Giuliano-Dalmat refugees en route from the German camp of Aurich to the International Refugee Organisation (IRO) camp in Bagnoli, Naples, August 4, 1950. From Bagnoli they migrated to Canada, Australia and the USA. Among them was Lazio Fantini who would later emigrate to Australia.
a clash of civilisations? the slovene and italian minorities and the problem of trieste from borovnica to bonegilla

PAPER GIVEN AT THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON MINORITIES AND CULTURAL ASSERTIONS - LITERARY AND SOCIAL DIASPORAS, UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG, 8-10 OCTOBER 2004.


No army in history has managed an invasion without barbarism and torture emerging as an inevitable part of the process.
(David Williamson, Sydney Morning Herald, 20 August 2004)

The eminent British historian Eric Hobsbawm, in his book Interesting Times. A Twentieth Century Life, in recounting his experiences as practitioner of this discipline, made the point that

history needs distance, not only from the passions, emotions, ideologies and fears... but from the even more dangerous temptations of identity. History needs mobility and the ability to survey and explore a large territory, that is to say, the ability to move beyond one's roots...Anachronism and provincialism are two of the deadly sins of history, both equally due to a sheer ignorance of what things are like elsewhere...Identity is defined against someone else, it implies not identifying with the other, it leads to disaster.

Hobsbawm's observation is a paradigm of the way in which the history of the tragic events that took place in North Eastern Italy during the Twentieth Century has in the past been approached by most Italian and Slovene historians. It is a history of two minorities that could not even agree on the name of the region which for centuries they both had been inhabiting side-by-side: Venezia Giulia for the Italians, Primorska (Littoral) for the Slovene. The rationale behind this historiography, based on the principle of reductio ad excludendum (of wilfully ignoring the 'other'), was best described by Sergio Romano, diplomat, historian and column for the Corriere della Sera, when he wrote in his book I confini della storia (The Boundaries of History):

We have the same memories, we witnessed the same events... and most probably are drawing the same conclusions. Yet, what is changing is that interplay of light and shadow which, in the final analysis, is conditioning the personal view and the sensitivity of the historian.

For centuries, the North-Eastern frontier of Italy and the entire Dalmatian coastline facing the Adriatic Sea have been a point of contact, as well as conflict, between the Latin and the Slav inhabitants of the region. The Romans established several military outposts and settlements to defend their borders, and as a base for further conquests. In 338 B.C the Roman Emperor Augustus ordered the construction of fortified walls around Tergestum, today's Trieste, as a bulwark against the Illyrians; later, Aquileia became an important outpost of the Roman Empire, only to succumb in 452 A.D. to the advancing armies of Attila the Hun. The Venetians, during their five hundred years of maritime supremacy, in order to protect their sea routes to the Orient from pirates, established a network of fortified settlements along Istria and the Dalmatian coast, penetrating only a few miles into the interior, which remained predominantly populated by Slav people. Therefore, right through the history of this region, one can detect the mutual, endemic fear of invasion, occupation and cultural subjugation, coming from the Roman, Venetian or Fascist empires as far as the Slavs were concerned, or from the barbaric tribes, the pirates, the Turks or the Slavo-Communists as far as the Venetian or Italian-speaking population was concerned.

On the other hand, Austria-Hungary, with its relative tolerance of cultural and administrative autonomy for the mosaic of nationalities which constituted its empire, was an exception to this historical trend of fear and violence, even if Vienna increasingly played the policy of 'divide and rule' to maintain its control over the warring ethnic groups. After 1815 Vienna favoured the Slavs over resurgent Italian nationalism which threatened the established social and political balance in the Adriatic dominions of the Empire.

It was during the Twentieth Century, at
31 newspapers and journals and 300 co-operatives and financial institutions. The Regime imposed the exclusive use of the Italian language at school, outlawed political parties and prohibited the speaking of Slovene in public. It curtailed the employment of Slovenes in the public service, "Italianised" all names of roads and localities and in 1928 even forced Slovenes and Croats to "Italianise" their names and surnames. In the Province of Trieste alone, 3,000 surnames were "modified" and 60,000 people had their surname, and often even their name amended to an Italian-sounding form. In its effort to achieve a "bonifica etnica" (ethnic reclaiming), Fascism favoured the emigration of Slovenes, especially if they were teachers or intellectuals. Slovene estimates claim that between the two World Wars 105,000 Slovenes and Croats left Italian Venezia Giulia, Istria and Dalmatia.

It is therefore not surprising that a deep sense of resentment and hatred developed among Slovenes and Croats, who were compelled to maintain their cultural traditions in the privacy of their families or at secret meetings. Their hostility for whatever was Fascist or Italian found an unavoidable outlet in terrorism and sabotage. The first terrorist organization, TIGR (from the initials of Trieste, Istria, Gorizia, Rijeka), which aimed to combat Italian rule and defend Slovene identity, was established at the end of 1927, while the first armed assault on Slav supporters of the Italian Regime took place at Monte Carus, near Pisino in Istria, on 24 March 1929. Of the five attackers apprehended, four were sentenced to 30-year jail terms and one, Vladimir Gortan, to death. Gortan was executed on 17 October 1929. Between 1927 and 1932, the Fascist Special Tribunal for the Defence of the State sentenced 106 Slav people to jail terms totalling 1,124 years. On 6 September 1930, four Slovenes were executed at Basovizza, near Trieste, after being found guilty of bomb attacks. The Corriere della Sera reported on 4 April 1931 that, during the previous four months, Slav resistance had committed 15 murders and 30 armed attacks, burned 18 schools and factories and perpetrated 8 acts of terrorism and 4 of espionage.

Between 1939 and September 1943, of the 35 executions by firing squad carried out against anti-Fascists at Forte Bravetta, in Rome, 18 involved people born in the provinces of Trieste, Gorizia, Pola and Fiume. Two were Croats, the rest Slovenes 'harbouring hostile feelings against Italy' as testified by the Police at their trial.
Perhaps the most emblematic instance of the Fascist policy of brutal repression of Slovene irredentism was what Slovene historiography later called the Second Trieste Trial. From 2-14 December 1941, the Special Tribunal for the Defence of the State arraigned sixty Slovenes who were accused of espionage and sabotage. Four were found not guilty, nine were condemned to death and the others were sentenced to jail terms totalling 666 years. Five of the nine were executed the following day at Opicina, near Trieste, and the remaining four had their sentences commuted to life imprisonment. The Public Prosecutor called for exemplary sentencing because, as he put it, 'more than punishing individual culpability, we must re-establish the primacy of civilisation and demonstrate the guilt of an entire people, incapable of submitting itself to a State and an elected Nation that rears civilisation... all Slovenes are guilty until they remain Slovene'.

The vicious German air bombardment of Belgrade on Easter Sunday, 6 April 1941, and the invasion by the Italian Army of Slovenia and Croatia on 11 April, brought about the collapse of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. On 17 April the Yugoslav plenipotentiaries signed unconditional surrender to the German Army in Belgrade, and the former Kingdom was carved up among the victors. On 3 May 1941, in violation of international law that barred the annexation of conquered territories while fighting continued on, Italy seized 5,242 square kilometres of Slovenia and its 380,000 inhabitants, calling it the Province of Lubiana. Dalmatia, including the islands of Arbe and Veglia, for a total area of 5,381 square kilometres and a population of 380,000 people, of whom 280,000 were Croat, 90,000 Serb and 5,000 Italian, was also incorporated into the Kingdom of Italy. For the following 29 months, the Italian Regime would have within its borders approximately 700,000 Slovenes, that is, almost half the entire Slovene nation.

After 1941 the German and Italian aggression mobilised a large part of the Serb, Slovene and Croat people behind the emerging partisan movement; the leadership of which was soon monopolised by Tito and the Yugoslav Communist Party by reason of its nationalist as well as socialist aims. This was also the case for Slovenes and Croats in Istria and Venezia Giulia, who saw in the partisans the defenders of their independence as well as the carriers of social revolution. Slovene and Croat resistance attracted brutal counter-insurgency measures on the part of the Fascist regime. More than 65,000 Army, Black Shirts and Carabinieri were employed in the Province of Lubiana in an attempt to destroy the Osvobodilna Fronta (Liberation Front).

Mussolini, during a visit to Gorizia on 31 July 1942, outlined the policy of repression to be followed by military authorities. In a meeting with Marshal Ugo Cavallero and generals Ambrosio, Roatta and Robotti, he stated that 'I believe we must respond to partisan “terror” with a policy of fire and brimstone (“ferro e fuoco”)... This people will never love us. Do not worry about the economic suffering inflicted upon the population. They have asked for it. Now they must pay... I would not oppose the mass transfer of the population. A few days earlier, on 26 June 1942, General Mario Robotti, commanding the XI Army Corps in Slovenia and Dalmatia, had declared that 'Italy's dominion and prestige must be restored at any price, even if the entire Slovene population disappears and Slovenia is destroyed'.

It is in the light of these events which preceded the Italian armistice of 8 September 1943, the collapse of the Italian Army and of civil administration in Venezia Giulia, Istria, Trieste and Dalmatia and the occupation by the German Army of these provinces, that one must consider the tragic events which unfolded between 1943 and 1956, events which for decades left a deep scar in the social and political psyche of both Italians and Slovenes and Croats still living in these provinces. This scar has not only affected economic, political, social and cultural interchange, but also the dispassionate historical examination of what really happened and why. Only in 1994, almost fifty years after the cessation of hostilities, the Italian and the Slovene Governments appointed a Mixed Commission of historians, seven from each country, to study the past without political strumentalizzazione (exploitation to one's benefit) or hidden agendas. After six years, the Mixed Commission produced a document, Dossier Italia-Slovenia. 1880-1956, which details the points of agreement and those of dissent in the interpretation of the history of this period. The report, published by the newspapers Il Piccolo and Primorski Dnevnik of Trieste on 4 April 2001, is an important document which will assist in excising the hatreds of the past and in creating necessary bridges towards a future of reconciliation.

Both sides often find hard to admit and
army threw, alive or after a summary execution, Italian and German prisoners-of-war and civilians, Italian as well as Slovene, who were considered compromised with Fascism or enemies of the new Yugoslav political order, is still a burning issue in the historical memory of Trieste and of the hundreds of thousands of Italians who had to flee from the areas occupied by Tito's forces.

Following the collapse of the Fascist Regime, the partisan movement took control of the whole of Istria and, between 9 September and 13 October 1943, a number of Italians were arrested, summarily tried and executed by infoibamento. Their number is difficult to estimate, but most studies agree that they total 500-700 people, of whom only 325 have been fully identified.15 This campaign of terror and of settling old scores, political and in some cases personal, generated fear for their safety among most Italians living in the coastal towns of Istria.

The nightmare for the Italian community ended when the Wehrmacht, assisted by contingents of Italian Black Shirts, swept through Venezia Giulia and Istria and by 13 October recaptured these areas. The German High Command, following Hitler's order 'mercilessly to crush the Slovene Communist insurrection in Istria', employed considerable force: the 162nd Turkmen division, the 71st infantry division, the 24th armoured division Waffen SS Karstjäger, the 44th division Prinz Eugen and a brigade of SS. On 10 September Hitler also established the Operationszone Adriatisches Kustenland, the Zone of Operations of the Adriatic Littoral, effectively annexing to the Third Reich Venezia Giulia and Istria, and nominated as its Gauleiter the Carinthian Friedrich Reiner. The rastrellamento (rounding up) in Istria, allegedly supervised by the Triestine-born, SS Polizeiführer Odilo Globočnik, the butcher of 1.65 million Jews in Lublin, was particularly brutal, inflicting 13,000 casualties on the partisan army and the Slav civilian population.16 Despite these terrible losses, the German sweep had the effect of galvanising Croat and Slovene resistance. Partisan officers sent by Tito to Istria to re-organise resistance activities following the mauling of his forces, were surprised to find among local Croat and Slovene men, women and even children, an unflinching determination to fight not only for their delivery from German and Italian oppression, but for the irredentist and nationalist aim to liberate what they considered to be their lands and for their

ABOVE The foibe of Pisino is the largest of over one hundred natural cavities in the region of Istria. It is also one of the most ill-famed. (Modiano Collection.)
return to a Yugoslavia under a Communist regime.\footnote{17}

From 1943 to 1945 the partisan war in the provinces annexed by Italy assumed a particularly savage character. In a speech made by Marshal Tito at Okroglica, near Gorizia, on 6 September 1953, he listed what he called 'an incomplete, indeed a very incomplete balance sheet of crimes' perpetrated by the Italian Army against the people of Yugoslavia. In it, he claimed that 'the Italian Army ... caused material damage amounting to no less than 9,850,000,000 American dollars. The armies of Italy murdered 437,956 persons in Yugoslavia. They sent to forced labour 84,512 persons, and 109,437 to concentration camps, while 122,430 people were deported. The Italian Army destroyed 142,555 village dwelling houses.'\footnote{18} Distinguished Trieste historian and diplomat, Diego De Castro, in his book Memorie di un novantenne, commented on Tito's claims as follows: 'naturally, these figures cannot be the real ones because it is impossible, in situations like this one, to be precise to the single unit. However, it can be stated that, on the whole, they reflect the real situation.'\footnote{19}

Recent studies by Italian historians have more accurately documented Italian repression in Slovenia. By 1 February 1943, 24,378 civilian Slovenes were interned in some 200 concentration camps in Italy, including approximately 18% of the entire population of Lubiana.\footnote{20} Other Slovene civilians were interned on the island of Arbe (Rab), where conditions were horrific. Data from the Historical-Military Archive in Belgrade account for 9,537 internees, 7,293 of whom were from the provinces of Lubiana and Fiume (Rijeka). Of these, 4,958 were men, 1,296 women and 1,039 children.\footnote{21} The names of 1,435 who died of hunger, cold, illness and deprivation are known. Italian historian Carlo Spartaco Capogreco claims that 'this number represents over 19% of Arbe's Slav internees, and is higher than the average mortality rate of the Nazi concentration camp at Buchenwald, which was 15%\footnote{22} However, Monsignor Jože Srebnik, Bishop of Veglia (Krk), on 5 August 1943 reported to Pope Pius XII that 'witnesses, who took part in the burials, state unequivocally that the number of the dead totals at least 3,500.' The mortality rate among the 24,378 Slovene civilians detained in the concentration camps in Italy was also very high, approaching 7,000, according to some historians.\footnote{23} Between 1 January and 31 May 1943, there were 865 deaths in the camps at Arbe, Visco, Goransa, Moniglo.

Chiesanuova, Renicci and Fiume.\footnote{24}

The moment of victory for the partisans came in April 1945 with the routing of the German forces and their Fascist allies (units of Junio Valerio Borghese’s Decima Mas were then operating in Venezia Giulia and Istria), the westwards race towards the Isonzo river, in an attempt to wrestle from the Anglo-Americans as much territory as possible, and the occupation of Trieste, Gorizia and Fiume on 30 April, 1 May and 2 May respectively. Zara had already been entered by Tito’s forces on 31 October 1944.

For 40 days the partisans were in complete political, military and administrative control of Trieste, while the British and New Zealand forces, who also had occupied Trieste in the afternoon of 2 May, stood by without intervening to stop the wanton arrests of some 17,000 people and the executions carried out by OZNA (Oddelok Zascite Naroda, or Section for the Defence of the People), the Yugoslav secret police, which in the preceding two years had index-carded more than 10,000 real and suspected Italian and Slovene collaborators with Fascism.

During these 40 days the Yugoslav Army carried out what the Dossier Italia-Slovenia. 1880-1956 has called 'an operation of State violence Italian anti-Fascists and people in uniform, symbols of the Italian State, as well as Slovene anti-Communists and often people innocent, except that they were Italian, were arrested, sometimes tortured and executed by intolamento. Many others were deported to concentration camps deep inside Slovenia and Croatia, the most infamous being the one at Borovnica, near Lubiana where, from June to September 1945, according to Italian sources, about seven of the over 2000 internees perished daily. Incidentally, it is a tragic irony that the camp commandant
in 1945-46, Ciro Raner, a former Sergeant in the Italian Army, indicted for murder and war crimes committed at Borovnica, since 1987 drew from the Italian National Institute for Social Security (INPS) a monthly pension of 569.750 Lire.25 Other camps for civilians as well as military internees were situated at Aidussina, Brcko-Banovic, Crikvenica, Curzola, Grobno, Idriz, Kocevje, Lubiana, Maresegio, Markovici, Martisnizza, Mitrovica, Prestrane, Ragusa, Sirak (Zagabria), Teodo (Dalmatia), Tolmino and Vipacco.

To estimate the exact number of the victims of *infamatismo* is extremely difficult. Some estimates range from 12,000 to 16,500, but include people unaccounted for. The most reliable figures range between 4,000 and 5,000 people. The *Dossier Italia-Slovenia. 1880-1956* makes brief mention of the 'hundreds of summary executions' - the victims were in general thrown in the loiba - and of the deportation of a large number of the military and of civilians, some of whom died of deprivation or liquidated during transfer, in jail or in the concentration camps.26

On 12 June the Yugoslav Ninth Korpus and units of the fourth Army had to pull back from Trieste, following strong diplomatic pressure from the British and American Governments and lack of support from the Soviet Union. On this decision, Tito later on bitterly wrote that 'today I can say ... that while we were fighting with ourselves whether to take the terrible decision to abandon Trieste or not, we did not receive any moral help, any signal, from the Soviet Union. Night after night I sat near the telephone, waiting for at least a word, some advice. We heard nothing, because their interests were not affected directly'.28

After the withdrawal of the Ninth Korpus and of the Fourth Army from Trieste on 12 June 1945, the following day the Yugoslav Army pulled back also from Pola. On 12 June 1945, the Allies established the Allied Military Government (AMG), with headquarters at Udine. A new border was agreed upon between Tito and the Allies at the Paris Peace Conference, with the creation of the Free Territory of Trieste on 3 July 1946, divided in two zones, the A Zone, administered by the American and British forces, and the B Zone, under Yugoslav control. Italy, by signing the Peace Treaty on 10 February 1947, relinquished all of Istria, most of Venezia Giulia, Fiume and all Dalmatian possessions, including the islands of Cherso and Lussino.

The loss of these territories prompted a mass exodus by ethnic Italians, who were innocent victims of a concerted strategy of terror on the part of the Yugoslav authorities. Milovan Djilas, who was a member of Tito's inner group, admitted to it in an interview given in 1991 to the magazine *Panorama*. In 1946 he and Edward Kardelj, then Yugoslav Minister for Foreign Affairs, went to Istria to organise anti-Italian propaganda. 'Our task', he said, 'was to pressure all Italians to leave. And this is what was done'.29
The military and political events of 1944-45 led to the uprooting in Europe of some twelve million people, and it is in this context that the exodus of between 200,000 and 350,000 people caused by the Yugoslav annexation of the former Italian territories must be seen. This flight had begun even before the end of the war. Zara, which suffered 54 aerial bombings and was almost entirely flattened by the Allies between 2 November 1943 and 31 October 1944, saw its Italian population reduced from 21,000 people to 3,000, following the occupation of the city by Tito's forces in November 1944 and their summary execution of 900 Italians.

On the night of 2 and 3 May 1945, Fiume was occupied by vanguards of the Yugoslav Army. Here summary trials and executions also took place of more than 500 Fascists, collaborators, Italian military and public servants, as well as anti-Fascists and innocent people. Fiume was the first centre where a mass exodus began almost immediately. By January 1946, more than 20,000 people had left the province of Fiume, and the Opera per l'Assistenza ai Profughi Giuliano-Dalmati (OP) in 1958 tallied 31,840 departures from the city, although their number could have escalated to 55,000 if one considers that many averted the census. Pola was occupied by the Yugoslav Army on 1 May 1945, and soon after was put under the military administration of the AMG. However, by 1947, when the city was annexed by Yugoslavia under the terms of the Paris Peace Treaty, of the 34,000 Italian inhabitants, over 30,000 elected to leave their ancestral homes and take refuge in Italy.

In all, the Italian exodus between 1944 and 1947 is difficult to quantify precisely. The OP census listed 201,440 people, including the 38,937 Italians who left the territories of the B Zone transferred to Yugoslavia in October 1954 as a result of the signing of the Memorandum of London. However, the number of the esuli may have been 50% higher, as previously mentioned. The Dossier Italia-Slovenia refers to 200-300,000 people. Approximately 36,000 Italians remained under Yugoslav sovereignty.

The return of Trieste and what was left of the A Zone to Italy on 26 October 1954 marked the conclusion of the territorial dispute between Italy and Yugoslavia and the end of the diaspora for people from Istria, Fiume and Dalmatia. Some 65,000 esuli found a new home in Trieste and the remainder emigrated to overseas countries or settled in other Italian regions. Between 1953 and 1956, a new mass migration took place, this time of triestini, at least 18,647 of whom, or 10% of the population left, mostly for Canada and Australia, displaced by the uncertain political future for the city, by the competition for employment and housing created by the esuli and by the sudden disappearance of the income which the presence of the Anglo-American forces represented for the Triestine economy. Their suspicion that the London Memorandum included clauses that had ambiguously settled the future of the A Zone, and therefore their personal future, was not unfounded. Only the Treaty of Osimo, on 10 November 1975, resolved the contentious issue of sovereignty over these lands.

However, despite bombastic nationalist propaganda to the contrary, Italy's public protests to unflinchingly defend Trieste and its surrounding territory as an integral part of the nation in reality were never rock-solid. In May 2004, former Italian President, Francesco Cossiga, revealed that, during the late 1970s, when he was Prime Minister, the Italian Government had approved a contingency plan, called Piano Alabarda (Halford Plan), contemplating that, following the death of Marshal Tito (which took place in Ljubljana, on 4 May 1980), the Soviet Union would probably invade Yugoslavia and the former A Zone, taking back what the Western Powers had conceded at Yalta. In that event, Italy would not invoke a NATO nuclear intervention in defence of Trieste and, according to Cossiga, “the plan predicated that, upon the entry in Yugoslavia by the Red Army, (Italian) military units would withdraw from Trieste and Venezia Giulia. Left behind, the Questore, Police and Carabinieri would maintain order and public safety until Soviet troops took over these functions.” With the wisdom of hindsight, it was for the best that many triestini wisely chose the challenge of a new, fortunate life in the lucky country, via the camps at Bagnoli and Bonegilla, Australia, rather than risking a repeat of the horrifying past experiences at Borovnica.

As playwright David Williamson recently pointed out, with reference to the current war in Iraq, “no Army in history has managed an invasion without barbarism and torture emerging as an inevitable part of the process.” This was certainly the case for the Italian invasion of Slovenia and Croatia in 1941, and for the terrible partisan reprisals in 1943-45. Needless to say, war...
criminals, on both sides, went unpunished at the end of the war. As with the previously mentioned Ciro Raner, all former members of the Ninth Korpus indicted of war crimes, among them, to name a few, Franc Pregeli, Josip Osagac, Nerino Gobbo, Giorgio Stiligoj and Mario Toffanin, escaped justice. They, too, like Ciro Raner, by reason of an unbelievable bureaucratic bungle, were recipients, until their death, of a social security pension from the Italian Government.39

Likewise, Italians indicted of war crimes did not undergo trial. The High Commissioner for the Province of Lubiana, Emilio Graziosi, on 24 August 1942 advocated 'the harshest line possible' against the Slovene population, including its mass deportation and replacement with Italian settlers to make, as he put it, Italy's ethnic border coincidental with its natural border. He was detained in 1945 for two murders committed near Ravenna, but not for his depredation in Slovenia. Released soon after, Graziosi disappeared into anonymity.40 The General commanding the XI Army in Slovenia, Mario Robotti, who on 9 August 1942 reprimanded his officers because 'we are not killing enough', after the war died in his bed, ignored by criminal justice investigators.41 The same could be said for General Mario Roatta, who was the author of the infamous Circular 3C, dated 1 March 1942, ordering the XI Army Corps to burn or destroy entire villages, execute all men found near military operations, take and execute hostages and prisoners and deport the entire population. In March 1945, Roatta went on trial in Rome for the murder of the Rosselli brothers, King Alexander I of Yugoslavia and French Foreign Minister, Louis Barthou - but not for crimes allegedly committed in 1942, while he was in charge of the Second Army of Occupation of Slovenia and Dalmatia, code-named SUPER-SLODA. On 4 March 1945, he escaped from jail and sought asylum in Franco's Spain. Sentenced to life imprisonment in absentia, soon after he was pardoned and returned to Rome, where he died in 1948.42

At the end of the conflict, the War Crimes Commission of the United Nations compiled a Central Register of War Criminals and Security Suspects, code-named CROWCASS. The Registry of War Criminals-Consolidated Wanted List, detailed the Name, Date of Birth, Rank, Occupation, Unit Place, Date of Crime and Reason Wanted of 1,200 Italians, accused of war crimes committed in Africa, the Balkans and Slovenia. In April 2000, a copy of the Register was discovered at the Wiener Library in London by historian Caterina Abbati. None of the 1,200 individuals had ever been brought to trial, and the same criminal negligence was perpetuated even after CROWCASS was made accessible to anyone on the internet.43 As was the case for many German war criminals, apart from those committed at the Nuremberg Trials, indicted Italians avoided retribution for their alleged crimes. Justice required the handing over of these people, but Cold War expediency before the collapse of the Soviet Union, on 8 December 1991, and a conspiracy of silence thereafter, militated against it.44

In 1946, the new republic had pledged to extradite suspected war criminals to countries where the crimes had been committed; there was a commission of enquiry, denunciations and arrest warrants. It was a charade. Extraditions would anger voters who still revered the military, and would thwart efforts to portray Italy as the victim of Fascism. Civil servants were told in blunt language to fake the quest for justice. On 19 January 1948, Prime Minister, Alcide De Gasperi, instructed them to 'Try to gain time, avoid answering request' In 1989, eminent military historian Giorgio Rochat commented that 'there remains in Italian culture and public opinion the idea that basically we were colonialists with a human face.45 The same myth is predominant even today.

The events of 1943-1956 left an indelible mark on the historic memory of the people of Slovenia and of Venezia Giulia, Istria, Fiume and Dalmatia. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the opening of the previously inaccessible Soviet archives, with the granting of access by Slovenia to the archives of the Ninth Corps in Lubiana, and with the research carried out for six years, between 1994 and 2000, by the team of fourteen historians who comprised the Italo-Slovenian Mixed Commission that drafted the Dossier Italia-Slovenia 1880-1956, much light has been cast on the terrible history of this period.

However, more work must be done by historians, who have so far only partially consulted the Belgrade archives of AVNOJ, the Yugoslav Army, and of OZNA, the Yugoslav secret police, that presumably store valuable information. Despite the obvious gaps, some general conclusions can be drawn on the persecution of and the forced exodus by the Italian communities of Venezia Giulia, Istria, Fiume and Dalmatia. These communities have paid the horrible
price of martyrdom and of physical, emotional, cultural and economic uprooting for five main reasons.

In the first place, twenty years of Fascist oppression, de-nationalisation, of annexation of territories that historically had been exclusively populated by the Slavs, sowed among the latter the seeds of hatred and a yearning for revenge. Besides, Fascist propaganda, which incessantly peddled the foolish axiom that to be Italian was tantamount to be Fascist, had the perverse effect of providing Slovenes and Croats with the ideological motivation to carry out their policy of de-nationalising towns and territories for centuries inhabited by Venetian and Italian-speaking communities. These communities were the first to pay the price of military defeat and of mindless Fascist nationalism.

Secondly, they were the only ones to pay, literally in many cases, with their blood, for the Slav military and political backlash, and for the Communist quest to establish a new regime and a new social order. In this context, it is pertinent to speak, as the Dossier Italia-Slovenia does, not of a concerted effort of ethnic cleansing, but of 'repression by a revolutionary movement which was transforming itself into a regime, and so transforming into State violence the national and ideological animosity that was permeating partisan cadres'.

There is incontrovertible archival evidence that points out to a mix of factors which motivated Tito's partisans to act as they did. The foremost reason was to meet the grassroots, irredentist demand by the Slovene and Croat minorities to re-unite with the motherland. Also, the appeal of Communism, of Slav solidarity with the Soviet Union as the only bulwark against International Capitalism and Fascism, offered the ideological framework for the eradication or the liquidation of those Italians who were perceived as being bourgeois, oppressors and Fascist. This perception was, if not justifiable, certainly understandable, if one considers that 40% of people in Trieste were card carrying members of the Italian National Fascist Party. Besides, Marxist doctrine, as interpreted by the Yugoslav elite, maintained that the Italian coastal cities, to operate in a functional dependence on the proletarian masses of the Slav countryside.

Therefore, the executions, deportations and the de-nationalising measures taken by Tito's partisans in Trieste, Fiume, Istria and Dalmatia in 1943-1945 were motivated by revenge for past injustice and oppression, by the urge to payback the Fascist element, by a concerted effort to physically eliminate the Italian intellectual leadership, in order to curb the community's future effectiveness as a political and social force and by liquidating the Slav nationalist, domobranci (Slovenians who joined the German Army), and the anti-Communist opposition. They also pursued a strategy of expelling Italians from coastal areas and immediately filling the empty houses and villages with Slav people. Besides, confusion and anarchy characterised the rapid advance of Tito's forces, favouring, in many cases, wanton and unbridled criminal acts. For instance, recently unearthed Slovene documents on the 40 days of the partisan occupation of Trieste reveal that the situation went out of the hand of the political authorities and that the leadership soon realised the possibly harmful effects of the policy of terror, and tried to control it, but with little success. OZNA, impregnated by the mentality of the Soviet NKVD, proved itself a totally autonomous body, perhaps under the influence of Belgrade, but certainly not of the leadership of the Slovene Communist Party. In the final analysis, the events of 1945, as underlined by historian Raoul Pupo in an important study on the folbe, 'are part of the process of the coming to power in Yugoslavia of the partisan movement under Communist leadership, by revolutionary means and through a war of liberation that was also a civil war, carried out at such a level of intensity that it cannot be compared with the Italian situation, and with a legacy of armed clashes and mass killings that lasted until 1946.'

In the third place, the Italian population of these regions paid the price of being the pawn in a complex and deadly game of brinkmanship between the Great Powers, which was at the origin of the Cold War. The permanent loss of territories conquered by Tito's army and the containment of Yugoslavia by the postulated but never fully realised creation of the buffer that was the Free Territory of Trieste was the price paid by an Italy defeated in the Second World War.

Fourthly, the loss of these regions and the grim fate of its Italian population were met with remarkable lack of interest by Italian public opinion, selfishly relieved by the fact that the Giuliano-Dalmati were the only ones to pay for Fascism's war. This attitude often attracted the accusation that Italy, in an exercise of collectively induced historical amnesia, which Luciano Violante.
to remember the exodus and past events to the benefit of future generations, must be welcomed.\textsuperscript{50} However, it is important \textit{di non dimenticare ma superare} – not to forget but to look forward – but to come to terms with \textit{un passato che non passa} – a past that refuses to go. If it is true, as stated by former Slovenian President Milan Kucan, that 'Trieste, until Fascism, was a centre of modernity and of contact, not a frontier. Fascism transformed it into a frontier, and since then the city has not liberated itself from this connotation\textsuperscript{51}, it is also true that today Trieste is again at the centre of Europe, following the collapse of the ideological barriers at the end of the Twentieth Century. The inclusion of Slovenia and most Eastern European countries in the European Union is again making of Trieste and the entire region \textit{un punto d'incontro, non di scontro} – a point of contact, not of conflict – between different civilisations and cultures, as indeed it was under the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

As Manlio Cecovini, a former Mayor of Trieste cogently stated when the \textit{Dossier Italia-Slovenia 1880-1956} was published, 'the Slovenes are as civilised as we are, and have been living next to us for more than one thousand years. Hasn't the time come to understand, tolerate and respect each other? Do we want to put past history on trial? Do we seek redress for our grievances? We are not the first, nor the luckiest to lodge this claim. The war ended more than half a century ago. We must do something to earn peace'.\textsuperscript{52} To earn it, one must know, and to know means to understand, to understand is to forgive, and to forgive is to live in peace, in the first place with oneself. A task this, which is still challenging the \textit{sloveni} in Slovenia, Croats in Istria and Italian \textit{giuliani}, \textit{dalmati}, \textit{istriani e friulani} in Trieste as well as in the diaspora.

This consideration brings us back to Eric Hobsbawm, and to the sometime taxing role for an historian to expose unpleasant facts. Even if the tragic events affecting the Italian and Slovene minorities on the North Eastern border of Italy during the last Century are still fresh in the collective memory of both sides, they have been instrumental, in the words of historian Giampaolo Valdevi, in 'unveiling' the reality of the existence of the 'other' minority, its vision of events, its plea for redressing past injustice, and for both minorities to come to terms with a different, wider and more complex world.\textsuperscript{53} The clock of history was not irrevocably stopped in 1945. To pretend it was, is to deny the present and, more significantly, to despair of the future.
it is a matter of establishing a social, political and historical meeting point between 'us' and 'them', even if this simplification is fraught with danger because, as Serb journalist Slavenka Drakulic commented with regard to the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, 'once the concept of 'otherness' takes root, the unimaginable becomes possible'.

Although these considerations can be objectionable to some, an historian can take comfort in and identify with Hobbsnbawm's plea 'not to disarm, even in unsatisfactory times. Social injustice still needs to be denounced and fought. The world will not get better on its own'.


Tito, Josip Broz, Marshal Tito on Trieste and Italo-Yugoslav Relations. Full text of speech made at Okroglica on 6 September 1953. State Library of New South Wales, NO945.393/1, p. 13.


Rodogno, op. cit., p. 423.


Rodogno, op. cit., p. 528.

Troha, Nevenka, emails to Author, dated 11 and 15 October 2004. See also: Troha, Nevenka, Borovnica, un-published paper. Also, Troha, Nevenka, 'Italiani in vojnovi ujedini v Jugosloviji 1944-1947', in: Annales, Series Historia et Sociologia, 102/2 (22), 2000, pp. 325-340. A report drafted by Carlo Chelletier, dated 28 July 1945, stated that at Borovnica there were about 2,720 prisoners and that as at 28 July, about 1,200 had already been released. It also stated that as at the end of July about 50 prisoners had died (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Archivio Storico-Diplomatico, Affari Politici, 1946-1950, Jugoslavia, b. 12, Rapporto di Carlo Chelletier: I campi di concentramento slavi, 28 July 1945). Also, see: Salimbeni, op. cit., p. 18. Salimbeni maintains that only 6.5% of Borovnica internesi returned home, however his claim is not supported by documentary evidence. Also, see: Italy, Camera dei Deputati, Atti Parlamentari, Interpellanze, Seduta 19 November 2001, p. 1796.


Dossier Italia-Slovenia, op. cit.


Petacco, Arrigo, op. cit., p. 142.


32 Papo de Montona, op. cit., p. 48.
34 Ibid., pp. 566-571. The Dossier Italia-Slovenia mentions the figure of 27,000 Italian *esuli* as a result of the territorial transfer of 1954.
36 Ibid., p. 72.
40 Ferenc, Tone, op. cit., pp. 498-502. Also, see: *Famiglia Cristiana on line*, Summary No. 6, 8 February 2004, also on: www.stpauls.it/fc/0406fc/0406fc54.htm
41 Ferenc, Tone, op. cit., pp. 484-487.
43 www.criminidiguerra.it/crowcass1.html. Also, Il Manifesto, 23 April 2000.
46 Dossier Italia-Slovenia, op. cit.
47 Pirjevec, Jozef, *La corsa jugoslava per Trieste*, op. cit., p.89.
52 Dossier Italia-Slovenia, op. cit.
53 Valdевitt, *La questione di Trieste*, p. 66.
54 Drakulic, Slavenka, *The Balkan express: fragments from the other side of the war*, New York, 1994, p. 3.
55 Hobbsawm, op. cit., p. 418.

Many Giuliano-Dalmat were incorrectly classified 'Jugoslav' by the Australian authorities in official documents as in this Certificate of Registration. Eduardo Vorano arrived in Australia in 1951.