

## LA CONQUESTA DEL POL SUD

## A LAND FULL OF HEROES



*Europe was once a border between two visions of the world.  
Europe was once the front line between opposing ideologies.*

*And today?*

*When we think of Europe, what images come to us?*

*What does Europe mean today?*

*Maybe it's still a border?*

A Land full of Heroes is a play based on the experiences and the books of the German/Romanian writer Carmen-Francesca Banciu. In 1990, she arrived in Berlin, leaving Bucharest behind after the revolution. Her life's journey is marked by rebellion: against the rigidity of the education received, against the ideological control of the party, against the limitations of artistic freedom. The experience of Carmen-Francesca Banciu traverses the collapse of the socialist regimes of Eastern Europe, and is characterised by the constant search for a new world, a new Europe. Was the Berlin of the late 1980s and early 1990s the mirage of a new European vision?

## 1. About our witness

The experiences of Carmen Francesca Banciu speak of transformation and are marked by the changes that followed the end of Soviet domination. Her identity is constructed across the gap between two worlds and on the collapse of the iron curtain.



Carmen Francesca Banciu (Lipova, Romania, 1955) is a writer. She writes in Romanian and German and lives in Berlin. She arrived in Germany in 1990, after the Romanian revolution and shortly before German unification.

Her life experience was forged in Ceausescu's Romania. Born in the bosom of a party-loyal family, her education was centred on the pillars of communist ideology. Beyond that, Banciu also studied fields as diverse as foreign trade and religious mural painting. Nonetheless, it is in literature that Banciu found a way to process and denounce the situation that surrounded her. Fiction was thus the tool that Carmen Francesca used to approach reality and avoid censorship. Her characters were drawn from her immediate surroundings, although we might say that they wore the mask of fiction.

Her literature delves into the human being, into our dreams and our wounds. This approach to the person is radical.

For example, in her 2007 work *Mother's Day. Song of a sad Mother* the author investigates through her alter ego 'Maria-Maria' her relationship with her mother, in particular, in the last days of the mother's life. Somehow, Banciu shows us how education filters down from one generation to another not only at a rational level but at a deeper level, at the level of the physical, at the most intimate level of our relationships.

Banciu uses the physicality of the maternal body to sequence her story. She transmits to us the character of the mother starting from an intimate approach to her body. Her hands, her neck, her arms, her eyes ... This anatomical 'zoom' shows how the inner world models the body.

As if we were approaching a mural painting that we could contemplate in all its detail, the works of Carmen Francesca enter the core of memory and uncover the essence of family relationships.

And through her radical introspection, the author reveals the profound elements that constitute a certain kind of education.



## **2. Themes and questions.**

The transformation of Europe after the fall of communism.

The pillars of socialist education.

The relationship between generations.

Literature, art, as a struggle and, also, as a flight.

Memory as narration in continuous elaboration.

With "A Land Full of Heroes" we asked ourselves about the implications of the fall of communism. In particular, we are interested in confronting ourselves with certain elements of that ideology. Can we say that, since the fall of communism, we have lost the counterweight to liberal ideology? What historical dialectic is produced in our day? Where can we find political speech?

The truth is that our history as Europeans is disturbing and fascinating at the same time.

But is there really a European identity? What is the end point of the process of transformation in which we find ourselves immersed?

What are the fundamentals of socialist education? How were they translated into the everyday lives of those who lived it? How can these ideas resonate in our current context?

### **A. The individual level**

We use those aspects of the world that connect with the life experience of Carmen Francesca.

The word. We have the author's literary universe.

The relationship with people. We work with two figures: Carmen Francesca Banciu herself and, her daughter, an actress capable of expressing herself with choreographed movement. This is because we juxtapose Carmen Francesca's words with the physicality of movement. Linked to this, we propose to work with the image of the human body, giving it a poetic value.

The figure of Carmen Francesca has a character with whom she can dialogue. We are interested in addressing the question of generation and a possible way to do this is to recreate the mother-daughter relationship either set in the present (Banciu is mother of a daughter), or by building moments of the relationship between our witness and her alter ego in the past.

These simple theatrical games offer us a powerful narrative mechanism. Carmen Francesca summons on stage, for example, her aspirations and her ideology in the past and, on the other hand, expresses the difficulties of inter-generational communication with her daughter in the present.

Finally, the search for one's own voice. The medium of song has a strong symbolic value in the piece. In Carmen Francesca's experience, singing assumes the metaphorical value of freedom. In her education, singing was considered to be harmful. We explore the possibilities of this moment, interspersing brief moments sung between scenes or as a sound counterpoint in more visual content passages.

### **B. The collective level: a 'road trip' through Central Europe.**

What is Europe?

For us it is a great contradiction. On the one hand it can be seen as a great cemetery, thousands of graves accumulated in the ongoing wars. On the other, Europe can be seen as the peak of Western culture, philosophy and art.

In what spaces does the individual story of Carmen Francesca come into contact with our collective history?

Through the trip, an element of our DNA as a company, we will connect the experience of Carmen Francesca with our own, tinged with our origins, also something hybrid: German and Argentine in the case of Eugenio, Spanish and Italian in the case of Carles. Our vision, our questions, our impressions in transit, will be added to hers. We will create a parallel between introspection and our journey over the ground, between the plane of memory of Carmen Francesca's narrative and the exterior world, the landscape, the Europe of the 21st century.

The image, the anatomy of a territory.

To Carmen Francesca's narrative we contrast the images and the original materials of our road trip through Central Europe, a journey of about 1800 km between Berlin and Bucharest, passing through Dresden, Vienna, Budapest ... touring some of the most significant places in the life story of Carmen Francesca and in recent European history.

We use the image also at the poetic level, especially centered on the body as a theme, the human body as a 'map'. We investigate the expressive possibilities of the world that Carmen Francesca creates in Mother's Day, establishing a parallel between a journey through human corporality and a 'real' trip over territory, a trip through Europe.



# **A Land Full of Heroes**

## **Dramaturgy, playwrighting and creation:**

Carmen-Francesca Banciu  
Carles Fernández Giua  
Eugenio Szwarczer  
Meda G. Banciu

## **Cast:**

Carmen Francesca Banciu  
Meda G. Banciu

## **Director:**

Carles Fernández Giua

## **Set & Video Design:**

Eugenio Szwarczer

## **Costume Design:**

La Conquesta del Pol Sud

## **Sound Design:**

Santiago Blaum

## **Lighting Design:**

Luis Martí

## **Choreographer:**

Tamara Saphir

## **Assistant Director /Dramaturgy:**

David Magnus

## **Production:**

Lucila Guichon

## **Supporters:**

University of Birmingham,  
Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)  
Théâtre La Cité (Marseille)  
Forum Jacques Prévert (Carros)  
Théâtre des Doms (Avignon)  
Théâtre Jean Vilar (Vitry sur Seine)  
La Conquesta del Pol Sud  
Winning show of the call for projects Le Réel Enjeu

## **I. Conceptual framework for the work of La Conquesta del Pol Sud**

*Our starting point at an ideological level is to avoid intermediaries. In other words, how can the theatre guide us towards a direct understanding of the world? How can we offer the viewer, a part of society, the opportunity to draw conclusions by directly accessing the sources?*

*La Conquesta del Pol Sud is a theatre company created in 2009 by Carles Fernández Gíua and Eugenio Szwarcer. Our performances combine the experience of real-life testimonies on stage with journalistic investigation.*

The central theme in our pieces is the relationship between the individual and the collective. The former is provided by the life experience of our witnesses. The latter emerges from the company's work with documentary sources. We are interested in finding the points of contact between one and the other. In other words, we are interested in juxtaposing individual experience with certain facts of collective relevance. In our performances, history is embodied in the voices of those giving testimony. Together, we build scenic moments that move between factual details and individual emotions. In our assemblies there are no intermediaries. On stage there are no 'actors' who interpret emotions, sensations and characters. La Conquesta del Pol Sud constructs its performances from the direct experience of individuals, who, via the symbolic space of the stage, relate to the public. Together with us, those giving testimony are authors of our pieces. This shared authorship is essential to preserve the ethical integrity of our work. The narrative that emerges from our performances has been previously agreed in depth.

Maybe we live more surrounded by fiction than we think. In the digital age, our sources of information are limited to what we observe through a screen.

Perhaps the theatre can offer a space for reality.

Reality also breaks through onto the stage through our own direct experiences arising during our documentation trip: an unequivocal and irreplaceable part of the originality of the work of La Conquesta del Pol Sud.

The trip is designed as an essential part of the creation process. Through the trip, members of the company's creative team enter the world of the witness and become part of it. In the first person, they confront other perspectives; they forge experiences and their own vision that enter into dialogue with those of the protagonist of the piece.

Finally, with regard to form, we use all the languages that the particular context can offer; our work is marked by eclecticism. Throughout our development as a company, we have perfected the integration of the image projected on stage, turning it into a character in itself. We combine archive images and others, most of them obtained by us in our process of documentation. We use brief dialogues and theatrical scenes based on improvisation. We play games with objects and create moments descriptive of the spaces we have visited ... We are interested in creating a performance as rich and complex as possible, with both informative moments and those of great poetic and visual power. In our work, then, the notion of 'assembly' is essential, that is, a combination of the various elements, the dialogue established between the different languages: how the word coexists with the image, the movement with the sound, an interview with a witness statement, etc. Our work seeks to create an ideal space for the viewer to build associations, contrasts and conflicts between these elements, so that, perhaps, from all this the rare poetry of reality emerges.

We like to see in our documentary theatre a form of knowledge that brings together reason and emotion in the same space.