

Migration, writers and literature: narratives of translingualism

Gioia Panzarella
University of Warwick

Summer School “Migrants, Human Rights And Democracy”, 20-24 June 2016

My research



_ Kossi Komla-Ebri meets a group of students

http://www.rubenet.it/leggende/Kossi%20Komla-Ebri_incontro.htm

- “Disseminating Migration Literature: A Dialogue with Contemporary Italy”
 - Focus on:
 - The role of the author/the text
 - Aims and audience of the event

“Migration literature”?



Maria Cristina Mauceri and Maria Grazia Negro, *Nuovo immaginario italiano: italiani e stranieri a confronto nella letteratura italiana contemporanea* (Roma: Sinnos, 2009).

- Translingualism
- Migration as a ‘theme’

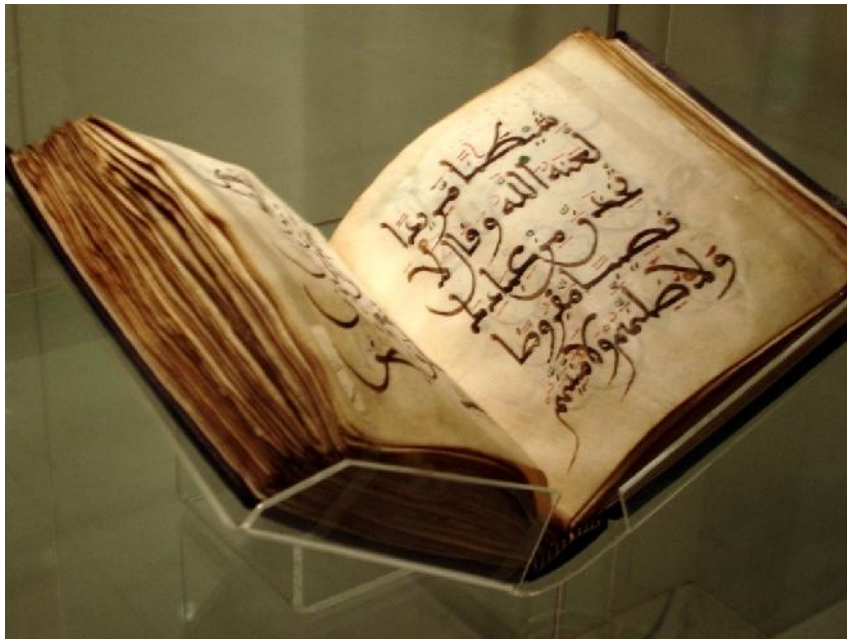
‘In an age of migration all literature, written by migrants as well as nonmigrants, is potentially a literature of migration’

Frank (2010: 52)

A case study: *Centro Culturale Multietnico La Tenda*

- Part of the Schools without Borders network (Milan)
- Dergano-Bovisa-Maciachini (high percentage of immigrants)
- Book launches with the authors to promote cultural understanding.

Activity (30 mins)



- Keywords
- Key concepts
- Traces of other languages/cultures
- ...

Participants (50 people) work in pairs on an excerpt [3 novels + 1 short story, see next slides]. Then the discussion within pairs starts, each pair discusses their excerpt and presents it to the others. In the final phase of the workshop, each participant chooses one keyword or one concept and shares it. Final comments on the texts are encouraged.

1. Gabriella Ghermandi, *Queen of Flowers and Pearls: A Novel*, transl. by Giovanna Bellesia-Contuzzi and Victoria Offredi Poletto (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2015)
2. Amara Lakhous, *Clash of Civilizations over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio*, transl. by Ann Goldstein (New York: Europa Editions, 2008)
3. Cristina Ali Farah, *Little Mother: A Novel*, transl. by Giovanna Bellesia-Contuzzi and Victoria Offredi Poletto (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011)
4. Julio Monteiro Martins, 'The Other Barack', transl. by Gioia Panzarella, in *Sagarana La Lavagna del Sabato* no. 627, 2 December 2014. <http://www.sagarana.net/anteprimal.php?quale=226>

... thank you!

G.Panzarella@warwick.ac.uk

[http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/modernlanguages/people/
postgraduate/panzarella/publications/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/modernlanguages/people/postgraduate/panzarella/publications/)

THE TRUTH ACCORDING
TO PARVIZ MANSOOR SAMADI

A few days ago—it was barely eight o'clock in the morning—sitting in the metro, rubbing my eyes and fighting sleep because I'd woken up so early, I saw an Italian girl devouring a pizza as big as an umbrella. I felt so sick to my stomach I almost threw up. Thank goodness she got out at the next stop. It was really a disgusting sight! The law should punish people who feel free to disturb the peace of good citizens going to work in the morning and home at night. The damage caused by people eating pizza in the metro is a lot worse than the damage caused by cigarettes. I hope that the proper authorities do not underestimate this sensitive issue and will proceed immediately to put up signs like "Pizza Eating Prohibited," next to the ones that are so prominent at the metro entrances saying "No Smoking!" I would just like to know how Italians manage to consume such a ridiculous amount of dough morning and evening.

My hatred for pizza is beyond compare, but that doesn't mean that I hate everyone who eats it. I'd like things to be clear right from the start: I don't hate the Italians.

What I'm saying is not beside the point—far from it. I really am talking about Amedeo. Please be patient with me. As you know, Amedeo is my only friend in Rome, in fact he's more than a friend—it's no exaggeration to say that I love



CHAPTER ONE

WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL, I WAS CONSTANTLY BEING told by the three venerable elders of our household, "You are the one who is going to tell our stories."

Round the coffee pot warming on the brazier sat the women. The elders, slightly off in a corner, wrapped up in their white *shemma* and looking distinctly like protective birds, blessed the coffee for the women and took note of everything around them.

"She's very curious," whispered old Selemon with an air of satisfaction. The others agreed, slowly nodding their heads. They were well aware of that irresistible bait that hooked my soul whenever the adults used to tell stories and anecdotes about other people, and especially when they spoke about the secrets of Ato Mulugheta. But that is another story that I'll tell you some other time.

"So curious that she becomes patient!" whispered old Yohanes. The other two continued to agree, slowly nodding their heads.

I was quite capable of waiting a long time for the beginning of some tale born by chance on the lips of a woman, while she was putting down her empty cup after her first coffee.

"So curious that she becomes patient—and wily. Look at her!" whispered old Yacob, and the three pairs of eyes converged on me.

Children were not allowed to listen to the conversations of grown-ups and curiosity was considered bad manners, but I managed to listen without their noticing me. I would sit in a corner and play while the women chatted. I was able to split myself in two: on one side my body was busily absorbed in play that, to the casual observer, gave the impression that I was totally uninterested in what was going

IV

ook, Mara, can you stop bothering me saying that I'm crazy just because I once slept with Ali Baba?

As if you've never done it, but yes you did, my dear. I haven't lost my mind, have I? I remember clearly that salsa teacher in Florence, that Cuban, what's his name? He had a weird name Porfirio, yes! Cute Porfirio! Mammamia, a total hunk. And you didn't waste any time, did you? You picked him up at the first lesson!

used to call him Ali Baba because I couldn't remember his name at all. He always felt hurt by it. He wanted me to call him by his real name, Barack Ali Samoudi. In the end I had to memorize it. He used to say that Ali Baba was a thief name, and that he was poor but not a thief. Fair enough. But I was no way able to call him Barack. It felt unnatural. What did the name Barack have to do with that poor bricklayer?

He worked together with two other Moroccans to repair the walls of my house, which were about to fall apart because of the damp, the plaster was crumbling, like dissolving, falling down with all the moss that had grown on it. I showed it to you once, didn't I? Where my house is now, there was once a swamp, which was reclaimed later, but not completely. When it rains the water there becomes stagnant around the yard and the house absorbs it from the soil as if it had roots. An awful thing. The mattress and the sofa, too, they're constantly wet, soggy, frozen in the winter, the pillows and sheets, too. When it rains, some dark stains appear in less than two days behind the wardrobe and then it becomes a white peach fuzz, gross. If I continue to live in that house I'll end up getting seriously ill. But for now I have to stay here. Of course I have to! No one wants it in these conditions, and I don't have the money to rent another place. One day it'll come down, with all those rotten walls, or it'll sink into the mud and disappear. I just hope that I'll have the time to get out before that happens.

PRELUDE—DOMENICA AXAD III

SOOMALII BAAN AHAY,¹ like my half that is whole. I am the fine thread, so fine that it slips through and stretches, getting longer. So fine that it does not snap. And the tangled mass of threads widens and reveals the knots, clear and tight, that, though far from each other, do not unravel.

I am one thread in that tangled mass and my beginning belongs to the multiple one.

My beginning is Barni as we eat together from the communal dish. We are sitting on the ground next to each other and the boys are laughing at the position of my legs. On the mat my knees are touching, one leg going this way, the other that way. How come they don't break, *dalbooley*? You

1. *Soomaalii baan ahay*: "I am Somali," 1977 poem by Cabdulaqaadir Xirsi Siyaad, also known as "Yamiyam."

should see how funny she looks when she runs with her calves flapping left and right.

Barni: even the boys are frightened of her. She gets up, grabs them by the neck, and scratches them, you should see how she can scratch. Don't you dare joke around. The plate, almost full, tips over, and there goes my Barni, with that heart-shaped birthmark right in the middle of her forehead, running off to complain: Not a day goes by when you can have a meal without having to get in a fight with these bullies. I'll show you who's stronger. I tried once, I wanted to be like her, but there is only one Barni.

My beginning is the two of us slipping into the kitchen, we see the papaya split wide open with its perfectly round little seeds and so, some for you and some for me, then we run into the courtyard and we make a deep hole in the red sand; tomorrow we'll come back and perhaps, who knows,