Marginal Legacies: Preliminary Notes for a Data-based Analysis of the Postwar Evolution of the Fascist Concentration Camps in Italy

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Abstract. In the post-war period, the 79 concentration camps and the crimes against humanity committed by Italian citizens in them were largely kept silent. This paper initiates an examination of the current state of these sites. The data is sourced from scholarly literature, specific websites, and geo positioning tools and is presented through charts summarizing key findings. It shows that most have either been demolished, transferred to private ownership, or repurposed for commercial use, such as hotels, spas, and resorts. Then, it inquires on the relevance of such memory today.
Keywords: Concentration camps, Historical memory, Italy, Collaborationism during the Holocaust, Fascism.

***Riassunto*.** Nel periodo del dopoguerra si è largamente taciuto sui suoi 79 campi di concentramento e sui crimini contro l'umanità commessi dai cittadini italiani al loro interno. Il presente documento avvia un esame dello stato attuale di questi siti. I dati provengono dalla letteratura scientifica, da siti web specifici e da strumenti di geo-posizionamento e sono presentati attraverso grafici che riassumono i risultati principali. Il documento mostra che la maggior parte di essi è stata demolita, trasferita a proprietà privata o riadattata per uso commerciale, come hotel, spa e resort. Si chiede poi quale sia l'attualità di questa memoria oggi.
***Parole chiave*:** Campi di concentramento, Memoria storica, Italia, Collaborazionismo nell'Olocausto, Fascismo.

Introduction

The structure of the concentration camp system during the fascist period involved approximately 900 structures including concentration and transit camps, prisons and confinement centers. The most of the 79 former concentration camps on Italian territory have been taken apart, destroyed, modified, and shifted into private hands, used for commercial reasons or private dwellings. Very few preserve something, such as a commemorative plaque, a memorial, or a monument that acknowledges their past.[1] Most are ruins, and people living nearby are unaware of their past. Arguably, gathering information about these locations is a challenging task. Revisiting the past often creates discomfort for people, as though the researcher has encroached on their physical and moral property without any right to do so. Allow me to recount an episode. Looking for information about the Lipari concentration camp, which housed and trained many Ustaša (Kersevan 2008, 123), the ultra-nationalist Croatian militia led by Ante Pavelić between 1934 and 1949, I called the owner of a local business where once there were the farmhouses used to hold prisoners. Before providing their response, the interviewee sought information regarding my profession and the potential consequences of publication while ensuring anonymity to maintain peaceful living in Lipari. Then, I did obtaine their response: They were not informed on the matter, and no one in Lipari had knowledge regarding it.

This contribution aims to investigate the current conditions of the former fascist concentration camps, the recollection of which has always been underappreciated by public memory.

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[1] To read about these pieces of remembrance – and what they remember – see the recent paper by Angeletti, Posocco & Gottardi (2024).

In addition to studies examining specific sites,[2] there are only three comprehensive studies on the Fascist concentration camps: Di Sante (2001), Capogreco (2004), and Kersevan (2008).[3] The first, which is the result of a 1998 conference in Teramo, Abruzzo, mainly focuses on the concentration camps in the region. The second source is likely the most trustworthy, as it includes an introduction to the Fascist concentration apparatus and life in the camps, followed by a short, detailed report on each camp, with dates and the names of those in charge. Through this study, which draws heavily from archival resources, we gain insight into the amount of Italian state police and civilians who collaborated to make the Fascist concentration system a success. The count of 79 concentration camps is based on Capogreco's research, as well as additional information obtained from the ongoing research project campifascisti.org, which aims to geolocate and catalog Fascist camps in Italy and the ex-colonies. Kersevan's (2008) work on the prison camps that held Yugoslavs is a commendable and innovative contribution. It highlights numerous offenses perpetrated by the Italian state police in those locations. Finally, it is worth noting a study by Davide Rodogno published in 2003, which examines the Fascist concentration camps in the colonies.

It is not much, but perhaps it is enough to state that the historical gap has been roughly filled. Nevertheless, there is a shortage of literature on the actual conditions at these sites, where—it is always good to remember—detainees, mostly non-combatants caught in police traps, did not perish in gas chambers but perished due to malnourishment, hypothermia, and illness because of horrendous sanitary provisions. This paper does not focus on collecting stories of these camps, which merit individual attention. Instead, it explores a field that journalist Fabio Galluccio initiated and remains the sole contributor to. In 2002, he produced a travel report on these sites, documenting his personal experiences rather than providing a quantitative or qualitative analysis. The author reports what struck him the most. Biographical details standard in travel writing are included throughout the report, while references to academic studies are lacking. It can be argued that a thorough scholarly investigation on this topic has yet to be undertaken.

It is difficult to maintain that the degradation of these historical structures can be attributed solely to naivety, ignorance, poor government or parastatal organization, or limited funding.

Analyzing the condition of these memory sites through a nationalist lens can yield valuable insights, as nationalism remains a core aspect of our historical and cultural nation-state reality. Nationalism encompasses more than just the bellicose strain that calls for the restoration of supposed glories of the past or the legendary "purity" of the ethnic group. Nationalism mainly develops in calm forms (Brubaker 2004), which are more or less unconsciously entangled within us (Billig, 1995). As Malešević put it, it is indeed a "grounded" ideology, meaning that it is institutionalized and incorporated into our habits and social environment (2019).

Nearly forgotten memory

The case studies this paper focuses on – namely, nearly-forgotten memory sites like the Italian concentration camps – require an additional theoretical layer that connects nationalism with our perception of reality. Posocco and Watson's notion of "national priority" (2022) provides a helpful framework for analyzing the causes of memory sites' decay or transfer to private entities. As the term suggests, within the national priority principle, governments (and citizens) are expected to prioritize their country's interest to protect the nation from any threat or adverse commentary. When it comes to confronting heinous acts such as the ones committed in concentration camps, the national priority principle may prompt efforts to conceal, minimize, or destroy evidence. The missed Italian Nuremberg trials for those who collaborated with the Nazis exemplifies the national priority principle, even at the expense of Holocaust remembrance. Additionally, the representation of collaboration concerning the Holocaust and Resistance in Italian museums offers additional evidence of the

[2] For example, Capogreco (2003) on Renicci, Kersevan (2003) on Gonars, Cerceo (2003) on Alatri, Lucchi (2004) on Colfiorito, and Zanuttini (2016) on Visco.

[3] Two other studies to consider are Dal Pont (1975), and Brigadoi Cologna (2019).

extensive implementation of this principle.[4] Regarding our case studies, letting time take its course and destroy the tricky memories preserved in the camps could find a solid understanding through the prism of the national priority principle.

If nationalism and national priority can provide insight into the history of memory sites and why they are disappearing, this perspective may not suffice for proactively addressing their condition. The *pars construens* of such a legacy can be found in cultural heritage studies, especially those that deal directly with the concept of ruin. By drawing on Geoge Kubler's comparison between the dependence of crustaceans on their external skeletons and the ruins that surround us, Bicknell, Judkins, and Korsmeyer argue that "along with providing shelter and utility," these sites are "portions of the past" that "perpetuate awareness of what has gone before us" (2020, 1). The destruction of this heritage "injures not only an object but a people, leaving behind a long trail of damage through generations" (Bicknell, Judkins, Korsmeyer 2020, 4; Meghnagi D., 2005). In this regard, some food for thought can also be found considering the numerous fascist monuments spread throughout Italy and the former colonies. In addition to the ongoing project *Luoghifascismo*,[5] which geolocates the fascist heritage in Italy and abroad, an original contribution on fascist postcolonial ruins is Scego and Bianchi (2014), which inquires on the condition of the colonial monuments and buildings in Rome.

However, monuments and memorials serve primarily aesthetic and commemorative functions, whereas the concentration camp heritage is distinctive in its absence of aesthetic and initial commemorative aims. In stark contrast, the camps were designed to erase selected heritages from memory. Several scholars have emphasized the effectiveness of public memory narratives that intersect with authentic historical sites in aiding visitors to absorb information more directly. James E. Young (1993) posits that original sites such as a camp can be perceived as a simulacrum as they convey meaning through features like barbed wire, crematoria, and guard towers without any third-party verbalization.

This discussion pertains to the Nazi extermination camps, which have been promptly established as memorials. But the former fascist concentration camps have not been safeguarded by public memory. In addition to the numerous opportunities for reinterpretation that the disappearance of such a site may offer, the complexity lies in the fact that these sites have evolved and continue to evolve.

The abandoned and demolished sites

The number of 79 concentration camps this paper has selected resulted from two main sources, Capogreco (2004) and the research project Campifascisti. The number cannot be precise for two reasons: the ambiguous concept of concentration camps[6] and the ambiguity of counting sites that might be considered detachments. For example, the Cittaducale concentration camp in Capogreco was part of the Ruscio concentration camp, while Campifascisti recognizes it as a separate camp. The same goes for the RSI (*Repubblica Sociale Italiana*) concentration camps of Monticelli and Montechiarugoli. The interactive map of Campifascisti counts two units for Montechiarugoli and one for Capogreco. This paper counts each site as one whenever possible, as the focus is on the buildings.

It is important to note that a concentration camp typically consists of multiple structures. Except in rare cases, such as camps located in convents or countryside villas, such as Roccatederighi or Vo' Vecchio, concentration camps were composed of multiple structures that spanned across an area. The Istonio concentration camp, now known as Vasto, serves as an example of this, as it was made up of two noble villas and a hotel that were spread throughout the village. Determining the precise number of structures is challenging, as they were typically clusters of purpose-built barracks that were later

[4] On how nationalism has affected Italian Holocaust museums, see the following publications: Angeletti, Posocco, and Meghnagi (2024), Posocco, Angeletti, and Meghnagi (2024), and Meghnagi, Posocco, and Angeletti (2024).

[5] https://www.luoghifascismo.it/mappa/mappa-completa (accessed on December 10, 2024).

[6] One of the leading authorities on concentration camps, Dan Stone (2017), has acknowledged the complexity of identifying different types of camps. As he explained, "The matter is complex. There is no single type of concentration camp and no clear dividing line between a concentration camp and other sites of incarceration" (p. 111). According to Kertzer (2022), the fascist concentration camps were more than 200.

demolished.[7] One emblematic example is the camp in San Domino, a village in the Tremiti Islands. This camp consisted of twenty prisoner structures, two dormitories, and an apartment building for the police that has been transformed into a hotel. This first investigative phase identified an approximate number of facilities, 121.

To obtain the precise location of these buildings, further research in local archives and municipalities is needed. As a preliminary note, this paper focuses solely on the primary structure of each camp and does not cover all discovered buildings. The development of the sites is classified into four distinct classes, each representing a particular faith: 1) The category "Abandoned and Demolished" includes sites that are no longer in use or have been destroyed. 2) "Private Properties" refers to sites that individuals or non-governmental organizations own. 3) The category "Civil and Mixed Purposes" encompasses sites used for religious, civil, and military activities, as well as those that are state-owned but managed by citizens to run an activity. 4) The "Unknown" category includes sites that have not been identified. Finally, this paper presents data regarding the number of sites with commemorative pieces, such as plaques, memorials, and transformed museums. The data illuminates how public institutions have approached concentration camp remembrance.

Figure 1: The condition of the former Fascist concentration camps (November 2023)

Figure 1 depicts the current condition of the 79 former Fascist concentration camps in Italy, categorized based on the four outlined categories in the Methodology section. The initial research that informs this study reveals that out of the entire sample, 23 sites (29.1%) are in a state of abandonment or were demolished over the past eighty years, other 23 (29.1%) belong to the Civil and Mixed Purposes, 22 (27.85%) are presently under private ownership, and, finally, there are 11 additional cases (13.92%) for which no data has been discovered yet.

Sites that are abandoned and razed, together with those that have been transformed for civil and mixed purposes, represent the majority of cases. More precisely, 13 sites (56.52%) remain abandoned but still in existence, while the other 10 (43.48%) have ceased to exist.

[7] As Capogreco (2004, 201) noted, the builder was very often Eugenio Parrini, a dear friend of Mussolini.

The abandoned and demolished sites

From northeast to Southern Italy, the following concentration camps were completely razed: Gonars in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region, Borgo San Dalmazzo in the Piemonte region, Vallecrosia, Ellera, and Coreglia Ligure in the Liguria region, Renicci and Colle di Compito in Tuscany, Pietrafitta and Ruscio in Umbria, Ariano Irpino in Campania, and Lipari in Sicily. Additionally, we must consider those sites that have been partially destroyed but still retain a minimal part of their concentration camp structures. These camps include Servigliano located in the Marche region, many barracks in the village of Ventotene, an island in the Lazio region, and whose main prison housed socialist intellectuals like Eugenio Colorni and Sandro Pertini, as well as federalist thinkers such as Altiero Spinelli and Ernesto Rossi, the future Italian President of the Republic, the camp in San Domino, a village on Tremiti Island, and Ustica, an island in Sicily.

Except for Vallecrosia, which was recently destroyed in 2022,[8] the remaining camps were razed in the aftermath. A significant finding that emerges from this count is that a high number of these destroyed camps were established by the Italian Socialist Republic (RSI), that is, the camps most associated with the Holocaust and Italian collaboration with Nazi Germany. These camps included Borgo San Dalmazzo, Vallecrosia, Coreglia Ligure, and Colle di Compito. In addition, we must mention Servigliano and Bagnolo in Piano, Tuscany, for which information has yet to be found. Last but not least, Celle Ligure and Bagni di Lucca (always in Tuscany) are two sites that have been transformed into luxury apartment buildings. Notably, 8 out of the 18 puppet-government RSI camps met this fate.

This suggests how the memory of the Holocaust has been conveyed in Italy. In this context, the post-World War II recollection of the camps provides many examples. Perhaps the most representative one pertains to Borgo San Dalmazzo. Placed on the site of the camp, its two 1983 and 1998 commemorative plaques clearly (and naively) demonstrate how Italian public institutions allowed local politicians and residents to recount their past. The first plaque in Borgo states that "free men" *finally destroyed* the place where 400 Jewish prisoners were imprisoned, literally "to erase the horror;" interestingly, it omits who imprisoned them. While the first plaque fails to acknowledge Italy's involvement in the Holocaust and instead optimistically suggests that life can resume now that the horror has ended, the second plaque takes a more heroic approach by depicting the locals and valley inhabitants as brave individuals. Though Italy's history during World War II includes many instances of solidarity and resistance, it's important to remember that the truth isn't always absolute. Thus, the second plaque transitions from forgetting to lauding the population, who, much like the victims of the Holocaust, are depicted as targets of "European hatred." These two plaques are heavily influenced by the prevailing post-war narrative of the Holocaust in Italy, wherein fascism is veiled, Italian anti-Semitism is portrayed as "European," and citizens are described solely as "good people."[9]

Many camps were demolished for economic reasons, primarily to accommodate the tourism industry. This was especially noticeable for camps located on islands and the seacoast. I have previously discussed Lipari's camp in the introduction. Little information is available regarding the

[8] https://www.sanremonews.it/2022/01/27/leggi-notizia/argomenti/eventi-1/articolo/anche-a-vallecrosia-per-non-dimenticare-il-giorno-della-memoria-celebrato-oggi-dal-sindaco-foto.html (accessed on December 10, 2024).

[9] The two plaques read as follows (my translation): "The city of Borgo San Dalmazzo, 1943-1983. / In this place where free men decided to erase the horrors of war and rebuild, four hundred Jews were imprisoned at the end of 1943 before being deported to Auschwitz extermination camp. Borgo San Dalmazzo, in remembrance, invites young generations to reflect and remember. The Municipality, on November 19, 1983." "While race hatred raged in Europe, Jewish refugees, unaware of their fate and coming from distant countries (Austrians, Germans, Poles, Belgians), found hospitality and salvation in Borgo San Dalmazzo and this valley, hidden in cottages, protected by the population, for two long, interminable winters, they waited with confident hope for the return of freedom. To pay homage to the memory of those who helped them, the children and grandchildren of those Jewish refugees fraternally embrace the inhabitants of these generous valleys. 20 September 1998, Erev Rosh Hashana 5750. / 'I rejoice and rejoice in thy benevolence, because having witnessed my affliction, having known the anguish of my soul, thou hast not delivered me into the hand of the enemy, but has allowed me to set my feet in breadth'. / Psalms 31, 8-9."

Ustica camp, which also housed ex-collaborators in the post-war period and was active until 1961; the local historian Paolo Graziosi (2020) concludes his article by saying that after its closure in 1961, the inhabitants worked to develop tourism, so the building was probably rebuilt and reused. The San Domino camp, which housed homosexual prisoners, consisted of more than 20 barracks and a police headquarters. The interview with a resident, referred to as Y, revealed that the police headquarters had been transformed into a hotel, and the other 20 barracks were no longer in their original form but had been destroyed and rebuilt as houses and other structures for accommodation. The 12 barracks in the village of Ventotene appear to have faced a comparable fate. The demolition in the 1970s enabled local institutions to construct a sports center, a multipurpose area, and a parking lot. The remaining building is the former police headquarters, which serves as the Financial Guard's office. Most of the camps in Liguria, namely Ellera and Coreglia Ligure, could have been destroyed or repurposed due to this principal factor. Along with Borgo San Dalmazzo, the only camp that was explicitly erased to forget its past seems to be Ariano Irpino, whose ten barbed wire barracks were burned by the Germans in 1943 to leave no trace.[10]

Still from northeast to South Italy, the first abandoned former concentration camp is Visco, in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region. From 1947 to 1996, the camp became the Luigi Sbaiz military barrack. In 2016, thanks to the efforts of Ferruccio Tassin and intellectuals such as Boris Pahor and Moni Ovadia, the Superintendency of Cultural Heritage recognized the site as an asset of historical importance. However, the site is currently in a state of complete neglect, and, since 2022, barriers have been put to obscure it from the outside.[11]

Another camp dedicated to Yugoslav and Slovenian civilians that is in a state of abandonment is Chiesanuova, a neighbor in Padua. The camp was tragically famous because, among the punishments it provided, prisoners were tied to a pole. Despite the 2021 announcement by the Padua mayor Sergio Giordani to include a green area in the renovation project of this state-owned area, online sources indicate that the camp remains up for sale for commercial and residential purposes.[12]

Firstly, Monechi's introduction is noteworthy as the *quasi* emphasizes the unconscious challenge of the average Italian citizen in acknowledging the existence of Italian concentration camps. Obviously, there are interrelated main reasons for this, including the dominant narrative that considers Nazi Germany as the sole perpetrator of the Holocaust and the misconception that concentration camps were solely a German enterprise. The application of Posocco and Watson's principle of national priority sheds light on the socio-cultural reasons behind this occurrence: Citizens protect the nation-state they belong to. Secondly, Father Franco's defense of the bishop aligns with the Church's stance on Pius XII's alleged silence regarding the fate of Jews during World War II. Advocates for the pope argue that publicly taking a stance would have exacerbated the situation toward the Jews. Nobody can prove otherwise. However, in a recent study that analyzes for the first time the Vatican archives opened in 2020, David Kertzer (2022) revealed that behind the pope's reluctance to denounce Hitler's actions, there were other reasons, including the secret negotiation with the *Fuhrer*, through Prince Hessen's intercession, to contrast the de-Christianization of Nazi Germany, and the difficulties in speaking out due to the numerous cases of pedophilia of which priests were accused in Germany.

[10] See www.orticalab.it/L-Irpinia-al-tempo-dei-lager and http://concentriamocisuicampi.weebly.com/ariano-irpino.html (accessed on December 10, 2024).

[11] On Visco, Tassin's website: https://campoconcentramentovisco.altervista.org/?doing_wp_cron=1700157974.7703471183776855468750 (accessed on December 10, 2024). See also this recent article on its condition: www.storiastoriepn.it/27-gennaio-2022-il-campo-di-concentramento-di-visco-lasciato-nellabbandono (accessed on December 10, 2024).

[12] See the interview with Giordani here: www.ilgazzettino.it/pay/padova_pay/ex_caserma_romagnoli_vorrei_farne_una_piazza-5973319.html?refresh_ce (accessed on December 10, 2024). The are of Chiesanuova is for sale here: www.investinitalyrealestate.com/it/property/padova-ex-caserma-romagnoli/ (accessed on December 10, 2024).

Private properties

Not all camps were initially constructed to serve as such. Many of these sites were privately owned before their use as camps. As previously discussed regarding Roccatederighi, numerous proprietors leased their buildings to the state and benefited financially. This raises a crucial question as to the extent to which those who rented their properties for monetary gain during times of war should be classified as collaborators. Factors such as the economic crisis during wartime and the national priority principle must be considered. The latter operated precisely through fascist propaganda, which received significant backing from the Church, an institution that has long influenced the Italian population.[13] For example, to win over skeptical citizens regarding Italian racial laws, fascist propaganda often drew comparisons between their racial policies and the historic ghettoization of Jews, which the Church sanctioned. In this regard, Pius XII's consistent silence did not contradict this narrative (Kertzer 2022).

Interestingly, those who chose to rent the facilities were primarily from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, while those who worked in the camp canteens and other menial roles were predominantly from the lower classes. Among these instances, we can discern that a prominent aristocratic family owned the pond where the RSI established its camp in Colle di Compito. Similarly, a noble estate was used as a camp in Notaresco, once belonging to another titled family. Furthermore, a distinguished lineage owned the villa that became the camp in Treia, while a notable patrician family held the estate in Vo' Vecchio. Additionally, it appears that members of the upper class—though not necessarily of noble heritage—such as professionals like lawyers in Casoli, Città Sant'Angelo, and Istonio, also leased their villas and properties for this purpose. From this, two implications arise.

Firstly, many individuals who rented these properties were educated and likely did so not because they had to but rather to benefit the state as responsible citizens. Secondly, fascism was not a movement fighting "against plutocracies" as Mussolini had promoted but rather the opposite.[14] In this regard, Dwight Macdonald's potent expression of fascism as "an older brother of capitalism," which appeared in the American edition of Daniel Guerin's *Fascism & Big Business* (1939, ix), accurately depicts the proper appearance of totalitarian regimes.

Since the camps could accommodate hundreds of people, many have been transformed into luxury accommodations, spas, golf clubs, and restaurants. In a country such as Italy, where public institutions are reluctant to acknowledge their fascist and collaborationist history, as demonstrated by the Holocaust Remembrance Day law, business owners who invest in redeveloping sites with such a tricky past may be hesitant to risk their enterprise by informing their patrons, who seek leisure and enjoyment, that eighty years ago the place was a concentration camp. This is particularly relevant concerning the following two sites.

Studying the postwar history of these camps indicates that, in most cases, their abandonment resulted from mismanagement and a lack of knowledge about the local institutions. Several sites are abandoned despite having hosted some activities in the postwar period, such as Celle Ligure, which served various purposes before its definitive closure in 2019, Pietrafitta, in Umbria, whose Enel thermoelectric power plant was closed in 2003, and Gioia del Colle, in Puglia, whose history deserves more attention. The camp was established in a historic pasta factory located in the village. After the war, it temporarily housed underprivileged families until its closure. In 1960, a private individual purchased the property to use it for storage. After falling into a state of abandonment, an enterprise acquired the area and transformed the building into a hotel. However, renovation is currently hindered as the Superintendency of Architectural and Environmental Heritage has designated it as a monument of industrial archaeology.[15]

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[13] For example, barbed wire was installed around the Corropoli concentration camp due to reports of prisoners frequently attempting to escape, as pointed out by concerned citizens (Capogreco, 2004, p. 212).

[14] Mussolini's declaration of war speech on June 10, 1940, emphasized this point: "...We enter the battle against the plutocratic and reactionary democracies of the West" (Kertzer, 2022, p. 145).

[15] For a detailed story of the camp, see: www.gioiadelcolle.info/il-campo-di-internamento-nellex-mulino-pastificio-a-pagano/ (accessed on December 10, 2024).

The source article contains more detailed information. A commentator nicknamed "Bello" urges the author of the article, Francesco Giannini, and other blog users to avoid overlooking the crimes perpetrated by the Communists, specifically the *foibe* and gulags. Bello's remark coincides with a right-wing narrative established during the discussions leading up to Law 211 that declared Holocaust Remembrance Day. As argued by De Pasquale (2001) and Gordon (2013), the debate on the text of the law brought attention to how "Italians of every political ideology" committed to saving the Jews and, above all, to the so-called "equalized memory" that led to the establishment of the *Giorno del ricordo* (Day of Remembrance) in 2004, an initiative strongly supported by the right-wing government of the time to commemorate the victims of the *foibe*.

Many sites have been left abandoned, yet they preserve tragic stories related to the Holocaust and Italian collaboration with the Nazis. One of the most famous is Roccatederighi. The villa, which was a Vatican-owned summer residence for the episcopal curia of Grosseto, was converted into a camp for Jewish prisoners, predominately children, despite the Church's non-recognition of the RSI. To govern the camp, the former bishop of Grosseto, Paolo Galeazzi, requested an advance payment of 5,000 lire per month, in addition to a monthly salary of 300 lire, which he justified as payment for the five employed nuns (Galluccio 2003, 155-162). A January 23, 2023, report by RAI brought this story to light.[16] Walking in the villa's garden, journalist Federico Monechi converses with two people. The first is Father Franco, a local priest and witness. In this two-minute report, Monechi starts the conversation with the priest by stating: "So, this building was *quasi* [almost] a concentration camp." Then, Father Franco replies: "Yes, it became a concentration camp, but Galeazzi opposed it as he could through his authority."[17] The second interviewee, the historian Luciana Rocchi, holds a different opinion. Galeazzi was an avowed fascist with no interest in opposing the law. While the report deserves credit for highlighting the history of the camp, it also exemplifies some narrative dynamics related to the Holocaust and the Church.

The splendid castle in Scipione, belonging to the Marquis Pallavicino, operates as a luxury estate for events and vacations. In 2012, the local edition of *La Repubblica* reported a dispute between the local Historical Institute of the Resistance and the family, who denied the castle's past functioning as a concentration camp. According to the Marquis, up to three people were imprisoned at the castle "for stealing sausages."[18] In 2009, journalist Vera Paggi approached the Marquis to create a TV report about the castle. However, the family forced her to leave the place when they learned the report would discuss its history as a camp. Despite meticulously chronicling the castle's prestigious guests since the Middle Ages, its website does not mention the period in which it was a camp.[19]

In 1929, Montalbano Castle, located near Florence and historically owned by a prominent family, was used by Mussolini to sign a joint peace statement with then-British Foreign Minister Austen Chamberlain. It then functioned as a camp before its transformation into a luxury hotel. Like the former example, the castle's website silences this period. Nonetheless, it does not hide its lingering fascination with Italy's Fascist past. A suite dedicated to Mussolini is a good indication. The room's description on the website pays tribute to the *Duce*, "a controversial figure in Italian history" who paid for his dream of "restoring the Roman Empire through a policy of decision-making and power." Furthermore, the potential patron reading the webpage is informed that "the government eliminated all forms of political and social dissent upon taking power, pursuing his ideals of greatness and creating important works." This is followed by a narrative list of Florentine architectural works created under fascism. Then, the castle recalls its enduring support of fascism, emphasizing that "it is no coincidence that the main hall of the castle, the one used for romantic dinners, is still covered

[16] www.rainews.it/tgr/toscana/video/2023/01/-campo-internamento-ebrei-roccatederighi-grosseto-ae22e1e0-b646-4af1-9c89-d19d4d6b66a4.html (accessed on December 10, 2024).

[17] My translation.

[18] https://parma.repubblica.it/cronaca/2012/01/27/news/il_lager_negato_di_salsomaggiore_macch_solo_ladri_di_salame-28840659/ (accessed on December 10, 2024).

[19] www.castellodiscipione.it/content.php?type=300&page=40&title=Blue+Suite+-+The+Watchtower (accessed on December 10, 2024).

with the classic black and white chequered brick floor, very typical of the architecture and the fascist period." Nothing is coincidental, and the castle owners acknowledge this by asserting that the hues of the room, and consequently, the hues of fascism, elicit feelings of authority, respect, importance, power, and merit."[20]

The owners of the two manors have certainly addressed past events, but which specific past? If these camps are transformed into a prison for petty thieves or a tribute to fascism, it raises the question – where do such revisionism and narrow-mindedness originate? In a recent article on the relationship between collective memory and populism in ex-collaborationist countries, Caramani and Manucci demonstrated that the more the country has not re-elaborated the past, the more populism has advanced (2019, 1159-1187). Many other examples – from the Florentine Villa La Selva, seized from its Jewish owner Silvio Ottolenghi and utilized by collaborator Margherita Soavi[21] to the then-luxury hotel Fabriano concentration camp, whose 120 Jewish prisoners were sent to the Nazi extermination camps – showcase that Caramani and Manucci proved correct: The government-led silence on the concentration camps has enabled the populace to ignore, re-examine, and modify their country's history, or, conversely, to emphasize what was deemed most suitable and useful in the contingency.

The sites with civil and mixed purposes

Many former concentration camps have continued to serve various state purposes even after their closure. In some instances, military and paramilitary forces have utilized them for deposits, prisons, and offices. This category includes Visco, Chiesanuova and Ventotene, Monigo, Tossiccia, Colfiorito, Farfa, Chieti, and Casacalenda. In addition to the Monteforte Irpino and Tortoreto concentration camps, repurposed as town halls following the war, other camps underwent similar transformations. Civitella del Tronto and Agnone were converted into retirement homes, while Tonezza del Cimone and part of the Chieti concentration camp are now used as a private cooking school and a kindergarten. Servigliano, in turn, now serves as a multisport area, while other buildings of the Colfiorito concentration camp house many facilities, including a post office, a grocery store, a tourist information point, and a café.

Examining the postwar narratives of these places teaches us that governmental institutions have not solely undervalued the memory of concentration camps but have additionally faced a multitude of ethical, moral, and economic dilemmas. This is especially true for state-owned sites managed by private individuals running profitable leisure businesses while benefiting the local community. In these sites, tourism and local memory are intertwined. At the same time, the citizen who takes over one of these places makes an economic investment and places profit-making expectations in them. It goes without saying that finding the balance between memory and tourism is not granted. While plans to turn the site into a museum seem to have stopped in some instances like Colfiorito, Gioia del Colle, and Visco, due to political and bureaucratic complications, other sites have found more flexible solutions. These include combining multiple types of museums or transforming a part of the site into an accommodation facility while dedicating another part as a museum. This approach would make the site self-sufficient, obtaining resources from tourism that are necessary for maintaining its memory. At the same time, the privatization of memory raises significant concerns. What will be remembered, and what will be excluded? Will the museum prioritize the tourist experience or the preservation of memory? Will the museum's focus be more on the local heroes or collaborators?

Among the sites in which memory is intertwined with business activities is the former concentration camp of Vo' Vecchio. Its upper floor accommodates a museum showcasing the local landscape, while the lower-level features panels detailing the events that took place there when it was a concentration camp. Additionally, the splendid villa is equipped to host weddings and comparable occasions.[22]

[20] www.castellodimontalbano.com/stanza-di-mussolini/ (accessed on December 10, 2024). My translation.
[21] On Villa La Selva, see (Jonas 2012).
[22] www.creativo01.com/ (accessed on December 10, 2024).

In this context, the former concentration camp in Casoli is a remarkable example of coexistence. The main building was once owned by a well-known local family, who remain active in the area's winery industry. The Campocasoli Foundation has established current and user-friendly online documentation centers concerning the concentration camp. Additionally, they frequently organize commemorative events and remain a constant presence within the village.[23] For instance, on April 25, 2018, Italian President of the Republic Mattarella visited the former concentration camp, which is now a splendid wine cellar. Finally, in the upcoming months, the Casa Rossa Foundation plans to add a significant element to this list with the unveiling of a Holocaust memorial museum within the main building of the former concentration camp in Alberobello. Accompanying this establishment are guesthouses and other accommodations, which are already in operation. According to the website, the objective is "to create forward-thinking establishments that can revitalize the local economy through art, commemoration, and tourism."[24]

Final thoughts, or what to do with memory

The last series of sites that are trying to give a new light to their past invites us to conclude these preliminary notes by reflecting on the memorialization of these sites. While it may be simple to turn something into a ruin or debris, reversing the process is undoubtedly more difficult. In the case of disappearing sites of imprisonment and death, such as our case studies, require in-depth examination to determine how a community and, particularly, a nation-state should handle this material. Cultural, historical, ethical, industrial, and aesthetic factors should be considered to ascertain what is desirable, appropriate, and permissible under heritage and conservation protocols.

At a theoretical level, this paper has highlighted that there is a lack of literature in the case of such problematic sites. According to Peter Lamarque, "if the destruction is deliberate and malicious, as in war or ethnic cleansing, there might be added pressures to reconstruct. [...] And there are also strong pressures not to reconstruct" (2020, 88). But Lamarque was referring to sites that, even before their destruction, had an aesthetic and symbolic value for the community (the philosopher gives the example of the Mostar Bridge in Bosnia-Herzegovina). Furthermore, the case of concentration camps does not appear to align with the "Rust Belt" ruins, namely the ruins of factories and industries that stand as "counterparts of the colossal ruins of great antiquity" (Conroy 2020, 121), unless we espouse Agamben's thesis that really the concentration camps have evolved from the state of exception to normality.

Therefore, without a suitable historical model to draw from, it can be argued that the commemoration of the former but ruined concentration camps continues to be an uncommon practice. Although it may not required to create museums for all 79 former concentration camps, such as "Ferramonti di Tarsia", "Campagna," and "Borgo San Dalmazzo", recognition of these sites and their past by local and national institutions would undoubtedly be beneficial. One possibility is to create a museum in a central and easily accessible area, and, for each site, to install a commemorative plaque or a tribute to recognize its historical significance. Figure 2 below shows that 31 out of 79 camps have already taken this step. After the site no longer exists, the commemorative objects – which are often one-sided – become *the* site, presenting the factual interpretation of the crimes committed there by the Italian institutions. From this point of view, as seen with the Borgo San Dalmazzo plaques, what institutions select from the past says much about their intention in what and how to remember.

[23] www.campocasoli.org/ (accessed on December 10, 2024). The foundation's website description of the wine cellar as a concentration camp requires attention. It claims that "the fascist regime chose Palazzo Tilli," whereas it is more likely that they rented it from the owner, as was customary.

[24] www.fondazionecasarossa.it/ (accessed on December 10, 2024). My translation.

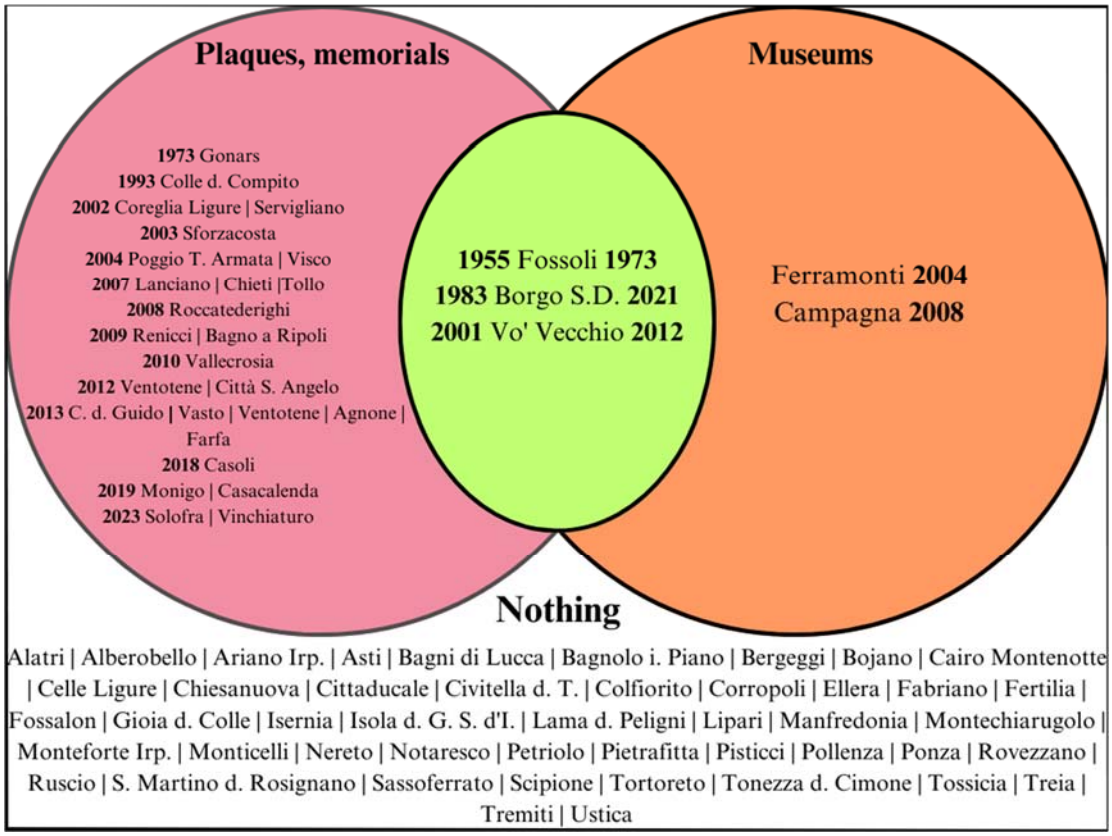

Figure 2: List of memory sites (November 2023)

To conclude, life is always shaped by narrative: our self-representation defines us. What does our silence about the concentration camps reveal about us? Silence does not lead to re-elaboration, rather it fosters distorted and self-exonerating perspectives.Acknowledging Italy's silence about its concentration camps has never been more important. Memory must be a tool for change, used to challenge policies that mirror past injustices. Italy's historical failures should be openly addressed – not to dwell in guilt, but to demand accountability and inspire a better path forward.

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