

REPRESENTATIONS OF TRAUMA: DAVIDE TOFFOLO'S *ITALIAN WINTER*

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ABSTRACT

The graphic novel Italian Winter (L'inverno d'Italia) by Davide Toffolo relays the story of two children, Drago and Giudita, who are interned in the Italian Fascist concentration camp Gonars. The paper will analyse the work and examine its visual language regarding to the content. For the interpretation of the work as a representation of trauma a comparison between Italian Winter and the acclaimed graphic novel Maus by Art Spiegelman. Since Maus has inspired new concepts in the interdisciplinary field of memories studies, this paper builds on some of them for an interpretation of Italian Winter.

Keywords: *Italian Winter, L'inverno d'Italia, Davide Toffolo, Gonars, concentration camp art, Art Spiegelman, postmemory, traumatic realism*

RAPPRESENTAZIONE DEL TRAUMA NEL *L'INVERNO D'ITALIA* DA DAVIDE TOFFOLO

SINTESI

La novella grafica L'inverno d'Italia di Davide Toffolo racconta la storia di due bambini, Drago e Giudita, internati nel campo di concentramento fascista di Gonars. Il saggio analizza la novella ed esamina il suo linguaggio visivo rispetto al contenuto. Per interpretare il lavoro come una rappresentazione del trauma si fa un confronto a Maus, la celebre novella grafica di Art Spiegelman. Maus ha ispirato nuovi concetti nel campo interdisciplinare di studio sulla memoria ed alcuni di loro vengono usati per dare un'interpretazione a L'inverno d'Italia.

Parole chiave: *L'inverno d'Italia, Davide Toffolo, Gonars, arte dei campi di concentramento, Art Spiegelman, postmemoria, realismo traumatico*

REPRESENTATIONS OF TRAUMA

The unimaginable destruction brought by the World War II has left a strong mark on artistic imaginary. The topic is addressed not only by those who witnessed the war and suffered internment, but also by subsequent generations who became acquainted with these crimes through their families, education, mass media, and art.

The field of inquiry called “memory studies” is expanding, and there is a growing number of studies of the representation of trauma and collective memory. Yet, these studies overwhelmingly focus on representing the Holocaust, while studies of representations of internment, concentration camps, and systematic killing of non-Jewish populations—for example, mass internment of Slovenes in Fascist and Nazi camps during World War II—remain scarce.

Holocaust representation is a field of trauma representation that is so vast it has its own distinctive characteristics and warrants classification as a genre with subgenres (cf. Lang, 2000). Holocaust art is the term most commonly used, and Henry W. Pickford defines it as »any artwork that is about the Holocaust, that is, the intentionality or content of which includes reference, direct or indirect, to the Nazi project of humiliation, deprivation, degradation, and extermination against the Jews and other marked groups« (Pickford, 2013, 3). The shortcoming of this term is that it does not include non-Jewish internees and internees in non-German concentration camps, thereby excluding the experiences of large numbers of people.¹ A vivid example is the fact that only from the Province of Ljubljana (*Provincia di Lubiana*), the part of Slovenia occupied by Fascist Italy; 10% of the population (cca. 30,000 people) were taken to Italian concentration camps during the time of the occupation.² Among them, there were many artists, and since Italian camps were less restrictive regarding artistic pursuits than German ones, a sizeable corpus of work by Slovenian artists produced in internment camps survives (cf. Visočnik, 1969). Yet the term Holocaust art, which denotes the mass killing of Jews during World War II, *cannot* be applied to works by Slovene artists interned as Yugoslavs or because of political reasons (such as collaboration with the Liberation Front) or those

dealing with Fascist camps. To avoid these problems, I propose the term “concentration camp art” to refer to art that is connected to either Nazi or Fascist concentration camps (Vrečko, 2014a, 214–215).

This paper will focus on the graphic novel *Italian Winter* by Davide Toffolo,³ a story about two child internees at the Gonars concentration camp, which I will interpret in the context of concentration camp art. I will build on concepts drawn from the studies of Holocaust art, and while some of them are specific to the representation of the Holocaust, many can be fruitfully used to (re-)think the broader field of concentration camp art and representations of World War II trauma. On this note, I will make a comparison between *Italian Winter* and Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*. Firstly, for the obvious reason that they are both done in the same medium and dealing with a similar subject, and secondly, because *Maus* has been a central point of academic studies focusing on Holocaust art and has thus contributed to a new understandings of the representation of trauma and atrocities.

For telling the story, both Spiegelman and Toffolo, have turned to their own medium of expression – comic art. With his pioneering work, Spiegelman has at once posed and dismissed the question about the “appropriateness” of comic art for such a serious topic (Young, 2000, 20). *Maus* has not only transcended this question, but it has achieved »considerably more by addressing certain impossible issues and topics« (LaCapra, 1998, 140). Even though nowadays we might not ask ourselves whether the graphic novel is an appropriate medium, there are still considerations inherent to art that directly or indirectly tackle the topic of concentration camps. Leaving aside the question whether such art is even possible, there is quite a debate about the style. On one hand, there is a tendency toward realism and referentiality as one of the »defining features of study of the Holocaust« and the »commitment to documentation and realistic discourse has come to hold an almost sacred position in confrontations with genocide« (Rothberg, 2000, 99). On the other, there are considerations as to whether any kind of representation is even suitable; furthermore, there are moral implications of this decision (cf. Bartov, 1996; Lang, 2000). Representations of concentration camps continue to struggle with moral considerations and dilemmas regarding the

1 There have also been many debates about the uniqueness of the Holocaust and the Holocaust solely as a Jewish tragedy, for example, genocide and suffering Roma people during the World War II (cf. Hancock, 2009).

2 Deportation and confinement to small islands or poor remote places was one of the central repressive measures of Fascist Italy. A network of “camps” (confinement colonies; *colonie di confino*) existed in Italy even prior to the outbreak of World War II. In June 1940, when Italy entered the war, it began interning civilians—foreigners on its territory as well as citizens deemed dangerous or merely suspicious (Capogreco, 2011, 49). Exact numbers of civilians in internment are not known. Between 1942 and 1943 the network of camps of the Ministry of the Interior was supplemented by a network of camps exclusively for Slovene inmates. It was comprised of six large camps under the control of military authorities: Gonars, Monigo, Chieanuova, Renicci, Colfiorito, and Visco (Capogreco, 2011, 77). The number of inmates varies in the scholarly literature. As Božidar Jezernik claims, the problem originates from the fact that even Italian authorities were not aware of the exact numbers. According to his estimates, the five concentration camps Rab, Padova, Treviso, Gonars, and Renicci accommodated 20000 civilian internees at the end of October 1942 (Jezernik, 2004, 73).

3 Davide Toffolo (1965, Pordenone, Italy) is an acclaimed Italian author of contemporary auteur comics and co-founder of many comic-centred publications. The graphic novel *Italian Winter* was originally published in 2010 by Coconino Press under the title *L’Inverno d’Italia* (Toffolo, 2010).

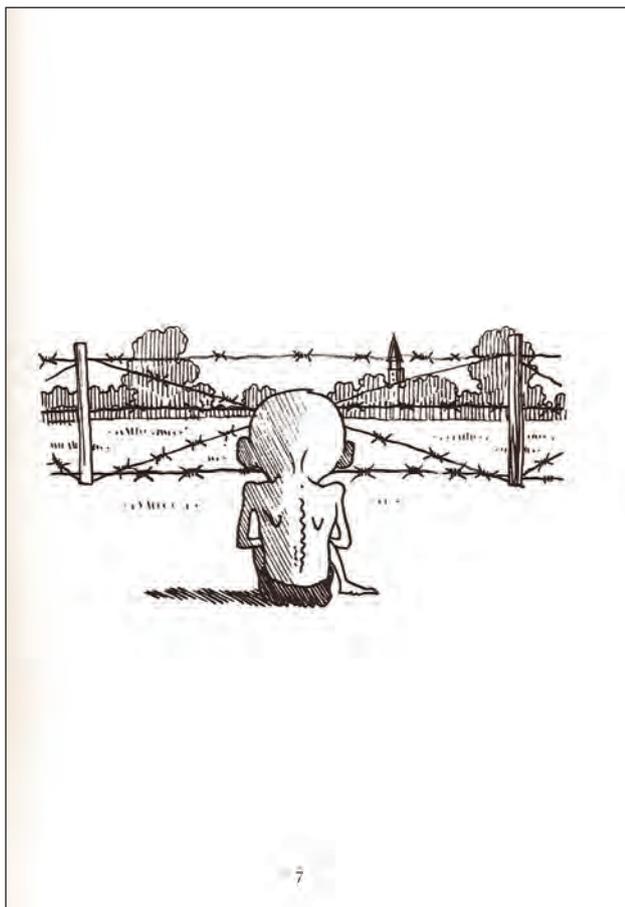


Fig. 1: Davide Toffolo, *Italian Winter*, 7 (Toffolo, 2012)
Fig. 1: Davide Toffolo, *L'inverno d'Italia*, 7 (Toffolo, 2012)
Sl. 1: Davide Toffolo, *Italijanska zima*, 7 (Toffolo, 2012)

boundary between artistic and historical representation. As Van Alphen claims, imaginative discourses such as art and literature are met with suspicions when dealing with the topic of the Holocaust (Van Alphen, 1997, 16–17). Imaginative discourse is juxtaposed to historical facts in a hierarchy in which the latter is superior to the former. According to Pickford, to be successful, each Holocaust artwork must fulfil two criteria not applicable to other artworks or non-aesthetic works related to the Holocaust. First, it must maintain a *historical relation* and, secondly, it must maintain an *aesthetic relation* in that it must in some way evince aesthetic properties, properties that induce an aesthetic experience of the work by the subject. However, Pickford does not regard the *moral-political relation* as essential and stresses the *aesthetic-historical*

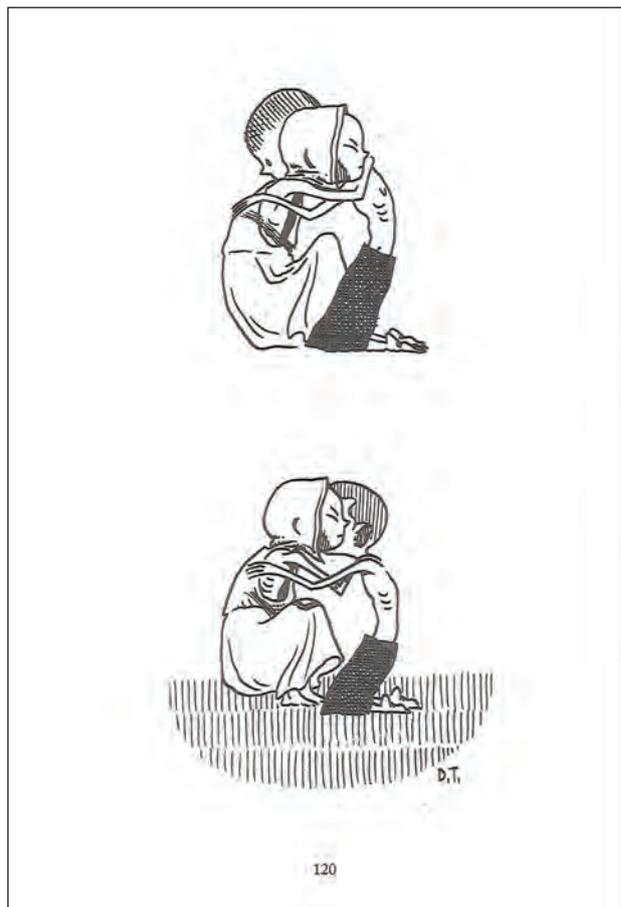


Fig. 2: Davide Toffolo, *Italian Winter*, 120 (Toffolo, 2012)
Fig. 2: Davide Toffolo, *L'inverno d'Italia*, 120 (Toffolo, 2012)
Sl. 2: Davide Toffolo, *Italijanska zima*, 120 (Toffolo, 2012)

(Pickford, 2013, 3–4). I will discuss some of these questions in my analysis of *Italian Winter* further on.

ITALIAN WINTER—CHILDREN IN THE CONCENTRATION CAMP

Toffolo's *Italian Winter* is a graphic novel set in the concentration camp at Gonars, which operated from 1941 to 1942. At first it was used to contain prisoners of war and civilian internees, yet after March 1942, it was also used for civilian internees, many of them children. The protagonists of the graphic novel, Drago and Giudita, are such young internees.⁴ The book is divided

⁴ Not all children joined their parents in internment. The children of some interned mothers who were working for the Liberation Front were taken care of by the Liberation Front. If the children were to fall into the hands of the occupying forces, they could have been used as leverage against their parents. The Liberation Front created a network of virtual families to take care of a large number of children, and they were called illegal children (slo. "ilegalčki") (cf. Štrajnar et al., 2004).

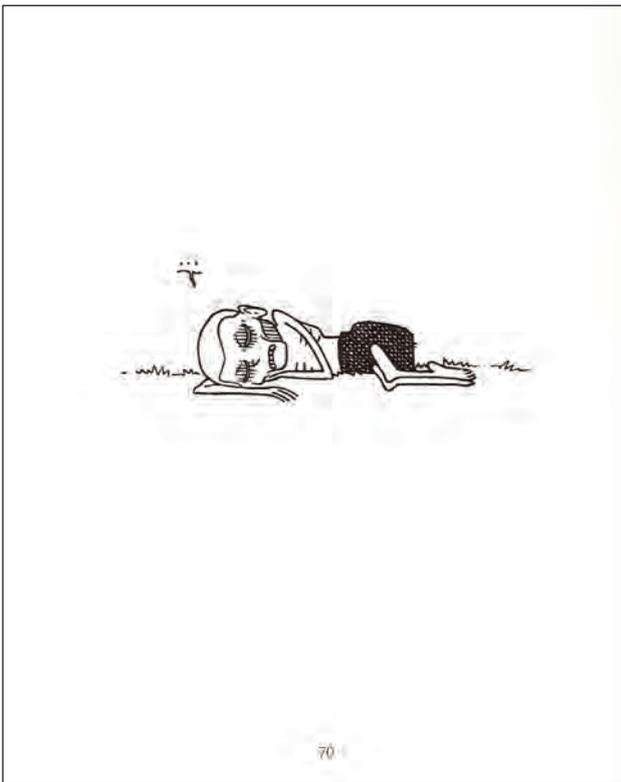


Fig. 3: Davide Toffolo, *Italian Winter*, 70 (Toffolo, 2012)
Fig. 3: Davide Toffolo, *L'inverno d'Italia*, 70 (Toffolo, 2012)
Sl. 3: Davide Toffolo, *Italijanska zima*, 70 (Toffolo, 2012)

into five chapters, each of which takes its name from an animal (Hawk Moth, Centipede, Fly, Lice, and Cricket). The first image in the book is not the author's; before the beginning of the first chapter, there is a sketch of the civilian concentration camp divided into three sectors, and this is the first included historical document I will focus on later. The opening scene of the first chapter depicts a hunched child gazing at a church steeple on the other side of the barbed-wire fence (Fig. 1).⁵ The tall,

insurmountable fence has perhaps become one of the most widely known symbols of concentration camps. Besides an iconographic meaning, it also represents the concrete border dividing the space between people whose lives were not considered equal by the official Italian ideology of the time.⁶

For the most part, the children are depicted against a blank white background, which contains no additional objects (Fig. 2). Their physical appearance is cause for concern from the outset, since they are visibly malnourished, their ribs and cheekbones are protruding, their eyes are recessed, and their heads too large for their bodies. As the story progresses, their physical appearance deteriorates even more as insufficient nutrition was one of the greatest challenges faced by internees of concentration camps and the reasons for the large number of casualties.⁷ Children were even more affected by hunger. Malnutrition led to their lips shrinking to the degree that they could no longer fully cover their teeth; the children were pale, and they walked with the steps of an old man. Many younger children developed ascites, they had large bellies, and were plagued by scabies and lice. Those near death could not even cry anymore, only whimper (Jezernik, 1997, 129). The problem of the lack of food is omnipresent in the graphic novel, most prominently in two scenes. In the first, the boy is suffering from stomach aches because he had been eating garbage. On the second occasion, Drago is telling Giudita about a soup that he has eaten that consisted of two pieces of macaroni and three beans.⁸ As the story progresses, the boy becomes ever more visibly starved, and he attempts to eat dirt from the ground until he finally falls silent and starts having delusions. As he lies on the ground, resembling a corpse, the agonizing moment is amplified by the empty space around him, showing how isolated he is from the world (Fig. 3). As we enter his hallucination, panels, which are a staple of comic book narration, appear for the first time. The drawing fills the panels, the emptiness disappears, and the panels seem to frame his inescapable suffering.

Throughout the book, the children are portrayed barefoot and insufficiently clothed. Drago is wearing only a pair of shorts, Giudita a light summer dress and a

5 The larger concentration camp for civilian internees was subdivided into three sectors: alpha (α), beta (β), and gamma (γ). Sector α at first had limited capacity, but after it was enlarged, it could hold as many as 2,800 persons. For a while it contained only protected internees. Sector β had seventeen barracks that could hold 2,000 persons, while sector γ had seven barracks housing various supplementary facilities. The camp was the largest for civilian internees on Italian soil during World War II (Capogreco, 2011, 227; Kersevan, 2003).

6 Barbed wire was used to mark the border of the so-called forbidden zone a few metres from the outside fence. On the outside of the fence was the path for guard patrols. There were two six-meter-high guard towers on each side. At night guards were stationed in guard houses every 20 meters and used reflectors to illuminate the camp and its surroundings (Jezernik, 1997, 30).

7 Testimonies by survivors show that the desire for proper nourishment quickly became the central concern of internees. Even children began to focus almost all of their attention on obtaining food, and after a while, that became their primary source of satisfaction (Jezernik, 1997, 148, 282).

8 This is unfortunately a rather precise description of the meals for internees. The amount of food each internee received was rationed, but they rarely received the amount allotted to them (Jezernik, 1997, 135–136). The menu was normally composed of a soup, which contained a piece of pasta or two or a bit of rice and no more than 200 grams of bread. A lot of food was “lost” before it even reached the internees. Yugoslav internees were lucky to receive rations that fulfilled half of their needs. Only when the death rate started to skyrocket did the Fascists start to explore possibilities to improve living conditions (Capogreco, 2011, 131, 138).

headscarf. At some point, Giudita reveals she received the dress from a woman whose daughter had died at Rab. This short episode relates the dire straits of the children who did not have relatives who could send them packages.⁹ Besides malnutrition and inadequate clothing, internees were suffering from other problems connected to bad living conditions such as lice, scabies, and infection. These are referenced numerous times in *Italian Winter*. A whole chapter takes its title from one of the most ubiquitous pests in concentration camps—lice. The authorities resorted to shaving the heads of internees to remediate the problem, and Giudita is depicted with her bald head in this chapter. A shaved head was a badge of dishonour among internees and girls at the Rab concentration camp sometimes had to be physically restrained during shaving (Jezernik, 1997, 127). After seeing Giudita's bald head, Drago refuses to talk to her. The children often reminisce about their homes and through their memories, we learn about their lives prior to internment. Yet their memories of home do not provide the children with a safe haven of imaginary escape since they are poisoned by the brutality of the Italian occupation.¹⁰ At another point in the story, the children are enumerating the Italian words they are familiar with, a device the author uses to point to the Fascist policy of Italianization of Slovene people. The children refer to it as the Italians wanting them to become "like them".¹¹

Life in a concentration camp was particularly unmerciful to the most vulnerable, among them children. They had to make do with the same quantity and quality of food and shelter as other inmates, which often had fatal consequences. Death is a topic touched upon in *Italian Winter* several times, mostly through Giudita while Drago tries to remain unmoved. Giudita first mentions death when she talks about the death of her mother who died from the consequences of dysentery at the Rab concen-

tration camp.¹² The children talk about death in the vicinity of a barren tree that resembles a flame. They are not pictured; we see only the tree and read the dialogue between them. In the conversation, the tree becomes a symbol for internees as the children conclude their discussion by noting that the Italians do not bury dead trees but throw them into a hole, representing how dead people were disposed of in concentration camps.¹³ It is important to notice, that when the topic of the insignificance of one's life is debated between children; we encounter the only metaphor used in the book. The language in the book is otherwise rather simple, consisting of short sentences or words spoken by the children.

The drawings are as simplified as the language, conveying only the most substantial elements. As already mentioned, the protagonists are mostly portrayed against a plain white background. The text is not positioned in balloons or captions and the pages are not divided into panels. The text and the drawing are integrated into a visual whole. Space is occasionally implied by short vertical lines representing the ground, here and there vegetation is sketched. Representations of the barbed-wire fence and other visual signs denoting that the children are trapped in a concentration camp are present only on a few occasions, mostly at the beginning and end of the graphic novel. In that aspect, the space in which the story takes place can be said to be rather abstract or universal. The emptiness inhabited by the children is all the more suffocating since nothing notable actually happens in the story. The children sit around, gaze into the sky and the distance, and converse among each other.¹⁴ The visual emptiness can be understood as a symbol of the eternity of time, which the protagonists struggle to fill. Paradoxically, the infinite emptiness is at the same time constraining since there is no escape from it. The children are prisoners on the barren pages.

9 Internees in Italian concentration camps were not required to wear uniforms. Rather, they kept the clothing they had been wearing or what was sent by their relatives. At the end of December 1942 almost half of all women and children in Gonars were barefoot (Jezernik, 1997, 119–120).

10 We learn that Giudita was from the city of Ljubljana, while Drago was living on a farm in the countryside. Fascists had burned the farm, but the cows ran away and managed to elude them. At the end of this conversation, as memories of the suffering he had to endure even before he was taken to Gonars, Drago says: "I hate the Italians". Giudita replies: "No. They hate us" (Toffolo, 2012, 47).

11 Italianisation of the Slovene population in Italy started in the middle of the 1920s after the Treaty of Rapallo awarded the Kingdom of Italy a large part of western Slovene territories (and almost a quarter of the Slovene population came under Italian rule) and in connection with the rise of Fascism in Italy. The Fascist government considered all annexed territories to be geographically and historically part of Italy (Širok, 2012, 133–134). Use of the Italian language was made obligatory by educational and cultural policies. The Slavic-Slovene race, considered inferior by the Fascists, was subject to a systematic program of Italianisation (Kacin Wohinz, 2006).

12 The living conditions at Rab were even worse. Internees did not have access to shelter, toilets, and kitchens. At the end of August 1942, there were more than 1,000 persons under the age of 16 interned at Rab. These children, along with pregnant and nursing mothers, were subject to the same regime as the other internees. As a consequence, the death rate was high, particularly among the youngest, and continued to rise even after the most vulnerable were transported to Gonars in the fall and winter of the same year (Jezernik, 1997, 286–288).

13 In contrast to Nazi concentration camps, Fascist camps were not equipped with infrastructure for mass extermination like gas chambers and crematoria. Nonetheless, because of the exposure to weather, hunger, constant physical and mental torture, inadequate living conditions, and the spread of diseases the number of casualties in the fascist camps was very high (Gombač, Gombač, 2013, 24). Due to the increasing number of dead in Gonars at the end of 1942, a separate cemetery for internees had to be created (Capogreco, 2011, 231).

14 This is in accord with what sources claim about the daily routine in the concentration camp. Gonars was not a labour camp and therefore, the internees were plagued by boredom. Those children who were well enough to be able to play, did so. As there were no toys available in the camp, they had to improvise (Jezernik, 1997, 230).



Fig. 4: Davide Toffolo, *Italian Winter*, 127 (Toffolo, 2012). *Italy has lost the war. Italy surrendered. - Did you hear? We are returning home. - How?*

Fig. 4: Davide Toffolo, *L'inverno d'Italia*, 127 (Toffolo, 2012). *L'Italia ha perso la guerra! L'Italia si è arresa! - Hai sentito? - Si torna a casa. - E come?*

Sl. 4: Davide Toffolo, *Italijanska zima*, 127 (Toffolo, 2012). *Italija je izgubila vojno! Italija se je vdala! - Si slišala? Vračamo se domov. - Kako?*

Towards the end of the comic, the white pages turn black and the action takes place in a white bubble. The inversion of the visual field denotes a transformation:

Italy has surrendered and the children can look forward to returning home. Yet the darkness descending on the pages and the dialogue between the children do not allow for optimism. Drago tells Giudita, »Did you hear? We are returning home.« She asks, »How?« He answers, »On foot.« (Toffolo, 2012, 127–128) (Fig. 4). Such a reaction from the exhausted children is hardly surprising since we already know at this point that Giudita has lost her mother, Drago has lost his father and does not know where his brothers are. But the war will not end with the capitulation of Italy; it will drag on for another two years, one occupying force being substituted for another.¹⁵ The last page of the graphic novel concludes with the same view of the wire fence with a church steeple in the background, only this time the boy is sitting on the other side of the fence. The date of the Italian capitulation, September 8, 1943 is written under the drawing.

POSTMEMORY AND TRAUMATIC REALISM

Toffolo's *Italian Winter* inspires an instant comparison to the famous graphic novel *Maus* by Art Spiegelman. Since *Maus* has been, from the beginning, the focus of many interesting scholarly discussions that opened new ways of thinking about the representation of trauma, I will turn to some of them for analysing Toffolo's work.

Maus tells the story of Art Spiegelman's parents, Polish Jews, from the mid-1930s to the end of World War II and the consequences of the fateful events of this time for the family (Art's brother died during infancy, and his mother committed suicide).¹⁶ *Maus* is based on interviews the author conducted with his father during the 1970s, and the making of these interviews has provided the frame story for the core story of the graphic novel—the survival story of the author's parents. Even though Spiegelman's is a true story, he chose to narrate it in a fictional manner by representing people as animals (Jews are mice, Germans are cats, Poles are pigs etc.).¹⁷

The concept of post-memory developed by Marianne Hirsch in her study of *Maus*, holds a special place in memory studies dealing with artists of the second or third generation after World War II. Postmemory refers to the temporal and qualitative difference between the memory of the survivor and secondary, already transmitted memory.¹⁸ One of the hints that *Maus* is such a work of

15 After the fall of Benito Mussolini on July 25, 1943, the government of Pietro Badoglio took office. It continued with the anti-Slovene policies of Fascism and was stalling the process of dissolution of the concentration camps. Many internees fell into the hands of the German occupying force after September 8, 1943. After that date, some 4,000 internees left for Slovenia; some joined the partisan resistance, and some were captured and returned to the camps by the Wehrmacht. On October 19, 1943 there were still 737 civilian internees in Gonars, among them children (Capogreco, 2011, 111–112, 232).

16 *Maus*, Volume I (*Maus: A Survivor's Tale. My Father Bleeds History*) was first published in 1986, *Maus*, Volume II (*And Here My Troubles Began*) in 1992. *The Complete Maus* was first published in the United States by Pantheon Books in 1996.

17 The portrayal of people as animals lends an air of fiction to the graphic novel. Nonetheless, Spiegelman was surprised to see *Maus* enter the New York Times best-seller list in 1991 on »the fiction side of the ledger« (Young, 2000, 38–39). After the author's intervention, it was moved to the nonfiction list since, as LaCarpa claims, »*Maus* is not made up, although it is obviously made or shaped« (LaCarpa, 1998, 146).

18 »Postmemory most specifically describes the relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents, experiences that they "remember" only as the narratives and images with which they grew up, but that they are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right« (Hirsch, 2001, 218–219).

postmemory is the original photographs of the author's mother and father included in the book (Hirsch, 2008, 107). As we will see, *Italian Winter* also contains original archival documents, including a list of children interned at Gonars, from which Toffolo took the names of the protagonists. Even though the names are real, *Italian Winter* is not a biographical story of Drago and Giudita, but an invented story set in real historical circumstances.

¹⁹ In this context, the extension of the concept of postmemory as proposed by Michael Rothberg can be useful. Rothberg claims that postmemory may refer to people haunted by the memories they have inherited from their families but also »from the culture at large« (Rothberg, 2000, 186). When discussing Spiegelman, he claims that the cultural logic of postmemory thus provides the field in which Spiegelman engages with the Holocaust. He proposes a working definition for collective postmemory that allows us to simultaneously transgress and uphold the ethical injunctions related to acts of representation »after Auschwitz« (Rothberg, 2000, 189).

Such cultural trauma may include a sort of collective repression of the memory of Fascist atrocities. The transmitted memories used by Toffolo were not the memories of his family, and more importantly, they were rather marginal in the author's cultural environment. Even though the discussion of the issue has intensified in re-

cent years and the number of publications dealing with the topic has increased, remembrances of Fascist concentration camps and knowledge of Italian concentration camps, especially civilian camps, is weak among the general population in Italy. Concentration camps for Slovene and Croatian civilians during World War II can consequently be counted among the suppressed aspects of Italian history.²⁰ Denial or manipulation of memory of Fascist concentration camps has been happening and continues to happen at the highest levels of the state, as attempts to revise history are very much alive in Italian politics and public discourse.²¹ A notable example of this happened on Italian National Memorial Day of the Exiles and Foibe (*Giorno del ricordo*) in February 2010, only a month after *Italian Winter* was published in Slovenia, when the Italian public broadcaster RAI chose to broadcast a photograph of Italian soldiers executing Slovene hostages with the title »They were convicted to death because they were Italians«, as part of the program *Porta a Porta*.²²

Davide Toffolo himself was shocked to learn about the history of Gonars, which is only an hour's drive from his place of birth.²³ He started working on the graphic novel following the influential exhibition on children interned in Fascist concentration camps, *Quando morì mio / When my Father Died*,²⁴ and formation of his graphic

19 »The story is fictional but it is set in a real context. I planned to use children. I searched for a girl from Ljubljana and a boy from the countryside, from the hills surrounding Ljubljana. I wanted them both to be 9 or 10 years old. I searched the long list of internees and found the names of two children, a girl and a boy, who fitted my purpose. The names of the children in the story are real, they are not made up: Drago and Giudita. Documentation about them was available. I tried to imagine how children would behave in such a cruel environment, how they react to messages of ethnic hatred that surround them« (Primorske novice, 25.3.2011: Davide Toffolo, avtor knjige stripov o koncentracijskem taborišču Gonars).

20 It might sound incredible, but the Republic of Italy did not prosecute those responsible, while immediately after the end of the war, investigations of concentration camps were often met with resistance (Capogreco, 2011, 14). As Božidar Jezernik claims, Italian concentration camps are less known than German ones in part because archival data about them are largely unavailable (Jezernik, 2004, 66). All of this has contributed to the fact that collective consciousness about Fascist atrocities is very weak in Italy (cf. Capogreco, 2011, 13–22; Matussi, 2014).

21 Francesco Cossigo, who was the president of the Republic of Italy at that time, claimed during an official visit to Germany in 1990 that »the horrors of concentration camps never happened in Italy«. Even more widely known is the statement by controversial Italian politician Silvio Berlusconi, who, in 2003, said in an interview, »Mussolini never killed anybody; when he sent people into confinement it was like a holiday for them« (Capogreco, 2011, 17).

22 Also appearing in the show was the historian Alessandra Kersevan, author of a monograph about the Gonars concentration camp (Kersevan, 2003), who was silenced by the TV show's host after pointing out the falsehood. She claimed that the show contained further misinformation and that such practice was not uncommon in Italy (RTV MMC, 14.2.2012: RAI manipuliral s fotografijo slovenskih talcev). The entire show is available online at <http://www.rai.tv/dl/RaiTV/programmi/media/ContentItem-1784a3df-aa07-4bcd-a5ab-1be49cfa2899.html#p=0> (1.6.2015). Despite protests the following year, the same photograph was used with the same title (RTV MMC, 10.2.2013: Italijani znova zlorabili fotografijo usmrtitve talcev).

Sadly, such manipulation with photographs is not an exception. Capogreco mentions a well-known example in his book about Italian concentration camps in the Italian anthology of World War II, *Notte sull'Europa*. A photograph of children at the Rab concentration camp is titled »Children in Auschwitz«, and another of a Slovene internee is titled »After liberation« (Capogreco, 2011, 16–17). According to Susan Sontag, »ideologies create substantiating archives of images, representative images, which encapsulate common ideas of significance and trigger predictable thoughts, feelings« (Sontag, 2006, 68 on Kindle edition). Since familiarity of some photographs with Sontag's words, »builds our sense of the present and immediate past« (2006, 67), these 'incidents' are not some sort of meaningless mistake, but an aim to construct a historically inaccurate collective memory.

23 Primorske novice, 25.3.2011: Davide Toffolo, avtor knjige stripov o koncentracijskem taborišču Gonars. For further information on the lack of knowledge about this part of history among the local population of Gonars, see Piani, 2014, 47–61.

24 The exhibition *Quando morì mio padre: disegni e testimonianze di bambini dai campi di concentramento del confine orientale (1942–1943) / Ko je umrl moj oče: risbe in pričevanja iz koncentracijskih taborišč na italijanski vzhodni meji (1942–1943)* was first presented to the public on the Italian National Memorial Day of the Exiles and Foibe in February 2005 in Gorizia. It drew the attention of the broader public in Italy. For further information about the exhibition and responses to it, see Gombač, Gombač, 2013, 43–51. The incentive for the graphic novel also came from Ivan Cignola, the mayor of Gonars at the time (Širok, 2012, 141).



Fig. 5: Stane Kumar, Children in Gonars, 1942, ink, National Museum of Contemporary History

Fig. 5: Stane Kumar, Bambini a Gonars, 1942, inchiostro, Museo di Storia Contemporanea della Slovenia

Sl. 5: Stane Kumar, Otroci v Gonarsu, 1942, tuš, Muzej novejšje zgodovine Slovenije

novel is to some extent connected with the suppression of remembrance. This lack of public debate and acknowledgment about the existence of Fascist camps can provide an entry point where the past meets the present and for Michael Rothberg's "traumatic realism". He uses this concept for literature dealing with the Holocaust, including *Maus*, as it »brings together history, experience, and representation, but not in order to unite them. Rather, traumatic realism reveals their overlaps and their tensions« (Rothberg, 2000, 176). According to him, traumatic realism »does not ignore the demand to confront the unfounded nature of writing, but it nevertheless attempts to develop new forms of 'documentary' and 'referential' discourse out of that very traumatic void« (Rothberg, 2000, 96).

If we broaden the horizon from the merely linguistic to the visual, this paradigm can be found useful for the analysis of *Italian Winter*. Toffolo collaborated with scholars and made use of scholarly literature and archival sources in the creation of the graphic novel.²⁵ As mentioned above, the book itself includes five archival documents: a sketch of the Gonars camp, an essay by Drago Kalčič titled "My Father", a postcard sent to Gonars, a list of children interned at Gonars, and a sketch



Fig. 6: Stane Kumar, Children in Internment, 1943, pencil, National Museum of Contemporary History

Fig. 6: Stane Kumar, Bambini interanti, 1943, matita, Museo di Storia Contemporanea della Slovenia

Sl. 6: Stane Kumar, Internirani otroci, 1943, svinčnik, Muzej novejšje zgodovine Slovenije

of a tunnel that was dug under barrack XXI. The documents are accompanied by a short informational text, while the appendix to the book contains more information and references. All of the archival materials are connected to the content of the graphic novel. Moreover, at the end, a selection of artworks from the concentration camp²⁶ are added in the afterword by Kaja Širok, director of the National Museum of Contemporary History, where these artworks are archived.²⁷ These drawings are an important reference point for *Italian Winter*. They are valuable documentary sources that help us understand and reconstruct internment life, while they are, at the same time, works of art and personal testimonies of life in extreme circumstances.

Among the preserved oeuvres of Slovene artists in internment, the work of Stane Kumar contains the largest number of drawings of children. As he wrote, he was deeply affected by the inhuman conditions into which children were forced.²⁸ Most of his works were made by pencil or ink on an empty background; sometimes he would record colours to serve as hints for paintings he made after the war (Kumar, 1980, 147). Kumar reveals himself as a lucid observer in his portrayals of children in the midst of misery (Fig. 5). His drawings of emaciated children with flaccid faces wearing shabby clothing transgress mere documentarism, and are works of skilful

²⁵ Primorske novice, 25.3.2011: Davide Toffolo, avtor knjige stripov o koncentracijskem taborišču Gonars.

²⁶ Many Slovene visual artists were interned in Italian concentration camps because the Italian occupying forces targeted the intelligentsia since they suspected them of being particularly inclined towards collaborating with the Liberation Front (Durjava, 2009, 39). Painters were allowed to work in the war camps and were able to acquire materials through connections. They were even allowed to host exhibitions. Gonars was an artistic centre of sorts since many artists were interned there and for a short while (for two months during the summer of 1942) a course in painting was organised at the initiative of Nikolaj Pirnat (Visočnik, 1980).

²⁷ In Italian book the afterword is written by Paola Bristot (Toffolo, 2010).

²⁸ For the complete testimony of Stane Kumar about children in concentration camps, see Kumar, 1980.



Fig. 7: Stane Kumar, *Boy in Internment, sitting behind fence with billycan in his hands*, 1943, pencil, National Museum of Contemporary History

Fig. 7: Stane Kumar, *Bambino internato*, 1943, Museo di Storia Contemporanea della Slovenia

Sl. 7: Stane Kumar, *Internirani deček, sedeč za žico z menažko v roki*, 1943, svinčnik, Muzej novejšje zgodovine Slovenije

hands of a socially-sensitive artist.²⁹ His drawings are focused on the essential, and the artist is more intrigued by the children's reactions and emotions than with their surroundings (Fig. 6).

Andreas Huyssen claims that when creating *Maus*, Spiegelman knew that the past could not be made ac-

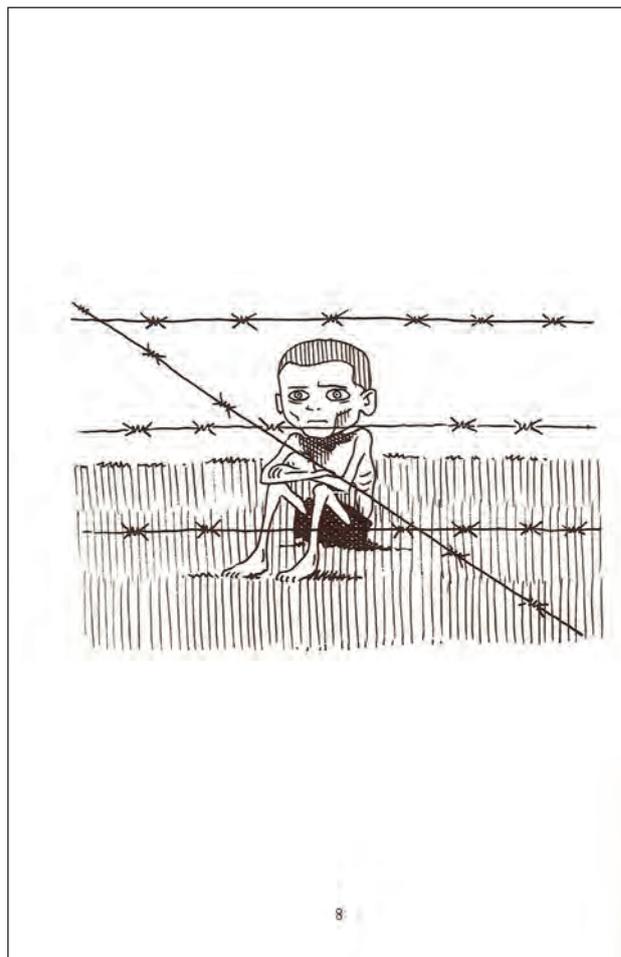


Fig. 8: Davide Toffolo, *Italian Winter, 8* (Toffolo, 2012)

Fig. 8: Davide Toffolo, *L'inverno d'Italia, 8* (Toffolo, 2012)

Sl. 8: Davide Toffolo, *Italijanska zima, 8* (Toffolo, 2012)

cessible by documentary authenticity of the representation, which will always remain "inauthentic". That is why Spiegelman attempted »*authentication* through the interviews with his father« (Huyssen, 2001, 35). In *Italian Winter*, authenticity is created not only by the use of archival documents, but also through the visual aspect. It contains enough visual associations and symbols—e.g., the appearance of the children and the wire fence—for us to understand what it is referring to even if the origi-

²⁹ Stane Kumar (1910–1997) graduated in painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb under the mentorship of Ljubo Babić. At the outbreak of the war, he joined the Liberation Front and was interned (Nedog-Urbanič, 2000, 11). Even before he began his studies at the Academy, he was impressed by the socially engaged drawings of Nikolaj Pirnat, with whom he was later interned at Gonars. In Zagreb he studied drawing under the guidance of Krsto Hegedušič, who was among the founders of the socially critical art group, Association of Artists Zemlja (Udruženje umjetnika Zemlja). Together with fellow students from Slovenia, Kumar founded the group Gruda in Zagreb and Hegedušič influenced them as a painter as well as ideologically. As a professor, he encouraged students to work also outside the academy walls since he believed that this sort of observation and finding motifs was important for socially critical artists (cf. Vrečko, 2014b, 119–123). Other members of the group Gruda who were interned in Fascist concentration camps were Vladimir Lamut, Mirko Lebez, and Lubo Ravnikar. Their drawings from the concentration camps reveal the influence of their professor, Hegedušič.

nal documents had not been included. There are similarities between the two works—in both cases the drawing is monochromatic and simplified—but Spiegelman pays more attention to detail than Toffolo. The latter's drawing is very stylised and is similar in style to what resembles a simplified and sketchy style we can imagine might be done in a concentration camp (cf. Fig. 7 and Fig. 8).

The fact that *Italian Winter* is dedicated to "To the Roma people, who are being persecuted in Europe today"³⁰, hints that the work is also a response to current events. This dedication can remind us that the persecution of Roma during World War II has been pushed towards the margins of collective historical consciousness, while at the same time, drawing parallels between the past and present. As Rothberg claims: »Instead of understanding the traumatic realist project as an attempt to reflect the traumatic event in an act of passive mimesis, I would suggest that traumatic realism is an attempt to produce the traumatic event as an object of knowledge and to program and thus transform its readers so that they are forced to acknowledge their relationship to posttraumatic culture. Because it seeks both to construct access to a previously unknowable object and to instruct an audience in how to approach that object, the stakes of traumatic realism are both epistemological and pedagogical« (Rothberg, 2000, 103).

Even though it might not be as obvious as in some other works that are used by Rothberg, I would nonetheless claim that there are enough clues in *Italian Winter* to be regarded as a work of traumatic realism. In addition to the dedication to the Roma, I base this decision on

the suppression of historical memory of Fascist concentration camps for civilians, which was an impetus for the creation of the comic, even though this aspect is not made explicit in the graphic novel itself.

CONCLUSION

We live with images and we relate to the world through images. Therefore, they are more than the products of perception. They emerge from the process of personal and collective symbolisation, as Hans Belting noted (Belting, 2004, 13). There is no other image that better encapsulates the horrors of World War II than scenes from concentration camps. Not only barbed-wires, piles of bones, but also the barely alive; images of starving bodies have come to epitomise the evil of the Nazis in the collective consciousness. However, these are not only images related with German camps, but also Italian Fascist's camps.

In *Italian Winter*, we are set on an emotional journey that tells this story. Toffolo navigates the terrain between literal representation of history, documentarism, and artistic freedom to create a convincing story of two children imprisoned in a concentration camp. As the invented story of the children in *Italian Winter* is set against a real historical background, Toffolo's drawing, to some extent, resembles drawings from the concentration camps. His drawing is simplified, purified of all extraneous elements, and only the most essential is recorded. Like life in concentration camps, the drawing is reduced and limited to the essential.

30 Italian: »Alla gente Rom, perseguitata oggi in Europa« (Toffolo, 2010). Slovenian: »Romom, ki jih danes v Evropi preganjajo« (Toffolo, 2012).

REPREZENTACIJA TRAVM IN ROMAN V STRIPU *ITALIJANSKA ZIMA* DAVIDA TOFFOLA

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POVZETEK

Roman v stripu *Italijanska zima* (Italian winter) avtorja Davida Toffola je zgodba o dveh otrocih, interniranih v fašističnem taborišču Gonars v Italiji. Fašistična taborišča za civilne internirance, med katerimi je bilo zelo veliko otrok, še vedno spadajo med bolj zamolčane zgodbe italijanske zgodovine. Po drugi strani pa narašča število študij in zanimanje za t. i. ‚spominske študije‘, ki se ukvarjajo tudi z reprezentacijo travme v umetnosti. V tem kontekstu lahko Italijansko zimo primerjamo s svetovno znanim romanom v stripu *Maus* Arta Spiegelmana, ki je že od nastanka predmet mnogih akademskih razprav. Kljub temu da so med deloma očitne razlike, so nekateri koncepti, ki jih srečamo v teh študijah, kot sta postspomin in travmatični realizem, pomembni za interpretacijo Italijanske zime.

Italijanska zima je postavljena v resnične zgodovinske okoliščine in vključuje ključne momente, ki so zaznamovali fašistično internacijo in okupacijo. Prav tako sta imeni protagonistov imeni resničnih interniranih otrok v Gonarsu. V prispevku preko primerjalne analize dela, ki ga umestim tudi v polje taboriščne umetnosti, pokažem, da kot se zgodba otrok prepleta z realnim zgodovinskim ozadjem, se je Toffolova avtorska risba prepletla z upodobitvami iz taborišč, kar lahko interpretiramo kot poizkus, da bi zgodba vizualno vzbujala vtis avtentičnosti. Avtor v Italijanski zimi tako manevrira med dobesedno reprezentacijo zgodovine, dokumentarnostjo in umetniško svobodo, da ustvari zgodbo dveh otrok, ujetih v taborišču.

Ključne besede: *Italijanska zima*, *L'inverno d'Italia*, Davide Toffolo, Gonars, taboriščna umetnost, Art Spiegelman, postspomin, travmatični realizem

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