

CULTURAL AND SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS ON THE BORDER: FROM DISAGREEMENT TO COEXISTENCE

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Abstract: In the twentieth century, certain locations, symbols, and ritual practices along the Italian-Slovenian border were subject to various social and cultural representations. During that century, they primarily represented a subject of disagreement between both ethnic communities; however, in the last ten years, some groups and local authorities have been seeking opportunities to live together in coexistence.

Keywords: ritual; symbol; social poetics; Slovenia; Italy; partisan; neo-fascism; discourse; graffiti.

Representations

In north-western Italy, on the border with Slovenia and in an area inhabited by the ethnic Slovenian minority, there are often incidents by various extremist right-wing (neo-fascist) groups in which they deface Partisan monuments and other public areas with anti-Slovenian graffiti—for example, *Tito, boia* “Tito, hangman”, *Sciavi, barbari* “Slavs, barbarians”, and so on.

First of all, this raises a question. What do these written messages represent and who are they intended for? Which and whose totality of culture does the particular character of the graffiti signify? Based on Charles S. Peirce’s definition of the sign,¹ one can ask where the grounds for representation lie and what they are. The second point of departure for study focuses on the question of whether current situations, events, causes, and effects (cf. Jackson 2005) can be analyzed within the framework of social or cultural anthropology, or whether one should instead dedicate more attention to and investigate “common sense”—that is, both its cultural manifestations and social effects (cf. Herzfeld 2001, X, 1).

In any case, watershed events (such as 11 September 2001, EU accession in 2004, etc.) and the specific graffiti incidents by neo-fascists speak of the need to investigate those points at which the basic trends in the use and interpretation of cultural and social

¹ “A sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. . . . The sign stands for its object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the representamen” (CP, 2.228).

representations are reflected and departed from. All of these events and situations reveal both the conflicting and creative potential of opportunities, limitations, and realizations. This changing image of the world, which is partly forcibly introduced from the outside, reveals images of the cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 1997) of a nation, of an ethnic group, of social groups, and so on, which can be understood from the viewpoint of social poetics—that is, from the perspective of the basic conviction of individuals or groups and their certainty about how the world is ordered and how it (should) work, in which they at the same time exclude all perspectives opposed to this from their image of the world. This also evades the image of the world that was sought and repeatedly found by the cultural sciences when, in seeking continuity, they overlooked changes and the ability to adapt, and in events and changes they overlooked certain fixed elements connected with a particular social group, a particular media discourse, and so on.

However, the greatest conflict potential lies in those discourses about turning points and events that occurred in the primarily ethnically/nationally defined past (cf. Eriksen 2002). The relationship between Italy and Slovenia (as well as Croatia) is thus largely defined by the discourse on the period from 1880 to 1956, which especially in the past twenty years has been studied by many amateur and professional historians on both sides of the border, members of ideologically different political orientations (from extreme right-wing neo-fascist to extreme left-wing communist), and methodologically diverse historical orientations (from “negationist” and realist to “revisionist”). In addition, from 1993 to 2000 this period was studied by a joint Slovenian-Italian historical committee appointed by both governments, resulting in a published report.² The Slovenian government accepted this report and published it on its website, whereas the Italian government has never accepted or published the report.

Even in this summary of the debate over the recent past,³ one of the fundamental conflicts or problems of communication between different discourses can be established. Anselm Strauss says that:

. . . the difficulty in interpreting representational interactions is this: They rest on the multiple bases of representation that each social unit (whether an individual or a collective) will possess (Strauss 1993, 170).

In such frameworks of operative dominant horizons of seeking and assigning (blame, merit, etc.), or ascribing the role of victim to oneself, conflict is unavoidable.

² *Slovene-Italian Relations 1880–1956: Report of the Slovene-Italian Historical and Cultural Commission* (Koper-Capodistria, 25 July 2000). This was published on the Slovenian government website (http://www.mzz.gov.si/si/zakonodaja_in_dokumenti/dokumenti/porocilo_slovensko_italijanske_zgodovinske_kulturne_komisije/), and in the newspapers *Primorske novice* and *Primorski dnevnik*; it was also published on a number of Italian websites, with the Trieste newspaper *Il Piccolo* among the first; the entire report, including speeches by both committee chairmen and Dimitrij Rupel, the Slovenian foreign minister, is available at http://www.kozina.com/premik/index_porocilo.htm. The report was prepared in three languages and was also issued as a book by *Nova Revija* Kacin Wohinz and Troha (Eds.), 2001.

³ A broader and more extensive historical context of this area’s history is provided in *Alpen-Adria, Zur Geschichte einer Region* (Alps-Adriatic: The History of a Region, 2001) by Andreas Moritsch et al.

Within the framework of the larger research on ritual practices, remembering and reviving the past systems, symbolism of places, conflict vs. being together potential of the borders of Slovenia with Italy, Austria, Hungary, and Croatia, some questions need to be touched upon. The author looks at some examples of neo-fascist graffiti and reconciliatory events and tries to understand the different opportunities for cultural and social representations, where both disagreement—as a relic of the ethnic, national domination and subordination—and reconciliation, with the goal of the coexistence of different ethnic, national communities, can take place.⁴

Disagreements

In January 1998, unknown perpetrators defaced the monument in Bagnoli della Rosandra-Boljunec, in addition to other monuments near Trieste: in Basovizza-Bazovica, Trebiciano-Trebče, and Padriciano-Padriče. The monument stands in a prominent place, nearly at the very entrance to the village from the direction of Cattinara-*Katinara*, at the



Figure 1: Slovenian monument to WWII Partisans defaced by graffiti. Bagnoli della Rosandra-Boljunec, January 1998 (Photo: J. Fikfak)

⁴ The initial analysis was conducted at the Interuniversity Centre Dubrovnik as part of the course on *Interpretation und Verstehen* led by Ulrich Oevermann und Detlef Garz. Some elements and ideas of the paper were presented at the 2004 SIEF conference in Marseille (France) and at the meeting of the American Geographic Association 2004 in Portorož (Slovenia). The broader framework of the research stressing the question of different discourses is presented in the Slovenian version published in *Studia ethnologica Croatica* 19, 2009, where other problems and questions were also raised, such as the internalization of discourses, the relation-interplay between official and sub-cultural discourse, neo-fascist video production. Part of the research for this paper was also undertaken within the bilateral project Slovakia-Slovenia *Slovakian-Slovenian parallels in ethnology and folklore studies* SK-SI-0020-08.

crossroads leading to the church and village centre. It is surrounded by a metal fence. The gates are usually closed and flowers and shrubs grow to the left and right of the monument; to the right there are three or four flags: the flag of the former Socialist Republic of Slovenia (with a red star), the communist red flag, the Italian flag, and a flag of peace bearing the words *PACE* and *MIR*. It is arranged like a garden and provides visitors and relatives with the opportunity to stop and pay their respects to the fallen. At the top of the monument, which was erected immediately after the Second World War, is a star, and below this is an inscription in Slovenian reading “To the victims of the Liberation War” and the names of the fallen. Somewhat later (in the 1970s) the ground in front of the monument was paved and a large red star was placed in the middle; together with the star at the top of the monument, these frame the Partisan message of the monument.

Because the text on the monument is only in Slovenian, it can be concluded that this was one of the first monuments erected after the war to the victims of the Yugoslav front of the Second World War, before 1947.

In January 1998, graffiti was written on this monument. According to informants, the monument has been defaced repeatedly, at least fifteen times.

An unknown perpetrator spray-painted a black circle with a cross (the Celtic cross) on the monument—one of the characteristic symbols used by young extreme-right movements⁵ and connected with neo-fascism or with groups of Italian soccer fans (e.g., the “ultras” of Trieste’s Triestina soccer club). Beneath the cross is written *TITO BOIA* “Tito hangman”; the break after this is marked with a fasces, and on the lower half of the monument two slogans are written: *ONORE AI CADUTI DELLE FOIBE* “Glory to the fallen in the Karst shafts” and *DUX* (i.e., Mussolini’s title). Several pieces of graffiti appear on the paving in front of the monument: the inscription *MS FT* is written across the red star. Another Celtic cross has also been drawn across the red star, and below this are a swastika and the word *RAUS* “get out”.

Two layers of representation have thus arisen. The original layer is shaped by the two stars, framing a narrative about those that fell in the Yugoslav front of the Second World War—in this case, Slovenians whose lives were sacrificed on the altar of the homeland, or, given the form of the monument, were sacrificed to the flame of freedom. At a discrete and indiscrete level, both inscriptions—*Žrtvam osvobodilne borbe 1941–1945* “To the victims of the Liberation War, 1941–1945” and all the Slovenian names and names written in Slovenian of the victims, the fallen, the hostages, the Partisan soldiers, and so on from 1941 to 1945⁶—narrate a story about the position of the Slovenian people, about the horrible sacrifices and hard-won freedom of the *ethnos*. At the visual level, the red stars, the flower vases, and the monument itself carved from the stone typical of this area strengthen a special perception that involved anti-fascism and the worker’s movement. The decoded message therefore reveals that the Slovenians fought under the Slovenian flag with the red star for their Slovenian

⁵ Cf. Ivan Sache; Tomislav Todorović & Mladen Mijatov (<http://flagspot.net/flags/fr%7Dultr.html>); António Martins http://flagspot.net/flags/qt-z_sym.htm.

⁶ In this year’s discussions in the newspaper *Primorski dnevnik* it turned out that there were more than three hundred victims; that is, many more than are inscribed on the monuments in the Municipality of San Dorligo della Valle-Dolina.

homeland and for a different social order, and that some of them also sacrificed their lives for this cause. The monument with its text and staging of these symbols presents the reality of an era and the dominant (ideological) image of the world immediately after the war (when an expressly leftist, communist orientation prevailed in the municipality for a significant time). As such, it was also in itself exclusive: of non-locals,⁷ of the Italians that moved here especially after the Second World War, either from southern or central Italy or from Yugoslavia. Especially for the latter, the Slovenian monument, with its names of victims and red stars, is an image of a reality that they shunned; however, for the majority of Italians, the Slovenian text on the monument is a denial of the Italian character of the area and does not fit into the framework of their internalized image of the world.

What kind of imagery of the reality of Trieste after the Second World War does the neo-fascist graffiti mark on the monument in Bagnoli della Rosandra-Boljunec? The Celtic crosses—one on the monument, and another on the ground—can be read as a denial of the first, Slovenian imagery; the Italian slogans written over the Slovenian ones produce a new image of reality: Tito is a hangman, he is an enemy; the fallen in the Karst shafts fell in the name of Mussolini, and, with the Latin *DUX*, are at the same time connected with Roman civilization; *DUX* ensures the preservation of Italian identity and Latin civilization. The Celtic cross is a poly-semiotic sign; to start with, it is a target, the goal of which is Tito himself, the star itself, Yugoslav or non-Italian identity; at the same time, it serves as a logo for many extreme rightwing groups.

MS FT is likewise a poly-semiotic sign: it may be a group's signature, it may be a code for the incident, or it may be an important stance communicated to the intended recipient of the graffiti. A problem arises here because the villagers (i.e., the addressees of the incident) were able to neither recognize the reference nor decode the inscription itself. It therefore seems that the graffiti can be read as the signature of the group *MS FT* (*Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore* "Tricolor Flame Social Movement"),⁸ which first of all functions as an affirmation of the group itself, which successfully marked and Italianized a non-Italian monument, as well as outwardly, in the media discourses that the graffiti incident may reach. It is in connection with these media reactions that the municipal authorities are increasingly effective: due to a lack of ability or will to find the perpetrators on the part of the police⁹—to date, not one has been identified (!)—the municipal authorities are seeking to reduce the attention generated by these events not only by reporting the graffiti, but also removing it

⁷ Italian families primarily settled in Bagnoli della Rosandra-Boljunec after the Second World War.

⁸ The extreme rightwing movement *MS FT* came into being after the dissolution of the Italian Social Movement party (*Movimento Sociale Italiano*, MSI), which was founded in 1946 by former Fascists and adherents of the Salò Republic. In 1995, together with a number of Christian Democrats, they founded the more centre-right National Alliance party (*Alleanza Nazionale*, AN). A key role in this was played by Gianfranco Fini, who led the MSI from 1987 onwards, was an actor in its dissolution, and was a factor in founding the AN.

⁹ Some signs indicate that there may be a problem with police jurisdiction: specifically, the way the force is divided into municipal and regional facilities renders a uniform approach impossible in looking for perpetrators (information from the municipal constable in Bagnoli della Rosandra-Boljunec, February 2009).

immediately. The locals are also aware that the authorities will not find the offenders; the events themselves do not, as one would expect, become a topic of general debate or public commentary. This year, despite the large number of graffiti incidents, the problem has been emphasized only a few times; for example, when swastikas appeared on a secondary school, and especially when the monument to the “heroes of Basovizza-Bazovica”¹⁰ was defaced by graffiti. In this case, the Slovenian authorities also reacted,¹¹ and the monument was cleaned the same day that the graffiti was discovered.

The last statement is the swastika and the word *RAUS*. During an analysis of the graffiti and photos with German colleagues on the course of objective hermeneutics (2000),¹² it was this portion in particular that gave rise to various interpretations. Some read the swastika and *RAUS* as Slovenian commentary on the previous graffiti: instead of *AUSLÄNDER RAUS* “foreigners get out”, “[Fascists] get out”—that is, that the Nazis/fascists should depart, should leave the scene. However, this cannot be read as a Slovenian commentary on pro-fascist discourse; the addressees are the Slovenians living there, who are defending Slovenian identity and anti-fascism, and therefore, just as foreign workers are pressured to leave Germany, Slovenians are pressured to leave Italian territory. A different staging attempts to cover or make problematic the fundamental, architecturally staged interplay of the original text on the monument, the inscriptions, the symbols, and the environment; this second staging is compelled to recapitulate the first to some extent. The old symbols (the star) are replaced by new ones (the Celtic cross, fasces, or swastika), the old inscription (“To the victims. . .”) is replaced by new slogans (“Glory to the fallen. . .”), and the old staging of the framed story by a new one. The conflict between the two levels is thus established anew and will continue.

The graffiti contain a peculiar syncretism of various and heterogeneous elements, combining Celtic symbols (the cross), fascist ones (the fasces, *dux*), and Nazi ones (the swastika, *raus*). This is also highlighted by the documentation of the graffiti incident at the memorial complex at Trnovo (Ital. *Tarnova della Selva*), a village near Nova Gorica, in April 2005 (see the analysis below), in which the perpetrators also drew a number of swastikas, fasces, Celtic crosses, and so on. The former “purity” of these elements, in which the swastika defined a (pro)Nazi stance and the fasces a (pro-)Fascist stance, has now been replaced by the perspective in which the neo-fascist world is also “glocalised,” encompassing and combining numerous symbols (e.g., in addition to the aforementioned symbols, also the Celtic cross, numbers such as Hitler’s birthday, etc.).

However, the seeming incompatibility of juxtaposing Italian Fascist and German Nazi symbols in both cases (in Bagnoli della Rosandra-Boljunec and in Trnovo) could be

¹⁰ At the first Trieste trial in 1930, four members of the first organized anti-fascist resistance group TIGR (Trst, Istra, Gorica, Reka) in Europe were sentenced to death and were shot at the commons in Basovizza-Bazovica, a village above Trieste.

¹¹ Among other things, the minister for Slovenians abroad, Boštjan Žekš, wrote to the mayor of Trieste, Roberto Dipiazza, and MEP Jelko Kacin tabled a question in the European Parliament.

¹² At the seminar *Interpretation und Verstehen* (Interpretation and Understanding), Dubrovnik Inter-University Center, the method of objective hermeneutics (Oevermann 2004) was taught.

explained by the very conceptual design of the MS FT movement, which to a great degree relied on the Salò Republic and thus preserved the connection between Italian Fascism¹³ and German Nazism.¹⁴

What kind of imagery of reality does the perpetrator use to mark the monument in the graffiti incident? He records a symbolic language from the time when Tito's forces "occupied" Trieste for forty days in 1945, and in the manner of the subculture interprets the discourse as being part of that which nearly all Italian discourses of various political persuasions hold until today. Almost all the participants in the discourse (with a rare exception probably of the strict communists), implicitly following the "reconciliatory" event between Luciano Violante and Gianfranco Fini in March 1998 at the Verdi Theater¹⁵ in Trieste itself, unified their standpoint on the "bloody" events after the war, in which the "Slavs" murdered "several ten thousand Italians"¹⁶ and cast their bodies into Karst shafts (cf. Accati 2009).

Among the municipal, especially leftist-oriented, authorities in both Gorizia-Gorica and Nova Gorica and in the region of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, which was headed by Ricardo Illy, at the beginning of the twenty-first century there were various endeavours to change symbols of difference and contention, including the borders themselves, into symbols of cooperation and coexistence. These include standing invitations from both sides to the other sides, a common market, relaxing the border-control system between the two towns, certain joint economic and administrative endeavours, and so on. This intense joint cooperation was tested by unknown perpetrators in April 2005—a year after Slovenia joined the European Union—who defaced the monument to Tito's partisans and the victims of the Yugoslav front of the Second World War near the village of Trnovo, more than ten kilometres from Nova Gorica.

The monument complex, which commemorates the Partisans that fell in the last German offensive in December 1944 and January 1945, is a semi-enclosed space intended for small events; it is encircled by large plaques with the names of the dead (fallen Partisans, hostages, etc.), and a set of steps lead up to a tall obelisk at the top of the hill. At the end of April 2005, swastikas, fasces, Celtic crosses, and various slogans were spray-painted over the names of

¹³ More on Italian fascism see Knox 2002, Wanrooij 2002, and Corneließen et al. (Eds.) 2003.

¹⁴ Some commentary about the MS FT movement is available at the website <http://flagspot.net/flags/it-poli6.html#msft>; regarding Fascism and the Salò Republic, among the many sources available Franco Ferraresi (1996) and Aristotle A. Kallis (2000) should be mentioned.

¹⁵ On the one hand, this meeting of reconciliation was greeted with protest by the new communists and defined as the beginning of historical revisionism, but it was also made problematic by the right.

¹⁶ According to a statement by one informant, this case also involves fighting over or arguing about the true number of victims, which to a great extent is connected with writers' views on the issues of the Italian exodus and the Karst shafts. In the last thirty years, especially among rightwing and neo-fascist circles, the number of dead cast into the Kast shafts has increased from a few thousand to tens of thousands. In the volume edited by Amadeo Colella, the number of refugees was rounded up from 201,440 (cf. Colella 1958, cited in Žerjavić 1993 and Manin 2006) to 250,000; in contrast, Flaminio Rocchi (1970) states that there were 350,000 refugees. Regarding the number of victims on the Slovenian and Italian sides, see *Slovene-Italian Relations 1880–1956: Report of the Slovene-Italian Historical and Cultural Commission* (cf. Troha 1997, Verginella 2009), and for the Croatian side see Žerjavić (1993).

the fallen. These slogans include ones similar to those in Bagnoli della Rosandra (e.g., *Tito boia* “Tito hangman”) as well as new ones (e.g., *Živio DUX* “long live Dux” and *Morte ai rossi* “Death to the reds”).

Two slogans, both over the inscribed names, are dedicated to the special Italian X^a MAS (10th Assault Vehicle Flotilla) units,¹⁷ which also operated as part of the Nazi regime. On the X^a MAS website¹⁸ this organization is depicted as a group of proud proponents of an order that did not wish to fight against the Italian partisans in Italy toward the end of 1944. By contrast, the author of the graffiti sees these combat units as a serious threat to the Partisan world and especially the Yugoslav 9th Corps,¹⁹ and as something that could have reassigned the space where the monument stands back to its own Italian space. It could be the same situation as the one fifty years earlier together with the Germans and the Home Guard units in December 1944 and January 1945, and as it was in the First World War, in which they shed blood in the battle and with many victims.²⁰ The graffiti *VV L'ITALIA FASCISTA* “Viva Fascist Italy” reinstates the old order. This desired arrangement could be disrupted by good cooperation between the Italian and Slovenian authorities.

The longest graffiti implicitly addressed the cooperation between the municipal and regional authorities on both sides of the border. “*BRANDOLIN, BRANCATI, TERPIN, BRULC, ILLY, ANTONAZ, PIZZOLITTO: FINIRETE COME ANNA FRANK!*”. (“Brandolin, Brancati, Terpin, Brulc, Illy, Antonaz, Pizzolitto: you will end up like Anne Frank!”).²¹

The juxtaposition of the Fascist and Nazi symbols shown by this graffiti, together with the reference to the X^a MAS military units, explains to a great extent the syncretic nature of the subculture patterns that reflect the actual relationship of X^a MAS to Nazism between 1943 and 1945. Both ideologies are illustrated by the symbols used, Fascist and Nazi—the first, characterized by the struggle against the “barbaric enemy” (cf. *Inno Decima Flottiglia Mas* “The X^a MAS Anthem”),²² and the second by anti-Semitism—indicate the basic stance and efforts of these and similar units. Their members participated in sending Slovenians to German concentration camps. In the perspective of the contemporary neo-fascist subculture, a statement like “You will end up like Anne Frank” (i.e., in a concentration camp) no longer seems unusual. Anti-Semitism, officially introduced into Italy in 1938, and the struggle

¹⁷ On their anti-partisan battles, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decima_Flottiglia_MAS; the website <http://www.decima-mas.net/apps/index.php?pid=26> describes the basic orientations of these units, emphasizing pride and the need to protect the homeland and order.

¹⁸ See <http://www.decima-mas.net/apps/index.php?pid=26>.

¹⁹ At Trnovo, the Yugoslav 9th Corps was joined by Italian partisans to fight against the German units organized by Odilo Globotschnik, the X^a MAS units, and the Home Guard (Domobranci). The symbolic meaning of the 9th Corps in the Trieste region is discussed by Alessandra Miklavcic (2008).

²⁰ See <http://www.italia-rsi.org/confiniorientali/tarnova.htm>.

²¹ In 2005 Giorgio Brandolin was the president of the Province of Gorizia, Vittorio Brancati the mayor of Gorizia, Damijan Terpin the representative of the Slovenian community in Gorizia-Gorica, Mirko Brulc the mayor of Nova Gorica, Riccardo Illy the president of the Friuli–Venezia Giulia region, Roberto Antonaz a regional councillor, and Gianfranco Pizzolitto the mayor of Monfalcone (*Tržič*).

²² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkz8r1cPASI>.

against barbaric Slavdom are component parts of comprehending the enemy within or without.

The social and cultural representations of both communities, Slovenian and Italian, have completely different bases. The Slovenian representations rely on the internalization of memories and narratives: on the Slovenian identity of the settlement, where they themselves live and where their parents and ancestors lived, on their extraordinary resistance to Fascism, which intentionally Italianized and thereby erased the external Slovenian character of the settlements surrounding Trieste and its population, and on the struggle in which several hundred people (in the municipality of San Dorligo della Valle-Dolina) lost their lives. The Slovenian-speaking members of the Slovenian community also internalize their affiliation and the special character of their community by remembering the dead every year, whether on All Soul's Day, on state holidays, or on May Day, as well as at the initiative of young men.

On the other hand, on February 10, just over a week after commemorating the millions of Holocaust victims, the Italians annually commemorate the exodus of over 200,000 Italians (among these were also Slovenians and Croatians who opposed communism) from Yugoslavia, and especially the victims disposed of in karst shafts—foibe when the Yugoslav Army drove the German army out of Trieste and ruled it for 40 days until the beginning of June 1945, when it had to relinquish it to the Anglo-American allied forces. In February 2007, the exodus and the victims were also commemorated by Italian President Giorgio Napolitano, a former communist, who gave a speech at Quirinal Palace on the barbarism, Slavic expansionism, and bloodthirsty rage of Tito's army. He repeated the content of this speech again a year later, and then partly mitigated his views in 2009 by more explicitly mentioning the fascist crimes that had occurred before the tragic exodus and killings connected with the karst shafts.²³ This official Italian position raises the question of the extent to which sub-cultural productions (especially graffiti, YouTube videos, and other videos) find their roots and a haven in the dominant discourse of certain official branches of authority. Is it possible that the graffiti on the memorial and the video *Trieste—ultima frontiera* (Trieste: The Final Frontier) on YouTube, which revives the ideological discourse of a great Italy as the last outpost of civilization, employ certain similar or even identical elements (e.g., the Slavs as barbarians, loss of memory of the fascist violence from 1919 to 1943) as the discourse of the authorities?

These social and cultural representations create and preserve a discourse field in which the pain of one surpasses the pain of another, in which the purpose of annual memorial events becomes the cultivation of pain experienced as a result of the loss of population, loss of culture, and, especially on the Italian side, the loss of territory. On the other hand it is problematic that the great majority of cultural and social representations rely on the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957), which does not thematise leaders' stances regarding other ethnicities or their perception of their own ethnic group's or national mission.

²³ Napolitano's speech: in 2007 <http://www.quirinale.it/elementi/Continua.aspx?tipo=3&key=930&printPDF=yes>; in 2008 <http://www.quirinale.it/elementi/Continua.aspx?tipo=3&key=1182&printPDF=yes>; in 2009 <http://www.quirinale.it/elementi/Continua.aspx?tipo=3&key=1456&printPDF=yes>.



Figure 2: Italian mayors in front of the monument to the victims of the anti-Fascist resistance at the commons in Basovizza-Bazovica (2009). (Photo: D. Križmančič)

However, as psychiatrist Pavel Fonda (2005) states, all of these polemics on the Italian side involve a sense of a “real” Slovenian or Slavic²⁴ threat, and on the Slovenian side a sense of a “real” Italian threat. This involves an internalized sense of ethnic victimization (cf. Verkuyten 2005, 212), which was identified especially among the Italian refugees and their descendents by Pamela Ballinger (2003), but is also present among members of the Slovenian community. The sense of victimization of the Italians is preserved through images of the loss of their homeland and possessions, and of the Slovenians through constant, often unsuccessful, attempts to assert the rights of their ethnic group. A characteristic of the media-dominant Italian discourse and social poetics in this phenomenon is a reliance on history, in which territorial rights are based on ancient Roman culture and the struggle against the barbarians, and, finally, on those that fell in the First World War. In contrast, Slovenian discourse bases its rights on indigenous settlement on this territory since the departure of the Lombards and with resistance to Fascism, or the struggle for ethnic emancipation during the Second World War. An important conflict also lies in the various understandings of the role of the town; for the prevailing Italian concept, the cities of Trieste and Gorizia are Italian economic and cultural centres for the broader region, including the Slovenian countryside; in contrast, it is typical of the Slovenian concept to see the Slovenian countryside as the environment that the centre, the town, depends on. Both conflicting discourses are preserved through a reproduction of the imagery of the enemy and through the concept of the victim.

²⁴ In many Italian narratives, including those by speakers favorably inclined toward the Slovenians, the terms *slavo* ‘Slavic’ and *sloveno* ‘Slovenian’ are often used synonymously.

Way to Coexistence

In addition to all of these social and cultural representations and events, which reproduce the conflict treatment of critical historical periods and positions, the past decade has seen the development of new official and informal views and practices that enable both communities to live in coexistence.

After the neo-fascist graffiti incident at Trnovo, nearly all of the representatives of the Italian and Slovenian municipal and regional authorities, including the Slovenian MEPs Borut Pahor and Jelko Kacin and the members of the *Concordia et pax* group, participated in erasing the slogans from the monuments; in their speeches, they paid their respects to the deceased members of the resistance movement and the victims of Fascist violence, emphasized their anti-Fascist stance, and confirmed the need for cooperation between the two sides, which had opposed one another in the past. In addition, efforts are being made by various groups such as *Concordia et pax* to seek coexistence between all of the ethnic communities in this territory. Together with the mayor's offices, they commemorate all of the victims from this critical period, and together clean monuments defaced with fascist symbols by members of neo-fascist organizations (e.g., *MS FT* or *Forza nuova*). Especially in the last year, organized dialogue has enabled several activities to take place; these have changed and fostered more nuanced views of the past (e.g., meetings between historians with various views).

Among the successful activities, the event titled *Soočanje spominov—Nove perspektive 70 let po vojni* (Confronting Memories: New Perspectives Seventy Years after the War)²⁵ is worth mentioning. This was the first meeting organized between the representative of refugees, the former president of the refugee organization *Associazione Nazionale Venezia Giulia e Dalmazia*²⁶ (ANVGD; National Association of the Julian March and Dalmatia), the former senator Lucio Toth, and the representative of Slovenians in Italy, the former Italian senator Miloš Budin. The event was organized by the most important Trieste dailies, the Italian *Il Piccolo* and the Slovenian *Primorski dnevnik*, who cooperated together for the first time on such an activity. It was attended by all of the mayors from the Karst area and a number of visitors (of the Italians that attended, one third did not even understand Slovenian). In addition to all the references to the tragic period and numerous grievances and injustices experienced by individuals and both ethnic communities from the 1920s to the 1950s, the following thought reverberated the most: "We cannot build a common past, but we can build a common present and future."

An important step in social and cultural representation is the holding of commemorations of all the deceased, which are being attended by all Italian mayors (ethnic Italians and Slovenians) in the Trieste region. They pay joint respect to the victims of the Fascist trials and the Karst shafts.

²⁵ In the Trieste region, the newspapers *Il Piccolo* (http://www.coordinamentoadriatico.it/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=1109) and *Primorski dnevnik* dedicated the greatest attention to this event. In Slovenia, President Danilo Türk expressed his appreciation of this meeting; his comment was published in the newspaper *Ljubljanske novice* (<http://www.ljnovice.com/default.asp?podrocje=37&menu=37&novica=97693>).

²⁶ For the former irredentist premises of this organization, see Volk (1999).

In light of all this, efforts are being made, especially in the Gorizia region, to build a common memory, most notably by the *Concordia et Pax* association, which operates on both the Italian and Slovenian sides of the border, and organizes various reconciliatory events held alongside historical symbols. In 1995, they unveiled a joint *Concordia et Pax* plaque commemorating all the victims, the killed, the fallen, and others on *Sveta gora (Monte Santo, "Holy Mount")*.

The main attendants of this year's ceremony, which *Concordia et pax* organized in Komen (SI) and Strassoldo (I), were the children of those affected either as victims or perpetrators. One of the association's initiators, the son of a Slovenian mother and an Italian military police officer, talked about the fear of the Other that tangibly influences one's experience regardless of the true threat (cf. Fonda 2005). The internalized fear of the Other that belongs to an "alien" community and history, in which the fathers and ancestors of the Other threatened the collective (and thus either the Italian or Slovenian identity of the territory), is a constituent part of one's experience. The association, which was also established on the Slovenian side in 2000, primarily by priests from the Nova Gorica area, sees the solution in the need to condemn all war criminals and renounce any totalitarianism (i.e., Fascism, Nazism, or Communism), apologize to one another, and establish the historical truth. Within this context, the association of Slovenian priests has also written to Italian President Giorgio Napolitano with the desire for a more balanced presentation of the historical truth. With the assistance of historians, the war of numbers should be ended, flags should no longer be used at commemorative sites, and the deceased should be buried and remembered on a commemorative plaque listing only the names of victims and the fallen. This would enable the establishment of social and cultural representations of coexistence without ethnic/national attributes.

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