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*Slovenian solidarity in  
the concentration camp of Treviso  
(Monigo)<sup>2</sup>*

*Abstract*

Like other camps (for example in Italy: Gonars, Chiesanuova, Visco, Renicci; in Dalmatia: Rab, Molat) the Treviso concentration camp was created by fascists in order to imprison civilians, Slovenians and Croats. These people were captured to suppress the resistance which developed after the Italian occupation. There were around 200 victims of the camp, including 53 chil-

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- 2 This essay is the summary of some parts of the book *Di là del muro. Il campo di concentramento di Treviso, 1942-1943*, Istresco, Treviso 2019 (new edition). A longer version of the essay (with pictures) can be found online at the site [www.istresco.org/functionality/dossier](http://www.istresco.org/functionality/dossier). All links to websites were verified in October 2019. I would like to thank Francesca Sodano and Martina Casarin for the English translation. Possible errors are my fault.

dren under ten years of age. The prisoners were supported by a network of solidarity, both religious and secular. The former was headed by the Ljubljana Bishop, the latter by a rich Slovenian engineer Milan Lenarčič, who was helped by his niece Breda, daughter of Mavricij Rus, medical director in Ljubljana. Lenarčič came to live in Preganziol in the “Villa Pace”, and his house became a logistical base for aid to prisoners.

KEY WORDS: fascism, concentration camp, Slovenians, solidarity

### *Izvleček*

Tako kot druga taborišča (v Italiji so to bili npr. Gonars, Chiesanuova, Visco in Renicci, v Dalmaciji Rab in Molat) so tudi taborišče v Trevisu ustanovili fašisti, da bi vanj zapirali slovenske in hrvaške civiliste. Ti so bili zajeti, da bi bil zadušen upor, do katerega je prišlo med italijansko okupacijo. V taborišču je bilo okoli 200 žrtev, od tega 53 otrok, mlajših od desetih let. Zapornikom sta bili na voljo verska in posvetna mreža solidarnosti. Versko mrežo je vodil ljubljanski škof, posvetno pa premožen slovenski inženir Milan Lenarčič, ki mu je pomagala njegova nečakinja Breda, hči ljubljanskega zdravnika Mavricija Rusa. Lenarčičeva hiša, »Villa Pace« v Preganziolu, je postala logistična baza za pomoč zapornikom.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: fašizem, koncentracijsko taborišče, Slovenci, solidarnost

*Introduction*

The Treviso concentration camp was created by fascists in order to imprison civilians, Slovenians and Croats, among others. These people were captured by the troops of the Second Army stationed in Slovenia, according to the Circular 3 C of General Mario Roatta, who resorted to indiscriminate round-ups in order to suppress the resistance that developed after the Italian occupation.

It was located near Monigo, a suburb of Treviso, inside the “Cadorin” barracks. The prisoners occupied five masonry dwellings (one sixth was reserved for guard soldiers). The camp was opened on 1 July 1942. Until September it was populated by Slovenians, mainly students and intellectuals. In autumn, families from Croatia also began to arrive: women, some of them pregnant, children and old people, many of whom arrived from Rab (It. Arbe), an alleged extermination camp. The barracks became overcrowded. Due to the cold, diseases spread, and mortality increased, especially in the early months of 1943.

Starting with March 1943, a group of South African (about 500) and New Zealand (about 100) prisoners of war, both white, were also placed in the camp and were partly used in agricultural work in the surrounding countryside. The camp remained in operation until the announcement of the armistice between the Kingdom of Italy and the Allies (8 September 1943). Following this, the north and the centre of Italy were quickly occupied by the Wehrmacht, while Mussolini established a puppet state in Salò near Lake Garda – the Italian Social Republic (It. Repubblica Sociale Italiana). According to Italian documents, the following day the German army as-

sumed command of the camp, where 38 Slavs remained; they were perhaps part of the “protettivi”<sup>3</sup> or were perhaps ill.

In May 1945 the war was over, and the Germans had returned home. The barracks became a camp for displaced persons and were run by the Allied Military Government. About 20,000 people were hosted there from May to August 1945. More than 1,000 of them were Slovenian, and they were organised independently, with schools and sporting and cultural activities, as well as with the support of the bishop of Treviso. However, this topic is a different story and thus deserves a separate treatment.

When the camp was a fascist camp, this is how it worked: the newly arrived prisoners were subjected to “bonifica”. They were forced to shower, and their clothes were disinfected and returned to them as a uniform was not provided, which was a marked difference from German concentration camps. For sleeping, there were bunk beds made of wooden planks and straw. It was not a forced labour camp, even if some drawings made by a Slovenian interned artist, Vladimir Lamut, show construction or maintenance activities. The prisoners were subjected to a strict discipline, which included frequent inspections to prevent escapes, although they sometimes still occurred. It does not appear that violence against prisoners was systematically practiced, but the commander Alfredo Anceschi was known for being strict and quick to punish.

3 The Circular C divided the prisoners into *repressivi* (to repress because Partisans) and *protettivi* (to be protected from aggression by the Partisans). However, the indiscriminate arrests prevented a clear distinction from being made, which is why it was difficult to implement the distinction in the camps in practice.

The living conditions were very bad: the dorms were cold, and the diet had only 911 calories per day. It was a very unbalanced diet, poor in fats, protein and vitamins; to make it worse, at the end of 1942 and the beginning of 1943, rampant inflation was eating into the budget made available for the camp. In addition, guards who were stealing food and supplies to sell them in the black market further exacerbated things. Those who could count on some support network survived, while those with no help or those who came to Treviso at the end of the rope, like the women and children from Rab, were at a high risk of death.

There were about 200 casualties in the camp (the average was calculated from three different lists, which respectively report 187, 192 and 225 deaths). In Treviso, 53 children under the age of ten had died; the infant mortality rate (calculated from the 45 born in the area) was almost 300 per thousand, including two children who were born in the Monigo area and died in Gonars. Doctor Menemio Bortolozzi, pathologist at the hospital, indicated in his autopsy reports that malnutrition was one of the first causes of death, together with tuberculosis and other diseases caused by cold and overcrowding. “*They were not normal corpses,*” he told the press later, “*they looked like mummies or exhumed bodies*”.

It should also be noted that despite the understandable sadness, depression and sense of displacement, the Slovenian prisoners showed great resilience, as they organised a choir, chess tournaments and even the publication of a newspaper (apparently only one edition): *Novice izza žice*.

*The help of the Slovenian Catholic Church*

Various secular and religious subjects entered the scene in support of the prisoners. According to historiographical tradition, there was a military chaplain who spoke Slovenian in the Treviso camp. The reality is more complex: in fact, there were several priests. The first one was Father Attanasio Kocjančič (the Italianized surname was Cociani), born on 20 April 1911 in Hrastovlje near Capodistria (Slov. Koper). He belonged to the order of the Friars Minor (OFM) and was made priest in Venice. On 20 September 1942, he was sent to the Chiesanuova camp by the Military Ordinariate in Rome because he understood and spoke Slavic languages. From there, he was sent to Monigo for a short time (from the 23rd of September to the 12th of October). Later, the military authorities dismissed him as “*not suitable for the office he held*”; in fact, as an officer of the Red Cross he had written to the Ljubljana Bishop, Gregorij Rožman, denouncing the situation of the internees of the Kočevska Reka region, who were particularly afflicted by disease and mortality.<sup>4</sup>

Another Franciscan, Father Engelhard Štucin, was sent to the camp to ensure religious assistance to the devotees in their natural language. In fact, on 11 September 1942, General Robotti had authorised the dispatch of some catechists to Italian

4 About Kocjančič, see Ivo Jevnikar-Apollonio Tottoli *Bozza di relazione* on the documents relating to aid provided by father Placido Cortese (1907–1944) to the inmates in the Italian concentration camps, preserved in the Vatican Secret Archive, prepared on 2 December 2009 for the beatification process of P. Cortese (I take this opportunity to thank both of them, especially Ivo Jevnikar, to whom I owe a lot of help.); Ivo Dalla Costa, *Monigo: un campo di concentramento per slavi. Luglio 1942–settembre 1943*, Treviso 1988.

fascist camps following the request of the Bishop Rožman,<sup>5</sup> and the friar was one of them. He sent regular reports to update the Slovenian curia about baptisms and funerals. The documents were notified to the curia of Ljubljana from November to December<sup>6</sup> 1942; then Štucin was removed.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, there was another friar in Monigo until September 1943, but we do not know his name. Ivan Gulič, a witness from Trieste (Slov. Trst), defined him as “*absolutely devoid of any charity and Christian goodness*”.<sup>8</sup> Then, between the 5th and the 7th of October, the religious inspection of Dr. Guglielmo (Vilko) Fajdiga, a theologian appointed by the Apostolic Nuncio, took place. Dr. Fajdiga wrote to the Bishop of Treviso, Antonio Mantiero, that he had found the camp well organised, but urgently raised three questions concerning the innocent people, the infants who died because they lacked milk and the relationships of the prisoners with their families at home. All of the prisoners suffered from poor nutrition and inadequate clothing for the cold. In addition, Fajdiga expressed apprecia-

5 Provincialni arhiv frančiškanske province sv. Križa – FFA, Vojne in povojne zadeve; Štucin was in Treviso from 5 November to 3 December 1942 and from 23 December 1942 to 19 January 1943; afterwards, the permit was not renewed. I thank Ivo Jevnikar for this report.

6 Archivi storici della Chiesa di Treviso (from now on: ASCTV), Mantiero, b.7 e Nadškofija Ljubljana, Nadškofijski arhiv (from now on: NŠAL), 332, Gregorij Rožman, Prezidialni arhiv n. 124/p; ivi: 37, Škofijska dobrodelna pisarna, b. 3. Štucin was ordained as a theologian in 1937. He ended up in Dachau but made it out alive. See: <https://www.dlib.si/details/URN:NBN:SI:doc-UCG5X5VJ>; [http://sloveniji.i.rssing.com/chan-7938702/all\\_p90.html](http://sloveniji.i.rssing.com/chan-7938702/all_p90.html).

7 See footnote 3.

8 Ivan Gulič, *Številka 141451*, SKD Tabor–ANPI, Opčine–Trst 2010.

tion for “*a good priest*” (Štucin?) who acted as a catechist and played a positive role.<sup>9</sup>

Overall, Slovenian and Croatian Churches did everything they could to safeguard the internees, despite having demonstrated an initial sympathy for the Italian occupation. Here we have no space to go deeper into the relations between the Ljubljana Bishop and fascism; these are complex, contradictory relations and subject to opposing historical evaluations. However, it is important to remember some positive actions by Bishop Rožman.

On 20 November 1942, Rožman went to see Pope Pius XII together with Monsignor Srebrnič, Bishop of Veglia (Slov. Krk), with a memorial in which great concerns were expressed, especially concerns about Rab, which was under the risk of becoming a camp of death and extermination.<sup>10</sup>

Rožman also wrote to the Bishop of Treviso, Mantiero, and then sent a report to the Holy See, which forwarded it to the Italian embassy in the Vatican; the report reached the highest Italian, military and civil authorities in the province of Ljubljana.<sup>11</sup>

- 9 Born on 22 June 1903 in Radovljica, died in Ljubljana in 1984 (his real name was Viljem Alojzij). He studied theology in Ljubljana and Paris and became a teacher of apologetics, first at the royal high school (1933–1943) and then at the faculty of theology until 1973. He wrote several books. ASCTV, Mantiero, b. 7 e NŠAL 37, Škofijska dobrodela pisarna, 3, 26 October 1942.
- 10 Carlo Spartaco Capogreco, *I campi del duce. L'internamento civile nell'Italia fascista (1940–1943)*, Einaudi, Torino 2004, p. 145.
- 11 ASCTV, Mantiero, b.7 (in typescript) and NŠAL, 332, Gregorij Rožman, Prezidialni arhiv n. 124/pr (handwritten on paper, with small misprints that were then corrected and with a deleted sentence).



The initiative of the Slovenian Church had an impact on the Vatican. In fact, the Apostolic Nuncio to the Italian state, Francesco Borgongini Duca, commissioned by the Secretary of State Maglione visited several camps and brought the internees sums of money, “*which had been collected among the Slovenes in America and sent back to the Pope by former Minister Snoj to be used in favour of the anti-communist struggle*”.

The quotation is by Grazioli, High Commissioner of Ljubljana, who wrote these words to the Ministry of the Interior on 28 December 1942. We do not really know whether the main objective was the support of anti-communism or the salvation of internees.<sup>12</sup> The Bishop of Ljubljana also acted on another more personal level with the collaboration of his secretary, Stanislav Lenič (born in 1911, theologian, later auxiliary bishop of Ljubljana, died in Ljubljana in 1991). Lenič wrote in his memoirs that at certain times Bishop Rožman wrote up to fifty requests a day for the release of internees, without any political distinctions, and that the bishop had concluded that “*perhaps it would be really better to break all ties with the Italians*”.

The Slovenian Church, as we have seen, acted in different ways in fascist camps; the energies mobilised in the upper and lower clergy were many, and the same can be said for the Italian Church. This subject is dealt with in the book *Di là del muro*, where we also mention two people: Don Antonio Serafin, a

12 In his memoirs, published posthumously by the daily newspaper *Delo* of Ljubljana in 1998, Snoj recalls a memorandum on interned persons sent to the Holy See through the Apostate Delegate in the USA, Monsignor Cicognani, and monetary collections both among Slovenian emigrants and through the American bishops' conference.

humble and unrecognised chaplain in Monigo who was the centre of the Italian solidarity network with his generosity, and Placido Cortese. The latter showed great charity in the Chiesanuova-Padua camp, which continued even after 8 September 1943, in favour of other persecuted people, Jews and escaped POWs above all, to the point of bringing him to martyrdom.

### *Milan Lenarčič in Treviso*

Milan Lenarčič was the head of a Slovenian solidarity organisation that operated near the camp. The first to mention it was Cino Boccazzi, doctor and writer in Treviso, but he did not identify him completely, indicating only his last name. We discovered who he was in the real estate registry archives.

Milan was born on 29 March 1884 in Vrhnika under the Habsburg Monarchy. His father Josip (1856–1939), who graduated in Vienna, was an expert in agriculture, president of the Ljubljana Chamber of Commerce and of the Yugoslav Forestry Association, a member of the Progressive National Party (in fact liberal) and of several economic and scientific associations. He also owned plenty of land (woods) and many industrial enterprises (a granite quarry, a glass factory and a furnace).<sup>13</sup>

Milan, who studied in Vienna, was both a mechanical engineer and a forest expert. He designed a narrow-gauge railway line, which was used to transport timber and granite, respectively from the forest and the Pohorje quarry, and con-

13 Biography of Josip Lenarčič: <https://www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi323288/> and [https://sl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josip\\_Lenarčič](https://sl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josip_Lenar%C4%87i%C4%87); <https://www.dlib.si/details/URN:NBN:SI:IMG-ATQCUTM1>.

nected it to the Slovenian railway network. He enjoyed prestige and authority, as various pieces in the Official Journal (Slov. Uradni list) prove. Moreover, in 1939, when his father died, he inherited his father's property, which also included land in Vrhnika.<sup>14</sup>

On the eve of the war, he was the richest man or one of the wealthiest men in Slovenia, as his liberal friend Ladislav Bevc, who provides a lot of information about him, wrote.

Lenarčič married Paula Kiepach von Haselburg, with whom he had a son, Miloš.<sup>15</sup> Then he separated from his wife and joined the Serbian Orthodox creed, as this religion allows second marriages. He then married Ninka Ana Stare,<sup>16</sup> daughter of Feliks and Josipina.<sup>17</sup>

14 Most of the information comes from digitized pages (PDF) of "Uradni list Narodne vlade iz obdobja 1918–1941" ([www.sistory.si/11686/](http://www.sistory.si/11686/); for example the following dates: 14 June 1924 (file 214), 3 February and 10 April 1926 (file 216), 30 June 1928 (file 218) and 20 August 1928 (file 219)) and "Jutro dnevnik za gospodarstvo, prosveto in politiko", 29 January 1933 (<https://www.dlib.si/details/URN:NBN:SI:doc-ooK5GSQH>).

15 <https://www.geni.com/people/Emilijan-Milan-Lenarčič>.

16 More briefly Ninka or Minka in Italian documents.

17 This information, along with other ones about the Stare family and about Breda Rus, whom we will talk about, comes to us from some emails. First, by prof. Irena Tršinar (wife of Dr. Bojan Tršinar, heir of Breda), who consulted, in addition to her husband, Prof. Matija Stare (a cousin, daughter of Ninka's brother Vladimir Stare), Vida Štrumbelj (a lady, a lawyer by profession, who spent a lot of time with Stare family). The correspondence is from February 2019. I would like to express my special thanks to Irena for her exquisite courtesy. Then we have other emails from Devana Lavrenčič (2 February 2011), a friend of Vida Rus. Thanks to all of them!

Feliks lived in the Kolovec castle, owned by the Stare family since 1870. Like other castles, the building was burnt down by the Partisans in 1943.

At the beginning of their marriage, Ninka and Milan lived in Josipdol, northern Slovenia, in a villa near the forest and the Pohorje quarry, but after the invasion of Slovenia (in April 1941) their properties were seized by the Germans, who were interested in materials such as timber.

This forced the engineer Lenarčič to move south towards Vrhnika where he was born<sup>18</sup> and had other properties, because this territory was controlled by the Italians.

He did not stay there for long; after a short while he moved to Preganziol, near Treviso. We do not know why he chose this place for expatriation. In order to escape retaliation, most pro-monarchists had moved to London at the time, where the royal government in exile resided. It is probable that he chose that part of Italy for business. In fact, in the documents of the Prefecture of Treviso, an unspecified debt to the Yugoslav company of Simon Stare is mentioned. In his wife's family, there was a certain Simon born in 1815 in Bohinj. It is not certain whether he was his ancestor. However, if this were the case and if the company he founded had kept the name, the Slovenian engineer would have had reason and opportunity to collect the debt. Lenarčič was certainly in the Treviso area on 31 October 1941, which is when he bought a big house surrounded by land as well as a sawmill and a wheat mill (with operating license and all the machinery for the millstone); Villa Pace is the name

18 <https://www.rova.si/grad-kolovec>.

of this house, which was located along the Terraglio, the tree-lined road that connects Treviso to Venice. *Pace* means peace in Italian, but we do not know why the house is called this way.

In case Milan gave it this name, it might have expressed his suffering during the war, be it the Second World War or the civil war that took place in Slovenia. Or perhaps the engineer was looking for peace when confronted with a very strong personal pain: his only son and only heir Miloš, born on 31 May 1920 died at twenty-two on 11 September 1942. Our engineer decided to leave the estate to a testamentary executor, who, assisted by a board of directors, assigned scholarships to deserving students. It is a project that shows Lenarčič's belief in humanitarian philosophy of the Cyril and Methodius Society of which he was a partner and supporter.

A few months after the death of his son, in December 1942, as stated in the notarial deed drawn up in Venice, he sold the mill, the sawmill and a house of four rooms to Emanuele Zenaro for the sum of sixty thousand lire. A good sum, probably destined to help Slavic prisoners – a gesture of generosity in accordance with his philanthropic spirit, which perhaps could have helped him to overcome his grave personal loss. In this action, which exposed him to considerable risks, he got help from his niece Breda Rus, whom we will talk about shortly, and from Dr. Boccazzi at the hospital. Lenarčič also seems to have housed Slovenian prisoners who had run away illegally from the hospital in his villa; this makes his work meritorious and his person respectable, but the story does not end here.

After 8 September 1943, the concentration camp was closed. In 1944 the villa was at least partially requisitioned by the

Germans and by the Decima Mas. We do not know if Milan and Ninka moved elsewhere, but Villa Pace was certainly their residence from 1945 to 1949<sup>19</sup>. Since the spring of 1945, the Terraglio residence had sheltered many Slovenian refugees who were often waiting for a visa to go to America. This was told by Ladislav Bevc,<sup>20</sup> who was stationed in the displaced persons camp in Riccione. Given the endless lengthening of the procedure for obtaining a visa, Bevc had turned to his friend to be hosted, but Milan refused; Villa Pace, he had told him, was too small to fulfil all the requests (about a hundred).

On 19 September 1949, before leaving for the USA, Bevc went to Preganziol to greet him. When he got there from Lucca, “*a certain Luigi Hrovat*,” a common friend, told him that he had arrived just in time for the funeral. Two days earlier, while cycling back from Treviso, Milan had been run over and dragged sixty feet by a car. He died almost instantly. In his last will, as it has been said, he requested the creation of a foundation for young students.

The local newspaper *Il Gazzettino* spoke of a serious road accident, which had taken place the night before along the Terraglio: Lenarčič had been hit while crossing the road in the dark. The news arrived to Slovenia by telegram. The family, who in the meantime had been evicted from the house in Vrh-

19 In 1947 M. L. declared that he enjoyed Italian citizenship when he presented two industrial patents for a parking lot in the Treviso Chamber of Commerce. This detail is interesting: Lenarčič, by now over sixty years old, continued to work. Perhaps he needed to earn money, having lost the goods left at home due to Tito's requisitions.

20 Ladislav Bevc, *Spomini Založništvo Jutro*, Ljubljana 2006 (*Liberal Forces in Twentieth Century Yugoslavia: Memoirs of Ladislav Bevc*, Peter Lang 2007, digitized 7 August 2009).

nika, had an obituary published in Ljubljana. The industrialist Dušan Lajovic, who emigrated to Australia, suggested that it was a murder disguised as an accident that was to be attributed to the Yugoslav Secret Police, OZNA.

This hypothesis is not entirely fictional, but it draws on a piece of research on English Intelligence in Veneto conducted by Marco Ruzzi.<sup>21</sup> In fact, there were several OZNA agents operating in the north-east of Italy, and for them the elimination of a “dangerous” subject by means of a “road accident” was a classic remedy. In our book, we have carefully assessed this possibility also by consulting a court expert.

However, the weekly newspaper *Demokracija* does not question Lenarčič’s death – it reports of a fatal accident. The article describes his life, which was full of economic and political relationships and extended beyond the borders of the Slovenian community to embrace Serbian, Croatian and other Slavic peoples, and concludes the portrait of this figure with a touch of heroism: “*During the war he fought, firm and indefatigable, for the rights of his people and for a better future, and was the herald of an unyielding resistance against foreign invaders.*”

The funeral took place in the small church of San Trovaso and not in the cathedral as Bevc wrote; he also spoke of “*a mausoleum dedicated to the illustrious deceased in the park of Villa Pace,*” which did not exist. The question that arises is: why this mythical transfiguration of reality? Can we envisage a narrative of Lenarčič as a Slovenian liberal hero, a victim first of Nazi-

21 Marco Ruzzi, *Spionaggio, controspionaggio e ordine pubblico in Veneto. Aprile-dicembre 1945*, Cierre, Sommacampagna 2010, p. 147.

fascism and then of Titoism? It is difficult to find documented answers. We do not know for sure whether he behaved in the same righteous way towards all of the inmates in the Monigo camp independently from their political affiliation.

Lenarčič's body was placed in the cemetery of San Trovaso, from where it was removed in 2003; after the cremation, which took place in the crematorium of S. Bona (Treviso), the ashes were brought back to his birthplace and precisely to the cemetery of Verd, beside the remains of his only son Miloš.<sup>22</sup>

*Breda Rus, the angel of Monigo*

Dr. Boccazzi, who treated prisoners in the hospital, wrote that he had not only met the engineer Lenarčič there, but also a beautiful blonde girl who spoke Slovenian.

Her name was Breda Rus, daughter of Hela Stare (sister of Ninka)<sup>23</sup> and Mavricij Rus.<sup>24</sup> The latter, born in 1879 in the village Matenja vas near Postumia (Slov. Postojna), graduated in medicine in Vienna and alternated the hospital activity with prolific scientific production. He was also the head of the health department of the Red Cross, the head of the fire brigade, the president of the Medical Society of Ljubljana (from 1927 to 1934), and the medical director of the city (from 1920

22 Date reported on the tomb in Verd which houses his ashes: 17 September 1949 (I thank Ivo Jevnikar who provided me with this piece of information after a visit to the cemetery).

23 See footnotes 14.

24 *Idem*. Moreover see [https://sl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mavricij\\_Rus](https://sl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mavricij_Rus); Anton Prijatelj, *Primorski slovenski biografski leksikon*, file 13, Goriška Mohorjeva družba, Gorizia 1987, p. 240.



to 1945). These numerous tasks made him irreplaceable. It is perhaps for this reason that he remained in Ljubljana without fearing the dangers of a civil war.

Breda, born on 10 July 1916, is a particularly fascinating character both for her beauty, which is immortalised in pictorial and photographic portraits, and for her complex personality. She studied gardening in Prague and learnt to speak four languages fluently; she was in Austria several times, as well as in England, Italy, the principality of Monaco, where she lived for a certain period, and, of course, in Prague.

We find Breda in Preganziol in 1943, when she joined aunt Ninka and uncle Milan and had to deal with the reality of the concentration camp. It is possible that Breda Rus was a kind of special correspondent or a Red Cross relay in charge of carrying out a rescue mission. It should be emphasised that, although Breda was well off, she did not hesitate to expose herself and put herself at risk.

We heard from the voice of the witness Ivan Gulič<sup>25</sup> that Breda was in the field every week and that she delivered medicine to the military chaplain. These journeys from Villa Pace to Monigo had two more stops: firstly, the parish of Monigo, where Breda left money so that the chaplain Antonio Serafin could provide food for the prisoners (the book explains how a humanitarian organisation was created that involved the peasants of the surroundings area); secondly, the hospital. Dr. Boccazzi had in fact shown Breda a secret passageway to get to the wards (from an internal stairway), and through this route

25 See footnote 6.

came food, money and letters, and some patients even escaped through it.

We do not know how long Breda stayed in Villa Pace. She was probably present in May 1945, when Milan's residence became a small hotel for Slovenian refugees. And perhaps this made her a political suspect in the eyes of Tito's Yugoslavia; in fact, Breda was included, like her uncle, in the lists of the CAE (Slov. Centralna aktivna evidenca) of the Yugoslav Secret Police (UDBA – Uprava državne varnosti).<sup>26</sup>

Breda almost certainly participated in Milan's funeral in October 1949. At that time, she had already been married once to engineer Vinko Zalokar, widower of Ana Maria Tenkrátova from Prague, owner or manager of a renowned Domžale hat factory,<sup>27</sup> but Zalokar died in 1950. Breda was then a widow, albeit for a short time, and this condition of solitude brought her closer to her aunt Ninka, with whom she lived for some time in Italy. In Trieste Breda met a lawyer named Branko Mikuletič,<sup>28</sup> who was born on 19 March 1915 and became her second husband.

Breda and Branko were married on 27 December 1952 in Preganziol by proxy: neither of them resided there, and Breda was just a guest at her aunt's. The best men at the wedding were Ilario Van Den Borre, owner of an important

26 We found this information on the website <http://cae.udba.net>, active at the time of the first edition of our book (2012), the page is now gone.

27 [www.genealogy.si/marriages](http://www.genealogy.si/marriages); [http://www.visitdomzale.si/dozivetja/tematska-dozivetja/univerzale-\(nekdanja-oberwalderjeva-tovarna](http://www.visitdomzale.si/dozivetja/tematska-dozivetja/univerzale-(nekdanja-oberwalderjeva-tovarna) (April 2019).

28 Branko was the son of Fortunat (Trieste, 26 July 1896–Ljubljana, 17 September 1965), who was also a lawyer.

nursery-gardening company, and Milan Bielika. Immediately afterwards, the bride and the groom moved to Trieste (Trst), to Viale Miramare, 269. The residence was elegant: it was a liberty villa located on the promenade of Barcola. Here, Breda undertook an import-export economic activity together with a partner, as shown by several advertisements published in 1953 in the Slovenian-language newspaper *Demokracija* of Trieste and Gorizia.<sup>29</sup> In 1954, her aunt Ninka Stare joined them and left Treviso after selling Villa Pace.

Later, the couple moved to Milan, which was Breda's residence for twenty years, until 29 December 1978, a few months after the death of her husband. However, Breda's hectic life took her also to Ljubljana (where she kept a Yugoslav residence for practical and bureaucratic reasons), Trieste (where she was repatriated on 15 July 1981 until her final emigration in 1999) and Opatija (It. Abbazia), where her father lived after retirement (1950).

She travelled a lot throughout her life. She probably went on holiday in Velden, where she met dr. Cino Boccazzi and his wife Gianna, perhaps to remember the gloomy times of the early months of 1943. Breda returned to Ljubljana and died on 14 February 2008. She was buried in the tomb of the Stare family in the church cemetery of St. Catherine of Rova in a village seventeen kilometres from Ljubljana (near the place where the Kolovec villa stood until 1943) together with her father, her mother, her beloved aunt Ninka, and her grandparents Josipina and Feliks Stare.

29 *Demokracija*, 2 October 1953, year VII, number 39, p. 4.

We have spoken about Breda as “The Angel of Monigo,” but perhaps there were two more Slovenian women who helped the prisoners, namely Marija Kamnikar and Vera Magušar, who was known for her generosity<sup>30</sup> (the Franciscan father Engelhard Štucin states that she sent 1000 packages to Monigo for the internees).<sup>31</sup>

### *Summary*

This essay is based on a more extensive piece of research published in the book *Di là del muro. Il campo di concentramento di Treviso (1942–1943)*, Istresco, Treviso 2012 and 2019 (new edition). Firstly, it analyses the history of the Monigo concentration camp and the material and spiritual living conditions of the Slavic prisoners using Italian and Slovenian sources; then, it focuses on what happened beyond the barrack walls, where civilian prisoners were held. The question is: in Treviso’s political and social background, was there any knowledge and awareness of what was happening? The answer is affirmative if we consider the authorities and the population that lived near the camp, although there has been a tendency to forget memories that have sunk into oblivion over time. The same question may concern the Slovenian community, which was affected by

30 Vera’s son Dušan, born in 1922, student in Venice during the war years, lived in Treviso.

31 We got this piece of information from Ivo Jevnikar in an e-mail of 4 January 2011 and 28 August 2019. The statements are based on documents preserved in the provincial archive of the Slovenian friars in Ljubljana.

these dramatic events, and the answer is certainly affirmative, as shown by individual and collective initiatives in favour of the prisoners.

The present essay focuses mainly on the Slovenian aid system that developed both in Ljubljana and in Treviso. The topic of Italian solidarity is more thoroughly discussed in the book mentioned previously.

*Solidarnost Slovencev v  
koncentracijskem taborišču Treviso  
(Monigo)*

*Povzetek*

Prispevek je nastal na podlagi obširnejše raziskave, objavljene v knjigi *Di là del muro. Il campo di concentramento di Treviso (1942–1943)*, ki je bila objavljena pri inštitutu Istresco v Trevisu leta 2012, v novi izdaji pa leta 2019. V prispevku so najprej na podlagi italijanskih in slovenskih virov analizirani zgodovina koncentracijskega taborišča v Monigu ter materialni in duhovni življenjski pogoji slovanskih zapornikov. Obravnavano je tudi dogajanje zunaj taboriščnih zidov, med katere so bili zaprti civilisti. Pri tem se odpira vprašanje, ali politično in družbeno zaledje v Trevisu vedelo za dogajanje v taborišču. Odgovor nanj je pritrdilen ob upoštevanju oblasti in prebivalstva, ki je živelo blizu taborišča, čeprav so opazna prizadevanja, da bi spomini na taborišče zatonili v pozabo. Enako vprašanje se lahko nanaša na slovensko skupnost, ki so jo ti dramatični dogodki zaznamovali. Tukaj je odgovor zagotovo pritrdilen, saj na to kažejo posamezne in kolektivne pobude v korist zapornikov.

V prispevku je obravnavan predvsem slovenski sistem pomoči, ki se je razvil tako v Ljubljani kot v Trevisu. Italijanska solidarnost je podrobneje obravnavana v prej omenjeni knjigi.