

Volumetric Populism: Foibe and Memory Politics in the Northern Adriatic Borderlands

LAURA MAFIZZOLI

Abstract: Foibe is the Italian term for the karstic sinkholes that characterise the Karst region on the border between Italy and Slovenia, as well as Istria, now a borderland region between Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia. In recent decades, with the strengthening of right-wing politics in Italy and the establishment of the Day of Remembrance (10 February) in 2004, the term has become affectively and politically charged across different borders. Today, it is commonly used in Italian national discourse (both right- and centre-left-wing) to frame these sinkholes as sites of “communist crimes,” namely the executions carried out in September 1943 in Istria and in May 1945 in Trieste by Yugoslav partisans, mostly targeting representatives of the Fascist and Nazi regimes, but also involving acts of personal retaliation and summary killings.

Drawing on ongoing ethnographic fieldwork between Trieste and Istria, this lecture uses a volumetric lens to approach foibe, attending to depth, materiality, and the agency of the sinkholes. It explores how their physical properties and spatial imaginaries participate in the production of memory, political narratives, and forms of what I suggest can be understood as volumetric populism across the borders between Italy, Slovenia, and Croatia. The lecture highlights how the voluminous materiality of foibe intersects with surface-level historical discourses, contributing to contested memory practices and to populist appropriations that frame these sites as symbols of both national victimhood and “proletarian justice.”

DISCUSSANT: JEREMY WALTON
(UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA)

PONDĚLÍ / MONDAY
2.3. 2026, 14:00 CET

ZASEDACÍ MÍSTNOST
ETNOLOGICKÉHO ÚSTAVU
IE CAS CONFERENCE ROOM

NA FLORENCI 3, PRAHA 1
5. PATRO / 5TH FLOOR

ONLINE LINK MS TEAMS:
[ZDE/HERE](#)

