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Macro Asilo - Sala Cinema
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Words4link - Scritture migranti per l'integrazione
**EUROPEAN SEMINAR FOR EXCHANGE
OF GOOD PRACTICES**
SEMINAR PROCEEDINGS

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Greetings from Mercedes Giovinazzo

The European seminar for the exchange of good practices, held in Rome on October 17, 2019, at the Macro Asilo, opens with the projection of the video *An intimate landscape*, curated by Marco Trulli, a selection of works by young artists on the Mediterranean landscape: Vajiko Chachkhiani, Liryk Dela Kruz, Sirine Fat-touh, Randa Maddah and Nuvola Ravera.

Each of them, even metaphorically, through the video, expressed the history and fears that characterize the vision of the place where we live.

The screening of the videos introduces the participants and the invited artists to the seminar theme: migrant writing.

The Words4link project, in fact, aims to identify and subsequently disseminate good practices aimed at promoting authors with a migration experience in their personal life.

They are artists born in Italy to foreign parents, or born abroad and then emigrated to Italy.

Presentation of the project, by Elisabetta Degli Esposti Merli and Sandra Federici

The idea for the project came from Franco Pittau, founder of the IDOS Study and Research Center. It was April 2018 and Italy was perceived as a place of strong social tensions.

A survey conducted by IPSOS PA, on the perception of the migratory phenomenon by Italian citizens, showed that only 17% of them were in favor of helping asylum seekers (https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2018-08/italyitfinal_digital.pdf). Furthermore, according to research by the Carta di Roma Association and the Pavia Observatory, only 7% immigration reportage gave voice to people of migrant origin (<http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/notizie-without-lan-ding-on-vii-report-card-to-rome/>).

From the need to build positive and different narratives of migration, the idea of the project partners was born to re-launch migrant writings, which were no longer spoken of.

The Words4link project is co-financed by the Ministry of the Interior and the Asylum and Migration Fund 2014-2020 and develops over a three-year period.

The first year includes a mapping of migrant writers present in Italy, currently operating or who have been operating in the last ten years. This action has already been carried out by the IDOS Study and Research Center and published online on the website www.words4link.it in a database. This database is on-going and any writer of migrant origin, if in possession of the requisites foreseen by the project, can send his/her application to be included in it.

The database contains the information of over 200 actors as well as libraries, associations and publishing houses, and wants to be a tool for the meeting and the circulation of information. For each author, in fact, there is a personal file in which, in addition to their bibliography, there are contacts and/or web address to reach them.

This operating mode differentiates the Words4link database from BASILI&LIMM created in 1997 by Ar-

mando Gnisci, Mia Lecomte and others and now hosted by *El Ghibli* magazine, one of the first journals of migrant authors.

The second year will be dedicated to workshops, creative writing and self promotion workshops, to contribute and give support to authors who want to make themselves known. Finally, in the third and final year some publications will be produced containing the good practices collected during these years.

The Words4link project is carried out by: Lai-momo, project leader, based in Bologna, IDOS, partner, based in Rome, the Mediterranean Cultural Association also a partner, based in Messina. To these realities is added a network of subjects active in cultural promotion that includes Eks&Tra, Razzismo Brutta Storia, Le Réseau and BJCEM (Biennial of Young Artists from Europe and the Mediterranean).

By connecting to the website www.words4link.it, it is possible to have all the information on the project and consult the database by clicking on the "research" section.

Introduction to the debate, by Roberta Sangiorgi

In opening the debate, Roberta Sangiorgi, president of the Eks&Tra association, has highlighted the importance of personal culture as a tool to develop one's own critical sense and actively participate in the political life of the country.

Reading the texts of these writers invites the reader to think about himself or herself. It is not just a matter of addressing the issue of the Middle East or the Mediterranean area. Just in these days, for example, there have been violent clashes in Barcellona for the independence of Catalonia.

In a complex context like the one we live in, creating one's own opinion, and deepening it, is as important as asking the political institutions for greater responsibilities.

The definition of the object of the project, "the migrant writings", is one of the possible ways to try to define a complex phenomenon to which each artist contributes in a different way. Here at Macro Asilo have been invited personalities who have a particularly significant professional and life path. Listening to their respective experiences, the different personal choices and the trajectories followed in their career, we try to bring up ideas and good practices to make known migrant writers.

The first to speak was Professor Hanan Kassab-Hassan, who has 35 years of academic teaching, research and managerial experiences in the cultural field. In particular, it is known for teaching at the University of Damascus and at the Higher Institute of Dramatic Arts in Syria, it also had several collaborations with some universities in Syria and Lebanon, such as Saint Joseph University in Beirut and Holy Spirit University of Kaslik.

Hassan-Kassab also received a doctorate in theatre disciplines from the Sorbonne in Paris in 1983. The professor was also director of the Damascus Opera House (2009-2011), Secretary General of the fe-

stival of the Arab capital of culture of Damascus for the year 2008 (2007-2009) and dean of the Higher Institute of Dramatic Art (2006-2009). Kassab-Hassan has directed several theatre shows; she has translated numerous theatrical texts from French into Arabic and vice versa and is one of the women featured in the Dictionary of Creative Women, published in France (2012).

Despite the significant personal career of the speaker, the intervention of Hassan-Kassab focused on the enhancement of Syrian artistic production.

Hanan Kassab-Hassan

In 2012, the Syrian population began a real revolution against the Soviet socialist model, which until then had control of the country, to achieve the establishment of democracy.

Years of resistance begin for Syria, the wall of fear was broken down and the road to freedom was undertaken. For this reason, every Syrian artist felt the need to talk about the conflict he was experiencing first-hand. The price to pay for dealing openly with democracy and rights, however, has forced most of them to leave Syria to take refuge in Europe.

The panorama of artists presented by Hassan-Kassab ranges from short stories to films, from theatre to visual arts and music.

Among the writers we mention Samar Yazbek, whose short stories have been translated into several languages. In 2012 Yazbek won the "Pinter International Writer of Courage Award" with her book *A woman in the Crossfire: Diaries of the Syrian Revolution*.

The story is about a woman who participated in the first four months of the Syrian intifada. With *The Blue Pen*, Yazbek was nominated, in 2018, for third place in the "Woman French Award".

The Blue Pen tells the story of Rima, a girl who can't stop walking enough to force her mother, for fear of losing her, to always take her with her or to have her checked in her absence.

During an attack, while they were together, the mother loses her life while Rima, despite being saved, remains disfigured forever.

Through the book *The Crossing. My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria*, the author recounts her journey as an illegal immigrant across the Turkish border, to return to Syria and see for herself what had happened during her stay in Europe.

Another famous Syrian writer is Khaled Khalifa who received positive reviews from international critics with his first novel, *The Guardian of Deception* (1993).

His novel *Madih al-Karahiya* won the attention of the world press in 2006: translated into 8 languages, he was nominated for the "International Award for Fiction in Arabic", and for the "Independent Foreign Fiction Award". With *No Knives in the City's Kitchens* (2013), Khalifa won the "Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature"; the text was subsequently translated into French, Dutch and English. The book will also be published in Italian.

His latest novel, *Death Is Hard Work*, was published in 2015. Khalifa, besides a well-known writer, is also

politically active in the peaceful opposition movement to the Bashar al-Assad regime.

Damascene writer Rosa Yaseen Hassan is also committed against the regime, after studying architecture at the university and graduating in 1998, she worked as a journalist writing for several Syrian and Arab periodicals. In 2000 the author published her first book containing a series of short stories and titled *A Sky Tainted With Light*. Hassan also wrote a series of novels, starting with *Ebony* (2004), with which he won the "Hanna Mina Prize". His third novel *Hurras al-Hawa* (2009) has been included in the longlist for the "Arab Booker Prize". In 2009, Hassan was chosen for Beirut39, a group of 39 Arab writers under 40 chosen through a competition organized by *Banipal* magazine and the Hay Festival.

Complaints against the Al-Assad regime also take shape in the theatre.

The playwright and journalist Mohammad Al Attar, together with the director Omar Abusaada, has done an important job with twenty Syrian women former refugees in refugee camps. None of them, before that moment, had ever walked the art scene.

The women and the two artists, inspired by Greek tragedies, gave birth to three plays: *Efigenia*, *Antigone of Syria* and *Queens of Syria*.

The latter represents an Arab adaptation of the Euripide tragedy *The Trojan Women*. The theatrical work carried out is not only a precious testimony of Syrian life during the war, but has represented, for the protagonists, a real therapeutic work on themselves. In 2014 *Queens of Syria* was represented at CERN in Geneva and will also soon arrive in the United Kingdom.

The couple of artists also gave birth to another important theatrical work entitled *The Factory*, in which they tell the story of the cement factory inaugurated by the French interest company Lafarge in northern Syria. In this representation the Syrian actors take the stage to tell a dark business game, against the background of a broken country.

Al Attar and Abusaada also made an interesting video documentary entitled *Could You Please Look Into the Camera?*, in which ex-prisoners are interviewed to tell about the torture they suffered during their captivity, in the hands of the Bashar Al-Assad regime.

The conditions of detention and the torture suffered are sadly protagonists also in Ramzi Choukair's *X-Adra*. The artist portrays the story of former Syrian inmates in Adra prison. These are activists condemned for having openly expressed their dissent.

With a much more sarcastic cut, the Syrian poet and playwright Liwaa Yazji with *Goats* exhibits a unique representation. After observing some bizarre customs of the Syrian war, Yazji gave shape to what struck her most: the custom of sacrificing a goat for every member of the family killed during the war. At the Royal Court in London, the poet used real goats on stage, leaving everyone speechless.

Syrian film production has also been very successful. The director Soudade Kaadan, with *The Day I Lost my Shadow*, after winning the audience, was awarded the "World Fiction Award" (2018). In the same year he also won the "Leone del Futuro" (Venice Prize first work "Luigi De Laurentiis").

The film tells the story of a young Syrian mother who tries to raise her son in a Damascus disfigured by war. Living conditions are difficult, especially for the numerous blackouts of water and electricity. One day, going in search of a gas cylinder for cooking, the protagonist will find herself in the outskirts of the city, far from her son, where she will face some dramatic events.

The director also made the short film *Aziza* with which she won the "Grand Jury Prize" at the Sundance Film Festival.

For Sama is the film by Waad Al Kateab, a 26-year-old Syrian director, in which he recounts his rebellious life in the city of Aleppo during the years of the uprising.

Sama is the name of her daughter, to whom the director dedicated the film. The film was very successful because the scenes were filmed with the director's video camera, during his visits to hospitals for Sama's pregnancy and birth.

The film review ends with the film by Talar Derki *Of Fathers and Sons - Children of the Caliphate*. The director, pretending to be a supporter of jihad, lived for two years with a family of radical Islamists, where the father educated his children to war.

In the figurative arts category, artists such as the sculptors Khaled Dawwa and Khaled Omran are mentioned; the painter Azza Abo Rebieh, who during his detention in Assad's prison painted the house he saw from the window of his cell. With *Four Acts for Syria*, a real visual journey, Ke-vork Mourad instead realizes a tribute to the country that has hosted three generations of his family. The common thread that links these artists' careers is their strong determination to denounce, using arts, the horrors of the war in Syria. The diffusion of their works takes place in an atypical, almost automatic way, compared to that of artists from other countries who struggle more to make themselves known.

In their case it is the same international news that, hungry for news, pushes them to a tight production. All this certainly guarantees a lot of audience for Syrian artists, but it can compromise the originality and quality of their works.

Roberta Sangiorgi

From the pressure that involves Syrian writers, we move on to the speech of the poet Mia Lecomte, to tackle migrant writing from another point of view. To the expression "migrant" literature, Lecomte prefers that of "transnational" literature and to explain what she means, she quotes to the words of Dubravka Ugresic, Croatian naturalized Dutch writer: «A vast gray area of non-territorial literature grows in European literary interstices and beyond; this area is inhabited by ethnically inauthentic migrant authors, writers in exile, writers who belong simultaneously to two cultures, bilingual authors who write neither from here nor from there, in any case beyond the border of their national literatures. While European thinkers try to define the turbulent processes of literary migration, using, in the absence of better terms, the old Goethian term of "world literature", the babelic cacophony of new incomprehensible and terrible concepts that makes its way - postnational units, transnational units, border mobilization, paranational units - becomes more and more numerous.»

Mia Lecomte is a French-born poet and writer with an important history of publications behind her. Among them *Intanto il tempo* (2012), *Al Museo delle relazioni interrotte* (2016), the collection of short stories *Cronache da un'impossibilità* (2015) and the children's book *Gli spaesati* (2019). Translator from French, she carries out criticism and editorial activities in the field of transnational literature and poetry to which she dedicated *Di un poetico altrove. Poesia transnazionale italofo- nna* (1960-2016), in which she performs a poetic mapping of foreigners in Italy from the 1960s to 2016. She is curator of anthologies *Ai confini del verso. Poesia della migrazione in italiano* (2006), *Sempre ai confini del verso. Dispatri poetici in italiano* (2011). She is also among the founders of the migrant writers magazine *El Ghibli*, as well creator and member of the Compagnia delle poete (www.compagniadellepoete.com), a theatrical poetic *ensemble* united by writing in Italian and which, together with Mia, includes twenty authors of international origin. With their representations the poets bring authentic texts on stage, reciting them and telling them to the public without filters or censorship. Their first show was *Matrigne* followed by *Novunque*, while they are currently on stage with *La casa fuori*.

Mia Lecomte

Lecomte immediately wanted to clarify that migrant writing in the Italian context is not new. In fact, the Albanian author Gezim Hajdari won the "Eugenio Montale prize" already in 1997.

Lecomte's position on the topic is clear: integration and acceptance are out-dated concepts. Who could establish the border between us and the other? The Compagnia delle poete represents the symbol of this overcoming. Among them we do not think in terms of "groups", but we work on equal terms. Each brings with it the experience of its country of origin which, combined with that of the others, conveys to the public a fusion of different traditions. This is considered good practice. Indeed, the identity of an artist is often confused with the language in which he/she expresses himself, but this is incorrect. She herself, when presented to the public as Italian, finds it difficult to recognize herself in this definition, because although writing in Italian, she is of French origin.

Still on the subject of good practices, after the theatrical experience, Lecomte tells of the Italian-French transnational agency *Linguafranca*, (www.linguafrancaonline.org) founded by her and other colleagues. The agency aims to promote migrant authors and texts and also involve the publishing sector in good practices. The involvement of the publishing houses was in fact designed to overcome the often widespread habit of trivializing the author's language, in order to convey an ethically correct message, but far from the literal translation of the text.

Roberta Sangiorgi

Researcher Walid Nabhan, who takes the floor immediately after Lecomte, also found himself involved in the transition from the use of one language to another. In his case, there were even more than one languages used. Born in Amman, Jordan in 1966, the son of Palestinian refugees who emigrated during the Naqba, Nabhan arrived in Malta in 1990 as a science student. He then studied biomedical sciences at the University of Bristol in England and holds a master's degree in human rights from the University of Malta,

where he currently lives.

The shifts that characterized his life led the Jordanian writer to call himself a third or fourth generation immigrant.

Nabhan has published two books of short stories in Maltese *Back Home and Other Short Stories which Never Happened* (2009) and *A Voice of Clay* (2012), a book of poems *On My Way to Her* and two novels *The De-Railed* in 2017 and *The Exodus of Storks* in 2013.

Walid Nabhan

Despite the success achieved, Nabhan says he encountered difficulties in his career as an artist and as a foreigner.

The first obstacles arose in Jordan, a country of Muslim faith like Palestine, during his adolescence, when the Palestinian origins of his parents became a reason for discrimination against him. During his studies in Malta, then, as an Arab, Nabhan had to measure himself with the prejudices of his university professor. Fortunately, the ransom came when he took the highest grade of the whole class at his exam.

The island of Malta, where the author currently lives, is a place of strong social tensions for the numerous daily landings of asylum seekers. Despite being a small island, with less than half a million inhabitants, Malta does not make it just a matter of space. Islanders tend to be suspicious of foreigners because they fear that immigrants may steal their jobs. Yet, to consider it an unfounded fear, it would suffice to observe that foreigners carry out jobs to which the Maltese no longer dedicate themselves.

Nabhan, who initially made writing a personal passion, understood that by sharing his texts he could bring down all forms of prejudice, including those of Maltese fellow citizens.

Having reached this awareness, however, finding a publisher was not easy and the publication of the first book in the Maltese language took place at his expense.

The mistrust nurtured by the publishing houses towards it was subsequently rewarded with the victory of the "Malta National Book Prize" (2014) and the "European Union Prize for Literature" (EUPL- 2017) with the book *The Exodus of Storks*. The text has also been translated into English and in the near future it will also be translated into Italian.

This story recalls that of the writer Josè de Sousa Saramago, winner of the "Nobel Prize for Literature" in 1998, whose last novel was published after his death because, until the Nobel's arrival, the publisher did not believe in the skills of the author.

Walid Nabhan's literary experience is undoubtedly another example of tenacity, because, despite the difficulties encountered, he has persistently continued to use writing to break down any form of ignorance and prejudice. His experience wants to be a practice to keep alive and to spread.

Roberta Sangiorgi

To close this review of interesting personal and professional experiences, we give the floor to Candelaria

Romero.

Writer, playwright and actress, Candelaria was born in Argentina in 1973 to poet parents and soon began her migration to Europe.

It was 1976, when the dictatorship arrived in Argentina and Romero with her family was forced to emigrate to Bolivia, where they remained until 1980. From 1981 until 1992 they moved to Sweden and then to Italy, where Candelaria Romero currently lives.

Candelaria Romero

The author focuses on her family history, which in itself represents good practice.

Her parents and even before her ancestors were poets and they used to meet in front of the fireplace, to tell stories.

This practice continued during her stay in Bolivia, where the experiences of the country of origin were mixed with Bolivian traditions, giving life to real intercultural stories.

Subsequently, the narrative space widened, also involving political institutions, radios, large newspapers and schools.

Upon the arrival of the dictatorship also in Bolivia, the Romero family moved to Sweden.

Here Candelaria, at the age of seven, began her artistic training by graduating in 1991 at the Södra Latin Dramatic Art Gymnasium in Stockholm. She deepens her studies of theatre and dance in Denmark, Spain and Italy.

Together with Mia Lecomte and others, she founded *El Ghibli* magazine.

In 2010 she published a dramaturgical collection, entitled *Poetics and civil theater*, three monologues for Amnesty and Survival. In the same year she also published *Poems from the end of the world*, a poetic collection.

Her writings are included in *L'italiano degli altri*, project published by Treccani and promoted by the Accademia della Crusca and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Italy.

She participates in the Compagnia delle poete by Mia Lecomte and together, in 2012, they present the company in the USA, Paris and Rabat.

In 2014 she released her second poetic collection *Salto mortale*.

Throughout her life Candelaria writes in Spanish, Swedish, English and Italian.

The writing activity then becomes a personal and intimate moment, letting the theatre space reach the public.

From the age of 19, Candelaria worked as a professional actress and, in December 2008, she won the national "Bianca Maria Pirazzoli" award for best actress.

In 2013 she created the cultural volunteer project "Il circolo dei narratori" for which, in 2017, she received the honor of merit from the city of Bergamo. Inside the club, participants are invited to tell stories and involve other people in doing the same.

In this way, Candelaria keeps the family tradition of spreading the stories alive and involves readers in the knowledge of writing, including migrant writing. A good practice to consider.

In addition to individual experience, writing can also take place collectively, combining the texts of multiple authors or creating one with the collaboration of multiple artists. Collective writing can also be an original way to spread the knowledge of migrant writers to the public of readers.

Discussion

In this regard, opening the discussion, Roberta Sangiorgi adds that the 5th edition of the "Collective & Mixed Breed Workshop" has been launched in Bologna, promoted by the Eks&Tra association, of which Sangiorgi is president, in collaboration with the University of Bologna. The goal is to create a moment of aggregation and exchange of respective experiences. Everyone can participate, regardless of age, origin or university enrolment.

The laboratory takes up the SIC - Collective Industrial Writing method - conceived by Gregorio Magini and Vanni Santoni, in which stories and novels are made through the joint work of several people.

A reflection of this collective experience is also found in the Compagnia delle Poete where, more than in writing, there is a moment of sharing in the part dedicated to the script development and the adaptation of the text. In those moments, the poets try to identify the expression that best expresses their poetic fusion, without unbalancing themselves in favor of one tradition rather than another.

Candelaria Romero finds this collective modality in her narrative circles while Nabhan, although he does not have direct experience of it, mentions the collective drafts of the events of the Gaza Strip and the collections of short stories, to commemorate the people who died in the conflict.

These include *Gaza writes back - Stories of young authors and authors from Gaza, Palestine*, edited by Refaat Alareer.

Walid Nabhan adds that not everyone feels able to participate in a group project. There are people who dedicate themselves to writing even in the chaos of a city bar and are probably more inclined to collective writing, but many others need to gather in solitude, to get in touch with their emotions.

The conference, in addition to the personal testimonies of each artist, is enriched with interesting ideas with public interventions.

Ugo Fracassa, researcher of the university Roma Tre, tells of his book on migrant writing entitled *Patria e lettere. Per una critica della letteratura postcoloniale e migrante in Italia* (2012).

The researcher considers it necessary to remember what he thinks is the title of the migrant writing par excellence, in which a Brazilian transsexual recounts her life in Italy and the period of detention in Rebibbia prison. This woman was Fernanda Farias de Albuquerque and that book is *Princesa*.

Its history has become famous thanks to the song by Fabrizio De Andrè with the homonymous title. The

text had reached the singer-songwriter even before being published; De Andrè had asked Renato Curcio, the sociologist, who had created a real creative writing laboratory in the prison. Over time, the book has inspired the creation of a film and two documentaries. Twenty years after the first publication, Fracassa has created a multimedia edition of the book which, thanks to academic funding, has become a real website that can be consulted at www.princesa20.it. Thanks to a collaboration with a translation atelier in Marseille, the book has been translated into French and is looking for publication.

The discussion ends with the speech by Farid Adly, president of the Mediterranean Cultural Association, partner of the project, recounting his experience on the radio after arriving in Italy. Broadcasted on *Radio Popolare*, one of the first to deal with political issues from below, the broadcast *Radio Shabi* had the task of integrating the Arab minority that had just arrived in Italy through the first migratory flows. This editorial initiative had the disadvantage of cutting out almost all the listeners, but the newly arrived migrants had the opportunity to get to know each other and get to know the country better.

The frequency of *Radio Shabi* was daily and the broadcast lasted 30 minutes, subsequently became weekly and finally closed. The journalist speaks of it as one of the most significant experiences he has experienced personally in Italy and indicates it as a possible channel for spreading, together with others, migrant writing.



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