

## The Identitarian Re-Interpretations of Italians from Istria

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**Abstract** This article investigates the dynamics of the *Istrian peoples'* identitarian process<sup>2</sup>. The two social groups of “who remained” and “who left” - historical consequences of the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus - are the object of our analysis. The underlying theme focuses to the evolution of identity, according to two different contexts, Istrian territorial roots and territorial dispersion. The reasoning steps, critical thinking and the deepening of analysis develop around the concept of Italian-ness, proceeding with complementary approaches. The first thanks to an elaboration of the collective memory and of the collective identity, going to re-interpret the findings from two studies about *those who left* and *those who remained*; the second one, with a perspective reconstruction by the examination of the secondary sources, of texts by writers and of several informal interviews. We have been led to see the changes that affect the identity of the individuals, or the groups, concerned and to wonder about the nature of the sense of continuity with which these changes are experienced. The result, in particular, allows for invalidating the idea of the identitarian definition rooted in a nostalgic memory of the lost homeland, in the case of dispersed *Istrian peoples*; while in the *Italians who remained*, the idea of an unproblematic experience of the commonality, groupness and cohesion in redefining boundary crossing and the development of networks in the new national configuration(s).

**Keywords** Cultural roots - Collective and diasporic identity - Ethno-national homeland  
Sense of belonging

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<sup>2</sup> Viscovich uses the formula *Istrian peoples* to indicate the “Istrian, Kvarner and Dalmatian people”. This on the consideration that “the people of Istria” and “the Italians who left (the exiled) and those who remained” are concepts quite strong and binding (in the first case) and ethnological (in the latter case) that do not help to define, what happened after the WWII and the collapse of communism (1995: 49). Here we use the terms *Istrian peoples*, *Italians from Istria*, *Italians who remained* and *who left*, *Istrian, Dalmatian* and *Kvarner people*, holding them instrumentally interchangeable (Viscovich, 1995: 49).

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## Introduction

The transition societies *laying beyond the Berlin Wall* have opened an acute debate inside historical and social scientific analysts on the progressive emergence of ethno-national communities or ethnic definition of the nation based on belonging to the people and on language, culture, and shared origins.

The process of dissolution of the Eastern European Bloc has evolved with the construction of new political nations, based on the loyalty of the people, we might say, to their cultural nations. The difference between the past and the future forced most people to redefine their life projects, giving way to the degeneration of ethnic “nationality” towards the *critical myths* (borrowing Berardinelli’s vocabulary, 1993). The same *myths* are in fact reinterpreted by extrapolating what it can be useful and functional for contingent purposes and for alternative hegemony, in this way they encourage the emphasis on the past in a compensatory function. In many cases, this has resulted in what one might call “nationalist rhetoric”, in particular when actors were seeking to transform mere categories into unitary groups, forcing an “ideology of conservation” (to borrow Pecchinenda’s words, 1999) and a “sacralisation of identity”.

The transition was played in terms of pluralistic openings (democracy) connected to the identitarian tension and territorial differentiation (construction of new nation-states). In doing so, Eastern Europe has crossed Western Europe in a particular phase, when the last one was involved in a supranational project, the European Union. This process is outlined in terms of economical global player, having a vision of global interrelated, transnational and intercultural society, and for that rejecting a possible sovereign entity. Given that Europe is the birthplace of the nation-state, we argue that also societies “from Western side of the Wall” seem somehow like *societies in transition*. The new configuration, based on a transnational model, is experiencing the overcoming of the modern nation-state sovereignty ideal (post-national conception), opening an era of interdependence and institutional policy of the European historical nation-states. This process is confronted with the re-emergence of identities in each country, a phenomenon that is reinforced by the increasingly importance of regional institutions. The so-called multicultural Europe – relying on the redefinition of the relationships between multiple cultural affiliations and political organization – seems the result, of this post-national conception (Bergnach 2012).

It is not by chance that a “public and private ‘identity talk’ is widely current” (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 25). Besides the specific European evolution, the complex contemporary Western societies and the fundamental changes in the social world produce, in fact, increasing interstitial forms, drawing out the proliferation of self-understandings and the identitarian question. “What becomes problematic and what the term ‘identity’ trying to grasp is changing of ways in which the individual in Western societies relates itself to the institutions, norms, social belongings”, as Sciolla put it (2010: 22; our translation)<sup>1</sup>. To live next to each other requires reworking modalities of coexistence

<sup>1</sup> The social changes in Western societies are mentioned briefly in some conceptual categories, such as *social centred system*, *mediated social relationships*, processes of *de-institutionalization*. The concept of *social centred system* refers to the dislocation of the social cohesion created organically. This condition

(with the other, for the other, against each other, to borrow Simmel's vocabulary), because in a context characterized by the postmodern explosion of searching the cultural roots and the authenticity. This *pluralistic coexistence* is susceptible of leading to a *higher freedom*, but it has to deal with the "tensions between contradictory values, equality and diversity, political unity and the right to one's own authenticity" (to use Schnapper's words, 2002: 7). One could then argue that it requires a daily construction, efforts and sacrifices, overall commitment, a form of *trust*, which is particularly relevant in the social world of the high modernity, made of *mechanisms for undocking*, following Giddens (1999).

This article traces the redefinition of the self-understandings of the *Italians from Istria*, marked by the disruptive force of the historical events. We develop our reflections reinterpreting the findings derived from the studies<sup>2</sup> on the *Italians who left*<sup>3</sup> and on *those who remained* in Istria and Dalmatia after the Second World War; in addition, through a consideration based on the review of secondary sources (necessarily partial and selective), on texts by writers<sup>4</sup>, and on informal interviews. We have been led to

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greatly expands the possibilities of choice and freedom of the individual, strengthening *mediated social relations*, while uncertainty of the social environment favours, according to Gehlen (1967), the evolution of the *de-institutionalization processes* (for more explanation on these three conceptual categories, see Sciolla, 2000, pp. 18-27).

2 The two studies were conducted in the Institute of International Sociology (ISIG, Gorizia, Italy). The research on the exiled people took place between 2001 and 2002 years, and it has concerned four principal topics (the exodus, the memory of the homeland, the transmission of the diasporic culture, the projects for the future), using different methodological tools: a questionnaire (a sample of 790 members of ANVGD), in-depth interview and focus groups. Furthermore, the investigation took place in two stages, involving the main communities of exiles in Italy (Milan, Genoa, Turin, Rome, Venice, Gorizia, Udine and Trieste) (413 subjects) and then the exiles emigrated to Argentina (Buenos Aires, La Plata, Zarate, Quilmar) (218 subjects) and Canada (Toronto, Chatham, Windsor, London) (159 subjects) [see Gasparini, Del Zotto, Pocecco, 2008 (eds.); Pocecco, 2011]. The survey on Italian community in Istria / Kvarner, was conducted between 1992 and 1993 years on a statistical sample of 1.500 subjects. The main areas of research included ethnic belonging, perception of ethnic borders, criteria of ethnic identification, the feeling and awareness of belonging to the Italian group and organizations, the daily use of Italian language, information sources, participation to the political change and process of new States and democracy building (see Bergnach, Radin, 1994; Bergnach, 1995a).

3 According to Bordes-Benayoun and Schnapper, exodus means a collective movement of large number of people under the pressure of events with significant spin on the history of concerned peoples and territories. In this sense, the concept also includes "being part of the same people", although geographically scattered, on the basis of a singular historical destiny (2008, 38). The case of Istrian peoples still represents an extremely sensitive debate, an ideological and political battleground, capable of deploying institutional effects (the inclusion of this page in the school textbooks, the issue of abandoned properties, the label of stateless persons or Yugoslav citizens by which are identified the individuals emigrated abroad, the often unfair re-writing of Istrian-Dalmatian history...). The exodus from Istria, Dalmatia and Kvarner has been publicly recognized only in the last decade in Italy. See, for example, the so-called "Day of Remembrance" to remember the turning point that struck Istria, Fiume and Dalmatia during the last phase of the Second World War.

4 We refer here in particular to the narrative works, short stories and essays of C. Magris (1991, *Un altro mare*, Garzanti, Milano); A.M. Mori and N. Milani (1998, *Bora*, Frassinelli, Milano); P. Rumiz (1994, *Vento di terra*, Ote-Mgs Press, Trieste); F. Tomizza (1967, *Trilogia Istriana*, Mondadori, Milano). Moreover essays and studies that have brought to Italian public attention the issue of the exodus, as G. Crainz (2005, *Il dolore e l'esilio. L'Istria e le memorie divise d'Europa*, Donzelli, Roma); G. Oliva (2005, *Profughi*, Mon-

see the changes that affect the identity of the individuals, or the concerned groups, and to wonder about the nature of the sense of continuity with which these changes are experienced<sup>5</sup>. The reflections we researched in the written materials and the questions posed to the different social actors have been finalized to evidence pitfalls, which should have been avoided in the identitarian process in the consequence of *Istrian traumatic event* or *Istrian turning point*, the phenomenon that broke links in the chain of generations<sup>6</sup>. We must suitably clarify that here we do not aim to contribute to the ongoing debate on exodus<sup>7</sup>, instead we focus on the links of belonging of Italian Istrian peoples. The point addresses to the development of an analytical path, which should be sensitive to the varying ways in which actors, and also public narratives and discourses, attribute meaning and significance to the relational mode of identification.

### 1. Interpretive Requirements

In order to analytically define the concept of identity in terms of its dynamic, we proceed specifying the sense in which collective memory participates to the process of identity formation, its role in shaping the identity of the subject (both individual and collective). The identity must rely, in fact, on its most important resource: the memory. Furthermore, we intend to agree on the importance of social action in maintaining commonality, connectedness and cohesion.

### Interaction between Individual and Collective Memory

There is analogy between the way in which the identity of individual is connected to

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dadori, Milano); A. Petacco (1999, *L'esodo. La tragedia negata degli italiani d'Istria, Dalmazia e Venezia Giulia*, Mondadori, Milano) and R. Pupo (2005), *Istria: le persecuzioni, le foibe, l'esilio*, Rizzoli, Milano). In addition, the so-called "literature of the exodus" [E. Bettiza (1999, *Esilio*, Mondadori, Milano); G. Semacchi, C. Benussi and M. Petronio (2003 *Parole lontane. L'Istria nella sua storia e nel nostalgico ricordo di autori esuli*, Ibiskos, Firenze); P. Tarticchio (2001, *Nascinguerra*, Baldini e Castoldi, Milano) and G. Zelco (1993, *Vento di terra perduta: una storia istriana*, ItaloSvevo, Trieste)] or other essays more focused on Italian community [Radin F., Radossi G. (eds.) (2001, *La comunità dei rimasti*, Garmond, Zagreb)].

5 The guiding criteria in selecting the information sources has been that of a first-hand knowledge the *Istrian-Dalmatian case*. The informal interviews involved various social actors, such as academics, professionals, politicians, cultural operators, public and opinion leaders and economic operators [in this latter case, we refer also to the survey on the Italian entrepreneurs of Istria (see Bergnach et al., 2001)].

6 The links in the chain of generations, from experiential event, full of symbols and meanings and of sufferings have been broken; the exodus turns into a plague of the past, to be taboo (Milani 1995: 73).

7 It should be considered the commitment of scientific and research activities in the field of historical or ethnographic studies and humanities-related policy issues of the exodus. This effort, however, does not go hand in hand with the production of systematic studies in the social sciences and sociological domain. Here the category of *Istrian exodus* is being imported from other disciplines, particularly the historical and political ones. But the Istrian exodus takes so on a rather elusive use, as if the historical-political meaning would be adequate, without requiring further specifications. We consider that this constitutes an obstacle to a more precise analysis and to a sort of emancipation from the local / national dimension of it, which deserves to be projected in a more wider perspective, like, for example, the multiplicity of studies that concerns other diasporas. However, it should be noted, as recognised by some authors, that there is not yet a sociological theory of the diaspora in the true sense of the term, or that it is a relatively recent concept in the social sciences (see, for example, Bordes-Benayoun and Schnapper 2006, 2008; Brubaker 2005; Hettlage 2012).

the memory and the one with whom it connects to the collective identity (of a group, a community, etc.). Identity and memory are the fundamental means of defining the experiential frame of individuals, significantly linking past and present thanks to a common sharing, on the basis of a temporally broader representation. In this sense, the re-interpretation of the past stands for the oriented use of some aspects of collective events, implying a set of complex mechanisms as the celebrative ritualism, the sacralisation of some episodes, etc. In other words, to analyse perceptions and narratives, to reconstruct the individual paths by which the collective memory of the event is formed, primarily explains how a group “rearranges” the past on the base of a shared narrative (Pocecco 2012). Following Halbwachs (1997), it is in society that people normally acquire recall, recognize, and locate their memories. The individual’s memory puts, intuitively, the subject in a steady relationship with his past, with his memories, even providing him references and interpretative tools for everyday experience. This symbolic reference to the past also promotes a continuous, critical and sometimes irrational reconstruction of a collective memory and of its shared representations: using a sort of “presentist approach”, collective memory consists in the re-composition of the past in the light of the present, in the sense that its social constructions are influenced by the needs of the present.

Halbwachs also stressed that it is impossible for individuals to remember in a coherent and persistent way outside of their group contexts. The group provides materials for memory and pushes to recall particular events and forget others; it may even produce memories of events not directly experienced. So, the individual’s memory is never entirely isolated or closed: “A man, to evoke his own past, often needs to appeal to the memories of others. He utilizes reference points that exist outside of him, and that are set by the society. Moreover, the functioning of individual memory is not possible without these instruments which are the words and ideas that the individual has not invented, and he borrows from his environment” (Halbwachs, 1997: 98; our translation). Consequently, the interaction between individual memory (or, as Halbwachs calls it, the *internal one*) and collective memory (the *external one*) is a multifaceted process: both feed on symbols, constructions, representations, testimonies, “signs” or “traces”, present in one or other. The collective memory is not the simple sum of several individual memories: every single memory is significant like a mosaic tessera - every piece, despite its infinitesimal size in relation to the whole, remains essential. In this sense, every memorial story-telling may precise the contours of an event or better define some aspects or add new ones. The internal memory offers to the subject the support of experience; the external one provides common representations shared with the other members of the group. Both are, however, “techniques” which allow the presentification of what no longer exists, creating a temporality that would be otherwise impossible. If in the case of the internal memory the presentification remains a purely subjective and voluntary act, in the external one it encourages a common feeling of belonging and a symbolic brotherhood, on which is based the cohesion of the group and the opportunity to recall events of immediate intelligibility to every member. The common feeling of belonging inspires the definition of an individual’s identity, and realizes the conscious

membership to the in-group. It assumes peculiar effectiveness in the case of a diasporic identity<sup>8</sup>. This because the recalling to a real or imagined homeland - the “homeland orientation” as Brubaker (2005) calls it - constitutes one of the cores of the external memory, often implying the demand of public recognition, and facilitates the mutual recognition within the in-group, perceived as community of dispersed people. In this sense, collective memory is never something irreversibly given, or a stable framework, but it is susceptible to fluctuations and different emphases. The mechanisms and representations of collective memory cannot be reduced in traces of the past, because it is surely “presence of the past”, but also “use of the past to the present”. With this in mind, one of the purposes is to reflect on the memory as “an actor of history”, its use and its users, its role and its effects, even contradictory.

This becomes particularly relevant in a time when “[...] we are witnesses and participants in a general trend of turning away from stable, ‘hard’ history in favour of changeable, ‘soft’ memory (ethnic, social, group, class, race, gender, personal and alien) and a new cultural phenomenon which [...] bears the ugly name of musealisation” (Ugresic 1998: 221-222). In the postmodern world the debate is focused on the “cult of the memory”, on “the era of commemoration”, on a “hyper-memorial era”, in order to emphasize an almost obsessive desire of making numerous historical events an occasion of ritualism and celebratory formulas (Lipotevsky 2004).

## 1.2 The Identitarian Process

Identity has undergone a rapid and continuous diffusion, coming to be extensively used in the media, in the journalistic lexicon, and in everyday life and talk. As the term has proliferated, its meaning has been stretched, opening a risk of devaluation of

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<sup>8</sup> The term of “diaspora” has undergone rapid and continuous diffusion in the last decade. Therefore, its utilisation as a category of analysis has not always gone hand in hand with the theoretical and conceptual deepening. As it is been underlined by some analysts, the evolution of the term is favoured by the migration processes in the context of globalization and in the framing of issues of particular identities, delimiting the concept to the Armstrong’s idea of applying the term *diaspora* to all ethnic communities without a territorial base in a national society. So, the term often made a general or allusive purpose, as if the word had a clear and obvious meaning not to require further specification. Borrowing Brubaker words its meaning *has been stretched* (2005). The author, in his reviewing of the changing meanings of “diaspora”, sheds light on neglected aspects, suggesting to speak of diasporic idioms, stances, projects, practices, claims: “As idiom, stance, and claim, the diaspora is a way of formulating the identities and loyalties of a population” (*ibidem*, 12). As it emerges in the literature on diasporic phenomenon and on the term diaspora as analytical concept, to which here we have made reference (Bordes-Benayoun and Schnapper 2006, 2008; Brubaker 2005; Hettlage 2012), we must distinguish between a larger and a stricter semantic domain. It should be noted in fact that a larger semantic domain links the concept of diaspora to the “dispersed people”, according to the Connor’s known definition (*segment of people living outside the homeland*); while a strictly one didn’t consider that it is possible to speak of the diasporization of every more or less dispersed population (for example Safran, 1991 Tölölyan, 1996, Cohen, 1997, Sheffer, 2003). Speaking of diaspora, in the latter case, means to consider it as a distinctive “community”, being characterized by active solidarity as well as by relatively dense social relations that cut across state boundaries and links members into a “transnational community”, so delineating social exchanges, and the existence of objective relations. French sociologists Bordes-Benayoun and Schnapper, starting from the second approach, describe the diasporic condition in term of implying consciousness and will.

the meanings of the term in conceptual space. Not for chance Brubaker and Cooper tilted their article “Beyond ‘identity’” suggesting that “ ‘Identity’ is a key term in the vernacular idiom of contemporary politics, and social analysis must take account of this fact” (2000: 1-6)<sup>9</sup>.

We know from the literature that the uses of the identity move between strong conceptions (when understood in a hard sense) and weak ones (when understood in a soft sense). The strong understandings of identity preserve the common-sense meaning, emphasising the sameness over time or across persons. The weak one, by contrast, break with the hard and also with everyday meanings of the term, being focused on qualifiers of identity as unstable, malleable, fluid, contingent, fragmented, constructed, negotiated, and so on (for example, the constructivist approach). The word “identity” is semantically inseparable from the idea of permanence. Implying sameness or difference across time or persons, it refers to a stable structure in which the individuals or the groups are identified. Closely related to this meaning is the everyday sense of “identity”, which in fact strongly suggests at least some self-sameness over time, some persistence, something that remains identical.

What is problematic is the relationship between functions of identity and social and relational roots in which identity is performed. Raising some more general questions related to overcoming the surrendering of the word identity using other terms, less ambiguous, as, for example, identification (Brubaker and Cooper, *ibidem*), we could say that speaking of identity means to speak of stability / instability, opening / closing *conditions*. The collective identity, which is not external and coercive with respect to the individuals, helps to define the boundaries of a group through the construction of symbols, and in meantime it interacts with the expectations of individuals identifying with the group. “Strong notions of collective identity imply strong notions of group boundedness and homogeneity. They imply high degree of groupness, an “identity” or sameness among 9 “For a variety of reasons, the term identity proved highly resonance in the 1960s, diffusing quickly across disciplinary and national boundaries, establishing itself in the journalistic as well as the academic lexicon, and permeating the language of social and political practice as well as that of social and political analysis”. Identity moved from being a technical term of philosophy and psychoanalysis to a key term throughout the human and social sciences, and the works of Erikson on “identity crisis” and “communal cultures” constitute important steps in the paths of diffusion. But “what do scholars mean when they talk about ‘identity?’” (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 3; 6). As underlined by Brubaker and Cooper, which have explored the work on “identity”, the social-analytical meanings and uses of identity has opened an interesting ambivalence in the literature, because oscillating from hard and soft conceptions, or better from essentialist argumentation and constructivist qualifiers. In their inventory of the uses of “identity” the authors has revealed not only great heterogeneity, but also a significant antithetic positions “that highlight fundamental or abiding sameness and stances that expressly reject notions of basic sameness”. That are between a strong or hard conceptions of identity, on the one hand, and a weak or soft conceptions, on the other. As underlined by the authors, the strong conceptions of identity preserve the common-sense meaning of the term - the emphasis on sameness over time or across persons. We must observe that it continues to inform important strands of the literature on gender, race, ethnicity, and nationalism. The weak or soft understandings of identity, breaking with the first meaning of the term, by contrast underline that identity is multiple, unstable, fragmented, and so on (2000, 10-14). In the context of our work, we will refer moreover also to the state of the art of sociological studies conducted on identity by Sciolla (1983). A useful upgrade and enrichment of the anthology may be found in a more recent contribution of the mentioned author dedicated to the multi-dimensional conception of identity (2010).

group members, a sharp distinctiveness from non-members, a clear boundary between inside and outside” (Brubaker and Cooper *ibidem*: 10).

But links are subjected to the stress of the free choice, which is due to the relevance attributed by the subject in a certain context and at a certain time to a certain level of identification rather than to another. In order to assess his own interest and calculate his own costs and benefits, the individual (the group) must assume *continuity over time* (the persistence), which is impossible without the intersubjective recognition. Individuals / groups need to nourish external recognition of authenticity, on the basis of the delimitation of the community itself, and the importance that assumes this delimitation on the level of communication and associative relationships-trust (Duchesne, Frogner 2002).

As argued by some authors, one of the features that might distinguishes the sociological approach in the study of identity is precisely to avoid referring to any substantialist and foundationalist understandings of identity. In particular in consideration of significant changes of contemporary Western societies, as the marked process of individuation: trying to adapt to the needs of the century, to the social complexity and to the increasing number of cultural models that guide choices, today the Western individual “let’s go to the waves of contingency” (Mongardini, 2011:102; our translation). If the identity is thought in terms of essences, the problem of “borders and continuity” appears insoluble, because it is faced with the fundamental change in the social world and the uncertainty of the social environment (Melucci 2000a: 120-123; 2000b: 30-37).

The identity is not an undifferentiated unity, having social and relational roots, and in this sense it calls attention to complex paths. It is composed by some elements, as the permanence and continuity over time, the unity and unicity (delimitation) and the relationship between subjects that allows them to recognize each other, configuring the intersubjective recognition.

In this sense, it seems useful to think the identity not as a stable entity, an undifferentiated unity, but rather through the functions, which consent individuals and groups to define themselves and realise their self-understanding in term of affinity and affiliation, of commonality, connection and cohesion, of peculiar stories. On the one hand, individual identity implies and entails differences (compared to others), highlighting the subjective aspect of the distinction and identification. We can contemplate the attitude of being part of a collectivity as being perceived *objectively* its own part (distinction), and the disposition of being member of the community based on the *subjective will* to be part of it (equality). In this sense, distinction and equality give to the self-understandings a procedural nature: individuals organise and construct boundaries of the community where they belong; they understand distinctive markers and concepts within a social context, recognizing them in a way that “rationally” orders and organizes them through the social frame. On the other hand, societal integration implies “equality” with others, through which a social actor assumes the objective belonging to a community, recognizing all dimensions that transcend the single individual.

The ability to stand out from the others must be recognized by the others, in order to find the permanence and continuity over time; moreover, the unity and uniqueness allow



to recognize similarities and differences from the others and to distinguish one group from another.

## 2. Between Acceptance and Denial of the “National Suicide”

After the trauma, *Istrian peoples* - “those who undergo actual displacement together with those who suffer interior displacement, losing their homeland without ever physically moving” (Ballinger 2003: 2) - were forced to set up a path of acceptance of the burden of the past. That is to recognize indirectly each other’s “choices and responsibilities”, respecting and valuing the different experiences of the *loss* (the brutal *loss* of the entire family, the *loss* of the only world that is known, the *loss* of the *homeland*, of the affective micro-cosmos, of nation, the *loss* of great ideals).

### 2.1 The Dual Nature of Exodus from Native Country

The collective memory of the exodus - as uninterrupted reconstruction of the past – cannot be considered only a full-fledged history-memory (as conceptualized by Nora), but rather a part of the history, in our case of the Italian nation-memory, living the same contradictions. As underlined by Nora, “With the following of the society in place and instead of the nation, the legitimation by using the past, then by using the history, has given way to the legitimation by the future. The past, one can only know it and respect it, and the nation, one can serve it; the future, one has to prepare it. The three terms have regained their autonomy” (1984: XXV; our translation). The operational concept of collective memory used in this analysis moves from the assumptions previously discussed, highlighting how it does not always coincide with the history, nor with the historical truth, and it is subject to continuous revisions both by individuals and by communities. As a result, the collective memory never corresponds to a unitary and crystallized construct, framed in the dimensions of the imaginary and of the symbolic, revealing itself from time to time diffuse, multiple, masqueraded, mutilated, manipulated. Moreover the collective memory of the exodus is not an “appeased memory”: it finds the identity of individuals who self-perceive Italians, “Giuliani”, Europeans, citizens of the world, but primarily - like an inalienable genetic heritage - “exiles”: *people who have experienced the exodus*. The exodus, as *breaking-event*, precisely reveals in the departure from own land the dual nature: material and relational breaking-event<sup>10</sup>. In the collective memory of exodus, the two dimensions cannot be separated, on the contrary they are irreducible aspects of a unique narrative. Perhaps, the only discriminating factor is if the individual has been forcefully divided from his family or not, but it only produces a sort of “hierarchy of suffering”, a purely statistical quantification of a diasporic dimension. The breaking-event of exodus has not been realized *ipso facto*, the warning signs (that preceded and caused it) sink in concretely and psychologically unsustainable situations

<sup>10</sup> The first refers to the loss of the material elements of an existence (house, property, work tools, etc.), everything which concurs to define the socio-economic status of the individual and his integration into the local community. The second makes reference to the affective micro-cosmos (family, relatives, friends, etc.) of the subject, which accomplishes the daily existence with meetings, mutual exchanges, sharing of anniversaries and celebrations, etc.

for individuals. Such situations are connected to the scheme “we” and “they”, which defines a situation of anxiety and deprivation of liberty, as well as a denial of a different cultural identity. From the will to defend their own cultural identity arises the feeling of the exiles to be foreigners in their own land, well made explicit by the words of an exile emigrated to Canada: “My desire to leave my land has been primarily due to the fact that I was an Italian” (quoted in Pocecco 2008: 127). The denial of own identity in the native land is stressed by the analysis of who has re-worked the experience of exodus: “The risk for a refugee - immigrant [the exile emigrated abroad] who wishes to speak both for himself and for others is to dig too deeply into himself, revealing anxieties and existential hardships impacted by personal factors and a very individual story, and then to attribute these anxieties and these discomforts to the other exiles. (...) But it can also happen the opposite, he remains isolated in his own solitude, and that it is being unable to believe that others can feel what he feels” (Antonelli 2002: 5; our translation).

This reflection is relevant for two reasons. On one hand, it fully explains the desolation and the feeling of emptiness that the individual memory of those moments still evokes and, therefore, the trauma of a denied identity, existentially and not only symbolically denied, and, as such, cause of a radical choice - leave own land. On the other hand, it shows a clear consciousness about the possible “unsaid” that deprives and sterilizes the same internal memory, making impossible its integration in the external one. That is an extremely contradictory play of forces, whose fluctuations may have an immediate impact on the transmission of the memory or on the oblivion of the past.

In such a context, the role of the temporal dimension of memory becomes central, because it ensures the maintaining a certain degree of biographical or communitarian integration connecting the present experiences and the past choices, and projecting the signification of the latest in the future.

## 2.2 Overcoming Denationalization and Assimilation

The ideological cosmopolitanism claims to be an integrative norm and a regulation of existence. As “obliged ideal”, it pervades every definition of the Other, swallowing it in undifferentiated acceptance. The regime of the *new Yugoslavia*<sup>11</sup> recognized

11 The Kvarner and Istrian-Dalmatian community crumbled with the advent of “Tito’s Yugoslavia” (or “Second Yugoslavia”) as a result of the annexation of the Italian territories to Yugoslavia after the WWII and the massive exodus. The “Tito’s Yugoslavia” was a State entity that inherited all the unresolved problems from the “first Yugoslavia”: “the Slavic nations of the South” were demanding political independence from the Hapsburg empire on the basis of so called ‘the Yugoslav idea’, in which there were contradictory justifications. On one hand, this meant a voluntary union and the recognition of a specific national individuality, on the other it denoted a project of the unitary state, hegemonic (“big state”) (Rizman 1994: 101). This ambiguity did not spare the “Second, or Tito’s, Yugoslavia”. In other words, the selfish attitude is confirmed in all communities, even if from the emphasis it seems that some of them are characterized more aggressive than others: each of the communities projected into the *shared contract* own aspirations and peculiar interests. The Second Yugoslavia has configured *constituent peoples*, which means *constituent* element of social relations. The federal constitutions of the republics and autonomous provinces, have distinguished between nation and nationality: pointing out with the first term “nation” the “dominant” national group in a single republic, while with the second term “nationality” (community culture) the minority ethnic groups. This on the basis of national belonging, which was not been determined by the bond of citizenship, intended

the ethno-national groups through a formal institutionalization and codification of ethnic and national categories, however, subordinating the ethnic and ethno-national loyalty to the “class ideology” (principle of horizontal solidarity as opposed to the primary solidarity). Ethno-national belonging has not been determined by the bond of citizenship, and this has not generated an extended form of consensus. Borrowing Brubaker and Cooper, “it does not entail that these categories will have a significant role in framing perception, orienting action, or shaping self-understanding in everyday life” (*ibidem*: 27). Some individuals brought a pragmatic behaviour and actively acceptance of the political project perceived as the higher moral project - in this case, imagining a possible future and therefore conforming to the “cosmopolitan political project” based on the internationalist principle of universalism that characterized the first phase of the *Second (or Tito’s) Yugoslavia*. But others brought a defensive behaviour or a passive adaptation, structured around the denial of “putative national identity”. This because of the difficulty transcending not only the concept of persons and families rooted in the local context and homeland, but also all feelings that explain attachment and devotion to own native country. The Italian nation-memory, in term of values and feelings, which the community was forced to “remove”, was relegated to the private sphere: to live the adverse fortune has produced in some cases a sort of *internal exile*<sup>12</sup>. This in particular when the reading of the *loss* of the identity of the people, of the *homeland*, of the nation have been interpreted from ‘outsiders’ as “nationalist behaviour”, and when the policy guidelines aimed at the denationalization and deculturation of the group were particularly effective<sup>13</sup>. The *Special Italians*<sup>14</sup> were obliged to deal with the past political legacy associated to the regime of the fascist period, the “painful” political past with which they linked its own fate. Ending up to configure the Italian destiny as a damn: the exodus, from experiential event, full of symbols and meanings and of suffering, turns into a plague of the past, to be taboo. The memory of the negative historical events becomes oblivion, reflexive information, not metabolized, at best confined to a “loud silence”: the oxymoron “loud silence” makes the idea that the appearance of oblivion is repeated, but it seems largely fictitious.

The Italian community developed later aspirations (second phase of Tito’s Yugoslavia) for a more equitable recognition by expressing the willingness to tackle the effects of the past. Moreover, they displayed that they wanted to seize the opportunities related to the establishment of territorial units and consequent attribution of subjectivity to the ethnic groups<sup>15</sup>, through the commitment to defend cultural particularity. All

as a specifically political practice (Bergnach, Komac 1995).

12 What we know “[...] of our ‘internal exile’, guaranteed solely by the home space?”, as Milani asks herself (1998: 11).

13 “Too [...] we have been denied: a slice of identity, a certain size of local culture [...]” (Bogliun Debeliuh 1992, “Ripartire da Brioni”, *Panorama*, XLI, 18, pp. 11-12; our translation).

14 “[...] individuals in whose deepest selves strange fusions have developed between what they were and what they have become in the place where they born, something like a sweeping redistribution of molecules into unforeseen geometries” (Milani, 1998: 11).

15 The new government recognized all groups, without distinction. As regard the territorial aspect related to ethnicity, it established republics and autonomous regions, according to the administrative boundaries built in relation to the model of territorial aggregation of the year 1918, with a territorial adjustment, of course,

of that gives form to the *area of equality*, within which mutual recognition of equal belonging allows to reject or to cover judgments of an own inferiority (borrowing Pizzorno's vocabulary, 2007: 316), gradually transforming it into a social microcosm, which fulfilled daily life with connectedness and cohesion. The continuity is articulated, we might say, in a succession of adaptive behaviours and flows almost to be independent from those that preceded it, before the historic "earthquake" that rocked and "fractured" Italian community<sup>16</sup>.

### 3. Between Oblivion and Diasporic identity

Adopting the idea of Candau's symbolized genealogy (the reference to a founded story), we tried to stress the dynamics of the collective memory of the exodus through three generations of exiles, in order to find the *uniqueness of the family story*, the *perception of the breaking-event* and the *strength of the collective memory* (Candau 2002).

*The uniqueness of the family story*: the different meaning given to a family story fits in a larger narrative dimension (the collective dimension of exodus from Istria, Dalmatia and Fiume), characterised by a heuristic specificity. The concept of "family story" has been crucial in defining the transmission of breaking event from the first generation (who has directly experienced the event) to the second (who has / has not directly experienced the event) and to the third (who has experienced the event through the family narratives). The language has proved to be an interesting factor, because in the third generation of exiled migrated abroad, the linguistic competence in Italian appears largely overcome by the knowledge and the use of the dialect of the place of origin of parents or grandparents. This datum may be undoubtedly considered an evident sign of the capability of the collective memory of making present the past in everyday life. It should be also noted that, in the free responses of the third generation resident abroad, it is recurrent the concept of "our land" (and not "land of my parents" or "land of my grandparents") and the use of the term "homeland". Even discussed by many scholars, the recalling to the homeland appears relevant in the case of the diasporic identity, generated by the Istrian exodus, for the correct assessment of the significance of collective memory in the construction of identity. So, the third generation seems at the same time nourishing a strong sense of belonging to the society in which lives and claiming the recognition of own identitarian roots. *The perception of the breaking-*

where the new annexations required it (i.e. the creation of the Republic of Macedonia and the autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina).

<sup>16</sup> The Italian community, which does not aspire to be a simple folk group, is equipped with a complex sub-organizational system. The community of Italians is articulated in organizations, institutions and associations (schools, theatres, publishing, research centres, etc.) emerged with the aim of satisfying the legitimate demands of the Italian minority. These bodies meet cultural, economic and political aspirations, offering the blossoming possibilities to be united in an organized community. They help to revive the traditions, to increase the opportunities for sociality. Today the Italian community is divided between two new European State entities, constituting in both realities an autochthonous ethnic group, recognized on the basis of possession of minority status at the time of birth of the two new national entities. As regards the protection of minorities, the general principles of law were formulated in the Constitutions of the Republic of Croatia and Slovenia. In the case of Croatia, the question was further regulated through legislation of a constitutional rank.

*event*: this perception, emerging both at the individual level than at the collective one, expresses the objective dimension of exodus (the sharing of a diasporic identity) and the subjective one (the diversified processes of internalization of individual's experience). If the founder *epos* (the exodus) remains the focus, its emphasis changes in the three generations. That is, a detailed memory (present in the first generation), a greater retrospect rationality of who has lived (but given the young age, was not able to fully understand its signification) or has not lived the breaking-event (the second generation), a sort of universalizing interpretation of the vicissitudes of own family (the third generation). Oversimplifying, one might be tempted to say that for the first generation of the exiles the breaking-event occurred "yesterday", because constantly present in everyday experience, able to re-emerge in form of explanation of the sense of its own existence in different situations. For the second generation, the exodus has taken place the "day before yesterday", since it is a recalled past consciously (and more or less painfully), internalized in terms of progressive emotional distance or even of conscious removal. Furthermore, for the second generation, in the case there is not direct experience, the evocative power of the exodus exclusively depends on the willingness / unwillingness of the first generation to talk about it that is to create a narrative. Emblematic in this regard are the testimonies of some of the respondents who clearly talk about a sort of shame about their condition as "children of exiles", self-perception mainly due to the silence of their parents. This "shame" has at first caused a real removal of a distinctive trait of own identity, often re-addressed in a later phase of the life. So, it could be argued that the second generation of exiles is a sort of "Generation of orphans" [as Siebert writes about the German generations after the Second World War (1997: 115)].

*The strength of the collective memory*: this label alludes to the power of the collective memory opposite to the oblivion (in the cases of a strong / weak transmission of the family narratives or a relevant / limited importance given to the breaking-event) through the three different generations. A scheme proposed by Augé (1998: 76 et seq.) has been relevant to describe the different phases of transmission or non-transmission of this collective memory. He highlights one of the characteristic phenomena of our time: the constant sedimentation of the memory and its formalization accompanied by the incessant action of oblivion, understood as *return*, *suspension* and *beginning*. The *return* is conceptualized as regain of the lost time forgetting the present - and the immediate past with which the latter tends to identify itself - to restore the continuity with the most ancient past, deleting the "composed past" in favour of a "simple past"; the *suspension* as the rediscovering of the present, temporarily releasing it from the past and the future and, more precisely, forgetting the future in order to identify it with the return of the past; the *beginning* (or *re-beginning*) is the discovery of the future, forgetting the past, creating the conditions for a revival which, by definition, opens every possible future, without privileging any.

An existence closed in its own individual dimensions cannot structure itself: it needs a collective dimension. The claim of the collective memory is given as a "strong datum" in the social configuration, since "[...] allows each one to situate himself in the course of time" (Bensoussan 1998: 12; our translation).

The need to be rooted in the past, to define an ideal continuity with “what was” is therefore a pressing need as irrepressible, dictated both by the desire to maintain a common symbolic and shared background, and by the capability to tap into it (to *evoke*) if and when the opportunity arises. This just becomes relevant in the case of the exodus from Istria, Dalmatia and Kvarner, because from it, existential trajectories are drawn, in a continuous and fragile balance between “what it was” (and it could have been), and “what is”, in the awareness of being part of a dispersed people.

If for the third generation the exodus is an event that happened in “a day in the past”, this implies the consequent disappearance of the distinction between internal memory (remember what one has experienced) and family memory (what is transmitted): it is a representation constructed by the individual thanks to the narratives of the previous generations. The third generation also seems to pick up the threads of the collective memory, proving interest, curiosity, eager to learn and understand. The memory that the first and second generation have clouded or relegated in the background of its own existence, re-becomes the context for young people, the searching of own roots takes on new meanings, helping them to define own identity.

In this third generation, the “emotional shock wave” (the experienced sufferings, abuses and indifferences) appears less intensive due to time elapsed from the breaking-event, so that “be of Istrian / Dalmatian origins” does not in itself imply grudges or closures, but becomes a source of identitarian pride. In this sense, the collective memory of the exodus takes a “transversal” existential dimension [as Benussi wrote (2003: 122), “The category of exile has become transversal, it has lost the historical specificity becoming existential”].

#### **4. Italians *who Remained*: The Will and Social Action in Preserving Particular Commonalities, Connections and Stories**

Having analysed the concept of identity, we seek now to illustrate the identitarian process of Italian community. For the purposes of exploring the sense of belonging concerning Italians who remained, it has been considered useful the scheme proposed by Sciolla (1983, 2010), referring to the three analytical dimensions or theoretical components within which to place the different aspects that characterize the phenomenon of identity. The author identifies a *locative* dimension, through which the individual is placed in a “symbolic” playing field, a ground where it defines and marks the boundaries, which are more or less mobile, for delimiting the “territories of the self”. With the locational requisite, the individual develops a sense of belonging and attachment to the group, a mind-set of being part of a community. Through the *integrative* dimension, the individual may set up (develop) an interpretative framework that links present, past and future experiences in the unit of a “biography”. The integrative function offers a temporal consistency, which is important for the identity. As the author explains, the same dimensions and functions that define individual identity refer also to the collective identity. But in the case of collective identity, the locative dimension is represented by territorial and symbolic borders and by members that here are included; the integrative dimension, by institutional officers and leaders of the group. The last dimension, the

*selective* one (or dimension of active orientation) allows the individual, once defined the boundaries, to order own preferences, to choose some alternatives and discard or postpone others, through the elaboration of the history and collective memory, as well communication models, both intergenerational and intra-generational. The sense of action concerns selective and interpretive aspects within a field defined by the coherence: the participation in a collective action might, when the favourable conditions are ensured, strengthen the identity of the individual (stabilization mechanisms of preferences). More the collective actor is involved in expansion events, which individuals do not directly control, the more it should define the purpose of long-term goal, creating strong ties based on mutual trust and transparency of decisions. In this way, the 'orientative' action makes sense only if the group owns decision-making centres and executive bodies. Moving from assumptions mentioned here above, we highlight and describe the social factors and the interactive dynamics that underlie the genesis and maintenance of the collective identity in the Italian community.

*Location and boundaries.* The relationship between collective identity and territory is narrowing. The human space, according to the words of the Italian anthropologist Altan (1994), is the container of cultural symbols and history, place of social interactions, socio-spatial context in which to exercise collective identity. The familiar *oikos* and the Istrian land are symbolic resources of a founding ethos of Italian community, placing itself inside of a space with sense and meaning. The We-identity, which is recognition in terms of equality with others, therefore social ties, it develops and strengthens through the preservation of the distinctive signs (language, cultural heritage, etc.) being characters of the historical and cultural community. One of the strength criteria of the self-understanding is made up by local *istrio-veneto* language, which is followed as a strong sign of differentiation and identification. Moreover, due to Italian language and Italian culture, it is being perceived and lived as vehicle of a mentality, a way of thinking and a symbolic heritage.

*Internal consistency.* A school system that includes the teaching of the Italian language ensures the transmission of own language and, through it, the possibility of preserving the cultural peculiarity. Besides that, the information systems, cultural activities, common celebratory rituals and memorials, and so on, constitute the sense of continuity, offering an active support for strengthening collective memory and the permanence during the time. The sense of continuity and permanence in time, and the processes of individuation ensure in the case of integrative dimension the internal consistency of the group. The experience and perception of time through the historical memory based on elaboration of myths, symbols and traditions, satisfies the aspiration for a specificity, giving meaning, legitimacy and sense of continuity. Moreover, the Italian culture is taken into account by "Others", being closer to the Western world, to which the new countries refer in the research and development of a pluralistic and democratic model: a reversal of the phenomena of denationalization and assimilation of the group known in the past, we can say. Seen as prestigious, the Italian culture reinforces, by induction, both the feeling of ethnic pride, which has effect on the maintenance of cultural identity, and the recognition and respect of Others: being the bearers of a culture valued by the Others and having an "ethnic homeland" as Italy, it constitutes a source of pride and dignity.

*Choosing with pragmatic coherence.* The collective identity is nourished by orientative action in the integration and preservation process of cultural distinctiveness. Organizations and institutions of the minority not only meet the desires and personal needs, but it also allows defending the position that, because of certain socially shared values, they cover in the system of social relations. The answer to the expectations of cultural, economic and social requirements, in fact, contributes to enhance the entire social microcosm of the minority, so as to make quite blurred the distinction between ethnic communities and ethnic institution, setting up some overlapping between the belonging to the ethnic group and the membership to the specific organization of ethnic communities. This has concurred to connect experiences and perspectives in a meaningful set, to coordinate the reasons (symbolic and temporal integration of the experience) and to obtain an external recognition. Its long-term continuity is preserved by the intersubjective recognition, but not against ‘the Others’: Italian community live the differences identifying itself through the “Istrian-ness”, a sort of *negotiated cultural strategy*<sup>17</sup>, giving a sense of belonging to a unity of style, a way of being and thinking, a relationship model between different groups, capable to stimulate a pluri-ethnic dimension of collective identity<sup>18</sup>.

The contribution of the Italian group in promoting the evolution of the culture of living together and raising ethical behaviour in the mutual respect and tolerance generates a deep self-esteem (positive self-consideration) and a significant external admiration (positive hetero-consideration), favouring the evolution of cohesive capacity and internal solidarity. Besides that, an inclusive propensity that evokes, in an apparently paradoxical way, the universalistic vocation, rather than the particularity. In the light of the data emerged, different aspects characterize the sameness, clarifying the forms of identification in the production of the sense of belonging represented in term of the boundaries, of the consistence and of the active orientation. The familiar *oikos* and the Istrian land are symbolic resources of founding ethos of a “good society”, inspired by the universal habits, tolerance and individual freedom; in other words, progress to a context of “broadened cultural horizons”, being able to reconcile the *particular* and the *universal*. While, internal consistency, regarding the need to connect the past and present experiences to the future prospects in a meaningful set, is implying regulation and management of differences, offering a configuration perceived to be consistent, reinforced by actively adopting communitarian stance and committing to the Italian community project.

### Concluding Remarks

The “Who We are” is intertwined with the questioning about the continuity and discontinuity in the *Italians of diaspora* and with the organizing different and new systems of relations as framework of possibilities in the *Italian community of remained*.

17 “[...] Individuals link among them natural and original relations, concretely personal and non-institutional, born from an organic and inseparable desire, from a transcultural approach based on a ‘mutual glance’ [...]. It is a daily world of life evolving on ancient loins and because of a “new birth”, followed by the change in the way of thinking, caused by the changed numeric relationship of co-presence in the territory between the Slavic and the Italian world [...]” (Milani 1995: 68; our translation).

18 See Šuran (1995).



The analysis about the Italians of diaspora has produced evidence that there is a precise identification in the “common destiny of the exiles”. The reference to a homeland has been preserved over time (like *loss of the native land*), but mingling with new existential experiences, it became in the new generations the reference to the *land of the origin*; a sort of response to the need to maintain the identitarian roots in a “post-national” and “multicultural” world. Not excluding the importance of the associative networks, it should be emphasized that the collective memory of the exodus has been mainly kept thanks to the family narratives. It is in the action of story-telling that the exiles “build” their identity (*identitarian process*), at the same time demanding at the public level the acknowledge of their symbolic and cultural background (*recognition process*), namely being identified and recognized as those who lived the experience of the exodus.

But the process of generational replacing reveals its remarkable importance. Each generation, in fact, develops a collective memory based on two main components (Cavalli, 1996: 52): the historical experience [“i.e. modalities of participation and presence in the constellation of problems, situations, conflicts, projects that characterize the period in which it makes its entry onto the public stage” (*ibid.*)], and the resources received from the past generations. Three phases clearly emerge in the re-processing the significance of the exile: the *return* peculiarly connotes the first generation of exiles, in terms of existential practices revealing continuity with the “life of before”. The *suspension* characterizes the identitarian tensions of the second generation (both in terms of denial of own identitarian origins that, in the case of individuals living abroad, of a pluri-belonging). The *beginning* (or *re-beginning*) refers to the third generation, aware of its own identity and clearly oriented to its “re-investment”.

The involvement of third generation seems to bring out a sort of recognizing the “weight” of the tragic event. It emerges here the call to the “consciousness of the past”, which refers Pecchinenda. In his reflections on the meaning of memory the author highlights how young people often express the need to acquire “a sense of continuity in which the present value reverts only one of the stages of a single and indivisible process, which is understandable only in terms of both the past and the future” (1999: 151; our translation). So, the problem occurs in the failed sharing of a common memory among generations, which corresponds to a loss or a denial of the identitarian markers in the exiles.

In the group of “who remained” the minority institutions are central, constituting an indispensable point for the understanding of collective identity in terms of the processes of integration and social life. As combination of membership and communitarian loyalty, they evolve in a defined space, able of giving meaning to the community on the basis of the delimitation of the community itself and of the importance that the latter assumes in terms of communication and associative-trustable relationships. The different aspects that characterize the phenomenon of identity suggests moments and phases, as we have seen, of development of identity, clarifying the forms of identification in the production of the “sense of belonging” represented in term of boundaries, of consistency and of orientative actions. The exchange systems are highly socialized. There is a link between identitarian process and socio-organizational factors, especially and increasingly with

the associative ones, however, subject to the specific nature and to the variety in the institutional structures (that are different organizational systems; see for example the fall of the communist system and the emergence of new nation-states).

Through a sort of “selective reconstruction”, a way of processing the memory (borrowing a concept from Cavalli, 2005, 217), the Italians who remained were searching for the meaning of Italian-ness in a cultural horizon, looming through a distant process of civilization (the universal man, the concept of person, abstract thinking, the basics of legal formalism, the concept of freedom, democracy, etc.), and becoming hope in the context marked by the Balkan conflicts. To the Italian community, in the process of social interaction, have been recognized those traits and characteristics that, the same community has recognized as “own”. This process highlights the central importance of the recognition from others<sup>19</sup>. As it has been emphasized in the literature on memory, what is being remembered, selected and partly rebuilt, it is not just the product of conscious activity of individuals, but it needs to find the recognition of the others. This partially explains also the presence of an overlap between Italian-ness and Istrian-ness. In this sense, the identitarian revival of the Italian minority group is connected not so much to a form of opportunism (convenience behaviour), as to a great aspiration based on *mutual glance*.

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