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## **Longing for Home-Land:**

### **Taming High-Speed in a 'Precarious' Italy**

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#### **Introduction: A “Dead, Immobile City” and the New Borderlands of Fortress Europe.**

In an already economically declining Italy, the 2008 crisis has represented the seemingly definitive crash of the speculative ambitions of the Berlusconi era. It was at that time that, in reaction to the neo-liberalization of the Italian and European markets, Italy has seen a boom of both “no-global” social movements emerged from the unionized and autonomista radical left, and “nativist” groups risen from far-right circles. Strikingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, both have been advocating a closer relationship with the “home-land”, understood not only as the local or national homeland, but arguably also as physical land, the earth.

In this conjuncture, my research is concerned with the relationship between these apparently opposed social and political movements in the north-eastern city of Trieste, sitting at the northernmost point of the Mediterranean, between Venice and Vienna, 10 kilometers (6 miles) from what used to be the Iron Curtain (remember Churchill’s phrase, “from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic...), at the border to Slovenia, Central Europe and the Balkans. The old port of Vienna, serving much of Central Europe, the fourth city of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire after Vienna, Prague and Budapest, on the line of the Simplon Orient Express from Paris to Istanbul, Trieste and its hinterland were annexed by Italy after WW1 and lived through Fascism, but after WW2 the city has been almost surrounded by the newly-drawn international border to Yugoslavia and then to Slovenia, running at a distance never

greater than 10 kilometers from downtown along the edge (or immediately above it) of the Karst plateau, itself surrounding the city by the sea below. The port rapidly lost most of its traffics, the population dramatically declined, and what young Triestini today keep on repeating is that “Trieste is immobile”, “Trieste is dead”.

Today the county (*provincia*, province) of Trieste, by area, is the smallest in Italy, and its population of 205,000 has the highest ratio of over-65 in the country while remaining one of the wealthiest (Italian Minister of Interior, 2010 cf). Trieste is the only city with a Nazi concentration and extermination camp in Southern Europe, with the *Foibe* pit-holes used for mass-killings by both Communists and Fascists spread across the cave-rich Karst plateau, and neo-fascist groups remain very strong downtown, while an important Slovenian minority still resides in sub-urban Trieste and especially up on the plateau, although continuously harassed throughout the post-War period. During the Cold War Triestini maintained their local dialect, a Venetian idiom with influences from German, English and Slovenian, and the city maintained its intimate connections with the North and with the East areas “*oltreconfin*” (beyond the border), yet precisely at the moment of Slovenian accession to the Schengen Area in 2007, in the years immediately following the 2008 crisis all the railway connections between Trieste and Ljubljana, Vienna, Budapest and Beograd were interrupted (Piccolo, 2009, 2013). The newly-opened border of the old Iron Curtain seemed to immediately close up again.

At the same time, the EU plans to integrate the continent and the common market through a network of highways and railways did include Trieste in the “Corridor 6” project, stretching from Lyon in France to the Ukrainian border across Northern Italy, Venice, Trieste, Ljubljana and Budapest. Yet Italian and international planners did not manage to implement the “Corridor 6” high-speed railway project (in Italian *treno ad alta velocita'*, or TAV, pronounced *taav*), on which they had been working on since the 1990s. To the East, Italian-Slovenian rivalry also among the Mediterranean ports of Trieste and Koper prevented the project from being carried forth, and to the West, in the Valley of Susa in Western Piedmont, massive protests emerged already in the mid-1990s blocked the construction of the Lyon-Turin trans-Alpine section. While Berlusconi’s Italy built an integrated network of TAV high-speed railways renamed “the subway of Italy” (“*la metropolitana d’Italia*”), Trieste remained largely cut out from it too. Further, the “No-TAV” movement born in Piedmont spread across the country, and became the symbol of anti-globalization, anti-Berlusconism and later of anti-austerity movements, finally being largely channeled into Beppe Grillo’s populist Five Star Movement (*Movimento Cinque Stelle* or M5S), founded (not by chance) in 2009, and by 2013 representing the single largest political

force in the Italian parliament in Rome. Grillo advocates for localism, environmentalism and de-growth, supports leftist “back-to-the-land” movements, the local No-TAV movement in the Valley of Susa born in the mid-1990s but boomed in 2010, and even the right-wing peasants’ rebellions of *I Forconi* (“the Pitchforks”) which exploded across Italy in late 2013. Finally, now Grillo also advocates for the exit of Italy from the Euro-zone (allying himself with Farage’s UKIP party) and for the drastic reduction of immigration in Italy, getting actually close to the positions of Bossi’s Northern League party, which had actually also supported Berlusconi. So what may one mean by “localism”? In what ways may one oppose neo-liberal globalization, the precarization of the job market and EU austerity reforms? What does it mean to go “back-to-the-land” in Italy today?

In Trieste, I am specifically working with 9 collective gardens run by Italian-speaking or Triestino dialect-speaking youth, in conjunction with 1 mental health center, 1 social services cooperative and 1 Italian-Slovenian school, which all do “therapeutic exercises” in their own small gardens and clay workshops. All these experiences, that in Trieste represent very recent and still diverse attempts of going back-to-the-land, are each based in a garden (what in Italian are simply called “*terreni*”), while are just a few among the hundreds of gardens emerged or re-emerged in the years immediately after the 2008 crisis on the edge of the Karst plateau right by the Slovenian border. These young Triestini, disillusioned by what they perceive as the corruption and inefficiency of the Roman government, by the disastrous economic situation of Italy and much of Europe, and by their low chances to get a stable job in downtown Trieste, maintained “precarious” jobs with part-time and/or short-term contracts, but refuse to migrate abroad like many young Italians have done since 2008 (out of a national population of 61 million, 4.2 million Italians are now officially registered as residing abroad, cf. Cambiamento, 2013). In Italian, they are widely referred to as Generation Y “*precari*”, or “the precarious”. Among them, although some support parties of “no-global” radical left, others far-right “nativist” ones, most have voted for Grillo’s M5S in both the 2013 national elections and the 2014 European Parliament elections. Finally, many also support the most “localist” movement of all, *Trieste Libera* (or “Free Trieste”), advocating the independence of Trieste from Italy, the creation of an independent state comprising the old “Free Territory of Trieste”, occupied by Allied troops between 1945 and 1954, stretching into a small part of Slovenia and Croatia, but centered around the Italian-speaking city.

The Democratic Party led by current Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi is now also developing an alternative project to integrate Trieste’s territory to its old Slovenian-Croatian hinterland to boost its

depressed economy, yet the high-speed TAV project to Eastern Europe has been almost abandoned: along the old dismissed railway lines to Vienna, Budapest and Istanbul, the rail tracks have been removed, and those routes in the last years have been redeveloped as three walking and cycling paths. As the high-speed dream of Berlusconi's Italy has crushed, and a schizophrenic Italy is going "back-to-the-land", what does it mean to "tame speed" in Italy today? Once again, what does one mean by "localism"? What does it mean to use "land as a therapy"? And most of all, what does it mean to go back to the land in a demographically very old, politically very conservative, still very rich but "dead" and "immobile" city like Trieste, on the edge of the Italian-Slovenian Karst plateau, along a newly-opened Iron Curtain but in the heart of "Fortress Europe"?

This paper serves to contextualize my ongoing research in Trieste and the Italian-Slovenian Karst plateau, by investigating the Italian situation at large while focusing on the No-TAV movement against high-speed trains and Grillo's populist Five Star Movement, in order to provide a theoretical framework to understand the back-to-the-land movements of a "precarious" Italy. In the first section I will engage in a discussion of "schizophrenic" precarization by focusing on the neo-liberal reforms of Berlusconi's Italy. In the second section, I will attempt to understand the "schizophrenia" of neo-liberal Italy through the analysis of the development of high-speed TAV infrastructure since 2005, the 2008 financial crash and the post-2008 resistance against "speed" in the No-TAV movement and Grillo's M5S, boomed in 2013. Finally, in the third section I will introduce my ongoing fieldwork in Trieste while discussing the politics of "home-lands" and "border-lands", unfolding in different attempts to achieve a new relationship with the earth today, arguably bridging the apparently insurmountable divide between "leftist/no-global" and "right-wing/nativist" approaches to anti-precuarization, anti-financialization and anti-austerity resistance.

## **1. A Schizophrenic Belle Époque?**

"Precarity" has gained currency in Italy as a term describing the life condition of the generation come to age since the mid-1990s after the beginning of the "Berlusconi era", roughly coinciding with the so-called Generation Y. By the "Berlusconi era" I mean the period of what is referred to as the Second Italian Republic, inaugurated in 1994 at the end of the corruption scandal nicknamed

*Tangentopoli* (“bribe city”) with the election of Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia (“Go Italy”) in a coalition with the secessionist Lega Nord (Northern League). Already before election, in Italy Berlusconi had been promoting a new type of cultural politics through its vast media empire, which emerged from *the Milano da Bere* social environment of the 1980s (“Milan to drink”), promoting the glamorous lifestyle of white male entrepreneurs, and at the same time introduced explicitly neoliberal policies once in power in the Roman government already with his brief first term (1994 through early 1995). In this sense, the “precarization” of labor contracts in Italy, as part of such process of neo-liberalization towards an allegedly “free market” (or to use a Polanyian term, “self-regulating market”), has allowed workers to be hired and fired more easily and at a faster pace, introducing a range of part-time and short-term job contracts favoring employers rather than employees, allegedly attempting to stimulate economic growth by increasing flexibility in hiring/firing practices and intensifying the overall competitiveness of the job market, actually leading to what some Italian commentators have called “flex-insecurity” (Berton, Richiardi, Sacchi, 2009; Zoppoli, 2012).

Such process of precarization has been carried out by successive reforms of the labor market in Italy supported in different ways by Berlusconi’s right-wing governments (1994-1995, 2001-2006 and 2008-2011) but also by the different left-wing governments in charge in between, most explicitly since the “Biagi Law” of 2003, introduced by the second Berlusconi government (in charge between 2001 and 2006). In fact, the crucial question of reforming “article 18” of the 1970 Italian Labor Law, which guaranteed the necessity of a “just cause” for firing an employee, had indeed already been at the center of the struggle between unions and the different government administrations since the mid-1990s, but the introduction of the 2003 reform was the first one explicitly liberalizing the job market in the direction of “precarization”, which continued also with left-wing governments throughout the late 2000s and then into the years following the 2008 crisis with the third and last Berlusconi government (2008 through 2011). Nevertheless, the successful final revision of “article 18” has been implemented with the “Fornero Law” reform of 2012 by the technocratic government of Mario Monti, which has actively promoted post-crisis austerity measures, while being explicitly backed by different European leaders in both Brussels and Berlin and by Berlusconi’s party in Rome. With the topple of Berlusconi’s last government in 2011 and his final conviction for tax evasion and other crimes in 2013, the 20-year long “Berlusconi era” that had begun in 1994 finally came to a close, thus being popularly nicknamed “*Ventennio*” (“Twenty-year period”), with an obvious reference to the period of Mussolini’s fascist government from the mid-20s through the mid-40s.

The process of precarization of labor in Berlusconi's Italy, with the offer of seemingly endless possibilities of ever new and fast-changing career opportunities, had seemed to have fueled individualistic drives, ambitions and competitiveness "for all". Precarization indeed had been part of a twenty-year long frenzy similar to that of speculative financial markets, in Emily Martin's words, "manic markets" (Martin, 2007). Milan was confirmed as the economic capital of the country and Italy's true "creative city" (Florida, 2002; cf. Peck 2011), as precarized "creative" jobs have been further and further removed from concrete activities, making *autonomista* Bifo talk about "info-labor" (Berardi, 2005). As opposed to those "Baby-boomers" or "Generation X" who have come to age before the mid-1990s, in my research I indeed focus on "Generation Y" young Italians (also named or "Echo-boomers", being by and large the offspring of Baby-boomers), as they are arguably facing challenges specifically tied contemporary neoliberal globalization when entering the job market: possibly the height of an ongoing process of financialization, unprecedented global connectivity thanks to the spectacular development of information technologies, the boom of international mobility within and without Europe, and precarization of job contracts and heightened competition in the job market in both Italy and the EU as a whole, where "precarization" is arguably a process that may be understood itself in terms of heightened and constant mobility.

How do we understand how "precarity" has been lived and understood in contemporary neo-liberal Italy then? In the late 1990s Bourdieu had already famously claimed that "today precarity is everywhere" (Bourdieu, 1998), although he arguably could only affirm that as precarity had finally reached even the most economically secure parts of the Global North. Precarity, understood as a "lack of security", had long been typical of the condition of the working classes of the Global North and especially in many parts of the Global South. Precarity in 1998 was not new, but the ways in which it was experienced, understood and reproduced in neo-liberal times in places like Italy and Southern Europe may have been. In order to understand how precarization may be different today in Trieste, I argue for adopting a Polanyian framework of the liberalization of the labor market but updating it to "neo-liberal" Italy. Polanyi writes:

"It is the absence of the threat of individual starvation which makes primitive society in a sense, more humane than market economy, and at the same time less economic". "Only the penalty of starvation, not also the allurements of high wages, was deemed capable of creating a functioning labor market" (Polanyi, 1944., p. 172, chap. 14);

"The New Poor Law abolished the general category of the poor, the 'honest poor' or 'laboring poor' - terms against which Burke had inveighed. The former poor were now divided into physically helpless paupers whose place was in the workhouse, and independent workers who earned their living by

laboring for wages. This created an entirely new category of the poor, the unemployed, who made their appearance on the social scene. While the pauper, for the sake of humanity, should be relieved, the unemployed, for the sake of industry, should not be relieved.” (ibid. p. 232, chap.19).

In studying Polanyi’s “double movement”, one may observe how for him the “commodification” of labor towards a “self-regulating market” allows the creation of a labor force, but his account of labor “de-commodification” is more complex and largely implicit. After 1834, with the New Poor Law, one can maybe talk about de-commodification only for the labor of the pauper, whose basic needs are provided for in the workhouse. Conversely, the unemployed are part of a reserve labor army that needs to labor in order to survive. The latter are not de-commodified, but ex-commodified, yet they are also forced to re-enter the labor force. Therefore his frame of reference is nevertheless still the commodification of labor in times of pauperism and unemployment, and he claims that with the New Poor Law of 1834 in England, “while the pauper, for the sake of humanity, should be relieved, the unemployed, for the sake of industry, should not be relieved” (ibid. 232).

It seems necessary to complicate Polanyi’s framework in order to understand precarity in Italy today. The labor condition of precarious workers, or *precari*, defies not only the boundary between commodification and ex-commodification (as had arguably already happened for the unemployed), but also the seeming boundary between employment and unemployment. When employed, the precarious worker does not sign stable long-term contracts but faces constant insecurity, so he or she is never really “employed” in the same way as before, while when unemployed, the precarious is still “working for labor” by constantly training and looking for another job (as seen in Standing’s account, 2011) and never really exits the labor force, so he or she is never really just “unemployed”. Precarious labor therefore occupies a hybrid borderland between commodification and ex-commodification, employment and unemployment, in which the shifts between the two are not only faster, but also more ambiguous and undefined. Furthermore, the experience of precarity is also much more individual and subjective. The precarious do not only face dismissal as other workers in the same company do, as signing personalized short-term contracts make each of them live a specific experience in the job market and a more atomized existence.

The discussion of precarization in Italy through a Polanyian lens seems appropriate also given the context of a “neoliberal” push towards an allegedly self-regulating market. Contra Harvey’s account of “post-modernism” as just another phase of the capitalist era (Harvey, 1989), precarization in Europe today has indeed taken place in tandem with a radically different speeding up of both physical and digital movement (thanks to IT, information technology) and a crisis of representation of value,

increasingly detached from its tangible aspects (produced with financialization). Drawing from the work of Bifo one may consider that, in a neoliberal push towards marketization, through the “digital recombination of info-labor in networks” what really happens is a process of “abstraction from concrete activities” (Berardi, 2005). Further, paralleling what Emily Market has termed “manic markets” (Martin, 2007), when discussing bipolar disorder precisely in relationship to financialization and abstraction from concrete activities, the seemingly endless possibilities of ever new and fast-changing career opportunities seem to then have engendered a “schizophrenic” speculation in the labor market, fueling individualistic drives, ambitions and competitiveness. In neoliberal push towards marketization the *precari* are thus not simply deprived of certain stability and security, and their “precarity” should not be simply predicated on an ontology of lack by emphasizing only “insecurity”, “uncertainty” and “unsafety” (Bauman, 2000, 161, cf. Standing, 2011, 10). The “precarious” worker lives in a condition of constant mobility, constantly competing as an “entrepreneur of the self”, an individual paradoxically “isolated by the economic bond he has with everyone and anyone” and whose social ties result to be weakened (Foucault, 2008, 303; cf. Foucault, 2007). I thus employ a Foucauldian understanding of biopower, according to which the “conduct of conduct” is then “rendered technical” in Tania Li’s terms through the planning state apparatus, expecting biopolitical management to be enacted rather than reacted to (Li, 2007), and integrating Nikolas Rose’s emphasis on the fueling and management of “positive freedom” in being “obliged to be free” (Rose, 1999, 87). In this sense, Spivak writes that liberalism is precisely “that which we cannot not want” (Spivak, 1993, 45-46, quoted in Butler and Athanasiou, 2013, 76).

Nevertheless, one should also not stop here. An analysis of precarity that rethinks it only as schizophrenic speculation remains incomplete as this remains a catch-all phrase that disregards the ways in which it is experienced and reproduced by each in historically situated circumstances. In this sense it would in fact comprise first the victimization of the white-male European whose economic condition has recently become relatively insecure, and then also the long-standing conditions of economic insecurity of marginalized minorities that is now coupled with expectations of high-speed mobility. I therefore convene with Butler in understanding that “precarity, understood as a vulnerability to injury and loss, can never be reversed (this [she tends] to call precariousness), and yet the differential ways of allocating precarity, of assigning disposability, are clearly aims and effects of neoliberal forms of social and economic life” (Butler and Athanasiou, 2013, 20-21). It seems to me that, in Butler’s terms, the requirement to be “disposable” is not to be interpreted as rendering excludable and



expendable in the Agamben sense (Agamben 1998), but “disposable” as constantly usable and available, constant mobile, in fact as “that which you cannot not want” in Spivak’s terms, although this need to be “disposable” is then lived by each in situated conjunctures. Butler’s “dispossession” understood as both “precariousness” and “precarity” is then the way in which precarity is conjuncturally produced, experienced and understood. If schizophrenic neoliberal reforms in Berlusconi’s Italy promised endless development and growth, financial markets do periodically crash. So do computers. So do high-speed trains.

In this sense, the role of the 2008 economic crisis in Italy is key. In the Berlusconi era individualistic drives and ambitions have indeed been fueled “for all”, but in a society of existing and widening inequalities especially since the economic crisis they remain conjuncturally produced and subjectively experienced, remaining largely unfulfilled for most. In Italy such schizophrenic economic and social development indeed took place disregarding the opportunities actually available to each, as Berlusconi’s neoliberal recipe has in fact further favored the Italian white-male entrepreneur, already strong of his own capital and connections, while it has contributed to increase economic and social inequalities and promote the cultural politics that have become proper of “Berlusconism”: marginalizing and exploiting women, “extra-comunitari” (non-EC or EU) immigrants, the disabled and the queer, among others. In a context that I would argue is specific to parts of the Global North, the British think-tank Institute of Precarious Consciousness discusses how

“in contemporary capitalism, the dominant reactive affect is anxiety”, where “the necessities of life are not simply absent. They are available, but withheld conditionally. Precarity leads to generalised hopelessness, a constant bodily excitation without release” (Institute of Precarious Consciousness, 2014).

Thus with the 2008 economic crisis in Italy, in a similar way to how Butler discusses the effect of 9/11 in the United States (Butler, 2004), the speculative schizophrenia of precarization may have been then experienced in terms of vulnerability. The idealistic push for individualistic drives abstracted from concrete activities in Berlusconi’s neoliberal era, in a “precarious” Italy hardly hit by the 2008 economic crisis, has really left both speculative markets and “self-entrepreneurial” individuals vulnerable, anxious and insecure.

Thus, while Berlusconism has contributed to the common Southern European process of precarization of job contracts allegedly to promote new and better opportunities for all, it has in fact limited them for most, and has then furthered an existing “brain drain” out of Italy. Since the 2008 economic crisis Italians’ outward migration has boomed again, with a 30% increase between 2011 and 2012 alone (Repubblica, 2012a). The mass emigration of precarious workers towards Northern Europe

has paralleled the ongoing large-scale immigration into Italy chiefly from North Africa and the Balkans, many themselves directed onwards to Northern Europe, and the registered numbers of Italians resident abroad are indeed getting closer to match the also booming numbers of foreign nationals officially registered as residing in the country (Cambiamento, 2013).<sup>1</sup> This has led to a situation in which a “precarious” Italy hardly hit by the economic crisis since 2008, where the young emigrate by the millions, feels even more vulnerable when facing what right-wing groups call the “invasion” of immigrants ready to “steal our jobs” in an increasingly competitive job market. In this context, I am interested in studying how those Y-generation Italians today in their 20s and 30s who did not migrate abroad like many of their peers, but stayed in Trieste and Italy instead, may be opposing neoliberal globalization and precarization in both political activism and everyday life.

According to Polanyi’s understanding of the “double movement”, a century ago Europe closed up and resisted Belle Époque globalization by turning to Soviet Five-years in Russia or to Nazi-Fascism in Germany and Italy, in order to “protect society” from the damages brought forth by the liberal push towards a self-regulating free market. Today, after two or three decades of schizophrenic neoliberal development, a “precarious” Italy and Europe might indeed be facing similar dilemmas, albeit in a very different conjuncture.

## **2. Taming Speed: Bullet Trains and “No-Global” Nativism**

For Generation-Y Italians, high-speed international mobility in “neoliberal” Europe has boomed thanks not only to national and EU-wide legislation liberalizing inter-European trade and labor mobility, but also to improved infrastructural connections, given the boom of low-cost airlines like Ryanair and Easyjet and the construction of an integrated continent-wide network of highways and also high-speed railways (in Italian *treni ad alta velocita*’, or TAV, pronounced *taav*), defined as ‘high-speed’ as trains may run at more than 250 km/h, most frequently 300 km/h. I propose that speed, in transportation infrastructure and in different realms of everyday life, has become an imperative demand of neoliberal reforms in Italy and Europe. This is happening in quantitative terms in different realms of life, from

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<sup>1</sup> In 2013 the number of Italians officially registered as resident abroad stands at about 4,200,000, while the number of foreign nationals officially registered as residents in Italy stands at about 5,430,000 (Cambiamento, 2013).

increased competition, productivism and careerism in achieving promotions and success easily and quickly, to reaching Milan as fast as possible for a number of consecutive business meetings, to fast-food, speed-dating, speedy Amazon-Prime deliveries. Synchronicity ideally substitutes speed. Everything must be available as soon as possible, ideally right away, right now. In IT times of neoliberal reforms, schizophrenic markets and widespread precarization, what I am focusing on here is nevertheless the *ways* in which this may happen and therefore what resistance may be possible, borrowing Hannah Appel's wording (2012), the *how* of capitalism. In the discussion of "the production of space", Henri LeFebvre alludes to how infrastructure comes to life in spatial practice, "between daily reality (daily routine) and urban reality (the routes and networks which link up the places set aside for work, 'private' time and leisure)" (LeFebvre, 1991, 38), yet spatial practice will develop in ways unexpected or unforeseen by planners and builders, in a way akin to what Anna Tsing accounts for as "friction" (Tsing, 2005). The point of planning smooth infrastructure, which would allow a circulation reproducing the fluidity of water over land, seems in fact to be aiming at annihilating friction, while at the same time it certainly produces it. This may take place specifically in the limits and exclusions intrinsic to built infrastructural networks. In Italy, TAV high-speed railways did in fact become the crucial site (and symbol) of resistance to the imperative of speed demanded by the neoliberal capitalism of the "Berlusconi era".

Since the mid-1990s, the Italian government has in fact followed the example of the French TAV (*TGV, train a' grande vitesse*, high speed train) and oversaw the construction of an integrated country-wide TAV network, finally become operative in the years after 2005. This network has been renamed *La Metropolitana d'Italia* (The Subway of Italy) by Trenitalia, the semi-monopolistic railway company in the country. *Frecciarossa* and *Frecciargento* trains (Red Arrow and Silver Arrow) currently link the main urban centers along the North-South axis of Turin-Milan-Bologna-Florence-Rome-Naples, with one more line connecting Venice to Bologna. Another major TAV line, planned itself in the mid-1990s but today still under construction, is to run along the West-East axis across Northern Italy, along the Turin-Milan-Verona-Venice-Trieste corridor, as part of the "Corridor 6" of the EU Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T), to connect Lyon to Turin, Milan, Trieste and then Ljubljana and Budapest.

The project for the Turin-Lyon TAV line was born at a Franco-Italian inter-governmental meeting in 1991, and was soon incorporated in the planned TEN-T in 1994, as part of Corridor 5 to connect Lisbon to Kiev, now shortened and renamed Corridor 6, to connect Lyon to the Ukrainian border. The Lyon-Turin line also promises to halve the travel time between Milan and Paris, today still a

7-hour train journey apart: Italians will soon be able to travel between “from Milan to Paris in 4 Hours”, recited the title of a 2012 article in the most widely read Italian newspaper *Corriere della Sera*, where the Italian and French presidents Monti and Hollande are referenced discussing TAV’s “general value for the whole EU”, claiming that TAV trains may stimulate intra-European trade and mobility (*Corriere della Sera*, 2012).<sup>2</sup> Yet one may ask, what “value” may that be? Value for whom? And at what costs?

The Italian TAV network offers ‘endless’ possibilities of travel that are marketed as “tailored for you” by Trenitalia. In the advertisement the train seats are empty. No matter who you are, you will have the chance to travel to Paris at 300 km/h. Yet TAV travel remains very costly, and in the previous version of that advertisement Trenitalia was explicitly targeting white businesspeople for “executive”, “business” and “premium” classes, while a family of color was depicted as traveling in the fourth, “standard class”. We will all be given the opportunity to get “to Paris in 4 hours” soon, but in very different ways. In this sense, the high-speed infrastructure of TAV in fact reproduces a push for the neoliberalization and precarization of the Italian and European markets: entrepreneurial ambitions are fueled as a generalized ambition, whereas the both legal and material infrastructure continues to reproduce the same class-based, gendered and racialized project of the Berlusconi administrations. The fueling of individualistic drives “for all” is indeed experienced, understood and reproduced conjuncturally in very different ways in everyday life. It was precisely around these issues that the No-TAV movement was first born in the Val di Susa, at the Italian-French border, and it was on planned high-speed line that the Italian government’s neoliberal ambitions were to crash.

Soon after its initial planning in the early 1990s, the TAV project in Val di Susa was critiqued as unnecessary by both locals and experts in the field: both passenger and freight traffic on the existing railway line between Turin and Lyon, under the Frejus Alpine tunnel, was not growing enough to warrant the construction of a new line, and remained far from reaching its potential capacity. In fact, at its peak in 1997 it reached 10 million tons of annual freight traffic out of a capacity of 17.5 (Mazzetti, 2012, 10). Yet the residents of Susa themselves keep on repeating, “this is not about a train” (*New York Times*, 2014), so what is it about? Other arguments included its ecological unsustainability, in particular with reference to the 57-kilometer tunnel to be built not far from the existing 13-kilometer Frejus tunnel, and especially the incompatibility of the government’s logic of development and large-scale

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<sup>2</sup> The Turin-Lyon TAV line is receiving priority EU funding to be supplemented by French and Italian funds according to the length of the line in the territory of each. The older Corridor 5 project has now been rescaled due to the economic crisis in Portugal and Spain and complications in the partnership with Ukraine at the Eastern frontier of the EU (Rastello and De Benedetti, 2013).

infrastructures with the lifestyle of the Alpine valley of Susa, which already hosted the existing railway line to Lyon and the A32 highway connecting Milan and Turin to France, reasons that warranted local forms of occupation as sedentary resistance (Pizzo and Sullo, 2012; Centro Sociale Askatasuna, 2013). Specifically, the Turin-Lyon line is being really built to provide the opportunity to get to Paris in 4 hours only for those who may supposedly need to, who may be able to afford it, and may benefit from it. The parallel cuts in both local infrastructure and welfare provisions are a case in point, as they would disproportionately affect the marginalized sections of society and increase not only economic but also social inequalities. In short, TAV high-speed would respond to the interests of some while at the same time being detrimental to the wider society. The resulting inequalities would not be only economic or monetary, but would impinge on wider “social” needs, as exemplified not by chance by the No-TAV struggle, which denounces:

- a) the lack of need of the new Turin-Lyon TAV line considered the underuse of existing local and international infrastructure;
- b) the degradation of the natural commons in the construction of the high-speed train line;
- c) the negative impact of construction works (and their aftermath) on the health of locals;
- d) the depletion of common financial resources for particular interests;
- e) the corruption resulting from the involvement of mafia groups in the construction works;
- f) given the denounced waste of public resources, the resulting reduction of welfare provisions and other public investments for the collectivity, such as education, healthcare and pensions.

(No-TAV Torino, *Perche' No al TAV Torino-Lyon*, 2014, my translation)

No-TAV”, first spelled on a mountain-side in the Valley of Susa in 1995, by 2008 had become the cry of a protesting generation of Italian *precari*. Italian protests against TAV lines in fact first boomed in Val di Susa on the Turin-Lyon line, but supportive No-TAV movements soon sprung in all major Italian cities, while in other regions localized protests emerged for instance on the Florence-Bologna section across the Appennini mountains (Terra Nuova, 2011; 2012). On the Turin-Lyon line, protests on the French side of the Alps have been minimal, for reasons that pertain to the specific Italian conjuncture analyzed in this paper, specifically the linking of TAV projects to the fights against neoliberal globalization, financialization, precarization, austerity and widening social inequalities. The first protests arose in Val di Susa, Florence and Milan already in 1995, while the first formal Franco-Italian agreements were signed in 1999. Nevertheless, construction did not start until ten years later. Locations within the valley, for instance those near the planned construction sites, were occupied by local groups for the first time in 2005, protests boomed during the Turin 2006 Winter Olympic Games,

that were partly held in Val di Susa, and then again since 2010 and 2011, as the construction sites were finally opened. The very first workers arriving on site were welcomed by a hail of stones by militants of the No-TAV movement in 2011 (Mazzetti, 2012, 21-30). Since then, both violent and nonviolent resistance in the valley has been refueled, and so has violent and nonviolent police repression. Four people, linked to the Social Centers of Turin and Milan, were arrested in December 2013 accused of terrorism for bombing attack at the construction site in May of the same year (Messaggero, 2013).

The valley's No-TAV movement has been supported in different parts of the country chiefly in a wave of protests in 2005 and then especially in 2011, when has been incorporated in wider anti-austerity popular protests (Sasso and Giorno, 2008; Pizzo and Sullo, 2012), finally being linked to the experience of the Occupy Movement and *Autonomista* social centers fights in recent years (Mercalli, 2011; Ravelli and Pepino, 2012). The No-TAV struggle has even been encouraged by violent groups of the extreme left, albeit such encouragement was promptly dismissed by No-TAV activists themselves. In particular, I am referring to a letter from prison written by members of the New BR (New Red Brigades), heirs to the group responsible for a number of violent attacks during Italy's "Years of Lead" in the 1970s and 80s, who in 2002 were actually responsible for the killing of Marco Biagi, the main signatory of the "Biagi Law" reforming and precarizing the labor market in 2003 (Repubblica, 2012a). Their letter read:

"The capacity to generalize the No-TAV struggle, thanks to the solidary mobilizations all over the country and the spreading of its flag as a symbol of resistance for other movements, has reinforced clashes on other fronts" (Nuove BR Brigade Rosse, - New Red Brigades, November 21, 2013, quoted in La Repubblica, 2013a).

A burgeoning literature in Italy, some of which referenced here also when connected to No-TAV allied movements, has been concerned with the question of TAV in Val di Susa. The publication of essays on the topic has boomed in the mid-2000s and again after 2011, therefore coinciding with the peaks of the No-TAV struggle, which is continuing today. Few recent studies are also directly linking it to the wider current Italian economic and political crisis as a crucial example of popular upheaval, and adopt a largely sympathetic attitude to the valley's resistance (Mercalli, 2011; Ravelli and Pepino, 2012). In particular, in 2012 comedian-turned-politician Beppe Grillo published *Alta Voracita'*, meaning "high greed", playing with the words *alta velocita'*, or "high speed" (Grillo, 2012), where Grillo denounces the destructive speed and greed of development led by the neoliberal reforms of the Berlusconi era.

Grillo rails against the "caste" of Italy's both right and left-wing corrupted politicians also in connection with the No-Tav struggle, as his deeper critique is in fact advanced against the neoliberal

logic of development, which is contained in a nutshell in two statements by Beppe Grillo with regard to TAV. He retains that “the Turin-Lyon line is the biggest fraud of the century. Thinking of transport freight at 300 km/h is a concept from the Seventies, the future is transporting less freight, it’s regionalism” (quoted in Mazzetti, 2012, 89). In his own book, Grillo also contends that “we plan pharaoh-like railway lines that will go to the exclusive advantage of those who will be able to afford the ticket, while local transit is progressively weakened and destroyed. The state has consciously decided to deny the weakest strata of society the right to travel” (Grillo, 2012, 23). Claiming to represent part of the “no-global” movement and of the Italian “*precariato*” or “precariat”, what Standing has called “the new dangerous class” (Standing, 2011), Grillo is today advocating for localism, environmentalism and “degrowth” (*decrescita* in Italian and *decrecimiento* in Spanish), and has also been personally involved in the No-TAV struggle in recent years (Torino 2.0, 2012). Grillo has not only endorsed the localized No-TAV struggle in the Valley of Susa, but also the more recent *Forconi* (Pitchforks) revolts of 2012 and 2013, which convey popular discontent for the economic crisis, ask for lower taxes and exit from the Euro-zone, as does Grillo but not all other movements. Since December 9th 2013, the day of a national strike of employees of the transportation sector, wide-ranging popular revolts in every major city of the country have linked transportation workers, peasants and far-right groups. Although the *Forconi* movement started in Sicily last year, Turin is now the epicenter of these revolts. Some Turin *autonomista* social centers have initially joined the protest while they later retreated (also being blamed by the organizers for triggering chaos together with “the immigrants”, cf. Movimento dei Forconi, 2013), whereas from the very beginning No-TAV groups chose not to be involved at all.

Grillo has recently emerged as a key political figure in Italy, specifically since the 2008 crisis, when the No-TAV movement, the anti-globalization movement and the more recent movements against austerity measures have been finally channeled into Grillo’s Five Star Movement founded in 2009 and by 2013 representing the largest political force in the Italian parliament. The Five Star Movement (in Italian *Movimento Cinque Stelle* or M5S) takes its name from its concern with Public Water, Protection of the Environment, and Sustainability in Development, Energy Sources and Transportation (Repubblica, 2012b). The M5S does not define itself as a party but in fact as a “movement”, professing to be a popular political force opposed to the logic of party politics, and today represents the largest single “political force”, having gathered more votes than either of the two traditional parties (Berlusconi’s Forza Italia and the center-left Partito Democratico), but was surpassed by both the right- and left-wing grand coalitions.

Grillo's electoral triumph in 2013 is really the result of the widest popular upheaval in Italy in generations. The last overturn of the established politico-economic order in Italy took place with the rise of Berlusconi's Forza Italia party ("Come On Italy") in 1994, which was going to dominate the political scene in a bipolar political order for twenty years. Crucially, large parts of the Italian radical left did not converge into the Five Star Movement, but criticize it and oppose it instead. In fact, Grillo's movement, like Berlusconi's in 1994, has been already criticized as populist and anti-democratic, also with reference to practices internal to the movement, with the strict control exercised by Grillo himself as the undiscussed leader of the Movement on the young and inexperienced MPs, many of them elected to serve in a public institution for the very first time, and the demonization of published lists of "hostile journalists" who are seen as critiquing the movement (Repubblica, 2013b). Past the years of Berlusconi's television-based media empire, Grillo uses the Internet as his main communication channel, and the second most important figure in the Movement is Gianroberto Casaleggio, a well-connected internet magnate. Grillo's website is the most popular in the country, but recently started to enforce a compulsory registration policy for comments and access to specific content. In this sense, an important critique to Grillo as "digital populism" has been moved by Giuliano Santoro and writers connected to the Wu Ming collective based in Bologna (Santoro, 2012; Wu Ming, Collettivo 2013a, 2013b).

In Polanyi's terms, what is at stake in Grillo's Movimento Cinque Stelle is indeed what kind of "protection of society" one may achieve today in opposition to neo-liberal globalization, a hundred years after Nazi-Fascism seemed to emerge in Europe precisely as a reaction to Belle Époque globalization. At a moment when Europe is experiencing a worrisome "turn to the right", as seen in the 2014 European Parliament elections, this question is more urgent than ever. In crowded squares across the country for his "V-days" (where V stands for "*vaffanculo*", or "screw you", but is also an explicit reference to the comic book and movie "V for Vendetta"), Grillo rails against the traditional Italian political parties arguing that his politics are "beyond left and right" (Repubblica, 2011): he has been advocating for localism, environmentalism and "degrowth" like parts of the Italian radical left (Grillo, 2012) but like the far right has also argued for both the drastic reduction of immigration in Italy (Grillo, 2006) and for the exit of the country from the Eurozone (Grillo, 2013; 2014b), tying his claims to nationalistic rhetoric, supporting also the right-wing "Pitchforks" peasants movements, and finally forging an alliance with Nigel Farage's United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) following the 2014 European Elections. In the contemporary social movements of the Italian *precari*, between the local No-TAV



movement in the Valley of Susa and Grillo's Movement in the national parliament in Rome, what seems to be at stake is the bounding and glorification of an impossibly "immobile" home-land and of a "Fortress Italy" or "Fortress Europe" closing up to "foreign" immigrants that really has never been more precarious, raising concerns with the rise of neo-fascism also when masked as *no-global* populism.

### 3. Trieste and Europe: A Precarious Fortress

As part of a process of regional and European integration, in Trieste today intersect two EU-sponsored East-West transcontinental transportation corridors: the planned Lyon-Budapest TEN-T "Corridor 6" of highway and TAV high-speed train lines, planned to also pass through the Valley of Susa, and the Cadiz-Athens "Eurovelo<sup>3</sup> Corridor 8" of walking and cycling paths. Nevertheless, the city has been largely cut out from new "Subway of Italy" network of high-speed TAV lines, with only slower trains running from Trieste West to Venice on a narrow corridor of Italian territory, and since 2008 Trieste has been completely cut off from its vital rail connections to Ljubljana, Beograd, Budapest and Vienna across the Eastern border. The last train to Vienna left the city in 2009, by then not even a direct connection any more, while the trains to Ljubljana and Budapest were suppressed in 2011 (Piccolo, 2009, 2013). Considering the double severance of its ties to the rest of Italy and to Central Europe since 2008, Possamai comments that, as Italian TAV trains do not reach Trieste, east of Milan "rules darkness, a darkness of ideas and initiative, a darkness of future perspectives and hopes" (Possamai, 2012, 5; cf. De Benedetti and Rastello, 2013). The situation of Trieste, where the sentence "Trieste is immobile, dead" resonates with local youth and is repeated in their own everyday conversations, indeed stands in stark contrast with the ambitions of the schizophrenic "high-speed" Italy of the Berlusconi Era.

It the same years, those following the 2008 crisis, new nativist tendencies also emerged in Trieste, a city with the only Nazi concentration camp south of the Alps and already very strong neo-fascist groups. The resulting Trieste Libera or "Free Trieste" movement, advocating for the independence of the TLT (*Territorio Libero di Trieste*, or Free Territory of Trieste) and inspired by the brief experience of the TLT Allied protectorate of Trieste between 1945 and 1954 ("Declaration of

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<sup>3</sup> The name derives from the word "velo", meaning "bike" in French.

Existence”, in Trieste Libera, 2014). At the same time, new forms of “back to the land” movements reminiscent of the 1960s and 70s have been emerging in the province of Trieste, as groups of predominantly white Italian-speaking or Triestino dialect-speaking youth are in fact opening new collective gardens on the largely Slovenian-speaking Karst plateau within the international border. Among the latter, opposition to Berlusconi’s neoliberal policies and TAV is generally quite strong, and so is support for Grillo’s *no-global* Movement. In fact, in Trieste Grillo’s M5S managed to reach 28.7% of votes, way above the national average and not only more than any other party, but also surpassing both the right- or left-wing grand coalitions (Repubblica, 2013b). Yet what is at stake in longing to go “back” to the land on Trieste’s Karst today? If the expression “...my/our land” (“...*la mia/la nostra terra*”) is constantly repeated in conversations about collective gardens, about the city of Trieste and the Karst plateau, or even about the TLT area, which actually spans across the Slovenian and Croatian border, how may the *no global* movements of the radical left be different from nativist groups to the far right? How can one argue for *no-global* “localism” and appeal to ideas of “home-land”, when the land itself is more and more an Italian-Slovenian border-land within the new enlarged European Union, spanning across the old Iron Curtain? In an era of reactionary “protection” from neoliberal globalization and precarization, what kind of regional integration may be possible for isolated, decaying, ageing and conservative Trieste? What kind of organically inter-related “border-land” may be produced in the new borderlands of “Fortress Europe”?

I am particularly interested in the ways in which discourses akin to “back to the land” principles are embedded in the inter-connected movements of the No-TAV struggle in Val di Susa and elsewhere, Grillo’s Five Star Movement, Occupy, the *autonomista* social centers and the network of communes based in Tuscany, down to the more everyday experiences of collective gardens. Yet, as exemplified by the Italian Network of Ecological Villages RIVE (Rete Italian Villaggi Ecologici), inserted in the context of GEN (Global Ecovillage Network), “back-to-the-land” attempts in Italy today as existing or planned ecovillages indeed comprise very different approaches and political agendas, while all share the central concern of ecological sustainability and the idea of achieving a closer relationship to the earth. Antinori writes how such experiences have been re-branded “from communes to ecovillages”. as an ecovillage is defined an “intentional community” inspired by the 1960s communes but that “goes beyond class struggle” (Antinori, 2012, 37), being focussed on “economic, ecological, social and cultural sustainability” (Global Ecovillage Network, 2014). In the American context, Andrew Jacobs talks also about the renewed tendency to go back to cooperative housing not only in the traditional sense of

common ownership as in the traditional commune (Jacob, 2006), but also merely as an effort to counter the waste of resources and social isolation of modern life (New York Times, 2011). Among hundreds of privately-owned gardens and at least a dozen of collective gardens in the Province of Trieste, Trieste's own ecovillage project was inaugurated in 2013 and inspired by the Facebook page "I would like an Ecovillage in Trieste" (Vorre Un Ecovillaggio a Trieste, 2014), although it remains at a very initial stage both in material construction and in the construction of a shared political agenda. Certainly not all new "back-to-land" movements in contemporary Trieste, Italy and Europe may be seen as being simply tied to the circles of the radical left.

What these different experiences really seem to share is a refusal of (but not always active resistance to) mainstream society. An interesting tension emerges then between desires for escape and belonging, among different ways to relate to the earth. So how are such desires for escape and belonging renegotiated in the border-land of Trieste's Karst? Is going "*oltreconfin*" ("beyond the border") seen as crossing an anarchic frontier (Scott, 2009) by Italian-speaking or dialect-speaking Triestini? Once one goes "*per le alte*" ("on the high places", on the Karst plateau), into an area that is already widely Slovenian-speaking even within the Italian border, who is "autochthonous" and feels that that is still "my land"? And when one stays "*in citta*" (in the city, in Trieste) who feels to "belong"? Multiple borderlands emerge here, between urban cement, sandstone and clay at the Karst's edge, and limestone and "red earth" up above it. In each "border-land", I propose, a longing for an idealized "home-land" is constantly renegotiated in everyday practices.

Thus, in critiquing Deleuze's notion of "becoming" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980/1987; Deleuze, 1987) through Donna Haraway's notion of "becoming with" (Haraway, 2008), I understand border-spaces as *organically* related to one another. Emphasizing the "organicism" of social ties in Haraway, I thus draw also from Gramsci's theory of the person, according to which "the individual enters in relationships with other men not by juxtaposition, but *organically*, that is to say inasmuch as he becomes part of *organisms* from the simplest to the most complex. So man does not enter in relation with nature simply, for the fact of being himself nature, but *actively*, by means of work and technique" (Gramsci, 2012, 335 - Q10II, §54, my translation, emphasis added).<sup>4</sup> I therefore consider that while one may still

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<sup>4</sup> The lines preceding this quote read: "one needs to conceive man as a series of active relationships (a process) in which if individuality has the utmost importance, it is not the only element to consider. The humanity that is reflected in each individuality is composed of different elements: 1) the individual (*individuo* in Italian) 2) other man 3) nature. But the second and third elements are not as simple as they may seem" (Gramsci, 2012, 355 - Q10II, §54, my translation, emphasis added).

tend to a Deleuzian “speed” or speculative schizophrenia<sup>5</sup> in a process of neoliberal globalization, financialization and precarization, taming its speed will not necessarily translate into remaining unpredictably suspended in “becoming” while longing for an immobile land. By appreciating the complex mutual production of our selves in a shared world, one could instead consider the Italian-Slovenian Karst as a space where it may be possible to think of “belonging” to an unbounded home with an extroverted and “global sense of place” (Massey, 1994; cf. Massey 2005). This is where I convene with Mary Louise Pratt’s conception of borderlands as “contact zones” of multiple and mutually productive inter-relations (Pratt, 1992), and more specifically, in critiquing the schizophrenic speculation of neoliberal precarization I am also critiquing the notion of a dichotomous “bipolar” disorder, a notion that is also still employed by Martin when she discusses the schizophrenia of “manic markets” (Martin, 2007). Trieste is also the city where psychiatrist Franco Basaglia started his fight to close down asylums in Italy, leading to the successful “Basaglia Law” of 1978, at the time truly revolutionary and with wide international repercussions, but still not completely understood today in Italy or elsewhere. Without going into further detail in this sense, when discussing the high-speed of neo-liberal Italy and resistance against it, it will suffice to say that, it seems to me, there is still a lot to learn from Basaglia: “taming speed” does not mean simply to slow down and “arborify” your schizophrenia, to repress as with medication or institutionalized internment, to react by bouncing back and tending to the opposite extreme towards an “immobile earth”. This seems to be true for No-TAV and *no-global* movements as much as for right-wing nativist groups in contemporary Italy, or for Grillo’s populist cries for “localism”. It seems to me that in everyday practices in close relationship with the earth these tendencies are constantly renegotiated, and that a longing for a home-land that is a safe and immobile *terra firma* may really result, in everyday practices, in the appreciation of the mutual co-production of ourselves in a shared world, in an “organic border-land”. In everyday encounters with people and matter, *terra firma* may indeed result itself as an illusion, and may be increasingly understood as what the contemporary Italian writer Franco Arminio understand as “*terramossa*”, or mobile land (Arminio, 2012).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Deleuze understands “speed” in quantitative terms as the acceleration of life in its multiple realms, but also in qualitative terms as the idealized production of the smooth spaces of capital: “only nomads have absolute movement, in other words, speed” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980/1987, 381).

<sup>6</sup> Franco Arminio interprets the production of a different relationship with the ‘home-land’ in his book *Terracarne (Flesh-earth)*. The relationship with his own home-land of Irpinia in Southern Italy is visceral: “earth and flesh almost melt, the body becomes landscape and the landscape is embodied in flesh”, but to tame the contemporary Italian idea of ‘progress’ “it is time to return to a less ambitious physiology, to a quiet vagrancy on the world that spins” (Arminio, 2011). In his documentary *Terramosa (Mobile-earth)* he further exhorts Italians: “make sure to move around, do not stay still like a cloth

After a hiatus of a few years, again the years following the economic crisis, a local train to Ljubljana was reinstated in December 2013, the first one crossing again the Slovenian border since 2011, although not reaching Vienna or Budapest any more (Piccolo, 2013). At the same time, the old “Parenzana” railway linking the city to Porec in former Yugoslavia had already been discontinued during the Cold War, and it has recently been remade into a walking and cycling path connecting Trieste to Koper and Portoroz in Slovenia, along the seashore. Another cycling path, the “Cottur”, built along the old railway to Vienna after removing the old Austrian tracks, today links the city on the Mediterranean to the Karst plateau, reaching Kozina in Slovenia a few kilometers across the border, as a space where today the lives of urban joggers intersect those of goat herders. At least two cycling paths cross the border at Opicina and Trebiciano, and a great number of cross-border walking and horse-riding paths have been today re-opened after the removal of checkpoints at the Italian-Slovenian border on the plateau. Integration of an “organic borderland” seems therefore to take place not through TAV high-speed trains, but through everyday forms of interactions and practical encounters.

## **Conclusions:**

### **Longing for “Home-Land” and Walking in “Border-Lands”**

A rapidly ageing and politically conservative decaying port-town, although still very wealthy, Trieste today epitomizes the European situation quite fittingly. Situated at the Southern edge of the old Iron Curtain, almost surrounded the Yugoslavian and now Slovenian border, the city really finds itself today again caught up in the midst of regional integration, with the EU enlargement to the East and the entering of Slovenia and Hungary (and soon Croatia) in the Schengen area. Today’s opening of international boundaries is nevertheless quite different from Austrian-Hungarian times, when imperial integration made Trieste the fourth city of the Empire and brought immense wealth to its citizens. Today Trieste finds itself not at the center of an empire but at the far Eastern edge of Italy and Western Europe, on the edge of the Balkans, open to an “East” that its citizens seem to not understand as part of

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underneath an iron”, “maybe we do not need one town, but a landscape, maybe the secret is to stay in a place, with what there is, that is always a lot” (Arminio, 2012).

themselves, an “East” that remains largely unknown and that is paradoxically even more disconnected today than during the Cold War. The possible rediscovery of Trieste’s inland borderlands though new back to the land movements is in fact happening in conjunction not only with increased international mobility in terms of booming immigration and emigration, but also with the rise of nativist groups such as Free Trieste coupled with Grillo’s cries for no-global “localism”. Yet closing up in Trieste’s TLT today would equal, once again, to building walls and smother a city that is already said to be “dead”.

Therefore, if seen as “the last outpost of the West”, in a precarious borderland “vulnerable” to Balkan immigration, Trieste would really risk closing up even more, as much of the rest of “Fortress Europe”. Yet for groups of young *precar*i going back to the land in Trieste today, a different relationship with both land and homeland may be produced not only by deciding to open collective gardens or ecovillages, but also by dealing with the “sticky materiality of practical encounters” (Tsing, 2005) in everyday life, by also unexpectedly forging new ties between the urban and the rural, the “Italian” and the Eastern European “other”. As the city’s laws of environmental protection protect the Karst’s “wilderness” and restrict construction on the plateau, most collective gardens are non-residential projects, with the exception of the project for an ecovillage and of course of youth reclaiming family-owned land. So almost all of these young Triestini maintain their “precarious” urban jobs, while traveling on a daily basis to their collective gardens on the Karst. Driving, cycling and walking on, to and from the plateau, traveling to both Venice and Ljubljana, interacting directly with the Slovenian minority, hearing the Slovenian language more and more often, as more and more of them have started learning it too, planting seeds, day after day, herding goats, being stung by a bee, and touching, smelling, feeling the earth, may not count as “escape in the wilderness” (cf. Thoreau 1862/2013) nor as the romanticization of an essentialized home-land as an immobile “refuge from neoliberal globalization and precarization” (cf. Geschiere, 2009). The everyday practices of Italian youth going back-to-the-land on the plateau may instead be producing a new relationship with a “mobile home-land” as a “border-land” with an extroverted sense of place, forging new connections between urban Trieste and the rural Karst, and new relationships with both the Italian nation and with “the East” across the border. Thus longing for “home-land” in a reactionary closure in opposition to neoliberal globalization may certainly risk to romanticize escape from society, or even romanticize an “immobile” land (as I have argued here discussing attachment to *terra firma* or to “my/our land”), but such journeys inland may really also wind up contributing to the production of an organic “border-land” in the most improbable of places, namely, a fortress.

Trieste's Italian-Slovenian Karst, at the heart of "Fortress Europe", emerges today precisely as such a "border-land". In an attempt to understand the everyday forms of back-to-the-land practices of young Triestini *precari*, I thus understand Trieste not simply as a possible gateway of TAV high-speed lines or of slower travels at the meeting of East and West, but beyond Orient and Occident by accepting Edward Said's invitation (Said, 1978, 28), as a "contact zone" in both Pratt (1992) and Haraway's (2008) terms, that is the rich and lively conjuncture of multiple and organically related histories and spatial relations. In renegotiating the relationship with a home-land that is therefore increasingly felt and understood as the rich and lively space of Arminio's *terramossa* (mobile land) in everyday practices, young *precari* in the collective gardens of Trieste's Italian-Slovenian Karst are really not on either side of a neat border or in a constant tension along it, but in a borderland produced as a meeting-up of journeys.

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