

# LOST AND FOUND

Processes of abandonment of the architectural and urban heritage  
in inner areas. Causes, effects, and narratives (Italy, Albania, Romania)

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## Territori dell'abbandono. Paesaggio, rovine e memorie in una prospettiva sociologica

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*Il saggio analizza il processo di spopolamento di due aree interne della Calabria causato dagli effetti di un disastro naturale e le modalità che hanno caratterizzato la ricostruzione dei centri abbandonati in altro sito. Inoltre, si indagano anche i complessi legami socio-identitari che si mantengono e modificano fra popolazioni e vecchi luoghi, secondo le dinamiche di ricostruzione memoriale a livello intergenerazionale. In particolare, i due casi studio selezionati riguardano i paesi di Canolo e Africo, entrambi raggiunti nel 1951 da un'alluvione. Questo evento produsse effetti disastrosi su questi insediamenti, provocandone l'abbandono e la conseguente ricostruzione ex novo in altro sito. In realtà, l'abbandono fu solo parziale per Canolo, che si divise fra una parte della popolazione che volle rimanere nel vecchio sito e un'altra parte che fu costretta a ricollocarsi più a monte, abitando nuove case e riorganizzando la vita sociale e domestica. Il trasferimento fu pressoché totale per Africo, la cui popolazione fu invece condotta in una porzione di territorio lungo la costa in netta discontinuità con la tipologia di ambiente e condizione di vita fino a quel momento sperimentate. Oggi i vecchi centri abbandonati sono oggetto di differenti interessi ad opera sia della popolazione che si è spostata nei nuovi insediamenti, sia di altri attori sociali che vi si accostano sotto varie forme e con diverse finalità. Da queste relazioni e tensioni fra interessi del presente e ricostruzione del passato si generano rappresentazioni memoriali plurime, che sono analizzate alla luce della categoria dei "paesaggi della memoria".*

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# Territories of Abandonment: Landscape, Ruins, and Memory from a Sociological Perspective

Monica Musolino

Territories of abandonment – i.e., uninhabited towns and villages reduced to ruins – are always linked to the history of a group, or rather, the procedural history of a community of inhabitants. These are histories that push or force such communities to leave their settlements for various reasons and at different rates of depopulation. Some of these reasons have a historical character, since, for example, they are linked to invasions or wars; others have a political character (persecutions, political opposition, etc.); still others are of a calamitous nature (earthquakes, floods, etc.), suddenly and unexpectedly bursting into collective life; in other cases, very long-term processes take place, which produce geographic and economic isolation so significant as to make associated life particularly difficult in some localities. Here, we will draw attention to findings relating to depopulation phenomena caused by natural events – specifically, the destruction following flooding – which preceded the depopulation processes of mountain areas in Italy. In particular, the two case studies analysed here are located in Calabria. These are the towns of Canolo and Africo, both in the province of Reggio Calabria, both of which were hit by a flood in 1951, which had a disastrous effect on these mountain settlements, causing their abandonment, partial for Canolo and almost total for Africo, with the consequent reconstruction *ex novo* on another site<sup>1</sup>. Today, these centres are the object of

1. See MUSOLINO 2012.

various kinds of interest, both among the population that moved to the new settlements that arose after the flood, and by successive generations of their children, but also among other social actors, who approach them in various forms and with different aims.

Why, then, does an abandoned centre arouse interest and curiosity, even becoming the subject of planning (social, cultural, architectural, restoration, etc.), beyond the common rhetoric of nostalgia? What is the socio-historical crux, the issue around which the movement of this return ferments and revolves? In many ways, which we will try to define in more detail within the essay, the central question is located in the memorial relationship between the abandoned place and the community of inhabitants, understood not only in relation to those who actually lived there, but also in relation to those who inhabit that place and that past in narrative forms, even though they have only come to know it as a result of destruction and abandonment. One can, in this way, consider such a place, its ruins first and foremost, as an extensive trace of the collective and individual past of those who lived there, the tangible physical sign of their memory and identity construction. And it is this place thus defined in terms of the landscape of memory that over time becomes the centre of rotation of memorial practices oriented towards the interests of the present.

### *Ruins and collective memory*

The expression "territories of abandonment" can in many ways be misleading and should therefore be clarified, since in a sociological sense abandonment does not refer exclusively to physical depopulation, but rather to a kind of termination of the affective bond with a place. Abandonment is deeply connected with the dynamics of memorial relations, which bind communities or groups to their places. This is evidently also true for those who, belonging to different generations from the original inhabitants, continue to inhabit the place in the story and memory of their parents or ancestors. Thus, it even occurs that entire generations can dwell in that place only in memory and narrative<sup>2</sup>, even though they have never seen it in person. This condition is given by a fundamental fact on which the social dynamic of collective memory hinges: this, as well as the very possibility of remembering, both on the part of the individual and collectively, derives from persistent and constant adherence to a group. It is precisely dwelling in a group that makes it possible to generate living memory even on the individual level, since the latter shares a past, a history, with all the other members, in which he/she recognises aspects, events, decipherable traces on which all those

2. On storytelling as dwelling, as a "practice embedded in social relations", see JEDLOSWSKI 2009.

meet who, like him/her, inhabit that past in relation to that group. Halbwachs makes it clear that a testimony will only remind us of something if some trace of the event to which it refers has remained in our minds. However, this does not mean that the memory of that event, or even a part of it, must remain with us exactly as it took place, but rather that we have somehow remained in contact with the group that experienced it together with us. And this is possible because we were part of it and had in common with it a certain way of thinking, so much so that in the present this allows us to still recognise ourselves in that group and confuse our past with its<sup>3</sup>.

The valuable lesson of Halbwachs tells us clearly that this link with a group's past, as deep as it is delicate and dynamic, makes possible the construction of a shared memory that also structures individual memory. In fact, there is no individual memory except in relation to the memory of one or more reference groups, up to the social construction of a public memory<sup>4</sup>. The definition of a shared memory, collective in the broadest sense, also makes possible the structuring of an identity, again collective and individual, the two dimensions being inseparable from each other. And one of probably the most significant and profound, albeit sometimes elusive and finely balanced, memorial and identity relationships is precisely that between inhabitants and place.

On this point, it is necessary to clarify what is meant here by the identity relationship between inhabitant and place, immediately referring to Heideggerian thought on this issue. According to Martin Heidegger, the manifestation and root of dwelling, which he identifies with man's existential condition, can be found in the act of building proper and caring for what exists. Indeed, it is precisely in this transformative action - *Buan* - that man generates the places in which his mortal being is realised, on earth and under the sky, his being<sup>5</sup>, the very condition of his identity. Therefore, the creation of a place - *Ort* - is an act of translation and transformation of the environment by a community, which spatialises, in this way, its own character, making it visible to itself and to the Other. This action, as mentioned, takes the form of the act of transforming what already exists in nature (agriculture), but also in the architectural and urban, as well as artistic, products of the inhabited place. The latter, in their overall articulation, connote that place in a unique and irreducible way with respect to another,

3. HALBWACHS 1997, pp. 55-56.

4. Public memory is the product of that memorial construction which, through various stratifications, extends beyond a restricted community and becomes a heritage of memories for a wider society, which thus elects its own founding places as testimonies of its past (e.g., the founding places of a nation, as in NORA 1997). On the processes of public memory construction see also AFFUSO 2010.

5. On what it is to inhabit a place, see HEIDEGGER 2007.

so that its particular character is to some extent collectively recognisable, without being confined to the condition of a mere object of interpretation, varying according to subjective sensitivity<sup>6</sup>. What is of most interest here concerns the relationship of care that is established between inhabitants and place and makes their identity relationship solid. But this practice also allows the overcoming of the idea that indicates in the natives, and only in them, the possibility of establishing an identity relationship with the place. According to landscape geo-philosopher Luisa Bonesio, the cultural construction of the relationship between community and place today no longer necessarily concerns the natives, but rather an elective community, whose subjects may in part also have different geographical and cultural origins, but who choose to inhabit a place by "taking care of it"<sup>7</sup>. On the same wavelength, the geographer Daniela Poli insists on the relationship of care as a transformative and therefore an identity practice in relation to place:

«In the contemporary world, place does not exist naturally [...], the practice of care and knowledge of place totally disrupts the alternation between insiders and outsiders. [...] The insiders (those who have lived in a place for a long time) can be delocalised, i.e. they may not enter into any cognitive and active relationship that brings into play the values of representativeness and symbolic value, while the outsiders (those who come from outside) can advantageously interpret the local potential. [...] The place today exists only where it is cared for, regardless of the type of ownership to which it is subjected: it is not the insiders and outsiders who own the place, but only those who care for it, those who re-cognise it as their own, those who continually safeguard it and revive it, whether inside or outside the settled community»<sup>8</sup>.

This excerpt is central because it highlights how the selective mechanisms on which the practice of caring for a place hinge are analogous to those that characterise the processes of memory, which move according to the memory/oblivion polarity. It is worth dwelling on this point in order to understand how the practices of collective memory construction and those of care, placed in relation to a place, move along the same lines. Again, according to Halbwachs, the past, in its multiplicity and vast articulation of events, is subjected by each group and each society to a process of selection and reconstruction, which will generate as many collective memories. This is evidently due to the impossibility of retaining and remembering everything that has happened, which would, moreover, be unspeakable. But then, what is remembered? What are

6. On this see also: SIMMEL 2006, p. 64; NORBERG-SCHULZ 1981, pp. 50-78; 1982, p. 45.

7. « No longer a "given" (taken for granted?) that nails one to birth, or condemns, today place becomes, in a world where the desert of non-places dramatically prevails, a *destination* to strive for, a space of meaning that must be regained through a care and awareness that is often difficult to reawaken», BONESIO 2007, pp. 201-202 (translation by the author).

8. POLI 2000, p. 208 (translation by the author).

the mechanisms that make it possible to select the relevant events of the past and indicate which memories carry weight, have relatively more significance, and which less? Quite simply, these mechanisms are guided by the interests of that group in the present<sup>9</sup>. However, as Paolo Jedlowski (2002) emphasises, this process of reconstruction lends itself to the risk of arbitrariness and is therefore bound to encounter limits set by the past itself: on the one hand, there must be a trace, that a certain significance of certain facts of the past remains with the community; and, on the other hand, it is the very plurality of collective memories within a society that generates a sort of mutual reconciliation, albeit sometimes with conflicting outcomes. It is precisely this permanence of traces in the present that makes it possible not only to curb the arbitrariness of reconstruction, which can even lead in the direction of negation, but also to continue to influence the present: that is to say, the past is somehow not yet past, in the sense of its distance, and therefore a break with what happened and what was, but in a certain way it passes through and remains in the present, albeit transformed. This is also a typical characteristic of memory: bringing the past to life in the present. One could say that it is by analogy what happens with the practices of place care: in fact, communities of inhabitants also necessarily operate a selection of elements and traces sedimented in the territory through registers and interests grounded in the present, thus revitalising in a new form what has already existed for some time.

This perspective, therefore, reinforces our interpretative proposal, according to which the abandonment of a place occurs when the relationship of care, which is also manifested in its memorial construction, fails. Even more so if memory and care relate to the physical traces of a place's collective past, i.e. its ruins. These assume a central role since, as stated above, it is the traces of the past that set a limit to the reconstructions of memory, but at the same time also orient them as permanencies of the past itself.

9. Halbwachs' thoughts on collective memory are presented by Jedlowski in some general terms: «They can be summarised in three positions: 1) individual memory is always also collective memory [...] 2) memory (individual and collective) represents the continuity of the past in the present only on the condition that the images of the past are subjected to a constant work of selection, synthesis and reconstruction that moves from the interests of the present; 3) memory is a factor of identity - both at the individual and collective level - but it is also its expression: the present identity, in other words, expresses itself in certain interpretations of the past, which tend to be congruent with it, from which it draws strength». JEDLOWSKI 2002, p. 52 (translation by the author).

*Ruins: the place where the aura of the past dwells*

A simple question, rhetorical as it may seem, opens up this second issue: how can a place reduced to a pile of ruins be so important to those who lived there and, sometimes, even to generations who never lived there? How is it possible that ruins not only manifest feelings of nostalgia and pain, but have a much more complex collective role? How is a positive impulse towards the past possible from such remnants, particularly if they are connected to recent and dramatic events, to destruction and forced abandonment, as in the cases we are dealing with? All this is possible, in a first and rough approximation, because ruins are the form that the memory of a community's past has taken. In other words, the abandoned place, made up of the rubble of the buildings, streets and squares that existed before the disastrous event, often takes on a sacred character in the collective representation. As will be explored later, the sacredness of the ruins also emerges in the narratives of the interviewees from Canolo and, above all, Africo: in effect, they become spatio-temporal points of reference for the narration of their own history, their own past and therefore their own identity. All the more so, because it was a disastrous event that drove them to abandonment (fig. 1).

On the other hand, even among scholars who have investigated the places and dynamics of memorial processes, this recognition of the sacred character of ruins is markedly present: in particular, Aleida Assmann points to ruins as places of memory. The scholar takes up the concept of aura formulated by Benjamin with reference to the work of art and the change that the experience of the latter goes through with the introduction of the serial production related to the capitalist system also in the field of art (painting, theatre, etc.). For Benjamin, therefore, what is missing from the work of art in the age of its technical reproducibility is the *hic et nunc* of its fruition, or rather, of its experience, that inseparability and irreproducibility of its space-time dimension, which is taken away from it, for example, with the serial reproductions of its image: the aura is a singular interweaving of space and time, the «unrepeatable appearance of a distance however close it may be»<sup>10</sup>. It is the aura, precisely, that leaves the work of art, thus in turn allowing art to become a commodity. Assmann, in taking up this interpretative category, highlights how places of memory, such as ruins, tombstones and graves, are signs. In other words, ruins, as signs, make up a presence that refers to a remoteness, to the unapproachability of the past, precisely because they continue to maintain an aura: «An auratic place [...] does not promise an unmediated experience; it is, rather, a place where the unbridgeable gap between present and past can be experienced. The place of memory is indeed

10. BENJAMIN 2000, p. 49.



Figure 1. Africo Vecchio,  
Reggio Calabria (photo A.M  
Oteri, 2022).

a “strange tissue of space and time”, weaving sensual presence and historical absence together»<sup>11</sup>. In other words, it is the history of a population or a social group that is sensitively evoked, in the hic of the place, which acquires for this very reason its sacred character. Ruins, therefore, are among the most important examples and manifestations of this, as they are themselves the form of this unresolvable estrangement between past and present. This is, therefore, the first founding element onto which the possibility of reconstructing that feeling of re-appropriation of collective history, which is manifested in the action of care, is grafted.

*Ruins as a trace to build a landscape of memory in the present*

Ruins have a further socio-semiotic connotation, which makes them extremely important in communicating a historical continuity between past and present: they become an enormous trace. By trace, precisely according to the socio-semiotic perspective, we mean that imprint produced on a place by an event or an action and becoming a sign following its recognition<sup>12</sup>. In this conception of the trace as sign proposed by Umberto Eco, one finds part of the reflections just developed, according to another analytical perspective, about ruins. Indeed, here the ruins take on a character of transit between past and present by virtue of the fact that their meaning, as a physical and visible sign, is shared and recognised by one or more groups who approach them. And this is possible, in cases relating to abandoned places, because of the capacity to continue to remember, to maintain the memory, at least in part common, of the group's past, renewing it in various forms. If a recognition of the sign-vein persists and is alive, this is due precisely to the permanence of a memorial relationship with the place and with the group that continues to inhabit in the narratives, and within these in the affective relationship with that place and that group: in this type of affective memory, in fact, a part of collective and individual identities continues to be structured in a dynamic way.

How, then, to "treat" the ruins, in the light of what is considered overall in these pages? How to approach this delicate relationship made up of memories, but also of oblivion, of composite meanings, also in relation to the different generations and types of inhabitants taking part in the process of their vivification? For the social science approach that we are concerned with here, one can only start from the narratives that the original inhabitants themselves, together with the

11. ASSMANN 2011, pp. 322-323.

12. Eco 1975, p. 289; VIOLI 2014, pp. 90-92.

generations of their children ("postmemory")<sup>13</sup>, offer to the researcher who wants to decipher at least in part that process of recognition of the trace constituted by the ruins themselves, as already mentioned. In other words, what was attempted in the sociological research was precisely a process of decoding the meaning that structures the complex memorial and identity relationship between the inhabitants and the abandoned place, by means of the narratives provided by the interviewees.

*Africo and Canolo: the construction of two different landscapes of memory.*

Before reconstructing the Africesi and Canolesi narratives in relation to the place of abandonment, it is useful to review briefly what happened to the two Locride villages in the early 1950s.

Africo and Canolo are two municipalities in the province of Reggio Calabria (figs. 2-3), united by the fact that their reconstruction was carried out following the same destructive event: a massive flood that caused considerable damage in 1951. Apart from this triggering event and the attention that Umberto Zanotti Bianco dedicated to these territories, the reconstruction paths of the two Locride centres proceeded in very different directions. The Africesi, who lived in the mountains in a difficult and harsh territory, were driven along the coast, where the new centre was built, immediately connected to the main communication routes and "civilisation", although this move along the coast was decisive, not only for the general change in the socio-economic structure, but also the change in the identity of the population<sup>14</sup>. New Canolo, on the other hand, was built within its own municipal territory, but even higher up, about 9 km from old Canolo (where some of the inhabitants also wished to remain), with a view to preserving a line of continuity with their way of life, their traditions and their main activities.

The research on memorial processes has focused on the use of a fundamental investigative tool: the collection of narrative interviews on the model of life stories<sup>15</sup> with members of the current political-administrative and socio-cultural elite, as well as witnesses of the destructive event and the subsequent reconstruction, since it is obviously no longer possible to trace those who took part in the decision-making processes of the era, which is now too far back in time. It is, therefore, through

13. Postmemory means, according to Hirsh, the generations of children or descendants who, despite not having experienced the events, traumas and places of their ancestors, elaborate memorial paths through narratives, stories or other cultural products, HIRSH 2012.

14. STAJANO 1979.

15. BERTAUX 1999, BICHI 2007.



Figure 2. Africo Vecchio,  
Reggio Calabria (photo A.M.  
Oteri 2022).



Figure 3. Canolo, Reggio Calabria (photo S. Pistidda, 2022).

the words of the interviewees themselves that we want to reconstruct here at least a corner of that landscape of memory that, with necessarily different results and strategies, but with the same logic of care that animates the dimension of living, Africesi and Canolesi have realised despite the disaster and abandonment.

The Africesi, after decades of substantial estrangement from the old town, and also because of the difficulties of access due to road conditions, express a relationship of care and therefore of identity bond clearly more oriented to the old town than to the new one. In particular, the devotion to Saint Leo is recalled several times during the interviews as a moment and dimension of belonging for the community of inhabitants, in relation to old Africo. G. M., former mayor of new Africo, recounts it this way:

There is a lot of devotion, a lot of devotion. Every 5 May we go to the mountains, we have a shrine in honour of Saint Leo and we spend the day, we combine the useful, the religious and the pleasant, the festive outing, that's it. But it keeps us together. Young people, too, are attached to Saint Leo. [...] It prescind from everything and everyone. We all come together behind Saint Leo, here<sup>16</sup>.

As is also evident from the words just quoted, this symbolic figure that builds around it a strong bond of identification of the Africo community is closely linked to the old village, to which, thanks to some cleaning work in recent years, especially by the Forestry Corps and volunteer associations, people return in large numbers, particularly on the feast of the saint. The attention paid to old Africo, also manifested in past years by the Aspromonte National Park, which has built an access gate in collaboration with the municipality, is an expression of an eagerness to rediscover a place - however mythologised and no longer intended for settlement - of identity foundation. Many frequent old Africo during the year, they often reach it, to see the places of their childhood and the traces of a memory, which restores a sense of identification even in the younger generations. This is how P. describes it:

Now for a few years, it seems to me that they are trying to go back to their roots, at least for those who want to, these young people, even us older ones. I didn't see the 'earthquake' either. They go there and look, maybe the daughter sees where her father used to be and vice versa, schools go there, people from that area [...] People come from all over, from the University of Reggio Calabria, they've come from the faculty of architecture, they've come several times and they've made several rounds. I mean, they are places that were suggestive, people like them. Of course, people who have suffered, not so much, but those who come for a specific reason like it, it's living nature, there's not much of it<sup>17</sup>.

16. Interview done in new Africo, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

17. Interview done in new Africo, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

And F. also confirms the care that is being shown towards the old, abandoned village:

It's clean now, as much as they cleaned most of it last year, so you can get there easily. I went as far as the house where I was born, I mean. They cleaned all those little streets, all clean. In front of the church there was a stone floor, they cleaned it all up... these are suggestive things, the village has remained virgin at the origin, as it was at the origin, I mean, there has been no change. There, as it used to be, it is, they just cleaned the houses, that's all. [...] At the Cozi, where Saint Leo used to do his penances, where he used to go to pray, which is a suggestive place. When my daughter saw it, she was enchanted, it's suggestive, it's something really suggestive, wonderful, I mean, for those who love nature in a certain way [...] and from there you can see the whole sea, when the ships go by, you can see everything [...] These are difficult places to get to, but for scholars like yourselves, it's really worth going. [...] But then we often find ourselves in the village, I mean, because we have our sanctuary, for us Saint Leo is our protector, the protector of Africo, they went yesterday, for example, to clean the church<sup>18</sup>.

From the narrative excerpts just reported, it is clear how, alongside the ethno-religious element, that of the character of a landscape is also strongly identifiable: the uncontaminated nature, the panorama, the evocative dimension, not only for those who have roots in that countryside, but objectively - the interviewees seem to say - also for those who have an interest in nature, emerge as values to be cared for and preserved through an action of care and enhancement. These are the main elements that, in their overall dynamism, define a landscape of memory for old Africo - i.e., a spatialised narrative and the object of representation by different social groups, who each build their own imprint on it. Thus, old Africo, simply cleaned up, resurfaces in all its beauty, despite the abandonment and ruins, or perhaps because of them. For these reasons, we can affirm that the construction of the Africesi identity keeps the old place as its fulcrum, especially through the feast linked to Saint Leo, and reworks this reference into the awareness of a rare landscape and natural heritage to be offered also to the outside world. One of the most interesting elements of the process of selection and memorial elaboration of the inhabitants of Africo with respect to the old village consists in a kind of conscious mythologisation of it. The old inhabitants, who were children at the time of the flood, remember very vividly the living conditions and isolation in which they found themselves and from which the displacement effectively freed them. However, they have built up a collective and individual memory of the bond with that place/landscape as a founding feature of their identity, decoupling that meaning from what the new village has assumed for them as a community of inhabitants. This is identified with the place of comfort, of civilised living conditions, of inclusion in a society that allows widespread access to education and communications. And this is undoubtedly as desirable as it could have been for a population in conditions of great hardship, but

18. Interview done in new Africo, 30<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

the mythicised beauty of the country of origin still remains as an identity trait, having to make up for what the new landscape and the new place could not so far offer.

Very different considerations must be made, however, with regard to Canolo (fig. 4), due to the fact that the old town centre has not been completely abandoned and the headquarters of some important municipal institutions, such as the schools, are still there. On the other hand, although there is a certain amount of conflict between the inhabitants of the historic centre and those of the new post-flood settlement, there has been a desire to maintain continuity with the ancient traditional practices, among which the most identifiable is bread-making. In fact, bread-making in Canolo is a practice that undoubtedly had its origin in necessity, since, understandably, in a peasant population bread is the first food needed. But bread-making takes on such importance here that it becomes a family and even community practice. And so, what structure could have been more important for maintaining this daily identity and community practice than the bakery oven? That oven was present in many homes in the old centre and became a communal oven – at the beginning, four communal ovens were installed – in the new settlement. This made it possible in the immediate future to maintain that continuity of the basic practices of daily life, which could allow the unity of the relocated population to be maintained, as attested by P.:

We have six communal ovens, which is perhaps the only commune in Calabria, because I've been to conferences, even at a professional level, to go around, to talk, to meet a lot of people, 'Do you really have communal ovens?' So, for example, here I have the receipt book: whoever wants to come, books, pays me 2.50 euro. But then it's not a tax, you pay for what? It is a tax for the management of the oven, the light bulb, the light, and also to regularise use. That is, because once in the years... this happened until 1985, before the delegation was made, before it was four ovens, a family had the key. Depending on the area, one family had it. But what happened? That if I had the need or my mother had the need to go to the bakery, what would happen? A daughter would pass by, then the other daughter, then the other daughter, and she would say 'But do you need the bakery by tomorrow? By the day after tomorrow do you need it?' So, the local authority, to remove this habit, what did it do? It picked up all the keys, and said 'the municipality manages the service', that is, I'm not interested, Giuseppe comes and says 'I need the oven tomorrow', I look at the diary, if it's free I sign it. [...] Then, following the construction of the housing, what happened? There were plots of land behind the houses - which were then sold - so whoever had the opportunity to build a garage, an appurtenance, something (because the families consisted of many members), many people built the oven. Because here it is still customary, for example, during the Easter festivities each family is used to making cakes with its own hands, the 'sgute', the famous 'sgute', cakes they are, you (aka the inhabitants of Messina) call them 'cuddura', but that is the cake. [...] In old Canolo, everyone had their own bakery, but when this village was built, the practice was maintained. [...] So there has been continuity, at first with the communal bakeries because at first there were four, now for 10-12 years or maybe more, in any case there are six. But everyone who had the opportunity - we have it



Figure 4. Canolo, Reggio Calabria (photo S. Pistidda, 2022).

at home, don't we? - everyone who had the opportunity did it. Of course, not every family, because you can't make an oven in a house like this, but those who had the chance to buy the land did. So, the tradition is still maintained<sup>19</sup>.

With respect to the baking tradition, S. L., former mayor of Canolo, also emphasises the relevance of these simple structures, which enable the maintenance of shared practices and a community-type bond:

We have to say the truth that there used to be this tradition in the old town, where there were neighbourhood bakeries, they were bakeries that, for example, I had the space and I had made the bakery, but my neighbour would make the bread at home and then come and bake it in my oven. So there was, as there is everywhere. So there was this culture. Precisely because of the fact of the buildings, which were not suitable for the mountains, they had no woodshed, the spaces outside were immense and beautiful, and still remain so. So there were these inconveniences. And so from here... it was also a culture that carried over. So there was a demand for... and the mayor at the time actually built the community ovens. We call them the communal ovens, the Municipality's ovens, which are used and maintained by the Municipality, and just to have a rule, they are brought... But the tradition is not only to make one's own bread, but to make bread within the family and friends. Today I make the bread, but for eight days I always ate fresh bread because then she made it, the aunt made it, the relative made it, and so it was passed around, and this is still the case today. For example, when the yeast was made, there were two or three people who kept the yeast, so I needed to make bread, I would go to Rosina, just to give her a name, Teresina was the lady who kept the yeast, and even today, now she's dead, now I think there's always someone who keeps the yeast and then I need it and I go there, get the yeast and then bring it back fresh, and so there's always fresh yeast going around to make bread. And as the yeast turns, so does the fresh bread for these families, for everyday use. So you always have fresh bread<sup>20</sup>.

This very light and simple intervention, from the point of view of construction, nevertheless made it possible to weave a web of continuity in the life of the community of inhabitants. What is even more relevant, although still related to the practice of bread-making, is once again the relationship with the mountain landscape. Indeed, the Canolesi, in 1951, faced with the urgency and necessity of moving to rebuild the town, which had been banned in the first place, steered firmly towards a choice that maintained the link with the mountain. Admittedly, the mountain of Canolo Nuovo is even colder and more difficult than that known in the old town, but the practices of pastoralism had already allowed them to weave over time a solid bond with that environment and landscape, thus enabling, at least from this point of view, a less traumatic transition for those who finally moved there. The bond was further strengthened, developing in other directions and practices, and today, despite the ambivalence that often connotes the inhabitants' relationship with isolated places, far from urban plots and even difficult to connect to the virtual world, the affection for the mountain

19. Interview done in Canolo Nuovo, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2012.

20. Interview done in Reggio Calabria, 27<sup>th</sup> April 2012.

landscape and the opportunities it offers especially in childhood, and then undoubtedly more limiting in the period of youth and beyond, is felt:

I'm very happy here, I lived my adolescence very well, but then when you start to grow up you begin to understand... I mean, you miss things, so you have to go down to Siderno or other places, travel a lot of kilometres, come back late at night, and you can't do that every night. [...] I like my mountains so much, I have this passion for hunting and fishing that when winter comes I'm always around, when the mushrooms come out [...] I mean, for me it's great to go to these places. Then, the family, of course. [...] When the mushrooms come out, for me it's really a passion to go and look for them, to be in the mountains, alone, because I enjoy going alone, then sometimes with my father, if not, and I have this passion. Then there's hunting, for example, that is, when it's time you go fishing, there's the stream and you go fishing, even if you couldn't, though!<sup>21</sup>.

Even for M., 30, having lived his childhood and adolescence in Canolo had a formative value, a light-heartedness and freedom that is neither comparable to nor possible for those living in an urban area:

In my opinion, a place like Canolo is an ideal place for the first years up to adolescence, because you don't have those constraints that you have in the city [...] I remember, when I was a child, you would go out to play in the meadows, in the square, in any case you lived in this protected condition, you knew that you were protected from those risks that can be in the city. So for me, until I was 16 or 17 years old, until I got my driving license, it was nice to live here, because it's surrounded by a series of attractions and you used to go to the lake to fish, you used to go to pick oregano, then to go mushrooming, but you have fun because you go there with your friends and you feel free, you feel [...] you have fun, basically<sup>22</sup>.

Thus, a landscape of memory is drawn in this place, perhaps a little hidden from the quick glance of an outsider.

### *The relationship between memory, identity and foreignness*

And it is precisely on the role of the "outsider" and his gaze that we would like to dwell in closing these pages. In fact, if, on the one hand, it is true that the collective narratives elaborated within communities are fundamental to understanding how the memory and identity of a group of inhabitants are constructed in relation to their place; on the other hand, it is equally relevant to consider the vision that the outsider formulates, when he or she stands in relation to this complex of collective representations. In this way, too, a form of inhabiting a territory is constructed that is quite peculiar and different from that of the original or second-generation inhabitants. The outsider, in fact,

21. Interview done to R., 21 yers old, in new Canolo, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2012

22. Interview done in new Canolo, 24<sup>th</sup> March 2012.

can assume different positions within this dynamic: a position of observer that solicits remembrance and narration; a position of provocation and/or mediation of internal conflicts within communities and groups; a position of critical solicitation of the processes of memorial reconstruction; and, again, a position of positive reinforcement to the action of caring for and enhancing the inhabitants/place relationship. In this regard, in picking up on what has already been pointed out in the previous paragraphs, attention will be focused on the particular vocation of a specific type of outsider, namely the scholar, the outsider who approaches the community of inhabitants with a wealth of specialised issues and skills.

First of all, when using the term "foreigner", reference is made to a specific conception of foreignness, which can be condensed into the definition of "foreigner" proposed by the sociologist Simmel: «The union of the near and the far that every relation among people contains is achieved here in a configuration that formulates it most briefly in this way: The distance within the relationship means that the near is far away, but being a stranger means that the distant is near»<sup>23</sup>.

When Simmel refers to the closeness of the foreigner, he means that closeness which unites him with others as a man, a member of the same species, connoted by the same general traits. Distance, on the other hand, is inherent in those cultural, historical, etc. traits that distinguish him in his particular dimension from the rest of mankind. This peculiar composition of proximity and distance identified in the figure of the stranger, who represents the outsider par excellence, also gives him a greater freedom with respect to the internal members of the group: in fact, this condition of "objectivity" - to borrow Simmel's words - with respect to the circles of natives, more bound to habits, practices, consolidated prejudices, is more simply a form of freedom, which allows him to imagine differently, more dynamically and with less internal pressure. Thanks to this positioning, the stranger – the distant person who becomes near, fixing himself in space and duration – is able to insinuate other possibilities within the group of insiders, thus activating a process of "re-enchantment with respect to spaces/places". This dynamic, in fact, springs up everywhere in society: for instance, migrant communities reinvent places left empty by the insiders and structure their own activities or community lifestyles there, especially in open spaces such as squares; more generally, the caring action of various social groups also constructs new shared meanings for old places that have been forgotten (an example from recent years is occupied theatres). One can also trace a very peculiar action, within this type of care of places, in the role that the scholar potentially plays with respect to places of memory. The outsider/student or researcher takes a very specific approach to

23. SIMMEL 1998, p. 580 (English trans. 2009, p. 601).



Figure 5. Canolo Nuovo, Reggio Calabria (photo S. Pistidda, 2022).

the memories and physical traces of the relationship between inhabitants and place, trying first and foremost to stimulate memory and to select from it, through physical traces, such as ruins, new ways of making use of it. Indeed, what this figure solicits first and foremost is precisely the narration, the memorial reconstruction of that relationship and of the memories that those physical traces testify to. Moreover, this action takes on a particular significance because it is grafted onto the encounter between insiders and outsiders. One of the possible declinations of such an approach is precisely the intervention that can be elaborated with respect to the restoration of certain elements of the landscape of memory, as we have conceived it here, with that peculiar affective and auratic construction of the object/vein that distinguishes it as a sacred place, a condensate of the past. The encounter between social analysis of the collective memory and restoration intervention thus has great potential for enhancing the narratives of the insiders, in a difficult balance that tends to avoid the temptation of isolated design, however avant-garde this may be, from an architectural and urban planning point of view.

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