Drawing the east-west border: narratives of modernity and identity in the Julian region, 1947-1954

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The Julian Region, today shared between Italy, Slovenia and Croatia, has long functioned as an integral part of the symbolic fracture cutting through the European continent, dividing it, in the eyes of Western Europeans, into its civilised Western and underdeveloped Eastern or Balkan part. The main contours and early history of the fracture, first formed in the period of the Enlightenment, have by now received considerable attention. Often inspired by Edward Said’s influential study of the Western perceptions of the Orient, historians, anthropologists and political scientists have produced a number of detailed studies exploring the historical formation and variegated uses of Western imagery of the Balkans and Eastern Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, pointing to its links with racism and nationalism as well as its affinities with established power relations. More recently, these studies are being complemented by examinations of symbolic mappings of Europe in regions stigmatised as Eastern or Balkan, whose inhabitants often react to the sigma by pushing the symbolic boundary of the West further East, or by producing equally distorting images of the West. We know relatively little, however, about what exactly happened with these mutual misperceptions during the Cold War period. On the surface, the answer seems straightforward: in the eyes of its inhabitants, the European continent continued to be divided into its Western and Eastern parts, but the differences between the two were no longer seen as a matter of race, nation, culture or civilisation. Instead, the roots of the division were thought to lie in ideology, politics and economy: the democratic, liberal West...
was now facing the communist, totalitarian East. Yet as this chapter aims to demonstrate, this answer is at best partial, if not misleading: it neglects the persistence of older mental mappings, and tells us nothing about the competing images of Europe formed on different sides of the Iron Curtain.

The lack of literature paying attention to the symbolic mappings of Europe after World War II is no coincidence. This blind spot is part and parcel of two closely related tendencies that long dominated the study of the Cold War: the tendency to avoid the discussion of culture, and the associated assumption that during the Cold War, ethnicity, nationality and race were trumped by ideology, international politics, or class. Over the past two decades, both tendencies have been challenged and in part overturned, though predominantly in studies looking at the U.S.. The rapid increase in the volume of books and articles dealing with various aspects of Cold War culture has prompted one author to talk of a ‘cultural turn’ in Cold War studies. The number of works exploring the intricate relationships between Cold War, ethnic conflict, nationalism and racism is increasing as well, and so is the range of books exploring the possibilities of applying the concept of Orientalism to various aspects of American Cold War culture. This chapter aims to add to this body of work by looking at Cold War identity constructions in the Julian Region. Having functioned as one of the epicentres of East-West confrontations in the early post-World-War-II years, the region provides an ideal case study for exploring the mutations of nationalist, racist and Orientalist discourses during the Cold War. Unlike existing examinations of Cold War Orientalism, this chapter adopts a comparative approach, and examines not only the pro-Western visions of the East, but also their counterparts produced in the pro-Yugoslav camp. In doing so, the chapter echoes the ideas of those who have argued for a comparative approach to the history of the region, as well as those urging for an analysis that explores the construction of symbolic boundaries between the East and the West from both western and eastern points of departure.

The examination is limited to the years between 1947 and 1954, which coincides with the period of existence of the Free Territory of Trieste (FTT). FTT was an unusual political formation, established on a patch of bitterly disputed territory that was claimed by Italy on the one hand and the Yugoslav federation on the other hand. The border dispute has a long and turbulent history, which is closely tied to the rise of national states and the

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accompanying attempts to make culture and ethnicity coincide with state borders. Given
the region’s complex ethnic and cultural patchwork, establishing a border based on national
principles was bound to trigger processes of national assimilation and ethnic un-mixing, as
well as provoke violence. The rise of fascism in Italy gave way to increasingly ruthless
forms of Italianisation of Slovenians and Croatians in the region,\(^{11}\) which in turn prompted
a hardening of anti-Italian sentiments among growing numbers of the affected populations,
and gave rise to several clandestine anti-fascist organisations that regularly resorted to
violent means.\(^{12}\) Though intermittently broken by forms of Italo-Slav antifascist
collaboration, this spiral of violence and suspicion continued throughout World War II and
into the post-war period as well.

In the years following World War II, the border dispute acquired a wider strategic
significance. Poised on the southern end of what came to be known as the Iron Curtain, its
fate appeared too important to be left to Italy and Yugoslavia alone. After prolonged
negotiations, most of the Julian Region was carved up between the two neighbouring
states, while the remaining patch of territory, comprising the port city of Trieste and its
immediate surroundings, was declared a Free Territory. The FTT was divided into two
zones, controlled respectively by the Allied Military Government (Zone A) and the
Yugoslav army (Zone B). In line with the early Cold War politics of containment, Zone A
came to function as the last bulwark against Soviet expansionism,\(^{13}\) which was seen as
operating not only through the Yugoslav government, but also through the mass appeal of
Italy’s own Communist Party. At the same time, Zone B was becoming ever more
incorporated into the Yugoslav economic, political and ideological system.\(^{14}\) After the
electoral defeat of the Communist Party in Italy in 1948, and Yugoslavia’s expulsion from
Cominform later in the same year, the double-headed threat of Soviet expansion into
Italian territory suddenly receded. With Trieste no longer functioning as a site of East-West
confrontation, the solution to the “Trieste question” again became a largely bilateral
problem, to be solved between Italy and Yugoslavia themselves. In 1954, FTT was finally
dismembered and the two zones annexed to the two neighbouring states.

Throughout the existence of FTT, the local mass media were heavily involved in the border
dispute, projecting different ideas about the “true” identity of the region and its people, as
well as dissimilar convictions about where the borders should lie. Divided along both
national as well as ideological lines, the newspapers in particular provide an excellent
insight into the multiple cleavages cutting through the public representations of identity,
space and place in the region. The analysis presented in this chapter covers newspapers
published in all three major languages of the region – Italian, Slovenian and Croatian – and
includes pro-Western, pro-Yugoslav as well as pro-Soviet outlets. Among newspapers
published in the Yugoslav part of the Julian Region, the sample includes the Croatian daily
\textit{Riječki list} (1947-1954), later renamed into \textit{Novi list} (1954-), the Slovenian bi-weekly \textit{Nova
\footnotesize\textit{12} Cf. Rolf Wörsdörfer, \textit{Krisenherd Adria 1915-1955: Konstruktion und Artikulation des Nationalen im italienisch-
\footnotesize\textit{14} See Nevenka Troha, “Ukrepi jugoslovanskih oblasti v conah B Julijske krajin in Svobodnega tržaškega
Gorica (1947-1953), later renamed into Primorske novice (1953-), and the Italian daily La Voce del Popolo (1945-). Together with the Slovenian bi-weekly Slovenski Jadran (1952-1963), published in Zone B, and the Slovenian minority daily Primorski Dnevnik (1945-), published in Zone A, most of these newspapers had their roots in clandestine antifascist, pro-communist periodicals established during the Second World War. Under the Federal People’s Republic of Yugoslavia, all publications were legally free, but were in fact rather tightly regulated by the communist authorities, which resorted to a variety of direct and indirect means, including the banning of distribution, denial of paper supplies etc. As a result, all the pro-Yugoslav newspapers included in the sample represented the identities and boundaries of the Julian Region in broadly similar ways, more or less in line with the positions of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia.

The remaining materials examined in the chapter, all published in Zone A, are much more varied in terms of both their political affiliations and their approach to identities and borders. The official outlet of the regional branch of the Italian Communist Party, Il Lavoratore (1945-1964), and its Slovenian counterpart Delo (1949), offer an insight into the specificities of pro-Soviet Cold War discourse in the region after Tito’s break with Stalin in 1948. The two pro-Italian dailies, La Voce Libera (1945-1949) and Giornale di Trieste (1947-1954), although affiliated to political groups at different ends of the political spectrum, both unequivocally supported the annexation of Trieste to Italy, and represented the voices of those Triestines who “recognised themselves in [...] the Western, Atlantic, and European camp”. The weekly Trieste (1954-1978) followed broadly similar lines of argument. Finally, the Slovenian weekly Demokracija (1947-1963), tied to the Catholic and liberal fractions within the Slovenian minority in Zone A, provides an insight into Slovenian appropriations of pro-Western discourses.

Julian Region as a civilisational fault line

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17 That said, it needs to be added that the Yugoslav press at the time did not always accurately reproduce the official line of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY). In the early post-World-War-II years, this was largely due to the lack of educated and skilled editors and journalists, which forced the CPY to rely on inexperienced and non-communist personnel. From the early 1950s onwards, other factors came into play, most prominently the press reform, which required all newspapers to follow consumer demand and rely on sales rather than state support. See Lilly, Power and Persuasion, 68 and 207-208.


20 Due to limitations of space, this chapter avoids the discussion of identity- and border-constructions apparent in the pro-independentist daily Il Corriere di Trieste (1945-1958). Suffice it to say that this newspaper bears witness to the continued existence of supranational, cosmopolitan forms of identification in the region. Many of its founders and contributors were known for their disdain for nationalism and support for supranational, yet not exclusively socialist, forms of identification and political legitimation.
Already a quick glance at the pro-Western newspapers published in the Julian Region in the post-World-War-II years reveals that the perceptions of Europe prevalent at the time cannot be assessed fully without taking into account their continuities with pre-war mental mappings. Far from being swept away by Cold War divisions, beliefs in the fundamental influence of racial, cultural and civilisational differences continued to hold sway throughout the period of existence of the FTT. The Cold War mapping of Europe, based on the division of the world into two economically and politically radically opposed blocks, was simply grafted onto pre-existing layers of nineteenth- and early twentieth century distinctions. The long-standing notion of Italy as a cultural nation, for instance, now regularly appeared in conjunction with the notion of a liberal, democratic Western civilisation,21 while Yugoslav nations were repeatedly pictured as belonging to the illiberal, communist Eastern civilisation. Moreover, the core ideas that coalesced into the Cold War mapping were themselves of an older date. The notion of Europe being divided into a civilised West and an underdeveloped East can be traced back to the period of the Enlightenment.22 Similarly, ideologically-motivated cleavages between liberals, socialists and clericals, both within and across the various national groups coexisting in the Julian Region, have a much longer history and were largely established in the late nineteenth century. However, in the post-World War period, Churchill’s metaphorical “Iron Curtain” gave these divisions an unprecedented fixity, largely resolving the old ambiguities, including those related to the exact position of Germany and the Slavic nations in Central Europe.23

The symbolic geographies drawn by the pro-Italian, anti-communist Triestine newspapers often coincided with, and sometimes even explicitly mentioned, the notion of an Iron Curtain, emphasizing that it marks not only a border between nations, but also a border between radically different civilisations and races. In an article published in *Trieste* (Year 1, No 1, 1954), the Julian Region is deemed to be “a sensitive point of encounter between three worlds: the Latin world, the German world, and the Slavic world – a point that, depending on the historical moment and temperature, can be either a point of strife or a point of agreement”. For the author of the article, there is no doubt about how the East-West divide fits into the picture: according to him, it is “the march of Slavism that threatens to submerge the Western civilisations” and only Italianness could reinstate the equilibrium in the region – the very same Italianness that “prevented the Germans from grabbing the Mediterranean”. This juxtaposition of the Slavic and German threats, and the concomitant neglect of the totalitarian past of Italians themselves, finds its parallels in other pro-Italian publications from the period. According to an editorial published in *Giornale di Trieste* (September 10, 1947), for example, Panslavism “is, at least as far as its mental forms are concerned, a direct heir” of Pangermanism.

Arguably, representations such as these were an echo of the broader Western discourse at the time, within which both Nazism and Communism were thought of being essentially alien to the Western civilisation,24 got lumped together under the label “totalitarian” or

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22 Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*.
“authoritarian” and contrasted to the “democratic West”. The dichotomy of the democratic West and the illiberal, totalitarian East frequently appeared in the Triestine pro-Italian press as well. The crucial addendum, however – and in fact the focus of attention in such representations – was the position of Italy. When drawing a parallel between Nazism and Communism, Italian nationalists in the region were in fact appropriating Cold War bipolarities to buttress their own nationalist claims. Typically, the pro-Italian press would endorse the notion of Trieste as the bulwark protecting the Italian nation from the Slavic threat, and tie it to western Allied aims to protect the Western block. The conclusion of the above-mentioned article published in *Trieste* provides a fitting example of how this strategy worked in practice:

> It is clear today that Trieste, along with the part of the Julian Venetia indispensable to it, can fulfil its important and delicate function of an equilibrator between the Orient and the Occident of Europe only if it is included in its natural nest, that is into the Italian state, into an Italy that is reconstituting itself […] as a bulwark of democracy and of the Western civilisation. Without Trieste and its territory, however, Italy herself is weakened and much less able to resist the pressure of the Orient. (*Trieste*, Year 1, No 1, 1954)

An integral part of this convergence of nationalist claims and Cold War mappings was the marrying of national and racial categories to political and economic orientation. In line with this, some nations – or even whole races – were assumed to be inherently predisposed to developing a democratic political system and adopting a market economy, while others were believed to be condemned to a totalitarian outlook and centrally planned economy. The pro-Italian Triestine press regularly drew on these distinctions and equations when discussing the allegedly unique fate of the city and the broader region. “For the Italians of Trieste and Istria […] the idea of homeland is indissolubly tied to the idea of freedom”, read an editorial published in *Trieste* (Year 1, No 1, 1954). Yet these freedom-loving Italians, continued the article, “live close to an environment where the civil, political and social liberties and the respect for the autonomy of the peoples are considered to be simple propagandistic formulas, to be exploited often but never applied”. Closely similar distinctions were drawn in an editorial published in *La Voce Libera* (April 01, 1947), which concluded that true democratic liberties could be secured only with the return of the FTT to Italy – a country that, according to another article published in the same daily, also “gave the world the Roman law” and should therefore certainly be involved in the administration of justice in the Free Territory.

A characteristic element of the discourse that married national and racial categories to political and economic orientation was the term *slavo-communist*, a derogatory label that at least partly fed on the assumption that communism had its roots in the innately totalitarian character of the Slavs. The articles published in *Giornale di Trieste* offer numerous examples. One such article (October 02, 1953) describes the cruel behaviour of Yugoslav communists towards the local Italian population and refers to the perpetrators as “human beasts”. Even more telling are the derisive caricatures in which

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25 Naumann, *Uses of the Other*, 103. To fit the dichotomising pattern, the fact that the supposedly “democratic” West included countries governed by military dictatorships – Portugal, Spain, Turkey and Greece – was conveniently forgotten. See Gerard Delanty, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995), 125.

slavo-communisti are regularly pictured with a grim, stern expression on their faces, wearing a uniform, with no distinguishing individual features, and often even barefoot (e.g. November 02, 1953). Suggesting a propensity to militarism, collectivism and violence, as well as primitivism, such caricatures provided a fitting visual backdrop to newspaper stories warning of the imminent threat of a “Slavo-communist invasion” in Trieste. In one such article (Giornale di Trieste, March 21, 1948), the author claims that the Slavs are using “complex mechanisms of infiltration”, getting nearer and nearer to the heart of the city, casting a dense net of institutions that is controlled centrally in a machine-like manner and can easily be used to stir up the obedient masses across the city.

Another frequently invoked characteristic that functioned to demonstrate Italy’s privileged link to the Western civilisation – and, by default, Yugoslavia’s detachment from the West – was religion. Historically, the Italian national myth of origin relied heavily on Catholicism. Particularly in the turbulent post-World War Two period, Catholicism provided one of the foundational myths that helped re-build Italian national unity, defined in opposition to two main Others: the fascist past and the communist threat. In this period, Catholics’ repugnance toward Communism took precedence over their traditional antipathy toward liberalism, and facilitated their reconciliation with the values of modern Western society. If the Cold War setting provided external pressure, Catholicism was thus the glue that was used to restore Italian post-war nationhood and sense of belonging to the West from within. This was in tune with the wider function of religion in the construction of the West during the Cold War, namely the fact that the Christian West was contrasted to the atheist East.

The convergence of Italian religious nationalism and the Cold War rhetoric came very clearly to the fore in Giornale di Trieste’s reporting on the violent incidents in the autumn of 1953. The incidents were sparked by an announcement, issued jointly by the United States and Britain on October 8, in which the two Allies informed the parties involved that they intend to withdrawn their troops from Zone A of the Free Territory and hand the administration over to Italy. Yugoslavia responded with public denunciations, mass protests, and finally a mobilisation of armed forces along the Italian frontier. The pro-Italian part of the population in Trieste, cheer-led by Giornale di Trieste, greeted the prospect of the arrival of Italian troops with excitement, organising mass displays of national loyalty. The demonstrations that escalated in early November provoked repressive measures on the side of the Allied administration, and resulted in bloodshed. One of the major clashes with the police took place in front of one Trieste’s Catholic churches, the Sant’Antonio Nuovo. Giornale di Trieste found this fact particularly repugnant, claiming that the events were an affront to the religious feelings of the people (November 06, 1953), and “offended the most sacred values, using violence against the flag and against the crucifix” (November 02, 1953).

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29 Delanty, Inventing Europe, 123.
31 Novak, Trieste, 418-448.
Yet another set of oppositions that often surfaced in pro-Italian constructions of the border, and overlapped with the contrast between civilised Italians and barbaric Slavs, was one that pitched civilised coastal cities against the untamed rural hinterland. This opposition has its origins in the Venetian Enlightenment, when Venetians often criticised the Dalmatian “Morlacchi” – a now non-existent category referring to the people leaving in the rural hinterland of Dalmatia – as lazy, irrational and prone to violence.32 Over the course of the nineteenth century, the rural/urban divide gradually acquired racist and nationalist overtones, thereby linking the urban settings to the Italian civilisation and the rural hinterland to Slavic tribes. It is in this racialised form that the distinction became an integral element of Fascist ideology. Fascists often spoke of Dalmatia as a land in need of being civilised from the Italians, or singled out particular cities in Dalmatia as superior to other towns that were permeated by barbarism, low levels of hygiene, and, more generally, balkanism.33 The aristocracy of the “new” Fascist civilisation was believed to be morally responsible for saving humanity, including the inhabitants of the Balkans, from the combined threats of democracy, communism and Jewish conspiracy, and thereby also secure the “vital space” for the expansion of the Fascist New Order.34 In the post-war period, the specifically fascist inflections of the rural/urban contrast largely receded, but the fundamental polarity, intertwined with the Italian/Slav split, continued to function as one of the core instruments of boundary-maintenance, this time combined with typical Cold War elements. The article commenting on the festivities and protests organised on Labour Day in 1947 (Giornale di Trieste, May 03, 1947) provides a case in point. According to the author, a substantial part of the “tired people who trampled […] the streets of the city centre” on Labour Day was “undoubtedly foreign” and “did not belong to the city”, but was instead brought over from the villages in Zone B. Not only were the protesters alien because they were communist and supposedly came from the Yugoslav part of the Free Territory, but also because their rural origins made them appear as an alien body in the urban environment of Trieste.

While the above-discussed polarities – East/West, totalitarianism/democracy, atheism/Christianity etc. – were particularly characteristic of identity constructions appearing in the pro-Italian press, one should also note that the very same rhetorical devices were used by the anti-communist fractions of the Slovenian minority in Zone A. Similarly as their Italian counterparts, Slovenian anti-communists relied on Cold War
rhetoric to buttress their own nationalist demands and claim a privileged Western character for Slovenians. These rhetorical devices are clearly evident in the opening issue of the weekly *Demokracija* (April 25, 1947), a publication affiliated to the major anti-communist Slovenian party at the time, the Slovenian Democratic Union. One of the main aims of the new weekly, claims the editorial, is to reveal to the world the true face of the Slovenian nation, and help rebuild the image of Slovenians as a “truly democratic, cultured and Christian nation [narod]”. Communist rule, argued the editorial, was imposed on the nation from the outside and is essentially alien to its historical roots. With time, the Slovenian nation should “return to the family of free nations belonging to the democratic and Christian culture and civilisation”. Similarly as the pro-Italian press, *Demokracija* thus presented the Julian Region as a major civilisational fault-line, yet one that should be shifted further East to include Slovenians into the West. Quite unsurprisingly, the same line of argument was adopted also in Slovenian-language publications of the Allied Military Government, aimed at promoting pro-Western sentiments among local Slovenians. In one such publication, the Slovenians of the Free Territory were described as “one of the rare branches of the Slovenian national family that has the opportunity to freely and actively participate in the cultural, political, and economic life of European nations” and that was able “to maintain its historical ties with the West”.35

**Julian Region as an ideological battleground**

If the pro-Western press clearly perpetuated older identity constructions, couching them in Cold War rhetoric, the pro-communist press followed a very different vision, one that was, at least initially, firmly intent on breaking away from racist and nationalist discourses of the past, and instead divided the world following ideological, political and economic criteria. The ideological premises of these criteria were of course in direct opposition with those at work in dominant Western Cold War discourses. In line with the historical-materialist interpretation of history, the pro-communist vision rejected the assumption that modernisation went hand-in-hand with the advancement of market economy and liberal democracy. Instead, it invested its hopes in an egalitarian, worker-led society in which the distribution of profits is subject to social control. Especially in the immediate post-war period, it also refused the idea that sovereign political units should coincide with culturally and nationally homogenous units – a fact that is habitually overlooked in existing analyses of identity construction in the region.36 As a consequence, the Italo-Yugoslav border in pro-communist identity constructions assumed a radically different function: it did not serve primarily as a national divide, but instead functioned as the marker of an ideological divide.37 To be sure, references to national identities and interests were far from absent, yet their fulfilment seemed coextensive with the communist cause.38

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58 The rise of communism, both in Yugoslavia and elsewhere, owes a great deal to the manipulation of nationalist aspirations, condoned by both Marx and Lenin as an acceptable means of furthering the communist cause in pre-revolutionary societies. Yet contrary to the expectations of Leninist national policy,
Despite this fundamental difference, pro-communist constructions of identity and difference continued to be based on the fundamental premise of modern identity construction shared also by the anti-communist press, namely the opposition between the modern, civilised Self and the underdeveloped, backward and primitive Other. However, in contrast to westocentric identity constructions explored earlier, representations of the Self and the Other prevailing in the pro-communist press associated progressiveness, civilisation and modernity with political and economic doctrines and practices adopted in “the East”: internationalism, centrally planned economy, and working class rule. This alternative narrative of progress and modernity drew on the broader narrative that saw the Soviet politico-economic model as more advanced than that of capitalist Europe, and often amounted to an exact reversal of the civilisational hierarchy present in the anti-communist newspapers. Instead of the contrast between civilised Italians and underdeveloped, barbaric Slavs, pro-communist newspapers were regularly drawing on the distinction between the progressive working peoples of Yugoslavia and the uncivilised Italian bourgeoisie. It is important to note that this distinction did not coincide with national, racial and more broadly geo-cultural divisions: the “progressive working peoples of Yugoslavia” often expressly included the local Italian working class. Instead of being divided into two blocks, the world as seen through the lens of pro-communist newspapers in the region was divided into two fronts: “the front of the imperialist instigators of war” on the one hand, and “the huge front of peoples of all countries who want the peace” on the other hand. The latter was believed to include “the invincible Soviet Union, the new Yugoslavia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, the democratic forces of Greece and Hungary, and the great majority of the people of America, England, France, Italy and all other countries not only in Europe, but across the whole world” (La Voce del Popolo, January 03, 1947).

Apart from fascist Italy, which featured as the major enemy of the “working people” in the region before 1945, pro-communist newspapers repeatedly attacked also “contemporary imperialists”, above all those based in the U.S. The democracy, civilisation and culture of contemporary imperialists, claimed one article (Riječki list, September 05, 1947), is only a veil covering their “spiritual poverty”, while “the true democracy” can only be found among the “progressive powers rallying around Soviet culture”. Another article (Riječki list, October 17, 1947) presented an even more damning picture of “the western world, and particularly America”, referring to their use of “uncivilised instruments”, such as “the atom bomb” and “the barbaric dollar-democracy”, which are “unworthy of civilised people”. A further indicator of the assumed backwardness of the imperial forces, including the Italian bourgeoisie, was their alleged propensity for patriarchal family relations. According to one article (Primorske novice, June 03, 1954), the communist revolution “swept away the shameful stains of the inequality of women and the outdated beliefs about the worthlessness of women, their subordination to men, their inability to contribute to the social, political and economic life”. In contrast, however, the women on the other side of the Italian-Yugoslav


40 Naumann, Uses of the Other, 104.
border, “are continuing to carry the burden of foreign domination” (Slovenski Jadran, March 05, 1954). The women living in the coastal cities in Zone B were seen to be no better off: the inhabitants of these cities, allegedly consisting mostly of the “Italian bourgeoisie”, were purportedly “extremely backward” and “patriarchal” (Primorski dnevnik, September 03, 1947).

Another criterion of civilisation and progress habitually invoked in the pro-Yugoslav press, was the presence (or absence) of fascism, chauvinism and nationalism. These were phenomena that, as one article (Primorski dnevnik, November 29, 1947) claimed, “were thoroughly extinguished in Yugoslavia”, but continued to be “tolerated, allowed and even supported” in the Free Territory, where “democratic principles and human rights exist only on paper”. One could easily be tempted to conclude that the charge of fascism was indiscriminately directed at all Italians, thereby creating a fitting ideological counterpart to the stereotype of the “Slavo-communist” so often present in the pro-Italian nationalist press. Intermittently, pro-Yugoslav newspapers levelled the charge of fascism not only at the pre-1943 Italian regime, but at post-war Italy as well (e.g. Primorske novice, September 03, 1954), thus indeed reinforcing the stereotypical connection between Italians and fascism. However, pro-communist, including pro-Yugoslav newspapers normally avoided the equation between Italians and fascists, and instead emphasised that the common struggle against fascist Italy unified the local populations regardless of national allegiance. Predictably, the distinction between anti-fascist and pro-fascist Italians was most often drawn in Il Lavoratore, the official outlet of the regional branch of the Italian Communist Party. Its articles regularly criticised the Italians of Trieste who “continue to be victims of nationalism” (March 01, 1947), and condemned the persistence of “fascist terrorism” in the city (May 02, 1947), yet without at the same time loosing sight of anti-fascist activities and convictions among Italians in the region. Similar arguments could also be found in the Croatian and Slovenian pro-communist press. According to an article (Riječki list, March 02, 1947), “one could expect that the struggle against Italian fascism, which was the most visible expression of Italy in this region, would lead to a fight against all Italians”. However, continued the article, the national liberation struggle helped turn the developments into a different direction: “The great idea of brotherhood and unity of nations in the struggle against the common oppressor, for the common freedom and wellbeing, united both Italians and Croatians of Istria into a common front.”

The various imperialist, fascism-prone Others, and particularly so Fascist Italy, were also the ones to be blamed for the poor economic and social condition of the working class in the Julian region. According to one article (Primorski dnevnik, September 03, 1947), fascist Italy “was preventing any education of Slovenians and Croatians and the Italian working classes”. “Our working people”, claimed another article (Riječki list, September 05, 1947), “were consciously and calculatingly diverted from theatre […] and deliberately entertained by farce and comedy to turn them away from political and social problems”. Even the irresponsible exploitation of natural resources such as forests, for example, was seen as a

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41 The official proclamations of Italo-Yugoslav brotherhood of course provide little insight into the struggles taking place on the ground, which often contradicted ideas of brotherhood and continued to be fuelled by mutual suspicion and nationalist prejudices as well as violence, and prompted a mass exodus from Istria. For a synthetic overview and critical assessment of various interpretive approaches to the issue of inter-ethnic relations and migrations in the Julian Region during and after World War II see Raoul Pupo, Il lungo esodo – Istra: le persecuzioni, le foibe, l’esilio (Milano: Rizzoli, 2005), 187-204.

Consequence of similarly irresponsible behaviour of “foreign imperialists” and “capitalists” (Riječki list, September 17, 1947). The low level of transport infrastructure in the country was equally blamed on the “internal exploiters and foreign imperialists, people who for twenty years have been exporting what was best out of our country” (Primorski dnevnik, September 03, 1947). Upon the dismemberment of the Free Territory, when Zone B was annexed to Yugoslavia, the president of the local socialist alliance was reported saying that he hopes for a “new era, one that would do away with the dark past and the damaging consequences of the hundred-years long enslavement” (Primorske novice, November 26, 1954). “We are left with a sad heritage”, lamented another article published in the same period (Slovenski Jadran, October 07, 1954): “Our highland villages do not have good drinkable water, and we will have to tear down all the hovels in which the working people used to live in the times of the ‘high civilisation’.” Given that the “imperial forces of the West” were seen as generally hostile to progress and true democracy, the guiding light and measure of progress was to be sought at the other end of the symbolic map of the world: in “the East”. Where geographic and natural obstacles hindered the strengthening of ties with the East, argued one article (Riječki list, 29 November 29, 1947), railways and tunnels should therefore be built to overcome these obstacles and turn the alienated regions into the right direction.

However, only a few years after the establishment of the Free Territory, the lines of division drawn by the pro-communist press were reshuffled, and among pro-Yugoslav newspapers “the East” suddenly lost its previous appeal. Tito’s split with Stalin in 1948 was followed by a clear bifurcation within the pro-communist press in the region. For Il Lavoratore and the newly established, pro-Soviet Slovenian newspaper Delo, Yugoslavia now joined the ranks of imperial enemies: its supporters deserved to be labelled as “fascists”, “nationalist” and “chauvinist” (Delo, January 08, 1949), and were accused of paving the road to the establishment of capitalism in Yugoslavia (Delo, January 08, 1949). Upon the announcement of the partition of the Free Territory in 1954, both newspapers decried the decision, arguing that it goes against the will of the population and presents a threat to the peace in the region (see e.g. Il Lavoratore, October 4, 1954). The pro-Yugoslav newspapers, on the other hand, believed the true traitor was the Soviet Union itself. The reports on developments in the Soviet Union were now far from the glittering portrayals known from the immediate post-war years. Instead, the articles were warning against “Soviet expansionism” (La Voce del Popolo, April 02, 1954, 1) and portrayed Soviet elites as the new imperialists, who are enjoying a luxurious lifestyle while the living conditions of Soviet workers are deteriorating (La Voce del Popolo, June 15, 1954, p. 3). Following the same interpretive framework, Triestine supporters of the Soviet Union were accused of misleading the proletarian mass in Trieste and supporting nationalist, imperialist and capitalist aims (Primorske novice, September 03, 1954, p.2). The former ally now joined the list of Yugoslavia’s main Others: together with capitalist regimes and colonies, it was now regarded as a country whose workers are “oppressed, deprived of any rights, denied freedom” (La Voce del Popolo, May 01, 1954).

The break with Soviet Union also marked the beginning of a slight shift in the relative weight of nationalist aspirations and class struggle, in favour of the former. Geo-cultural demarcations were now regularly appearing side-by-side with socio-economic ones. Particularly in the realm of foreign policy, Yugoslavia was beginning to adopt a new geopolitical identity, positioning itself as being outside of the two “imperialist” blocks,
belonging neither to the East nor to the West. “We,” argued Tito in a speech given in 1954, “are following our own path into socialism, and we will let anyone, neither those in the East nor those in the West, to make us stray away from this path” (Primorske novice, April 02, 1954, 1). This liminal position allowed Yugoslav leaders to selectively draw on cultural, political and ideological elements associating them with both poles of the symbolic map, acting simultaneously as a bridge between, as well as a bulwark of, both the East and the West, while at the same time refusing to join either of them.42 This symbolic positioning was to become particularly prominent from the late 1950s onwards, when it found its political expression in the Non-Aligned Movement.

Within Yugoslavia itself, geo-cultural principles of identification, in particular nationalist ones, were taking hold as well: Slovenian representatives were disappointed by the increasingly real prospect of “loosing” Trieste, which among other things meant that Yugoslav borders would not coincide with the ethnic distribution of the Slovenian population. In the public realm, these stirrings became visible in occasional disagreements between newspaper commentaries written by Slovenian communist leaders, and official positions defended by Tito,43 as well as in the continuing insistence on the London Memorandum as an ultimately unjust, provisional solution. In a speech delivered by France Bevk, reproduced in Primorske novice (October 15, 1954, 1) the Slovenian writer commended the Memorandum for being the best possible solution under given circumstances, and emphasised its role in maintaining peaceful relations with Italy. However, he also clearly signalled that the new arrangement of borders was not there to stay, since it did not coincide with ethnic distribution: “if we look into the more distant future, we should not forget that unnatural borders, which unjustly cut into the body of a nation, cannot endure”. Although ultimately accepting the border settlement, voices such as this one made clear that the communist vision of the Julian Region continued to draw on national and cultural lines of division – though to a much lesser extent than pro-Western discourses produced in the region at the time.

Conclusions

As demonstrated in the chapter, post-World-War symbolic mappings of Europe produced in the Julian Region in many ways continued to perpetuate lines of identification and exclusion of a much earlier date. Especially ideas fostered in pro-Western newspapers, centred on the perception of the Julian Region as a civilisational fault-line, remained deeply embedded in nationalist discourses, and resorted to Cold War rhetoric primarily as a means of furthering nationalist claims and territorial demands. However, pro-Soviet and pro-Yugoslav outlets provided a significantly different vision, one that perceived the region primarily as an ideological battleground. Although both mappings and corresponding sets of identifications were tied to the same basic narrative of progress, and operated with

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42 This kind of symbolic positioning is part and parcel of a more widespread phenomenon that can be fittingly conceptualised as “frontier Orientalism”, a variety of Orientalism characteristic of European empires without overseas colonies, as well as modern states established in their stead. Cf. Andre Gingrich, “Frontier Myths of Orientalism: The Muslim World in Public and Popular Culture of Central Europe,” in MESS - Mediterranean Ethnological Summer School, Vol. II, edited by Bojan Baskar and Borut Brumen (Ljubljana: Institut za multikulturne raziskave, 1996), 99-127.

distinctions such as progressive/backward and civilised/barbaric, they were premised on radically different understandings of what it means to be ‘modern’: one was consistent with the dominant Western narrative, culminating in industrialisation and development of market economy, the other was based on socialist ideas and ended with an egalitarian, worker-led society in which the distribution of profits is subject to social control.

References


