

The memorialisation of Treviso concentration camp

By Giorgio Romanello

After the end of WWII, the camp returned under the control of the Italian Army and soldiers would be living there throughout the following decades. They built new storehouses, dorms and also a chapel, nevertheless the entrance would still be forbidden to the public. On November 9th 2019 the participants to a civil ceremony in memory of the deportees and the refugees who lived in the camp had access to the military base, after the unveiling of two memorial plaques affixed on its boundary walls¹.

This event is the result of a decade long activity aimed to raise public awareness about the historical events happened inside the Treviso camp. According to the historiography, in the 1960s local citizens were surprised by the arrival of a group of Yugoslavians willing to remember their compatriots who were deported and died in the camp. No one in Treviso seemed to know anything about what these people from abroad reported. Not even a clear piece of information was available about the graves the corpses were buried in². This situation was the result of more than twenty years of silence, during which the camp was part of no historical narrative.

After this first “epiphany”, veterans, members of Partisans organisations and Left wing parties in Treviso lead historical researches and public campaigns about the “Monigo concentration camp”, describing it as an example of Fascist violence against non-Italian communities under Italian occupation. The first exhibit about this issue took place in in 1980, in occasion of the Italian Liberation Day³. The event was in line with the messages presented above: the younger generations should not forget that the Fascist regime was a violent phenomenon and that democratic societies should react against the rise of any political movement with the same ideology.

Historical research about the camp have been focused mainly on the months when the Cadorin military base was a concentration camp. The first booklet about the camp was published by Ivo Dalla Costa in 1988⁴. The same author, a pioneer in the study of the facts related to the camp,

¹ https://www.rainews.it/tgr/veneto/video/2019/11/ven-Treviso-Deportati-Profughi-8d27683c-bd6b-41bd-8c61-8fb7b282327f.html?fbclid=IwAR0vjRb831tQn3RwHtCnT_K2FtDteiBtLr_QIJrvzPVAofAQHBYvFmGumy4 .

² F. Meneghetti, *Di là del muro. Il campo di concentramento di Treviso (1942-1943)*, Istresco, 2012, p. 21.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 23-24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

supported the foundation of Istresco, Istituto per la storia della Resistenza e della Società Contemporanea, in 1992. This institution published also other books about Treviso camp in 2003⁵, 2005⁶ and in 2006⁷. In the framework of her collaboration with this institute, Francesca Meneghetti authored *Di là del muro* published by Istresco in 2012. This book dealt also with the circumstances in which the Cadorin basis was a refugee camp⁸.

Istresco organized public events as well as educational activities. Among these activities they held also a contest during which some high school students created a commemorative plaque to be affixed on the former Treviso hospital, where inmates from the camp gave birth to children who died because of the unbearable life conditions of the detention⁹. Even though research and public initiatives became in time less ideological and more objective, Istresco always aimed to raise awareness towards these historical issues in order to stimulate a wider debate about local identities, democracy and human rights.

The memorial plaques in front of the former camp reflects the current state of the art. In this initiative post-war refugees and military inmates were included as part of the public discourse about this structure. During the unveiling ceremony, civil and religious authorities from Italy, Croatia and Slovenia highlighted how this *place of memory* should remind the public of the importance of tolerance, human dignity and international cooperation¹⁰.

⁵ M. Trinca, *Monigo: un campo di concentramento per slavi a Treviso (luglio 1942 – settembre 1943)*, Istresco, Treviso, 2003.

⁶ D. Lavrenčič Cannata, *Come se non fosse mai accaduto. Lettere d'amore dal campo di concentramento*, Istresco, Treviso, 2005.

⁷ A. Manesso, F. Scattolin, *Deportati a Treviso. La repressione antislava e il campo di concentramento di Treviso*

⁸ Meneghetti, *Al di là*, p.125.

⁹ “Vera, ex internata a Treviso: “I trevigiani ci hanno aiutato.””, *La Tribuna di Treviso*, January 28 2013.

¹⁰ <http://www.oggi-treviso.it/caserma-cadorin-lager-trevigiano-che-imprigionò-civili-sloveni-croati-219029> .