

## **Introduction**

### ***For a Participatory Geography of Memory***

**by Gustavo D'Aversa**

#39 tells the story of Displaced Persons Camp 39 in Tricase Porto during the Second World War, from 1943 to 1948, an episode of local history largely forgotten - or even unknown - by the Tricase inhabitants themselves.

Throughout the 20th century, in fact, during various local and international crises, Puglia's geostrategic position made it a port of call for refugees and repatriates from neighbouring countries: from the Italians expelled from Smyrna (1912), to the Armenians who escaped the Turkish massacres (1915-1922), to the thousands and thousands of displaced persons, former internees and in particular Jews fleeing, at the turn of the Second World War (1943-1948). It was precisely as a result of this last intense migratory flow that the Refugee Collection Centres were created, conceived as places to isolate the other from oneself, as homogeneous enclaves in which to enclose diversity, avoiding interaction with it in the name of a sort of 'negative tolerance'. which risks squandering "the opportunity to constructively confront 'other cultures', even erasing their traces, as if they were faces of sand on the edge of the sea".

On the contrary, listening to these "dissonant and profound" voices could shake the uncritical rejection of the "other" and lay the foundations for an inclusive citizenship, which knows and can be "citizenship of the world", meaning the possibility "of being both insider and outsider, of feeling at home in a particular place, yet understanding that place as part of a great, entire Earth". thus helping to counter beliefs based on exclusion and consolidate an intercultural strategy aimed at 'reconciling old and new worlds'.

This was discussed on 9 April 2021 as part of the webinar entitled 'Faces of sand on the brink of the sea. Orienting oneself through visual languages for a narrative of the encounter with the Other', organised by the University of Salento on the occasion of the Geonight 2021 edition. Starting from the vision of #39, we questioned the maze of inclusions/exclusions that have affected and still affect the Salento, our 'land between the two seas'. More precisely, following the new reflections that are maturing in the field of critical geopolitics, as well as the consolidated ones concerning the relationship between geographical research and travel literature, we chose to resort to visual languages that attempt to give back the living voice of migrants on the journeys they have made and on the situation in their homeland (testimonies that are almost completely absent in the mainstream media).

#39 is to all intents and purposes a narrative for and with the people of Tricase: in the film, the actors, non-professional insiders, inhabit the small agricultural centre of Salento in the 1940s and stage, in an ironic and light-hearted manner, the initial misunderstandings arising from the inhabitants' sudden impact with the new arrivals, showing how, only after a long and difficult period of experiential learning, is it possible to make the seed of welcome germinate.

This docu-spectacle, in other words, represents a true embedded geographical information tool, capable of effectively and immediately reconstructing the deep and complex relationships between the human group and the lived space.

It should be emphasised that #39 is part of a mosaic of existing narratives on the subject: since the beginning of the 2000s, Ercole Morciano's research work in the volume *Ebrei a Tricase Porto* (2017) and the documentary film *Rinascere in Puglia* by Gady Castel (directed by Yael Katzir, Italy/Israel, 2015) have made this historical event re-emerge in the collective memory, which unfortunately has left only a few tangible traces, as evidence of an intangible memory linked mostly to direct testimony.

A.Lib.I Teatro therefore intended to seize this witness, to offer an answer to a fundamental question: how can an episode of our recent history, so relevant and rich in identity value, remain unknown to those who were not contemporaries of it?

This was the starting point for the artistic research, through a participatory path of a workshop and theatrical nature, but also historical, through the identification of sources, witnesses and historically relevant places. The dramaturgy of #39, curated by Walter Prete, was born from the narrative reworking of the materials resulting from this research. This original writing then became a theatrical performance directed by the writer, but also a site-specific performance with a strong vocation for the narration of places, understood as an opportunity for the creation of heritage communities - as envisaged and desired by the Faro Convention - and, finally, a filmed documentary, realised thanks to the contribution of the citizens of the Tricase community and acting amateurs, with the pedagogical aim of disseminating the micro-history of DP39 to school students of all levels. An articulated path, rooted in the territory, that of #39, which starts from the bottom, reinventing - through the tool of theatrical narration - a collective historical memory somehow removed.

On the other hand, memory, as we know, has its intentions, which - according to the paradigm proposed by Jedlowski - can take the form a) of self-absolving morals, thus confirming a polarised historical vision b) of reflections animated by a spirit of self-criticism and thus, by the desire for an authentic search for historical causes and reasons, which often leads to recognising one's own - rather than others' - responsibilities first and foremost; finally, c) of conducts marked by oblivion, as in the case of Displaced Persons Camp 39, in which the collective removal of memory corresponds precisely to an intention that deserves to be investigated.

Hence the effort of the #39 project was oriented towards the creation of a site-specific performance, which carried out the task of Placetelling® Tricase Porto, through an original dramaturgy and counting on the actors of maldEstro (community theatre workshop), addressing a local audience, but also tourists and occasional patrons.

#39 has thus gradually become something more than our initial intentions. Today, it is configured as a sort of memory map, an emotional map of places, capable of engaging the local community through the interaction of narrative, historical, emotional, sensorial, participatory perspectives; in a word, immersive.

By merging the narration of places with a map of memory, the show is also an attempt to interpret a territorial identity. We will attempt to define its perimeter.

Identity is not something fixed and immutable, but rather a reality in the making. A fortiori, so is territorial identity, whose change results in the loss or regaining of a sense of place. And it can be defined as 'narrative identity'. the result of a process of cultural mediation that brings a flow of events, actions and experiences, even heterogeneous ones, within the unity of a story that can be put on paper. Identity appears to our eyes, therefore, as a sort of 'narrative', a dialectical pathway through which subjects rediscover and reconstruct their equilibrium over time and through the changes they are called upon to face.

With this in mind, Teti suggests that 'our sensations, our perceptions, our memory, our life can only be narrated and represented with respect to a place. We are our place, our places: all the places, real or imaginary, that we have experienced, accepted, discarded, combined, removed, invented. We are also the relationship we have been able and willing to establish with places. When I speak of the feeling of places, while not excluding the magic they can exercise, I do not intend to construct a metaphysics of places, to place them in a kind of immobility and abstricity. Places have their own geographical, spatial location, but they are always, everywhere an anthropological construction. They always have their own history, even when not easily decipherable; they are the result of relationships between people. They have a life of their own: they are born, they are founded, they change, they are abandoned, they can be reborn" .

Places are therefore "part of our experience" and, in this sense, are to be considered an active integral part "of an emotional and sensorial sphere where the perceiving subject - through his emotions, his senses, his spiritual attitude - is placed, if not at the 'centre' of the representations themselves, at least

in a privileged position, since he is the bearer of meanings". including the perception of experience as a criterion for representation.

Describing new or transitional identities, as in our case of DPCamp 39, fosters an understanding of the evolutionary process of a place, its profound reality, taking local communities to the roots of shared memory .

The inhabitants thus become biographers of the territory, 'artists' capable of capturing and narrating the essence of a territorial narrative.

Numerous studies have been oriented towards the search for theoretical points of contact between anthropology, sociology, geography, economics and social psychology, mutually borrowing research methods increasingly directed at investigating the deep connections between history, culture and territory, thus attempting to highlight the identity dimension of places, starting from the investigation of social perception.

The identity of a place is defined on the basis of shared representations of the territory, culture and common spaces; it is collectively understood as the substance of the common imagination . The place is, in fact, a space onto which meanings, both objective and subjective, are projected, from which culturally and historically many others inevitably linked to the past also derive. And so far this would explain the involvement of inhabitants and local communities.

But it is possible to find an intermediate dimension between the appearance of the place in its concrete and symbolic forms and the perception of the real spaces and intangible culture that characterises it: it is the dimension of its narration or representation in artistic and media form that enables and enhances the combination of tangible and intangible elements.

Participation can, in fact, express an unprecedented point of view that looks at a place, perceives it, makes it the raw material on which to graft processes of sensitive, narrative geography or in any case 'other' than the more traditional one.

Places could therefore be defined as spaces of emotional inter-action, loaded with meanings that return to us through the emotions they awaken, giving memory and imagination a spatial sense, as well as a temporal one.

The experimentation, which has been underway for some years now, of methodologies that allow visualising both physical reality and its multisensory and symbolic perception, is thus becoming a valuable tool and a necessity.

To conclude, #39 intends to offer you its own small contribution, through the experience that this volume recounts, that of artistic research through the instruments of theatre within communities, consciously practising the objective of a participatory geography of memory and narration of the territorial identity of Tricase.