



International Conference

**DECADE OF DECADENCE: 1914-1924  
SPACES, SOCIETIES AND BELONGINGS IN THE  
ADRIATIC BORDERLAND IN HISTORICAL  
COMPARISON**

Koper, 29-30 May 2024

**PROGRAMME AND ABSTRACTS**



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KOPER 2024

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE DECADE OF DECADENCE: 1914–1924. SPACES, SOCIETIES AND BELONGINGS IN THE ADRIATIC BORDERLAND IN HISTORICAL COMPARISON**

**Programme and Abstracts**

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# CONFERENCE PROGRAM

**Wednesday, 29<sup>th</sup> May 2024**

**15:00-15:15**

**Welcome, Greetings & Introduction**

**Tilen Glavina** (Science and Research Centre Koper)

**Borut Klabjan** (Science and Research Centre Koper)

**15:15-16:00**

**Keynote Lecture**

**Milan Ristović** (University of Belgrade)

**16:00-16:30** *Coffee Break*

**16:30-18:30**

**Panel I**

**Mark Cornwall** (University of Southampton): *Propaganda and Plebiscite in the Adriatic during the Collapse of Austria-Hungary*

**Dragica Čeč** (Science and Research Centre Koper): *Complex Legal and Political Use of Right of Domicile in the Late Habsburg Monarchy*

**Marta Verginella** (University of Ljubljana): *»On the Ray of Sunshine, the Fountain of True Freedom and Warm Love« or How the Italian Authorities Have Approached the Minority Question in the Julian March*

**Andreas Guidi** (Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales, Paris): *From the Adriatic to the Aegean to the Pacific Ocean: The Bogdanich Family and their Transimperial Generations*

Discussion

**Anders Blomqvist** (Dalarna University, Falun)

**20:00** *Dinner*

**Thursday, 30<sup>th</sup> May 2024**

**10:00-12:00**

**Panel II**

**Maura Hametz** (James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia): *Making Enemies in the Borderland*

**Tullia Catalan** (University of Trieste): *Managing the Jewish Emigration Flow after World War I. The port of Trieste in the early 1920s*

**Marco Bresciani** (University of Florence): *Shifting and Overlapping Sovereignties: Problems of Trieste's post-Habsburg Hinterland and Projects of Customs Union*

Discussion

**Vanni D'Alessio** (University of Naples "Federico II")

**12:00-13:30 Lunch**

**13:30-15:30**

**Panel III**

**Jakub Beneš** (University College London): *The Peasant Revolution of 1918-1920 and Political Instability in Interwar East Central Europe*

**Gašper Mithans** (Science and Research Centre Koper): *The Beginnings of Anti-Fascism in Venezia Giulia and the Marezige Uprising*

**Ivan Jeličić** (University of Rijeka): *Fighting and Dying for Autonomism, Fiume's Realistic Alternative to Italy*

**Matteo Millan** (University of Padua): *The Great Watershed? Gun-control and Gun Cultures in the Years of the First World War*

Discussion

**Pieter Judson** (European University Institute, Florence)

**15:30-16:00 Coffee Break**



**16:00-17:30**

**Panel IV**

**Gorazd Bajc** (University of Maribor): *Problematic Returns to Venezia Giulia after the First World War. The Case of Women Without Permanent Residence ("non pertinenti")*

**Matteo Perissinotto** (University of Trieste): *Female Suicides in Trieste During the Postwar Transition (1918-1923)*

**Dagmar Hájková** (Masaryk Institute and the Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences): *Food Supply as a Barometer of Loyalty to the State in the Early Years of Czechoslovakia*

Discussion

**Sabine Rutar** (Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies, Regensburg)

**17:30-18:00**

Concluding remarks

**Nancy Wingfield** (Northern Illinois University)

**20:00** *Dinner*

### **CONFERENCE ORGANISED BY**

Science and Research Centre Koper, Institute for Historical Studies,  
Slovenia



### **ORGANISATION AND PROGRAMME COMMITTEE**

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Nina HOFMANN, Science and Research Centre Koper  
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# ABSTRACTS



## PLEBISCITE AND PROPAGANDA IN THE ADRIATIC DURING THE COLLAPSE OF AUSTRIA-HUNGARY

**Mark CORNWALL**

*University of Southampton*

In the second half of the Great War, the eastern Adriatic coast witnessed a major food crisis, worse than most other regions of the Habsburg empire. At the same time this coastal territory was the target of an ideological offensive by propagandists from inside and outside the Monarchy. Feeding on economic and national insecurities, such propaganda challenged citizens in Istria and Dalmatia to take a stand on the 'Yugoslav question': not just whether they supported some form of South Slav unity, but whether they viewed that vision as a meaningful alternative to anything offered by the Habsburg regime.

This paper analyses the two strands of this anti-Habsburg propaganda offensive. Firstly, there is the Slovene-led 'Declaration Movement', which from late 1917 was penetrating the southern crownlands with petitions and public rallies. It called for South Slav unity within the empire, but in 1918 morphed into a popular mobilization in the face of official Austrian intransigence. What do our archival sources suggest about the success of this radical 'plebiscite' in favour of Yugoslavia? Was there mass support for a Yugoslav future, or was that simply an intellectual veneer obscuring the socio-economic grievances? Secondly, the year 1918 witnessed a major psychological offensive from Italy against Austria-Hungary, with Yugoslav propaganda as a key tool in the armoury. Either directly by propaganda flights over the Adriatic coast, or indirectly through the dissemination of leaflets overland, this offensive steadily encroached on Slovene and Croatian territory. It made Habsburg officials increasingly anxious that they now faced a new psychological battle of ideas that was winning over the native population. Yet how true was this? As with the Declaration Movement, we can compare Italy's propaganda with its potential or actual impact on the ground. Although the Italian leaflets were highly sophisticated, their main impact was probably the sheer mass dissemination (through Italy's control of the air space) rather than the strength of the written arguments. In other words, the Habsburg

authorities felt increasingly on the defensive and had few powers with which to respond.

The paper therefore analyses how and why new ideas could circulate in the Adriatic space in the final years of the Monarchy. While propagandists employed new methods, many people in turn were mobilized to demand change in order to shore up their personal insecurities. A psychological power struggle now went in tandem with the military conflict.

## COMPLEX LEGAL AND POLITICAL USE OF RIGHT OF DOMICILE IN THE LATE HABSBURG MONARCHY

**Dragica ČEČ**

*Science and Research Centre Koper*

Modern citizenship embodies a triad of dimensions: a legal status granting rights, a principle underpinning democratic self-governance, and a conception of collective identity and membership [Joppke 2010]. This nuanced concept of citizenship was partially introduced to the successor states following the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy. In the 19th century, the right of domicile (*Heimatrecht*) exhibited certain characteristics akin to modern citizenship but also served as a “technology” [Cruikshank 1999] for the practical management of mobility, encompassing both impoverished individuals and migrant workers.

Political debates and policies regarding mobile populations during this period were pulled in two conflicting directions. On one side, there was a drive to control and secure the movement of these “dangerous” population groups. On the other, there was a need to meet labor demands, which necessitated greater freedoms [cf. Foucault 2007]. Immigrant men and women, particularly those experiencing temporary unemployment, improper behavior, incapacity to work, poverty, chronic illness, or those seeking access to local, municipal, and provincial politics, faced discrimination based on the right of domicile. They were often subjected to close scrutiny by municipal authorities and native-born residents.

A change of residence within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy could lead to an individual’s perception of themselves, and by others, as foreigners, regardless of the high mobility and multicultural nature of urban centers such as Vienna and Trieste. Nevertheless, the concept of “foreignness” is a variable construct, changing according to political, economic, and social circumstances and networks.

Following the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy, the exclusionary tools of pertinency automatically granted citizenship to certain individuals, irrespective of their workplace or long absence from their domicile municipality. However, this right of pertinence also caused significant social trauma

across post-Habsburg Europe, leaving many at risk of statelessness (Kirchner-Reill et al.). Despite the extensive and varied application of the right of domicile in different social contexts within the late 19th-century Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, some recent historical analyses reduce its meaning to a mere “legal mechanism that communities used to avoid the costs and presence of persons considered socially undesirable.”



**ON THE RAY OF SUNSHINE, THE FOUNTAIN OF TRUE FREEDOM  
AND WARM LOVE” OR HOW THE ITALIAN AUTHORITIES HAVE  
APPROACHED THE MINORITY QUESTION IN THE JULIAN MARCH**

**Marta VERGINELLA**

*University of Ljubljana*

This paper will shed light on how the Italian military and civilian authorities dealt with the minority question in the former Austrian Littoral and how the different segments of Croatian and Slovenian society reacted to the new authorities. The main material to be analyzed will be that of the ITO, headed by Cesare Finzi, who created an intelligence network that operated on both the Italian and Yugoslav sides. The repressive policies and forms of assistance used by the Italian authorities to win the sympathy of the population in the new occupied territory will be presented.

## **FROM THE ADRIATIC TO THE AEGEAN TO THE PACIFIC OCEAN: THE BOGDANICH FAMILY AND THEIR TRANSIMPERIAL GENERATIONS**

**Andreas GUIDI**

*INALCO Paris*

How can we combine a focus on the Adriatic region between 1914-1924 with broader spaces and temporalities that redefined territories, forms of rule, and belonging? My paper will address this question through the trajectory of the Bogdanich family of shipowners. Based on the island of Silbe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, trade brought one of their branches to Smyrna. Away from the Adriatic, after World War I, they were exposed to the fall of empires, the Habsburg and the Ottoman, which led them to change their nationality. Some members acquired the Yugoslav, others the Italian citizenship, before leaving Smyrna and moving to Rhodes in the 1920s. The city in the Aegean had been under Italian rule since 1912 and it had a link to another Italian occupation in the Adriatic, Zadar. There some members of another generations of Bogdanich spent their military service in the 1930s. After World War 2, some of them relocated further to North America, in Seattle or Vancouver. The Bogdanich have left a paper trail between genealogy and archival sources, that I discovered both in Rhodes and by correspondence with their descendants. This microhistorical approach can be read in constant dialogue with the transformation of the Adriatic space, especially those of the decade 1912-1924. Beyond a simple comparative approach, my paper invites specialists of the Adriatic to engage with Mediterranean and global history. It reads loyalty and citizenship as not confined to national rivalries and tensions, but as linked to connected imperial legacies in a space in flux. The generational approach also invites to adopt more complex markers of temporality to connect family trajectories with large-scale processes like world conflicts, migration flows, and fascism.

## **“MAKING ENEMIES IN THE BORDERLAND”**

**Maura HAMETZ**

*James Madison University*

Citizenship is generally considered in terms of belonging to a state, inclusion in a state and or community by birthright, through legal nationalization, based on territorial ties, or through affective associations. But, as much as holding or gaining citizenship signifies acceptance and inclusion, withholding or denial of citizenship denotes rejection and exclusion. This paper will explore the impact of the denial of citizenship to individuals who sought to opt for or elect Italian citizenship in the Adriatic borderlands in the wake of the First World War. Examining the disposition of petitions filed with the Citizenship Commission in Trieste from 1922 to 1926, it will trace the ways in which decisions on citizenship transformed Habsburg subjects of the Adriatic Littoral into enemy aliens in the new Italian state and demonstrate how persecutory legal practices that fed a sense of non-belonging fuelled violence and anti-Fascism in the *ventennio* and beyond.

## **MANAGING THE JEWISH EMIGRATION FLOW AFTER WORLD WAR I. THE PORT OF TRIESTE IN THE EARLY 1920S.**

**Tullia CATALAN**

*Università degli Studi di Trieste*

At the end of the World War I, one of the first organisation emergencies that the Jewish community of Trieste had to face was the restart of the transit of Jewish refugees from Eastern Europe, Poland and Hungary above all, and directed towards the Americas and Palestine. The migratory flow, already substantial in the first decade of the 20th century, had been interrupted during the war, only to be reactivated with large numbers from 1920 onwards also following the resurgence of anti-Semitism in the East and the consequent affirmation of Zionism, which saw in the Palestine of the British Mandate the safe haven for the Jews of the Diaspora persecuted by racism. The transition from Austrian Empire to Italy imposed new borders and rules on emigration and a different management of transport than before: the revival of the port of Trieste as a transit hub for Jewish refugees and emigrants was one of Fascism's objectives in the early 1920s, which was also interested in the Middle East area.

The paper aims to answer the following questions: what were the practices that emigrants had to perform once they arrived in Trieste? Did they differ according to the destination of the refugees? Where were they housed while awaiting embarkation and how were they treated by the shipping companies? Who were their local and international mediators with the Italian authorities? How did they spend their time waiting to embark, as it could sometimes take days if not months, especially in the absence of the required documentation. The research is based on consultation of local and international archives, autobiographies, diaries and private correspondence of some emigrants of the time, and oral interviews.

## **SHIFTING AND OVERLAPPING SOVEREIGNTIES: PROBLEMS OF TRIESTE'S POST-HABSBURG HINTERLAND AND PROJECTS OF CUSTOMS UNION**

**Marco Bresciani**  
*University of Florence*

Trieste in the post-Habsburg period offers one of the best observatories for understanding both the tectonic shifting in political and economic relations because of the Great War and the appropriation and adaptation of Habsburg legacies in managing the local impact of the imperial breakdown itself. As the empire's most important maritime hub, Trieste had become a crucial crossroads for Mediterranean and world trade routes, making it a spectacular example of increasing economic success up to 1914, despite conflicting developments in terms of nationalist claims and conflicts. The collapse of the Habsburg Empire and the subsequent fragmentation of the political and economic space in Central Europe shook the foundations of Trieste's economic success.

This paper will explore a diverse spectrum of ideas and projects emerging as a concrete articulation of opportunities and decisions, situations and expectations that arose in the wake of the Habsburg collapse. As a matter of fact, while shifting their loyalty to the Italian nation-state, the Upper Adriatic economic elites had to cope with a largely unpredicted crisis triggered by the disintegration of the former Habsburg hinterland. As a result, they became aware that a distinction had to be made between political sovereignty, which was entirely entrusted to the Italian state, and economic sovereignty, which was inevitably linked to a far-reaching network of interests and agencies that connected Trieste to Central Europe.

In order to investigate the different positions, I will focus on a proposal for customs and monetary union that Austria submitted to Italy in the summer of 1922. This ambitious solution aimed at disentangling political and economic sovereignty in Central Europe, saving Austria from financial chaos and reorganizing the port activities of Trieste. The analysis of the debate that followed the Austrian proposal will make it possible to highlight the deep rifts between the Italian authorities and the local elites of the Upper Adriatic with regard to the management of the post-Habsburg transition.

## **“THE PEASANT REVOLUTION OF 1918-1920 AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN INTERWAR EAST CENTRAL EUROPE”**

**Jakub BENEŠ**

*University College London*

In late 1918, a peasant revolution erupted in large areas of rural Austria-Hungary. Often led by returning soldiers and armed deserters, the revolution aimed to create a new social and political order in the countryside. Alongside violence against perceived oppressors and wartime profiteers, local and regional peasant republics were established in places such as western Galicia, Slavonia, Carpathian Ruthenia, lower Carniola and Prekmurje. This paper will shed light on this forgotten revolution and explain how it contributed to the instability of interwar Habsburg successor states, particularly Czechoslovakia, Poland, and the Yugoslavia. The suppression of peasant violence in the nascent Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (Yugoslavia's official name before 1929) and in Czechoslovakia helped produce destructive centralism in Belgrade and Prague—a tragic irony, given the federalist strivings of many peasant revolutionaries—as well as increasing oppositional nationalism among Croats and Slovaks. Republican movements among Croats and Slovenes also menaced public order in Yugoslavia into the 1920s. The half-hearted, ineffective suppression of anti-Jewish violence in Poland, much of it perpetrated by peasants in 1918-1919, was a significant factor in the imposition of minority treaties on postimperial states. These much-resented agreements overseen by the League of Nations fostered disillusion with the western victors of the First World War along with the eventual abandonment of liberal democracy in most of interwar east central Europe.

## **THE BEGINNINGS OF ANTI-FASCISM IN VENEZIA GIULIA AND THE MAREZIGE UPRISING**

**Gašper MITHANS**

*Science and Research Centre Koper*

Fascism in the border region of Venezia Giulia/Julija krajina was confronted with the unfamiliar social and political conditions, 'tradition' and multiculturalism of the former territories of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In this territory, the beginnings of the heterogeneous resistance to the violence of the Italian authorities date back to the period between 1918 and 1920 and consisted mainly of the expression of 'Slavic' sentiments, various demonstrations, anti-Italian propaganda, and informing Yugoslavia about the situation in the area.

In the pre-election period, the fascist squads attacked and destroyed everything that seemed hostile to them. On the day of the national elections on 15 May 1921 throughout the region incidents occurred, trying to turn the result in their favour by force. In particular, the Socialists and Communists were under attack in all of Italy. In Slovenian Istria, the best-known response to the violence is the local revolt in Marezige. A group of 11 fascists arrived in the village in the morning and immediately started provoking and forcing voters to vote for Blocco Nazionale. When the fascists started to shoot, the locals reacted spontaneously, attacking the fascists first with stones, and the fascists responded with shots. The outraged people killed three and seriously wounded one man. From Koper the available force of carabinieri and soldiers were sent, joined by fascists and three republicans. The latter immediately resorted to violence, but the soldiers and carabinieri soon restored order. However, in the marches that followed, the fascist squads took revenge on the nearby village of Čezarji.

The Marezige uprising culminated in a highly publicised trial in Trieste. The fascists were acquitted based on the amnesty decree, which did not apply to the Slovenians. Those affected by the fascists' rampage have never been compensated nor were they held responsible for their actions.

## **FIGHTING AND DYING FOR AUTONOMISM, FIUME'S REALISTIC ALTERNATIVE TO ITALY**

**Ivan JELIČIĆ**

*University of Rijeka*

A week before Christmas 1923 and on the eve of Fiume (Rijeka)'s annexation to Italy, Ernesto Zaller passed away. Although the biography of this Dalmatian born figure remains mostly unknown, news about his death and burial are a vivid expression of the political momentum; in the last months of his life Zaller was attacked by local Fascists for his Autonomist sympathies, while the Autonomists adorned his tomb with a wreath of Fiumian colors.

Starting from this story, the aim of the presentation is to shed light on political conflicts and opposing loyalties Fiumian society faced in the post-Habsburg transition period. With historiographical focus mainly confined to D'Annunzio's presence in the city, conflicts following the "Christmas of Blood" are disregarded, overlooking the ongoing civil war between advocates of the city-state independence and Italian annexationists. These conflicts were not merely a direct legacy of "D'Annunzio's escapade" and a feature of the emerging Italian fascism, they reveal persisting and readjusting forms of Habsburg period loyalties, with Autonomism as its most noticeable expression. From defence of city's historical rights inside Hungary, since November 1918 Autonomism was advocated as a potential contender to Italian nationalism, growing in 1921 to a form of loyalty and an agenda worth dying for. By displaying the pertinency and the citizenship of some of the actors and the casualties of these events, the presentation will show how Autonomism and the free state independentist option, were considered not only by locals as a realistic alternative to Italy.

Finally, Zaller's biography can unveil the continuity of alternatives to the nation, a potential network for the spreading of the notion of Autonomy, and, finally, how opposition to the (Italian) nation-state persisted even when the free state was already on its way to be buried.



## **THE GREAT WATERSHED? GUN-CONTROL POLICIES AND THE MAKING OF MODERN EUROPE AT THE TURN OF THE FIRST WORLD WAR**

**Matteo MILLAN**  
*University of Padua*

This paper investigates the gun question in Europe between the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 1920s and how it affected the nature of European citizenship and the state system.

Common images of the First World War depict the bloody consequences of the astonishing power of modern weaponry, from rattling machine-gun fire killing dozens in a few bursts to heavy artillery mercilessly crushing helpless soldiers. And yet, the Great War was also a time when, while millions of heavily armed soldiers fought in the trenches, millions of law-abiding civilians were disarmed at home. Before WWI, only a handful of European countries (e.g. Italy, Austria, Spain, and Portugal) had enforced preventive controls on the possession and use of small firearms by law-abiding civilians. Conversely, revolvers and shotguns could be purchased freely in hardware stores or by mail order in, say, the United Kingdom and Germany: a situation similar to that in certain US states today. Everything changed with the outbreak of the Great War. Although the disarmament of civilians in wartime was nothing new, what really changed was that such measures were not temporary but permanent. The capacity of state officials to implement restrictive gun-control laws must not be taken for granted: to be effective, new measures should reflect pre-existing political cultures, societal attitudes, historical traditions and deep-seated customs.

The paper connects changes in gun-control laws with major social, political and cultural transformations, arguing that since the First World War, social security and physical protection have been granted by the state on a “trade-off” basis as compensation for the loss of certain liberties and individual prerogatives (including the right to be freely armed). Especially after 1914, gun control became a widely accepted social necessity and one of the cornerstones of state sovereignty, influencing the reconfiguration of forms of citizenship, systems of governance and state attributions in a crucial period in European history.

## **PROBLEMATIC RETURNS TO VENEZIA GIULIA AFTER THE FIRST WORLD WAR. THE CASE OF WOMEN WITHOUT PERMANENT RESIDENCE (“NON PERTINENTI”)**

**Gorazd BAJC**

*University of Maribor*

Based on the analysis of various sources, and in particular the documents preserved in the Trieste section of the State Archives (Archivio di Stato di Trieste), the paper will present the issue of the difficult return of civilians to the area of Venezia Giulia/Julijska krajina (the Littoral/Primorska and Istria/Istra) at the end of the First World War. In particular, it will present the difficulties faced by women who did not have permanent residence in the area and who, as a result, were deprived of the right to return for several months or even longer – they were called ‘non pertinenti’. The problem was also political in character, so that here too we can speak of a kind of repressive measure by the new authorities.

## **FEMALE SUICIDES IN TRIESTE DURING THE POSTWAR TRANSITION (1918-1923)**

**Matteo PERISSINOTTO**

*University of Trieste*

My paper aims to investigate the continuities and discontinuities in the phenomenon of suicides in Trieste between the First World War and the transitional phase that followed it.

The data from Trieste after the First World War, read in the light of a gender perspective, show how there was an absolute and relative increase in female suicides, which came to exceed male suicides in absolute numbers, when usually male suicides are 2 or 3 times higher than female ones. In 1921, for the first time in peacetime, the number of female suicides exceeded that of men in absolute terms, with a very similar frequency: 4.63 per ten thousand males and 4.61 among females. A trend that is even more evident when analyzing failed suicides, i.e. acts that did not lead to death. This figure was so exceptional that it aroused the attention of both the statisticians of the time, such as Pierpaolo Luzzatto Fegiz, who dedicated a study to this data, and the Trieste press, which dealt with the subject in a series of enquiries.

Although the causes of each suicide are unfathomable, we can reconstruct the social, economic and political situation in which they occurred. I would also like to consider the role of the press in disseminating and analyzing these suicides. What emerges is the crisis that the city went through, which was shaken not only by the mourning and the private and political violence that followed the conflict, but also by a profound economic crisis that saw the cost of living rise, wages fall and a food, health and housing crisis.

## **FOOD SUPPLY AS A BAROMETER OF LOYALTY TO THE STATE IN THE EARLY YEARS OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA**

**Dagmar HÁJKOVÁ**

*Masaryk Institute and the Archives of the Czech Academy of Sciences*

The birth of Czechoslovakia in October 1918 was accompanied not only by relief that the war had ended, but also by fears about the future. One disturbing aspect was the general shortage of goods, which the territorial insecurities of the new state and tense nationalist atmosphere only exacerbated. The ability to ensure that the new state could supply its own population served as a barometer for its viability. Food, or rather the lack of it, could also serve as a means of coercion by the successor states of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to secure their own political interests and to promote their state ideas as well as justify its creation and continued existence. The inhabitants of Czechoslovakia defined their relationship to the state, and the state sought ways to win their loyalty. The food supply became a test of loyalty to the state and an indicator of ethnic and social frictions. The question is whether there were actors whom the state deliberately favored. How did the state explain shortages and distribute food to keep the peace? In contrast to the neighboring states, postwar shortages did not become an important part of the collective memory and were overlaid in Czechoslovakia by the narrative of the heroic struggle for liberation.

## NOTES

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