

## Reaching out to the Other? *Bora* and the Wind of Forgiveness

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### Abstract

At the end of WWII, the former Italian areas of Istria and Dalmatia were handed over to the then Yugoslavia. After the 1947 Paris peace treaty, approximately 350.000 ethnic Italians left these regions. The massive wave of migration which followed in the years after the treaty has been later referred to as the Istro-Dalmatian exodus. The exodus led to the creation of an aftermath society: the one of the Istrian Italians. But such a community suffered as a result of a further internal division, having been split into the *andati* (gone), the 350,000 who left after the Paris treaty; and the *rimasti* (stayed), the few who decided to stay in their hometowns.

Through the analysis of *Bora*, an epistolary novel co-authored by two women belonging to the two communities, this paper examines various aspects of the question of identity presented by this case of border shift. Anna Maria Mori and Nelida Milani challenge the barriers separating the two parties which for decades rejected each other, moved by a mutual sense of betrayal. These letters are the effort at reaching out to the Other, dismantling the high wall erected between the ones who left Istria and Dalmatia and the ones who stayed behind. However, in this arduous process of re-union of the subject, the two writers acknowledge the existence of another, common to both parties, Other: the Other who took their home-country away.

Mori and Milani face here a long neglected, and until then, still open question. Despite the different processes of becoming undergone by the two writers, Mori and Milani prove that co-existence is achievable through forgiveness. In doing so, they also implicitly open the path towards a wider form of reconciliation: the one still needed among all the inhabitants of a very troubled little piece of land.

### Keywords:



In 1998 Anna Maria Mori and Nelida Milani published a book entitled *Bora*, named after the northern wind blowing through the city of Trieste and along the eastern coasts of the Adriatic Sea. *Bora* is a collection of letters exchanged between the two writers and can be considered as

an open dialogue between two women who are both members of the ethnic Italian community of Istria, formerly an Italian region, but now part of Slovenia and Croatia.

At the conclusion of the Second World War, the 1947 Paris peace treaty established that Istria and Dalmatia, two areas on the Adriatic coast to the east of Trieste, were to be handed over to former Yugoslavia. Anna Maria Mori and Nelida Milani, both children at the time of the war, were born in the now Croatian town of Pula/Pola. Mori's family is part of the hundreds of thousands of ethnic Italians who decided to leave the area after the Paris treaty and move within Italy's newly re-defined borders. This community is often referred to as the community of the *andati* [gone] and stands in opposition to the one of the *rimasti* [stayed], a label used to indicate those ethnic Italians who decided to remain in their hometowns, such as Milani's family. *Bora* alternates passages from letters written by Mori and addressed to Milani with passages taken from Milani's replies and vice versa. This alternation is organized in such an intertwined fashion as to shape a narrative a *due voci* [double voiced], as stated on the book cover. Readers can easily attribute the passages to their legitimate authors through a stylistic device that sees Milani's texts printed in italics.

This collection of letters clearly outlines the gravity of the identity dilemma triggered by the handover of Istria to former Yugoslavia and also abruptly unveils the fracture between the communities of the *andati* and *rimasti*. Such sharp scission acted on and exacerbated an already severe situation: the attempt to transplant two communities onto a new social (sociolinguistic in the case of the *rimasti*) tissue. In this article, I will argue that the identity dilemma disclosed in this correspondence operates on two different levels. On the one hand, the writers initially acknowledge the internal division of the Istrian Italian community. The *andati* and *rimasti* are indeed comparable to two sides of a coin: both part of a whole, they are connected to each other but stand in a relationship of mutual exclusion; perpetually back to back, they look in opposite directions. From this perspective, I argue that *Bora* can be read as an encounter between two individuals looking to overcome the distance separating them from the (reciprocal) Other. Within this context, I then recognize forgiveness to be the crucial element able to spark the re-union of two opposites. However, on the other hand, this successful process of reaching out to the Other will almost surrender to the recognition of a further opposition. In *Bora*'s last chapters this co-existence (which has just been reinvented through the narrative process) seems to be sealed in the face of a third extraneous element, which is then identified as a new Other: the non-Italians who subtracted Istria from the ethnic Italian community.

Let me start this analysis with a quote from Bora's opening chapter, in which Milani addresses Mori:

Lei mi ha raccontato di essere andata via da Pola ragazzina. Come gli altri trantaduemila. [...] Figli dell'esodo: la breccia, la lunga e frastagliata rottura, quella che ha generato moncherini, quella che ha aperto nella coscienza una ferita inguaribile. Noi che siamo rimasti abbiamo dovuto adattarci psicologicamente alla situazione reale, e in ognuno di noi si notano tracce di questo adattamento. La metamorfosi degli esseri non si procura: accade. Si sono venuti formando gli 'italiani speciali', esseri umani nel cui io più profondo sono avvenute strane fusioni fra ciò che sono stati e ciò che sono diventati nel luogo in cui sono nati, qualcosa di simile a una redistribuzione di molecole sconfiniate in geometrie impreviste. Nessuna forza al mondo potrebbe più riportarci allo stato pristino.<sup>1</sup>

*[You have told me you left Pola when you were a child. Like the other thirty-two thousand [...]. Children of the exodus: that breach, that long and jagged rupture which created stumps and opened an incurable wound into the conscience. We, the ones who stayed, had to adapt psychologically to reality and, in every one of us, you can note traces of this process of adaptation. The metamorphosis of the human beings is not caused: it happens. The 'special Italians' are the results: human beings whose innermost self has suffered strange fusions between what they used to be, and what they have become in the place where they were born. Like a redistribution of molecules strayed into unexpected geometries. No existing force could take us back to our original state (my translation).]*

A few pages earlier, the first chapter started with Mori's description of an old black and white photograph of a little girl. The picture portrays Mori when she was a child and, observing it many years later, she comments:

Si può vivere senza la bambina o il bambino che si è stati, poco o tanto tempo fa, senza i suoi luoghi e magari anche i luoghi comuni della sua infanzia, senza i suoi ricordi di ambiente, i volti e parole, senza le certezze conquistate contemporaneamente all'uso della parola, prima, e poi della parola scritta [...]?<sup>2</sup>

*[Is it possible to live without the child we were, a short or a long time ago; without her own places and even without the commonplaces of her childhood; without the memory of her environment, of the faces and the words; without those truths conquered together with the capability of speaking, first, and writing later [...]?]*

Right from the initial pages of this correspondence, it is clear that the *lunga e frastagliata rottura* [the long and jagged rupture] mentioned by Milani will be a recurrent theme of this co-authored narrative. The letters can thus be read as an attempt at incorporating the scar tissue resulting from the long process of wound healing into one's own map of identity.

However, it should also be pointed out that this collection unveils the existence of a twofold dilemma. On the one hand, there is the dramatic condition of the living stumps: 'special Italians' generated by the rupture between the *andati* and *rimasti*. As Mori plainly affirms:

Il nostro nemico siete diventati voi: perché restando avete sminuito il nostro andarcene [...]. Il vostro nemico siamo diventati noi. Perché, andandocene, vi abbiamo lasciato più soli, più deboli, impotenti a difendere la vostra identità di italiani in un territorio che non era più italiano.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Anna Maria Mori and Nelida Milani, *Bora* (Milan: Frassinelli, 1998), p. 11 (my translation).

<sup>2</sup> Mori and Milani, *Bora*, p. 5 (my translation).

<sup>3</sup> Mori and Milani, *Bora*, p. 218 (my translation).

*[You became our enemy because, by staying, you belittled our decision to leave [...]. We became your enemy because, by leaving, we left you even more alone, weaker and powerless in front of the necessity to defend your Italian identity in a territory which was no longer Italian.]*

On the other hand, a further identity issue is addressed explicitly in the last pages of *Bora*, although its effects are at work throughout the collection. It is the sense of otherness separating *noi* [us], Italians, from *loro* [them], Slavs:

*E incomincia a questo punto un viaggio ignoto al resto d'Italia e degli italiani in genere: il viaggio tra il 'noi' e i 'loro'. [...] Per gli italiani d'Istria, e qui sono assolutamente uguali 'i partiti' e 'i rimasti', 'lori' sono gli altri: croati o sloveni, a questo punto non fa differenza.<sup>4</sup>*

*[At this stage another journey starts, one unknown to the rest of Italy and to all Italians: it is the journey along the border separating 'us' from 'them'. [...] For Istrian Italians (and here there is no difference between the andati and the rimasti), 'they' are the others: and it does no longer matter if they are Croatians or Slovenians.]*

In order to understand this further level of Otherness, it is crucial to bear in mind that the starting point of this dialogue is the mutual recognition of a shared grief. Indeed, such a grief originated from the same historical events, but developed following separate routes. This initial acknowledgement is accompanied by the will to understand the voice on the opposite side of the border. In other words, through this dialogue, the two authors are able to recognize each other as equals; even if in this case it means being equal in their misfortune. In this sense, it is a dialogue marked by the patience to listen to the 'other version', and the courage to open a conversation on uneasy memories. Such recollections, despite their intrinsic problematic nature and the interlocutor they are directed to (a threatening counterpart), do not give rise to any form of aggressive resistance. The hostility dividing the two communities is explicitly recognized but here it is accompanied by a sense of resignation more than resentment:

*Figlie della stessa, spaventosa, guerra e dello stesso orrendo e ingiusto dopoguerra. Perché i tuoi ricordi e i miei — che peraltro abbiamo in comune con due grandi eserciti di umanità diversamente e ugualmente vinta e disperata, l'umanità alla quale tu appartieni che viene definita dei 'rimasti', e la mia degli 'andati' [...] —, se non sono propriamente identici, sono però molto simili: ricordi che corrono paralleli e incomprensibili gli uni agli altri, anche perché da sempre, per quel che ci riguarda, che riguarda la nostra patria comune e in modi diversi perdita da entrambe, c'è sempre stato qualcuno che ha soffiato sul fuoco.<sup>5</sup>*

*[Children of the same horrible war and of the same horrid and unfair post-war period. My memories and your memories — which we share with armies of differently and yet equally defeated and desperate human beings: on the one hand, your army, the rimasti; on the other, mine, the andati [...] — if not identical, they are at least very similar. These memories run parallel and yet are incomprehensible to each other also because, since ever, for what we and our fatherland are concerned (a shared fatherland later lost, in different ways, for both of us) there has always been someone who blew the fire.]*

<sup>4</sup> Mori and Milani, *Bora*, p. 200 (my translation).

<sup>5</sup> Milani and Mori, *Bora*, pp. 77–78 (my translation).

Now that I have shed light on the nature of the twofold dilemma previously mentioned, I will analyse the first level of Otherness which characterizes this correspondence. In the last quote, Mori points out how Istria ended up to be for both parties the '*patria comune e in modi diversi perduta da entrambe*'. She thus suggests the necessity to put aside the hostility that for years has divided the *andati* and the *rimasti*: even if it was via different paths, both communities have experienced the same dramatic loss. The purpose of these letters is, therefore, '*capire, raccogliere i fili sparsi o interrotti, mettere a confronto le idee ricevute, andare a vedere*. [Understanding, gathering the scattered or interrupted threads, confronting the ideas previously accepted, verifying]'.<sup>6</sup> In other words, this collaboration is an attempt to overcome the brutality of history and politics, which not only transformed a community into a mass of refugees or internally exiled people, but also managed to separate the two resulting parties by igniting a strong sentiment of reciprocal rejection.

Such a long history of rejection between the two communities, combined with the intention behind this double voiced narration, suggests the crucial importance of the issue of forgiveness. Jacques Derrida regards the essence of writing as a request for forgiveness coming from the person who writes and directed to the readers:

Si domanda al lettore, apostrofato come giudice [...], di perdonare – ed è forse la verità di cui parla il testo come verità di ogni scena di scrittura e di lettura: domandare perdono al lettore confessandosi. Si scrive sempre per domandare perdono [...].<sup>7</sup>

[*The reader, addressed as the judge [...] is asked for forgiveness — and, perhaps, this is the truth spoken by the text as well as the truth of every setting of writing and reading: confessing oneself, asking the reader for forgiveness. One always writes in order to ask for forgiveness [...].*]

I argue that these letters enact the ultimate reflection on the act of forgiveness between the *andati* and the *rimasti*: *Bora* exposes such an issue in its blatant bareness by calling for the attention of a reader who is the immediate recipient of the apology it acts out.

These letters are written for a specific addressee (Mori writes for Milani, and Milani writes for Mori) and have then been published for a general readership. Forgiveness can be explored on the level of the correspondence between the two writers. Subsequently, we can extend the validity of this act, widening its scope. The moment of publishing aims at two objectives: (1) it enacts an offering for the readers who partook in the events (other members of the two communities); and (2) it highlights the value of an open dialogue that does not aim at establishing new truths or solutions, but rather seeks a mutual understanding.

<sup>6</sup> Milani and Mori, *Bora*, p. 8 (my translation)

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Perdonare*, trans. and ed. by Laura Odello (Milan: Raffaello Cortina, 2004), p. 102 (my translation).

This observation calls for a second one, likewise deriving from Derrida's reflections. One of the first questions about forgiveness relates to the possibility or impossibility, or better the appropriateness or inappropriateness, of formulating a request for forgiveness addressed to a community. Is it admissible to ask for forgiveness to a plurality of individuals? Derrida writes:

Si può, si ha diritto, è conforme al senso del 'perdono' domandare perdono a più di uno, a un gruppo, una collettività, una comunità? È possibile domandare o concedere il perdono a un altro che non sia l'altro singolare, per un torto o un crimine singolare?<sup>8</sup>

[Is it possible, and does one have the right to, is it consistent with the sense of 'forgiveness' to ask for forgiveness to more than one person simultaneously, to a group, to a collectivity, to a community? Is it possible to ask for or to grant forgiveness for a wrong or a singular crime to an other who is not an individual?]

*Bora* presents an attempt to define the writers' positions on two different levels: we recognize moments in which Mori and Milani speak as individuals, especially when they write about their own experiences and childhood memories. However, in other passages, their attempts at explaining or understanding move along the tracks represented by the dichotomy *andati* and *rimasti*. On these occasions, events are then presented or questioned from acknowledged perspectives: their words speak for their respective communities of belonging.

Yet this dialogue never really loses its peculiar character of a face to face confession: two worlds stand in front of each other without any mediation. And the theme of forgiveness finds its context within the microcosm constructed through the letters. The authors' words might depict the point of view of their own community, but the issue of forgiveness at stake here is actuated on an individual level. Undoubtedly, we come across some passages written in the plural, especially the ones authored by Milani. Yet, through such use of this personal pronoun, neither of the writers intends to claim a collective validity of her thoughts. Even if at times these letters do utter a collective discomfort (expressed through the use of the plural grammatical subject), the confrontation at stake is undeniably one between two individuals:

Io ... E Nelida: tu, e io ...

Ed è successo che Io è andato a cercare quel 'Tu': con un viaggio dentro e fuori da sé, nei ricordi da confrontare con altri ricordi, e nei chilometri sulla costa o all'interno dell'Istria, su strade in mezzo a boschi di ginepri. [...] E il 'tu' ha risposto con una voce sottile, prima timida, quasi fioca, poi dura e imperiosa: 'Non ho niente da dire....'

Io ha insistito: è andato a cercarla per parlarle di persona.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Derrida, *Perdonare*, p. 31 (my translation).

<sup>9</sup> Milani and Mori, *Bora*, p. 10 (my translation).

[I... and Nelida: you, and I...  
*And what happened is that I went looking for that 'You': through a journey within and outside the self; inside memories to be confronted with other memories; travelling for kilometers on the coast or through the Istrian inland, along roads cutting through juniper woods. [...]*  
*And that 'you' replied with a thin voice, firstly shy, almost faint, and later harsh and imperative: 'I have nothing to say...'*  
 I insisted and went looking for her to talk to her, face to face.]

It follows that, in response to Derrida's questions, we can here exclude the presence of a collective request for forgiveness. Mori's choice to refer to this dialogue as one arising from a quest of an *io* [I] who decided to look for a *tu* [you], unquestionably reveals the confidential and personal nature of this exchange.

The use of these two personal pronouns to address the encounter acted out through these letters brings to mind Martin Buber's observations on the binomial I-you (and indeed Derrida makes a brief reference to Buber's work). In his work *I and Thou*, Buber explains existence precisely as a moment of encounter between 'I' and 'you'.<sup>10</sup> According to him, the capacity to address a human being as 'you' determines a passage from experience to relationship. The other person is no longer shaped through a grid of references: saying 'you' means overcoming the limits of a world made of contents, to use Buber's own words. It means being able to overpower the distance that ordinarily separates individuals. As a matter of fact, Buber differentiates two possible attitudes towards the world: one that is regulated by the basic words 'I-you', and one dominated by the basic words 'I-it'. The 'I-you' mode of existence implies a capacity to overcome experience (which instead dominates the 'I-it' attitude) in order to enter into relation with another human being. Such a relationship demands the absolute commitment, on the part of the self, to abandon the 'I-it' mode in order to dwell in the 'I-you' relationship. The 'I' enters a moment of presence through the relationship with 'you'. Experience is abandoned (because it is part of the 'I-it' relationship) and so is the past, in that it characterizes everything that is experienced. In the 'I-it' mode, the 'I' is surrounded by objects: contents, as specified before. Such contents are transient, they pass. By virtue of this feature ascribed to objects (the possibility to experience them), objects are then located into the past. In short, entering into relation with 'you' means overcoming the distance that separates the subjects in the 'I-it' mode of existence:

The basic word I-You can be spoken only with one's whole being. The concentration and fusion into a whole being can never be accomplished by me, can never be accomplished without me. I require a You to become; becoming I, I say You. All actual life is encounter.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. and ed. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Scribner, 1970).

<sup>11</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 62.

This brings me back to *Bora* as a moment of encounter between ‘I’ and ‘you’. Buber asserts the necessity to enter into a relation with ‘you’ in order to become ‘I’. In the opening of the book, Mori addresses herself as *la bambina-Io* [I-the child], referring to the black and white photograph that she describes in *Bora*’s opening page. But before uttering this identification, she writes: ‘*Una bambina, poi una ragazza grassa e infelice. Dopo ancora...: finché tutto, faticosamente, si riunisce un giorno in unico “io”*’ [A child first, then a fat and unhappy teenager. Until one day, with great effort, everything is recomposed into a single “I.”].<sup>12</sup> The unity of the subject is achieved only after, first, the confrontation (the encounter), and then, the acceptance (through forgiveness) of the Other. The process that led Mori to reunite all the ‘splints’ of the self into a complete *io* has to pass through the moment of encounter with ‘you’, namely Milani.

The same can be said for Milani, although there is no passage in *Bora* in which she explicitly comments on this necessity. The reason for this absence is most likely to be found in the genesis of the book. This encounter was pursued by Mori; she was the one who initiated this exchange with her attempt to establish the first contact. Milani initially blocked Mori’s initiative but eventually the two writers found a fruitful channel of communication through the letters. Again Buber writes: ‘[T]he You encounters me by grace — it cannot be found by seeking [...]. The You encounters me. But I enter into a direct relationship to it. Thus, the relationship is election and elective, passive and active at once.’<sup>13</sup> From this perspective, we can deduce that the correspondence between the two authors flourished in the moment where such an encounter became ‘election and elective’ at the same time. The encounter happened when it was no longer perceived (by Milani) as an act initiated by the ‘I’ (Mori) and imposed on the ‘you’. The relationship therefore became reciprocal; and, in fact, reciprocity is another feature that Buber attributes to the moment of relation.

Having established that the encounter witnessed in *Bora* revolves around two individuals, it is important to understand why forgiveness is relevant in this case. Derrida attributes a confessional nature to the moment of writing. According to him, when writing, the writer is moved by a request for forgiveness addressed to the readership. Therefore, the next question is: what is the ‘perjury’, as Derrida defines it, calling for forgiveness? The answer to this question also implies some considerations on the readership: who is taking up the role of the reader in *Bora*?

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<sup>12</sup> Milani and Mori, *Bora*, p. 6 (my translation).

<sup>13</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 62.



Let me start with the last question. This is a collection of letters; therefore, the primary addressee of this narrative is the recipient of the letter. However, through the publication of the correspondence, the letters cease to exert the function of private communication. The ethical moment behind the birth of *Bora* is to be recognized in the urge to tell a story. Once started, this compulsion generates into the will to get the story across. Therefore, alongside the private and therapeutic function of this correspondence, the option of a future publication of the letters immediately offered to the two writers a second motivation: the opportunity of attracting public attention to a topic until then avoided.<sup>14</sup>

Precisely because the act of publication consigns a personal exchange to a public space, I suggest the necessity to proceed here with two different readings. The first stems from a point of view that looks at *Bora* as a personal exchange between the two writers: the addresser of the letter is writing to a specific addressee. The second reading focuses on the writers' decision to publish their correspondence. When considering Derrida's reflections, it is necessary to distinguish between these two levels. In other words, we need to bear in mind the existence of two separate narrative levels also when we move to individuate the nature of the perjury mentioned in *Perdonare*. Since this narrative addresses two readerships, the stimulus behind it (the 'perjury' indicated by Derrida) needs to be identified within the respective levels.

I will begin by considering the nature of this perjury within the first narrative level (the letters as a personal exchange between the writers). In this context, Mori and Milani inhabit the roles of both writer and reader. Given this duality, it follows that the perjury to be forgiven resides on both edges of the dichotomy *andati* and *rimasti*. *Bora* presents all the features of testimonial writing and the authors can be considered, in this regard, as representatives of an aftermath society. We therefore face a situation in which two antithetic concepts mix together: guilt, which implies the existence of a perpetrator, and victim. In our case these concepts are mixed together.

The sense of guilt here also resides within the victim, precisely because of the separation of the aftermath society into the two communities of the *andati* and the *rimasti*. The original victims of the traumatic event, the ethnic Italians, are split into two groups that grew into reciprocal enemies, rejecting each other. In other words, *Bora* represents an effort to surpass that sense of isolation, generated by post-war events, which was later aggravated by the scission of the aftermath society into two subcultures hostile to each other. In view of this attempt

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<sup>14</sup> Only in 2005, seven years after the publication of *Bora*, did the Italian government officially dedicate a day to the commemoration of the dramatic post-war events experienced by the Istro-Dalmatian Italians (*Giorno del Ricordo*, celebrated on the 10th of February).

undertaken by Mori and Milani, the ‘perjury’ Derrida refers to here intersects with the reasons which led these two groups to consider themselves victims; victims not only of historical events, but also of the ‘perjury’ committed by the other community. Mori writes:

La cosa più semplice, la più naturale, di fronte a una tragedia — e la nostra è stata, resta una tragedia, alla quale però non è stato ancora riconosciuto fino in fondo il diritto a essere tale nelle pagine di storia — è prendersela con qualcuno: datemi un nemico, e vi solleverò il mondo [...].  
Perché ve ne siete andati?  
E voi, perché siete rimasti?  
Ha senso continuare a porsi questo tipo di domande?<sup>15</sup>

*[The simplest, the most natural reaction in front of a tragedy — and our was a tragedy, it still is a tragedy which has not been granted the right to call itself so in the pages of history — is to blame someone: give me an enemy, I will raise the world [...].  
Why did you leave?  
And you, why did you stay?  
Does it make any sense to still ask these questions?].*

These lines clearly show the recognition of a ‘reciprocal perjury’ that has further worsened an already dire situation. In this passage, Mori underlines the pointlessness of these reproachful questions. Forgiveness is, in this sense, to be interpreted as the will to accept that, for each of these questions, there is an equivalent one coming from the counterpart. Forgiveness means the resolution to stop chasing an enemy.

It follows that the dialogue enacted through these letters is not aiming at establishing new truths. It represents rather the effort to acknowledge the fact that both parties involved in the post-war events have suffered a dramatic loss. Writing about the *andati* and the *rimasti*, Milani comments:

Realizziamo all’interno di un dialetto comune, mondi concreti non condivisibili, la reciproca estraneità di due orizzonti concettuali privi di punti di contatto, perché prodotti da due contesti molto diversi. Solo il mondo affettivo è condivisibile, quello della nostra infanzia e adolescenza. E i mondi immaginari. Il mondo istriano come te lo immagini tu da lontano, il mondo italiano come lo immagino io.<sup>16</sup>

*[Through a common dialect, we shape concrete worlds which we cannot share with each other. It is the reciprocal extraneousness of two conceptual horizons with no contact points, the result of two very different contexts. The affective world is the only one we can share, because it is the one of our childhood and adolescence. And the imaginary worlds too. The Istrian world as you imagine it from far away, and the Italian world as I can imagine it.]*

Here Milani acknowledges that years of separation and a life spent on opposite sides of the border have irrefutably caused a fracture between the two communities. However, this fracture appears different from the *lunga e frastagliata rottura* she mentioned in her first letter to Mori. This correspondence seems to have restored the integrity of the affective sphere. The hostility towards Mori’s first attempts at establishing a contact has disappeared and has been substituted

<sup>15</sup> Milani and Mori, *Bora*, p. 218 (my translation).

<sup>16</sup> Milani and Mori, *Bora*, p. 224 (my translation).

by a form of hospitality, in that both writers are able to host each other in their own process of remembering.

In short, the urge behind the writing of these letters is the desire to break the circle of mutual silent accusations that keeps feeding sentiments of hostility and resentment between the two communities. This is achieved through the appreciation of a possible different perspective coming from the other side of the borderline. The choices made after the Paris treaty divided the aftermath society and were the origin for distinct points of view. This correspondence underlines the importance of remembering the status of injured party common to both communities.

This last reflection brings me back to the second reading of *Bora* mentioned earlier. We have seen how the use of the two personal pronouns ‘I’ and ‘you’ underlines the encounter of two individuals who embark on a journey aiming at mutual understanding. However, there is a further situation that needs to be explored, one in which we witness an opposition between *noi* (we) and *loro* (they): the plural used by the authors in the last chapters of the book unveils the second aspect of the identity dilemma at the origin of these letters.

Paradoxically, the additional borderline that separated Slovenia from Croatia after the civil war in former Yugoslavia re-unites the two communities. However, this is a negative reunion in that it creates another opposition which sees the Italian community standing against what is perceived as another form of Other. Mori underlines that both the *andati* and the *rimasti* share the same feeling of hostility towards the new power-holders. The resentment towards the Yugoslavian governing class is also explicitly articulated in various pages authored by Milani.<sup>17</sup> Both authors agree that the two communities adopt the same attitude. The main factor behind this resentment is the ‘non-belonging’ to the ethnic Italian community. *Loro* are part of the generic category of the Other, therefore the distinctions between the single elements included in such a group are not relevant. It is evident that these pages marked by *noi* and *loro* bring to light a sentiment of hostility between the ‘autochthonous Istrian inhabitants’, as the ethnic Italians often address themselves, and the Yugoslavian citizens (today, and already when *Bora* was published, not Yugoslavians anymore but Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Bosnians, and so forth). This is a further dimension that adds to the dynamics that led to the social isolation of the ethnic Italians.

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<sup>17</sup> ‘*Venne il malvagio e ci sottrasse la bolla di sapone* [The evil arrived and stole the bubbles we were happily blowing.]’. Milani and Mori, *Bora*, p. 214 (my translation).

*Loro* are the common enemy, the perpetrators who have taken control of the Istrian peninsula. Yugoslavia emulated the strategy previously employed during the fascist domination: cultural repression of the foreign culture. The lack of public recognition of the injustice suffered by the Italian community is the factor that hindered the process of healing of this wound. In this sense, *Bora* sums up the consequences of a trauma that, far from being contained within the realm of the past, has deepened its roots until reaching the present, feeding on feelings of hostility, resentment, mistrust and derogation of the Other. We have seen how Mori emphasizes the status of ‘tragedy’ that should be attributed to the experiences suffered by the ethnic Italian community of Istria and Dalmatia. She also highlights that history had failed (at least until then) to grant these events the right to be officially recognized as a tragedy. In other words, this tragedy has been denied and this denial has transformed the original event into a surviving trauma; a trauma that persists in the present.

From this perspective, the publication of *Bora* also aims at claiming public attention and recognition. With regard to this point, Ross Chambers underlines that testimonial writing has to be considered a symbolic practice.<sup>18</sup> It performs a captatio on the readers, in that it wins their attention in order to focus on what he defines as the ‘obscene’. The obscene is something that society is not willing to look at. What I am suggesting here is that Mori and Milani’s aggressive tones towards Yugoslavians can be read as an act of what Chambers defines ‘impertinence’. I defined *Bora* as an act of writing committed to understanding and forgiveness, an attempt to put aside any form of hindrance in order to listen to another voice without any anticipation. In this context, the resentment emerging from these pages written along the opposition between *noi* and *loro* surprises the reader, because here there is no space for that attempt at listening to the counterpart. The mutual availability to hearing out the voice on the other side of the border is the core element of this communication between the *andati* and the *rimasti* up until *Bora*’s last chapters. Chambers writes about ‘im-pertinence’:

Since the obscene is wholly or partially excluded from the set of genres that constitutes a given culture, and so liminalized, witnessing writing is obliged to exercise its indexing function through the performance of a generic act of catachresis: in the same discursive act whereby the attention of its readers is turned in an unwonted direction, it turns a conventional genre to new purposes [...]. But such an outcome [...] is further dependent on there being what I have called a meta-etiquette capable of canceling normal rules of appropriateness and politeness, so that, instead of being received as an error to be shrugged off and ignored [...], the testimonial intervention is read instead as an intended act of im-pertinence, and hence achieves a status of meaningful utterance.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ross Chambers, *Untimely Interventions. Aids Writing, Testimonial, and the Rhetoric of Haunting* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> Chambers, *Untimely Interventions*, p. 36.

Thus, the sharp and at time derogative tones characterizing these pages are to be interpreted as an attempt at raising the readers' awareness of the distress suffered by the Italian community, which has passed unnoticed for too long. What I am suggesting is that, at an instinctive level, we witness the release of sentiments of reprisal dictated by the necessity to finally bring to the fore the policy of cultural repression undergone by ethnic Italians under Yugoslavian rule. Like the fascists before the Second World War, the Yugoslavian government acted out (within its own geographical borders) a cultural and linguistic repression of the Italian community.

In this context, the publication of *Bora* with a major Italian publisher represented the possibility to scream about the injustice undergone by the whole Italian community. Perhaps the writers did not disdain the possibility of eliciting some feelings of guilt in the general readership: the public has ignored this situation for too long (because they are unaware of it, if young readers; or because of an unwillingness to look in that direction, if old enough to remember the post-war events). The decision to publish these letters reveals therefore the intent to bring to light the obscenity, to provoke the readership and force it to face what was known but not acknowledged.

In summary, this analysis of *Bora* has recognized two different narrative levels which are moved by separate intentions. On the one hand, I underlined the autobiographical dialogic character of these letters. In this respect, the relevance of this dialogue lies in the effort to create a link between two individuals belonging to opposing communities, divided for decades by a sentiment of rejection. The letters provide a comfortable and safe space for confession; they grant the writers the possibility to open up the Pandora's box of their memory. Within this first narrative level, I have suggested the relevance of Martin Buber's studies on the 'I-You' relationship, and subsequently pointed out how this correspondence can be interpreted as the encounter between an 'I' and a 'you', finally able to enter in relation.

In this context, forgiveness is the turning point able to tear down the barrier separating the two communities. It is the element allowing for an openness which might wipe away previous feeling of intrusion. Forgiveness is the secret motor behind this correspondence: the writers confront the 'original perjury' (the acceptance of a further borderline between the *andati* and the *rimasti*) and work together to surpass it.

I also drew attention to the motivations behind the publication of these epistles. Here the issue at stake is no longer forgiveness but rather the wish to break down the barrier of denial erected around the post-war events on the North-Eastern border of Italy. From this perspective, *Bora* aims at achieving a public recognition of the drama suffered by the communities of the

*andati* and the *rimasti*, hoping therefore to terminate the surviving character of the trauma experienced.

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