

I imagine myself hiking in the hinterlands of Rome, through idyllic mountain landscapes, green woods and blooming fields. My path leads me in the direction of Alatri. All of a sudden, I find myself standing in the middle of a large, abandoned place that clearly contains some history in its grounds: A huge area with ruins of what looks like abandoned row homes, a former kinder garden or hostel, and the base bones of what once might have been a canteen. The question of what this place once was would have been left to my imagination, as no information board or even plaque can be found to explain this gloomy area.

What I would have stumbled upon is, “Le Fraschette”, a concentration camp where mainly people from the occupied territories of south-eastern Europe were interned during the second World War. After the fall of Fascism in Italy, the barracks were taken down. Yet, new ones were built immediately in the same area that would now function as a camp for displaced persons and, simultaneously, a prison for war criminals. Here, victims of the fascist area from Europe and beyond would live side by side with perpetrators. In my imaginative hiking scenario, I would have stayed clueless about all of this.

Luckily, I did not really stumble on the site by chance, but rather took part in a guided trip towards it. Having studied European Studies, I am used to discussing matters of memory culture from an intellectual viewpoint. I am not used to approaching these themes in a creative way, though. Thus, when the invitation to the study trip stated: “This is a unique opportunity to learn, reflect, and help give international visibility to a neglected site of European history, through the lenses of a camera” I was very curious of what this workshop would be like.

The two days’ workshop we had in Rome, Alatri and Le Fraschette indeed inherited a well-assembled combination of both theoretical and creative parts. We began on September 17th with a general introduction in the matter of Fascism in Italy and of deportations to concentration camps during the second World War especially from the territory that was later to become Yugoslavia. From there, we continued with a discussion on appropriate ways of remembering the victims of these times. Interestingly enough, there was no “goal” within these moderated discussions, nor right or wrong answer. It is indeed very enlightening to have such debates in a diverse group with people from all over Europe. Certainly, these challenged some of my personal viewpoints that partly feel like consolidated ‘german’ takes on the matter. At the end of the first day, we had a practical introduction on communication via photography.

On the second day we jointly visited the site itself. We were encouraged to approach it in a considerate and respectful manner, by doing a guided, ‘creative walk’. This means that we walked in very slow motion, as a group, yet without communication. During the process we took photos, while some also drafted paintings or wrote poems. Many interesting documentations were created in the process. After having encountered the place in this way, we met with locals in Alatri for a more detailed lecture on the history of the place.

I have stated before that internationalized views on commemorating can be quite refreshing from my ‘german’ viewpoint. At the same time, the silencing of a place like Le Fraschette in Italy is alarming. Our meeting with the locals confirmed what was perceptible on the site: That even they got to know about the history of the camp only after they actively engaged in some self-motivated research. Hopefully, study trips like the one I was able to take part in can help to remember places such as Le Fraschette and with it at least some of the names of those subjected to tremendous human-rights violations.