

## INTRODUCTION

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# In the Shadow of the Balkans, on the Shores of the Mediterranean

IN the border zone between Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia known as the Julian March reside members of families who were divided and scattered at the conclusion of the Second World War when Italy and Yugoslavia partitioned the region. These separated kin live on the fringes of the Gulf of Venice, an inner body of water making up part of the Adriatic Sea, which today divides populations as much as it once united them. Triestine writer Claudio Magris's description of the forests in this region hold equally true for its seas: "The woods are at once the glorification and the nullification of borders: a plurality of differing, opposing worlds, though still within the great unity that embraces and dissolves them" (1999, 107).

Though the fluidity of the sea would appear to defy any attempt at sovereignty, political borders cut through them. Indeed, the Adriatic's waters have witnessed the struggles of diverse powers—in more distant epochs, Venice, Austria, and the Ottomans and in the last century, Italy and Yugoslavia—to secure and police the adjacent territories. The most recent example involves the dispute between Slovenia and Croatia over precisely where, in the tiny Gulf of Piran, to draw the maritime frontier between those two states, which declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1991. This border contest, though seemingly in comical miniature, reflects the dramatic transformations that have reshaped the political geographies of the Julian March, as well as former Yugoslavia and the Balkans, in the last decade. The story I tell in this book traces the reconfigurations of memory and identity in relation to both political and symbolic boundaries.

In particular, I explore contemporary political debates surrounding the contentious post–World War II partition of the Julian March, memories of which the 1991 division of the Istrian Peninsula between Slovenia and Croatia echoed and renewed. The rearrangement of political borders after the Second World War provoked the Istrian exodus (*l'esodo istriano*), entailing the migration of between 200,000 and 350,000 ethnic Italians (as well as Slovenes and Croats).<sup>1</sup> My account here of the consequences of this displacement for those ethnic Italians who left (the *andati* or *esuli*) and those who remained (the *rimasti*) reflects the recent impulse on the part of scholars to study what many see as representative of the contemporary condition: the exiled, the refugee, the boundary

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crossers of various sorts. In her book on the Appalachian coal-mining region of West Virginia, Kathleen Stewart encourages us to “[i]magine a place grown intensely local in the face of loss, displacement, exile, and a perpetually deferred desire to return to what was always already lost or still ahead, just beyond reach” (1996, 16).

Closer at hand, in the field of Mediterranean anthropology, studies of Greek refugees—those of the 1922 population exchange between Greece and Turkey, of the Cyprus conflict, and of the Greek-Macedonian dispute (Brown 2002; Danforth 1995; Hirschon 1998; Karakasidou 1997; and Loizos 1981)—have challenged once-prevalent assumptions of either stable identities or (putative) cultures. As in the case of the Istrians I examine, the Greek and Macedonian examples deal with former refugees for whom the condition of exile has become permanent and for whom the moment of displacement proves central to historical consciousness. My analysis offers an innovation, however, in its attention to the experiences of those who undergo actual displacement together with those who suffer interior displacement, losing their homeland without ever physically moving. In heeding Malkki’s fruitful suggestion (1995) to broaden our understanding of what the unit of analysis (“exile”) consists of, I demonstrate how examining only one group misses the crucial dialogues (implicit and explicit), as well as shared histories, uniting these populations.

Considering diverse victims of displacement in tandem further helps link the work on forced migration with that on economic and so-called voluntary migration. Scholars in the latter field have begun to question the old dichotomies of sending and receiving communities, instead noting the multidirectional and often long-standing flows of migrants (Glick Schiller 1999; Kearney 1986; Stack 1996). Just as the example of massive Italian emigration to the New World has informed the thinking and rethinking about “classic” patterns of economic migration (Baily 1990; Glick Schiller 1999), so does the case of Italians from Istria help us reexamine our theoretical models of displacement. As I demonstrate, an analysis of the forms of identification forged through violence in the Istrian case proves productive for a critical interrogation of related topics of theoretical debate such as hybrid and borderland identities.

Though in a very different context from that of Stewart, who reports from a liminal part of the United States, my work also illuminates the (always unstable) constitution of locality and peripherality in a region profoundly shaped by displacement. At the same time, I do not just imagine such a space but also explore the imaginings of those who inhabit it and thereby render space meaningful as *place* (Carter, Donald, and Squires 1993, xii). Central to these understandings are interwoven images of both nature and culture: land and sea, churches and cemeteries. Ultimately, it is the sea—its beauty, as well as its association with coastal cities and “civilization”—that *esuli* and *rimasti* alike recall with both affection and sadness. As a song in Istrian dialect puts it, “I hear

the voice of your sea, which sighs for my return" (*Del tuo mar la vose sento; che sospira el mio ritorno* [Sizzi in Bogneri 1994, 224]).

The sea that inspires esuli's longings has also animated a rich body of anthropological scholarship. In studying the consequences of partition for ethnic Italians from Istria, I address many of the concerns—including violence, symbolic group boundaries, political patronage—that informed the classic texts of what has come to be called Mediterranean anthropology, even as the methodological and theoretical framing of the project reflects shifts in both the object of study itself and how contemporary scholars conceptualize it. Whereas traditional Mediterraneanist studies typically focused on rural or marginal communities, often treated as isolated from or hostile to larger state structures, my analysis firmly situates the experience of the esuli and their kin, the rimasti, within the moving interstices of state centers and peripheries. Traversing the boundaries of states and ethno-national groups, as well as the disciplines of anthropology, history, and political science, this book is a product of the ongoing reconceptualizations of the very notion of what constitutes the anthropological field.

The theoretical musings of Marcus (1998), as well as the Europeanist ethnographies of Carter (1997) and Holmes (2000), offered important reference points for undertaking a "multi-sited" ethnographic project in which I based myself in two primary locales (Italian Trieste/Trst,<sup>2</sup> from January to October 1995, and Istrian Rovigno/Rovinj, from November 1995 to September 1996) while visiting and conducting interviews throughout the broader region known as the Julian March. My methods included formal interviewing and life histories (with approximately fifty conducted among the esuli and fifty among the rimasti), participant observation in various events and rituals, archival work, and close readings of the extensive literature of local scholarship, memoirs, prose, and poetry exploring the exodus.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, my research took inspiration from older studies that had innovated within the confines of the Mediterraneanist framework. Herzfeld's (1985) work on Cretan sheep thieves and his demonstration of the ways in which marginality within the state is continually reproduced, for example, and Cole and Wolf's (1974) classic account of competing ethnic identities in the Italian Tyrol (an area that, like the Julian March, has a long history of competing irredentisms) raised early on the problem of symbolic (ethnic) group boundaries within the context of complex, modern states.

This issue of boundaries proves inherent to the very vision of a Mediterraneanist discourse laid out and endlessly debated by social historians (most notably Fernand Braudel) and anthropologists, even if the borders in question are usually those of the region and "culture area" itself. Echoing the words of Braudel, whose magisterial work on the "inner sea" any scholar of the Mediterranean must acknowledge, Predrag Matvejević writes of this body of water:

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Getting to know the length and breadth of the Mediterranean is no easy task. We are never certain how far it extends, that is, how much of the coast it occupies and where it ends, on either land or sea. (1999, 7)

In his attempt to unlock the riddle of what, if anything, defines the Mediterranean, Matvejević paradoxically admits:

Its boundaries are drawn in neither space nor time. There is in fact no way of drawing them: they are neither ethnic nor historical, state nor national; they are like a chalk circle that is constantly traced and erased, that the winds and waves, that obligations and inspirations expand or reduce. (Ibid., 10)

Matvejević's vision of the ultimate indeterminacy of the sea nonetheless shares certain assumptions with definitions of the Mediterranean as a "homogeneous environment" (Braudel 1972a, 1972b; Gilmore 1982), although Matvejević's ecological markers include such intangibles as sea smells, waves, and nets. Matvejević's conceptualization of the sea contrasts sharply with other widely circulating views in, and of, the region that rigidly map populations onto territory. Examples of the latter include late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century Italian nationalist and irredentist claims to the eastern Adriatic; again, however, these competing accounts rest on similarly "ecological" notions. Indeed, in their beliefs about peoples' "belonging" to or being rooted in particular territories and environments, many of the ethnic Italians with whom I worked refracted the scholarly debates about the broader region. Informants continually spoke of Italian *civiltà*, or civilization, as simultaneously derived from (in the sense of ecological adaptation) and having profoundly shaped (tamed, that is, civilized) the landscape of the Julian March.

The fundamental ambiguity around the question of "cultural ecology" in Matvejević's book, appropriately titled *Mediterranean: A Cultural Landscape*, does not prove coincidental and undoubtedly reflects, at least in part, his own location as a Slav hailing from those territories once contested by Italy and Yugoslavia. Envisioning the sea from the perspective of a South Slav born in Mostar, fifty kilometers inland from the Adriatic Sea, Matvejević's only partial claim to a Mediterranean identity points to the long (albeit always incomplete) hegemony exercised by Latinate culture in the Adriatic. Braudel goes so far as to argue, "The Adriatic is perhaps the most unified of all the regions of the sea" (1972a, 125), owing to centuries of influence by the Italian peninsula on the eastern Adriatic. The question of which culture is most authentic and autochthonous or "indigenous" to the Adriatic littoral lies at the heart of the contests over territory that form the backdrop to the exodus of Italians from Istria. Throughout this book, I examine the history and legacies of this powerful mapping of a space (terrestrial and maritime) onto populations, in particular those groups labeled Italians, Slovenes, and Croats. My account of these processes proves historical in two senses: I explore the ways in which understandings of

the past inform these contests over identity, as well as over territory, and I examine these identity claims over time.

In doing this, I bring an anthropological focus on localized identities in the Mediterranean—the subject of so many monographs that if they recognized the relationship of the local to the broader context at all, they tended to do so within a framework of modernization (or integration into the capitalist world system) that either idealized or pathologized a folk past—into a productive dialogue with the Europeanist discussion in other disciplines about the problematics of modernity. More precisely, I address perhaps the central issue at the heart of Europe's vexed modernist projects: the legacies of violence and victimhood generated by the “dual traumas” of fascism and communism in the twentieth century. The “timeless” Mediterranean thus acquires an all-too-real historical specificity as a site of bloodshed, ethnic violence, and suffering. An older focus on tradition, understood as local rituals and practices, converges with the extensive literature on the politics of the past, yielding an account that illuminates both the (re)configurations of broad landscapes of memory shaped by war and other state-sponsored violence and the “microphysics” of such violence as refracted through individual and family narratives.

The image of the Mediterranean as a site of state-sponsored violence does not altogether accord with the stereotypical passions and romance associated with that realm. The region has, of course, not only challenged scholars who have sought to map its boundaries and capture its essence but also seduced countless writers, artists, and travelers. From the outset of his book, Braudel confesses: “I have loved the Mediterranean with passion, no doubt because I am a northerner like so many others in whose footsteps I have followed” (Braudel 1972a, 17). As an anthropologist and a young American woman, I too followed in the footsteps of my many predecessors. The seduction to which I was prone was not, however, what one might expect (for example, that of Henry James's naive heroine Daisy Miller) but rather that of *complicity* in a fieldwork encounter centered on what Robben (1995) has deemed the “politics of truth and emotion among victims and perpetrators of violence.”

From the first days of my fieldwork stay in Trieste, I found myself drawn into a sphere of mutual recriminations and competing, often exclusive, claims to victimhood. Because I sought to analyze the common landscape within which these memories competed, I necessarily had to enter several different communities: those of the Istrian exiles, of the Italian minority in Istria, of the Slovene minority in Italy, and of academics in the regional circuit. Despite my repeated explanations that I wanted to study the operation of memory, rather than produce an “objective” history of events in the Julian March in the immediate postwar period, many informants in Trieste and later in Istria expressed their satisfaction that at last their story (the “real story”) would be known in the English-speaking world.

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Each group viewed me as an instrument for *its* history, and, predictably, various factions promoting diverse histories existed within those respective communities. I heard exiles' accounts of "Slavic barbarity" and "ethnic cleansing," suffered in Istria between 1943 and 1954, as well as Slovene and Croat narratives of the persecution experienced under the fascist state and at the hands of neofascists in the postwar period. Admittedly, I could not forget—as many exiles seemed to do—that the exodus from Istria followed on twenty years of the fascistization and Italianization of Istria, as well as a bloody Italian military campaign in Yugoslavia between 1941 and 1943. Nor could I countenance some exiles' frequent expressions of anti-Slav chauvinism. At the same time, however, I could not accept at face value the claim by some that the violence the Slavs suffered under fascism justified subsequent events in Istria or that all those who left Istria were compromised by fascism. Similarly, I came to reject the argument that ethno-national antagonism had not entered into the equation, as well as the counterview that the exodus represented simply an act of "ethnic cleansing." Thus, like Robben, working with both perpetrators and victims of the Argentine "generals' war," I eventually learned that "[e]ach group was seductive in its own way, and it was only after months of interviewing that I succeeded in recognizing the prevalent defenses and strategies" (*ibid.*, 83).

Despite this recognition, I felt conflicted throughout the fieldwork and writing processes, as if I were betraying one or the other group by consorting with the "enemy." My knowledge (however limited) of Serbo-Croatian<sup>4</sup> and my sojourn in Istria aroused suspicion among some *esuli* (although some saw my multi-sited work as important and much needed). As often occurs during fieldwork (see Herzfeld 1991, 47–54), informants even joked nervously about my being a spy. Sometimes they trotted out the old Italian tag line about "*antropoloCIA*" (a play on the words *antropologia* [anthropology] and *CIA*), and one *esule* even asked, quite seriously, "Are you sure you're not a *Mata Hari*?" before agreeing to let me participate in an exile event. Given contemporaneous U.S. diplomatic and military engagement in former Yugoslavia, the possibility that I was a spy apparently did not seem altogether impossible. This fear also suggests that some *esuli* thought their cause was so politically sensitive and important as to merit CIA surveillance. All too frequently, I did not know how to respond to such suspicions and experienced discomfort about my "duplicitous" activities.

This awkwardness and insecurity about my own location in the field points to the anthropological expectation of empathetic rapport with the informants (an assumption that often leads to disappointment; see Keiser 1991 for a dramatic example). The traditional anthropological relationship usually entails championing the oppressed and celebrating the margins at the expense of the center, history and experience from below over that from on high. The relationship of the *esuli* and *rimasti* to centers of state power, however, cannot be categorized in such simple black-and-white terms. Indeed, the complicated

flows between the center and the periphery put into question some of our very notions of place, as well as the distinction between (authentic, popular) memory/oral history and official historiography; this reveals considerable fluidity and fluctuation, depending on time and level, between what Holmes (1993) deems licit and illicit discourse.

In light of this, my account here of my time in the field reflects not so much a standard “ethnography of empathy” but rather what Marcus (1998) and Holmes (1993) have begun to sketch out as an “ethnography of complicity.” This approach offers a more nuanced response to the insidious nature of informants’ discourses than that proposed by Robben, who merely “learned to distinguish seduction from good rapport” (1995, 83), thereby leaving in place his faith in “the interplay of empathy and detachment that sound fieldwork ordains” (*ibid.*, 99). Robben frames the issue of ethnographic complicity in largely moral terms, which replicates the discourse of informants expressing their (the “one”) truth. Such a replication becomes particularly problematic in a situation like that of the Julian March, where individuals or groups may in different moments or contexts have been both victimized and victimizer; similarly, such groups may variously inhabit either the (relative) margins or the centers of power.

More productive is the model of licit and illicit discourse that Holmes offers. Fittingly, Holmes first came to this notion in his research in the rural districts of Italian Friuli, to the north of Trieste, and then elaborated it in his interviews with various members of the European Right. Holmes deems “illicit” a political discourse that

aims at reestablishing the boundaries, terms, and idioms of political struggle. The resulting political practice is deconstructive. Its authority is often parasitic, drawing strength from the corruption, ineptitude, obsolescence, and lost relevance of established political dogmas and agendas. Its practitioners negotiate and map the points of contradiction and fatigue of partisan positions. They scavenge the detritus of decaying politics, probing areas of deceit and deception. By doing so they invoke displaced histories and reveal deformed moralities. They strive to introduce the unvoiced and unspeakable into public debate. Established political forces resist these “illicitudes,” defining those who articulate them as racists, terrorists, bigots, or as some other form of essentialized pariah. (Holmes 1993, 258)

As I detail in subsequent chapters, the discourse of the Istrian exiles revolves around a sense of having been politically exploited and subsequently forgotten. It is not coincidental, of course, that the exiles succeeded (to varying degrees) in finding new audiences for their histories at precisely that moment (the 1990s) when the “deformed moralities” and corruptions of the Italian First Republic (the postfascist reconstruction state) and socialist Yugoslavia led to the respective implosion of both entities. In the exiles’ case, the boundary between licit and illicit discourse remains porous and reflects a complex history whereby



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Italians in the eastern Adriatic have contested territorial borders mapped out by diplomats and treaty makers.

At certain points, the alternative symbolic borders constructed by these exiles in opposition reflect the state-making projects of an earlier epoch (particularly those of Italian and Slavic irredentism), suggesting that flows between the center and the periphery are not unidirectional; nor are groups that reside literally on the margins merely the passive victims of state elites. Despite their oft-stated hostility to the state, the *esuli* in fact enjoy an ambivalent relationship with representatives of the Italian state. One example: Different exile associations have found patrons within Italian political parties, both those in power and those in the opposition. Furthermore, contemporary exile accounts often demonstrate remarkable continuity with irredentist narratives dating from the period of Italian unification until the First World War (the term *irredentism* derives from the struggle for an Italian state and the desire to redeem the unredeemed lands, the *irredenta*; for more on narratives associated with this struggle, see chapter 2). These irredentist demands initially enjoyed the support of the Italian state formed in 1861, then became a nuisance when Italy formed an alliance with Germany and Austria in 1882; they received state endorsement again during World War I when Italy joined the Allied side against the Hapsburg Empire, found legitimacy in the eyes of *some* Italian leaders during the post–World War II dispute over Istria (see chapter 3), and finally returned to their original status as an oppositional discourse challenging the state (see chapters 4 and 5). Taking analytical account of this shifting terrain demands work in “discontinuous spaces,” both in temporal and spatial terms. As Marcus argues, “This version of complicity tries to get at a form of local knowledge that is about the kind of difference that is not accessible by working out internal cultural logics. . . . In effect, subjects are participating in discourses that are thoroughly localized but that are not their own” (1998, 119).

The slippery nature of such a discourse therefore renders it particularly challenging—in intellectual as well as moral terms—for the anthropologist trained in the notion of holism, as well as in the expectation of rapport and identification with informants who typically “resist” the powerful or hegemonic. Both Holmes and Robben comment on the frequent frames of reference shared between themselves and their interlocutors (European neofascists and members of the Argentine military, respectively [see Crapanzano 1986 for his discussion of a troubling identification with whites in apartheid-era South Africa]). Informants whose actions neither anthropologist could countenance morally (and with whom the typical fieldwork “identification” did not occur) nonetheless refused to submit to the expectation of exotic Otherness typically ascribed to those labeled as racist or violent. For while “[t]he idea of complicity forces the recognition of ethnographers as ever-present markers of ‘outsideness,’” (Marcus 1998, 118), there paradoxically exists an increasing lack of distance between the observers and the observed.



The individuals whose experiences animate these pages, for example, do little that is exotic in the ethnographic realist sense. When the authors or speakers noted here are not attending events at exile or Italian minority centers, they are doing what many of us do in our daily lives: they go to work, if retired they may look after grandchildren, they finish their shopping before the stores close and prepare meals, and they spend evenings in front of the television. This is not to imply that the increasingly shared structures of material, everyday life are understood or lived in exactly the same ways everywhere but rather to highlight the relative and deliberate scarcity of “classic” ethnographic descriptions in this book. This signals an abandonment of the anthropological effort to fully get inside a (putative) culture and associated holistic assumptions about cultural process whereby understanding one set of practices (such as activism in exile centers) demands rooting them in other activities carried out by the same actors.

By consciously choosing not to privilege exclusively (though I do use it) one of anthropology’s classic modes of both research design and exposition—the experiential aspect of “being there” (Clifford and Marcus 1986), observing what Malinowski called “the imponderabilia of daily life” (1984)—I further underscore and thereby bracket the claims to privileged knowledge made by exiles (and other survivors) who experience displacement and other traumas in the first person. Just as anthropologists have derived their scholarly and moral authority from “bearing witness” through firsthand observations, so too do survivors claim a special knowledge and moral authority. The constitution of this experiential authority, and the illicit forms it assumes, is less the basis for my identification or nonidentification with the subjects of my research than itself the question to be investigated. I do not wish to imply that all such claims should be denied as illegitimate but rather to signal my own interest in the process whereby such discourses are legitimated or authorized precisely in *moral* terms. By not taking all such claims at face value, I also underscore the question of complicity in its most literal sense, that of possible collaboration by individuals with fascist and state socialist regimes. Like the effects of displacement, the potential of such complicity lurks within and shapes many of the narratives explored in this book.

I first learned of the violent recent history of Istria at the moment when those who had lived through it were responding to larger geopolitical transformations—notably the end of the Cold War and the breakup of Yugoslavia—and seeking to reposition their group histories. Discouraged in my plans to work in Dalmatia by the Serb-Croat war, I spent the summers of 1992 and 1993 traveling through the Julian March. At that time, I encountered self-described ethnic Italians who were born and raised in the Istrian Peninsula and who conceived of their identities in extremely divergent ways.

One Istrian Italian *esule*, a sixty-year-old retired schoolteacher born in the Is-

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trian town of Parenzo/Poreč and today residing in the Italian port city of Trieste, insisted on her *italianità*, or pure Italian-ness. Eleonora noted that Istria historically had been under Venetian rule for many centuries before becoming a part of the Hapsburg Empire (in 1797), the Italian state (in 1920), and, later, the Yugoslav federation (after World War II).<sup>5</sup> In Eleonora's opinion, after the Second World War the "Slavs" had stolen an Italian land and driven out its original residents, many of whom—including Eleonora—had settled in nearby Trieste, from which on a clear day they could gaze on the lost homeland. As Eleonora put it, "We were victims of 'ethnic cleansing' in Yugoslavia before the term had even been invented."

Eleonora and her parents had abandoned Istria in 1948, when she was thirteen, after the family home was nationalized by the local communist authorities. In Trieste they joined Eleonora's older brother, Gigi, who in 1945 had first fled to Pola/Pula (a naval port at the base of the Istrian Peninsula) and eventually to Trieste; at that time, both cities were under the Anglo-American Allied Military Government. Gigi had left in the face of partisan threats to "*finire nelle foibe*," that is, to meet his end in the karstic pits (*foibe*) in which partisans executed several thousand persons in 1943 in Istria and in 1945 around Trieste. In contrast to Gigi's clandestine nighttime flight on foot, Eleonora and her parents legally "opted" for Italian citizenship three years later by the terms of the Italo-Yugoslav Peace Treaty of 1947 and spent four years living in cramped conditions in a refugee camp. They eventually obtained an apartment in a housing complex on the outskirts of Trieste, which was built for Istrian refugees by the Italian state in the 1950s.

Reflecting on her experiences, Eleonora contended that "genuine Istrians" (*istriani veraci*, or in istro-veneto dialect, *istriani patocchi*) are to be found only outside Istria's territorial confines. An active participant in the exile association Unione degli Istriani (Union of the Istrians), Eleonora located the spirit of Istrian culture in the exile community of Trieste. Members of this community reconstructed various aspects of traditional Istrian life (such as saints' days celebrations and local festivals) together with more newly minted traditions commemorating the violence of the *foibe* and the exodus.

Eleonora's cousin Gino (the son of her paternal uncle) still lives in the Istrian town of Rovigno and tells a different tale. Too young to be called up for military service during World War II, Gino (born in 1928) nonetheless joined the Istrian Italian partisans *nel bosco* ("in the woods") during the final months of the war. He soon became an activist in the Unione degli Italiani dell'Istria Fiume, the Italian minority organization sponsored by the Tito regime, and found steady work in Rovigno's cigarette factory, or *fabbrica tabacchi*. His two children attended the Italian-language schools in Rovigno. One subsequently became a teacher at the Italian school, and the other a journalist. Although some townspeople, or *rovignesi*, remember Gino as a strong adherent of the party line, he claims to have been an ardent antifascist but not a committed socialist. Indeed,

he contends that Yugoslav partisans (and later the regime) manipulated Italian antifascists, taking advantage of (*sfruttando*) their ingenuity and enthusiasm.

Like Eleonora, Gino expressed a sense of being both Italian and Istrian. Whereas for Eleonora “Istrian” signifies Italian, for Gino “Istrian” represents a hybrid of Italian and Slavic languages, cultures, and populations. In line with this, Gino enthusiastically supports the regionalist movement that arose in Istria in the early 1990s promoting a vision of a multiethnic and multicultural Istrian identity. According to Gino, the regionalist movement represents an important opportunity to mend the torn fabric (*ricucire il tessuto*) of Istrian life and to heal the wound (*il ferito aperto*) left open by the Istrian exodus. Even as their political commitments and beliefs differed dramatically, Gino and Eleonora agreed that for too long the story of the exodus and its victims had remained forgotten, canceled, and buried (*una storia dimenticata, cancellata, sepolta*).

With their competing visions of Istrian identity, these cousins do not constitute an anomalous case but rather give voice to two pervasive and competing views of identity that divide the population of ethnic Italians who once lived in or still inhabit Istria. One model of identity envisions Istria as a “pure” Italian land “stolen” by Slavs, and the other understands Istria as historically characterized by ethnic and linguistic hybridity. In the first view, *Istrian* becomes synonymous with *Italian*, in the second *Istrian* represents a Latin-Slav hybrid. The former belief tends to be advocated by the vocal community of Istrian Italian *esuli* who settled in nearby Trieste; the latter is heard among Italians who chose to remain in Istria after World War II.

Understanding the puzzle that Eleonora and Gino presented led me to this book. The personal histories of Gino, Eleonora, and their relatives and friends intersect major currents of twentieth-century European experience: nationalism and state building, the two world wars, the confrontation between fascism and socialism, the Cold War and its end, the resurgence of large-scale violence in late-twentieth-century Europe, and troubling questions about where Eastern Europe and the Balkans belong in a union of European states. My analysis centers on the question of how populations situated at the borders of state systems lived through dramatic processes of state formation and dissolution and subsequently recall and narrate the violence (physical and symbolic) attendant to the ultimately impossible project of rendering state and nation congruent. Examining the narrative space between those who became exiles and those who remained behind, I trace the symbolic and material effects of multiple moments of violence and erasure, which together may be said to constitute a “wound culture” (Seltzer 1998),<sup>6</sup> a phrase that accords with the constant discussion in the region of *un ferito ancora aperto*, or “a wound that remains open.” In particular, I focus on the rituals—semantic and otherwise—through which the violence of the first half of the twentieth century informs the present experience of those who inhabit the partitioned territory of the Julian March.

Those who suffered the consequences of living at the margins of hostile state

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systems often, as in the case of the *esuli* and *rimasti* of the Julian March, cast themselves as unambiguous victims of violence (particularly by the state). In reality, however, the relationship of such groups to state bureaucracies and systems of patronage—particularly in the realm of historical production and state-sponsored research institutes and/or organizations associated with political parties—proves much more complex. Such local and regional actors possess not only certain forms of agency but also, quite obviously, various degrees of complicity in relation to state power, past and present. The relationships of Eleonora's brother, Gigi, to the Italian fascist regime and of Gino to the socialist Yugoslavia regime offer just two examples of possible complicity usually excised from self-narratives of victimization. In the case of the Julian March, such issues become particularly charged, bound up as they are with the legacies of the authoritarian regimes of fascist Italy and socialist Yugoslavia and the apportioning of blame for the violence committed in the name of those states.

With the radical transformation of those postwar regimes which dominated Italy and Yugoslavia from 1945 to 1991—in Italy, the corruption scandal known as *Tangentopoli* facilitated the demise of the Christian Democratic political machine, whereas Tito's socialist federation in Yugoslavia violently dissolved into ethnically defined states—previous verities about the partisan war against the fascists have come into question. The storytelling practices of groups like the *esuli* and *rimasti* have proven significant for these recastings of national history. At times, though, the Istrian Italians' black-and-white accounts of victimization go against efforts to explore the nuances of the civil wars that occurred within the broader conflict of the Second World War. Various actors in the region necessarily obscured such complexities in their accounts of World War II and the exodus, deploying memories as a form of what I call a "politics of submersion."

Informants such as Gino and Eleonora continually spoke of history as something to be exhumed, as having been submerged or sent underground (echoing the subterranean horror of the *foibe*) and only now being brought into the light. The imagery of both light and underground darkness refers to a complex tangle of associations: the *foibe* and the region's elaborate speleological topography, a rejection of the long-standing idea that the *esuli* were merely chasing shadows or ghosts, the notion of a light (or lamp) of civilization extinguished in Istria by the exodus, and possibly even a symbolic inversion of the darkness (blackness) commonly paired with fascism. The metaphors of submersion and disinterment also point to participants' view of memory as an indelible imprint whose experiential truth counters the falsities of official historiography (recalling the Platonic allegory of the cave and the shadows on its walls which can only approximate the ideal, true forms). Such a vision underwrites *esuli* and *rimasti* efforts to deploy meanings of the past as truth claims centered around narratives of victimization. These narratives are, in turn, underwritten by references to those material traces of history which "testify" to the rootedness and autochthony of the Italian populations of Istria, whose genealogies the exodus

sought to erase; as Cascardi (1984) has suggested, the common sense notion of a “recuperation” of the past (what we might call the storage model) makes questions of authenticity central to those practices of remembrance labeled “memory” and “history.” Similarly, Starn deems authenticity “memory’s Siamese twin” (1999, 193).

Istrians’ alternate and complementary usage of archaeological and illuminist imagery when talking about the past highlights the Julian March’s interstitial location and the ways in which both contemporary Istrians and exiles who settled in Trieste continue to live in the long historical shadow cast by the postwar exodus. Just as surely as the state borders demarcating Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia divide a territory with a certain historical, cultural, and architectural integrity, the exodus continues to dominate local and regional politics in an obsessive manner. (Some readers will no doubt be reminded of other political circumstances shaped by exile politics, such as those of Miami.) On a more micro level, the children of those who lived through the exodus grew up in the nebulous half-light of this difficult experience.

Descendants testify to the powerful effects—self-censure, framing personal identities, and shaping interfamilial relationships—exercised by memory in families whose lives unfolded within the space of exodus. One woman, born in 1958 to a father who had fled Istria as a teenager, struggled with her parent’s virulent rejection of the former territory. Maddalena grew up in a household filled with rancor against Slavs and the rimasti. Indeed, her father refused to even admit that some Italians remained in Istria, as I discovered one day when my comment about rimasti unleashed his angry retort: “If you haven’t understood that there are no Italians left in Istria, you haven’t understood anything!” The father’s refusal to return to his hometown, a forty-five-minute drive from Trieste, piqued in his daughter a curiosity that led to the latter’s discovery and love of Istria. Maddalena’s frequent visits to Istria thus created a certain tension and even anxiety in the family (particularly when her car broke down and she asked her father to pick her up in Istria). Visiting the site of her father’s former home, Maddalena eventually learned from her father’s former neighbor that immediate members of the family—who, she had been told, were long dead—had instead lived out their lives in Istria, dying in the 1980s; she confirmed this fact by examining their death certificates at the town registry. She never confronted her father with this shocking and unsettling knowledge, reasoning, “Clearly something happened to divide the family during the exodus which was so painful and traumatic that my father had to negate the existence, for me but also for *himself*, of those members of the family who chose to stay.” For Maddalena, filling the lacuna excised in memory suddenly illuminated what for her had seemed irrational or exaggerated aspects of her father’s behavior.

Other children I met experienced similar revelations that helped explain their parents’ often puzzling responses and that shed light on the shadows cast by the exodus over parent-child relations. I was present one day at the Centro di

## 14 INTRODUCTION

Ricerche Storiche di Rovigno, the Istrian institute dedicated to the Italian minority, or *rimasti*, when a woman stopped in to request information about her grandmother. Having grown up in Tuscany, far removed from the continual polemics and history making of Trieste, Romana knew only what her *esuli* parents had recounted about their departure from Istria and the wartime execution of her maternal grandmother. She was shocked to learn that her slain grandmother was widely recognized as a great antifascist partisan and that numerous streets, monuments, and cultural circles in Istria bore her name in recognition of her heroism.

Raised on bitter invectives about Slavs and communists, Romana marveled that her own grandmother numbered among the heroic figures appropriated by the Tito regime and the Italian minority, a fact her mother had never communicated to her. When the staff of the research center showed Romana a photograph of her grandmother's house (honored as the birthplace of the antifascist "martyr"), she burst into tears. Whereas the Istrian account of her grandmother's life and political identity differed dramatically from her mother's narrative, the house matched the mental picture Romana formed from her mother's descriptions—"Yes, that's the courtyard my mother always talked about." Romana's experience, like Maddalena's, reveals the silences and selectiveness of memory that figure not only in public history making about the exodus but also within families and between generations. As E. Valentine Daniel notes, "Regardless of who the witness is—the villain, the surviving victim, or you and I—the violent event persists like crushed glass in one's eyes. The light it generates, rather than helping us see, is blinding" (1996, 208).

Despite the nontransparency of such violence, in the following chapters I take up the challenge of analyzing the identity politics centered on exhuming the past in the border area between Italy and ex-Yugoslavia. I demonstrate how marginalized groups on both sides of the former Cold War divide employ the metaphor of "raising up buried histories" in order to authorize contemporary moral and political claims. In Italy and former Yugoslavia, these uses of the past reflect and refract much broader projects of national redefinition centered on issues of ethnicity and race, and hence of those questions of purity and hybridity highlighted by the cousins Eleonora and Gino. The ongoing projects of national reconfiguration in Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia in which these themes of purity and hybridity come to the fore intersect dramatically in the border area of the Julian March, just as they did at key points during the twentieth century. I discuss these earlier moments at length in part 1. Part 2 focuses on the means (semantic and otherwise) by which the *esuli* and *rimasti* attempt to "bring into the light" their stories, as well as to use the associated moral capital for various political ends.