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## The ‘border within’: inhabiting the border in Trieste

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**Abstract.** In this paper we look to the Italian border city of Trieste—at various points in its past, a cosmopolitan port, Austria’s *urbs europeissima*, but also a battleground for competing understandings of territoriality, identity, and belonging and a paragon of the violent application of an ethnoterritorial logic to a plurinational, plurilingual urban context; a paragon of the violence of modern borders. At the same time—and precisely by virtue of its border condition—Trieste has often found itself within the cracks of European modernity, rendering it a unique site for the rearticulation and reappropriation of that which Walter Mignolo terms “global designs”. In our analysis, we ask what lessons the experience of a city like Trieste in ‘inhabiting the border’ can hold for Mignolo’s notion of “border thinking” and for the elaboration of alternative geopolitical imaginaries.

“Borders: a need, a fever, a curse. Without them is neither identity nor form, there is no existence; they create existence and arm it with all-pervading talons.”

Claudio Magris, *Microcosms* (1999, page 107)

The night of 20 December 2007 is a surreal experience for Trieste. The border with the Republic of Slovenia—the Yugoslav border of old—is dismantled. The Cold War border that for generations defined the city’s place in the postwar European order and that so profoundly marked the lives of its inhabitants vanishes in a flurry of champagne toasts and fireworks. With news cameras flashing and accompanied by the sounds of a local band, Italian and Slovenian politicians together tear down the last barrier at the stroke of midnight. The thousands of people who travelled the couple of kilometres from the city to witness this event pour across the once-border, laughing, taking pictures, still incredulous. It all seems a game. Some attempt to get the very last stamp on their passport or *lasciapassare/propusnica*;<sup>(1)</sup> others take pictures in front of the now-empty booths that just minutes before were surveilled by the border police. Some take home pieces of the barriers or take down the signs commanding cars to stop and prepare for inspection. The morning after, the bulldozers and diggers will arrive to remove the remaining traces of the border.

The celebrations go on through the night—the largest at the Ferneti/Fernetici border crossing right above Trieste, but also at numerous other minor border crossings and in the city of Gorizia/Nova Gorica, until this night split in two. Smiling into the TV cameras, local and national politicians with one voice pronounce the ‘beginning of a new era’ and the importance of this night for ‘a new, borderless Europe’. The official rhetoric that inscribes the disappearance of this border with Slovenia’s entry into the Schengen space is, indeed, surprisingly monolithic. Whether in the pronouncements of the EU delegation, or in the words of the Italian and Slovenian political leaders assembled at Ferneti/Fernetici, the removal of the border is simply an unquestioned and unquestionable good, of symbolic import far beyond this borderland (*Il Piccolo* 2007).

<sup>(1)</sup> The document that allowed those living in this border region to use the many minor crossing points.

### The 'border within'

The events of that December night revealed, on the one hand, the impermanent nature of the border—cancelled in a manner of minutes, leaving simply the empty shell of the crossing, a border-set to be captured on camera, a playground for folkloric dances and horse-drawn carriages (the first 'vehicle' to cross the once-border was a carriage drawn by white Lippizaner horses). On the other, precisely in the moment of its disappearance, the border suddenly became much more important than it had ever been over the previous decades (despite the existing controls, the border had been extremely 'porous' with countless Triestini and Slovenians regularly travelling across the border for work, shopping, and Sunday lunches). In its disappearance, the border was reborn—but as a symbol of something else. The fiction of a limit was thus transformed into the fiction of no limits: the fallen ex-Cold-War border became a symbol of a 'borderless Europe'.

Represented for many years as a civilisational divide between the Communist East and the Free World and an iconic site in the early Cold War imaginary of a Europe split in two, the Italian border at Trieste had also come to define the city itself. With the delimitation of the Yugoslav–Italian border, Trieste was formally transformed into a 'border city'. The border defined all that it was, all that it could become. The border became the excuse and the explanation for everything, for all the limits and advantages of Trieste's 'special condition'. The border, its procedures, and its banal, everyday geographies marked all cultural, political, and economic relations in the city. Trieste became one with the Cold War border and learned to express itself almost exclusively through that border identity.

It is not surprising then that the disappearance of the border brought bewilderment: the term that constantly cropped up in the days following the opening of the border was *spaesati*—literally, torn from the *paese*, torn from familiar points of reference, from home (Magris, 2007). As countless comments in the special 'border issue' of the local newspaper *Il Piccolo* (2007) pointed out, the city's inhabitants seemed to experience the passing away of the border, on the one hand, as simply a long-delayed recognition of a space that had always remained partially open thanks to the countless quotidian practices of exchange and encounter that made up this borderland in practice and, on the other, as a sudden loss of their—and Trieste's—very purpose.

For half a century the border was a both real and ideal line in the sand that defined the city. Now, generations of Triestini who had grown up in the shadow of the border and for whom the border provided the categories within which (for better or worse) they defined themselves had to try to find a new language to express their place in the world, had to try to understand what it means to live in a Europe without borders. As Triestine historian Raoul Pupo suggested,

"maybe [they] are simply mourning the loss of that endless trove of anecdotes, jokes and stories linked to the border that every Triestine could draw upon. Or perhaps it is the sudden sensation that their entire way of being would have to be re-thought: a way of being that had made of the border both a precious resource but also a very useful alibi; an alibi that covered a whole variety of failures. Or the distinct feeling that a certain part of history had ended" (2007, page 7, all translations for quotations from non-English publications are the authors' own).

The disappearance of the border presumably left Trieste without a key geographical referent—a referent that was at times menacing, but nonetheless reassuring in its fixity, in its stability. From their previous role as the virtuous defenders of Europe's essence, as the last outpost of (Western) European civilisation, the Triestini were now thrust into a different role. Trieste was now the paragon of a 'new' common European space, where borders are no more. In fact, beyond the celebratory events of the

20th of December, the dissolution of the border was presented and discussed in the city almost *sottovoce*—as something that just happened to have happened—as simply another EU formality.<sup>(2)</sup>

What we argue in this paper is that rather than seeing this border region, as in the Cold War years, as simply symbolic of something else—now, a presumed borderless Europe—we should pay attention to Trieste's actual experience of the border, that which Angelo Ara and Claudio Magris, in their seminal 1982 book *Trieste: Un'identità di Frontiera* [Trieste: a border identity] have referred to as the “*confine dentro*”, the “border within”, a never fully defineable but for that no less real border identity. We suggest that an examination of the ‘actually existing’ political practices and representations<sup>(3)</sup> that made up this presumed border identity can allow us to ask some intriguing questions regarding strategies of political and geopolitical meaning-making, in particular, regarding the shifting geopolitical imaginations of Trieste's place in Europe.

In analysing the constitution of Trieste's ‘border identity’, we have found particularly useful Walter Mignolo's (2000) notion of “border thinking” and its potential in the elaboration of alternative geopolitical imaginaries. In *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges and Border Thinking*, Mignolo envisions borders as key sites in “the decolonisation and transformation of the rigidity of epistemic and territorial *frontiers* established and controlled by the coloniality of power in the process of building the modern/colonial world system” (2000, page 12). Borders, Mignolo argues, “install in the imaginary of the modern/colonial world system an other logic, a logic that is not territorial” (page 36). By “border thinking”, Mignolo refers specifically to “the moments in which the imaginary of the modern world system cracks” (2000, page 23)—moments, he suggests, that can open up a space for a “different geopolitics of knowledge” that escapes “Western geohistorical mapping” (page 37).

Although Mignolo's theorisation focuses predominantly on the ‘cracks’ in (post)colonial worlds, we believe his comments can be fruitfully extended in the Triestine context, in particular as they relate to the formulation of alternative geopolitical imaginaries. These cracks are particular places and moments that witness what he calls a “multiplication of epistemic energies” and “the rearticulation and appropriation of global designs by and from the perspective of local histories” (2000, page 39). Such cracks allow for the emergence of what he terms “incommensurable (from the perspective of modernity) forms of knowledge... of border thinking: *thinking from dichotomous concepts rather than ordering the world in dichotomies*” (2000, page 85, emphasis in original).<sup>(4)</sup>

Trieste, precisely by the supposed virtue of its ‘border condition’, has frequently been described as forced into the cracks of European modernity and the struggle between competing ‘global designs’. It is not by chance that historians have characterised Trieste as a ‘laboratory’ of some of the principal crises of European modernity (most prominently, Ara and Magris, 1982; Dubin, 1999; Finzi and Panjek, 2001; Finzi et al, 2003; see also Hertmans, 2001). Indeed, most popular histories of the city embrace a distinct narrative of once-glory and subsequent decline, recounting the

<sup>(2)</sup> See the comments in Magris (2007) and Rumiz (2007), as well as the special (bilingual) issue of the city's ‘alternative’ monthly *Konrad* (2007).

<sup>(3)</sup> Our analysis follows calls by Ballinger (2003b; 2004) to move beyond mythologised/idealised accounts of Trieste's ‘cosmopolitan’ identity, paying attention, rather, to what she terms (following Robbins, 1998) its “actually existing cosmopolitanisms” (Ballinger, 2004, page 31).

<sup>(4)</sup> For another reading of the epistemic potential of ‘cracks’ in modern geopolitical imaginations, see Sarah Green's (2005) *Notes from the Balkans: Locating Marginality and Ambiguity on the Greek – Albanian Border*—in particular, her notion of the “Balkan fractal” as a space of both marginality and possibility.

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transformation of Trieste from a cosmopolitan port city of the Habsburg Empire into a battleground for competing understandings of territoriality, identity, and belonging—a paragon of the violent application of an ethnoterritorial logic to a pluricultural, plurilingual urban context (for a critical review of similar narratives, see Ballinger, 2003b; also Waley, 2009). In such accounts, Trieste is presented as a 'tragic mirror' of the principal European tragedies of the long twentieth century, from the disintegration of European empires to the rise of nationalisms, to the emergence of totalitarian ideologies.

At the same time, however, these historical accounts also envision Trieste as a unique space for the elaboration of alternative spatial imaginaries and for "the re-articulation and appropriation of global designs", to return to Mignolo's characterisation (2000, page 39). What is crucial for us is the fact that this double reading of the city as both a paragon of the demise of a 'cosmopolitan project' and a space of possibility for the elaboration of new, alternative spatial imaginaries has not only dominated nostalgic reconstructions of the city's past but has also formed the subtext of 'actual' political and (geo)political strategies aimed at repositioning Trieste in a changing European context.

In her critical review of contemporary work on the city entitled "Imperial nostalgia: mythologizing Habsburg Trieste", Pamela Ballinger (2003b, page 97) uses the term "prospective nostalgia" to hint at some of the ways in which particular understandings of Trieste's cosmopolitan past and its supposedly 'unique' border condition inform political strategies in the present. We would like to extend her argument here and, without lapsing into myth, interrogate the imagined—and actual—political geographies of Trieste's border condition, as well as the 'uses' of the border myth in crafting new geopolitical imaginations. Mignolo's concept of border thinking allows us to engage *both* with some of the tropes of the Triestine myth of a border city/border identity as well as with the 'actually existing' political and geopolitical practices that have sustained this myth—and fed (and continue to feed) off it. Our analysis draws on the most recent work of Triestine historians (both Italian and Slovenian) aimed at rethinking the city's border condition—in particular, the path-breaking reappraisals by Marina Cataruzza (2007) and Raoul Pupo (2007) and, in part, Marta Verginella (2008). These reappraisals are themselves, in a sense, an integral part of contemporary Triestine border thinking.

### **Inhabiting the border**

In order to trace the emergence of Triestine border thinking, some historical context is necessary—in particular, to better understand how various 'global designs' for the city were deployed, co-opted, and at times, subverted in Trieste. The city's complex identity has been an ongoing subject of political and cultural debate ever since the constitution of Trieste as a free port in 1719 and the subsequent transformation of the city from a provincial sea-town into the booming and cosmopolitan port of the Habsburg Empire (and, by the late 1800s, the Empire's third largest city, behind Vienna and Prague) (for an overview, see Dubin, 1999). Most scholars concur, however, that the 'question of the border', posed in national–territorial terms, was born only in 1866 (see, among others, Ara and Magris, 1982; Cattaruzza, 2007; Pupo, 2007). The 'placing' of Trieste as a 'frontier' city comes as the nascent Italian state begins to consolidate its national body and identify in the 'spaces of the East' (that is, in Trieste and the Istrian/Dalmatian coast) the crucial missing pieces necessary to the completion of the process of national territorialisation. In the imaginations of the Italian irredentists outside Trieste, the city becomes a symbol of Italian unity (together with the Trentino region), with influential propagandists like Giuseppe Mazzini demanding that the city be returned to the 'motherland':

“geographers, historians, political and military leaders have decided to assign to Italy the borders assigned it by [Dante] Alighieri and embedded in our tradition. ... The Istrian coast is the eastern extension of the Veneto coast ... For ethnographic, political, and commercial reasons, Istria is ours; it is needed by Italy just as the southern Slavs need their Dalmatian ports. Ours is Trieste” (Giuseppe Mazzini, 1912, cited in Cattaruzza, 2007, pages 18–19).

It is also in the late 1800s that the question of the ‘right’ tracing of the border at Trieste first presents itself: a question that from that moment on will determine the fate and fortunes of the Adriatic city and that will come to coincide with a shifting series of fractures and lines of division between nations, classes, and ideological blocs.

According to Pupo (2007), the ‘conjuring up’ of the border at Trieste by the Italian national leaders of those years takes on a very particular form. The Eastern border is presented as a quasi-civilisational divide, the veritable frontier of the nation where Italy faces its two ‘historical enemies’: the German and the Slav.<sup>(5)</sup>

Trieste does not only become an important symbol for Italian irredentism, however. The rightful place of the city and the areas that surround it also greatly preoccupy Vienna: not only as a concern for Trieste itself but for the greater symbolic import of the potential ‘loss’ of this multinational port. The imperial foreign secretary, Count Gyula Andrassy, in a letter to the Italian foreign minister in May 1874 warns against the dangers of irredentism in these territories: “We cannot cede to the Italian state populations that share its language without provoking artificially a centripetal movement of all the nationalities laying at the borders of our Empire towards their sister nations in the surrounding States” (Andrassy, 1874 quoted in Cattaruzza, 2007, page 25). He warns, especially, against the potentially dire consequences for Europe of “an indiscriminate application of ethnography to politics” that such a move would embody:

“you can only imagine where the idea of ethnographic borders would lead, even if such a thing could ever be accomplished in Europe? ... A war of all against all would not be far off. [Such ideas] would imprudently throw into question the European order that we have so painfully constructed, and would spell chaos” (Andrassy, 1874, cited in Cattaruzza, 2007, page 26).

Andrassy’s worries are more than warranted. The Italian irredentism that claims Trieste is, in fact, of a double nature. As Elio Apih argues in his overview of the city’s political history, “irredentism [here] was somewhat ambivalent: on the one hand, it was marked by the legacy of the Risorgimento and the desire for a unitary [Italian] state; on the other, it was an exquisitely Habsburg phenomenon, characterised by intense national competition, almost theatrical in its expressions” (1988, page 89). A similar ambivalence, Apih suggests, “can be identified in Slavic [nationalism] of the time as well”, and the competition between the two progressively acts to “dissociate the ideal of the nation from its universalist roots and reduce it simply to a territorial conception” (1988, page 89) or, better yet, to a series of competing territorial aspirations (on this point, see also Verginella, 2008).

Beyond the growing tensions between the nascent Italian and Slavic nationalisms, however, there exists a deeper tension within Triestine irredentism itself. Italian irredentism in the city had been, from the outset, something very different: although the urban elite had always presented itself as culturally/politically Italian, it was, as Stefan Hertmans (2001) has termed it, a particular “self-conscious Italianness” (page 43), a “conscious choice”, expressed “through the [selective] negation of traditional [territorial] identity” (page 48). Scholars of Trieste and its borderland such as Pamela Ballinger have argued, indeed, that it is crucial to note the continually renegotiated *copresence* of

<sup>(5)</sup> An identification missing in its relations with other European neighbours—see Apih (1988).

national irredentism and imperial cosmopolitanism in the city—very often advanced by the same subjects and dependent on the particular political needs of the moment. As Ballinger suggests, “the city’s ‘cosmopolitan elite’ proved itself quite capable of embracing a seemingly paradoxical national/ist position, one that shows the ways in which the ‘nationalist’/irredentist and cosmopolitan positions at points overlapped” (2004, page 38).<sup>(6)</sup> We will say more on this point below, as we discuss the ways in which Triestine writers and intellectuals negotiated this tension between (Triestine) nationalism and ideas of cosmopolitanism in their work.

An emblematic figure in this respect was Triestine socialist Angelo Vivante, whose 1912 work *Irredentismo Adriatico* presented a spirited critique of the claims of Italian irredentists, while advancing the idea of a different, ‘Adriatic’ irredentism that would allow Trieste to fully capitalise on its hybrid, cosmopolitan past. As Ballinger suggests, Vivante

“persuasively dismantled the central nationalist myth that Trieste and its hinterland had always been fundamentally Italian in character. Arguing that the ‘national question’ was incompatible with the economic needs and interests of a city created by imperial fiat and dependent on its position as Austria’s primary maritime outlet, Vivante instead proposed a separatist solution that took account of ‘natural’ economic ties to its Slavic hinterland” (2004, page 36; see also Sluga, 2001).

Vivante’s ideas form part of a broader discussion among Triestine intellectual and political elites in those years on the ‘proper’ place of the city within a future Italian state marked by the very same copresence of national–irredentist and imperial–cosmopolitan ideas noted by Ballinger (2004). As the Triestine elite attempted to imagine a new role for themselves within the geographies of Italian irredentism, they did so marked by these two contradictory (self)representations.

### **Cosmopolis: negotiating border identities in language and literature**

Ara and Magris’s *Trieste: Un’identità di Frontiera* (1982) is, in many ways, focused on an analysis of such contradictions that, according to the authors, have always marked Triestine attempts at self-definition, what they describe as Trieste’s ir-reconcilable soul, its always-irreducibility to a singular unity, to cartography, to territory. Not by chance, the book opens in the early decades of the 20th century, Vivante’s time—a time in which the contradictions of Trieste’s border condition emerge with full force.

As literary critic Bobi Bazlen (1984) points out in his “Intervista su Trieste”, Trieste at the turn of the century is perhaps better conceived not as a ‘melting pot’ but, rather, as what he terms a “*cassa di risonanza*” (literally, a ‘resonating chamber’) where opposites coexist in constant interplay. As a result, Bazlen argues, the Triestini themselves were “approximations, never-fully-defined figures, incomplete experiments... people [who] had to try to reconcile the ir-reconcilable—something impossible, of course—and so we see the appearance of individuals... marked by all the torment that derives from such imposition [of identitary definition]” (1984, page 251). Ara and Magris’s reflection focuses on just such irreconcilability, opening with Scipio Slataper’s lament for the unbearable tension born of the impossibility of inhabiting the border, in Slataper’s *Il mio Carso* (1989 [1912]), a key text of 20th-century Triestine literature: “you know that I am a Slav, I am a German, I am an Italian” (pages 4–5).

<sup>(6)</sup> The Triestine experience is not unique in this sense: Ballinger (2004, page 38) points to Robbins’s (1998) argument that “there is a growing consensus that cosmopolitanism sometimes works together with nationalism rather than in opposition to it”.

In *Il mio Carso*, Ara and Magris argue, Slataper “identifies the *triestinità* with the awareness and the experience of a very real yet at the same time undefinable [sense of] difference, authentic when experienced in sentiment and being, but rendered immediately false, immediately artificial when proclaimed, when exhibited” (1982, page 3). It is, in their words, an awareness both of the impermanence of all distinction but also—especially—of the impossibility of stating or defining such distinction. The “echoes of other places, other civilisations that Slataper feels flowing within him are traces that are so convoluted, so thoroughly fused within his very being as to be undistinguishable, inseparable” (Ara and Magris, 1982, page 3). He feels their pull, their presence, and yet Slataper was not born in Croatia or Moravia; Italian is, in fact, his only language: “the *patria* that he longs for does not exist anywhere, for even if [in Trieste] he claims to suffer, he could not—and would not—be able to imagine another home” (Ara and Magris, 1982, page 4).<sup>(7)</sup>

For Slataper, the only space within which such difference can be expressed is in literature, in poetry, in the interior spaces of the soul, for every attempt at defining identity, as understandable as it may be from an existential point of view, “necessarily brings with it a forced alteration of socio-historical realities. [Any attempt to] theorise difference is [immediately] rhetorical artifice” (Ara and Magris, 1982, page 4). These observations illustrate quite poignantly Mignolo’s evocation of the poetic and literary worlds as fundamental in border thinking. In a section of his 2000 book entitled “Theories are where you can find them”, Mignolo appeals for a new understanding, a new geography of theoretical knowledge that ‘takes literature seriously’:

“[we] must create, through border thinking... a frame in which literary practice will not be conceived as [only] an object of study (aesthetic, linguistic, sociological) but as production of theoretical knowledge; not as ‘representation’ of something, society or ideas, but as a reflection [in] its own way about issues of human and historical concern, including language of course” (2000, page 223).

A ‘frame’ of thought, in other words, where the border can be made into something else, where (as for Slataper) one can be at once Italian, German, and Slav. For Slataper, the Triestine subject holds the border (indeed, multiple borders) *within*; his tormented soul ‘transits’ through them daily, in search of its place in the world. It is, in many ways, a desperate search, bound within a profound contradiction. As Ara and Magris argue, it desires nothing other than to “become [a] culture, an identity... [Yet] in repressing what it must in order to reach that goal, it ends up denying itself; its vitality becomes an impetus towards death... even in its most passionate attempts, always secretly aware of the impermanence of any *kultur*” (1982, page 88).

Slataper writes in the first decades of the 20th century, as Trieste is torn between the pull of the Italian ‘motherland’ (Slataper himself was active in irredentist associations) and its unique condition as the multinational, multilingual port of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The city that the erstwhile Austrian governor Prince Konrad Hohenlohe-Schillingsfurst described as an ‘a-national city’—as the ideal symbol of the economic and cultural unity of the Danubian basin (and of the unity of the Empire itself)—faces an impossible task when it is forced (‘by the nationalism of others’, as Joseph Roth would have it) to define itself. As long as it remains not fully defined, the Triestine condition remains ‘what it is’: multiple, made up of infinite crossings, traces, influences. It is giving a (national) name to this condition, forcing it into the strictures of ‘identity’ that denies it, as Ara and Magris suggest:

<sup>(7)</sup> For an analysis of Slataper’s ‘metropolitan’ identity politics, see Coda (2002).

“the search for identity always implies, in a more or less conscious fashion, the desire to capture an essence, some constant, permanent dimension within changing reality; [such attempts] necessarily tend to freeze or remove historicity, [they] invent and accentuate analogies and similarities rather than capturing transformations and differences... they tend towards myth, towards the seduction of the reassuring rigidity of the always-the-same; they tend to petrify historical change within the mask of the myth” (1982, page 5).

The inner tension described by Slataper is reflected in the work of other prominent Triestine writers as well, who see the city's very *raison d'être* in those contrasts and their irreconcilability. For writers who achieve subsequent international renown, such as Italo Svevo and Umberto Saba, Trieste similarly becomes a mirror reflecting the crises and contradictions of European modernity. It is also so for James Joyce, who “came to realise in Trieste that all civilisations are impure, and warned against the perilous construction of relationships between nation and race, race and rhetoric” (Robinson, 2000, page 154). Recent scholarship highlights, indeed, the important role of Joyce's Triestine experience in shaping his work and writing style (see, especially, McCourt, 2000; Robinson, 2000; 2007, but also the edited collection by Knowles et al, 2007) and we wish to spend some time discussing it here, in particular because many of the reappraisals focus directly on the presumed 'effects' of Trieste's border condition on the Joycean opus.

Living in Trieste for eleven years (1904–15), Joyce came to know well most of the city's literary figures, including Slataper. His most celebrated friendship was, nonetheless, with Svevo, his pupil at the Berlitz School. Svevo's real name was, as was Slataper's, a perfect Triestine mix: Ettore Schmitz, part Italian, part Germanic, with Hungarian Jewish origins. As Robinson (2000, page 152) notes, Svevo's assumed *nom de plume* explicitly drew attention to his “sense of bilocation”: Italo Svevo literally being ‘Italus the Swabian’, the Italian and the Swabian (southern German) at once.<sup>(8)</sup> As both McCourt (2000) and Robinson (2000) argue, Joyce was struck by the way in which Triestine intellectuals like Svevo and Teodoro Mayer, another good friend and the editor and owner of the city's newspaper *Il Piccolo*, negotiated their ‘border identities’.<sup>(9)</sup> What most fascinated Joyce was how “place names and personal identities [here] were constituted by the flux of the border, which arbitrarily confers nationhood upon its subjects then effaces it ... the border as palimpsest whose originary source is perpetually deferred to vanishing point” (Robinson, 2000, page 151; see also Pizzi, 1998; 2002).

Both McCourt (2000) and Robinson (2000; 2007) argue that it is in Trieste that Joyce learns to think—and write—‘from the border’. Robinson (2000) cites a lecture that Joyce delivers (in Italian) to a Triestine audience in 1907, just three years after his arrival in the city, in which he satirises attempts to describe the Irish national character as ‘ancient and monolithic’ (at that moment, the focus of debate within Ireland). In his talk, held at the Università Popolare and entitled “Ireland, Island of Saints and Sages”, Joyce argues that the racial diversity of Ireland's tribes rendered claims for blood purity not only hopeless but risible:

<sup>(8)</sup> As Robinson (2007, page 59) suggests, Svevo had in fact been educated in Bavaria, not in Swabia, “but probably intended the name to be taken as a synonym for non-Prussian, non-Austrian Germanity”—a refusal of ‘national’ Germanness.

<sup>(9)</sup> Mayer was an important inspiration for *Ulysses*'s Leopold Bloom: as McCourt (2000, page 95) notes, Joyce was particularly struck by “the idea of Mayer, a Hungarian Jew, leading the Italian nationalists” (Mayer's newspaper, *Il Piccolo*, was the leading Italian irredentist daily newspaper in Joyce's time and is still Trieste's most read daily broadsheet).



“In such a fabric, it is useless to look for a thread that may have remained pure, virgin and uninfluenced by other threads nearby. What race or language (if we except those few which a humorous will seems to have preserved in ice, such as the people of Iceland) can nowadays claim to be pure?” (Joyce, 2000, page 118).

The impossibility of national or linguistic ‘purity’ and, especially, the impossibility of ‘fixing’ any such purity in language, becomes a recurrent theme in Joyce’s subsequent work, which, as Robinson (2000; 2007) and McCourt (2000) argue, is marked by his own incorporation of the Triestine ‘border syndrome’.

In his essay on Trieste Stefan Hertmans describes this awareness as “a certain urban self-consciousness” characterised “by a complete absence of ‘fundamentalist’ ideas about enrootedness, native soil or origin” (2001, page 11). Robinson (2000; 2007) and McCourt (2000) suggest that it is precisely this distinct Triestine “urban self-consciousness” that provides a powerful inspiration for Joyce in crafting the character of Leopold Bloom in *Ulysses*. Both authors highlight, in particular, Bloom’s distinct set of beliefs and ideas about nations and national belonging. These ideas, according to McCourt, were “more than just a political code”; they were a (uniquely Triestine) “mode of living and being. Central to them was the belief in freedom and the rejection of nationality” (2000, page 73).<sup>(10)</sup> Bloom’s well-known definition of the nation is one, McCourt argues, that any Triestine socialist of Joyce’s day would have given, in the true spirit of the city’s *municipalismo* or “the long-established idea that the municipality of Trieste was capable of embracing different peoples and traditions” (2000; page 73):<sup>(11)</sup>

—But do you know what a nation means? says John Wyse.

—Yes, says Bloom.

—What is it? says John Wyse.

—A nation? says Bloom. A nation is the same people living in the same place. (Joyce, 1993 [1936], episode 12, lines 1419–1423).

As we noted in our discussion above, Italian irredentism was, in fact, something very different in the Trieste of the early 1900s, and Joyce was undoubtedly influenced by its particular inflections in elaborating his own ideas on nationhood and belonging. McCourt, in narrating Joyce’s dalliance with the Triestine irredentists notes how the author was particularly drawn to it as “a different type of irredentism—not an exasperated nationalism but an attempt at achieving a federation of free nations” (2000, page 70).<sup>(12)</sup>

It is important, nonetheless, not to idealise such understandings. In particular, it is important to note how the apparently seamless copresence of national–irredentist and imperial–cosmopolitan ideologies within the Triestine border identity was (also) bound with particular understandings of political/geopolitical and economic utility. As Ballinger argues, the image of a cosmopolitan city where everyone was free ‘to choose their own nationality’ “proved useful not just to the imperial rulers but also the city’s financial elite who ... found a certain form of ‘Italianism’ useful” (2003b, page 93), in particular in shoring up their own legitimacy (see also Dubin, 1999; Minca, 2009a). The ways in which Triestine border identity at the turn of the century embraced both cosmopolitan and irredentist ideologies may seem paradoxical, but only if we “order the world in

<sup>(10)</sup> Joyce, 1993 [1936], *Ulysses*, episode 12, lines 1417–1418.

<sup>(11)</sup> For a discussion of the Triestine *municipalismo* and the notion of an ‘urban patriotism’ expressed through the ideal of the ‘Trieste Nazione’ (the ‘Triestine Nation’), see Minca (2009a).

<sup>(12)</sup> This was elaborated by writers like Vivante, but also those in the broader Austro-Marxist tradition that envisioned the possibility of ‘freely chosen’ nationality—within which, to cite Eric Hobsbawm, “nationality could attach to persons, wherever they lived and whoever they lived with, at any rate if they chose to claim it” (1990, page 7).

dichotomies", as Mignolo (2000, page 85) would have it. Rather, as scholars such as Cattaruzza (1995) have argued, these ideologies were mutually forged and mutually reinforcing within the founding myths of the city in the early 1900s:

"That individuals like Svevo simultaneously embraced 'nationalist' and 'cosmopolitan' positions in different aspects of their life appears problematic only if we consider nationalism and cosmopolitanism as totalizing identities ... rather than as interrelated ideologies upon which individuals may draw in different realms or moments" (Ballinger, 2003b, page 93).

There was one realm, however, where the 'national' and 'cosmopolitan' were reconciled 'in practice' in turn-of-the-century Trieste, and it was within the realm of everyday spoken language—within the city's own 'hybrid' local dialect called the *triestino*. Vernacular language—and, in particular, that which Walter Mignolo (2000) broadly terms "linguaging"—was, in fact, a crucial shared way of 'inhabiting the border' for turn-of-the-century Triestines. Mignolo defines "linguaging" as a form of "thinking and writing between languages" (2000, page 226). Such an understanding, he suggests, "allows us to move away from the idea that language is a fact (eg a system of syntactic, semantic, and phonetic rules) and [move] towards the idea that speech and writing are strategies for orienting and manipulating social domains of interaction" (page 226). An other tongue, he argues, is the necessary condition for an 'other thinking', for the possibility of transcending 'national' languages and 'national' ideologies. "Linguaging", "living-between-languages", is thus "a fundamental condition of border thinking": "while the imaginary of the modern world-system focused on frontiers, structures, and the nation-state as a space within frontiers with a national language, linguaging and bilanguaging ... open up to a postnational imaginary" (2000, page 253).

*Triestino* can certainly be conceived as a form of 'linguaging', in Mignolo's terms. As Trieste's lingua franca since the early 1800s, *triestino* was a key part of the city's 'cosmopolitan' self-representation and, in practice, the 'linguistic glue' that bound the city's diverse national communities. As Giorgio Negrelli (1978) and Roberto Finzi (2001) suggest, Trieste's dialect was born as a 'pragmatic-commercial tool' of a new cosmopolitan bourgeoisie that, beginning in the second half of the 1700s, affirmed itself as the dominant class in the Adriatic port. This new urban class established its identity precisely through the adoption of a new lingua franca. As we have argued elsewhere (Minca, 2009b), the new Triestine elite made the city's commercial-economic vocation its guiding cultural-identitary model as well. As a cosmopolitan capitalist emporium, Trieste logically, adopted as its 'mother tongue' a variant of the main commercial idiom of the Mediterranean: the 'colonial Venetian' that for long served as lingua franca all along the shores of the Adriatic and wide swathes of the Mediterranean. Translated 'on the ground' in the Triestine babel, this idiom was forever transformed, incorporating ever-new influences: from elements of other Italian dialects to Armenian, Croatian, Czech, English, German, Greek, Hungarian, Maltese, Slovenian, Spanish, Turkish, and Yiddish (Negrelli, 1978).

In the Triestine context of the 1800s, the dialect represents, on the one hand, a necessary instrument of integration and, on the other, the language that best represents the civic and cultural values of the *triestinità*—values that coincide precisely with those of the new urban elite. The process of cultural integration that occurs through the adoption of the dialect is indeed quite unique, reflecting the specificity of Triestine capitalism: 'municipal' in its idiom and yet highly internationalised in its self-representations and economic horizons (Andreozzi, 2003), bringing together the paradoxical blend of national and cosmopolitan elements described by Ballinger.

When James Joyce arrives in the city in 1904, he is immediately struck by the diffuse use of the *triestino* dialect. In John McCourt's biography of the writer's Triestine sojourn (*The Years of Bloom: James Joyce in Trieste, 1904–1920*) (2000), McCourt notes that what Joyce finds surprising is that, although the city's diverse national communities usually maintained close (at least affective) ties "with their home nations and the continued use of their native languages, especially in their homes, [they] all became Triestines [by] learning, like the Joyces, the local *lingua franca*" (page 51). "How liberating it must have been for Joyce", McCourt continues, "to come to a city where the native tongue had been allowed to flourish, mutate, multiply, and assimilate so many words from other cultures, and where so many imported languages were allowed to co-exist" (2000, page 51).

Joyce comes to see *triestino* "as an inclusive force which...embraced different civilisations and became a living encyclopaedia of the cultures, nations and languages that had been assimilated in the city", "one of the richest, most 'composite' languages in the world that Joyce listened to with passionate attention" (McCourt, 2000, pages 52–53). As both McCourt (2000) and Robinson (2007) argue, *triestino* becomes a fundamental influence in *Finnegans Wake*, where Joyce "creates his own international portmanteau language, rooted in English but brimming with different traditions, in which few individual words could be safely reduced to one single, authoritative meaning" (McCourt, 2000, page 52).<sup>(13)</sup>

### Conjuring up the border

The 'pragmatic' identity imaginary of the Triestine urban experiment described above (that takes as given the assimilation and reconciliation of difference) begins to face increasing challenges in the early 1900s, as the geographical imaginations of Italian irredentism begin to shift to include the 'claiming' of the northern-Adriatic territories. All at once, Trieste's 'national' (Italian) bourgeoisie acquires a new role. From a cosmopolitan-yet-Italian identity, Trieste's Italian elite is now reimagined as the 'vanguard' of the nation's 'civilising mission' in the East. But it is not only an 'external' refashioning. Beyond its utility within the broader geopolitical imaginations of Italian irredentism, this newly assigned role also reflects changing political and economic conditions in the city and conveniently plays on the fears of many members of Trieste's Italian bourgeoisie who see their role challenged by the emergence of a growing Slovenian middle class, whose economic as well as political weight is becoming a serious concern (see Minca, 2009a).

(Italian) Trieste's imagined role in the reconstitution of the nation, at the vanguard of the 'struggle' against the (rapidly nationalising) Slavic enemy, soon begins to translate itself into a siege mentality, however. Although they remain a minority in the city, Trieste's Italian irredentists are a very vocal and influential group; their preoccupations soon crystallise into the representation of Trieste as an Italian island surrounded by Slavic territory (Cattaruzza, 2007; Verginella, 2008). It is important to note that until the end of the First World War, Trieste does not lie on any border—it is part of the Austro–Hungarian Empire, as are the territories that surround it. And yet already in the early 1900s, Trieste begins to live what Ara and Magris characterise as its 'border syndrome', a territorial anxiety that will eventually bring its demise:

"Trieste is a distillation of the Empire and of all its contradictions; as such, it perishes with any univocal resolution of these latter. And yet it pushes forward, heroically, into self-destruction, tragically torn between its unique historical–economic function, tied to its Imperial belonging, and its irredentist aspirations that aim for liberation from the Empire and an end to its peculiar condition" (1982, page 14).

<sup>(13)</sup> On Joyce's 'language play' see also the seminal work by MacCabe (1978).

The Triestine 'border syndrome' is thus born well before the border itself. It is not surprising, then, that the actual tracing of the Italian border in 1918 unleashes an all-encompassing "border mobilisation", as Pupo (2007) terms it. From 1918 on, Trieste and the border progressively become one and the same thing in the thoughts of the statesmen who decide its fate:

"Trieste knows that geography is not an opinion and will take her revenge on those that would have it be so... Trieste cannot, does not, will never turn her back on her sea" (Benito Mussolini, 1938, cited in Cattaruzza, 2007, page 202).

"Both Trieste and Klagenfurt are completely encircled by Slovenian lands, something that even Lenin considered a fundamental factor in determining the belonging of a city. Of course, in socialism this question would not be an issue. But we are currently in the phase of a war of national liberation, and thus we need to approach this problem as a capitalist society would" (Yugoslav Communist leader Edvard Kardelj in a letter to Tito, 1942, cited in Cattaruzza, 2007, page 222).

The interwar period witnesses the emergence of three distinct conceptions aimed at tracing the 'proper' delimitation of the Triestine border: in very broad terms, the notion of a 'natural border', a 'strategic border', and an 'ethnonational border' (see the overview in Pupo, 2007). The definition of the 'natural border' was always a highly contested enterprise. Imperial Austrian geographers and, subsequently, their Yugoslav counterparts chose to adopt geomorphological criteria to demarcate the boundaries of the 'Italian' space (most often the riverbed of the Isonzo or the western limit of the Julian Alps). Italian geographers favoured hydrographic criteria (in an extension of this 'natural' understanding of the border, the southern extension of the Adriatic coast also presumably formed part of this regional whole).

The notion of a 'strategic border' emerges during the Fascist *ventennio* and relies on the myth of a 'mutilated victory': the diffuse conviction among Italians (sustained by state propaganda) of the grave injustice operated upon the Italian people by the Allies in the territorial settlement decided at Versailles and St. Germain (see Pupo, 2007, page 18; also Sluga 2001). Trieste becomes seen as a key strategic node in the reclaiming of Italy's Adriatic territories, the latter seen as crucial to the economic and political 'realisation' of the Fascist state. Interestingly enough, the 'strategic' argument emerges once more following the Second World War, this time used by the Yugoslav state to argue in various international fora the 'strategic' (political and economic) significance not only of Trieste but of the entire Friuli plain, suggesting that the Italian border be brought back to its pre-1918 delimitation. The struggle for the delimitation of the 'strategic border' in the years that follow the war once again reduces Trieste to an object of international dispute, to 'the Trieste Question' (see the account of those years in De Castro, 1981, and Ballinger, 2003a).

The 'territorial solution' must come to terms, however, also with the third conception of the border: that of an 'ethnonational' divide between the Italian and Slavic populations. As Pupo (2007, page 21) argues, the notion of an 'ethnonational' boundary emerges already in the late 1880s and, much like in other ethnically mixed areas of Central and Eastern Europe, is associated with an urban-rural (and class) divide that maps onto the 'ethnic' categories. As both Pupo (2007) as well as Ara and Magris (1982) note, 'ethnic' tensions begin to emerge when Habsburg Trieste is no longer able to assimilate its Slovene inhabitants into the broader urban project (based primarily on the city's distinct economic functions as a cosmopolitan port, but also reliant on an incorporation of all new arrivals into the local Italian culture—for further discussion see Minca, 2009a; 2009b). What is more, the emergence of a new Slovenian urban bourgeoisie (alluded to previously), but also the presence

of considerable rural Italian settlements in the neighbouring Istrian peninsula, confound any simple distinction between an Italian urban elite and a Slavic/Slovene peasantry.<sup>(14)</sup>

This divide does not only run along simply 'ethnonational' lines, however. It is a divide, as Pupo argues, between two radically distinct conceptions of the nation itself: "between the 'social' nationalism of the Triestine Italians, based not on descent but on the conscious decision to be part of a specific national and urban culture, and the 'ethnic' nationalism of the Slavic populations [nb Slovenian as well as Croatian]" (2007, page 22). This divide persists from the late-19th century well into the 20th, marked by what Pupo (2007, page 22) has termed a reciprocal and frequently violent "negation of autochthony" (see also Cattaruzza, 2007; Verginella, 2008): for Italian Fascism, these territories' Slavic populations are 'nonendogenous'; for the Yugoslav Communist state, the Italian presence is a 'colonial', 'immigrant' one. The preoccupation on both sides thus becomes a restoration of what is seen as the 'natural' ethnic order: "for the Italians, it was a question of returning the Slavic populations to their stereotyped role as peaceful peasants, subordinate to the dominant power... for the Slovenians and Croatians, the challenge was, rather, the elimination of the century-old process of assimilation that had 'weakened' the Slavic component to the benefit of the Italian one" (Pupo, 2007, page 24).

Under the Italian Fascist regime, this struggle is taken to its extremes, with a full-scale attempt at the 'ethnic reclamation' of these areas, including population transfers of Slovenians and the mass intimidation and forced Italianisation of entire communities. Triestine–Slovenian historian Marta Verginella in her recent (2008) reappraisal of the history of border relations entitled *Il Confine degli Altri* [The others' border] describes a particular "border fascism" that develops in those years and that makes of these territories a focus for its propaganda activities. The Special Tribunals for the Defence of the State instituted in those years by the Fascist regime bring before them countless political and intellectual leaders from Trieste's (and its surroundings) Slovenian community. As Verginella narrates, "we could argue that between the 2nd and the 14th of December 1941, the entire Slovenian community of the Venezia Giulia is called up to the defendants' bench, the city dwellers as well as the peasants" (2008, page 9). The Tribunals refer to the accused as "little men consumed by hate" that dare refuse obedience "to the only state and nation able to bring order and civilisation into those lands", "a writhing mass of human reptiles, slithering in the shadows and mud to and fro across the border, always ready to bite and to poison, to stoke the flames of a particular sort of Slavic nationalism" (District Attorney Fallace, cited in Verginella, 2008, page 23).

Verginella also writes, however, of the complete sense of *spaesamento*, of disorientation, felt by the Triestine Slovenians who fled Fascist Italy and settled in Ljubljana. Many encounter hostility, and are treated "almost as invaders, as strangers in their own land" (2008, page 64). They are "seen as Others: sharing a common language, this is true, but very distant in habits and understandings" (Verginella, 2008, page 65). An emblematic figure in this regard is Slovenian novelist Boris Pahor. Pahor, one of the leading figures of the contemporary Slovenian literary scene, was born and grew up in Trieste. In 1944 he was deported by the Nazi occupying forces as an enemy partisan and interned first in the Natzweiler-Struthof concentration camp and subsequently in Dachau and Bergen-Belsen. In *Necropoli* (2008)<sup>(15)</sup> his account of those years

<sup>(14)</sup> For a discussion of the complexity of territorial and 'national' identities in the Istrian peninsula in those years, see Ballinger (2003a; 2004) and Ivetic (2006).

<sup>(15)</sup> It is notable that this, perhaps Pahor's best known work, was only translated into Italian in 2005 (subsequently republished in 2008), years after its translation into German and French (2001 and 2003).

Pahor describes his arrival in the Natzweiler-Struthof camp and the tragic absurdity of his classification as an 'Italian political prisoner': he, a Slovenian-speaking, Triestine-born, militant anti-Fascist. At the same time, he feels no 'necessary affinity' with the other 'Slavs'. The forcible divisions among the various 'national' communities in the camp make no sense to him. In a bilingual interview that the novelist gave as part of a collaborative Italian–Slovenian documentary made about the impending fall of the border in December 2007 (Penco, 2008), Pahor speaks of the various national categories that he has had to endure during his 90 years: 'Italian', 'Slovenian', an *apolide* (after his liberation from the camp, Pahor possessed only French transit papers, his sole proof of identity). His closing comment in the interview is striking, for it expresses the desire not for an end to (national) categories—he is dismissive of the idea of the possibility of a 'borderless Europe'—but simply for "the ability to decide", to freely choose allegiance and belonging, echoing the Triestine irredentists of the early 1900s.

### The Iron Curtain

The decade of Anglo–American administration (1945–54) that follows the end of the Second World War (and the city's occupation by Yugoslav forces in May/June 1945) only confirms many Triestini's sense of disorientation and loss. As De Castro (1981) masterfully argues, albeit maintaining Trieste in the sphere of Western control (and eventually restoring the city to full Italian rule), the period of international administration creates a long-lasting political and cultural limbo. For almost ten years, the city and its inhabitants are suspended between two radically different worlds, belonging to no state, with no control over their destiny, at the mercy of the vagaries of international geopolitics (for an account of these years, see Ballinger, 2003a; Dinardo, 1997; Rabel, 1988; Sluga, 2001).

The border in those years is permanently in motion: both on the ground and on the countless maps and recommendations produced by the various international commissions created to determine the 'right' border between the Italian and the Yugoslav state. As both De Castro (1981) and Valdevit (1987) highlight in their reconstruction of those years, the personal biographies of all those who lived through this period are forever marked by this pervasive sense of uncertainty. At the same time, the nationalist fervour that for decades had gripped the city and that had made the question of the border the defining focus for Triestine Italian and Slovenian political mobilisation now appears almost absurd, for Trieste's destiny lies entirely in the hands of others.

The seemingly endless series of proposals for the border—the Morgan line (proposed by the Americans), the French line, the Russian line, the Yugoslav line, the Italian line—draw on a variety of often contrasting logics: presumed ethnonational balance, strategic needs, ideological and geopolitical considerations. When the 'Trieste Question' is formally adjudicated with the London Memorandum in 1954, it is through a process of extreme ethnic simplification (as in many other parts of postwar Europe). In this sense, Trieste once again becomes a 'test case'. The new Italian–Yugoslav border, moreover, becomes a key focal point of the Cold War confrontation (see Ballinger, 1999; also Smith, 2003) and one of the most iconic sites of a Europe now split in two. Trieste's symbolic role is not limited to its role in the geopolitical imaginary of an Atlantic Europe, however. For the Italian state, Trieste also becomes (once again) a vital space of 'Italianness' to be defended against the Communist (and Slavic) threat (see Ballinger, 1999; Hametz, 2005).

The city's double symbolic role—as both the vanguard of the 'West' and as the frontier at which Italian national identity was to be protected—operates, of course, on the presumption of the 'right' tracing of the border: an assumption that the lengthy and controversial process of the adjudication of Trieste's status (lasting from 1947 until 1954)

makes difficult to sustain. As Pupo (2007), Cattaruzza (2007), and Verginella (2008) all argue, for most of Trieste's inhabitants the 'real' experience of the delimitation of the border is far removed from the lofty pronouncements of the international commissions. This disjuncture is an important one. Indeed, what makes this Cold War border particularly interesting from a political – geographic point of view is the tremendous gap between the rhetorical and symbolic 'weight' of this border in the early Cold War imaginary [both at the national as well as the international scale, in many ways an 'overdetermination' of the border, as Balibar (2002) would term it], its subsequent reimagination following the Tito – Stalin split in 1948, and its ongoing lived experience for the Triestini.

Both Sluga (2001) and Ballinger (2000; 2003a) note how the reinterpretation of Western security interests post 1948 leads British and American negotiators "to force the hands" of their Yugoslav and Italian counterparts in order to settle the dispute in 1954. As Ballinger points out, "where Trieste had formerly symbolized the *cordon sanitaire* against Soviet territorial advances, after 1948 the Anglo – Americans redefine Yugoslavia as the strategic buffer zone between 'East and West' and ultimately agree to Yugoslavia's acquisition of Zone B (including all of Istria), in contradistinction to a 1948 Tripartite Agreement favouring Italian claims" (2000, page 14). Within just a few years, Trieste is thus symbolically repositioned in the international geopolitical imaginary: no longer the confine of Western Europe to defend, it now finds itself celebrated (in Yugoslav state propaganda at least) as 'the world's most open border' (Ballinger, 1999; Dinardo, 1997).

Forced as it is by the hands of others, the formal delimitation of the border in 1954 (though experienced with a sense of profound injustice by many on both sides of the border) does not give rise to new tensions. Quite the opposite is true. The fixity of the border, paradoxically, serves to pacify the political situation in the city. The 'hard' border, in a sense, gathers within it the ideological and national struggles, leaving people to simply 'get on with their lives'. And transgressing the border, indeed, becomes part of everyday life, seen not as a symbolic/ideological act but simply something that 'makes sense'. Already from the 1960s on, the Istrian peninsula becomes a weekly destination for countless Triestini in search of cheap petrol, fruit, vegetables, and meat. In the 1970s the tourist development of many parts of the Yugoslav coastline encourages intense cross-border flows, with no parallel in any other part of the Iron Curtain. The Triestini do not only travel across the border during vacation periods, however: the Istrian coast becomes a regular destination for frequent day trips as well. On the other hand, the city also draws to it countless Slovenians, many who come as day-labourers or simply to purchase products difficult to obtain at home (for an analysis of some of these cross-border flows see Battisti, 1979; Bufon, 1996; Valussi, 1972). Such flows intensify significantly in the late 1970s and 1980s, with Trieste becoming a veritable 'emporium' for the various Yugoslav populations (and not only those living right across the border). Arriving on buses from across the country, the Yugoslav visitors crowd the city's shops every weekend, with numbers reaching 100 000 on occasion.<sup>(16)</sup>

From the 1970s on, for most Triestini, the world across the border may be the fundamental 'Other' against which they define themselves, but it is also an 'Other' with whom they have constant—often daily—contact, bound within a very specific "micro-politics of everyday social contact and encounter" (Amin, 2000, page 959).<sup>(17)</sup> This is not to suggest, of course, that the 'political' (or geopolitical) is entirely forgotten in the flurry of shopping bags changing hands across the border. The signing of the Treaty of

<sup>(16)</sup> For a recent appraisal of such flows, see Minca et al (2005).

<sup>(17)</sup> For a discussion of the case of Trieste, see Bialasiewicz (2009).

Osimo in 1975<sup>(18)</sup> provokes widespread mobilisation in the city, bringing into the streets crowds unseen since the time of the Anglo–American occupation. As Cattaruzza argues, the city's rebellion against the signing of the Treaty is, in many ways, a mark of something much greater: "Osimo has the effect of a match thrown into a petrol tank ... unleashing a protest that had been brewing for much longer, taking the form of a civic rebellion against the central [state] authorities" (2007, page 349). The focus of the protests, in fact, are not the terms of the Treaty itself but the proposal for the creation of a cross-border free-trade zone. The mobilisation against this proposal brings together the most disparate political factions, from environmental activists to defenders of Trieste's municipal autonomy, to the leaders of various nationalist associations. Each sees in the proposal a different threat—from ecological disaster to impending Yugoslav economic colonisation. What everyone agrees on, however, is the Italian state's incapacity to understand Trieste's complex realities—and the limited nature of 'official' representations of the border.

It is possible to see the mobilisation against Osimo as the first formal attempt at organised 'border thinking' and a 'border (political) practice' in the postwar era, at moving beyond "the dichotomies of [national] geo-historical mapping" as Mignolo (2000, page 37) would have it. In fact, 1975 becomes a key moment in Triestine politics for it also marks the triumph of a new local party—the *Lista per Trieste*—that, building on the popular protests against Osimo and against the free-trade zone, succeeds in bringing together a wide cross-section of the Triestine electorate. In the 1978 regional elections, the *Lista* emerges as the first party in the city, capturing 27.5% of the vote and overthrowing the long-standing dominance of the *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC), which comes in at 22% (Valdevit, 2004). The emergence of this 'local' political movement, coalescing around a 'local' issue, is an important marker of the shifting perceptions of Triestines with regard to their place in the Cold War order as well. The DC, long the representative of the struggle against the Communist threat, is perceived as outdated, unable to provide the answers that the city demands, and unable to engage with its 'real' needs (see the analysis in Ballinger, 2003a; also Cattaruzza, 2007). And although the *Lista*'s success is limited in time (it will essentially disappear from the Triestine political landscape by the early 1990s), its reimagining of the city's place (especially vis-à-vis the Cold War border) will leave important effects.

From the late 1970s on, the symbolic place of Trieste as the city at the 'frontier of the West'—a geopolitical representation that had remained firmly in place in the rhetoric of many local and national politicians—is substituted by another set of representations, another set of geopolitical myths about the city: this time, however, at least in part, 'locally produced'. The dominant local myths of the late 1970s appeal, in many ways, to the post-1954 myth of 'Europe's most open border', actively promoted by local leaders and supported by a number of national politicians (see Pupo, 2007; Valdevit, 2004). The creation of the new administrative region of Friuli – Venezia Giulia (FVG) in 1963 (of which Trieste becomes the capital) gives further impetus to this process of refashioning the imagined role/place of the border, especially as the region gains autonomous competences. The FVG region soon becomes a foreign policy actor in its own right, engaging in a number of cross-border initiatives such as the creation of the Alpe – Adria Community in 1978.<sup>(19)</sup> As part of the Alpe – Adria, but also other

<sup>(18)</sup> Delimiting in definitive fashion the final frontiers between Italy and Yugoslavia and formally closing the 'border question' (for a discussion, see Valdevit, 2004).

<sup>(19)</sup> Officially called the Working Community of States and Regions of the Eastern Alpine Regions (ALPS-ADRIATIC), and bringing together the FVG region with the Austrian regions of Kärnten, Styria, and Upper Austria and the Socialist Yugoslav Republics of Slovenia and Croatia. See <http://www.alpeadria.org/>



cross-border initiatives, especially from the late 1980s on, regional politicians become quite active in promoting a variety of formal as well as informal exchanges and networks of collaboration—campaigning, among other things, for the opening of further transport links and shared infrastructural projects (from the 1990s on, also as part of broader Trans-European Network projects for Corridor V).<sup>(20)</sup> The narratives of the border now evoke it as a *confine ponte*: a bridge-border.

### After the Cold War

With the collapse of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s, Trieste is thrust into the limelight once again. The FVG region recognises the nascent Republic of Slovenia in October 1991, several months before the formal recognition of independence on the part of the Italian state on 15 January 1992 (see the description of these events in Rumiz, 1996; 1997). Then FVG regional president and DC politician Adriano Biasutti actively campaigns for the recognition of both the new Slovenian as well as Croatian states and their eventual integration into the European Community, a role that subsequent regional and local leaders take up in various measures as well.

More importantly still, with the disappearance of the Cold War Yugoslav border, popular as well as institutional imaginations of Trieste's role begin to focus even more explicitly on its potential as a key 'bridge to the East', a key port and logistical hub in an enlarged Europe, but also a unique 'Mitteleuropean' cultural pole and multicultural laboratory for Europe [see the analysis of such representations in Apuzzo (2001); also Minca (2009a)]. The European Union and the idea of Europe more broadly become key referents in such (re)imaginings, albeit it is a distinct understanding of Europe and Europeaness that is at work here. Playing directly to ideas of Trieste as a 'cosmopolitan city' and, in particular, its 'magical' quality of Mitteleuropeaness, imaginations of Trieste's place in post-Cold-War Europe draw directly on nostalgic reconstructions of its past to project the city into an idealised ('European') future.<sup>(21)</sup> Indeed, as Ballinger suggests, evocations of Mitteleuropa in Trieste after 1989 are not only memory work but "a concrete political project that simultaneously looks back to the past and forward to the future" (2003b, page 96), part of the "prospective nostalgia" (page 97) that we have alluded to previously.<sup>(22)</sup>

The most recent initiative inspired by such 'prospective nostalgia' is the project for a new Euroregion, first proposed in 2005 by then-regional governor (and, previously, twice Trieste Mayor) Riccardo Illy. The Euroregion should incorporate not only border areas in Italy and Slovenia but also territories in neighbouring Austria and Croatia, with the explicit aim of creating a 'community' based not simply on territorial age contiguity but on the supposed will to be part of a common political and economic project—a project that, in Illy's words, is designed to "make the most of existing shared practices and connections" and within which "national and cultural differences could perhaps finally be conceived as valuable resources, rather than frontiers" (2005, page 188).

The stated aim of this initiative is to transcend, once and for all, the 'national' question and to transform Trieste's often conflictual experience of its place at the border into a new condition of possibility in today's Europe, into a new 'border practice'.

<sup>(20)</sup> For a summary of such initiatives, see Lusa (2001). For a broader analysis of the region's 'foreign policy', see Antonsich (2002).

<sup>(21)</sup> For a discussion of the geopolitical uses of the idea of Mitteleuropa in another post-Cold-War European context, see Bialasiewicz (2003).

<sup>(22)</sup> It is important to note that the end of the Cold War also 'unfreezes' some less glorious memories of this border: most visibly, contested memories of the partisan massacres of 1943–45, as well as the Istrian 'exodus' (for discussion, see Ballinger 2000; 2007; Baracetti, 2009).

The Euroregion draws on some long-standing tropes of the Triestine myth of a 'border city': (1) Trieste as the 'natural' capital of a wider northern-Adriatic space, but also (2) the city's 'natural' vocation as a 'cosmopolitan ideological emporium' within which to elaborate novel forms of collaboration and coexistence in the new Europe.<sup>(23)</sup> Within the Euroregional container, 'prospective nostalgia' marries the Triestine myth with the myth of a Europe of open borders and the 'magical qualities' of European cosmopolitanism,<sup>(24)</sup> in order to reposition the city in its new geopolitical and geoeconomic context.

What makes the project for the Euroregion particularly interesting for us here is its "[selective] negation of traditional [territorial] identity", to cite once again Stefan Hertmans's (2001, page 48) characterisation of Triestine identity politics. Much like the imaginations of Trieste's role as a 'cosmopolitan but firmly Italian' port in the early 1900s, the Euroregional geopolitical imaginary similarly relies on the copresence of 'national' and 'cosmopolitan-European' representations of the city and again, as in the early 1900s, on the (extremely potent) geoeconomic affirmation that the city's future fortunes can only be ensured by looking beyond the national territory.<sup>(25)</sup> In reimagining the city as a 'European' metropolis, the myths of turn-of-the-century 'cosmopolitan' Trieste are proving, once more, vital: again, not simply as nostalgic 'memory work' but also in sustaining 'prospective' political projects.

Beyond the celebratory rhetoric of city marketing initiatives of the past years that the actively play on 'cosmopolitan' representations,<sup>(26)</sup> there is one sphere within which the Triestine 'border identity' has, according to some authors, maintained its unique potential for the 'reconciliation of difference': within the *triestino* dialect. As Ara and Magris argue, throughout the post-WWII period,

"The only totality, the only unity that remains, with the refusal of the official, 'national' one, is the Oedipic, subterranean womb of the dialect, spoken by all social classes, adopted for all purposes, from the most banal everyday conversation to lofty intellectual discussion" (1982, page 33).

The dialect, they argue, is like a "subterranean stream that traverses the city", a shared memory both reaffirmed and transformed every day by the ever-fluid, ever-mutating use of the dialect:

"while literary Italian ... expresses the negative aspects of absence and loss, of ir-reconcilable difference, the dialect—which in Trieste has always been the most diffuse means of intercourse, among all social classes—is an immediate, reassuring form of communication, with things and with people; it is a natural bond, a continuity with the past, with a shared history" (1982, page 198).

As we have suggested elsewhere (Minca, 2009b), the wide repertoire of *triestino* stories, jokes, and songs that are passed on between friends and family members (but also increasingly commercialised and commodified) ideally embodies the intersection of formal and informal memory work in celebrating the 'uniqueness' of the Triestine *koine*.

<sup>(23)</sup> The idea of Trieste as an 'ideological emporium' for the nearby countries of Central and Eastern Europe was first articulated by writer Enzo Bettiza in his 1966 essay *Mito e Realtà di Trieste* (Myth and reality of Trieste). For discussion of the ways in which the notion of 'Trieste capitale' (that is, Trieste as the 'capital' of a Euro-Adriatic space) has been reworked in recent years, see Porcaro and Minca (2009). For a broader discussion of the 'Adriatic Space', see Cocco (2006).

<sup>(24)</sup> For a discussion of some of the 'mythical' qualities of 'European cosmopolitanism' see Rumford (2007); in the Triestine context, Bialasiewicz (2009) and Colombino (2009).

<sup>(25)</sup> As Ballinger points out in her assessment of post-Cold-War Triestine myth-making: "as Angelo Vivante argued back in 1912, the economic question and the (Italian) national question still remain incompatible almost a century later" (2003b, page 98).

<sup>(26)</sup> For a discussion, see Colombino (2009); Porcaro and Minca (2009).

While on the one hand *triestino* anecdotes and ‘ways of saying’ recall and reenact a profound sense of nostalgia for an idyllic past that never was, on the other, they materialise such nostalgia in the present, rendering it a moment of shared enjoyment and joyful sociability.

The *triestino* dialect retains its power as a nonnational, nonterritorial language today. As in the late 1800s and early 1900s, it continues to provide a ‘safe’ space of encounter for all forms of cross-border exchange: precisely because it cannot be fully defined or inscribed—because it does not have to state ‘what it is’ within national categories. It is not completely Italian; it is certainly not Slovenian or German: it is simply its own, ever-changing practice. It is exactly the sort of ‘linguaging’ described by Mignolo as fundamental to a ‘border gnosis’:

“Linguaging... locates interaction among individuals, among human beings instead of in pre-existing ideas. It is precisely at the intersection between person, self, humans, living organisms where linguaging is located as the condition of the possibility of language” (2000, pages 253–254).

*Triestino* as a vernacular tongue remains such a space of (continual) renegotiation and rearticulation. It relies on a continual recontextualisation, constant remaking within each encounter, each conversation. Although it feeds on a legacy of shared understandings and shared ways of being, it can never be fully determined. It relies on ever-new interpretations and inputs and thus can never be fully territorialised. It remains simply (em)placed, in the sense given to this term by Doreen Massey (1994).

Just as it did in Joyce’s time *triestino* continues to incorporate new words and terms according to logics that no one fully controls but that are the result of the metamorphosis enacted by and in everyday practices, rather than any formal or textual (re)definition of the language. Today, it not only interacts with the ‘Slavic’ world across the (once) border (that furnished countless terms to the *triestino* repertoire); it also engages with the city’s most recent immigrant communities—Albanian, Chinese, Romanian, Senegalese—whose children all learn to speak *triestino*, contributing to making it something different still. As in the early 1900s, *triestino* continues to be the vehicular language for most commercial and professional exchanges in the city, and mastery of the dialect remains the mark of full integration into Triestine culture. As Ara and Magris (1982) described it over two decades ago, it is the sole “necessary condition of indigeneity”. This is not to say that the dialect is undifferentiated. *Triestino* has a variety of ‘inflections’ that can reflect class, gender, and ‘national’ origin (though not entirely clearly—and not always). At the same time, its predominance in the city can also often obfuscate ‘actually existing divides’, swept up in the logic of what Russell Scott Valentino writing about the Istrian case has termed the “homogenously heterogeneous” (2003, page 95).

In a recent collection of interviews dedicated to ‘the end of the border’, well-known Triestine writer and journalist Paolo Rumiz was asked what, to his mind, defines today this city and its inhabitants’ border condition:

“The triestini don’t have an identity, if not one defined by its absence. We all come from somewhere else and the only thing that binds us is the common condition of living in a place—in this place. There is no *genos* that unites us, only a *topos* within which we can find refuge. It is this particular relationship with place—and the need to reflect upon and reflect ourselves within this place—that defines us” (Gallio, 2008, page 91).

The dialect is key to such strategies of emplacement. As a vernacular language, it is based on shared experience; its ‘rules’ are those elaborated in practice by individuals who speak it *in a particular moment* and *in a particular place*. Like Mignolo’s ‘linguaging’, it emerges from interaction between particular individuals, not predetermined

categories (whether 'national' or 'territorial'). Although such reflection is beyond the scope of the current paper, we believe that an investigation of the epistemic potential of a 'border dialect' like the *triestino* and its varied practices is pressing.<sup>(27)</sup> As a unique site for the negotiation of difference, as a constantly renegotiated and reflected-upon 'common space' as Rumiz characterises it, it could shed light on the promise of a different 'border gnosis' of the sort envisioned by Mignolo (2000).

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(27) The only study of which we are aware probing the 'epistemic potential' of dialect is Tammy Smith's (2007) research with Italian–Istrian and Yugoslav–Istrian communities in New York and their negotiation of conflict through story-telling in dialect.

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