated by the geographies of the Cold War (Ballinger 1999). The political forces that emerge in those years draw precisely upon this new geographical imaginary of a world divided in two, precluding any alternative political future for the city if not one defined by its traumatic past—or its present condition as the 'last border of the West'. The city is also convinced that it was forced to pay the price for the errors of others (Fascism, the Italian state, Allied decisions) and a siege-like mentality develops, marked by a profound sense of injustice and lack of compensation for its suffering (De Castro 1981). Trieste's Slovenian community also loses out in this equation: it is reduced to a 'minority' population in a foreign state and, as such, perceived as 'the enemy within' (see Sluga 2001).

The territorial imperative thus makes losers of both sides, essentially silencing all alternative voices (Karlsen and Spadaro 2006). It is only with the end of the Cold War and the expansion of the European Union to the East that Trieste finds the conditions necessary to begin to imagine new political projects able to capture its complex and multiple economic

and cultural traditions—and to reconcile the conflicts of its past (Valdevit 2004).

Spatialising absence

Today, in many of its urban representations, Trieste draws upon its ideal(ised) image as a multicultural, Mitteleuropean city and a cosmopolitan Adriatic capital. But how accurate is this geographical imagination of the city in capturing the everyday lives of Trieste's inhabitants at the start of the new century? As I have tried to highlight above, modern Trieste was founded (and prospered) upon a series of ideal(ised) geographies and municipal identities, most strongly articulated in the notion of the Triestine 'nation'. These idealised geographies were a fundamental referent marking belonging to the Triestine project: while speaking Triestino with each other, the city's various communities remained culturally distinct according to their nation of origin, in an endlessly shifting interplay between 'hereness' (confirmed by their genuine Triestinita') and 'elsewhereness' (embodied by their distant, and in this sense 'absent', nation). Indeed, dominant imaginations of the city have always been (and continue to be) structured around such 'geographies of absence'—both in ideal terms (absence as a value in itself), as well as in clear opposition to the 'geographies of essence' that sustained the other grand project of European bourgeois modernity: the territorial nation-state. The modern Trieste made possible by the Habsburg dream was born as the political and economic projection of a maritime, Adriatic horizon for Central Europe, as Austria's gateway to the Orient. Its position—its very being—made no sense without the logistical and strategic connection with Central Europe, or without the Adriatic corridor and its vast

maritime horizon. Its geography was certainly a distinct material geography of people, goods, and exchanges—but it was also a distinct ideal geography of would-be European horizons (see Agnelli 2005; Rumpler 2003).

The ideal urban vision embodied by the city opened its doors to individuals and cultures hailing from a variety of worlds: individuals, cultures and entire worlds that re-constituted themselves in Trieste as part of a single (and singular) urban imaginary and a distinctive 'urban spirit'. It is from the fusion of these 'nations' in a common project that the idea(l) of the 'Trieste Nazione' was born: an ideal formed within a captivating 'geography of absence' of other, multiple, nations—often mythologised in the imaginary of the various protagonists of the Triestine 'miracle'. This ideal geography was made real by a shared urban language: the Triestine dialect. The dialect was also, however, a language of absent places, the result of endless re-elaboration, addition and subtraction, fusing the Venetian vernacular with countless other influences, whether Slavic, German, or Greek (see Minca 2009). It is within this ideal linguistic container that the myth of the city's inhabitants as a 'special' people flourished: a unique 'urban nation' tied to no specific territory but, rather, inspired by a broader, maritime horizon. In its ideal imaginations, Trieste is a city that defines itself almost entirely through the sea, that essentially ignores its hinterland, if not for the connections that it offers (that allow it, in turn, to project itself into the Adriatic—and further still).

The year 1848 marks a key passage when the city's 'geographies of absence' begin to take on territorial form, signalling the beginning of the end of the ideal of the cosmopolitan city. Indeed, it is precisely the attempt to re-interpret in 'national'/territorial rather than cosmopolitan/Mediterranean terms the city's ideal geographies of absence that translates

Trieste's 'play of differences' into a battle to the death between competing nationalisms. The 'Italianness' of Trieste, previously simply a key cultural marker of the uniqueness of this 'urban nation', is progressively transformed into a marker of exclusive national belonging, into territory. Italian Triestines begin, increasingly, to think of themselves as orphans of a lost Motherland, as part of a geography of absence (of the nation); as the projection of an Italian-national dream waiting to be realised. The second absence that comes to mark the city from the 1860s through to the outbreak of the First World War is, paradoxically, that of Vienna: a Vienna that, in the perception of many Triestini, seems to betray Trieste and its privileges and that sustains Slavic national ambitions in what is perceived as an anti-Italian and anti-municipal key—but especially because it decides to deprive Trieste of its free-port status, a status around which the city had constructed its entire self-image and its European and Mediterranean centrality. But the perception of being Austria's widow, coupled with the effective loss of some Imperial privileges and the feeling of being at the short end of Austria's new nationalities policy, reinforces even further the sensation of urban distinctiveness and a certain municipal pride, while also nurturing a sense of unfulfilled promise. 'Abandoned' by Austria, 'orphan' of the (Italian) Motherland that is coming to life in those very years, the Triestine urban elite lives the second half of the 1800s and the first decades of the 1900s as a forlorn noblewoman, extraordinarily dependent on Vienna but passionately dreaming of Italy and its national ideal. This double soul of Italian Trieste will persist even through the tormented twentieth century. The third absence of those decades, finally, is the sense of absence perceived by the city's Slovenian minority: the absence of a Slavic nation, at that moment

in time lacking both a capital city and a state; a nation that, nonetheless, begins to imagine Trieste as its natural metropolis, as the realisation of its historical-geographical destiny (Ballinger 2003; Kardelj 1946).

This, in brief, is the historical context framing Trieste's ideal(ised) geographies of absence, marked by a tension between, on the one hand, a series of fluid identitary practices and complex webs of relations among the various ethnic and political-economic communities of a rapidly growing and evolving city and, on the other, a 'hard' and increasingly territorial geographical imagination that attempts to capture the spirit of the city within an 'absence of something', of another ideal(ised) horizon, but this time one that is land-bound: an essential, absolute, national horizon. It is in this shift that the roots of the city's tragic destiny in the contemporary period lie, a tragedy that in many ways mirrors the tragedy of Europe as a whole (Kent 2007).

In theory, Italy's arrival in 1918 should have marked the accomplishment of Trieste's (national) 'historical destiny'. But in reality the city's annexation by the 'Motherland'—a Motherland that soon became a Fascist state—only contributed to further accentuate its 'geography of absence', rendering Trieste a forever-unaccomplished project (Schiffner 1992). With annexation to Italy, it is definitively orphaned by Vienna and by the very Empire that created it as a modern city, an Empire that is forever erased from Europe's map with the First World War. But Trieste also feels orphaned by the Italian state that reveals itself absolutely incapable of understanding the complex nature of the Triestine laboratory. The arrival of the Italian 'compatriots' is experienced by even the Italian Triestini as something quite different from the dream of national re-unification that for many years had driven the city's

Liberal-National political elite. But was any other outcome really possible? Any geography founded upon an ideal imagination of absence as was the Triestine one, by its very nature could not possibly be resolved by a reunification with that which was absent, could not be resolved by simple 'presence'. It was able to survive and prosper only in a condition of constantly mutating, creative equilibrium, driven by ever-new horizons. And a horizon cannot be provided by 'hard', defined territory: it is, by definition, a projection and a project, a gaze into the future. The materialisation of the geographies of absence could thus only reveal itself an illusion or, worse still, a (territorial) trap.

Indeed, the politics of territorial nationalisation that the Fascist state imposes on the Venezia Giulia region right from the outset preoccupy the Triestines, who soon realise that they are regarded by the regime simply as peripheral areas to be colonised and 'Italianised' (Apollonio 2004; Matiussi 2002). And, what is more, they find themselves suddenly deprived of the horizon that always guided their imaginations, deprived of that privileged condition of boundless expectation conceded by every geography of absence to a community in exile from itself, such as the Triestine one (Schiffner 1996). At the same time, the city's Slavic community watches with interest the emergence of a new Yugoslav state right at the city's doorstep, a state that proclaims itself a sanctuary for all the Southern Slavs, and begins to imagine the concrete possibility that Trieste will, one day, become their capital as well (Kardelj 1946). But the reality of Fascist Trieste seems to point in quite the opposite direction, with the increasingly violent repression of all Slovenian institutions and the attempt to erase the Slovenian political presence through forced assimilation. The Triestine Slovene nation is silenced, waiting

to be 'liberated' by its (again, absent) Motherland (see Ballinger 2003; Sluga 1994b, 2001).

The years of the Nazi occupation and the immediate post-war period (marked first by 40 days of Yugoslav occupation and, subsequently a decade of Anglo-American administration and the mass exodus of Italians from Istria) bring great uncertainty about the city's future.

This condition profoundly marks Trieste's self-representation and the city becomes, once more, a theatre for the enactment of absence, though this time an absence that no longer appears a temporary condition as it did in the past but, rather, a sort of inescapable destiny, an end to a dream. Following the war, Trieste is left, in fact, only with what appear to be 'closed' horizons: closed due to the city's loss of the ambitious geographical imagination for which—and within which—Trieste was born, and that nationalism and the tragedies of the twentieth century violently erased (Kent 2007).

The 'geographies of absence' that mark the city's (self) representations in the post-war era are even more convoluted than those of the preceding decades. What is absent, above all, in post-war Trieste is Italy, or so many Triestini think. In the perception of many, the Italian state consigns the city to a peripheral existence: the country has other projects, other languages, other mentalities, and did not know what to do with Trieste, perceived above all as a problem, as a reminder of a historical and political period that was best forgotten (see Cecovini 1968). This perceived 'abandonment' of Trieste by Italy is supposedly balanced by an ambiguous politics of compensation on the part of the State (Valdevit 2004), a set of transfers and subsidies that only served to further dampen the city's mercantile and cosmopolitan 'spirit'. The second absence that powerfully marks the city in the post-war era is that of the Istrian

Peninsula whose territories are lost to the new communist Yugoslavian state: a loss that feeds mourning and nostalgia for a Julian past that will clearly never return and that ends up profoundly influencing Triestine society in the post-war years (Ballinger 2004; Pupo 2005). Trieste's party politics unscrupulously exploit such sentiments of regret and remorse, transforming the trauma of the war and the tragedy of the exodus into political capital, frozen 'as is' for as long as possible within this geography of absence, precluding any alternative political imaginary (Ballinger 2003; see also Sluga 2001; Valdevit 2004). Finally, the third absence is that perceived by the Triestine Slovenians who, following the brief period of Yugoslav occupation of the city, become once more a nation without a state, a national minority in a non-Slavic city and, by virtue of their identification with the Communist and Yugoslav cause, now perceived by many as the enemy of the city and of its Italian tradition.

All the while, the most glaring absence of the post-war decades is that of a new cultural and political horizon for the city, a horizon that would allow it to project itself into the future, to coalesce its strengths around an urban vision that could give it back its lost imagined role as an Adriatic capital. This perceived 'absence of a grand project' explains, indeed, the electoral revolt of 1975 that witnesses the triumph of a new local party, the Lista per Trieste, that succeeds in bringing together the Triestine electorate around a generalised mistrust of the traditional (and national) parties, the call for a *zona franca* (free trade zone) to be constituted in the city and, finally, a refusal of the Osimo Treaty of 1975. After Osimo, in fact, Yugoslavia and Italy become the two metaphorical and political/territorial 'subjects' against which Trieste defines its destiny as a city now reduced to simply looking back at its

memories of (real or presumed) grandeur (see Cattaruzza 2007).

Experimenting new European identities

Can today's Trieste define itself only through imagined geographies of decline and regret, rather than the legacy of its glorious past? What remains of the idealised cosmopolitan project and of the maritime horizon that made of Trieste an extraordinary experiment of Mediterranean modernity? How can we describe the Julian capital today without either falling back into the trap of national(ist) cartographies—or succumbing to sugar-sweet celebrations of its distant past that paint the city in the colours of cheap nobility and that, above all, ignore the challenges and dilemmas of the present?

In some ways, the idealised imaginations of the 'Trieste Nazione' have begun to re-emerge in the past couple of decades, albeit in still timid fashion: whether in the distinctly detached and almost ironic way of perceiving politics in the city (a sort of postmodern ethic as a way of being, masterfully captured by Triestine novelist Mauro Covacich), or (especially) in the deeply pragmatic attitude of the city's inhabitants to the border. It is on everyday practices of the mediation of difference that representations of a new post-Cold War Trieste have focused, imagining a city forever scarred by the violence of the hard territorialisations of nationalism, but also proud of its 'special' status, of its unique dialect, of its being much more complex, much more complicated than its cartographic descriptions would ever allow. It is precisely such ironic and quite mundane understandings of difference—to cite Covacich (2006), the awareness that all Triestini really come from somewhere else, that the 'Triestinita' is not

a fixed identity but simply a 'way of being in the world'—that constitute the most evident expressions of an attempt by some urban actors to reclaim the city's ideal(ised) 'cosmopolitan tradition', using this latter as a starting point for re-imagining the city as a new 'Euro-Mediterranean' capital (see Illy 2005).

The disappearance of the border¹⁷ that for so long defined Trieste's fortunes and urban identity simply served to confirm such imaginations. It is as though the de-materialisation of that border had simply revealed the ephemeral nature of the territorial understandings that had nurtured the nationalist imaginary and the culture²⁰ of regret of the whole post-war period. The border had already assumed an entirely different meaning for most Triestini long before 1991, habitually traversed for weekend excursions, Sunday lunches, and summer vacations on the Istrian and Dalmatian coast. Indeed, the astounding number of exchanges of goods and people (meat, fruit, vegetables and cheap petrol for the Triestini, jobs in the factories and homes of the city for the Yugoslav citizens from across the border) had rendered this one of Europe's²¹ most open borders already from the 1960s on. And the Triestine dialect continues to be key to (re)constituting Triestine belonging (see Minca 2009). Today, however, the dialect is also spoken by the various immigrant communities in the city, from recently arrived Serbians and Bosnians, to the children of immigrants coming from the Maghreb and even China. As it was in the 1800s, still today this lingua franca acts as proof of belonging to the 'Triestinità', but it is neither national nor territorial, merely urban, and remains a common marker of distinction from that which is not Triestine.

With the disappearance of the Cold War border imaginations of the city's future in the past couple of years have focused largely on its

potential role as an international research centre (Picchieri and Pugliese 2004), as a key port and logistical hub for an enlarged Europe (Caroli 2004), and as a Mitteleuropean cultural pole and multicultural laboratory (Apuzzo 2001). Nonetheless, the most ambitious geographical imagination of (and for) the city in recent years has been the project that envisions it as the virtual capital of a new Euroregion that should also incorporate portions of Austria Slovenia and Croatia: a project designed to make the most of connections and common spaces between these territories and within which 'national and cultural differences could perhaps finally be conceived²² as valuable resources, rather than frontiers'.

The explicit aim of these geographical imaginations is to transcend, once and for all, the 'national question' and to transform the city's (often conflictual) experience of the reconciliation of difference into new 'conditions of possibility' in today's 'borderless Europe' (Illy 2005). Indeed, the not-so-hidden hope of Trieste's urban leaders²³ is that within the new 'European Project', the city can perhaps again become the laboratory of a non-territorial citizenship and can reclaim its lost Mitteleuropean and Mediterranean horizons.

Notes

- 1 See Cattaruzza (1995), Panjek (2003) and Visintini (2001).
- 2 For a consideration of the Empire's changing nationalities policies and the cultural debates of the day, see the seminal work by Robert Kann (1977). See also Hobsbawm (1990).
- 3 On the Triestino dialect see Ara and Magris (1982) and Minca (2009).
- 4 Waley's (2009) paper in this issue engages in much more depth the notion of Trieste as a 'cosmopolitan' city; for a broader consideration of the distinct nature of 'Mediterranean cosmopolitanism', see Chambers (2008).

5 Later the Imperial Minister of the Economy.
 6 For a discussion of the Mitteleuropean geopolitical imaginary, see Agnelli (2005).
 7 The idea of a Triestine ‘nation’, championed by urban intellectuals like Rossetti, served as a key support to the political and economic project advanced by the city’s elites. The rhetoric of a ‘municipal nationalism’ helped to galvanise support for a variety of political initiatives and, above all, to craft a sense of unity and of belonging to a unique ‘urban project’ (all the while co-existing with a variety of ‘cultural’ nationalisms).
 8 See, among others, Apih (1988), Finzi, Panariti and Panjek (2003) and Tamaro (1974).
 9 For a discussion, see Agnelli (2005) and Magris (1996).
 10 See Hoßler (2008); also Kacin-Wohinz and Pirjevic (1998).
 11 See Apih (1966), Apollonio (2004) and Matussi (2002).
 12 It is significant that the Laws are proclaimed in Trieste.
 13 See Ballinger (2003); also Melik (1946), Novak (1970) and Sedmak and Mejak (1953).
 14 See Ballinger (2003, 2004), Pupo (2005), Sluga (1994b) and Volk (2004).
 15 I do not have the possibility here to dwell too long on the relevance of the ‘Trieste Question’ in the immediate post-war years, or on the deliberations regarding its contested confine, a confine that will soon become a ‘civilisational’ threshold in the Manichean geographies of the Cold War order (see Ballinger 1999; De Castro 1981; Sluga 1994a, 1994b, 2001; see also Bogdan 1970; Campbell 1976; Cappellini 2004; Collotti 1974; Dinardo 1997; Duroselle 1966; Geoffrey 1977; Kaplan 2001; Kent 2007; Lane 1996; Lees 1997; Novak 1970; Pupo 1999; Rabel 1988; Schiffrer 1992; Smith 2003; Thomassen 2001; Valdevit 1997; Vinci 1992).
 16 See Valdevit (2004); see also De Castro (1981) and, for a different perspective, Kardelj (1953).
 17 See <http://www.listapertrieste.it>.
 18 This Treaty delimited the final frontiers between Italy and Yugoslavia and thus formally closed the ‘border question’ suspended since the end of the war. see Valdevit (2004).
 19 In 1991, with the dissolution of Yugoslavia and, in 2007, with the entry of Slovenia into the Schengen space.
 20 See Magris (2007), Minca (2007a, 2007b) and Rumiz (2007).

21 See Battisti (1979), Bufon (1993, 1996), Cattaruzza (2007), Kaplan (2000), Rossi (2005) and Valussi (1972).
 22 As suggested by then-Regional Governor Riccardo Illy (2005); see also Bufon (1996, 2003) and Minghi and Bufon (2000).
 23 See Bufon (1996, 2006), Favretto (2004) and Honsel, Malinconico and Maresca (2006).
 24 For a broader discussion of non-territorial citizenship, see Amin (2002) and Isin and Wood (1999); on how Trieste can possibly embody a new ‘European’ belonging, see Bialasiewicz (2009) in this special issue.

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Abstract translations

'Trieste Nazione' et ses géographies de l'absence

Le but de cet article d'introduction est d'offrir une vue d'ensemble des histoires et géographies de Trieste en soulignant, en particulier, les manières dont des interprétations du passé de Trieste ont été structurées par un groupe distinct de tropes; un groupe distinct d'imaginations géographiques. J'affirmerai que c'est uniquement en engageant des tropes récurrents, avec ces imaginations géographiques récurrentes, que nous pourrions commencer à comprendre les manières dont la ville représente son passé et aussi son présent. Dans ce sens, le but de cet article est de fournir quelques contextes historiques nécessaires, mais également idéaux, pour des investigations plus empiriques sur les géographies contemporaines et historiques de la ville qui composent ce numéro spécial.

Mots-clefs: Trieste, identité, nation, Europe, géographie de l'absence.

'Trieste Nazione' y sus geografías de ausencia

El propósito de este ensayo introductorio es ofrecer una visión general de las historias y geografías de Trieste, acentuando las maneras en que las interpretaciones del pasado de Trieste han sido estructurado por una serie distinta de tropes; una serie distinta de imaginaciones geográficas. Expongo que solo por entablar en un diálogo con estos tropes, con estas imaginaciones geográficas, que podemos entender la manera del cual la ciudad representa su pasado y su presente. En este sentido, el propósito de este ensayo es contribuir un contexto histórico, sino también 'ideal', necesario por las investigaciones más empíricas de las geografías contemporáneas y históricas de la ciudad que se constituye este número especial.

Palabras claves: Trieste, identidad, nación, Europa, geografía de ausencia