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From a cosmopolitan to a fascist land: Adriatic irredentism in motion

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This article explores Adriatic irredentism, a complex political, cultural, and social movement, by specifically analyzing the unique role it played in the legitimization of Italian territorial claims over "language frontiers" such as Trieste and its hinterland. Through a close reading of first-hand sources, it examines how Italian irredentist intellectuals, public press, and associations purposefully utilized anti-Slav and anti-German arguments to shape public perception of both the Italian nation as well as Trieste's Italian identity or "Italianità." Although recent historiographical interpretations have emphasized continuities in local understandings of "Italianità," this article examines the discontinuities in the debate over its identity. It suggests that although Italian identity was first conceived as an expression of cultural and linguistic autonomy within the broader intellectual framework of Adriatic multi-nationalism, this idea gradually vanished amidst the structural crisis triggered by the Ausgleich or Compromise of 1867 and then inexorably faded on the eve of the Great War. Thus, notions of Italian national identity took an exclusionary and sometimes xenophobic meaning that was publicly used by a wide set of political actors to justify the territorial reincorporation of the "unredeemed" land within the borders of the new Italian state. The fascist regime, especially, utilized Italianness to further its aggressive and chauvinist agenda toward the Adriatic borderland. Consequently, Italian language and culture became instruments as well as symbols of repression and imperialism that were used to fulfill the regime's ambitions of "fascistization" of the Slavic population living in the region.

Keywords: Adriatic irredentism; Trieste; Italianità; borderland; cosmopolitanism; fascistization

Introduction

"Carso is the part of the Adriatic region between the eastern side of the Julian Alps (Italy's natural border) and the mountain range that runs through the Triestine gulf, cuts Istria in two distinct halves and reaches the Quarnero" (Slapater 1962, 16). With these words, the nineteenth-century Triestine writer, Scipio Slapater, described the territory surrounding Trieste, which he also envisioned as Italy's frontier on the Adriatic border. Slapater, who was born in Trieste in 1888 and lived in Hamburg until the outbreak of WWI, published "Il mio Carso" in 1912, just three years before dying in combat within the Italian army. Unlike the works of Italo Svevo or Umberto Saba, this literary piece strove to find a unifying meaning of Trieste's complex urban reality (Coda 2002). Within it, Slapater depicted conflicting images of Trieste as an Italian city that "should aspire to belong, at least, culturally

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to Italy, but it should do so from the premise of its own difference" (Coda 2002, 158). These views partially echoed those of intellectuals, segments of national public opinion, and political associations whose thoughts, strategies, and actions increasingly underscored Italy's territorial claims toward Trieste, Istria, and Dalmatia. These "agents of Italianization" publicly redrew the image of a multi-cultural, multi-linguistic, and multi-ethnic space such as the Adriatic region in national terms and became the leading voice of Adriatic irredentism (Schiffrer 1978).

Adriatic irredentism has been often understood by scholars as a historical phenomenon that naturally merged into twentieth-century aggressive nationalism. Mark Mazower's analysis of Hitler's new order exemplifies this approach to irredentism, claiming that "such speeches make Hitler sound like a typical nationalist-heir perhaps to the nineteenth century pan-Germans. Like other irredentists, their goal had been to win the largest possible state, which left as few countrymen as possible outside its borders" (2008, 5). Likewise, Rogers Brubaker studied irredentism as "a movement to incorporate irredenta, that is, lands or people represented as unredeemed because stranded under alien rule," a classic example of homeland nationalism (1996, 110). Indeed, scholarly works have often treated irredentism as a former expression of nationalism and have drawn a linear historical trajectory between two phenomena that blended within the twentieth-century fascist mainstream.

However, in a multi-cultural urban space such as Trieste, irredentism was deeply embedded in commercial pragmatism and cosmopolitanism and, despite the rhetorical use of the idea of unredeemed lands, only extreme irredentists embraced the expansionist views of the Italian nationalist movement in the mid-nineteenth century (Morris 2001, 173). Instead, other local Adriatic thinkers promoted a socio-political model that relied on the logic of consociationalism and pursued the cultural autonomy of the Italian-speaking population within a multi-national state, namely the Habsburg Empire (Nimni 2009). Dominique Reill's recent study of nationhood as a "cultural category denoting a linguistic or religious group" (2012, 1) has demonstrated that, until 1848, Adriatic nationalists promoted multi-ethnic and multi-national cooperation to achieve the creation of a multi-national state in opposition to Mazzini's model of one single nation. Not only does Reill's work shed light on Adriatic pluralist-nationalists who opposed the homogenizing impulse of a "one nation, one state" model (2012, 3) but it also expands scholarly understanding of the multifaceted nature of nineteenth-century nationalism and its manifestations. Likewise, Maura Hametz's *In the Name of Italy: Nation, Family, and Patriotism in a Fascist Court* (2012) explores the case of Luigia Barbarovich Paulovich, a widow who resisted fascist legislation to "Italianize" her foreign surname, demonstrating the complex local understanding of Italian nationhood in fascist Trieste.

Nonetheless, Reill's analysis only partially addresses the process of radicalization that transformed Adriatic irredentists in Trieste into irrepressible nationalists. Instead, Hametz's work identifies a continuation in localism that somehow shadows abrupt discontinuities of local understandings of "Italianità" within the Triestine public. This article further analyzes the transforming meaning of nationhood in the Adriatic borderland and, inspired by a socio-cultural approach to history (Anderson 1998), examines the role that not only nationalist political and intellectual elites but especially associations and public press played to construct a public sphere in which people recognized each other as members of the same community sharing a common language, culture, and historical past (Banti 2000, 150). Within the Habsburg Empire, events such as the Ausgleich of 1867 triggered a set of economic and political changes that enhanced the rise of national consciousness across minorities with important ramifications in multi-ethnic cities such as Trieste. Likewise, the socio-political

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chaos that marked Trieste's transition from the Habsburg to the fascist era also played an important role in facilitating the rise and affirmation of an identity politics within multiple strains of Adriatic irredentism and, above all, growing segments of the Triestine population. In studying the transforming meaning of nationhood in the Adriatic region, this article argues that its proponents initially sought an autonomous Italian cultural identity; however, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, their message was overshadowed by a wide network of political actors with secessionist ambitions who underscored exclusive ideas of Italianness of the Adriatic and Italy's territorial claims over Trieste and its surroundings. Thus, this work ultimately traces the transforming nature of nineteenth-century nationalism from the perspective of Trieste, a city whose changing rhetoric of the idea of nation from Risorgimento to fascism offers invaluable insight into its complex and constructed meaning.

Adriatic irredentists: the cartographers of the nation

In 2012, the Triestine newspaper *Il Piccolo* celebrated the 100th anniversary of Angelo Vivante's "Irredentismo Adriatico," and highlighted Vivante's outstanding intellectual contribution to nineteenth-century Trieste as well as his firm opposition to extreme Italian irredentists who aptly nurtured aggressive territorial ambitions toward the city and its hinterland. Vivante, who was born in Trieste in 1869 into a local Jewish bourgeois family, had served as the editor of the Triestine newspaper *Il Piccolo* before becoming the leading figure of the local Socialist movement. Like many of his fellow Adriatic thinkers, the Triestine Socialist firmly supported Trieste's multi-cultural identity and its indissoluble association to the Austrian empire (Vivante 1984, 23). This group of intellectuals, often referred to as Adriatic multi-nationalists, advocated the defense of Trieste's Italian cultural autonomy within the imperial public sphere rather than its political or territorial separation as the best means to preserve the city's economic opulence (Cocco and Minardi 2007).

Among them, irredentist thinkers such as Pacifico Valussi conceptualized Trieste as the "Hamburg of the Adriatic," a notion which highlighted the city's pivotal role within the multi-cultural, religious, and linguistic network of the maritime region (Reill 2007, 82). Valussi, who was born near Udine in 1813, worked as an editor in many Triestine and Venetian newspapers before being elected at the national Parliament as a member of the liberal party in the mid-1860s (Tafuro 2004). In one of his writings, Valussi well summarized Adriatic multi-nationalists' views by claiming that "distinct nations formed on the borderlands in conjunction with other nations would secure peace" among neighboring communities (Reill 2007, 111). Such a view revealed the prominence of economic over political factors in shaping Italian group identity in the Adriatic, and ultimately reinforced a sense of cosmopolitanism within the local public sphere for the years that anticipated the "springtime of nations" in 1848 (Bonucci 2006). At this time, a complex set of underground nationalist movements vigorously emerged. Not only did their propaganda undermine the peaceful coexistence of different national cultures within the region but it also revealed the urgency of the nationality question within a multi-ethnic empire such as Austria-Hungary (Reill 2007). In such a context, popular disapproval of extensive taxation, conscription, and the ongoing financial crisis fomented revolutionary upheaval in Trieste (Millo 2007, 61). When reflecting on those events, Valussi argued that anti-Habsburg sentiment in the city was not a clear expression of political separatism (Valussi and Ressman 1861); but was rather a reaction to changes in the nature and

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scale of international commerce as well as the unequal language policies imposed by Vienna for secondary and higher education (Cohen 1996, 9).

Indeed, following 1848, most of the local Italian-speaking bourgeoisie remained generally loyal to the Habsburg crown and called for political compensation and broader administrative autonomy to both protect its economic privileges and respond to rising Slav nationalism (Ara and Magris 2007, 55). In such a context, the Triestine bourgeoisie pursued the defense of local commercial interests not only from the centralist policies of the Vienna administration but also from the economic competition of other local minorities (Cattaruzza 2002, 179). Indeed, the city attracted many Slovene migrants who developed their own network of banks and cooperatives while seeking political recognition from the Habsburg administration (Krmac 2007). Although these demographic and economic changes significantly affected group identities and aroused ethno-political rivalry toward the Slovene minority, the Triestine bourgeoisie continued to rely on a strategy of political accommodation, which better served its commercial interests (Baskar 2007, 25–55).

Niccolò Tommaseo, the most prominent intellectual of Adriatic multi-nationalism, best described the views and attitudes of the Triestine bourgeoisie in those years. Tommaseo, born in Dalmatia in 1802 and one of the leading poets, linguists, and novelists in and outside the Adriatic region, firmly believed in the importance of regional over national identity in ethnically heterogeneous areas such as the Adriatic region. Although he embraced the ideals of the Italian liberal movement and co-led the 1848 uprising in Venice, Tommaseo believed that "variety helps us feel unity" (Reill 2012, 243). From this perspective, the Dalmatian intellectual championed the "anational" nature of the Adriatic littoral and the desirability of federal or confederate solutions such as a Danubian confederation to maximize linguistic and cultural autonomy for its Italian community (Pirjevec 1977). Tommaseo's notions of regional cosmopolitan identity were partially reinforced by the Habsburg Empire's accommodative policies toward the Italian language, which remained unchanged until 1864 when German became compulsory in public schools. At this time, Vienna's decision to deemphasize the use of the Italian language within the school system and block Triestine and Dalmatian students from attending Italian universities aroused popular animosity among Italian speakers and further shaped the tone and popularity of local anti-Habsburg sentiments in Trieste (Reill 2012, 234). In this context, the third Italian War of Independence of 1866 drastically changed the ethnic and political configuration of the Venetian region, made Trieste a border city to Italy, and ultimately compounded the Austrian administration's distrust of its Italian community.

While reflecting on these changes, Vivante argued that the reduced strength of trade, which had been the traditional vehicle of "Italianità" throughout the region, significantly weakened the cosmopolitanism of moderate irredentist factions within the local Triestine bourgeoisie (1984, 260). In Trieste, a city of 145,000 people of which 136,000 were Italians, fears of Slovene penetration of state institutions and commercial sectors as well as governmental repression of people's ambitions of self-determination boosted popular support for Italian nationalism (Cattaruzza 2002, 180). Adriatic irredentists who had previously advocated Italian cultural autonomy within the Empire also increasingly aligned their views with those of Italian nationalists who called for Trieste's incorporation within Italy. Although Vivante's argument provides an explanation of the local rise of separatist sentiments, the endemic structural crisis of former Habsburg economic and political practices that followed the 1867 Ausgleich further elucidates the strength of nationalist groups whose "dynamic and symbiotic process of developing civil society, growing popular political action, and changing governmental structures" paved the way to the Empire's demise (Cohen 2007, 242).

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In Trieste, especially, it appears that economic and political factors triggered secessionist ambitions that were increasingly shared by some Adriatic intellectuals and segments of the local public toward the late nineteenth and especially early twentieth centuries. This radical turn, whose roots are further explored in the next section, was also mirrored in the writing of Adriatic thinkers whose views firmly diverged from those of intellectuals such as Slapater. In 1909, Slapater argued that the local Italian bourgeoisie in Trieste was unable to put aside its economic interests and fully pursue the political and cultural interests of the Italian-speaking population. In exchanges of correspondence with other intellectuals published in the newspaper *La Voce*, Slapater defined irredentism as a cultural phenomenon located within the multi-cultural soul of Trieste which "was not irredentist" (1988, 60). Numerous writers responded to Slapater, criticizing the irredentist thinker for his support of Trieste's sense of ambivalent nationhood. Among them was Ruggero Timeus, an occasional contributor to *La Voce* and a member of the Triestine bourgeoisie who became known for his zealous nationalism. Timeus published his ideas in his book *Trieste*, a sort of intellectual testament that briefly anticipated his death as a volunteer in the Italian army in 1915. Unlike Slapater, Timeus understood Italian civilization in contraposition to both German and Slav civilizations, and advocated the extension of Italian rule from Trieste to Dalmatia (Valdevit 2004, 16). These two thinkers well summarized the tension between views of Trieste's national or multi-national identity, an issue that would polarize future debates about the city's "Italianità" within public discourse.

Indeed, by the eve of the Great War, extreme irredentists posed an unparalleled challenge to local multi-national understandings of "Italianità" and overwhelmingly supported aggressive Italian nationalism. Among them was Attilio Tamaro, who used a biased reading of Trieste's historical past to minimize Trieste's multi-national identity and heightened its Italian geo-political identity (1976). Tamaro, who was born in Trieste in 1884 and studied in Vienna where he received a degree in letters, was actively involved in the Italian student movement and became the editor of many Triestine newspapers of nationalist inspiration. He volunteered in the Italian army and became one of the main proponents of Italian territorial rights in the Adriatic. Soon, he joined the Italian Fascist Party and served as a diplomat until Mussolini's fall. In the immediate post-war years, he continued working to reassert Italian territorial ambitions in the Adriatic before dying in the mid-1950s.

In his early writings Tamaro celebrated manifestations of "Italianità" in Trieste in the form of its patriotic associations, press, and Masonic lodges, and attributed the failure of former patriotic uprisings to strong governmental censorship and repression. Tamaro minimized the complex interconnection between economic interests and cultural identity and never changed his beliefs about the historic "Italianità" of Trieste. However, Tamaro himself recognized that "Triestine irredentism had lost most of its romanticism" and had been moving dramatically toward more aggressive and nationalist positions since the early 1900s (1946, 231). In line with the overwhelmingly imperialist orientations of national and local irredentists, Tamaro presented the inclusion of Trieste within Italian state borders both as the best means to provide continuity with the Venetian past and to serve as a platform for the city's national rebirth (1915). While highlighting the "anti-patriotic" positions of social democratic segments of the irredentist movement and stressing the problematic ethnic polarization of the city, Tamaro also celebrated the contributions of high and middle layers of the Triestine society who irrepressibly advocated for Trieste's Italianness.

In contrast, Fabio Cusin, a Trieste-born anti-fascist intellectual of Italian-Jewish origin, wrote from the perspective of traditional nineteenth-century Adriatic multi-nationalism and based the historic rights of a nation on cultural and linguistic principles. Cusin, who became the leading voice of the local independence movement after 1945, published multiple

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writings that diverged from the official views of the fascist regime and challenged national historiography toward the eastern border as well as patriotic rhetoric regarding national unification. Cusin explained Italian national unification as the outcome of the will of a centralist and despotic entrepreneurial elite who manipulated irredentism for expansionist goals. Cusin argued that Trieste's artificial character of "Italianità" and the myth of national unification greatly relied on the political opportunism of the Triestine bouregeoisie (1970).

Cusin's work proved that local meanings of Italianness survived as a minor voice within the homogenizing nationalist mainstream of the twentieth century. Intellectuals like Cusin rejected the irredentist rhetoric of national patriotism and fully embraced the idea of a democratic and independent Trieste. Cusin ultimately became the voice of a specific form of political localism whose emphasis on the idea of "foreign not as a threat to be resisted, but as an invitation to explore and understand" would ultimately reverberate in the writings of many Triestine authors in the twentieth century, among them Claudio Magris (Pireddu 2015, 295). Although the works and ideas of Adriatic thinkers such as Vivante, Valussi, Slapater, Tamaro, and Cusin mirrored the complex trajectory of ideas of nationhood in the Adriatic borderland and significantly affected identity politics in Trieste, local associations and groups played a crucial role in shaping people's attitudes and views about Trieste's "Italianità" from the Habsburg to fascism.

The irredentist network: making the border Italian

After 1848, within the context of a multi-national empire such as Austria-Hungary, the promises and activism of nationalist agitators were mediated by the strength of local rooted identities and consolidated civic cultures (Applegate 1991; Aaslestad 2005). To the greatest extent, however, both political elites and common people responded to nationalist rhetoric by mobilizing on a local level in expectation of potential material benefits (Confino 1997; King 2002). Although the Italian struggle for national independence, also known as the "Risorgimento," was mediated by Trieste's cosmopolitan past, the rise of pan-Slavism among the local Croatian and Slovenian minority (D'Alessio 2008, 238) facilitated the affirmation of competing nationalisms both in the city and in rural areas inhabited by a Slavic-speaking majority such as the Istrian region (Reill 2007, 16–36; Monzali 2009).

Despite this, when the Habsburg administration refused to accept Italian as the official language of Istria, a region whose inhabitants of the coast towns were mostly of Italian origin, the Italian Liberal Party produced a memorandum that supported federalism rather than territorial separation for Trieste, Istria, and Dalmatia (Schiffrer 1978, 107). This initiative was publicly supported by local irredentist organizations such as the Triestine Council and the Triestine Society. It proved that Trieste's "municipal myth" and its special relationship with the Istrian hinterland locally served as a remedy to Italian nationalism and made Trieste a city that considered itself "as an Adriatic and Mediterranean cosmopolitan capital" (Minca 2009, 261). Nonetheless, the creation of the Italian state also strengthened aspirations for national unification among segments of the Triestine public after 1861. Thus, extreme Adriatic irredentists gradually began to develop separatist ambitions that took either a specifically liberal or Socialist outlook. From this perspective, Trieste was not unique, especially after 1867. As Pieter Judson demonstrates in his work on the rise of national identity within the Habsburg Empire, local elites who embraced political liberalism attempted to "increase the right of those who were already enfranchised and not to draw the unfranchised into public life" (1996, 122). They did this by broadening civil and linguistic rights for specific groups while exercising mounting pressure to reassert homogenous ideas of citizenship. These ideals drew on the strength of German values and traditions in political

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institutions and were utilized to reassert their socio-economic position within local communities.

In response to Vienna's central policies, segments of the local Triestine bourgeoisie also increasingly promoted exclusive solutions to the problem of nationality within the broader Adriatic space (Fogar 1966, 18). At this time, Trieste became a micro-cosmic entity that embodied the conflict between Imperial sovereignty and liberal-national aspirations (Ghisilberti 2008, 216). Changes in the Habsburg structure compounded economic changes such as the 1860s' crisis in exports to Italian markets and the 1869 opening of the Suez Canal to fuel anti-Habsburg sentiment within the Italian local bourgeoisie. Although the Suez initiative responded to the rising need of non-European maritime transports and facilitated Trieste's trade with the Indies and the Far East (Katsiardi-Hering 2011), it was also rhetorically used by the Triestine bourgeoisie to accuse the Habsburg administration of having transformed Trieste into an obsolete and intermediary port (Millo 2002, 204). From this perspective, Alison Frank's work on the rise of the Galician oil industry highlights that Vienna's failure to build a second railway route to Trieste further accelerated the city's decline and weakened its former status as the empire's major Adriatic seaport (2005, 177). Differently from local magnates in Austrian Galicia, the liberal-nationalist elite that led Trieste from the 1880s only partially benefited from the growth of the oil industry, and used the city's economic decline to further underscore separatist ambitions within the local public and weaken local political sentiments of "Triestinità" that had long supported peaceful coexistence between Italians and Slovenians, Jews, Greeks, and Serbs.

However, Italy's amicable foreign policy toward Austria-Hungary and Germany impaired political support among Triestines who only partially embraced a geo-political solution that envisioned the city's territorial incorporation into the new Italian kingdom (Pupo 2007, 15).

Although extreme irredentists still represented a minority within the Italian-speaking population of the city, Tullia Catalan's work has shown that the violent and persistent racism that consumed the city in the early twentieth century stemmed from the exasperation of opposing nationalisms whose roots "were firmly in place in the closing decades of the nineteenth-century" (2011, 71). Indeed, the analysis of the Triestine liberal newspaper *L'Indipendente* reveals the strong anti-Slovenian tone of the local bourgeoisie that continued to portray the new Italian nation as the opponent of pan-Slavism and a "symbol of the material and moral civilizing of humanity" (January 20, 1878). While rhetorically celebrating the Italian nation as an ideal community with a common heritage, the newspaper also criticized the Italian state for its ambivalent foreign policy that, best exemplified by the Austrian, German, and Italian military alliance also known as the "Triple Alliance," led to the widespread repression of irredentist associations both within the Empire and in Italy in the 1880s (*L'Indipendente*, May 15, 1889). This process, which culminated in the arrest of Bottera Raimondo, a patriot and founder of the irredentist journal *Italia Irredenta*, was understood by some Italians in Trieste as proof that their ambitions for national unification had been "sold out" by Rome, a feeling that survived into the twentieth century (Millo 2011, 216).

Nonetheless, editions of *L'Indipendente* continued to fuel Italian nationalist claims that "led to the planting within Trieste of the first invisible but profound divides between Italians and Slovenians; Italians and Germans; Italians and Hungarians, Croatians, Poles" (Catalan 2011, 79). However, the tone of these claims significantly differed. While the journal attacked members of the Slovene community for their alleged barbarism and inferiority (Ashbrook 2008), the quality of its anti-German propaganda highlighted the draconian nature of the Habsburg state policies against the Italian minority within the Empire. In

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one instance, the newspaper praised the protests of Italian students inside Habsburg universities as an expression of Italians' unalienable rights to self-determination. In response to this incident, local branches of the cultural association "Dante Alighieri" expressed their solidarity for the rebellious Italian youth whose actions underscored the goals of Adriatic irredentism (*L'Indipendente*, September 15, 1888). It is in this context that local opposition to linguistic discrimination compounded widespread criticism for the abolition of Trieste's status as a free port and its related loss of exemptions from tax duties that had long supported its commercial traffic toward the East and competitiveness with the neighboring Hungarian port of Fiume (*L'Indipendente*, November 15, 1888). These factors ultimately facilitated the rise and affirmation of pro-Italian associations such as "Pro Patria," and more importantly the "Lega Nazionale" (Sardos Albertini 2011).

By the early 1890s, the latter had 10,000 members (*L'Indipendente*, December 1, 1892), a number that proved the increasing strength of extreme irredentist views within the Triestine public. However, outside of the city, irredentist secessionist ambitions only partially appealed to the Italian community. The Pirano revolt of 1894 demonstrates this point. Pirano, an Istrian town populated by a small Italian population, was represented in the Diet of the Austrian Littoral (Apollonio 1992). In response to the compulsory imposition of Italian and German bilingualism, the town's Italians vehemently protested the Habsburg local administration. Although Italian irredentists portrayed this protest as an example of Istria's secessionist ambitions, local political groups campaigned for the creation of a group of independent nations called the Balkan Confederation as the best means to preserve Italian language and culture in the region (*L'Indipendente*, April 1, 1895).

Such an argument echoed the views of Adriatic multi-nationalists, yet they were increasingly marginalized within Trieste as arguments of Italy's cultural attractiveness had become central to irredentist rhetoric. In claiming that "Rome is the mother for each educated person and Rome is the genesis for each pious soul" (*L'Indipendente*, November 1, 1895), irredentists attempted to both reinforce Trieste's Italian identity and legitimize its inclusion within Italy's borders by invoking the cultural heritage of Imperial Rome. Although factions of the Italian bourgeoisie were still committed to the protection of commercial interests within the Habsburg imperial framework, their perspective of "Italianità" had deeply changed over time. The city's transformation "into one of the unhealthiest towns of the Habsburg monarchy in pre-1914 period" had gradually weakened popular support for the Triestine Liberal Party, the leading political voice of Italian moderates in the city (Cattaruzza 2007, 207). Consequentially, strongly separatist political views inside the city attracted not only larger segments of the local commercial bourgeoisie but also the local Italian public and its political parties.

Meanwhile, also irredentist associations such as the "Associazione Nazionale Trento Trieste" (National Association Trento Trieste (ANTT)) strongly promoted Italian territorial rule over both Trento and Trieste. In 1905, a letter from a member of the association emphasized the strong commitment of the ANTT toward the Italian population living in border regions. It stated that "whereas the association Dante Alighieri embraces the entire world, we modestly pay attention only to our brothers under Austria" (FMsdT, ANTT, Busta 6, fasc.1 cc3, May 25, 1905, 72). While this letter elucidates the regional focus of this irredentist formation, correspondence from its members also reveals the ANTT's independence from other Italian political groups, in particular those with clerical tendencies that were often portrayed as supporters of the local pan-Slav movement (FMSdT, ANTT, Busta 6, fasc.1 cc3, December 16, 1908, 76–85). The ANTT condemned the repressive measures of the Austrian authorities against manifestations of "Italianità" in the school system and increasingly connected the defense of Italian language and culture with the geo-political

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"redemption" of Trieste and its surroundings (FMSdT, ANTT, Busta 6, fasc.1 cc3, November 22, 1909, 142).

Indeed, during the months anticipating Italy's entry into WWI, the intense propaganda campaign conducted by the ANTT and the new "Associazione Nazionalista Italiana" (Italian Nationalist Association) of 1910 was centered upon the idea of a struggle for survival against hostile German and Slav civilizations. During the ANTT Congress of 1913, speakers recalled the glorious past of Rome and Venice and invoked the political and territorial redemption of the Adriatic lands "for Trento, for Trieste, and for a greater Italy inside its own sacred borders" (*La Voce della Patria*, August 10, 1913). In drawing a direct relationship between the cultural heritage of former "Italian" empires and Trieste's Italian identity, irredentists aimed to capitalize on anti-Austrian feelings among local and national public opinion and strengthen political support for Italy. In a city, whose urban population was overwhelmingly Italian (Hametz 2005, 105–106), nationalists strived to mobilize people to "take up the sword" (*La Voce Patria*, August 31, 1914) against the daily oppressive attitude of German civilization (Pizzi 2009, 53).

As these statements demonstrate, this association attempted to maximize popular support among the local Italian-speaking community by equating the struggle for self-determination to the demise of German rule over Trieste and its surroundings. The ANTT celebrated the war as the highest expression of Italian patriotism claiming that its final goal was "to make Dante's dream possible and to assure that our flag rules over the sea and the shores in which our only language is and always has been spoken" (*La Voce della Patria*, September 27, 1914). This statement mirrored the general views of the local Triestine bourgeoisie whose commercial interests also combined with the widespread fear of pan-Slavism within the public. As Millo suggests, in sharp contrast to earlier years, the larger part of the Triestine bourgeoisie identified its main interests with the imperialist ambitions of the Italian kingdom (2002, 227). This solution, which was firmly opposed by the Triestine Socialists, fueled both ethnic and political tension in Trieste at the dawn of the Great War (Agnelli 1969). The bitter diatribes between "Vociani" and the Futurists best represented the ongoing crisis that accompanied the re-conceptualization of the border's Italianness. While the former highlighted the multi-cultural nature of Trieste and the strength of its local identity or "Triestinità," the latter stressed that Trieste's geographical location had gradually transformed the city into a bulwark of Italian national identity (McCourt 2000, 171). Despite the efforts of the irredentist network, popular attitudes toward the war were mediated by Trieste's cosmopolitan past and a significant portion of the population remained loyal to the Habsburg crown (Apih 1988, 88). Indeed, about 50,000 men of the Italian Adriatic littoral served in the Austro-Hungarian army while only 1000 defected to serve in the Italian army (Hametz 2005, 15). As these estimates suggest, inside the Venetian Julian region, which was inhabited by approximately 350,000 Italians and 470,000 Slavs, royal loyalty, deep-rooted regional identities, and past economic prosperity reduced the attractiveness of political separatist views among the local Italian population and supported a more moderate response to the nationality question in the Adriatic.

In Trieste, this response was best exemplified by the views and strategies of the political movement "Democrazia Sociale Irredenta" (Unredeemed Social Democracy) (Fogar 1966, 34). In a traditionally Mazzinian outlook, this political group conceived the natural borders of the nation in Carso and Brennero and, in contrast to the most radical nationalist groups, did not support the inclusion of Dalmatia within Italy. This movement, which departed from Adriatic multi-nationalism to directly connect to Risorgimento ideas of the nation, proved the existence of two conflicting strains within Adriatic irredentism: romantically tolerant and violently authoritarian. During the war years and despite the resilience of social

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democratic views, aggressive nationalist ambitions dominated the ANTT and the irredentist associational network more generally. War was portrayed as an invaluable means for defense against future German or Teutonic aggression as well as the instrument to reassert the Italianness of the unredeemed lands that "naturally stretched from Trento to Dalmatia" (FMSdT, ANTT, Busta 1, fasc. 3 cc 65, 1917, 31). To attain these goals the internal structure and organization of the association gradually became more centralized and efficient in its war-time propaganda. The Association strove to give a single voice to the panoply of irredentist organizations (i.e. Pro Fiume, Alto Adige, Pro Dalmazia, Latina Gens, etc.) and to propagate the long-term goal of unconditional liberation from Austrian rule (FMSdT, ANTT, Busta 2, fasc 5 cc249, April 7, 1918, 73).

It is noteworthy that the activity of the Association was not solely limited to the national territory in which it counted 70 different chapters, but it also found support among branches located abroad in South America, Central America, and Northern Europe (FMSdT, ANTT, Busta 3, fasc 8, 185–202). The ANTT also lobbied for political support of the Italian struggle for self-determination in countries such as France and Great Britain (FMSdT, Busta 1, fasc 5 cc252, February 13, 1919, 109). The ANTT firmly vouched for Italian annexation of Austrian territories and advocated for the resolution of border disputes with the prospective Yugoslav neighbor. In confronting the uncertainties of diplomatic negotiations, the ANTT threatened to use mass demonstrations and popular agitation, claiming that "So far we have been quiet but if necessary we will bring them on the square" (FMSdT, ANTT, Busta 2, fasc 5 cc249, December 1918, 31).

The ANTT's propaganda, its emphasis on territorial separation from the Habsburg crown, and popularity in and outside Trieste demonstrates a significant departure from the nineteenth century moderate views of Adriatic multi-nationalists. Despite this, it is hardly disputable that segments of Italian irredentism in Trieste, in particular its Socialist formations, remained loyal to a more municipal conceptualization of the city's geo-political identity which recognized its multi-cultural and linguistic identity within Italy's borders. However, in the 1920s the rise of Italian fascism posed an unparalleled challenge to Trieste's cosmopolitan identity and unleashed a vortex of violence and repression that, in the words of the anti-fascist Triestine intellectual Carlo Schiffrer, further marginalized "the tradition of rational, democratic Italian *civiltá*" (Sluga 2001, 78).

Irredentists in fascist Italy: conformists or dissenters?

In the immediate post-war years, ideas of a multi-national Trieste were gradually dashed by the rise of Italian fascism, whose nationalist outcry led to what scholars have called "Trieste's darkest hour." Hametz suggests that in 1918 the presence of the warship *Audace* in the port of the city exemplified its symbolic passage of territorial sovereignty to Italy. In Italian public discourse, Trieste became the guardian of the eastern border as well as the ideal platform to emphasize the past vestige of Italian influence across the Adriatic. At the same time, the Socialist fringes of the irredentist movement in Trieste continued to actively support the linguistic and cultural rights of the Slovene minority within the post-war Italian state. The movement, which politically identified with the Socialist Party, vouched for broader political and administrative autonomy for Trieste (Silvestri 1959, 9). From this perspective, Socialists placed themselves between Mazzini and Tommaseo. While the former envisioned the creation of a rationalized, centralist, and homogenized Italian nation by means of insurrection, the latter proposed a gradual geo-political reformation that would ultimately establish a multi-national federation inside the Adriatic region (Reill 2012, 57). Socialist irredentists, while advocating Trieste's territorial incorporation

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inside Italy's state borders, also vouched for a political configuration that responded to its multi-cultural and heterogeneous reality.

In Trieste, these ideas were especially shared by members of the combatant movement who politically referred to the Republican Irredentist Front. One study, which strongly relied on the associational and national press as well as state documents, shows that the "Associazione Nazionale Combattenti" (National War Veteran Association, ANC) issued a programmatic manifesto declaring the pacifist, internationalist, and democratic orientations of this movement on 4 November 1918 (Sabbatucci 1974, 71). While heightening the cult of homeland, the glorification of WWI martyrs, and the independence from any political party, the movement, largely made up of WWI veterans, also strongly criticized the Italian Liberal Party and condemned Italian aggressiveness toward the Adriatic.

One such critic was Luigi Gasparotto, one of the most representative figures of the ANC. Gasparotto, the son of a Lombard patriot and an ex-combatant in WWI, was appointed as head of the Associazione Nazionale Combattenti (ANC) and, after withdrawing to private life in 1924, went into exile in Switzerland. It was only in 1943 that he first joined the anti-fascist resistance and later the Southern Italian government during the last years of WWII. Gasparotto well expressed the movement's opposition to D'Annnunzio's decision to invade and capture the Yugoslav city of Fiume, a city whose inhabitants were mostly Italian speakers, and appealed to peace and political normalization of relations with the Yugoslav kingdom (ISEC, Busta 1, fasc 1). By contrast, associations such as the ANTT exerted increasing pressure on Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Emanuele Orlando to support D'Annunzio's adventurism and "reaffirm the entire Italianità of the Adriatic" (FMSdT, ANTT, Busta 1, fasc 5 cc252, April 3, 1919, 122). After recalling the past experiences and successes of Italian irredentism, the central Committee of the ANTT outlined the new goal of post-war irredentism at its National Congress of 1–2 June 1919: the conquest of Fiume, Spalato, Malta, Corsica, and Nice. These goals demonstrated the increasingly imperialist nature of the association which was best exemplified in the slogan "we will not put away our sword as long as a corner of Italy will be enslaved" (FMSdT, ANTT, Busta 3, fasc 8, 208). It also demonstrates that in the early years of the twentieth century "many individuals were susceptible to increasingly shrill calls for expansionism, international assertiveness, and imperialism that characterized the European international diplomatic scene" (Hametz 2012, 32).

In such a context, popular support for the leftist and democratic parties gradually vanished in and outside Trieste (Silvestri 1959, 52). Between 1919 and 1921 the eruption of workers' struggles throughout the country, also known as "the Red Two Years," further alienated moderate support for parliamentary liberalism across the nation. This two-year period was marked by an ongoing economic and political crisis that saw workers, peasants, and war veterans violently respond to the government's unfulfilled promises of mass employment and economic prosperity. In Trieste, especially, the rise of political violence fostered anti-Slav feelings and the nationalist tide. In addition, socio-political tension was further aggravated by the ongoing diplomatic diatribe on Italy's eastern border and its extension to Dalmatia. In such a context, the local public increasingly conformed to Rome's projected image of the city as Italian and increasingly embraced the idea of Habsburg rule as a sort of parenthesis in Triestine history. Movements such as the ANC, which had initially opposed the fascist agenda toward the border, failed to present itself as a viable political alternative to competing liberal, fascist, and Socialist parties (Sabbatucci 1974, 223) and, after 1919, its members overwhelmingly embraced fascist rhetoric (ISEC, Busta 1, fasc.14, s.fasc.1).

Due to its location on the border, Trieste became one of the most fascist cities with about 18% of the party's national members. Many of the party's members in Trieste

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consisted of WWI veterans and the local bourgeoisie. The former was easily attracted by both fascist propaganda and idealized continuities with the nineteenth-century rhetoric of the nation. Within the Triestine public, the alleged superiority of the Latin over the Slav civilization and Italy's projected image as a mother who was unconditionally tied to her daughter, Trieste, proved increasingly appealing to too (Pizzi 2001, 58). Likewise, the Triestine bourgeoisie gradually shifted toward an alliance with the fascists to respond to the uncertainty of the socio-economic practices that marked the transition to Italian sovereignty and to confront the rising requests of the local workers' movement. In the immediate post-war years, the coordination between Italian and Austrian administrative practices proved extremely complex. Although the Italian liberal government attempted to maintain former regional liberties and local institutions, their power was significantly limited. Administrative confusion fed local insecurity and, in a context of growing economic uncertainty, facilitated the rise of the political left. Local liberals differently appealed to the protection of the "Triestine shipping, Istrian agriculture, and local industry" or embraced a more nationalist stance that "encouraged anti-Slav prejudice" in opposition to the Socialist left (Hametz 2005, 20–21).

In this context, the political weakness of Socialist and Communist parties, which were unable to forge a progressive coalition, ultimately facilitated the rise of the local fascist party and the passage to Triestine Fascism. From this perspective, Mussolini's fascist expansionist views toward the Adriatic can be best exemplified by his words "when ethnicity does not agree with geography … it is ethnicity that must move" (Petacco 2005, 14). Fascism abruptly ended the special long-term relationship between Trieste and the Danubian-Habsburg hinterland. This traditional source of Trieste's prosperity never fully recovered from the wounds of the war and its aftermath. Despite the rhetoric that surrounded the acquisition of the Julian city, the fascist government failed to comprehend the detrimental effects of WWI on the local economy, the marginalization of the Triestine port within international trade, and the legacy of years of broad administrative autonomy. Although fascist propaganda weakened Trieste's traditional cosmopolitanism, factions of the Triestine bourgeoisie showed "ambivalent loyalties" toward Mussolini's regime (Hametz 2005, 5).

Intellectuals such as Fabio Cusin, especially, embraced anti-centralist stances that were rooted within the ideal of nineteenth-century moderate irredentism. From this perspective, a study based on a set of letters, pamphlets, and oral memories of irredentists such as Gabriele Foschiatti highlights the continuation of a democratic strain of "Italianità" within fringes of the Triestine post-war Republican irredentist movement as well as its firm condemnation of fascism for its exploitation of national patriotism and broad use of violence (Fogar 1966, 65). These criticisms were partially echoed in the work of inter-war intellectuals such as Roberto Mirabelli whose arguments also provide a glance into the multifaceted nature of the post-war nationalist movement. In "Dalla Libia a Vittorio Veneto et ultra" (From Libya to Vittorio Veneto and Beyond), written in 1932, Mirabelli examined the main features of irredentism and emphasized the close connection between Italian rights in the Mediterranean and the Roman past. Mirabelli interpreted the Italian invasion of Libya as an "unavoidable duty" which pre-dated the conquest of Trieste (1932, 55). According to Mirabelli, expansion in the Mediterranean was one of the imperative steps in completing the process of national unification. In his views, the irredentist movement historically worked as an internal force to break the external constraints imposed by the Triple Alliance in the northern Adriatic.

Mirabelli's arguments were certainly full of nationalist rhetoric yet they also called for the creation of a republic rather than a dictatorship to lead the new Italian nation. Mirabelli not

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only criticized the fascist governmental structure but also implicitly criticized the regime's attitude and claims toward the Adriatic. Mirabelli argued that the "petty spirit of nationalism" mistakenly replaced national ambitions for redemption that, while legitimate on the Western border, still needed to be clarified with regards to Dalmatia and more generally the eastern border (Mirabelli 1931, 575). In disputing the extension of Italy's eastern border to the Dalmatian region, Mirabelli's arguments connected to nineteenth-century irredentism. Mirabelli identified irredentism as a political phenomenon that pursued linguistic and Republican unity and, embodying the Mazzinian goals of international brotherhood, created a "nation of Italians" who worked toward the establishment of a European federation in response to the vague Wilsonian ideas of self-determination (1932, 613). Thus, Mirabelli's notions of "Italianità" became more closely associated with Mazzinian notions of national patriotism rather than Mussolini's aggressive and xenophobic nationalism.

As outlined above, former nineteenth-century views of a Europe of nations were rarely shared by intellectuals as they were gradually marginalized within the Adriatic network. In border areas such as Trieste the irredentist movement proved unable to challenge the new exclusively fascist reading of nationality during the inter-war years. Although the partial success of fascist policies of Italianization revealed a "disjuncture between local understanding of nationalism and fascist vision of the Italian nation" (Hametz 2012, 20), the rise of extreme irredentist sentiments within associations such as the ANC or ANTT shows that the local public gradually conformed to the fascist rhetoric of the nation. Nonetheless, Republican and Socialist segments of the irredentist network resisted fascism's homogenizing views and later re-emerged as one of the leading voices of the local resistance and anti-fascist movement between 1943 and 1945.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that during the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, Trieste transformed from a Habsburg to an Italian domain and, together with Trento, became focal points in the myth of an Italian national manifest destiny (Ara and Kolb 1995, 13). This myth was informed by a set of symbols and values that were rooted within the historical experience of the Italian Risorgimento and heightened Giuseppe Mazzini's idea of the nation as a voluntary association of people based on the principle of nationality (Vetter and Stefanel 2011, 5–32). This principle underscored irredentist claims of membership and mutual loyalty toward Italy's new imagined community and was used to inform a specific sense of Italian nationhood or "Italianità" that, especially in the early twentieth century, legitimized the territorial reincorporation of the "unredeemed" land within the borders of the new Italian state.

Indeed, Adriatic irredentism as a nineteenth-century movement that originated from a multi-nationalist intellectual minority advocated the cultural and linguistic autonomy of the Italian-speaking population within the Habsburg imperial framework and outside Italy's border rather than its physical separation. Until the 1890s, self-determination among the Italian-speaking population of Trieste was still in a formative stage and did not create a deep breach between the Italian population and Habsburg rulers. Afterwards, economic and political factors concurred to challenge the cosmopolitan attitude of the Italian-speaking population and facilitated the affirmation of a specific form of Italian orientalism toward its "Slav" neighbors especially in an urban center such as Trieste. The Triestine bourgeoisie responded to Vienna's economic and education policies by increasingly attacking the Habsburg bureaucracy and claiming the right to ostracize or absorb the local Slav population.

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Thus, the Italian commercial bourgeoisie gradually gravitated from compromise to open conflict with the German rulers first and Slav populations later. In claiming the indisputable "Italianità" of those lands, the local Italian elite rejected traditional Triestine cosmopolitanism and recklessly used nationalist rhetoric to invoke the extension of Italian sovereignty over the Adriatic border. Nonetheless, the ambivalent nature of the concurrent myth of cultural Risorgimental independence and the reality of economic dependence on Austria ultimately put "irredentists against irredentism" (Vivante 1984, 261). In these terms, Katia Pizzi's idea of irredentism as a local brand of nationalism well captures its inherent ambivalence as "it attempted consistently to impose a national tradition without relinquishing its anchorage to a local sphere of interest" (2001, 102). Indeed, a frontier city such as Trieste vividly proved the prominence of economic over political factors and revealed the limits of nationalist rhetoric in mobilizing local Triestines in the name of the nation.

Although Trieste's territorial "redemption" became the hallmark of nationalist propaganda after the war, the alleged "indisputable" Italianness of the Adriatic border remained a matter of contempt for some irredentist thinkers as well as Socialists or Republicans who opposed fascist rhetoric of the "mutilated victory." Their resilience to the fascist regime's projected image of an Italian rather than multi-national Adriatic demonstrated the complexity and drawbacks of the idea of national sovereignty that had emerged from the Versailles settlement (Sluga 2001, 6). In a traditionally mixed ethnic area such as Trieste and its surroundings, the re-emergence of moderate expressions of nineteenth-century irredentism within the local movement of resistance proved the ephemeral nature of the fascist grand strategy in the Adriatic and also re-launched the image of Trieste as the Western bridge to the East. Thus, the Triestine case proves the strength of European nationalism as complex discourse through which elites' dreams of the nation reverberated within the public (Van Houndmills 2012). Trieste's story ultimately shows that "nation, homeland, and identity are not an "immobile idol;" they are born, live, and transform themselves" (Pireddu 2015, 125).

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