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VENEZIA GIULIA AND DALMATIA: GEOGRAPHY AND THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE SLAVS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PADUA AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR

Abstract

The issue of the Italian eastern border after World War I has interested many Italian, Slovenian and Croatian scholars in the field of politics and diplomatic relations. It is known that Italy's diplomatic failure at Versailles in 1919 led to the rise of D'Annunzio's nationalism, which was entirely adopted by Fascism. The question of the Italian eastern border was provisionally resolved in 1920 but its final conclusion came with the Treaty of Rome signed in 1924 concerning the partition of the Free State of Fiume.

During this period several Italian intellectuals contributed to the political debate on borders. Before, during and after the war, the city of Padua was one of the main centres of Italian democratic irredentism. Within its university, some professors influenced students through their lectures and historical-geographical teaching and set a basis for a new kind of knowledge, in between populism and scientific instances.

With this contribution, the author considers some particular cases that during the First World War and immediately afterwards exposed their positions through their academic teaching. Among these, the liberal-patriotic Friulian geographers Arrigo Lorenzi and Francesco Musoni, both professors in Padua, affirming that Italy should reach its natural borders along the Alpine ridge as far as the Istrian and, for Musoni, Dalmatian mountains. Noteworthy at a time, when nationalism pitted peoples against each other, they considered Slavic culture as a natural and historical characteristic of north-eastern Italy: even if they affirmed it had been used by the Germans to annihilate Italian culture, it should not be eliminated but integrated jointly with the creation of friendly relations with the Kingdom of SCS.

Despite their ideas, history would turn out differently. Their example, however, bears witness to the fact that in intellectual circles and in higher education in Italy after the Great War, in particular among geographers, there was a minority aiming at a peace that went beyond nationalism and was based on study and knowledge regarding neighbouring countries.

Key words: Padua, University, Geography, Irredentism, Nationalism, Italy, Istria, Dalmatia

The end of the First World War brought with it the problem of a large-scale redefinition of European national borders. In particular, the Balkan area represented the main object of this diplomatic work through the Treaty of Saint-Germain-end-Laye (1919) and the Treaty of Trianon (1920), which gave birth of new states such as Czechoslovakia and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Kingdom of SCS). If we consider Italy, the failure to achieve all territorial claims would lead the country to withdraw from the Versailles conference, resulting in bilateral border negotiations with its eastern neighbour. This negotiation would be resolved in two stages represented by the Rapallo Treaty of 1920, which permitted Italy to annex Gorizia, Trieste, Istria, the islands of Cres/Cherso and Lošinj/Lussino and the Dalmatian city of Zadar/Zara; and, after the advent of Fascism, by the Rome Agreements of 1924 which permitted the annexation of the Free State of Fiume.¹

These national political events largely conditioned Italian academic circles and in particular the University of Padua: many irredentist and nationalist professors gave a contribution to the construction of national claims. Since the end of the Italian Third War of Independence in 1866, the University had been the main and most turbulent hotbed of Italian irredentism aimed at the regions of Trento, Trieste, Istria and Dalmatia. The reasons for this characterisation were related to the University's history as the only higher education centre of the Republic of Venice and its past reception of students and lecturers from the Adriatic territories of the Serenissima as one of the oldest universities in the world.² Due to its geographical position and historical tradition, professor and rector Raffaele Nisini (1905-10) had proclaimed Padua University an "advanced sentinel towards the Rhaetian and Julian Alps", as a bastion of cultural defence for the Italian-speaking populations oppressed by Italy's hated enemy during Risorgimento, the Austro-Hungarian Empire.³

According to a narrative then widespread in Italy, since the loss of the Lombardo-Veneto Kingdom, the Austrian Government had done its utmost to wipe out the Italian national community remaining within the borders of the Empire. A symbol of this oppression was the failure to grant an Italian university to Trieste, a battle which, across the border, Padua also showed solidarity with the Italian community.⁴ Italian speaking students from the Austro-Hungarian Empire

¹ Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919. Six months that changed the world* (New York: Random House Trade Paperback, 2003); Marina Cattaruzza, *L'Italia e il confine orientale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007); Rolf Wörsdörfer, *Krisenherd Adria 1915–1955. Konstruktion und Artikulation des Nationalen im italienisch-jugoslawischen Grenzraum* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004); Paolo Soave, *Una vittoria mutilata? L'Italia e la conferenza di pace a Parigi* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino, 2020); Costantino Caldo, *Il territorio come dominio: la geografia italiana durante il fascismo* (Napoli: Loffredo, 1982).

² Angelo Ventura, *Padova* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1989), 300.

³ Angela Maria Alberton, *L'università di Padova dal 1866 al 1922* (Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2016), 141.

⁴ Anna Maria Vinci, *Storia dell'Università di Trieste. Mito, progetti, realtà* (Trieste: Lint, 1997); Gunther Pallaver, Michael Gehler, *Università e nazionalismi. Innsbruck 1904 e l'assalto alla Facoltà di Giurisprudenza italiana* (Trento: Fondazione Museo storico del

and above all exiled intellectuals in Florence imported this perception to Italy to promote the cause of Italianness in their homeland, and they had been successful in merging it with a patriotic and neo-Risorgimento reading.⁵

The public demonstrations in Padua in the early years of the 20th century, both in terms of active participation and in the cultural sphere, were all characterised by this anti-Austrian tendency. Like many others in the rest of Italy, they motivated Italian interventionism in the First World War. After the conflict, they were stripped of the anti-Austrian Risorgimento aspect, maintaining radical lines in the D'Annunzio myth of the "vittoria mutilata" with an anti-Slavic tone. The enemy was no longer the defeated Habsburg Empire, but the Kingdom of SCS, which had followed it in the possession of the only unredeemed land that had not been annexed to Italy, Dalmatia.

In the early post-war period, the University of Padua witnessed an ever-growing identity stance towards the former Venetian territory: during 1919–1921 many Paduan professors promoted a series of initiatives mainly aimed at celebrating the recent annexations of Trento, Trieste and Istria and supporting the Italian character of Dalmatia. These included two significant events concerning the celebration and reception of Julian-Dalmatian students, which took place in February 1919.⁶ On one of these occasions, the professor of Romance Philology Vincenzo Crescini (1857–1932), a well-known nationalist and irredentist figure in Padua,⁷ clearly expressed the prevailing sentiment of the time: in no uncertain terms, he asserted that the eastern Adriatic coast should belong to Italy only because of its Venetian past, summarising in radical terms the main features of Dalmatia's Italian character.⁸ Using recent radical nationalist as well as scientific publications to support his assertions,⁹ Crescini justified his statements on the basis of the then current use of the Italian language: he placed it within a political and religious context characterised by the perennial clash between Latins and Slavs. The Professor stated that the Italian language, derived from the knowledge of the Venetian one, had been harshly opposed by the Habsburg Empire in Dalmatia, although recognising its status. To protect the Italian identity, Italo-Dalmatians had fought hard against the so considered politically more loyal

Trentino, 2010); Piero Del Negro, *L'Università di Padova: otto secoli di storia* (Padova: Signum, 2001); Pietro Del Negro, Francesco Piovan, *L'Università di Padova nei secoli (1601–1805). Documenti di storia dell'ateneo* (Treviso: Antilia, 2017).

⁵ Giorgio Negrelli, "In tema di irredentismo e nazionalismo," in *Intellettuali di frontiera Triestini a Firenze (1900–1950)*, ed. Roberto Pertici (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1985), 251–292.

⁶ Alberton, *L'Università di Padova*, 148–49 and 153.

⁷ Gianfranco Folena, "Crescini, Vincenzo," in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 30 (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1984); Ventura, *Padova*, 297–301.

⁸ Vincenzo Crescini, *Dalmazia Italiana. Nell'accogliimento dell'Università di Padova a una rappresentanza di studenti dalmati, 11 marzo 1919* (Padova: Prem. soc. coop. tip., 1919), 5.

⁹ Giotto Dainelli, *La Dalmazia, sua italianità, suo valore per la libertà d'Italia nell'Adriatico* (Genova: Formiggini, 1915); Konstantin Jirecek, *Die Romanen in den Städten Dalmatiens während des Mittelalters* (Wien: Kais. Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1901–1904); Matteo Giulio Bartoli, *Das Dalmatische: altromanische Sprachreste von Veglia bis Ragusa und ihre Stellung in der apennino-balkanischen Romania* (Wien: A. Holder, 1906).

Slavic element. The conflict between the two ethnic groups was traced by Crescini back to the invasions of the 7th century and, according to him, had ended with the end of the Great War. He concluded with a markedly anti-Yugoslav tone:

Would we have given the flower of our heroic youth and destroyed Austria for the suicidal desire to renew it under the disguise of Yugoslavia? We have saved, as Serbs, these Yugoslavs from extreme slaughter; we have crushed them as Bosnians and Herzegovinians, as Croats and Slovenes, savage janissaries of the Habsburgs accustomed to the taste of our blood, to the sacking of our possessions, hoping and annulling their ferocious ordinances. What do they want? That we renounce ourselves, the decrees of Nemesis, deep in the centuries, according to which we are finally victors? No: Italy does not abandon its victory to the vanquished enemy; it does not abandon to its hatred and slaughter any part of its faithful, who, pale and desperate, invoke it with the ancient word and the throb of undiminished love: *cur mi bun, nu mie bandunure* [my good heart, don't leave me].¹⁰

Crescini's statements were related to a political and cultural opinion that was gaining increasing consensus in a destabilised Italy engaged in international negotiations at Versailles. Furthermore, they were indicative of the cultural and political climate that was perceived within the universities and that laid the foundations for the subsequent advent and consolidation of Fascism. Saying that Dalmatia was only Italian represented a radical evolution of Risorgimento thought, related to an idea of power and expansionism based on a partial reading of reality, at times distorted by exaggerated national patriotism. The mixture of Crescini's personal political faith and his academic specialisation also cannot be overlooked: the irredentist idea was convincingly motivated by scientific cultural assumptions, typical of higher education. Moreover, it is possible to read his words as part of the new intellectual duty: from the beginning of the 20th century, Italian intellectuals saw themselves as social protagonists, as mediators between the man of culture and a highly backward mass society, with the purpose of the creation of a national and unified identity.¹¹ However, the humanistic education of the early post-war period continued to reflect the liberal tradition of scientific objectivity. Despite their emotional participation in politics, many professors were still able to provide a serene reading only conditioned by the determinist, evolutionist and positivist context of early 20th-century European science.

Nationalists, however, were not the only ones to advocate the cause of irredentism. Openly liberal and democratic personalities aspired to the annexation of the irredentist lands with the sole purpose of completing the Risorgimento, to place Italy as one the other great European nations. The professor of International Law Enrico Catellani (1856–1945),¹² fervent liberal patriot, considered Italian war motivations as “just” because “not imperialist”. In 1917 he wrote:

¹⁰ Crescini, *Dalmazia Italiana*, 12. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

¹¹ Gabriele Turi, *Lo Stato educatore. Politica e intellettuali nell'Italia fascista* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2002).

¹² Antonella De Robbio, “Enrico Catellani, giurista di diritto internazionale: un ricordo a settant'anni dalla sua morte,” *Bibliotime. Rivista elettronica per le biblioteche* 1, 18 (2015),

Italy was not inspired by the desire to enslave other peoples under its dominion; it was not seduced by the insatiable greed for new territories, nor by that superb imperial design which has led so many peoples and princes astray in every epoch of history and which no powerful man on earth has ever been able to carry out permanently. But it was guided by the most legitimate of desires, indeed the most certain of rights: that of reuniting all the children still dispersed to the great Mother.¹³

Non-kingdom Italians should have been included for historical reasons:

Whoever is thinking of making the diocesan borders coincide with the political ones, so that the Patriarch of Venice would extend his jurisdiction to the two Venetias and to Dalmatia, is not therefore invoking the establishment of a new order, but rather the restoration of an ancient one; a restoration that will be both recognition and protection of our national rights.¹⁴

Catellani was part of the neo-Risorgimento generation which felt invested by the task of completing what their fathers started in 1848 and did in 1861.¹⁵ Unlike the nationalists, his statements were not necessarily meant to translate into a mystification of reality, exploiting culture to motivate political initiative. Personalities such as Catellani kept the two spheres separate, giving culture the role of providing tools to politics. As well as representing the intellectuals' patriotic sentiment in Italian society, this was the message of Giuseppe Dalla Vedova (1834–1919)¹⁶ and his pupil and father of modern Italian geography Giovanni Marinelli's (1846–1900)¹⁷ geographical school. Both had been distinguished professors at the University of Padua, the cradle of academic geography in Italy: thanks to the teachings of the German school of Carl Ritter (1779–1859) and, above all, Friedrich Ratzel (1844–1904), they formed the new generation of geographers who would contribute to the definition of the discipline in the 20th century.¹⁸

Nevertheless, even geography was not immune from the influences of patriotism and nationalism, especially in the anthropogeographic study of the country's eastern borders. In addition to the interest in Africa, in the first quarter of the 20th

accessed May 20, 2022, <https://www.aib.it/aib/sezioni/emr/bibttime/num-xviii-1/derobbio.htm>.

¹³ Enrico Catellani, *L'Italia e l'Austria in guerra* (Firenze: G. Barbera, 1917), 7.

¹⁴ Catellani, *L'Italia e l'Austria in guerra*, 103.

¹⁵ Catia Papa, *L'Italia giovane dall'Unità al fascismo* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2013).

¹⁶ Ilaria Luzzana Caraci, "Dalla Vedova, Giuseppe," in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 32 (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1986); Ilaria Luzzana Caraci, *La geografia italiana tra '800 e '900. Dall'unità a Olinto Marinelli* (Genova: Università degli studi, 1982), 17–21 and 53–88.

¹⁷ Francesco Micelli, "Giovanni Marinelli e la scuola geografica friulana," *Atti dell'Accademia di scienze, lettere e arti di Udine* 88 (1995): 69–83.

¹⁸ Roberto Almagià, "Padova e l'ateneo padovano nella storia della scienza geografica," *Rivista geografica italiana* 19, 7 (1912): 465–510; Lucio Gambi, "Uno schizzo di storia della geografia in Italia," in *Una geografia per la storia*, ed. Lucio Gambi (Torino: Einaudi, 1973), 3–37; Mario Ortolani, "Orientamenti della Geografia politica," *Il Politico* 21, 2 (1956): 263–277.

century, Italian scientific production was concentrated on the Alps, the Po Valley, the Apennines, Tuscany, with works on particular phenomena, as glaciers or erosion, or small territories. Consequently, interest in the north-eastern border of Italy had matured, and its studies were soon taken as a motivation for nationalist and irredentist claims, not without some scholars' complicity.¹⁹ Following the lines of determinism and scientific positivism, in the name of rationality and the naturalistic principle, Italian geographers defined the natural border of Italy along the Alpine ridge, then the political one on the same line, including South Tyrol and the Istrian peninsula. At times, some studies and reflections extended the natural border to the Boka Kotorska Strait in Montenegro, incorporating Dalmatia. In the years between the end of the war and the reinforcement of the fascist regime, there were different publications and debates on the new border arrangement, which followed and resumed the studies carried out and published before and during the war without substantial changes.²⁰

A RISORGIMENTO-STYLE IRREDENTIST: ARRIGO LORENZI.

Arrigo Lorenzi was a prominent figure in Padua University, considered among the great geographers of the Italian 20th century. He taught geography in Padua from 1916 to 1948 and was lecturer in Economic Geography at Ca' Foscari University in Venice from 1924 to 1927. Born in Udine, Friuli, on 16th September 1874, Lorenzi, a young man with a passion for mountaineering, completed his training in Padua but never attended Marinelli's lectures, although he learned his content and method. A scholar of his native land, he published several scientific geomorphological and anthropological studies on Friulian and Slavic dialectal and toponymic terms, considering their derivation on an orographic and environmental basis. These studies, culminated in a publication on the Po Valley, showed great adaptation to the modern European and American trends in geography and earned him a spot in the Italian academic world. When Italy joined the First World War he enlisted as a volunteer, remaining in service until 1917. After the end of the war, Lorenzi was one of the few geographers who did not adhere to Fascism, maintaining an open aversion towards it: in 1925 he signed the *Manifesto degli intellettuali antifascisti* (Manifesto of anti-fascist intellectuals) by philosopher Benedetto Croce, which was a response to a similar document by the Fascist philosopher

¹⁹ Maria Garbari, "La storiografia sull'irredentismo apparsa in Italia dalla fine della prima guerra mondiale ai giorni nostri," *Studi trentini di Scienze storiche* 58, 2 (1979): 149–221; Giovanni Sabbatucci, "Il problema dell'irredentismo e le origini del movimento nazionalista in Italia," *Storia Contemporanea* 1, 3 (1970): 467–502, part 1 and Giovanni Sabbatucci, "Il problema dell'irredentismo e le origini del movimento nazionalista in Italia," *Storia Contemporanea* 1 (1971): 53–106, part 2; *L'irredentismo armato. Gli irredentismi europei davanti alla guerra, Atti del Convegno di studi, Gorizia, 25 maggio, Trieste, 26–27 maggio*, ed. Fabio Todero (Trieste: Irsml FVG, 2015).

²⁰ Matteo Proto, *I confini d'Italia. Geografie della nazione dell'Unità alla Grande Guerra* (Bologna: Bononia University Press, 2014).

Giovanni Gentile concerning the adherence of intellectuals to the new regime. Esteemed by his colleagues, in 1944–1945 he accepted the chairmanship of the Faculty of Letters at Padua University. During his entire career in Padua, he divided his time between teaching Political Geography, Physical Geography and Anthropogeography. Lorenzi's lessons constantly aroused an ever-increasing number of students, with lectures and courses on America, Africa or general topics such as volcanology. A full member of the Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere e Arti in Venice, the Academies of Padua, Udine and Rovigo, and a member of the Accademia Veneto Trentina Istriana, he died in Padua on 2nd April 1948.²¹

Even as a young man, Lorenzi showed an interest in the redemption of the irredentist lands to Italy, especially Venezia Giulia. At the age of 12, he was working as a cross-border correspondent for irredentist newspapers printed in Italy, while at 17 he held a public commemoration of the patriot and martyr Guglielmo Oberdan from Trieste as president of an irredentist club.²² His studies and scientific research did not distract him from his innate political passion: indeed Lorenzi was strictly convinced that the eastern Italian border should follow the natural geographical boundary represented by the Carnic and Julian Alps. Like his colleagues, he contributed to the geographical and scientific definition of the Italian border during the First World War, mostly because contributing to the patriotic cause was “not only the right of free men, but also the precise duty of scientific bodies”.²³

His reading of geographical data was part of the broader and more widespread deterministic reading of the time, based on the teachings of Ratzel's *Politische Geographie* (1897), of the greatest representative of Italian positivism and one of Lorenzi's teachers in Padua Roberto Ardigò (1828–1920), of the philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), and of Carl Ritter. Lorenzi combined their teachings by analysing the concept of evolutionism on a philosophical level: he asserted that human society also evolved like nature into better and more perfect forms. Such was the progress or “superorganic” evolution, which followed biological evolution and was witnessed by history: it concerned civilisations that, once born, reached a stage of development, then declined and reappeared in new forms. As biological life, their diversity and degree of development was related to the geomorphological conditions of their territory.²⁴

Referring to the specific cultural and linguistic reality of the Friuli and Venezia Giulia regions, Lorenzi advocated the idea that peoples with an agricultural

²¹ Ardito Desio, “Arrigo Lorenzi. Memoria,” *Atti dell'Accademia di Udine* 11 (1948–1951): 367–374; Francesco Micelli, “Arrigo Lorenzi e i tipi antropogeografici della pianura padana,” in *Studi sui tipi antropogeografici della pianura padana*, ed. Arrigo Lorenzi (Bologna: Forni, 2008), 1–20; Francesco Micelli, “Lorenzi, Arrigo,” in *Dizionario biografico dei friulani, Nuovo Liruti*, vol. 3 (Udine: Forum, 2011).

²² Roberto Almagià, *Arrigo Lorenzi (1874–1948). Commemorazione tenuta il 5–12–1949 nell'Aula Magna dell'Università* (Padova: Tipografia del seminario di Padova, 1950), 7.

²³ Arrigo Lorenzi, “I confini d'Italia nelle Alpi orientali,” *Atti della Accademia di Udine* 5, 1 (1915–21): 5–39.

²⁴ Arrigo Lorenzi, *Lezioni introduttive al corso di geografia tenute all'Università di Padova nell'anno 1939–40* (Padova: Gruppo universitario fascista, 1940), 251.

tradition were on a lower rung of the ladder of progress: the geographical and natural conditions did not allow them an evolutionary development comparable to those whose daily life was based on urban and, therefore, better development conditions. As he emphasised years later in his lectures, a civilisation needed a stimulating environment or equally favourable natural conditions that compelled people to a moderate amount of work, guaranteeing inventiveness, in order to develop itself. Akin to his colleagues, Lorenzi affirmed that this kind of comparison was visible between Italians and Slavs, in other words, between two cultures with different grades of evolution.²⁵

Many Italian geographers shared these positions which frequently rose to political considerations. For instance, in 1919 the Trieste-born Carlo Errera (1867–1936), a Geography professor at Bologna University, advocated racist positions on the superiority of the Italian over the Slavic people to enforce the irredentist nationalist principle: greeting the arrival of the new Italian citizens within the recently conquered borders, he warned of the danger represented by the alien Slav minority as a potential threat to the cultural life of the Venezia Giulia region. Along with a series of stereotypes that would later become popular in fascist literature, Errera considered these people as invaders in historical times, with a low, rural culture and reluctant to participate in the civic life of the cities. He documented his observations with historiographic and social arguments, arguing that the Slavs were historically characterised by elementary, tribal-like state organisations. Their recent urbanisation and demographic growth had placed them in contrast to the Italian component according to the political plan of Slavification promoted by the Habsburg Empire. With the end of the Empire, Errera's solution was to stop the influx of Slavic labour into the newly annexed territories and to hinder pan-Yugoslav propaganda by proposing the Italian cultural model to the new citizens.²⁶

In the redemption process of Venezia Giulia, the prospect of self-determination and nationality were therefore rejected by geographers, in name of the principle of Italianisation of lands that for centuries were believed to have been inhabited mostly by Italians. However, there were also exceptions, considering the freedom of expression in one's own mother language: already in 1908, the Touring Club Italiano, directed by geographer and speleologist Luigi Bertarelli (1859–1926), had published a map of Venezia Giulia in which non-Italian place names appeared alongside Italian ones. Bertarelli provided for the highlighting of the Italian name for places inhabited by an Italian-speaking majority, subordinating it to other names only in the case of its scarce use or historical reflection in places where the language was predominantly foreign. This criterion, still sensible today, was totally opposed by his colleague Ettore Tolomei (1865–1952): Tolomei, who worked on the South-Tyrol names, advocated the unpromising use of Italian toponyms. He considered that they were used not only by

²⁵ Lorenzi, *I confini d'Italia*, 16.

²⁶ Carlo Errera, *Italiani e slavi nella Venezia Giulia* (Novara: Istituto geografico De Agostini, 1919), 7–24; Proto, *I confini d'Italia*, 108–109.

the local Italian minorities but also in the Italian language. In his radicalism, he attempted to rework the nationalist reflections in a geographical key, which propagated the Italian character in names, language, customs, and architecture.

Tolomei focused his thesis on the idea of *ius primi occupantis*, which aimed to identify the traces of a cultural and national presence with philological methods instead of defining the natural, ethnic, and political boundary of the territory. To do so, he carried out almost archaeological research aimed at testifying the Italian character of the region even when the elements of Italianity were not visible.²⁷ Beyond the controversy, in the new tourist guide *Le Tre Venezie* (1920) Bertarelli continued to give the Italian name only to the major localities and where the Italian presence was the majority, leaving the Slavic toponym in other cases. He furthermore preferred Italian in mixed-lingual areas where it was not certain what the majority element was.²⁸

Similarly, Lorenzi also accepted the free use of non-Italian terms on maps to indicate a Slavic locality, considering Slavic presence in Friuli and Venezia Giulia as a historical fact. Some of the studies he carried out proved that many names originating from the Slavic language were not derived from Latin, Friulian or Italian and had always existed in parallel with these. Indeed, Lorenzi's approach to anthropogeography was extremely meticulous and cautious in advancing scientific theories: he avoided as much as possible any generalisation derived from similarities or easy yet potentially misleading schemes. He considered different aspects, especially philological and linguistic, but also naturalistic-environmental, cultural, historical, and social ones through archive sources. This is particularly evident in the analysis that Lorenzi made of place names and the Slavic presence in eastern Friuli and Venezia Giulia: on certain names, he stated that the identification of their origin was not only a question of experience related to knowledge of the territory but above all the result of very rigorous erudite, historical, and linguistic research.²⁹

Like Errera, Lorenzi considered these realities to be evidence of a centuries-old political project aimed at the annihilation of regional Italianness. However, he never expressed hate or racist statements towards the Slavic world, which was increasingly advancing its legitimate claims for independence: in Lorenzi's opinion the ultimate responsibility of the Venezia Giulia Slavicisation process was to be attributed to the Germans and their imperialism. Differently from Crescini, Lorenzi observed that up until a few decades before the First World War Italians and Slavs had lived in complete harmony with each other due to their complementary social functions. Based on a strongly anti-Germanic reading, Lorenzi considered the German element as the only enemy of the Italian one: in affinity

²⁷ Proto, *I confini d'Italia*, 36–39.

²⁸ Luigi Bertarelli, *Guida d'Italia del Touring Club Italiano. Le tre Venezie* (Milano: Stamp. Ed. Lombarda, L. Mondaini, 1920); Proto, *I confini d'Italia*, 109.

²⁹ Arrigo Lorenzi, "Toponomastica e topolessicografia della Venezia Giulia," *Rivista geografica italiana* 23, 9 (1916): 361–383; Arrigo Lorenzi, "Di alcuni supposti toponimi slavi della provincia di Udine e ancora del manualetto di topolessicografia della Venezia Giulia," *Rivista geografica italiana* 24, 2 (1917): 187–200.

with the ideas of democratic and Risorgimento patriotism, he stated that the progressive Slavicisation of Venezia Giulia that had taken place since the mid-nineteenth century was not natural and spontaneous, but a result of the renewed Austrian will aimed at the *Drang nach Osten* (“Push towards the East”) and to *Drang nach dem Mittelmeer* (“Push towards the Mediterranean”) of its empire. The Slavic presence in Istria, which was considered an Italian-majority land, was very useful for Austria and the Pan-Germanists to annihilate any form of Italianness in the eastern Adriatic by favouring the numerical increase of a more loyal population at the expense of another considered to be less loyal. For Lorenzi, “the uncultivated southern Slavs settled in the Giulia region, [felt] the influence of modern civilisation and [woke up] from their secular lethargy, participating in that great economic and ethnic movement which was one of the causes of the European war and which will undoubtedly have profound political consequences”.³⁰

Lorenzi did not consider that history had to be corrected with present actions to restore an ancient tradition: he considered the past as something static, concluded, and immutable. It was therefore necessary to adopt new measures compatible with the reality of the facts, with the sense of civilisation and respect for nationalities. He distanced himself from the thinking of professors such as Crescini and Errera: for Lorenzi it was an illusion to think that, once the Austrian problem had been eliminated, the Adriatic could once again become completely Italian “as when the lion of St. Mark spread its beneficial wings over the entirety of the other shore” as nationalists hoped. The Slavs, historically and indisputably settled in eastern Friuli, Istria and Dalmatia, were in fact claiming their rightful place in the history and life of peoples:

Nor do we, in the name of that same principle by which a nation free of its destiny emerged from the “land of the dead”, wish to oppose the Slavs retaining their language.³¹

The Italians should therefore have supported the independence and freedom of the Southern Slavs, following the example of the Risorgimento, allowing them to rise to the rank of a nation just like Italy. However, the Italians should in no way have allowed the Slavs to continue the denationalisation of their compatriots in Venezia Giulia and Istria, “where the policy of *divide et impera* has penetrated them with subtle tricks, nor will we allow the Italian spirit still surviving in some centres of the Dalmatian coast to be overwhelmed and cancelled”.³² This thought was related to the democratic and liberal perspective of Italian patriotism, according to which the non-respect of historical rights by foreigners would hurt not only freedom but also national pride itself.

By these considerations, Lorenzi gave both a geographical and a political definition of Italy's borders. He asserted that national consciousness was a histo-

³⁰ Lorenzi, *I confini d'Italia*, 11.

³¹ Lorenzi, *I confini d'Italia*, 17.

³² Lorenzi, *I confini d'Italia*, 11.

rical formation, consisting of an inalienable ideal heritage, reflecting the past of a people, its struggles, its sufferings, its power, and its misfortunes. The natural Alpine borders had constantly been reported for centuries as such by many Italian scholars and intellectuals, such as Dante Alighieri. For these reasons, Lorenzi asserted that they were an integral part of the Italian national sentiment, and it was unthinkable to give them up for a question of “artificial” denationalisation operated by a neighbouring country. Consequently, he affirmed that it was indisputable to draw an imaginary natural boundary on the highest and most inaccessible peaks of the Alps. Even before Italy joined the war, in November 1914 Lorenzi outlined what he saw as Italy’s ideal borders: based on a proposal made by his colleague Filippo Porena, former professor at the University of Naples, he traced them from the Reschen/Resia pass along the ridge of the Tyrolean Alps to the Picco dei Tre Signori, from there to the Toblach/Dobbiaco pass and then to the Italian border which already followed the watershed of the Carnic Alps. In the east, the border was to start at the Montasio plateau, then follow the Julian summit line to Idrija/Idria and on to Snežnik Mount/Monte Nevoso. From here the border would have closed itself to the left by the “Fiumara”, in order to include also the city of Rijeka/Fiume “according to absolute strategic needs and well-founded ethnic and historical reasons” but also because of its role as a port of Hungary and Croatia. Under Italy it could have continued its Balkan function without damaging the nearby Trieste harbour.³³

Lorenzi asserted that “half of the Italian aspirations” were “positively well-founded and acceptable” on a geographical formal interpretation: he considered that the close union of the continental and peninsular parts, separated by the Alps from the rest of Europe, had permitted the coexistence of many similar biological features and varieties in a naturally delimited environment. This concentrated variety had to be reflected on a human level as well, since the peninsula presented itself as an “immense melting pot”.³⁴ Like his colleagues, Lorenzi affirmed the superiority of the physical over the ethnographic fact: minority populations within this ideal or theoretical line were conceived by national subjectivism as usurpers, whose presence could distract from considering the naturalistic-geographical fact. According to Lorenzi, to avoid easy political axioms, it was therefore necessary to take into consideration merely how the Alpine arc had played a role not only in defending the Italic peoples but also in regulating the movements of peoples through the political control of the passes and valleys. In the Professor’s opinion, an Italic state needed to control those valleys that led from linguistically Italian mountain territories to the Venetian plain and the Adriatic for its strategic security and freedom of foreign policy. The Italian valley control would not have precluded the peoples from trading freely, nor studying their original language in schools, alongside the Italian one.

With this assumption Lorenzi solved the ethnic problem: on one hand it was necessary to occupy strategic crossings to prevent possible cultural and political

³³ Lorenzi, *I confini d’Italia*, 31.

³⁴ Lorenzi, *I confini d’Italia*, 25.

threats following a naturalistic criterion; on the other the ethnic minorities within the natural borders were given the opportunity to continue to express their language and culture due to their historical presence. Italy had much to learn from the mistakes of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and was naturally predisposed to guarantee this right, granted by its libertarian and Risorgimento origins. However, Lorenzi himself noted that this was not easy to implement. Realistically speaking, linear borders in Europe were drawn on the basis of obvious necessities, derived from a concept of justice between nations concluded in an equivalence of reciprocal bullying: a nation had for borders the lines it could acquire by force. The possibility of a peaceful ethnic coexistence, although hoped for by Lorenzi, was not a feasible operation because other nations would probably never have done the same with the Italian minorities within them:

Although we sincerely intend to respect the original language of the populations that have entered the traditional borders of our home and to attach them to Italy with a wise border policy (which has been woefully lacking since 1866!), will we seek for them an impossible absolute justice, such as other peoples will never be willing to use towards our compatriots?³⁵

BEYOND ISTRIA: FRANCESCO MUSONI, SLAVS, DALMATIA, AND THE KINGDOM OF SCS.

The issue concerning the annexation of South Tyrol and Istria to Italy was undisputedly shared by all Italian geographers. The same could not be said of Dalmatia: this region had been requested by the Italian government in the London Pact of 1915, according to a diplomatic strategy aimed to ask for the maximum with the aim of obtaining the minimum necessary.³⁶ However, the eastern Adriatic coast represented a symbol for nationalist-irredentists, whose leaders demanded it in the name of national greatness principles, motivated by ethno-historical and above all geographical claims. Thus, in the immediate post-war period, alongside the failure of diplomatic negotiations, Italian political interest in Dalmatia remained strongly accentuated as a main topic in relation to the “vittoria mutilata”. The military occupation of the eastern Adriatic coast, while waiting for the bilateral Italian-Yugoslav treaties to sanction the new border, helped to fuel the feeling that the region actually represented a bulwark to defend the Italian peninsula from attacks from the east. This feeling persisted even after the Rapallo Treaty of 1920 and continued to be maintained in geographical circles thanks to the geographers Giotto Dainelli (1878–1968) and Antonio Renato Toniolo (1881–1955).³⁷

³⁵ Lorenzi, *I confini d'Italia*, 29.

³⁶ Luciano Monzali, *Gli italiani di Dalmazia e le relazioni italo-jugoslave nel Novecento* (Venezia: Marsilio 2015), 95.

³⁷ Umberto Toschi, “Necrologio di Antonio Renato Toniolo,” *Bollettino della Società geografica italiana* 62 (1955): 257–275.

Between 1907 and 1914 Toniolo, assistant to the nationalist and early fascist geographer at the University of Padua Luigi De Marchi (1857–1936),³⁸ had affirmed the absolute need to annex Dalmatia on the basis of military, political and economic considerations. At the beginning of the 1930s, he was still expressing his opposition to Yugoslavia, which had annexed the region, with more radical positions, underlining the unnatural linking of different historical and ethnographic populations in one state. As he would later write in the entry 'Dalmatia' for the *Enciclopedia Italiana* (1931), the region, separated from the Balkans by the Velebit/Bebie and Dinaric Alps, had geographical, climatic and biological characteristics that had nothing in common with the Balkan hinterland, "so that it is a land in its own right and essentially Adriatic", hence Italian.³⁹ Already in 1922, at the VIII Italian National Geographical Congress, in a climate of great interest towards the new State of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, geographers expressed serious doubts about the region's belonging to it due to orographic reasons.⁴⁰

In Padua, among the irredentist geographers besides Lorenzi, geographer Francesco Musoni always maintained the conviction that Dalmatia was a region strictly belonging to Italy due to deterministic and anthropogeographical considerations. Musoni was born Sorzento (Sarženta), in the Natisone Valleys, in the province of Udine, on 21st November 1864. After finishing high school in the seminary, he enrolled in the Faculty of Literature at the University of Padua. As a student of Giovanni Marinelli, he graduated in 1888. From that year until the early 20th century, he taught in various secondary schools in Cuneo, Palermo and Udine, where in 1892 he began to collaborate with several geographical journals. Between 1894 and 1902, he was mayor of the town of San Pietro al Natisone and, from 1902, a freelance lecturer at the University of Padua, a role he held throughout the first twenty years of the century. During the war he was elected provincial councillor from 1914 to 1923: during this period Musoni was active in denouncing military abuses against the civilian population of his territory. Refugee in Florence in 1917, he continued to publish the *Mondo sotterraneo* magazine which he had directed since 1904. A right-wing liberal, Musoni never openly opposed Fascism, maintaining a distinct ideological stance like his friend Lorenzi. In 1923 he founded and directed the new scientific high school in Udine, named after Giovanni Marinelli in honour of his teacher, where he worked as headmaster and professor of History and Philosophy. In his last years Musoni was short-listed as director of the Udine "Antonio Zanon" Institute and died in Udine on 10th October 1926.⁴¹

³⁸ Luigi De Marchi, *Memorie scientifiche, 1883–1932* (Padova: Cedom, 1932). Luigi De Marchi to Carlo Anti, 11 maggio 1932–X, prot. 1616, pos. 48. Typescript of Giotto Dainelli and Giorgio Dal Piaz, Padova, settembre 1931–IX. Note "Il prof. Luigi De Marchi nominato Professore emerito," 16 dicembre 1932–XI, 48–50, folder 43/2, Professori cessati, Archivio del Novecento, University of Padua, Padua, Italy.

³⁹ Antonio Renato Toniolo, Umberto Nani, Giuseppe Praga, Adolfo Venturi, "Dalmazia," in *Enciclopedia Italiana*, vol.12 (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia italiana, 1931).

⁴⁰ Proto, *I confini d'Italia*, 115.

⁴¹ Attilio Mori, "Francesco Musoni," *Rivista geografica italiana* 33, 8–12 (1926): 185–186; Roberto Almagià, "Francesco Musoni," *Atti dell'Accademia di Udine* 5, 7 (1927–1928):

As a scholar of Slavic languages with knowledge of their ethnographic and historical problems, Musoni devoted himself to research by studying natural and human phenomena. Like Lorenzi, he was constantly aware of the problems related to the Italian minority in the neighbouring Hapsburg Empire: referring to the methodological analysis of some placenames in eastern Friuli, wanting to bring to light a past of which there was no trace in official documents, Musoni claimed that the political struggle going on in the territories under Austrian rule had contaminated the scientific debate. He asserted that a lot of research on local names had suffered “the cruellest outrages, having been artfully altered, mispronounced and translated from one language into another”. He then cited the cases of Monfalcone/Trzic, Capodistria/Koper, Muggia/Mile, Castelnuovo/Novigrad, Pola/Pulj; he claimed the preservation of their original Latin names to be in the interest of science. This issue concerned not only Venezia Giulia but also the Adriatic, whose philological history had been distorted by Slavic political nationalism.⁴²

Musoni regretted that science should be led astray by politics “which, out of a feeling of misunderstood patriotism, strives to distort historical truth, as if peoples and nations had nothing to fear from it”. To counter this state of affairs, Musoni divided the names into two distinct groups in his Friulian toponymy studies, as a demonstration of research carried out in complete detachment from any political suggestion: he merged in one group places where Slavonic was currently spoken and one where Slavonic had disappeared but where etymology or other historical factors proved its origin or influence. Musoni tried to illustrate the names by giving their etymology when he was sure of it, without lapsing into the political and nationalist field.⁴³

Admitting the Slavs had always been present in Venezia Giulia was not an issue to him: indeed, he stated that the Slavic presence in eastern Friuli should not be seen as the result of an armed conquest and occupation which took place all at once in the 7th century: it was the result of a long process of peaceful arrivals in several stages, mostly at the invitation of local feudal lords. Slavs received or occupied lands that were never completely depopulated and where the original inhabitants had been greatly depleted by the raids and barbarian invasions of the previous era. Conducting philological analysis of toponyms, Musoni’s distance from nationalists was clear although he did not exclude the Slavs had also committed raids and devastation. Anyway, in his opinion, this was not relevant: considering that the south-western Slavs were “Aryans and of the purest”, he believed that it was an unworthy prejudice “of our age and civilisation” to hate and despise each other among the different nations. At the same time, he asserted that the Friulian element itself had more to gain than to lose in this mixture of peoples:

145–165; Francesco Micelli, “Musoni, Francesco,” in *Dizionario biografico dei friulani, Nuovo Liruti*, vol. 3 (Udine: Forum, 2011).

⁴² Francesco Musoni, “I nomi locali e l’elemento slavo in Friuli,” *Rivista Geografica Italiana* 1, 4 (1897): 41–46 and 109–117.

⁴³ Musoni, *I nomi locali*, 45–46.

The streams of young and vigorous blood that were grafted onto its trunk at various times, give us a fairly clear idea of the particular physical strength of our people, in this respect second to none in Italy, and of its special intellectual and moral character, whereby the strong will, the activity, the almost rude frankness and the much-loved simplicity of the northern peoples are happily combined with Latin genius and courtesy.⁴⁴

Musoni's interest towards the Slavic world and the Balkans was always keenly prominent. Already at the beginning of the 20th century, he complained that Italy did not have much knowledge on the subject. In fact, he claimed that Italian geographical studies on the Balkans showed shortcomings in terms of scientific description, due both to the fragmentation of research according to geographic area, and to the military purpose. On the other side, many works coming from Austro-Hungarian academic and research institutes were very knowledgeable about the area. In Italy, a country which at the beginning of the 20th century was beginning to look with increasing interest at this region,⁴⁵ the scientific geographical aspect was completely absent: to protect its national interests, the country had to aim at promoting a more in-depth study of the Balkan peninsula. Furthermore, it had to stimulate national educational interest in geography since the study of the Balkans made it clear how much the environment's physical conditions determined the historical, social, and political conditions of the local peoples.⁴⁶

For Musoni, the Balkan peninsula represented a simulacrum of antiquity due to its geological and geographical conformation: limits represented by the different mountain ranges did not only divide peoples from one to another but had also allowed them to remain traditionally and culturally unaltered. Dalmatia was a topic case: this region was considered by him as an "Italian province rather than a Balkan one, even physically, regardless of the geology that [...] would have made it one with the Gargano in the Pliocene period". Musoni asserted that proof of its belonging to Italy came from historic observation: Hungarians and Turks had never managed to completely dominate it, whereas first the Romans and then the Venetians had no problem to extend their geographical-natural supremacy. Conversely, Venice never extended its influence into the interior of the Balkan peninsula whereas Bosnia and Herzegovina were easily conquered by the Turks, as the Habsburg Empire had done in recent years. Consequently, Musoni made the national claim of Dalmatia his own:

When Austria returned Venice to Italy, it should also have returned Dalmatia to it, in which it remains, occupying part of our home and paralysing all our lives in the Adriatic Sea, which was rightly said to be one of the lungs necessary for the easy and un-suppressed breathing of the Italian State.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Musoni, *I nomi locali*, 117.

⁴⁵ Alessandro Vagnini, *L'Italia e i Balcani nella Grande guerra. Ambizioni e realtà dell'imperialismo italiano* (Roma: Carocci editore, 2016).

⁴⁶ Francesco Musoni, "La penisola balcanica e l'Italia," *Rivista Geografica Italiana* 9, 5–6 (1904): 201–225.

⁴⁷ Musoni, *La penisola balcanica e l'Italia*, 214.

Like Catellani, Musoni did not believe these claims reflected a policy of conquest, remembering that Austria and Russia did not respect peoples' autonomy and self-determination rights, even those of the smallest minorities. The greatest obstacle to Italian commercial and economic expansion in the Balkan peninsula was therefore the Habsburg Empire: it held "provinces that are the inalienable patrimony of Italy (this too is a geographical truth, gentlemen!)", and was a geographical competitor that constantly stood in the way of the country's economic and natural needs. In this Austria was helped by the German Empire which not only "worked actively to overwhelm us commercially in the Adriatic" but also to "exclude us from all the lands along and beyond it that were already the glorious domain of the Serenissima, from which we, reconstituted as a nation, as from our other maritime cities, have inherited almost nothing but memories".⁴⁸

Like Lorenzi, Musoni also claimed that the inter-ethnic disputes between Italians and Slavs were not natural but were deliberately promoted by those who benefited from the *divide et impera* policy. For him the "Jugo-Slavs" and the Italians had a greater affinity in terms of "physical and mental characteristics" than the Germans: there should have been a reciprocal sympathy, reinforced by the analogy between the past of the one and the present of the other. Following the Risorgimento principle of self-determination, the Italians had risen as a nation thanks to the same principles that, at the time, animated the Slavs to achieve independence from the Austro-Hungarian and Turkish dominions. Moreover, Musoni believed that the establishment of a strong unitary or confederated "Jugo-Slavic-Balkan state" would have marked the end of Germanic-Austrian-Hungarian imperialism towards the south, while freeing the Slavs from the danger of subjugation to Russia and finally putting an end to the Ottoman threat in Europe. Such a state, established on the basis and within the limits of their respective nationalities, could have been nothing other than a valuable ally of Italy, making the Adriatic a sea of common interests.⁴⁹

Later Musoni's statements would be tempered by realism in the face of a radically changed international situation. In January 1918, Musoni, while confirming the necessity of the formation of a Yugoslav state, criticised the claims made in the Corfu Pact of a few months earlier. He stated that it made unreasonable claims on lands belonging to Italy, while it represented in its general guidelines a clear vision of the interests of the southern Slavs. At the same time, he admonished the Yugoslavs to put an end to the "excessive greed" which, in his opinion, had allowed Bulgaria to pass to the side of the Central Empires in contradiction not only to their own interests but also to those of Italy. Furthermore, they had to bear in mind that Russia's exit from the war had changed their condition to the point where they had no support left except that provided by Italy.⁵⁰ It's clear how Musoni felt the

⁴⁸ Musoni, *La penisola balcanica e l'Italia*, 219–220.

⁴⁹ Musoni, *La penisola balcanica e l'Italia*, 222–223.

⁵⁰ Francesco Musoni, "Problemi etnografici e politici della penisola balcanica," *Rivista Geografica Italiana* 25, 1–2 (1918): 1–23.

post-war climate: he was convinced that Italy had given the principal contribution to the Austro-Hungarian defeat and that the country had finally achieved a prominent European standing. It was up to Italy to take the place of the extinguished Empire and become the reference state in the Balkans, not as an empire but as a beacon of freedom and patriotism.

After the war, Musoni welcomed the new international reality, believing that the conflict had created a world characterised by peoples who were no longer “slaves” but free, having almost all conquered or integrated their unity and independence. In his lectures in Padua in the early 1920s, with confidence in the future and at a complete distance from the nationalists and fascist assumptions, he therefore looked at the Slavs as a whole in Europe, pleased that their nationalities had become a “splendid independent states constellation” with a new international importance they had not previously had. Italy now found itself bordering one of them, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, whose knowledge was to be made indispensable. This knowledge had to be formed not through the political press, “rarely sincere and truthful”, nor through the many publications “which under the influence of conflicting interests were written for and against it during and after the war and especially at the time of the Paris conference”, but through few “objective and serene” geographical sources. For Musoni, the importance of this knowledge went beyond the bilateral relations between Italy and the Yugoslavian state: such knowledge was necessary to have a representation as objective as possible of the neighbouring state in order to best shape policy towards it.⁵¹ These relations had to be maintained for another reason: since the neighbouring Kingdom had settled on the “Italian islands of Dalmatia” as the successor state to the Habsburg Empire, knowledge of it had to be indispensable in order to maintain continuous political, economic and cultural relations aimed at safeguarding the Italian minority.⁵²

CONCLUSIONS

If we analyse the question of Italian nationalism concerning the “vittoria mutilata” in post-war Italy, we realise that a large part of the geographers of the time, living in a context of extreme patriotic involvement, was more or less predisposed by training to support the nationalist message. However, this should not overshadow the presence of those who did not want to take an active part in politics, even though they agreed to put their expertise at the service of the nation: they were careful not to feed radical and populist propaganda assumptions, maintaining a scientific approach regardless of legitimate personal opinions. This is how we can frame the figures of Lorenzi and Musoni, both liberals, whose positions did not appear prejudiced or politically influenced: their statements were simple

⁵¹ Francesco Musoni, “La Jugoslavia e l’Italia,” *Rivista Geografica Italiana* 29, 4–6 (1922): 89–107.

⁵² Musoni, *La Jugoslavia e l’Italia*, 22–23.

scientific assumptions, functional, in their view and for their scientific field, to the formation of an objective geographical awareness.

Both Lorenzi and Musoni were irredentists, like a good many of the Italian intellectuals of the early 20th century. These professors drew strength for their statements from the regional environment of the Veneto and Friuli regions, due to their geographical proximity to the claimed lands, their history as Adriatic regions formerly dominated by Venice, and the presence of a lively centre of cultural exchange such as the University of Padua. However, the university environment was not yet characterised by nationalist features that later monopolised its contents and environments. The two geographers represented a class of intellectuals which was still trying to remark science's independence from the political debate and popular passion during Italy's transition from a liberal system to an anti-democratic one. Geography for them was therefore understood as an independent kind of research, related to anthropology and history and capable of merely providing tools to politics without directly supporting it. They were part of a generation which, born after the Risorgimento and in the myth of the unification of Italy, had an idea of homeland not as national supremacism but as a status that each people had to achieve for the affirmation of a single universal homeland of humanity encompassing them all. This cosmopolitanism was clearly rooted in the Risorgimento and in Giuseppe Mazzini's thought and was translated more specifically into the consideration of the sciences of the territory not as an end in itself, but as a social duty and civil responsibility of intellectuals towards the national community.

The scholarly interest in the question of Slavic minorities is a clear example of this liberal tradition: once the unredeemed lands had been conquered, such research was to inspire a wise policy that would implement a better planning of national interests in the name of civilisation and respect for non-Italian communities. These thoughts did not find practical use in politics: between the two wars, Italo-Yugoslav bilateral relations experienced moments of *détente* and hardening, characterised by regime-driven propaganda aimed at emphasising ancient claims on the basis of cultural and racial superiority. In addition to this, the so-called "border Fascism" promoted heavily discriminatory and repressive policies towards the Slavic population of Venezia Giulia.⁵³ This policy led to the exasperation of the already strained relations between the Italian and Slovenian-Croatian national communities and to the extreme conclusion of the well-known tragedy of the Italian eastern border at the end of the war.

⁵³ Anna Maria Vinci, *Sentinelle della patria: il fascismo al confine orientale 1918–1941* (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2011).

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