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The Cinematic Battle for the Adriatic: Film Festivals and the Trieste Crisis

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Abstract

This article analyses film festival practices related to the Trieste Crisis, the diplomatic struggle over the Northern Adriatic borderlands between (capitalist) Italy and (socialist) Yugoslavia (1945-1954). It explores how different forms of festival activities, from film selecting to establishing of film festivals, have shaped conceptions of national identities in the region, by symbolically labeling disputed territories as "national". Focusing on the way the local populations have been presented in films on this topic that circulated in major film festivals, it demonstrates the changing role of film festivals as playgrounds for political propaganda, from the early Cold War to contemporary post-socialist, nationalist and populist societies.

Keywords: Film Festival; Trieste Crisis; Cold War; Yugoslav Cinema; Italian Cinema.

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This article[1] analyses film festival practices related to the Trieste Crisis, that is, the early Cold War diplomatic struggle over the Northern Adriatic borderland between Italy and Yugoslavia.[2] As Western forces attempted to place the boundary between capitalist and communist Europe as far towards the East as possible, between 1945 and 1954 this ethnically hybrid region was split into two zones, one under Western control, and the other under control of the newly created socialist Yugoslavia. Central to the conflict's soft power dimension, both Italy and Yugoslavia produced several films about these events, often using them to validate their territorial claims. As the conflict coincided with the spread of film festivals across Europe, these cinematic images reached from local to international audiences, as the films traversed the festival circuit. Taking festivals as examples of what Pierre Nora described as *lieux de mémoire*, or sites of memory, the article investigates how different forms of festival action, from film programming to the establishment of new festivals, have been utilised to forge conflicting cultural memories of the struggle for this territory, coterminous with the national and international priorities of the countries involved (Nora 1997 [1984], Assmann 2006). With this in mind, the article's central concern lies in exploring how the identity of local populations of this multi-ethnic region has been presented through film festivals in order to symbolically label the disputed territories as "national", from the times of the conflict until the present. By addressing these issues, the article explores film festivals' evolving role as a propaganda playground, from the early Cold War to more recent times in which television and the new media have overtaken the primary role in moulding public opinion on political issues of national importance.

Despite the growing scholarly interest in memory and identity in the Northern Adriatic (Sluga 2001, Ballinger 2003, Verginella 2008, 2015, Klabjan 2020), cinema's role in their creation remains largely unexplored. Film analysis, for example, is usually limited to articles about TV programs (Knittel 2014) or Western production (Pizzi 2016, 2019). There are also some non-academic publications, primarily in Italian.[3] Regarding film festival studies, although the Trieste Crisis coincided with the creation of the first European film festivals after Venice was established in 1932, their role in this conflict remains largely unexplored. I touched on this subject in *Yugoslav Documentary and Short Film Festival, 1954-2004. From Yugoslav Socialism to Serbian Nationalism* (2022), where I connect the creation of the Pula Film Festival to the Yugoslav territorial claims over Istria.[4] Although historical analysis of film festivals in the Cold War perspective is available in the solid body of work (Kötzing and Moine 2017, Moine 2014, Pisu, 2013, 2016), publications in English taking into consideration diverse kinds of film festival response to this particular conflict are still lacking. By offering the first analysis of how different forms of festival activities have contributed to the shaping of the cultural memory of this historical episode, the article aims to use this specific study to make broader points about the political use of film festival action linked to the construction of national identities related to ideological and military conflicts in 20th and 21st century Europe.

The article, developed within the H2020 MSCA project "The Cinematic Battle for the Adriatic: Films, Frontiers and the Trieste Crisis (CBA TRIESTE)" is a result of research in cultural history based on an analysis of the relevant national and festival archives and films that refer to the topic.[5] After explaining the historical context and the main narratives resulting from it, the article proceeds to the examination of festival practices related to this conflict at the time of the events. It then compares these findings with the contemporary situation, demonstrating how the narrativization of these events, as well as the festivals' role in its creation and promotion, has moved from the political context of the polarized world in the early Cold War, to contemporary populist and liberal capitalist Europe.

1. I would like to thank to David Archibald and anonymous reviewers for their invaluable comments on the draft of this article.

2. Some sources use the term Trieste Crisis only for the most intense period within the broader term Trieste Question (Serbo-Croatian: *tršćansko pitanje*, Slovenian: *tržaško vrpašanje*, Italian: *questione triestina*). In this article, the term Trieste Crisis refers to the entire period of negotiations regarding the demarcation between the two countries, *i. e.* 1945 to 1954.

3. Alessandro Cuk's monographs provide information on the Italian films from the 40s and 50s (Cuk 2007, 2012).

4. The book is the adaptation of my doctoral thesis defended at Paris Saclay University in 2017 (*Festival jugoslovenskog dokumentarnog i kratkometražnog filma. Od jugoslovenskog socijalizma do srpskog nacionalizma, 1954-2004*, Beograd: Filmski centar Srbije, forthcoming in 2023).

5. Conducted at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, the project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No. 101020692 (MSCA-IF-GF).

1 Conflicting Memories of the Past

The multicultural and multi-ethnic region of Julian March has been a subject of long-term territorial aspirations of both Italians and South Slavs (Croats, Slovenes) and has undertaken multiple border redefinitions.[6] The disputed area spans from the town of Gorizia and the port of Trieste in the Northwest, over the peninsula of Istria, up to the port of Rijeka/Fiume in the Southeast. Until the end of First World War the region was a part of Austria-Hungary. After the empire dissolved at the end of the war, South Slavic populations sought to incorporate it into their newly created state, the kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918), or etymologically, the country of the South Slavs, a nation state that included parts of Austria-Hungary where Slovenes, Croats and Serbs lived in great numbers.[7] Italy had similar aspirations, however, and once the war was over it took control of the territory in question.[8] Yugoslav resistance leader, Josip Broz Tito, used the context of the Second World War to try to resolve this question in Yugoslavia's favour. After the capitulation of Italy in 1943, in May 1945 Tito's partisans liberated the area from the Nazi occupation (1943-1945), planning to integrate it into the reorganized, socialist and federal Yugoslavia, which they had proclaimed two years earlier in the territories under their control.[9] However, the Western Allies opposed the integration of this area into Yugoslavia, at the time a Soviet partner, in order to prevent the spread of Soviet hegemony towards the West. Instead, they divided it into two military administrations, separated by an administrative boundary: zone A in the West was under the control of the Anglo-Americans, while zone B in the East was controlled by the Yugoslav army. Particularly problematic was the status of the Istrian town of Pula, since it was placed under Allied control, although positioned in the middle of the Zone B. With the Paris Peace Treaty, Pula became a part of Yugoslavia, while a mini state named The Free Territory of Trieste (FTT) was created in the still disputed regions (1947).[10] This territory, smaller than the original one, was also divided into A and B zones, under Western and Yugoslav control, until the signing of the London Memorandum in 1954. The Memorandum established the *de facto* border between the two countries, enabling Italy to regain most of the Northern zone, while most of the Southern zone was unified with Yugoslavia. Nonetheless, Italy refused to ratify it for more than 20 years, which testifies to their unsatisfaction with the division of this territory (Zaccaria 2019: 506).[11]

War crime accusations by both sides and repeated migrations of local populations under political pressure, enabled the history of the struggle for this territory to become a fertile ground for the political use of cinematic images, resulting in the creation of contradictory cultural memories of these events. Frequent border changes had numerous social and cultural consequences, as well as an important influence on the demographics of the region. By the end of the Second World War there was a noticeable emigration of the Slavic populations from the areas under the Italian rule, to Yugoslavia. This was especially the case after fascists rose to power and began to implement repressive politics towards the non-Italian residents. After 1947 a reverse process happened, and numerous Italians migrated to Italy from the areas that were annexed to Yugoslavia, in the migrations known today under the term "Istrian-Dalmatian Exodus". Some were afraid of partisan retaliation against fascists and presumed collaborators, many of whom found death in deep natural sinkholes characteristic for this geographic area, called *foibe* in the local Italian dialect. Some fled influenced by the strong anti-Yugoslav and anti-socialist campaign on the Italian side (Altin and Badurina 2017: 321). Many of the ones who left, around a third, settled in the nearest city on the Italian side, Trieste (*Idem*, 322). The national structure of Trieste was therefore also modified. The complexity of national and political relations in the region

6. The region is known under the terms Julian March (Serbo-Croatian, Slovene: *Julijska krajina*) and Julian Venetia (Italian: *Venezia Giulia*).

7. Yugo – south. Slavia – the place of Slavs. Founded in 1918 as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes within the political project of Yugoslav unification, the state changed its name into Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929.

8. For a historical overview of the border changes in the region see Sluga 2001:11–63.

9. The only antifascist movement active in the Yugoslav area during WWII, Tito's partisans conducted a double, military and ideological struggle during the war. They also ended the war as the double victors, having managed to liberate the country from the occupation, and to take over the power transforming the Kingdom into a socialist republic.

10. FTT was established by the Paris Peace Treaty on February 10, 1947. Yugoslav Army entered Pula on September 15, 1947 when the Treaty came into force. As FTT was smaller than the originally claimed territory, this means that the conflict was partially resolved with the signature of the Treaty.

11. The territory's partition was confirmed and borders between the two countries definitely established only in 1975 with the Treaties of Osimo, which came into force in 1977. For more, see Zaccaria 2019: 503–520.

is additionally reinforced by the fact that not all the Italians left – many willingly stayed in Yugoslavia, and many of them had fought in Tito's partisan units. The memory of those who left, *esuli*, and of those who were thrown in *foibe* by the partisans, became the core of the tragic national and nationalist narrative of Italian sacrifice and expulsion from centuries-old hearths.[12] The memory of those who remained, *rimasti*, fit the official Yugoslav narrative of multinationalism and hospitality of the new socialist state, under whose cap equal rights and obligations are enjoyed by citizens of all "nations and nationalities" (*narodi i narodnosti*).

As these events coincided with the expansion of cinematographic activities in Europe, both countries found in cinema an important ally in their struggle for this territory and, within it, in the promotion and further construction of myths related to it. Between 1945 and 1954 both Italy and Yugoslavia produced a series of documentaries and newsreels about these events, as well as several feature films.[13] These films often utilize similar footage – images of Yugoslav partisans in Trieste, Italians leaving the areas that were accorded to Yugoslavia, political protests – but frame them in conflicting ways: as occupation/liberation, migration/exodus, anti-communist/antifascist protests, depending on the needs of the narrative in question. The fast-moving creation of film festivals, a new kind of cultural event with notable geopolitical influence, provided novel opportunities for showing these images to public. However, in line with the imperatives of national and international politics of the involved countries, as well as with the development of other means of film display such as television, the reliance on festivals for promotion of these films has been unequal in the two countries and in different periods. Moderately present in the early Cold War film festivals (1945-1954), this production practically disappeared from festival screens in mid-50s. It kept very low visibility throughout most of the Cold War, until it re-emerged as a significant controversy after 1989.

2 Film Festivals as a Playground for Cold War Diplomacy (1945-1954)

Between 1945 and 1954 the festival circulation of Italian films about this conflict was rather modest. The territorial claims over the Northern Adriatic were a common point for both countries, but their position in the multifaceted international relations of the early Cold War was unequal. Namely, after the break with Stalin in 1948, Yugoslavia lost Soviet support in the Trieste Crisis and experienced a major diplomatic rift with the USSR – which threatened, similarly to the ongoing dispute with Italy, to become an armed conflict. Hence, having a strong international campaign justifying the country's territorial claims and ideological position was more important for Yugoslavia than for Italy, which, despite its dissatisfaction with some of the stipulations of the Paris Peace Treaty, enjoyed stronger international support in this matter. Consequently, introducing global audiences to films which were demonstrating the perceived rightfulness of the country's claims over the contested territory appears to have been a greater priority for Yugoslavia than for Italy at the time of the events.

Some Italian documentaries directly or indirectly linked to the topic appear sporadically in the programs of the festivals active at the time, shaping the image of the Northern Adriatic local communities in the eyes of the international audiences and film critics. Among them, the most important is the Venice award winner in the category of documentary films, *Bora over Trieste* (*Bora su Trieste*, Gianni Alberto Vitrotti, Lux Film, Italy, 1953).[14] Depicting the strong north wind "bora", one of Trieste's hallmarks, the film is celebrated for its exceptional camerawork, which is encapsulated in scenes of everyday life filmed with the wind blowing at speeds of up to 100km per hour. Although not a film about this political dispute, *Bora over Trieste* is still contributing to a political cause, by reinforcing the image of Trieste as an ethnically homogenous Italian town. Trieste is described as "a very Italian harbour" (*italianissimo porto*), its Roman past is duly mentioned in the narration, which, furthermore, only uses the Italian versions of the regional toponyms. At the same time, the

12. *Foibe* have become synonymous with the suffering of Italians in Yugoslavia, and today the term refers to all victims, whether in actual *foibe* or otherwise. This reinforces the tragic impression of these crimes and contributes to speculation about the number of victims. The general silence about the fact that the fascists too threw some of their victims into the *foibe* also contributes to manipulations with the number of partisan victims. See Altin, Badurina, 2017: 321, Knittel 2014: 173. For a detailed account see Pirjevec, 2009.

13. These films and newsreels are hosted in film archives in Belgrade, Gemona, Zagreb, Ljubljana and Rome. A selection of digitized material is available on the Istituto Luce's website: https://www.archivioluce.com/archivio-cinematografico-2/ (Last Accessed: 15-07-2022).

14. *Premio per la Categoria A* in the group of documentaries on social problems and achievements.

other populations inhabiting the region, their languages and cultures are completely invisible in the film, as if they have never existed in this multicultural town, neither in the past or in the present. Finally, the impression that the political agenda of this documentary is elegantly hidden behind, at a first blush, a plain meteorological story, is reinforced by the fact that its screening in Venice occurred exactly when the diplomatic crisis between Italy and Yugoslavia looked like it might escalate to armed conflict.

However, in general, between 1945 and 1954, the interest of Italian institutions in positioning internationally their production about the struggle for the Northern Adriatic was humble. This is obvious from the limited festival circulation of the two principal Italian features about the contested territory, *The Suffering Town* (*La città dolente*, Mario Bonnard, Istria Film, Scalera Film, 1949), about an Italian couple from Pula trying to decide whether to leave or stay after the Paris Peace Treaty, and *Hearts Without Borders* (*Cuori senza frontiere*, Luigi Zampa, Lux Film, 1950), which focused on a town divided into two by the demarcation line, whose inhabitants, similarly, urgently needed to choose which side they would live in. These films were among the first to establish the cinematic myth, forged on the Italian side, of the barbarian Slav who is harming local Italian populations. Yet, neither one of them had a notable presence in the international festivals at the time of their production, although *Hearts Without Borders* was screened in Venice in 1950 as a part of the first *Mostra Mercato Internazionale del Film*.[15] The Italian filmmakers seemed to be more preoccupied with other topics in the immediate post-war period, often, but not necessarily, related to the everyday reality of war and the post-war years.[16] Therefore, despite these festival appearances, in this period, on the Western side it was Anglophone newsreels and not the local Italian production that played the primary role in moulding the narrative on the (non)autochthonic populations and political events of Trieste and the area (Turina 2019: 69). In addition, Western feature film production on Cold War spy affairs sometimes contributed to the anti-communist propaganda being heard outside the region (see *Ibid*). Therefore, on the Italian side there was less of a need for strong festival propaganda on this issue than in Yugoslavia, which, from 1948 found itself politically isolated on the map of the divided Europe. This difference in approach was also connected to the importance that the Yugoslav communists accorded to cinema as a promotional and propaganda tool – ever since they established the first film institutions in the liberated territories in 1944, their plans and undertakings in the field of cinema were methodical, regular and systematic.

3 The Narrative of *Our* Land, in the East and in the West (1945-1954)

Hence, on the other side of the administrative boundary the production of films about the contested territory was flourishing – some of the very first films made in socialist Yugoslavia were about the rightfulness of the Yugoslav demands for the Northern Adriatic.[17] Yugoslavian filmmakers even crossed the demarcation line illegally to obtain the visual material commissioned by the Party.[18] When the opportunity occurred to show these films internationally, it was not missed. Yugoslavia clearly used the new form of cultural event as an occasion to symbolically authenticate the status of disputed territories as Yugoslavian, at the same time ensuring the country's position in a larger conflict, the Cold War. In 1947, the year of the first Yugoslav participation in international film festivals, two out of six films sent abroad focused on the disputed areas.[19] Introducing a similar contrast, the first one, *Mercury from Idrija* (*Živa iz Idrije*, Nikola Rajić, Avala film, 1947), which screened in Brussels and Venice, describes the improvement of conditions in one of the world's biggest mercury mines

15. http://asac.labiennale.org/it/ (Last Accessed: 01-05-2022).

16. Films noticed in major festivals between 1947 and 1954 included neorealist features *Bicycle Thieves* (*Ladri di biciclette*, Vittorio de Sica, multiple nominations, among the awards: Locarno 1949, Best Foreign Film Golden Globe 1950), *Miracle in Milan* (*Miracolo a Milano*, Vittorio de Sica, Grand Prix, Cannes 1951), *Path of Hope* (*Il cammino della Speranza*, Pietro Germi, Silver Bear, Berlin 1951), *Two Cents Worth of Hope* (*Due soldi di speranza*, Renato Castellani, Grand Prix *ex-aequo*, Cannes 1952).

17. For instance, documentaries *Istria* (*Istra*, Branko Marjanović, FP DFJ-NR HR, 1945) and *Trieste* (*Trst*, Edvard Šelhaus, FP FNRJ, NR SRB, 1946), the fifth and the tenth film ever produced in socialist Yugoslavia.

18. Interview with filmmaker Puriša Đorđević, Belgrade, November 23, 2013.

19. In 1947 six Yugoslav films participated in the festivals in Locarno, Edinburgh, Venice, Brussels and Mariánské Lázně, the forerunner of the Karlovy Vary festival. They are all documentaries as the first Yugoslav feature, *Slavica*, was made in 1947 and ready for festival showings only in 1948. (Yugoslav Archives, AJ, 405, S13, „Učestvovanje na festivalima u inostranstvu 1946-1954 [Participation in festivals abroad, 1946-1954]").

after it came under Yugoslav jurisdiction, while the second one, *The Truth about Pula (Istina o Puli*, Kosta Hlavaty, Jadran film, 1947) screened in Mariánské Lázně, expresses hopes that, after the retreatment of Western military troops, the Istrian town will experience progress similar to that experienced by areas already under Yugoslav rule.

The Yugoslav selection for international festival screenings was made by the federal government's Committee for Cinematography (*Komitet za kinematografiju Vlade FNRJ*) in collaboration with the existing production houses.[20] Until the creation of the first national film festivals (Pula in 1954 and Belgrade in 1960) where foreign programmers came to select films for their events, being a part of the selection proposed by the official institutions – Committee for Cinematography, and as of 1953/1954, Committee for International Cultural Relations (*Komisija za kulturne veze sa inostranstvom*) and Film Festival Committee (*Festivalska komisija*) – was a film's principal, if not the only road to film festivals abroad. After all, this was in line with the way the biggest festivals at the time invited films – the documentation from the earliest years of the Cannes Film Festival reveals that communication with representatives of foreign countries went through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and that governmental institutions of the invited countries elected their own representatives in accordance with the number of films commissioned by the festival.[21] Such a selection process undoubtably reflected state interests, and the decision-making power of the ones who proposed it was limited only by the judgements of the host festivals themselves.

In the Yugoslav case, these limits were tested the year before – 1946 marked the first Yugoslav attempt to participate in the Cannes Film Festival. Yugoslav Committee for Cinematography sent two documentaries, both signed by former partisan Radoš Novaković: *Julian March* (*Julijska Krajina*, FP FNRJ, 1946), Yugoslav vision of the situation in the contested area, and *In the Name of the People* (*U ime naroda*, Zvezda film, 1946), a visual testimony of četniks' WWII crimes.[22] However, the two films were rejected with the explanation that the application was received too late.[23] This was not accepted well by the Yugoslav film professionals, and the Festival's organizers were accused of not having the same affability with Yugoslavia as with other countries that submitted their films after the deadline, such as Italy, Switzerland and the U.S.[24] In the manner of Cold War diplomacy, the magazine *Film* suggested that there was some hidden political agenda behind these decisions, writing that "[the rejection] was not a matter of pure rigid formalism and simple lack of prevenance, but of *something else*."[25] While kindness shown towards Switzerland and the U.S. is described as "unusual", the one shown towards Italy is described as "extraordinary", pointing once again to the oddity of new post-war alliances.[26] Being rejected by Cannes was a heavy blow to Yugoslav propaganda abroad, as the French festival has been highly regarded in Yugoslavia from its very beginnings, as can be observed from reports in the daily and professional press.[27] That is why the opportunity to present the documentary *Julian March* to the highly esteemed audience in the French riviera was understood as an opportunity reveal the Yugoslav side of the story on the events in the disputed territory.

Denied in 1946, this opportunity was compensated for the following year in Mariánské Lázně, the forerunner of the Karlovy Vary festival. Screened as a part of the informative programme, a documentary with the indicative title *The Truth about Pula* (Kosta Hlavaty, Jadran film, 1947) marked the beginning of the international representation of the socialist Yugoslav cinematic narrative of the joint antifascist and anti-capitalist struggle of the local populations, tailored for both local and international audiences.[28] The film was made as Anglo-

20. AJ, 405, S13, „Učestvovanje...", *op. cit.*

21. La cinémathèque française, FIF 118, B15. FIF 13, B4.

22. During WWII various national ideological and military groups from the Yugoslav space went into a civil war one against another. Četnik movement was a royalist and nationalist collaborationist Serbian army.

23. "Prvi međunarodni filmski festival u Kanu [The First International Film Festival in Cannes]", Dušan Timotijević, *Film*, No 1, December 1946, 12–16.

24. *Ibid*.

25. *Idem*, p. 13 („ovde [se] nije radilo o čistom krutom formalizmu i o običnoj nepredusretljivsti, već o *nečemu drugom*"). Italics by D. J.

26. *Idem*, p. 14.

27. See for instance *Ibid*, and „Bioskop Balkan – Danas [Cinema Balkan – Today]", *Politika*, 16 January 1947.

28. AJ, 405, S13, *op. cit.*

American troops, together with numerous local Italians, were leaving the town after the announcement of its incorporation into Yugoslavia in 1947. It focused on the confiscation of the machines from Pula's factories, showing Western soldiers loading them onto the ships that would take them to Italy. The narrator describes this as "the robbery of the entire town's industry" and as a "new great evil", brewed in the kitchen of imperialism, whose goal is "to destroy the economic power of Pula, in order to inflict an even greater damage to Yugoslavia."[29] However, the objects taken by the Italian refugees – such as parts of their houses – are also presented in the same context: as a prey of the greedy Westerners purposely working in the interests of capitalist Italy, and to the detriment of Yugoslavia. The Italian refugees are mentioned only once, in a brief sequence of a total duration of some 60 seconds, which is minimal bearing in mind the importance of their departure for the town, as well as the total duration of the film – 28 minutes. Furthermore, the film only talks about the ones who changed their mind and returned to Yugoslavia. Pula and Istria are repeatedly described as "*our* [Slavic] land", and the inscription at the beginning of the film announces a story of liberation from foreign rule. Despite this, by suggesting that the Italians who stayed in Pula made the right choice, the film does not put in an opposition Italians and Slavs, but those who share the same ideals no matter their nationality with those who do not – the 'imagined community' (Anderson 2006 [1983]) here is the classless socialist multinational Yugoslav society. On the other side of the spectrum: the imperialists and the fascists. Similarly, the film constructs the idea of unity of all the progressive people regardless of their nationality, when the narrator describes Pula as "a city of militant *Slavic-Italian brotherhood* [which] did not fall to its knees". In doing so, the opposition presented in the film, between on the one hand progressive people and, on the other, imperialists and fascists, also becomes an opposition between the Italian who stayed, *rimasti* and the ones who emigrated to Italy, *esuli*.

A similar image of (dis)unity is created through films sent to international festivals over the following years. Yugoslavia finally participated in Cannes in 1949, this time with an even more important film about the struggle for the Northern Adriatic – the first Slovenian sound feature *On Our Own Land* (*Na svojoj zemlji*, France Štiglic, Triglav Film, 1948). A story of the partisan liberation of the region of Slovene Littoral, the film depicts a group of Slovenian villagers in the final phase of the war. Exhausted after years of imposed Italianization, followed by German occupation, most of them eagerly help the partisans. One man is firstly reluctant, yet he finally joins the partisans. Only one character, his mother, a woman focused on her own interests, collaborates with the fascists. The supranational aspect of the antifascist struggle is highlighted by the scene where a captivated Italian soldier enthusiastically yells that he is for partisans while passing by a small group of locals. Such a "national division" along the lines of good and bad is typical for the socialist Yugoslav film production, where the enemy is regularly described in ideological and not in national terms. This is an outcome of a complex civil war that raged in the Yugoslavian space as a part of WWII, opposing various military formations fighting for the interests of particular national groups, to the partisans, as the only multinational and leftist movement. The creation of an idea of a conflict based exclusively on ideological and not national grounds was a way to enable former war enemies to identify with each other as members of the same imagined community in the times of peace. Such an approach also helped accentuate the nobleness of the partisan struggle, as a struggle motivated by universal reasons that go far beyond one's nationality and that concern all the citizens of Yugoslavia, and of the progressive world. In the case of Northern Adriatic, presenting the conflict as an ideological and not a national confrontation also made it possible to justify the country's official slogan of "Brotherhood and Unity of all our Peoples and National Groups" (which included an Italian minority), while at the same time defending Yugoslav territorial claims.

By forging an image of Slavic and Italian populations that are united in their struggle against the "Mussolini's servants", who – according to the narration of *The Truth about Pula* – included both Italians and Anglo-Americans, the Yugoslav participation in European film festivals between 1945 and 1954 promoted an idea of group belonging based on political convictions, and not on ethnic origins. In doing so these films seeks to create an effect of "objectiveness" by comparing good and bad values, and not "good" and "bad" nationalities, despite the ancient Slavic presence in the area regularly being accentuated. By sending these films to the most prestigious festivals located on both sides of the Iron Curtain, the message of (inter)national unity around the common goal of creation of a more just society and thus of establishment of just borders, is sent to the various audiences throughout Europe.

29. „Prvi međunarodni...", *op. cit.*, p. 14.

The culmination of the Yugoslav efforts to symbolically mark the contested territory as "our land" happened in June 1954 (24-30), when Yugoslavia organized its first ever national film festival, notably in the Roman Arena in Pula. Film festival culture was gradually developing in Yugoslavia, and between 1947 and 1954, a total of 60 Yugoslav films participated in 33 festivals abroad.[30] Consistent participation in worldwide festivals contributed to the international promotion of Yugoslavia and its values. Yet, for a quality international promotion, it was important not only to be able to attend the festivals abroad, but to invite foreign programmers and journalists *to* Yugoslavia, where they could have an even better insight into the local production. In addition, by inviting them to a *national* festival located precisely in Istria, the Yugoslav identity of this region was once again symbolically reaffirmed.

The festival was created at the initiative of the president of Pula's Cinematic Enterprise, Marijan Rotar. Although it was not started from above by the government or a political institution, the reasons for the establishment of a national film festival in the heart of Istria were still political. Several archival documents underline the political importance of organizing an "entirely Yugoslav festival in this very region."[31] Furthermore, Rotar himself related the importance of choosing Pula as the festival's host-town to the fact that "[w]e have been *at home in Istria* for only 10 years, and Pula even less."[32] Although in the beginning some were sceptical of success of such big open-air screenings in such a small town, when a demand was made to move the festival to Zagreb, as a more important and bigger town, this idea did not obtain the necessary political support. Not only did the festival remain in Pula, but in 1955 it was held under Tito's official patronage.[33]

The founding of the Pula Film Festival represented the peak of Yugoslav efforts to use film festival action to symbolically mark Istria as national territory, at the same time promoting a multinational ideological narrative on the struggle for this area. Only a few months later, in October 1954, the London Memorandum would be signed and Yugoslav propaganda around the struggle for the Northern Adriatic would begin to subside. In the late 50s, Yugoslavia's position on the international political scene significantly improved. Diplomatic relations with the USSR were re-established in 1955, new diplomatic horizons opened up in Africa and Asia, and as the leading figure of the non-aligned movement, Tito became a partner of both the East and the West. In this new political context, the conflict over the Italo-Yugoslav border was pushed to the margins of cinematic production: both in Yugoslavia, whose priority became to promote its 'third way', as well as in Italy, which sought to avoid conflict with Tito. In their study on the presence of the "Istrian Exodus" in the urban space of Trieste, Roberta Altin and Natka Badurina remark that until the 80s "the atmosphere of the Cold War did not allow for a deeper political debate on the *foibe* and exodus, nor did it encourage historical research" outside of the popular publications and the *esuli* community (Altin, Badurina, 2017: 322). This was reflected in film festival dynamics, and during most of the Cold War, this topic was absent from the programmes, revealing the duality of the relationship between festival decision-makers and the context in which they operate – while by promoting or ignoring certain film themes in a particular political context the festival actors can make an impact on that context, it also goes the other way around, and the political dynamics of the context in which they operate also has an effect on the festival dynamics.

4 Contemporary Rediscovery – From a Cold War to a National Film Theme

The post-Cold War period introduced new dynamics in the construction of cultural memories related to this conflict. The fall of the communist states in Europe, dismantlement of Yugoslavia in the wars of the 90s, and strengthening of the right-wing political parties both in Italy and in the Yugoslav space, rekindled interest in this historical episode. In this new political context, the memory of the partisan violence, embodied in the

30. AJ, 405, S13, Written version of the speech on Yugoslav cinema, delivered before the screening of documentary films organised by the Italian and Yugoslav cinematheques, no signature, 5 December 1954.

31. AJ, 405, S36, "Filmski festival u Puli (informativni deo) [Pula Film Festival (informative part)]", no signature, no date, p. 1 (pp. 1–10).

32. Zlata KLAPČIĆ, "Mario Rotar. Čovjek koji je osnovao Pulski festival" [Mario Rotar. The Man who Founded the Pula Film Festival], *Filmska kultura*, n° 87-88, 1973, p. 40. (pp. 39-45). Italics by D. J.

33. In line with the high interest in the events around the border, the first documentary to ever be awarded in Pula was *Our Documents – Okroglica* (*Naši dokumenti – Okroglica*, Milan Kumar, Triglav Film, 1953), about Tito's speech on the intensification of the conflict with Italy (September 1953). No official jury existed at the festival in 1954 and the film was awarded by the votes of the audience.

foibe killings and the "Istrian Exodus", became useful again. On the right pole of the political spectrum – for the strengthening of national feelings and reckoning with the communist movement; and on the left – for supporting a struggle against 'all forms of totalitarianism', widely promoted by the European parliament in the 2000s.[34] Yet, this time Italy took the lead in prioritizing this theme in film festivals. This was supported by the establishment of the national Memorial Day, *Giorno del Ricordo*, which introduced a wave of contemporary memorial practices related to the struggle for the Northern Adriatic and generated by the Italian state. Created in 2004 by the Italian government, *Giorno del ricordo* is marked on February 10, the anniversary date of the signing of the Paris Peace Treaty, as the day of remembrance of the "tragedy of the Italians"[35] in Istria and Dalmatia, the territories that it lost to Yugoslavia. Its establishment has fuelled the rediscovery of this once-marginalized film theme and opened new financial opportunities for the restoration of old and the production of new films on this topic. This has resulted in their consequent reappearance in film festivals, as well as in various special events, often, but not exclusively, organised in the week of *Giorno del ricordo*.

In such a climate, the feature films *Hearts without Borders* and *The Suffering Town*, which did not receive major festival visibility at the time when they were made, started acquiring a significant attention in the public sphere, becoming referential. Their festival rediscovery commenced in 1989 with the 7th Festival Internazionale Cinema Giovani's retrospective "Neorealism in 50 films" in Torino.[36] The two films continued their contemporary festival lives in the 2000s.[37] A restored copy of *Hearts without Borders* was shown at the Trieste Film Festival in 2001, together with a 1999 documentary about the making of the film.[38] It also was screened in festival Il Cinema ritrovato in Bologna in 2006, and in Festival Internazionale di Roma in 2009 within a retrospective of Zampa's work. The restored copy of *The Suffering Town* was screened at the Venice Film Festival in 2008, and a decade later, in 2018, locals from Gorizia, together with many international guests, could see it in a local history festival, èStoria. In 2021, more than 70 years after its production, it was also screened in Pula, the very festival established in order to contest the Italian claims over Istria, now the most prestigious Croatian film festival. Programmers in the wider post-Yugoslav space also showed it, and the film was programmed in the 18th Festival of Nitrate film organized by the Yugoslav Film Archives in Belgrade in 2016. Indicating the reach of the film, it was also shown within some more alternative events, such as a two-day film event "Istria and Us: *Vogliamo vivere*" organized in 2013 in the Centre for Cultural Decontamination, also in Belgrade. Such a notable contemporary circulation of Italian films from the 40s and 50s in festivals on both sides of the former Italo-Yugoslav border demonstrates a clear rise of interest in cinematic depictions of this historical theme after the end of the Cold War, especially considering that between 1954 and 1989 not even the new films on this conflict had significant visibility in the film festival circuit.

Yet this festival revival has an ambivalent nature, as we can see from the circulation of the contemporary films on this theme, which emanate from both sides of the former Italo-Yugoslav border. Present-day production is introducing a new cinematic narrativization of the local populations' role in the conflict, aligned with the current political realities of their countries of origin (Italy, Slovenia/Croatia). This insertion in the context is also reflected in their festival circulation – much more abundant than during the late Cold War, it is nevertheless limited and localized, being usually restricted to the region in question, as will be described later on. This is in keeping with the changing geopolitical importance of this historical episode – formerly a diplomatic argument that had a major influence on the drawing of the territorial and ideological map of bipolar Europe, the Trieste Crisis and the memory thereof is today a local issue that primarily concerns political and cultural actors of the countries involved. With these changes, resulting in the growing need to reach the local, and the decreasing need to reach the European audiences, we can also observe a change in the visibility of these films – they are more interesting to local festivals than to those outside the region. At the same time, filmmakers

34. The adoption of the Resolution 1481 on the need of condemnation of crimes of totalitarian communist regimes (2006), proclamation of 23 August as European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism (2008), adoption of the Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism (2009).

35. Article 1, Law of 30 March 2004, n92, published in the Gazzetta Ufficiale n. 86, 13 April 2004.

36. The festival was opened literally one day after the opening of the Berlin wall, on November 10. See https://www.torinofilmfest.org/it/edizioni/7-festival-internazionale-cinema-giovani/7/ (Last Accessed: 01-05-2022).

37. Copies of both films were restaured in 2000s, *Hearts without Borders* in 2000, and *The Suffering Town* in 2008.

38. *Hearts without Boundaries*, *Memories* (*Cuori senza frontiere*, *ricordi* /*spomini*, Martina Kafol, EuroWanderkino, ITA, 1999).

often work in cooperation with TV stations, which participate in the production of these films and therefore act as their display window, as outlined below.

Regarding contemporary Italian production, enhanced financial opportunities combined with the strengthening of the right-wing political parties have laid the ground for the promotion of a nationalist cinematic narrative centred around the memory of the lost fatherland on the other side of the Adriatic. The cinematic image of the Julian March (native) populations shaped by this narrative reveals a much more obvious division between heroes (good Italians) and villains (evil Yugoslavs) than the one constructed and promoted through film production from the early Cold War. Although the Italian films from the 40s and 50s, such as *The Suffering Town* and *Hearts without Borders*, usually portraited Slavs as malicious and/or unrefined, at the time this image was nevertheless somehow nuanced, and a Slavic movie character would also have some positive characteristics. We see this process at work in *The Suffering Town*, in a scene in which a Yugoslav woman obtains milk for an Italian woman, as well as in the closing scene of *Hearts without Borders*, when Stefano, a progressive worker of Slovenian origin, gives up fighting for the affection of his fiancée for the higher cause of her own happiness. 70 years later, the image of the barbarian Slav chasing away the Italians, who are presented as the sole indigenous population, explodes into a caricature of pure evil, as demonstrated by the two best-known contemporary Italian productions on this theme, the feature film *The Red Land – Rosso Istria* (Maximiliano Hernando Bruno, Venice Film, RAI, 2018) and the television mini-series *The Heart in the Pit* (*Il cuore nel pozzo*, Alberto Negrin, RAI, 2005). Targeted for the widest possible audience, neither one of them has so far had a notable festival circulation. Instead, their public presence is assured, with variable success, through television screenings and various kinds of special events, organized sometimes, but not primarily within the film festival framework. The change observed in the contemporary Italian production is thus dual and includes the change in narrativization fostered by an important part of the mainstream production, and the change in promotional strategies reserved for this production.

This is best exemplified in the feature *The Red Land – Rosso Istria*, which was first shown to public in a small event organized for the press and the representatives of the *esuli* organizations at the Veneto stand during the 75th Venice Film Festival (2018).[39] The film's narrative focuses on the Italian student and daughter of a prominent fascist, Norma Cossetto, who was killed by the partisans in 1943, a case emblematic of the *foibe* massacres. Its title is doubly symbolic – it refers to Cossetto's graduation paper about the bauxite in Istria, the paper she never finished as she found death in "red" Yugoslavia. Cossetto was thrown in *foibe* after being brutally raped by the partisans, as we can see in an extraordinarily long 2-minute scene. Such a fierce and unnecessarily extended scene generates an idea of partisans as foreign invaders, in this case the conquest of the woman's body stands in for the conquest of land. Throughout the film, the partisans are presented as convinced supporters of xenophobic and racist ideas, despite national equality being among the core values of their ideology. Their crimes against political enemies, which as is established historically happened despite the nationality of the assumed enemy, and thus also included Yugoslavs accused of collaboration, are repeatedly depicted as ethnically motivated. The plot also includes Italian characters who joined the partisan movement. As we have seen, something similar was conducted in the Yugoslav production, where such characters helped deny national motivations behind one's decision to join the fascist or antifascist movement. Their inclusion in this film, however, results in a recognizably propagandist take on this historical moment as they are all presented as people of questionable ethics: the ones who betray their friends, deserters, people with no values. In doing so, the film suggests that joining the antifascist movement was typical for morally suspicious characters. In addition, the fascists and communists are both described as the ones who got 'seduced' by their governments. In an unsuccessful attempt to demonstrate the complexity of historical events in Istria in WWII, the film ends up using the crime against Norma Cossetto to join the current European trend of rewriting the history of WWII by equating fascism and communism, and by extension, equating fascism and antifascism.[40]

39. The event was attended by the Presidents of the following organizations: FederEsuli, ANVGD, Associazione delle Comunità Istriane, Associazione Fiumani Italiani nel Mondo - Libero Comune di Fiume in Esilio, Associazione Italiani di Pola e Istria – Libero Comune di Pola in Esilio, Associazione Dalmati Italiani nel Mondo – Libero Comune di Zara in Esilio, Mailing List Histria, Arcipelago Adriatico. https://www.triesteprima.it/eventi/cultura/rosso-istria-film-norma-cossetto-festival-cinema-venezia-9-settembre-2018.html (Last Accessed: 01-05-2022).

40. For the left-wing activists' criticism of this trend, see Milena Rapajić's text on the DiEM25 website "New EU Resolution: How Antifascism and Fascism became the same Thing" (6/10/2019) https://diem25.org/new-eu-resolution-how-anti-fascism-and-fascism-

Although the event at the Veneto stand was marginal, the fact that the film was promoted during the famous festival gave more visibility to the statements surrounding it, such as the one by the regional councillor for education (*l'assessore regionale alla scuola*), Elena Donazzan, who described it as: "a moving work which brings truth and justice to the victims of *ethnic cleansing*."[41] Following its promotion at the Venice Film Festival, the film was shown in various special events organized by the political organizations, such as one in the Italian Senate in November 2018. The culmination of its promotion was the TV screening in RAI 3 at the occasion of *Giorno del ricordo* on February 11, 2019. With 871,000 viewers, this broadcast provided it with a national visibility much more significant than what a single film festival screening would generate.[42] However, this represents only 3.7% of total viewers share, demonstrating that such a visibility was small compared to other programmes on air the same evening in primetime. Such a rating is a consequence of the programming decision to show the film at the same time as the most popular Italian song contest, the Sanremo music festival, is broadcast live on RAI 1 (scoring up to 46,1 % of share or 9,941,000 of viewers).[43] The choice to screen the film on national television and in primetime, but to do so on the night of one of the most watched shows in the history of Italian television, reveals the ambivalent nature of the contemporary revival of this film theme. Such a twofold approach demonstrates the existence of a power struggle between the (right-wing) initiatives to promote such content and the (left-wing) attempts to put certain limits on such a promotion, bearing in mind that RAI 3 has been known of their centre-left editorial policies. However, this thus also suggest that there is a certain acceptance of this historical theme in leftist circles as well, in line with contemporary European initiatives to fight against 'all forms of totalitarianism.'[44]

Regarding the post-Yugoslav production, the way this theme is approached is markedly different from the image created on the Italian side, as well as from the one generated in the Yugoslav films of the 1945-1954 period. After the dissolution of the socialist state, new, more personal themes started emerging as contemporary filmmakers became increasingly interested in individual experiences of people living in the borderlands, rather than in describing the destiny supposedly shared by an entire population in the manner of political pamphlets. In that sense the most prominent example is the work of Slovenian filmmaker Anja Medved, from the divided town of Gorizia/Nova Gorica. She has directed various documentaries and video-works both independently and together with her mother, Nadja Velušček, dealing with the impact of the imposed borderline on the locals' lives, including *My Borderline* (*Moja meja*, Kinoatelje, RAI Slovenian Programme Trieste, SLO/ITA, 2002), *Town in a Meadow* (*Mesto na travniku*, Kinoatelje, SLO/ITA, 2004), and *View through the Iron Curtain* (*Pogled skozi železno zaveso*, Kinoatelje, SLO/ITA, 2010). They provide a valuable insight into the discrepancies between personal and collective memory of the main events related to the division over this area, such as the construction of Nova Gorica (New Gorizia) on the Yugoslav side once Gorizia was assigned to Italy in 1947. Very well known in the area, Medved's and Velušček's opus has had more significant festival exposure than any other artist's working on this theme. This has included multiple screenings in the Trieste Film Festival, Festival of Slovenian Film in Portorož, The Kino otok – Isola Cinema Festival and the festival 'A Film for Peace', organized by the municipality of Medea (province of Goriza). Yet, when it comes to presentations outside of the region, they are fewer. One of the most important ones is the screening of *Timeless River* (*Trenutak reke – Il tempo del fiume*, Kinoatelje, 2010), about the border-river Soča, in the London International Documentary Festival (Special Mention, 2011). Other than this, festival screenings of their work usually involve smaller and medium scale festivals, often in Northern Italy ('It's My Film' home movies festival in Vicenza, Trento Film Festival, Sondrio Festival, Etnofilmfest in Rovigo, Sguardi Altrove Women's Film Festival in Milan). Such a festival circulation confirms that the festival programmers' renewed interest in this film theme is quite localized,

became-the-same-thing/ (Last Accessed: 05-11-2021).

41. Press release of the Veneto Regional Council [*Giunta regionale Veneto*], 7 September 2018, available: http://www.regioni.it/dalleregioni/2018/09/07/veneto-mostra-del-cinema-assessore-donazzan-a-presentazione-di-rosso-istria-il-film-su-norma-cossetto-opera-commovente-che-restituisce-verita-e-giustizia-alle-vittime-577184/ (Last Accessed: 01-03-2022).

42. https://www.rbcasting.com/flash-news/2019/02/09/ascolti-tv-venerdi-8-febbraio-2019-sanremo-quarta-serata-al-46-1-95-mln-rai-1/ (Last Accessed: 10-05-2022).

43. *Ibid*.

44. The leadership of the Italian national television has been for decades divided between the main political groups: RAI 1 is considered to be pro-government, RAI 2 centre-right and RAI 3 centre-left. See: https://www.ilpost.it/2021/05/03/nomine-rai-politica/ (Last Accessed: 30-08-2022).

being significantly greater in the disputed area itself than in other Italian and European regions.[45]

In keeping with the observation sometimes attributed to Mark Twain that humour equals tragedy plus time, the new political context has also made room for comedies. The new generation of filmmakers, unburdened by the necessity to prove its own nation's right over the contested territory, is open to critically questioning such tendencies in the local cultural and political life. That is the case with the Slovenian filmmaker Žiga Virc's graduate satirical short *Trieste is Ours* (*Trst je naš*, AGRFT, RTV Slovenia, 2009). Somewhere in between a parody of the partisan movies, and a criticism of the Slovenian dissatisfaction with the loss of Trieste, *Trieste is Ours* shows the efforts of a contemporary Slovenian man to again 'liberate' Trieste with the help of his own partisan unit. Despite it being a graduation film with festival circulation mostly limited to its homeland Slovenia, *Trieste is Ours* did prompt a top political reaction from the Italian side. Franco Frattini, serving as the Minister of Foreign Affairs (2009) condemned the film saying that it rubbed salt into Italian wounds, proving once again the importance of the memory of the struggle for the Northern Adriatic for the contemporary Italian politics.[46]

Conclusion

As I have sought to demonstrate, various degrees of presence of films about the struggle for the Northern Adriatic in the public space throughout history are in accord with the political interests that marked different periods in the involved countries. Hence, with the passage from the early Cold War to the contemporary post-socialist societies, the level of visibility of this this historical theme has changed, rising on the regional, and declining on the European level. Equally important, the approach to the theme has also altered, which is reflected in the way the local populations are presented in this corpus of films. On the one hand, in the Italian productions a less nuanced image of the Slavic populations has resurfaced, with simplified division between "good" (Italians) and "evil" (Slavs). Such a division serves the nationalist purpose of forging cultural memory that relativizes the fascist past, through glorifying the victims of one's own nation, while putting aside its own wrongdoings. Conversely, post-Yugoslav production has offered a more nuanced image of the events in question, with a more personal and varied approach to this theme than in the films made in the early socialist years.

Together with the evolution of the dominant narratives constructed through these films, the way they are promoted has also undergone certain modifications. Increased state support, improved production possibilities and multiple screening opportunities, including not only film festivals, but also television, as well as various special events within the marking of the *Giorno del ricordo*, indicate a clear change in priorities when it comes to cinematic memorial practices related to this topic. Growing popularisation of the memory of the struggle for the Northern Adriatic in Italy demonstrates how the role of film festivals in shaping cultural memories has changed from their beginnings to the present day. In the context of their rising number and development of both television and the new media, film festivals' impact is increasingly dependent on their size and prestige, but also on reliance on television and new media for the promotion of their programs as the audio-visual landscape fragments and diversifies. This is especially the case when it comes to smaller festivals that do not (yet) necessarily have the prestige in question. In such a situation, when it is necessary to quickly popularize a certain topic and present it as a theme of national importance, television, as a medium that quickly and directly addresses the largest possible number of viewers, emerges as a more obvious option to reach audiences than film festival screenings. Hence, despite the renewed film festival interest in this theme, the priority for showing the contemporary film production is given to a much more powerful display – television, which is also often providing significant funding for the production of these films, a signifier of the ongoing convergence across the mediums.[47]

45. Medved has also presented her work in exhibitions in some of the world's biggest hubs of culture, such as Paris, New York and Moscow, however this does not encompass festival screenings.

46. https://www.dnevnik.si/1042312886 (Last Accessed: 10-05-2022).

47. Both *Rosso Istria* and *The Heart in the Pit* are (co-)produced by RAI.

The functioning of film festivals has significantly changed from the early post-WWII period to the present: festival curators have much easier access to films and more options in selecting their programs. However, the shift in the presence of the theme of the Trieste Crisis at festivals, from its complete absence during most of the Cold War to the fact that today even the films from the 40a and 50s are being presented, indicates that there is a continuity when it comes to the influence that institutional support or lack thereof can have on programming practices. The example of the struggle for the Northern Adriatic therefore indicates that film festival organizers, in spite of what they might wish for themselves, operate in a milieu that is deeply enmeshed in politics: they stand somewhere in between being the subjects who are maintaining the political context in which they are working, and cultural actors trying to influence and change these contexts.

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