

Persecution, Displacement, Internment: World War II and the «Axis» Powers in Slovenia (1941-1943)

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Abstract – Persecution, Displacement, Internment: World War II and the «Axis» Powers in Slovenia (1941-1943)

This article will focus on population shifts, persecution and forced displacements in Slovenia between 1941 and 1943. It will therefore consider the period of Italian occupation and what these phenomena meant in the larger context of Italian occupation policies and the interactions with its allies in former Yugoslavia. By doing so, the article will add to our understanding of the war scenario in Slovenia and Yugoslavia and to our knowledge of relations between the «Axis» powers, as well as the interconnectedness of different policies during the war. This is a good example for the situation created in Yugoslavia during World War II, as it portrays on the one hand, policies implemented by Italy and Germany to achieve their respective goals of Italianization and Germanization of their occupation zones, and, on the other hand, what repercussions those policies had on a much wider territory, including Croatia and Serbia.

Key words: Yugoslavia, Slovenia, World War II, Displacements

Parole chiave: Jugoslavia, Slovenia, Seconda guerra mondiale, Spostamenti forzati

During the occupation of Yugoslavia by the «Axis» powers – especially the period ranging from the attack on Yugoslavia in April 1941 and the Italian armistice of September 1943 – Italy, Germany, Hungary and the Independent State of Croatia, implemented different policies to secure their administration in formerly Yugoslav territories and to create «ethnically homogenous» territorial entities in the long run. The two major powers involved in this process, Italy and Germany, were both interested in the expansion of their national boundaries into the Balkans. Therefore, those territories directly administered and occupied by Rome and Berlin (as well as Budapest) ought to become integral parts of the respective countries in the end. For this purpose, both regimes – albeit not with the same fervour – aimed at 1) denying cultural and economic freedoms to the Slavic populations inhabiting those territories, 2) forcing unwelcomed parts of those communities to emigrate or assimilate under the threat of internment and 3) introduce new settlers to colonize acquired lands. The third regime in this scenario, the Independent State of Croatia, had its own ambitions. In this case, the drive was mostly directed against Serbian communities. These peoples were subject to harassment, internment and annihilation during the existence of the Croatian satellite state of the «Axis» powers.

This article will mostly focus on population shifts, persecution and forced displacements in Slovenia between 1941 and 1943. It will therefore consider the period of Italian occupation and what these phenomena meant in the larger context of Italian

occupation policies and the interactions with its allies in former Yugoslavia. By doing so, the article will add to our understanding of the war scenario in Slovenia and Yugoslavia and to our knowledge of relations between the «Axis» powers, as well as the interconnectedness of different policies during the war. This is a good example for the situation created in Yugoslavia during World War II, as it portrays on the one hand, policies implemented by Italy and Germany to achieve their respective goals of Italianization and Germanization of their occupation zones, and, on the other hand, what repercussions those policies had on a much wider territory, including Croatia and Serbia.

The article focuses on Italian sources, as it details how the Italian occupation regime dealt with population shifts in Slovenia and its role in this scenario. Furthermore, by including the rich literature on German occupation policies in Slovenia and population shifts, it is possible to reassess these very policies from a new perspective.

The Dismemberment of Yugoslavia¹

To understand the complex situation in Yugoslavia and especially Slovenia during World War II, it is imperative to compare the goals and strategies of Italy, Germany and Croatia before and in the aftermath of the war against Yugoslavia². After the April war, the «Axis» powers partitioned the country. Italy gained control of most of Dalmatia, Montenegro and Kosovo, as well as the southwestern part of Slovenia. Germany controlled north-eastern Slovenia and installed a puppet regime in Serbia, controlling the land militarily. Hungary was rewarded with the easternmost part of Slovenia, as well as parts of eastern Croatia and northern Serbia. Bulgaria gained control of most of Macedonia and parts of eastern Serbia. Finally, the Independent State of Croatia encompassed what was left of Dalmatia, Croatia proper, Syrmia, as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina. The head of this puppet regime was Ante Pavelić, a radical nationalist, inspired by fascist and national-socialist ideas, who had spent most of the interwar period in Italy, preparing with a

¹ For this topic and further details on occupation policies in Yugoslavia, see: J. Tomasevich, *War and revolution in Yugoslavia 1941–1945. Occupation and Collaboration*, University Press, Stanford 2001; K. Schmider, *Partisanenkrieg in Jugoslawien 1941–1944*, E. S. Mittler und Sohn Verlag, Hamburg 2002; *Die "Achse" im Krieg. Politik, Ideologie und Kriegführung 1939–1945*, a. c. di L. Klinkhammer, A. Osti Guerrazzi, T. Schlemmer, Ferdinand Schöningh, Paderborn 2010; D. Rodogno, *Il nuovo ordine mediterraneo. Le politiche di occupazione dell'Italia fascista in Europa (1940–1943)*, Bollati Boringhieri, Torino 2003; H. J. Burgwyn, *L'impero sull'adriatico. Mussolini e la conquista della Jugoslavia 1941–1943*, LEG, Gorizia 2006; E. Gobetti, *L'occupazione Allegra. Gli italiani in Jugoslavia (1941–1943)*, Carocci, Roma 2007; Id., *Alleati del nemico. L'occupazione italiana in Jugoslavia (1941–1943)*, Laterza, Roma 2013; D. Conti, *L'occupazione italiana dei Balcani. Crimini di guerra e mito della "brava gente" (1940–1943)*, Odradek, Roma 2008; B. Petranović, *Srbija u drugom svetskom ratu 1939–1945*, Vojnoizdavački i novinski centar, Beograd 1992.

² For details, see: Z. Čepič, D. Guštin, N. Troha, *La Slovenia durante la Seconda Guerra mondiale*, Istituto Friulano Per La Storia Del Movimento Di Liberazione, Udine 2012; T. Ferenc, *La provincia "italiana" di Lubiana*.

couple of hundred self-styled revolutionaries for the uprising against the Yugoslav state³. Italy, Germany and Croatia mainly dictated policies in former Yugoslavia, although not to the same extent. No territorial decision could be taken against the will of Germany and Croatia was divided between the two bigger partners of the «Axis» powers into two zones of influence, in which they could act according to their security needs. Nevertheless, Croatia adopted its own policies and pursued its goals ruthlessly⁴.

Italy did not see the lands beyond the Alpine ridge as a part of its imperial plans. In fact, when it came to Slovenia, Italian ambitions had been satisfied after World War I⁵. Nevertheless, Italian policy included the attempt to portray the region as somewhat belonging to the Italian sphere of influence, once the die was cast. In fact, studies completed after the war against Yugoslavia assumed that Italy, just like the Roman Empire in ancient times, would control some regions that were not part of irredentist wishes, to assure Italy's domination in south-eastern Europe⁶. The borders between the Italian and German occupation zones were drawn in Berlin, to the dissatisfaction of Rome. Accordingly, all major industrial sites remained firmly under German control⁷. Finally, the implementation of direct rule was a measure to crush any ambitions of self-determination by the Slovenian population⁸. The incorporation of a region inhabited by 336.000 people and including the cultural and political centre of Slovenia, Ljubljana, with its 90.000 inhabitants, came more as a necessity resulting from the war, rather than a clear-cut plan⁹. In the first months of occupation, the Italian administration aimed at establishing good relations with the local population and at enabling a regime of collaboration with the local church and anti-communist dignitaries of the interwar period, in what was now the «Province

Documenti 1941–1942, Istituto Friulano Per La Storia Del Movimento Di Liberazione, Udine 1994; M. Cuzzi, *L'occupazione italiana della Slovenia (1941–1943)*, Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito, Ufficio Storico, Roma 1998; T. Griesser-Pečar, *Das zerrissene Volk. Slowenien 1941–1946*, Böhlau, Wien 2003; A. Osti Guerrazzi, *L'esercito italiano in Slovenia 1941–1943*, Viella, Roma 2011; G. J. Kranjc, *To Walk with the Devil. Slovene Collaboration and Axis Occupation 1941–1945*, University Press, Toronto 2013.

³ B. Krizman, *Ante Pavelić i Ustaše*, Globus, Zagreb 1978; Id., *Pavelić između Hitlera i Mussolinija*, Globus, Zagreb 1983; N. Bartulin, *The Racial Idea in the Independent State of Croatia: Origins and Theory*, Brill, Leiden et al. 2014.

⁴ See: A. Korb, *Im Schatten des Weltkriegs. Massengewalt der Ustaša gegen Serben, Juden und Roma in Kroatien 1941–1945*, Hamburger Edition, Hamburg 2013.

⁵ Archivio Fondazione ISEC. Fondo Gasparotto, b.10, fasc. 38. Verbale riunione di generali con Mussolini a Gorizia, 31 July 1942, available online at <http://www.criminidiguerra.it/RapportoDuce.shtml>, accessed on 21 November 2018.

⁶ See as an example: E. Migliorini, *La Provincia di Lubiana*, Cremonese, Roma 1943.

⁷ See: K. Ruzicic-Kessler, *Italiaener auf dem Balkan. Besatzungspolitik in Jugoslawien 1941 – 1943*, De Gruyter Oldenbourg, München 2017, pp. 96–126.

⁸ M. Cuzzi, *La Slovenia italiana*, in *L'occupazione italiana della Jugoslavia*, a c. di F. Caccamo, L. Monzali, Le Lettere, Firenze 2008, pp. 221–256, here p. 227; M. Kacin Wohinz, J. Pirjevec, *Storia degli sloveni in Italia 1866–1998*, Marsilio, Padova 1998, p.75.

⁹ K. Ruzicic-Kessler, *Italiaener*, cit., pp. 97–100.; E. Gobetti, *Alleati del nemico*, cit., p. 12.

of Lubiana»¹⁰. Only after the summer of 1941 did the threat emanating from insurgents become a real problem in Slovenia. Thereafter, Italy implemented a more and more ruthless policy toward Slovenes suspected of being active or passive sympathizers of the partisans.

Germany developed a rather different approach to the question of rule in Yugoslavia in general, and in Slovenia in particular. In most cases, Berlin chose indirect rule over the implementation of German authority. While Italy aimed at conquering what it saw as the final step to fulfilling its irredentist dream on the eastern Adriatic shores, Germany was waging a war to secure German domination in central and eastern Europe. The Balkans were a mere secondary theatre in its grand scheme for the future of the continent. Consequently, friendly puppet regimes and indirect rule were the principal goals in former Yugoslavia. In Slovenia the situation was different. Those parts of the country occupied in 1941 were indeed meant to become an integral part of the Reich and its south-easternmost border, as these lands were perceived as having historically belonged to German peoples, whereas they had been «Yugoslavized» in the interwar period. Therefore, German authorities engineered a plan of cultural submission, ethnic cleansing and Germanization of north-eastern Slovenia¹¹.

Finally, the regime in Croatia had its own vision of a homogenous country, which was mostly aimed at destroying the livelihood of the Serbian population, which made up 2 million of its inhabitants¹². In fact, Ante Pavelić's Ustaša movement had not developed a coherent strategy on the organization of state during the interwar period. Most of its ideas were directed against the ruling class of Yugoslavia and against what it perceived as Serbian domination of Croatia¹³. Therefore, the program for an independent country was largely based on racism and the rather mythical perception of a 1.400 year-long history of the Croatian nation¹⁴.

The three visions show different ideas and approaches to the Yugoslav territory. These approaches were intertwined between 1941 and 1943 and actions taken in one part of the territory had their consequences on other regions as well. The following sections will focus on policies of migration, forced displacements and ethnic homogenization, showing which repercussions the policies of the three allies on Yugoslav soil had on partitioned Slovenia, but also on an interregional scale.

¹⁰ G. J. Kranjc, *To Walk with the Devil*, cit., p. 54; T. Griesser-Pečar, *Das zerrissene Volk*, cit., pp. 62, 66; J. Tomasevich, *Occupation and Collaboration*, cit., pp. 95–98.

¹¹ See: T. Griesser-Pečar, *Das zerrissene Volk*, cit.

¹² B. Krizman, *Pavelić između Hitlera i Mussolinija*, cit., pp. 117ff.

¹³ F. Jelić-Butić, *Ustaše i Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*, Globus, Zagreb 1977, pp. 24f.; E. Gobetti, *L'occupazione Allegra*, cit., p. 55.; B. Krizman, *Pavelić i Ustaše*, cit., pp. 85 ff.

¹⁴ H. Sundhaussen, *Der Ustascha-Staat. Anatomie eines Herrschaftssystems*, in «Österreichische Osthefte», 2:1995, pp. 497–534, here pp. 510ff.

Slovenia: A Focal Point of Violence and Homogenization Attempts

After an overview of different plans and patterns of control on Yugoslav soil, the analysis will continue with the case of Slovenia and its ramifications on the Yugoslav territory, as well as its importance for Italy and its goals in the region.

The question of the «Volksdeutsche» or «ethnic Germans» – German-speaking inhabitants, mostly of the «Gottschee» region in Italian occupied Slovenia – was one of the first problems Berlin wanted to solve. As this territory belonged to Italy after the dismemberment of Yugoslavia, collaboration between the allies was paramount to find a viable solution, to transfer these populations to Germany¹⁵. When Adolf Hitler visited Maribor on 26 April 1941, he met a delegation from Gottschee. He took the opportunity to reassure the delegation that the future of the «Volksdeutsche» would lie in the «Greater German Reich»¹⁶. Indeed, Germany's plan to annex those parts of Slovenia occupied after the war with Yugoslavia resulted from the assertion that 25.000 Germans lived in southern Styria (the term used for those parts of Styria formerly belonging to Austria-Hungary that became a part of Yugoslavia after 1918) and 2.500 in Upper Carniola. Adding 12.000 Germans from Gottschee, as well as other colonists, the goal was to secure an overwhelming German majority in occupied Slovenia and to Germanize these lands¹⁷. The idea of «bringing home» Germans from Italian territories was one main concern in Berlin and a propaganda goal of German policy in south-eastern Europe.

In June 1941 already, the High Commissioner of the Italian Province of Lubiana, Emilio Grazioli, had noted that all Germans inside the province were part of a cultural union and therefore, it would be a simple task to coordinate their emigration to the north. Moreover, the fascist regime intended to provide for the settling of Italian colonists to formerly German-inhabited territories¹⁸. Both the German embassy in Rome and the consulate in Ljubljana were concerned with the resettling. Rome and Ljubljana were informed that «some 10.000 Volksdeutsche» would emigrate to Germany. This made it necessary to organize mixed Italian-German commissions for a smooth and efficient transition of these peoples¹⁹. In fact, Italian authorities in the province saw the German minority as a general problem. On the one hand, Germans were accused of complaining too much about the post-war situation, whereas – according to Grazioli – the area inhabited by Germans was privileged in terms of nutrition and security. A more critical problem was the fact that the German com-

¹⁵ For more details on this question, see: M. Ferenc, *Die Beschlagnahme des Eigentums der Gottscheer Deutschen*, in: «Südost-Forschungen. Internationale Zeitschrift für Geschichte, Kultur und Landeskunde Südosteuropas», Vol. 72 (2013), pp. 133–157; M. Ferenc, *Delo nemške kulturne komisije na Kočevskem (1941-1942)*, in: *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino*, vol. 42, no. 1 (2002), pp. 93–108.

¹⁶ A. Suppan, *Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas: Zwischen Adria und Karawanken*, Siedler, Berlin 1998, pp. 400f.

¹⁷ J. Tomasevich, *Occupation and Collaboration*, cit., p. 85.

¹⁸ K. Ruzicic-Kessler, *Italiener*, cit., p. 161.

¹⁹ Archivio Storico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri [ASMAE]. Gabinetto [GAB]-Affari Politici [AP] 1923–1943, b. 1505. Appunto per il Ministero degli Affari Esteri, GABAP. 21 July 1941.

munity failed to recognize Italian authority, a rather frustrating situation for the provincial administration. Grazioli threatened to ban all German associations if they did not accept «the prestige and authority» of Italy²⁰. Indeed, German organizations rather contacted Berlin or the German consulate in Ljubljana in matters concerning the Italian province. After direct talks between Rome and Berlin, the question was solved by concluding that the «Volksdeutsche» would communicate with the Italian administration in the future²¹.

On 31 August 1941 the agreement for the resettling of German citizens and «Volksdeutsche» from the Province of Lubiana was signed in Rome. These individuals would be transferred into the «Reich», while special contact points were set-up in Ljubljana and Gottschee. The «Volksdeutsche» therefore acquired the right to receive German citizenship while renouncing to Italian nationality in the process. Those wishing to emigrate ought to notify district authorities until 30 September. Emigrants could also transport their net financial assets to Germany, without restrictions or taxation. Neither were stocks and bonds subject to restrictions. Special clauses were placed on Italian stocks. Moreover, article 9 of the agreement stated that the emigration would be completed until 30 November²². This was indeed an ambitious plan. Yet it was also merely a first step in a much wider program of resettling throughout the Yugoslav territory. It was also the only plan produced and implemented by the «Axis» powers rather smoothly. This was due to a convergence of interests. Germany aimed at «bringing home» all German minorities scattered across Europe. Italy and Germany planned to create homogenous regions in Slovenia in the long term. Finally, the German minority living in what was then Italian territory was willing to emigrate into the national boundaries of Hitler's «Reich».

Yet, the ambitious plan and time table of resettling 10-12.000 individuals who were willing to find a new home in Germany, is dwarfed by plans of forced expulsion and resettling of hundreds of thousands of Slavs inside the borders of former Yugoslavia, to create «ethnically» homogenous territories. Croatia, for instance, had its own plans of «bringing home» minorities from the Burgenland region in what was Austria until 1938, as well as Croats living in Istria and Dalmatia. Moreover, the plan encompassed also the Croatian emigration to North and South America. All those Croats who had emigrated and their descendants would contribute to Croatia's economy and society in the future and guarantee the implementation of an «ethnically pure» state – at least according to the regime of Ante Pavelić²³.

From the start of the occupation, Slovenes would be forced to resettle from the German occupation zone to Serbia and Croatia. Therefore, German authorities aimed at a massive expulsion of peoples from their territories in Slovenia. This in

²⁰ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1510. Grazioli al Ministero dell'Interno. 2 July 1941.

²¹ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1510. Pietromarchi a Grazioli. 30 June 1941.

²² ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1494. Abkommen über die Umsiedelung der deutschen Staatsangehörigen und Volksdeutschen aus der Provinz Ljubljana. 31 August 1941.

²³ A. Korb, *Im Schatten des Weltkriegs*, cit., pp. 175f.

turn led to frictions with Italian authorities. Those ethnic Slovenes who were Italian citizens and who lived in the German occupation zone or possessed houses and land in the region, demanded for a solution of their situation. The question was how to handle the resettling issue. Indeed, those Slovenes who could claim Italian citizenship through birth tried to avoid the fate of so many of their fellow compatriots²⁴. An Italian-German commission was tasked to find a solution deemed acceptable on both sides of the border. Unsurprisingly, Italian representatives demanded that populations belonging to the Province of Lubiana should have the same rights – in financial terms – to the «Volksdeutsche». More precisely, Rome wished that dispossessions, the confiscation of goods, houses, etc., would not be applied to persons claiming Italian citizenship, allowing them to transfer their possessions to the south²⁵. Italian scepticism toward Germany derived mainly from episodes witnessed in Slovenia during the first months of occupation. The first waves of forced expulsions of the summer 1941 included some individuals who had Italian citizenship²⁶. To avoid this in the future a juridical framework was desperately required. Berlin signalled its willingness to consider the situation of those individuals belonging to Italy. All those who, prior to the war with Yugoslavia, had their residence in what became Italian territory, could liquidate their possessions on German soil, without fearing taxation. The rule would explicitly not apply to those groups and individuals who had resettled on Italian territory after the war and dismemberment of Yugoslavia and could not prove any birthright. Moreover, Jews were exempted from any such rule²⁷.

In the fall of 1941, further financial agreements were stipulated, concerning those 12.000 Germans leaving Italian territories in Slovenia. Italy would compensate them for lost goods and estates. Germany pledged to do the same for some 18.000 Slovenes who had left the German zone of Slovenia and Carinthia, to reach Italy. This agreement also encompassed those Slovenes who lived in Italian territory but had possessions in Germany²⁸. Slovenes belonging to the Italian zone of influence could yet again liquidate their estates without taxation. Nevertheless, the liquidation could only be achieved through «sale to the agent appointed by the Reich Commissioner for the Strengthening of the German National Character». Moreover, German authorities were allowed to confiscate goods and estates with compensation if they did not accept the price offered by the emigrants²⁹. It is obvi-

²⁴ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1510. R. Consolato Graz, al Ministero Affari Esteri, Accordo italo-tedesco per rimpatrio originari tedeschi. 20 November 1941.

²⁵ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1505. Ministero Affari Esteri, Gab. A.P. a Governatorato di Lubiana. 1 December 1941; *ibidem*. Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Gab.A.P. al R. Ministero Interno, R. Min. Scambi e Valute [...], Situazione Sloveni emigrati a Lubiana da territori tedeschi. 28 October 1941; *ibidem*, Proposta germanica.

²⁶ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1505. R. Consolato, Sarajevo, al Ministero degli Affari Esteri, GABAP. 7 August 1941.

²⁷ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1510. R. Ambasciata Berlino, al Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Gabap, Accordi per Sloveni. 4 October 1941.

²⁸ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1493. Appunto ministero affari esteri. 19 November 1941.

²⁹ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1510. Accordo italo germanico per la sistemazione economica degli Sloveni nati nel territorio italiano di Lubiana ed ivi pertinenti, 10 December 1941.

ous that the German procedure was quite arbitrary, and that Berlin could dictate the terms of contract. The comparison between this ruling and the one concerning the «Volksdeutsche» is interesting indeed. The paragraphs of the two agreements had their similarities, yet the execution was very different. While German assets were not subject to any limitation, authorities in German occupied Slovenia could decide on the fate of assets that left the territory quite arbitrarily. This practice also reached into the judicial sector, when it came to the treatment of suspects³⁰. For instance, when a court in Maribor ruled the case of some 30 alleged members of resistance forces in Slovenia in 1942, some of the accused were Italian citizens. German authorities should have consulted with their Italian colleagues on how to treat these individuals, yet all accused were executed, proving how little Italian documents were worth north of the Italian-German border³¹.

Germany also discussed the question of Slovenia in the context of a broader strategy for former Yugoslavia with its Croatian ally. The German envoy to Zagreb, Siegfried Kasche, met on 4 June 1941 with Croatian ministers, to discuss resettling plans. 180.000 Slovenes were due to leave their homes and emigrate to Croatia, leaving factories, enterprises and arable land to new German settlers. At the same time, Croatia would force some 200.000 Serbs to emigrate to German occupied Serbia³². The first wave of expulsion from German held Slovenia affected 5.000 people in June 1941 already. This group was deported to Serbia³³. In August 1941 the transports toward Croatia began³⁴. These first transports stopped at Italian railway stations, before continuing their journey to the south. Therefore, Italian authorities directly witnessed the fate of «thousands of voices screaming against Germany»³⁵. Thereafter, these transports would not stop at Italian stations anymore. When, in August 1941, parts of the population of the village of Žiri, to the west of Ljubljana, was deported by German police, many others fled with what they could carry toward the Province of Lubiana or Italy proper³⁶. The prefecture of Gorizia was mostly invested with these shifts, since the two main directions of escape for the Slovenian population were to Ljubljana in the south and Gorizia in the west. The prefecture expressed its concern

³⁰ Objava nemačkog generallajtnanta Rösener-a od 3. januara 1942. god. O streljanju trideset i šest talaca, pripadnika narodnooslobodilačkog pokreta, in: Vojnoistoriski Institut Jugoslovenske Narodne Armije (Ed.), *Zbornik Dokumenta i Podataka o Narodno-Oslobodilačkom Ratu Jugoslovenskih Naroda, Tom VI, knj. 2, Borbe u Sloveniji 1942 god.*, Vojno Delo, Beograd 1953, p. 307.

³¹ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1510. R. Consolato d'Italia, Graz, alla R. Ambasciata d'Italia, Berlino, 15 April 1942.

³² Korb, *Im Schatten des Weltkriegs*, p. 169; ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1505. Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Uff. II, al R. Ministero dell'Interno, Scambio popolazioni slovene e serbe. 12 June 1941.

³³ Bericht der Kroatischen Delegation beim Umsiedlungsstab Untersteiermark über die Organisation der Aussiedlung von Slowenen, 12 June 1941, published in the digital edition of the book: T. Ferenc, *Quellen zur nationalsozialistischen Entnationalisierungspolitik in Slowenien, 1941–1945*, Založba Obzorja, Maribor 1980. See: <http://karawankengrenze.at/ferenc/index.php?r=documentshow&id=88>, accessed on 21 November 2018.

³⁴ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1505. Trasferimento sloveni in Croazia. 10 August 1943.

³⁵ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1510. Salvatore Rosa a Ministro Affari Esteri. 18 July 1941.

³⁶ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1510. Ministero degli Affari Esteri all'Alto Commissario per la Provincia di Lubiana. 9 August 1941.

over German brutality that left the population no choice but to emigrate to a safer place, such as Italy. Yet this concern was also aimed at the problems that could result from a massive immigration³⁷. Such episodes could be witnessed all across German occupied Slovenia after the signing of the German-Croatian agreement on population exchanges and were thus a motor for the immigration into Italian territory. The conditions of the civilians upon departure were miserable. They could only carry 20 kilograms of goods with them and endured «racial examinations»³⁸.

In April 1941, German authorities already decided that all those people who had entered German occupied Slovenia after 1 January 1914 would have to contact the authorities and state their national allegiance³⁹. The bureau of the Reich Commissioner for the Consolidation of German Nationhood was the focal point for the implementation of such measures concerning the emigration of Slovenes not only to Serbia and Croatia, but also to the «Reich» and Poland. Therefore, it is not astonishing that many chose to leave their homes and seek refuge among relatives and friends in the Italian occupation zone. Moreover, in the summer of 1941 a solution to the problem of Slovenes born in newly acquired Italian territory but residing in the German zone, was not yet established. Unsurprisingly, the Italian consul in Graz summarized the situation by pointing out that many Slovenes «looked with jealousy to their brothers living in our province, [...] spared from such measures». Yet the consul did understand why Germany enforced such rules, he was merely contrary to the execution. In fact, «it is obvious that the goal of these extreme measures, is not to leave any insidious elements inside the borders of the Reich, as these could threaten internal security in the future»⁴⁰. Germany presented the measures to be taken toward Slovenes according to their «Germanization capability» in July 1941:

Slovenian *intelligentsia* must be racially screened. Racially valuable [elements] will not be evacuated to Serbia but sent to the old Reich for Germanization. Of the people who have immigrated after 1 January 1914, only those will be relocated who have been politically active against Germany [...]. Those who have immigrated after 1 January 1914 and were not politically active against Germany, but still pose a threat to Germanization [...] are to be transferred to the old Reich. The directive to evacuate the population within 20km of the border, is subject to restriction, whereas racially valuable people, who do not pose a threat to the Germanization of the territory, may stay⁴¹.

³⁷ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1510. Rapporto fiduciario sul comportamento delle truppe di occupazione germanica nei riguardi delle popolazioni slovene. 22 May 1941.

³⁸ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1510. Ministero degli Affari Esteri alla Dir. Gen. A.E.M., Appunto segreto. 30 July 1941.

³⁹ Quellen zur nationalsozialistischen Entnationalisierungspolitik, Dok. 31. Rundschreiben des Politischen Kommissars für den Bezirk Cilli-Land (Celje-okolica) zur Erfassung der Zugewanderten. 23 April 1941. See: <http://karawankengrenze.at/ferenc/index.php?r=documentshow&id=31>, accessed on 21 November 2018.

⁴⁰ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1510. R. Consolato d'Italia, Graz, al R. Ministero Affari Esteri. 22 July 1941.

⁴¹ Quellen zur nationalsozialistischen Entnationalisierungspolitik, Dok. 100. Richtlinien des Reichskommissars für die Festigung deutschen Volkstums für die Aussiedlung von Slowenen aus den besetzten Gebieten Kärntens

The German plan envisaged the permanent relocation of some 300.000 Slovenes to be replaced by German colonists. To achieve its racial plans, Berlin wanted to proceed in three ways. First, large parts of the Slovenian population would be forced to emigrate. Second, German populations from Italy and other parts of Europe would occupy the land. Third, all remaining peoples would be Germanized⁴². Until the end of World War II only a part of the planned deportations were executed. Of the 300.000 Slovenes who should leave their homes, some 80.000 were actually transferred. Although this was less than a third of the predetermined number, it was nevertheless 10 percent of the total Slovenian population living in German occupied areas⁴³. Moreover, since this emigration concerned an important part of the local intelligentsia, the organization of resistance movements could be hampered: schools lost their teachers and of 275 priests in German occupied areas, 152 were incarcerated and 66 deported until the end of August 1941⁴⁴.

Croatia pursued similar goals. In the first months after the creation of the state, tens of thousands of Serbs were deported, creating a Croatian majority in some mixed areas of the country. Thousands of Serbs were attacked, murdered or interned in the summer of 1941. Indeed, after the signing of the German-Croatian agreement on population exchange of June 1941, Zagreb did everything in its power to force the Serbian population into Serbia. This in turn exacerbated the situation in German controlled Serbia. Until mid-July an impressive number of 180.000 Serbs were expelled from Croatia, while a typhoid epidemic among the exiled threatened the German administration⁴⁵. This forced German authorities to halt any further immigration of Serbs from Croatia, resulting in further internments in the infamous Jasenovac concentration camp in Croatia⁴⁶. Whereas the Serbs were targeted and forced to leave their homes, the 141 districts of Croatia were instructed to prepare for the accommodation of 2.500 Slovenes each⁴⁷.

These movements were observed by Italian legations on Croatian soil. In Banja Luka for instance, Croatian authorities had provided for the disappropriation of a vast number of its inhabitants. The Italian consulate concluded that 2.000 Serbs had already left the country toward Serbia and that Croatian authorities clearly aimed at producing a Croatian majority among the population⁴⁸. Yet, it has to be stated

und Krains. 7 July 1941. See: <http://karawankengrenze.at/ferenc/index.php?r=documentshow&id=100>, accessed on 21 November 2018.

⁴² ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1505. Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Uff. II, al R. Ministero dell'Interno, Trasferimento popolazione slovena in Croazia, 4 June 1941.

⁴³ B. Krizman, *Pavelić između Hitlera i Mussolinija*, cit., pp. 126ff; J. Tomasevich, *Occupation and Collaboration*, cit., pp. 85, 89f.

⁴⁴ G. J. Kranjc, *To Walk with the Devil*, cit., pp. 58.

⁴⁵ K. Olshausen, *Zwischenspiel auf dem Balkan. Die deutsche Politik gegenüber Jugoslawien und Griechenland von März bis Juli 1941*, De Gruyter Oldenbourg, Stuttgart 1973, p. 226.

⁴⁶ A. Korb, *Im Schatten des Weltkriegs*, cit., pp. 152f.

⁴⁷ Ivi, p. 186.

⁴⁸ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1505. R. Vice Consolato d'Italia, Banja Luka, alla R. Legazione d'Italia, Zagabria, Provvedimenti per l'espulsione di Serbi, 26 July 1941.

that the expulsion of orthodox communities from Croatia did not affect every region in the same way. The heads of single districts of Croatia had large autonomy in applying governmental dispositions⁴⁹. For instance, while in some parts of the country, like the city of Bihać in Bosnia, all unwelcomed peoples were rounded up and expelled in a short period, in other communities, like the one in Banja Luka, thousands of Serbs stayed in their homes, as the rationale to decide upon their future was rather found on a personal than on a juridical level⁵⁰. While Serbs were being persecuted, expelled and killed in large numbers, first groups of Slovenes arrived in such places as Sarajevo to be distributed inside the district in summer 1941⁵¹.

These first waves of expulsion concerned the Italian government and the administration of the Province of Lubiana to a lesser extent. While thousands of Slovenes fled the German occupation zone, they were absorbed by local communities and did not seem to pose a threat to Italian rule. Although the government intended to Italianize the region in the long run, the scheme to achieve this goal was not as coherent or brutal as the German and Croatian plans for «ethnic» shifts. Cultural aspects were predominant at this stage and Italian authorities found some satisfaction seeing that the Slovenes preferred Italian rule to German brutality. Even the Holy See contacted Rome to complain about German measures against Slovenes «who were excellent Catholics», asking for help⁵². Yet, these waves of forced emigration also show a pattern. Germany and Croatia had thought through, what they deemed a reasonable strategy to create «ethnically» pure regions and to enforce their rule on the territory. Therefore, a system of population shifts was deployed that concerned areas from Slovenia, through Croatia, to Serbia.

Problems in the implementation of authority

Although Germany's plan for the creation of a new «ethnically» German region in the north of Slovenia was rather simple on paper, the transfer of populations with specific expertise in the agricultural sector posed some major problems. Siegfried Kasche complained that German policies deprived the lands of capable farmers, stirring up the Slovenian population against German rule. Moreover, those «Volksdeutsche» who immigrated from the south were not an adequate substitute as they practiced rather antiquated farming methods. On top of that, as Kasche analysed, Croatia was unable to make any use of the knowledge of Slovenian immigrants, while it expelled capable Serbian farmers. Considering the aggravated situation of

⁴⁹ A. Korb, *Im Schatten des Weltkriegs*, cit., p. 187.

⁵⁰ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1505. R. Vice Consolato d'Italia, Banja Luka, alla R. Legazione in Zagabria, 28.8.1941.

⁵¹ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1505. R. Consolato, Sarajevo, al Ministero degli Affari Esteri, GABAP, 7 August 1941.

⁵² ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1505. R. Ambasciata d'Italia presso la Santa Sede, all'eccellenza Luca Pietromarchi, 4 July 1941.

the Serbian community in Croatia, Kasche showed what domino effect had been set in motion⁵³. These complaints were not mere isolated cases. Local authorities in occupied Slovenia demanded to postpone the transfer of farmers and workers to the end of the war, as it seriously jeopardized productivity in these areas⁵⁴. In fact, the «Volksdeutsche» from southern Slovenia left some 48.000 hectares of land and received 78.000 hectares in the north. In total 11.200 «Volksdeutsche» from Gottschee were transferred⁵⁵. Yet this also meant that Italy could not benefit from production of the depopulated region, as it lacked a clear-cut plan on how to use these lands.

In January 1942, the authorities of the Province of Lubiana communicated that almost all Germans had left the province. The authorities boasted: «half of the task is done». Yet the next step – therefore, the second half of the task –, was the resettling of formerly German inhabited lands. Following the German example, the colonization of the lands with workforce from Italy would contribute to the cultural homogenization of the province⁵⁶. For Berlin, the ongoing transfer of German population was a propaganda tool to show how Nazi-Germany was contributing to the development of the German nation and the promise of «a bright, busy future»⁵⁷.

A downside of these developments was, for the Italian administration, the problem of coping with the new situation. Resistance movements that had developed during the summer and fall of 1941 occupied these deserted swaths of land as a basis for operations against Italian and German forces in the winter of 1941-42. Partisans, among them strongly present were the communists led by Josip Broz Tito, infiltrated the Gottschee region and created weapon depots, as well as fortifications to counter offensives by «Axis» forces⁵⁸. This threat led to attacks on Italian emissaries tasked with the settling of new peoples. Therefore, Rome sought to implement the resettling of these lands in a short period, including the swift constitution of all governmental structures, such as civil administration, and the deployment of security forces. Moreover, the regional lumber industry would provide resources for the Italian army⁵⁹. Yet, Italy lacked a clear-cut plan of implementation. Hence, first steps to solve the problem were only taken months after the emigration of the «Volksdeutsche», leaving the partisans plenty of time to set-up their defences.

The population shifts also meant that Italian authorities had to cope with more and more logistic challenges in the Province of Lubiana. Some 27.000 Slovenes had already resettled in the south at the end of summer 1941. At this point, Italian authorities still relished in the thought that these individuals left their home due to the «inhumane German yoke». German rule was portrayed as crassly differing from

⁵³ A. Suppan, *Zwischen Adria und Karawanken*, cit., p. 404.

⁵⁴ G. J. Kranjc, *To Walk with the Devil*, cit., p. 58.

⁵⁵ A. Suppan, *Zwischen Adria und Karawanken*, cit., p. 404.

⁵⁶ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1510. Rapporto su trasferimento allogeni tedeschi, 24 January 1942.

⁵⁷ *Von der Gottschee in die Untersteiermark*, «Deutsche Zeitung in Kroatien», 2 December 1941.

⁵⁸ A. Osti Guerrazzi, *L'esercito italiano*, cit., pp. 104ff.

⁵⁹ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1510. Appunto per il ministero dell'interno, 2 April 1942.

benevolent Italian ambitions in official communications from the region. Germany, as one such report read, had «completely stripped the land», creating a situation that did not allow for the autochthon population to survive, leading it to emigrate to «nonbarbaric» lands⁶⁰. One must bear in mind that this rhetoric, considering the ensuing of a brutal repression campaign by Italian forces soon after, was mostly directed against German domination and an expression of Italian helplessness toward the policies of its ally. High Commissioner Grazioli complained directly to German authorities in the north, noting that the influx of civilians was not stopping and that «apparently, German authorities are not even trying to stop it»⁶¹. In fact, there was some truth to this statement. The German administration was doing everything to secure its newly acquired region and to get rid of as many Slovenes and their intelligentsia as possible. Therefore, the collateral damage of their policies, including the influx of peoples in the Italian zone, was a rather welcomed effect. Accordingly, it was Italy who first felt the brunt of upheaval in Slovenia and was confronted with an increasing number of attacks by resistance forces in the winter of 1941-42.

It comes as no surprise that more and more families sought shelter in the southern part of Slovenia. The Italian army was tasked with the accommodation of new arrivals, who «would rather die than stay under German rule»⁶². This illegal immigration was also starting to be perceived as a threat. Many of the incoming people were not registered and found shelter among families in the south. Hence, they were unaccounted for and posed a possible threat for the region in the future⁶³. Ultimately, it could not be granted that «it would not lead to serious disorder, if they were forced to return [home]»⁶⁴. These fears were not entirely baseless. German authorities assumed that in Ljubljana alone, some 17.000 refugees had found shelter. Some of these individuals – rather unsurprisingly – engaged in propaganda against Germany and its allies and were backers of the insurgent partisans. Moreover every individual who had fled its homeland was thought to be easy prey for communist propaganda⁶⁵.

Meanwhile, Italian authorities were unable to resettle the Gottschee. The agency tasked with the organization of the new territories complained in May 1942 that attacks on officials and even murders were a daily phenomenon. The goal of the «rebels», read a document of the time, was to bind as many Italian troops as possible in the region and to disrupt any economic activity⁶⁶. Therefore, all attempts to repopulate the area and exploit its industrial and agricultural potential were doomed, if the

⁶⁰ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1510. Resoconto sulla situazione nella Slovenia occupata dai tedeschi, 22 May 1941.

⁶¹ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1510. L'alto commissario per la provincia di Lubiana al console di Germania, 30 October 1941.

⁶² ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1510. Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Gabinetto A.P., a R. Ambasciata Berlino, Sconfinamento di sloveni dal territorio di occupazione tedesca nella Slovenia italiana. 23 November 1941.

⁶³ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1510. Cavallero. November 1941.

⁶⁴ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1510. Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Gabinetto A.P., a R. Ambasciata Berlino, Sconfinamento di sloveni dal territorio di occupazione tedesca nella Slovenia italiana. 23 November 1941.

⁶⁵ J. Tomasevich, *Occupation and Collaboration*, cit., p. 90.

⁶⁶ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1510. Emona a Ministero dell'Interno. 17 May 1942.

partisan threat was not tackled⁶⁷. What followed was a plea for the solution of this situation with military measures.

All acts of hostility in the Slovenian territories led to shifts of populations. When German and Italian troops attacked villages, from which they perceived a threat, whole families would leave the area. Some would find shelter among the insurgents. Moreover, civilians also suffered from the consequences of partisan actions, as parts of the population had opted to collaborate with the occupying forces, which was an act of betrayal for the partisans. Therefore, the Italian High Commissioner was forced to act, if he wanted to protect those parts of the population who had remained inactive and loyal to the new regime. Family members of public servants and of members of voluntary militias were transferred to safe places, such as abandoned barracks of the Yugoslav army, that were thus transformed into refugee camps. Moreover, new accommodations were built for the same purpose. The High Commissioner later even asked for further funding to protect those who had not taken up arms against Italian authority and were contributing to the administration of the province. One such report read: «The continuing flow of families fleeing attacks of the rebels has exacerbated our means [...] I demand a significant increase in funding to accommodate and look after these peoples»⁶⁸.

The end of all illusions: Oppression and internment in the Province of Lubiana

Another factor in the displacement of tens of thousands of civilians was the institution of large-scale internment camps for civilians from the Province of Lubiana. This development was closely connected to the situation in the region. After thousands of Slovenes had found shelter in Italian occupied territory, after the Gottschee region had been void of population and became a base for insurgents and after the attacks on Italian troops and administrators had increased dramatically between 1941 and 1942, Italian authorities opted to implement a more brutal conduct toward civilians.

The High Commissioner of the Province of Lubiana, Emilio Grazioli, and Mario Robotti, commanding officer of the XI Army corps of the 2nd Army, stationed in Ljubljana, had a dispute over competence questions in the province in early 1942. Mussolini sided with the general, presumably because of the partisan threat in the region. Thus, the decisions taken by civil administrators were subordinated to military necessities⁶⁹.

One of the most remarkable decisions taken by the army was the fencing of Ljubljana with barbed wire, while different sectors of the city also came into being separated by obstacles and fences. The main reason for this decision was the idea that house searches would be easier and that the partisans would have a much

⁶⁷ ASMAE. GAB-AP 1923–1943, b. 1510. Ministero degli Affari Esteri, al Comando Supremo, 22 May 1941.

⁶⁸ Archivio Centrale dello Stato [ACS]. Ministero dell'Interno, Servizi di Guerra, Aff. Generali, b. 90. Grazioli al Ministero dell'Interno – Ispettorato per i Servizi di Guerra, 1 March 1943.

⁶⁹ K. Ruzicic-Kessler, *Italianer*, cit., p. 289.

harder time to gain access to the city and to leave its perimeters. These measures also meant a drastic limitation of personal freedom for the population. Ljubljana was becoming a prison for its citizens. Until mid-February 1942 all preliminary measures were set for the fencing. In the night of 22 February Italian units started to implement general Robotti's plan. The commander noted: «In the night and the morning of 23 February barbed wire fences were installed. Before dawn the troops had completed the barriers. At 2pm the belt around the city was set in all its details and at 3pm the corresponding disposition was published. Thereby the population faced the complete impossibility to move out of town or to transfer goods from the perimeters of the city»⁷⁰.

After the single sectors of the city had been separated in the same manner, Robotti noted:

I hope, after we have been forced to use the 'resolute method' that our administration will understand that the man is nothing and that the only things that matter are the country, its prestige and the regime. [It is] a prestige that these men – for centuries accustomed to an iron fist – will only curb if they are forced to understand that our benevolence and civilisation are the essential energy of a country and a government that is capable of winning⁷¹.

As a parallel measure to the fencings, the population was more and more restricted in its mobility. Private journeys no matter the vehicle were prohibited. Moreover, train rides were restricted and special permissions issued for such matters.

Very soon these measures were introduced in 35 major centres of Slovenia which led to mass imprisonment and internment of the population⁷². The construction of new facilities for the growing number of detainees became necessary. The figures of the Vatican that were certainly gathered through the church in Slovenia, estimated that up to 30.000 Slovenes were being confined in Italian camps in winter 1942-43. Then again, the Italian administration declared the figure being much lower and of approximately 17.400 internees in December 1942⁷³. Nevertheless the smaller figure alone is quite relevant when compared to the rather manageable amount of people living within the limits of the province.

In summer 1942 further raids were organised in Ljubljana. The general responsible for these actions, Taddeo Orlando, noted on 4 July:

The city of Ljubljana has 80.000 inhabitants, half of whom are female. Of the 40.000 those in the age between 16 and 50 years have been examined [...] In

⁷⁰ Citation found in: A. Kersevan, *Lager italiani. Pulizia etnica e campi di concentramento fascisti per civili Jugoslavi 1941-1943*, Nutrimenti, Roma 2008, p. 51.

⁷¹ Comando XI. Corpo d'Armata, in: Idem.

⁷² Grazioli a ministero dell'interno. 25 March 1942, in: T Ferenc, *Rab – Arbe – Arbissima*, cit., p. 110.

⁷³ Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito [AUSSME]. M3, b. 64. Situazione in Slovenia – campi di concentramento. 16 December 1942.

few days they were individually examined if they could be of relevance politically. With the arrest of 2858 individuals, combined with the 3.000 arrests that have occurred earlier on, some one quarter of the able-bodied population of Ljubljana has been taken out of circulation⁷⁴.

The measures described by general Orlando obviously did not just aim at getting rid of the enemies of the occupying powers. Willingly all men who were potentially a threat to the regime and who might have been recruited by the partisans had to be imprisoned. These almost 6.000 prisoners were immediately deported to the concentration camp of Gonars. The number of persons put in concentration camps by Italian authorities was always quite impressive, as a document from August 1942 shows: «In the province of Lubiana military authorities have removed 5.000 individuals. They were all stationed in tents on the island of Arbe»⁷⁵. In the weeks before and after these events the largest military operation by Italian armed forces on Yugoslav soil was conducted in Slovenia. Italy amassed troops, aircraft and artillery units in the region. It also concentrated Slovenian militia to achieve the goal of destroying all partisan units in the region. This impressive build-up led to an operation that did not spare any part of Slovenia occupied by Italy from intervention. Up until fall of 1942 military operations were carried out with ruthless brutality and the internment of more Slovenian civilians followed as a consequence⁷⁶. Some 15.000 Slovenes were arrested, leading to an estimated 30.000 people being interned in total⁷⁷. This was almost 8% of the total population of the Italian Province of Lubiana.

In autumn 1942 High Commissioner Grazioli explained that the policy in the Province was aiming at preventive internment of parts of the population. Single members of a family had to be interned to hinder any of them from joining the insurgents⁷⁸. The motives for internment were quite interchangeable. The terms used to express the need for arrest of individuals were respectively the internment for reasons of «public security» and «preventive» internment. While the first category was meant for those that posed a threat to the regime, the second was rather described as an act of protection of the internees themselves. Nevertheless, those who were interned usually did not notice any difference in treatment between the two categories. Even worse, the majority of those who were interned in the most severe concentration camp, the one on the island of Rab/Arbe, were «protected» internees.

⁷⁴ Citation found in: A. Kersevan, *Lager italiani*, cit., p. 68.

⁷⁵ ACS. Ministero dell'interno, Servizi di Guerra, Aff. Generali, b. 90. Appunto per il Duce dall'Ispettorato per i Servizi di guerra. August 1942.

⁷⁶ K. Ruzicic-Kessler, *Italiener*, cit., pp. 248–256.

⁷⁷ ACS. Ministero dell'interno, Servizi di Guerra, Aff. Generali, b. 90. L'Ispettore per i Servizi di Guerra, 25 August 1942.

⁷⁸ ACS. Ministero dell'interno, Servizi di Guerra, Aff. Generali, b. 90. Rapporto di Grazioli su Sfolati da Lubiana, 22 October 1942.

Conclusion

The year 1942 ended with tens of thousands of Slovenes interned in Italian camps, while many more had been displaced due to war events or the radical homogenization policies of the «Axis» powers on Yugoslav soil. Although these repressive measures left some 10 percent of the Slovenian population displaced, it did not hinder the partisans to build their forces in Slovenia. On the contrary, most measures aimed at «pacifying» the region, led more and more young men and women in the arms of armed resistance groups.

Undoubtedly, there was a massive shift in population in Slovenia during World War II. This case study shows how fanatical plans of occupation regimes reshaped whole regions during the war and how these policies can be traced to interconnected events. Indeed, a massive shift in population could be witnessed across Yugoslavia, while, proportionally speaking, the one that took place in Slovenia dwarves any other such effort during the war. Slovenia is a perfect example for the ruthless policies of the «Axis» powers that were a major factor in the spiral of violence in Yugoslavia.

A differentiated analysis is needed when considering population shifts in Slovenia during World War II. Finally, it is possible to argue that the victims of forced migrations in Slovenia must be placed in different categories. There are those, who had to leave their homes to enable a regime to achieve its goal of «ethnically» homogenous lands. There are others, who fled their native communities in fear of what they could expect when accepting the fate of resettlement. Then there are groups and individuals who fled due to military operations, be it of «Axis» forces or the partisans. Some categories of peoples were saved by the occupier-administration because of their value as part of local administrations. Others joined partisan forces after witnessing the brutality of German and Italian armies.

Yet, the Italian scenario is a peculiar one, as Italy had not drawn up a plan of Italianization prior to the war, even less so, when it came to forced transfers of populations. At first, the idea was mostly of culturally assimilating the Slovenian population in the long term. This meant leaving civil society some space of manoeuvre and trying to cooperate with local intelligentsia. Slovenes who suffered harassment by German authorities did indeed search for shelter in the Italian zone and were genuinely looking for a place to live far from the German yoke. Yet, as the war progressed, and more and more people joined the effort to repel the occupation by actively supporting the partisans, the Italian administration enforced a more radical view in occupied Slovenia and began to implement a policy of intimidation, internment and a tactic of scorched earth in regions deemed «infested» by «rebel» forces. This in turn further fed the spiral of violence in Slovenia resulting in more deaths and less control by the occupying forces.