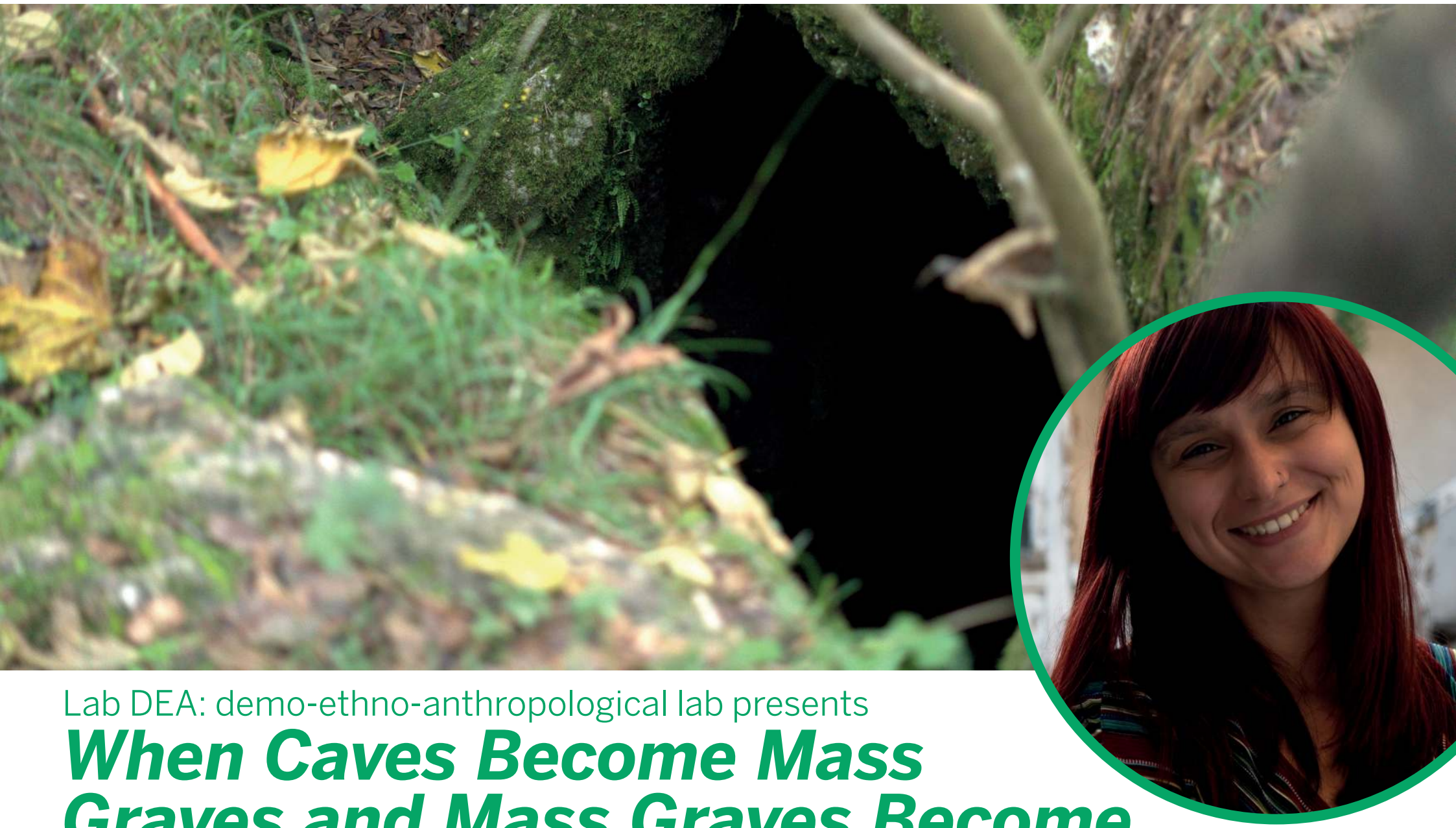
Università Ca'Foscari Venezia
Dipartimento di Studi Umanistici

LABORATORIO DEA



Lab DEA: demo-ethno-anthropological lab presents

When Caves Become Mass Graves and Mass Graves Become Caves: Voluminal Politics in the Upper Adriatic Borderland

Laura Mafizzoli
Institute of Ethnology of the Czech Academy of Sciences

16th November 2026, Monday from 2:30 to 4:30 pm
Room "Geymonat", 1° floor, Malcanton Marcorà Building, Dorsoduro 3484/D, Venice

What happens when we approach the foibe and the political and mnemonic practices surrounding them from a borderland rather than a nation-state perspective? Drawing on ongoing ethnographic research between Trieste and Istria within the ERC project Mempop (Memory and Populism from Below), I examine how these karst caves actively shape broader struggles over remembering and forgetting, participating in the production, negotiation and contestation of memory and politics across the Upper Adriatic borderland. Rather than treating them solely as objects of competing national memories, I approach them as material, epistemic and affective spaces through which different relationships to the past (and the future) are produced, negotiated and contested. Drawing on the concept of voluminal politics (Kojan L), I explore how the underground, understood as a three-dimensional space, becomes implicated in political and mnemonic struggles.

In particular, I foreground the tensions between the historical claims and memory projects advanced by the Italian, Slovenian and Croatian states and the situated knowledge through which people in the borderland make sense of these spaces and live alongside them. I argue that these engagements with the underground, while intersecting with national frameworks of memory, also exceed them, bringing into focus questions that extend beyond historical interpretation and national belonging to concerns with moral positioning, ethical responsibility and personhood. In this sense, the foibe become spaces through which different ways of knowing, dwelling and morally positioning oneself in relation to the past and the future emerge.

Laura Mafizzoli is a social anthropologist specializing in the Caucasus and the Balkans, focusing on memory activism, commemorations, and the politics of difficult heritage. She holds a PhD from the University of Manchester, where she researched Gulag memorialization practices in Tbilisi. She is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the Institute of Ethnology of the Czech Academy of Sciences, working on the ERC-funded project MEMPOP: Memory and Populism from Below, for which she explores memory and populism in Istria and Georgia.

Free admission / Seminar valid for DEA/ ACEL internship credits.

Lab DEA — Laboratorio demo-etno-antropologico
Anthropology, Arts and Performance

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