

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

INTERDISCIPLINARY SYMPOSIUM

Polyphony and Silence

Counter-hegemonic writing practices,
migration, and multilingualism

15th – 16th MAY 2025

KU LEUVEN

STUK Arts Center

COLLAB

COLLABORATIVE PRACTICES OF MAKING LITERATURE IN CONTEXTS OF DISPLACEMENT & MIGRATION



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ERC Starting Grant Project *COLLAB*

Symposium convenors: Marialena Avgerinou & Sonja Faaren Ruud

Scientific committee: Núria Codina, Sonja Faaren Ruud, Marialena Avgerinou

Coordination: Núria Codina, Sonja Faaren Ruud, Marialena Avgerinou, Anna Sofia Churchill,
Joana Roqué Pesquer

PROGRAMME

THURSDAY 15TH MAY

9.00-9.30AM Registration & Coffee

9.30-9.45AM Opening remarks (STUK Auditorium)

9.45-10.45AM

KEYNOTE LECTURE: “Accented Thinking in Migration Studies” Shahram Khosravi (University of Stockholm)

10.45-11.15AM Coffee break (STUK café)

11.15 AM-11.45PM

POETRY PERFORMANCE “I CAN SPEAK” Marina Kazakova and Sara Maino

11.45-1.15PM

PANEL 1: LINGUISTIC RESISTANCE

Chair: Alexandra Sanchez

1. Ai Ke “Camouflage as Truth: Polyphony and Silence in Tactical Identity Among Taiwanese Migrants in China”
2. Annie Webster “Collaborative Languages of Displacement: Bridge Translations of Arabic-Scottish Poetry”
3. Calum MacLean Esler “‘Nothing means anything in English’: (Non-)Translation as Resistance in Harry Josephine Giles and KNEECAP”
4. Linh S. Nguyễn “The night my parents went to check out grave plots”

1.15-2.00PM Lunch (STUK café)

2.00-4.00PM

PANEL 2: POLITICS OF VOICE

Chair: Jonas Vanderschueren

5. Brigitte Herremans and Helge Daniëls “Presencing harm: How Palestinian Literature Counters Erasure and Invisibilisation”
6. Olha Haidamachuk “Polyphony of Ukrainians’ memories of life before the war”

7. Anita Karimi "From Monologism to Polyphony: Afghan Female Writers in the Diaspora and the Reimagining of Self"
8. Tem Mirkazemiyani, "Accumulative Voices, Plenitude of Meanings: Migration, Home, and Hope in Iranian Adaptations and Translations of Sławomir Mrożek's *The Emigrants*"
9. Jad Khairallah "Lebanese Queer Voices: A Revolution for Political Correctness?"
10. Sahar Mousa "Writing in Gaza, writing in exile"

4.00-4.30PM Coffee break (STUK café)

4.30-6.15PM

PANEL 3: TACTICS OF SILENCE

Chair: Anna Sofia Churchill

11. Simone Toji and Puo-an Francisca Wu Fu, "From Silence to Polyphony: Exploring Multilingualism and Untranslatability in Migrant Experiences"
12. Deniz Aktaş "I Speak, Therefore I Think?: On Talkability, Criticizability, and the Counters of Belonging"
13. Letizia Sassi "Aphasia as Metatextual Reflection: Exploring Identity and Trauma in Postmigrant Italian Rap"
14. Alice Königstetter "The Reluctant Refugee: Exploring Silence as Resistance in Layla AlAmmar's *Silence is a Sense* (2021)"
15. Shuangyi Li "Multilingual 'Silence' and Painterly Mediation: Sino-African Encounters in Yvonne Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea* (2019)"

6.15-7.30PM

WORKSHOP – KLANKVANGERS "Poetic-Sound Walk" (optional, depart from the STUK Auditorium)

FRIDAY 16TH MAY

9.00-10.45AM

PANEL 4: POLYPHONIC PRACTICES

Chair: Joana Roqué Pesquer

16. Ciara Barrick and Lena Grimm, "Composing Polyphonic Belonging: Reconfiguring Centers and Peripheries in Swiss and Cypriot Multilingual Projects"
17. Daniel Schmidt, Ramona Pellegrino, and David Pappalardo: "Polyphony and Silence in Action: Rethinking Language Ideologies through Artistic and Academic Dialogues"
18. Eugenia Kelbert, Marianna Deganutti, and Lazar Kovačević, "Multilingual Cognates and Modelling Reading Polyphony"
19. Raf Van Rooy, "Greek migrants in Renaissance Europe (1397–1536): Classical bilingual literature between co-creation and self-fashioning"

20. Siobhan P. McShane, "Polyphony and Silence in literature by writers in exile: how do writers in exile negotiate multiple language spaces and the spaces between languages"

10.45-11.15AM Coffee break (STUK café)

11.30AM-1.00PM

PANEL 5: COLLABORATION AND COLLECTIVE NARRATIVES

Chair: April Wanjing Jiang

21. Santiago Gutiérrez Echeverría, "Postpoetry: an online poetry writing collective"
22. Francesca Morra and Arinas Usoro, "The poison in the cake. A fragmented, collaborative writing about truths, lies, and silences"
23. Maria Loftus and Fiona Murphy, "Stories in the Making: Co-Designing AntiRacist Narratives in Graphic Forms"
24. Katherine Mackinnon, "Experiments in collective narratives: refugee history in Glasgow"
25. Gerlov van Engelenhoven "Listening to silence: tactical, affective and therapeutic silences in Dutch decolonial practice"

1.00-2.00PM Lunch (STUK café)

2.00-3.30PM

ROUNDTABLE - CO-CREATIVE WRITING ALLIANCES

Chairs: Marialena Avgerinou & Sonja Faaren Ruud

Exiled Writers Ink (Jennifer Langer, London), En Palabras (María Ríos, Barcelona), The Post Collective (Mirra Markhaeva & Elli Vassalou, Brussels), The Poetry Project (Anna Höllmüller & Theresa Rüger, Berlin)

3.30-3.45PM Closing remarks

3.45-4.15PM Coffee break (STUK café)

4.15-6.00PM

WORKSHOP – THE POST COLLECTIVE "Co-editing of The Paperless Art Alliance Contract" (STUK Ensemble Hall, optional)

OPENING REMARKS

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION TO THE *COLLAB* PROJECT:

NÚRIA CODINA SOLÀ

KU LEUVEN

INTRODUCTION TO THE SYMPOSIUM:

MARIALENA AVGERINOU & SONJA FAAREN RUUD

KU LEUVEN

Marialena Avgerinou (she/they) is a PhD candidate in Translation Studies and Social Sciences with the *COLLAB* project, conducting ethnographic research on socially engaged, multilingual, and collaborative writing projects in Belgium and England. Before this academic position Marialena was teaching English in Turin and translating between English, Greek, and Italian.

Núria Codina Solà is assistant professor of Transnational and Plurilingual Literatures in a European Context at the Translation Studies Department at KU Leuven. She is also the Principal Investigator of the ERC Starting Grant project “*COLLAB: Making Migrant Voices Heard through Literature. How Collaboration Is Changing the Cultural Field*” (2023-2028), which looks at a wide array of collaborative practices across Europe that create spaces for literary participation of migrants.

Sonja Faaren Ruud holds a PhD in Anthropology and Sociology from the Geneva Graduate Institute. As a postdoctoral researcher with the *COLLAB* project, she conducts ethnographic research into collaborative literary projects centered around migration and multilingualism in Belgium, Spain and Germany.

KEYNOTE LECTURE

ACCENTED THINKING IN MIGRATION STUDIES

SHAHRAM KHOSRAVI

UNIVERSITY OF STOCKHOLM

ACCENTED THINKING IN MIGRATION STUDIES

DR SHAHRAM KHOSRAVI, KEYNOTE SPEAKER

UNIVERSITY OF STOCKHOLM

In this talk I use accent not in terms of a linguistic meaning but rather as a position. Accent as verb means to speak forcefully, to emphasize, and to accentuate. Accent means also breaking, a disruption of mainstream language. Accent reveals gaps and cracks in the otherwise imagined intact language, conversation, thinking. Accent as method offers a way to smash what otherwise is imagined as a whole and homogenous and thereby it highlights conflicts, contradictions, and disagreements. Accented-ness is a response and a reaction to the condition of coloniality that structures the processes of knowledge production. I use 'accent as method' to frame my critique of knowledge formation in the field of migration studies.

Shahram Khosravi is professor of Anthropology at Stockholms University. His research interests include anthropology of Iran, forced displacement, border studies, and temporality. Khosravi is the author of several books such as: *Young and Defiant in Tehran* (2008); *The Illegal Traveler: an auto-ethnography of borders*, (2010); *Precarious Lives: Waiting and Hope in Iran*, (2017); *After Deportation: Ethnographic Perspectives*, Palgrave (2017, edited volume); *Waiting. A project in Conversation* (2021, edited volume), and *Seeing Like a Smuggler* (2022, edited volume). He has been an active writer in the international press. He is a co-founder of Critical Border Studies, a network for scholars, artists and activists to interact.

POETRY PERFORMANCE

I CAN SPEAK

MARINA KAZAKOVA & SARA MAINO

“I Can Speak” is a poetry performance presented by Marina Kazakova and Sara Maino. Loosely autobiographical, it incorporates poems composed and recited by the two authors, along with their individual monologues. It unfolds around memories revisited by the two poets, highlighting key moments in their lives that pushed them in discovering their own language — the language of poetry. The show is dedicated to depicting the most crucial process that every person must undergo at some point—the process of “gathering” or “concentrating” one’s personality, discovering the language of your own. This is a journey through the thorns of the contexts in which we are raised towards the stars of self-discovery. Marina does this journey from the culture of silence, the environment of the crumbling of the Soviet regime. It is in silence that poetry, like prayer, arose in her. In contrast, Sara’s poetic journey originates from the meadow of Monte Velo in Trentino, Italy — a mythical gathering place where stories are shared in a circle every Sunday. The tales shared here connect the Trentino valleys to Sicily, Africa to Lake Garda; they traverse the ocean, reach America, and then return to a thousand meters Velo. At the same time, the meadow is encircled by mountains that obscure the horizon, creating a sense of confinement. “I can speak” is both the voice of two artists in a challenging time, and the birth of a unique creative speech act.

Marina Kazakova (b. 1983, Gorky, Russia) is a Russian-born, Belgium-based poet and researcher. Her work has been published internationally in magazines and journals, and she is the author of two books on art research: *SYMPHONISM as a Strategy of Translating a Lyric Poem into Drawings* (frACTalia Press, 2022) and *Symphonism as a Strategy of Translating a Lyric Poem into an Audio-Visual Aria* (frACTalia Press, 2023).

Sara Maino (b. Arco, Italy, 1970) is a versatile Italian artist and educator. With a background in philosophy from the University of Trento, she brings over 30 years of experience in the performing arts. Her poetry performances and theatrical productions have taken her across Europe, Georgia, Armenia, South Korea, India, and Brazil.

PANEL 1

LINGUISTIC RESISTANCE

CHAIR:
ALEXANDRA SANCHEZ
GHENT UNIVERSITY

Alexandra Sanchez is an Assistant Professor of Audiovisual Translation at Ghent University (UGent). Her research explores how language, identity, and power intersect in transnational media, with a focus on translation as a form of resistance.

CAMOUFLAGE AS TRUTH: POLYPHONY AND SILENCE IN TACTICAL IDENTITY AMONG TAIWANESE MIGRANTS IN CHINA

AI KE

UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW

This research examines the migration experiences and the everyday identity work of younger generation Taiwanese in Mainland China through the lens of polyphony and silence, focusing on identity negotiation in trans-Strait encounters. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork, the study explores how Taiwan Mandarin accents function as both markers of difference and tools for navigating complex sociopolitical landscapes.

Migrants strategically mobilize their polyglot language resources to adapt to various social contexts, balancing the need to "pass" as locals with the desire to preserve their dignity and distinctiveness. Polyphony is expressed in their audible identities, where multiple linguistic registers coexist, enabling them to negotiate belonging while maintaining agency in cross-Strait interactions. At the same time, silence emerges in the form of unspoken refusals or omissions, resisting hegemonic narratives and nationalist framings.

The study introduces the concept of tactical identity to highlight how these migrants employ language as a dynamic resource for navigating cultural boundaries, constructing identities that are fluid and contingent. By examining the role of accents and linguistic practices, this research sheds light on how migrants challenge monolingual assumptions and create space for multivocal expressions of selfhood.

This work is part of the author's in-process doctoral project, *Tactical Identity of the New Wave of Taiwanese Migrants in China*, and contributes to the symposium's focus on multilingualism and counter-hegemonic practices, offering insights into the political and social significance of polyphonic and silent strategies in transnational contexts.

Ai Ke is a doctoral candidate in cultural anthropology at the University of Warsaw, researching identity negotiation and everyday life among younger Taiwanese migrants in China. Her work draws on years of living in Taiwan and focuses on alternative histories and lived experiences in the trans-Strait context.

COLLABORATIVE LANGUAGES OF DISPLACEMENT: BRIDGE TRANSLATIONS OF ARABIC-SCOTTISH POETRY

ANNIE WEBSTER

UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

This paper explores Scottish-Arabic cultural exchange through recent multilingual poetry anthologies which use the collaborative method of ‘bridge translation’ (when a literal translation is first produced and then used to create a ‘new’ version). It argues that a growing body of creative initiatives in Scotland are using polyphony, multilingualism, and collaborative translation methods to articulate a mode of Scottish civic nationalism distinct from ethno-nationalist imaginaries popularised across the wider UK. The first part of the paper explores two multilingual collections – *I Chose to Listen* (2011) and *This Room is Waiting* (2013) – co-ordinated by Highlight Arts through creative collaborations across Scotland, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria. Through close readings of individual poems and paratextual materials which reflect on the collective processes involved in their co-creation, I consider how these anthologies experiment with the potential of collaborative translation techniques to explore histories of conflict and forced displacement in the Middle East as they translate poetry from various source languages – including Arabic and Kurdish – into English. In the second part of the paper, I explore how such collaborative techniques are developed further in *A Bird is Not A Stone* (2014), a multilingual collection of contemporary Palestinian poetry which includes English, Scots, Scots Gaelic and Shetlandic translations. I argue that these multiple languages of ‘reception’ show how these collections also engage with the politics and poetics of minoritised languages and dialects in Scotland to explore the country’s own complex national imaginaries and history of forced displacement through the medium of Palestinian poetry

Annie Webster is a Leverhulme Early Career Fellow in the School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures at the University of Edinburgh. Her research focuses on contemporary Arabic literature and culture, particularly how cultural production in the Middle East engages with experiences of conflict and forced migration. She completed her Wolfson-funded PhD at SOAS (University of London), which looked at fiction written in the wake of the 2003 Iraq War.

“NOTHING MEANS ANYTHING IN ENGLISH”: (NON-)TRANSLATION AS RESISTANCE IN HARRY JOSEPHINE GILES AND KNEECAP

CALUM MACLEAN ESLER

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW & UNIVERSITY OF STIRLING

This paper compares two texts to demonstrate how acts of translation can contain non-translation and subvert dominant languages even as minority languages are translated into them.

Harry Josephine Giles’ *Deep Wheel Orcadia* is an Orcadian verse-poem wherein each page contains the Orcadian and Giles’ self-translation into English. This translation, however, often breaks English by translating Orcadian words into compound neologisms such as the move from ‘mynd’ to ‘rememberknowreflectwill’. In Giles’ self-translation English words are unable to contain the meaning held in Orcadian. This Orcado-futurist text thus dares to imagine that the minority language has a place in the future while subverting the power dynamics of the British linguascape in the present.

Belfast hip-hop trio KNEECAP frequently slip between Irish and English in their music. Their song ‘Incognito’ sees them translating various words and phrases from Irish into English. However, their translations are rarely into Standard English, and instead rely on the audience’s knowledge of ‘slang’ terms for various substances and activities. The translations thus remain a step removed from ‘official’ English. The goal of the translation is to facilitate conversation in Irish so as to remain incognito as in the line ‘you always speak the lingo at a Garda checkpoint’. This is a conspiratorial act of linguistic exchange that seeks to welcome speakers into a subaltern community explicitly organised against the dominant order.

These texts thus demonstrate how the varying application of polyphony and silence can allow minority language translation to work as a subversive force against dominant languages.

Calum MacLean Esler is a SGSAH-funded PhD researcher based between the Universities of Glasgow and Stirling with a focus on the intersection of politics and culture in contemporary Scotland. His current research examines the impact of translingual poetry written in Scotland in the post-devolutionary period.

THE NIGHT MY PARENTS WENT TO CHECK OUT GRAVE PLOTS

LINH S. NGUYỄN

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

The western creative writing classroom prioritizes a monolingual template-like approach that alienates marginalized authors, gesturing to the need for radically inclusive practices and examples of writing that foreground lived realities (Chavez, 2021). My artistic engagement—a polyphonic piece of creative writing—engages with anti-racist and decolonial methods such as fragmentation (Fadel, 2023) to tell the story of a queer migrant experience. With a call-and-response format that makes use of literary practices like bolded phrases, italics, and varied languages, my piece draws on intertextual references and lived experience to create the effect of movement, de-bordering, and symphony across space and time. The piece provides an example of practice that sees art as process instead of product, favouring an emergent approach (brown, 2017) that prioritizes holding emotion and embracing love and desire as ways of making meaning (Lorde, 2018). In refusing writing as a skill of grammar or diction (Strunk & White, 1999), I reject a Cartesian mind/body split in favour of embodied pedagogy, aligned with feminist conceptions of knowledge and knowledge-making (Ellsworth, 2005). My practices offer an alternative to the aims outlined by academic institutions and encourage writers to be co-constructors of their arts education and learning communities. I build on my experience as an author and facilitator with creative writing methods derived from physical theatre (Lecoq et al., 2019), feminist studies (hooks, 2014), and emergence (brown, 2017). My work will interest those interested in practical examples of how writing from non-western and anti-imperialist communities can dismantle dominant, monophonic learning traditions.

Linh S. Nguyễn is Canadian children's author and PhD candidate at the University of Cambridge's Faculty of Education, specializing in love as epistemology. She completed her H.B.A. in English, Writing & Rhetoric, and Creative Expression & Society at the University of Toronto and her MPhil in Arts, Creativity and Education at Cambridge.

PANEL 2

POLITICS OF VOICE

CHAIR:

JONAS VANDERSCHUEREN

KU LEUVEN

Jonas Vanderschueren (they/he) is a Postdoctoral Researcher and Lecturer at Cultural Studies KU Leuven. They specialize in contemporary theatre, film, Polish culture, and the broader Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) region. Last year, their first monograph was published entitled *Queering Polishness in Polish theatre since 2005* with Palgrave Macmillan.

PRESENCING HARM: HOW PALESTINIAN LITERATURE COUNTERS ERASURE AND INVISIBILISATION

BRIGITTE HERREMANS & HELGE DANIËLS

Ghent University & KU Leuven

In the Palestinian context, there is a stark paradox between the abundance of evidence of international crimes and the obfuscation of those crimes through erasure and invisibilisation. Invisibilisation refers to a dynamic of marginalisation whereby certain voices or issues are rendered irrelevant, without a clear actor or action causing this. Erasure, by contrast, involves deliberate acts by individuals or groups to silence voices and exclude topics. These dynamics have been especially pronounced during the current war on Gaza, exemplified by the complicity of Western governments in Israel's violations of international law and biased media coverage.

This paper examines how Palestinian literary texts can “presence” experiences of harm. Erasure and invisibilisation frequently marginalise certain lived experiences and actors, excluding them from dominant narratives. Literary writing disrupts these exclusions by foregrounding a multiplicity of voices, generating a polyphony that opens spaces for acknowledging harm and counternarratives that foreground silenced experiences. The paper investigates whether, and if so how, literary writing can contribute to the pursuit of justice in Palestine, with a focus on fiction produced during the ongoing Gaza war. We engage in a close reading of literary texts, including poems by Mosab Abu Toha, Lena Khalaf Tuffaha, Ramzi Salem, and Fady Joudah, as well as the graphic novel *Palestine* by Joe Sacco and the novel *Enter Ghost* by Isabella Hammad. Through this analysis, we explore two central questions: First, how does literature open avenues for articulating harm? Second, can these works play a role in truth-seeking and memorialisation?

Brigitte Herremans is a postdoctoral researcher at the Human Rights Centre of Ghent University and a guest lecturer at the University of Antwerp. She is part of the inter-institutional iBOF project “Future-proofing human rights: Developing thicker forms of accountability.” She examines the relation between arts and accountability in the Syrian and Palestinian contexts. Her research interests are Syria, the Palestinian-Israeli question, (transitional) justice efforts, accountability, and literature.

Helge Daniëls (University of Leuven) is assistant professor at the Research Group Arabic Studies. She teaches Arabic, Arabic literature, Arabic sociolinguistics and the translation of Arabic literary and media texts. Her research focuses on language (variability), power and identity in Arabic discourse and is situated within the study of ideology and linguistic pragmatics.

POLYPHONY OF UKRAINIANS' MEMORIES OF LIFE BEFORE THE WAR

OLHA HAIDAMACHUCK

KHARKIV POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE

By researching the variety of the tonalities of Ukrainians' memories about their personal experiences of the war I try to answer the question: What kind of transformations in Ukrainians' memories about their life before 2022 did the war provoke? How wide a range of polyphony was manifested in their memories? What transformations traced in individual memory indicate certain tonal shifts in collective memory? The search for answers to these questions is conducted by analyzing the archive of the interviews collected by researchers of the "Prisma Ukraina: War, Migration, Memory" Group at the Forum Transregional Research during 2022-2023. More than 100 anonymous respondents were found among the Ukrainians inside and outside Ukraine. Despite the differences between the six collections of interviews from the archive, compiled by different researchers, the interviews are linked by the umbrella theme of the research group and by several common questions. I assumed that some deconstructions in their memory can be traced with the help of tonal analysis of the articulated memories. Special attention is paid not so much to the respondents' own reasoning as to the emotional and evaluative vocabulary articulated by them in order to reveal conscious and unconscious shifts in their attitude towards the content of their own memory. Since in individual archives of memories, enriched with historical knowledge, there is a certain layering of memory, where various historical events overlap each other, it is important to clarify the diversity of the request for the decolonization of the public memory of Ukrainians present in the interview.

Olha Haidamachuk received her PhD in Philosophy of Culture, Philosophical Anthropology from the V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University. She has been working in the Department of Ukrainian Studies, Cultural Studies and History of Science at the National Technical University "Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute". Since 2019, she is a member of the Kharkiv Historical and Philological Society.

FROM MONOLOGISM TO POLYPHONY: AFGHAN FEMALE WRITERS IN THE DIASPORA AND THE REIMAGINING OF SELF

ANITA KARIMI

PHILIPPS UNIVERSITY OF MARBURG

The arrival of modernism in Afghanistan is closely tied to the efforts of *Maḥmūd Tarzī*, who sought to imagine an Afghan nation through the promotion of the novel. However, instead of evolving into a polyphonic, dialogic genre reflecting diverse voices, the novel became a purposive, didactic, and monologic tool for advancing the male-dominated, homogeneous meta-narrative of nationalism. This marked the beginning of the politicization of literature as a medium of propaganda for conflicting groups competing for power. These groups, however, showed little interest in involving women in either politics or the literary landscape.

Frustrated by their exclusion and in response to the politicization of the novel, female writers in the diaspora turned to the short story as a medium for polyphonic narratives. These stories emphasized individuality and selfhood, addressing themes such as displacement, war, trauma, and loss. From the 1960s onward, Afghan female writers increasingly adopted the short story as their preferred literary form in the diaspora. Through this approach, they challenged the hegemonic discourse of nationalism and dominant literary paradigms, such as the "literature of commitment" or "commandment," which often prioritized collective conformity over individual subjectivity.

My research examines how female writers employ narrative techniques to create open-ended, polyphonic storytelling in contrast to the monologic approaches often associated with male writers. To analyse these techniques, I use discourse analysis as my methodology, as it allows for a detailed exploration of how narrative structures, and literary techniques are used to construct meaning.

Anita Karimi is currently pursuing a PhD at Philipps University of Marburg. Anita's doctoral research is part of a larger interdisciplinary project based at the University of Dresden, titled *From, to, and within Germany* (Aus, nach und innerhalb von Deutschland), which explores various dynamics related to Germany in transnational and internal contexts.

ACCUMULATIVE VOICES, PLENTITUDE OF MEANINGS: MIGRATION, HOME AND POLITICS IN IRANIAN ADAPTATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS OF SŁAWOMIR MROZEK'S *THE EMIGRANTS*

TEM MIRKAZEMIYAN

VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT BRUSSEL

The Emigrants (1974), a one-act play by Polish dramatist Slawomir Mrozek, has been (re)rendered in Iran in a multitude of ways: as translated text, on stage, in audio, using the French or English as source, “faithful” or “free”, and with nods to previous performances. This paper delves into the voices that emerge through the translations of *The Emigrants* into Persian and grapples with the plentitude of interpretations that each offers, uniting the isolated fields of translation and theatre adaptation under “theatre translation” while engaging with Bakhtin’s understanding of translation as central to literature (Cutchins, 2013).

The play, with its uncertain plot and language devaluation is inherently absurdist (Bennett, 2024), evoking multiple realities and possibilities (Esslin, 1961). This paradoxicality connects absurdist theatre to translation where a rupture between language and material is inevitable (Cutchins, 2013). The ability of absurdist theatre and translation to imply infinite meanings at once allows them to both reinstate norms *and* resist against them (Laera, 2014), subverting censorship through a dialogue that refuses a monophonic voice (Rahimi, 2023). This explains perhaps the popularity of absurdist theatre translations in the restrictive Iranian context.

This paper is an exercise in retracing paradox and polyphony. A multiplicity of readings is generated through exploring interrelationships (Cutchins, 2013): within languages, texts, mediums, and study fields. Accumulating differing perspectives on migration, the idea of home, and the influence of politics using Massimiliano Morini’s framework for theatre translation, this analysis explores how translations bring new dimensions to the original work and to each other. As we dissect the “differences within similarities” of these translations, new meanings arise (Cutchins, 2013), and *The Emigrants* becomes translucent. Whose muffled voice will begin to be heard?

Tem Mirkazemiyan is a doctoral candidate at Vrije Universiteit Brussel, specializing in absurdist theatre adaptations in Iran. Her research explores the socio-political implications of these intercultural transfers, focusing on how formal techniques navigate cultural realities.

LEBANESE QUEER VOICES: A REVOLUTION FOR POLITICAL CORRECTNESS?

JAD KHAIRALLAH

CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF PORTUGAL

This autoethnographic paper explores the state of the city of Beirut, Lebanon following the ongoing protests after October 17th 2019 or what is now referred to as ‘the revolution’. In my visit to the frontline, I uncover a stencil that reads (‘Luté mech msabbé’) which translates literally to “fag is not a curse word” and nonliterally to “referring to someone as a fag (homosexual) is not an insult”. Luté is a derogatory Arabic word predominantly used in the Lebanese social discourse to describe a gay person. As people on the streets ask for less taxes and for political reforms, a stencil sits on walls and calls for a more politically correct way of utilizing the word [homosexual] due to its persistent use [fag] as an insult to the politicians in office. The writing conveys a distinct tone among the other wall tags while sharing the same space and spreading across the protest blocks. Easily overlooked, by providing a moral lesson on the sustained misuse of the derogatory term, it sneakily escalates political correctness into national consciousness. From an intersectional queer perspective, my reading of the tag provides a modality of inquiry into deciphering what it does rather than simply describing what it means (Muñoz 1996). I engage with the stencil as a performative object that occupies an ephemeral voice meant to open up a space of potentiality by reclaiming Luté as a productive countering and embodying the way queer activists attempt to assert their stance against the dominant heteronormative culture.

Jad Khairallah holds a PhD in culture studies from the Catholic University of Portugal-Lisbon with a Master of Arts in Design from Notre Dame University-Lebanon. Khairallah’s work centers on exploring the intersection of shock, culture, and queerness, in the case of Lebanon.

WRITING IN GAZA, WRITING IN EXILE

SAHAR MOUSA

PEN FLANDERS

This presentation will focus on different limitations and contexts that affect writing processes.

Sahar Mousa is a Palestinian poet and writer based in Stockholm, and she is currently a visiting writer with PEN Flanders. She wrote articles during the 2008 and 2012 wars in Gaza, and often writes about politics, social injustice, and the general condition of the Palestinian people. Her poetry has been translated to Dutch and English.

PANEL 3

TACTICS OF SILENCE

CHAIR:

ANNA SOFIA CHURCHILL

KU LEUVEN

Anna Sofia Churchill is a PhD candidate on the *COLLAB* project. Drawing on literary, postcolonial, migrant, refugee and Indigenous studies, her research is a comparative study of notions of displacement and community in Indigenous, migrant and refugee anthologies from Canada, Australia and the UK.

I SPEAK THEREFORE I THINK?: ON TALKABILITY, CRITICIZABILITY, AND THE COUNTERS OF BELONGING

DENİZ AKTAŞ

VU AMSTERDAM & KU LEUVEN

The ability to talk about and criticize things—whether ideas, belief systems, or norms—is often regarded as a hallmark of autonomous, transparent, free-thinking, sovereign subjectivity in certain Western circles, positioning it as an expression of a shared progressive modernity. In Western Europe, particularly in the Netherlands, such signs of subjectivity are often framed as parameters of proper belonging (read: “one of us”), but are frequently placed in tension within the so-called secular-religious binary framework, where the compatibility of non-secular sensibilities or non-Christian religions—especially Islam—with such Dutch societal values is heavily problematized. Enforced through binaries such as tolerant/intolerant, modern/archaic, rational/emotional, and free/oppressed, these problematizations cast Muslims as subjects, or depending on the context, as objects, of debates and controversies, framing them as in need of “change” or “reform.” Within these moments, the notions of talkability and criticizability are instrumentalized in various forms as the very onto-epistemological norms of modern, free citizenship, criteria which Muslims in Europe are then expected to meet—not just to speak (out) and criticize, but also to do so *correctly*. To further explore and complicate these dynamics at a more intersubjective, micro-level, this paper draws on ethnographic insights from Christian-Muslim couples in the Netherlands, looking at how these notions of talkability and criticizability function within intimate contexts—where they take place, where they break down, and ultimately where their limits lie. By engaging with the ambivalent and non-linear articulations of individuals and attending to the cacophony of multivocal gestures—whether in acts of refusal, the quiet eloquence of silence, or the directness of vocal protest—this paper dwells on how such divergent discursive rhythms challenge and reshape the structures and affective forms of (un)belonging.

Deniz Aktaş is a joint PhD candidate in Religious Studies at VU Amsterdam and KU Leuven. His research explores how Christian-Muslim couples in the Netherlands navigate material and ritual practices, focusing on the cultural archive of Dutch society, particularly the normative “secularized” Christian assumptions and the dominant white Dutch identity.

APHASIA AS METATEXTUAL REFLECTION: EXPLORING IDENTITY AND TRAUMA IN POSTMIGRANT ITALIAN RAP

LETIZIA SASSI

UNIVERSITÉ CATHOLIQUE DE LOUVAIN

Rap, as a counter-hegemonic genre, found significant resonance among postmigrant communities when it arrived in Europe from the United States. Initially emerging as a subculture, it gradually transitioned into the mainstream and gained increasing recognition within academic research. While rap and hip-hop are often associated with polyphony, social engagement, and political critique, the role of silence within the genre remains underexplored. Traditionally framed as a highly verbal art form—emphasizing *prise de parole*, braggadocio, or freestyle battles—rap is rarely examined in terms of silence or intentional incommunicability. Yet, the use of silence and aphasia challenges rap's mainstream perception as a purely verbal narrative medium.

Postmigrant Italian rappers offer compelling examples of how rap can reshape identity and trauma representation through strategies of silence. Artists such as Baby Gang, Ghali, and Mahmood employ techniques like plurilingualism, opacity, and aphasia to create moments of deliberate incommunicability within their tracks. These techniques often mark sections that avoid directly addressing trauma, instead reflecting on the limitations of communication itself. This aphasic approach serves as a metatextual commentary on the act of songwriting and the challenges of conveying complex experiences to specific audiences. By integrating linguistic fragmentation and silence, these artists highlight the intricate interplay between identity, trauma, and cultural expression within a multilingual and postmigrant context.

Letizia Sassi is a Ph.D. candidate at the Université Catholique de Louvain, working under the supervision of Prof. Costantino Maeder. After studying English and Scandinavian Studies at the University of Milan (La Statale) and completing an Erasmus period at the University of Edinburgh, she began her doctoral studies in Belgium, supported by a scholarship within the NarraMuse project.

THE RELUCTANT REFUGEE: EXPLORING SILENCE AS RESISTANCE IN LAYLA ALAMMAR'S *SILENCE IS A SENSE* (2021)

ALICE KÖNIGSTETTER

UNIVERSITY OF VIENNA & VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT BRUSSEL

This paper examines the interplay of silence, trauma, and agency in the work of Kuwaiti American author Layla AlAmmar, particularly her innovative use of silence as postcolonial resistance rather than passivity. Drawing on Stef Craps' postcolonial trauma studies (2012), the analysis situates AlAmmar's work within a growing trend of Arab authors who, even outside the diaspora, write in English—a choice laden with the burden of representation. AlAmmar's *Silence is a Sense* (2021) explores resilience and trauma on both collective and individual levels, focusing on a nameless heroine grappling with post-traumatic stress disorder caused by her escape from war-torn Syria to Europe. As a refugee in Britain, the protagonist shares her experiences through a newspaper op-ed but struggles with editorial pressure to adhere to reductive stereotypes about refugees.

AlAmmar's narrative disrupts conventional form and language. Employing a fragmented structure and multilingual elements that may disrupt the expectations of anglophone readers, she challenges traditional trauma paradigms—which have mainly focused on Western experiences—and aims to decolonise the anglophone literary canon. Silence, portrayed as an asset rather than a limitation, enables the heroine to navigate her trauma and develop alternative forms of agency. While voiceless in a literal sense, her actions reject the victimization often imposed on migrants.

Alice Königstetter is a PhD candidate at the University of Vienna, researching contemporary women's fiction from Kuwait with a focus on language, nationality, and gender. She is a Visiting Fellow at Vrije Universiteit Brussel and an affiliated researcher at CEFREPA, Kuwait, with interests in postcolonial literature, cultural production in the Arab Gulf, and gender studies.

MULTILINGUAL 'SILENCE' AND PAINTERLY MEDIATION: SINO-AFRICAN ENCOUNTERS IN YVONNE OWUOR'S *THE DRAGONFLY SEA* (2019)

SHUANGYI LI

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL

Yvonne Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea* (2019) revolves around the female protagonist Ayaana, a supposedly Chinese descendant, growing up on the Kenyan island of Pate and travelling to China to study on a state-sponsored scholarship and back. The Indian Ocean is portrayed as a space of ceaseless human and animal migrations, a network of historical, political, economic connectivities and interchanges, which (in)form and (re)shape the basis and framework of transcultural memories between and beyond Africa and China.

The presence of untranslated words, expression, and sayings in multiple languages including Swahili, Arabic, and Chinese stands out as the most prominent multilingual textual feature of the novel, which can be perceived as both 'noise' and 'silence' in the 'sea' of relations that connect China to Africa as the coming-of-age protagonist goes through episodes of socio-cultural alienation and belonging, family losses and reunions, and cross-cultural romantic relationships. This paper approaches such a multilingual dynamic from an intermedial and interart perspective. The Franco-Chinese artist Zao Wou-Ki's (1920-2013) abstract paintings are frequently cited in the novel, which points to a visually and artistically mediated encounter, understanding, and articulation beyond verbally constructed narratives. Zao shares Ayaana's journey crossing the Indian Ocean by boat, although his arrival in Marseille took place more than 60 years earlier than Ayaana's disembarkation in Xiamen. Zao's paintings, drawing inspiration from Post-Impressionism, Expressionism, Chinese calligraphic lines, and Daoist thought, resonate with Ayaana's transformative navigation through silencing, articulating, and reimagining of linguistic and cultural encounters and differences. They resist, translate, and transform each other.

Shuangyi Li is Senior Lecturer in Comparative Literatures and Cultures at the University of Bristol, UK. He is the author of two monographs *Proust, China and Intertextual Engagement: Translation and Transcultural Dialogue* (2017, International Comparative Literature Association Anna Balakian Prize 2019) and *Travel, Translation and Transmedia Aesthetics: Franco-Chinese Literature in a Global Age* (shortlisted for R. Gapper Book Prize 2022). Shuangyi received his PhD at the University of Edinburgh and worked as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at Lund University in Sweden funded by Swedish Research Council.

WORKSHOP

POETIC-SOUND WALK WITH THE KLANKVANGERS

MERLIJN GABEL & MIKSI

Klankvangers is a poetic sound experience, a collective sketch of the city, led by members of *SpeakEasy Spoken Word BXL* (NL/ENG/FR/DU). A moment to open your ears and your imagination during this interactive workshop.

Join the Klankvangers for an interactive poetic sound walk. We invite you to practice listening to yourself and your surroundings. With open ears we create collective multilingual poetry together. (Optional workshop, by registration)

Founder of SpeakEasy vzw, **Miksi** is a multilingual nomadic Spoken Word artist, creative moderator, and literary event manager. She does not only perform internationally, but curates, publishes, and organises poetic happenings with the aim of providing safe stages for underrepresented voices. As an advocate for spoken word and poetry as artistic defence mechanisms, she uses words to make sense of the world. Miksi also organises interventions and workshops around mental health and grief in Brussels and beyond.

PANEL 4

POLYPHONIC PRACTICES

CHAIR:

JOANA ROQUE PESQUER

KU LEUVEN

Joana Roqué Pesquer is a PhD candidate on the *COLLAB* project, where her research is situated at the intersection of digital humanities, sociology of literature and publishing studies. More specifically, she focuses on the production and circulation of contemporary transnational literature published by small-scale independent publishers in Anglophone and Hispanophone contexts that are partly funded through online participatory patronage infrastructures such as crowdfunding or subscription-based models.

COMPOSING POLYPHONIC BELONGING: RECONFIGURING CENTERS AND PERIPHERIES IN SWISS AND CYPRIOT MULTILINGUAL PROJECTS

CIARRA BARRICK & LENA GRIMM

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Our paper explores the continual construction of the terms “center” and “periphery” through the examination of Swiss and Cypriot small press projects. Both multilingual states negotiating their places among the alliances of power (EU, NATO, Schengen) that produce and maintain European borders, Cyprus and Switzerland stand at the “edge and center” of Europe yet are rarely brought into conversation. Rather than reading Swiss and Cypriot cultural production in terms of the other or mapping the literary networks of these polyphonic places, we are interested in the ways in which small press projects in both contexts reimagine state-imposed linguistic, ethnic, and national borders, in turn allowing us to complicate the geographic and imaginative poles of Europe’s “center” and “periphery” from both ends. Taking up the multilingual Cypriot literary and arts journal *Cadences* (2004-2020) and the Swiss journal *Zwischen den Zeilen* (Between the Lines, 1992-2011), our paper will examine multilingual reclamations of the often-fraught term cosmopolitanism as modes of composing polyphonic belonging beyond the monolingual state. In a moment when scholars such as Yasemin Yildiz and Isabel C. Gómez probe modes of translation and multilingualism that resist assimilation into national and aesthetic paradigms, our work takes up literary projects that generate “critical edges” between political and national belonging and exclusion. This paper precedes our work on the University of Michigan Press’s journal *Absinthe: World Literature in Translation*, which will bring together translations of Swiss and Cypriot multilingual writers for the first time.

CC Barrick is a doctoral candidate at the University of Michigan in the Department of Comparative Literature and holds an MA from King’s College London and BA from Stockton University. She is the recipient of a Fulbright Scholarship and the Department of State’s AEIF grant that funded 2 years of teaching and study in Cyprus. Her dissertation focuses on the Cypriot literary journal *Cadences: a journal for literature and the arts in Cyprus* (2004-2020) and her interests include island studies, queer ecologies, translation, archives, architecture/landscape, and autotheory.

Lena Grimm is a doctoral candidate of Comparative Literature at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Her research focuses on translational poetics in 20th and 21st century Anglophone and Germanophone contexts; forthcoming publications include chapters on Barbara Köhler and Anne Carson.

POLYPHONY AND SILENCE IN ACTIONS: RETHINKING LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES THROUGH ARTISTIC AND ACADEMIC DIALOGUES

DANIEL SCHMIDT, RAMONA PELLEGRINO & DAVID PAPPALARDO

GLOBALE° - FESTIVAL FOR BORDER-CROSSING LITERATURE, UNIVERSITY OF BOLOGNA & UNIVERSITY OF CATANIA

The planned talk aims to examine how polyphony and silence in artistic settings operate within (and against) language ideologies – i.e. socially constructed beliefs about language (cf. i.a. Silverstein 1979; Busch 2013; Spitzmüller/Busch/Flubacher 2021; Gal 2023). Being “used to construct social, ethnic, national and other affiliations and exclusions” (Busch 2015: 8), language ideologies are deeply entwined with power structures, privileging certain languages and language varieties while marginalizing and/or repressing others. Drawing on Bakhtin’s concept of polyphony as “heteroglossia” (cf. Bakhtin 1981), our contribution attempts to explore how diverse voices from the contemporary German-speaking literary panorama disrupt monolingual norms and linguistic hierarchies through two opposite means: silence and voice. Against this background, our contribution illustrates two contrasting examples: 1) Ukrainian-born writer Marjana Gaponenko, raised with Russian as her first language, who refrains from using it today as an act of rejection of a language burdened with political and historical connotations 2) Kyiv-born author and literary scholar Katja Petrowskaja, who, on the contrary, rejects the linguistic-ideological offender-victim dichotomy and the diffused political indexicalisation of Russian as an aggressive language. Through our cooperation between the literary festival globale° – Festival for border-crossing literature in Bremen and the inter-university research center POLYPHONIE, we seek to emphasize the transformative potential of multilingualism in reshaping cultural and linguistic imaginaries. By bringing together artistic and scholarly viewpoints, we aim to explore how multilingual authors writing in German navigate issues of agency, identity, and *solidarity* in the face of hegemonic language ideologies. This partnership underscores the role of creative and academic dialogues in challenging entrenched linguistic power structures and in fostering alternative cultural narratives, particularly in politically charged contexts.

Daniel Schmidt is director of globale° - festival for border-crossing literature in Bremen since 2024, together with Tatjana Vogel, where he is responsible for international and scientific cooperations.

Ramona Pellegrino is currently a research fellow in German linguistics at the University of Bologna and co-editor of the journal “Polyphonie. Mehrsprachigkeit_Kreativität_Schreiben.”

David Pappalardo is currently a PhD candidate in sociolinguistics at the University of Catania and member of the editorial team of the journal “Polyphonie. Mehrsprachigkeit_Kreativität_Schreiben.”

MULTILINGUAL COGNATES AND MODELLING READING POLYPHONY

EUGENIA KELBERT & MARIANNA DEGANUTTI & LAZAR KOVAČEVIĆ

SLOVAK ACADEMY OF SCIENCES & INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER

Bakhtin's polyphony theory, introduced in his work *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, explores the concept of multiple, independent voices within a literary work. These voices engage in a dialogue, challenging and enriching each other, creating a complex and dynamic narrative. This paper proposes a novel approach to literary multilingualism through a focus on the reader's contribution to the polyphony of the reading experience where multilingualism is involved. We argue that the reading experience is shaped not only by the linguistic features of the text itself but also by the reader's linguistic skills, repertoire and cognitive processes. We thus model and simulate the copresence of different voices within the same text, through an interplay between reader reception, language contact, and intercomprehension (the ability to understand a language without formal learning, based on knowledge of a related/cognate languages). By analyzing a selection of multilingual texts (Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, Tardos's *Ami minden*, Marani's *Las Aventuras des inspector Cabillot*, Brooke-Rose's *Between* etc.), we demonstrate how the readers' understanding of the meaning in a literary text is influenced by their knowledge of cognate languages. We illustrate all this, and simulate readings and their impact on interpretation, with *ezglot* (<https://www.ezglot.com/>), a tool designed to explore common words shared or sharing a resemblance across languages. By investigating the impact of cognate languages on reading comprehension, we shed light on the complex ways in which readers engage with the multiple languages and voices present in multilingual literary texts.

Eugenia Kelbert and **Marianna Deganutti** are researchers at the Institute of World Literature of the Slovak Academy of Sciences on a project entitled "Translation and Language Contact in Literature". They have just launched the ICLA Research Committee on Language Contact in Literature: Europe (LCLE). **Lazar Kovačević** is an independent researcher with a focus on the application of IT technology to education, creativity, collaboration, social action, etc. He developed algorithms for increasing diversity of perspectives in search results.

GREEK MIGRANTS IN RENNAISSANCE EUROPE (1397-1536): CLASSICAL BILINGUAL LITERATURE BETWEEN CO-CREATION AND SELF-FASHIONING

RAF VAN ROOY

KU LEUVEN

The crumbling apart of the Byzantine Empire engendered a steady influx of Greek migrants (especially men) into western Europe, starting in Italy at the end of the Trecento. Many of these migrants were welcomed with open arms, as scholars in the west recognized that they carried an enormous cultural capital with them, even though stereotypes soon developed and living conditions for these newcomers often proved to be poor. The migrants arriving in Europe relied on their cultural capital of Ancient Greek language and literature to make a living for themselves, all the while embracing the dominant language in western culture: Latin. This dynamic of bringing in a valued new language and adopting a foreign one led to a flourishing of what I call classical bilingualism: the parallel use of Latin and Greek, two nonnative languages, that developed with migrants and their hosts, who co-created this bilingual literature. My paper will situate the bilingual writing of these Greek migrants in the Renaissance landscape starting from Manuel Chrysoloras' arrival in Florence (1397) until the death of Erasmus of Rotterdam (1536) using the database of classical bilingualism we are currently developing in the frame of the ERASMOS+ projects. Greek migrants developed language teaching tools for their western colleagues, co-translated Greek literature to Latin with their hosts, and composed a bilingual expat literature in Greek and Latin, often involving self-translation. The general picture based on the database metadata will be complemented by two case studies of co-creation and self-fashioning, where migrants collaborate with their hosts in literary composition and translation in the development of language tools (M. Chrysoloras, C. Lascaris).

Raf Van Rooy is assistant professor of Latin Literature at KU Leuven, working on early modern literary multilingualism, with a specific interest in exchanges between Latin and Greek.

POLYPHONY AND SILENCE IN LITERATURE BY WRITERS IN EXILE: HOW DO WRITERS IN EXILE NEGOTIATE MULTIPLE LANGUAGES SPACES AND THE SPACES BETWEEN LANGUAGES

SIOBHAN MCSHANE

DURHAM UNIVERSITY

Writers in exile are uniquely placed between polyphony and silence as they move between language environments. For some writers, exile is experienced as silencing. The exiled Ovid, in the first century AD, describes his struggle to write in exile, whilst unable to regularly speak Latin. Salim Bachi picks up on this as he explores the affinity he feels with this ancient poet. He highlights the role censorship may have played in Ovid's inability to speak about the causes of his exile. Ovid's silence is linked to polyphony, as being surrounded by an unknown language obstructs his use of Latin. However, Ovid politicises his silence by suggesting that he will abandon Latin in favour of becoming a 'barbarian' Getic poet, thus suggesting the fragility of Roman power.

Salim Bachi, in a colonised context, experiences silencing through the loss of his ability to speak Arabic and the mixed street language algérien through standardised teaching at his French school. Situated between languages, he feels a 'double exile'. The authors feel similar but inverted emotions about their languages. Ovid's Latin and Bachi's algérien are associated with loss and rejection, while Getic and French are associated with out-of-placeness. However, this out-of-placeness is expressed as concern about barbarism on Ovid's part, and colonialism on Bachi's. While Ovid resents his reduction from Latin poet laureate to a silenced 'barbarian', Bachi rejects the reduction of his identity to a linguistic definition, claiming that he is simply a writer. He embraces Ovid and a host of other multilingual exiled writers as his true, polylingual community.

Siobhan McShane is a PhD student in the Department of Classics and Ancient History at Durham University, UK. Her research focuses on writing in exile from the ancient poet Ovid to 20th and 21st century novelists. Prior to her PhD, Siobhan supported asylum seeking children in London with access to education.

PANEL 5

COLLABORATION AND COLLECTIVE NARRATIVES

CHAIR:

APRIL WANJING JIANG

KU LEUVEN

April Wanjing Jiang is a PhD researcher (FWO) in activist anthropology at KU Leuven, working with undocumented women in Brussels. April is currently writing about the everyday tactics of (self)care when waiting for regularisation—across domestic work, housing/squatting, and monetary communing.

POSTPOETRY: AN ONLINE POETRY WRITING COLLECTIVE

SANTIAGO GUTIÉRREZ ECHEVERRÍA

UNIVERSITY OF BUCHAREST

During the pandemic, virtual communities on social networks increased their popularity on a considerable degree. From those dedicated to literature emerged, as a result, a collective that eventually considered itself one dedicated to writing “postpoetry”, bringing with it concepts of posthumanism in the digital age. The collective, of which the presenter is a member, is composed of Hispanic-American users from various countries. They all interact on Whatsapp to share writings focused especially on themes of the virtual era, although they are allowed to share any kind of contributions that could enrich the circulation of poetry written by their own craft. During the last few months, some members (including the presenter) organized an anthology with a selection of the most representative poems that were written in this workshop. The format of the book is presented with features resembling a Whatsapp conversation, where the poems emerge written by the users in the context of various chat conversations. The proposal for the presentation of this work seeks to motivate reflection on collective forms of poetic production, especially in the context of the era of social networks.

Santiago Daniel Gutiérrez Echeverría (Cochabamba, Bolivia, 1995). PhD student in comparative literature at the University of Bucharest. He has published scientific articles in *Revista Transilvania* and *Metacritic Journal*. Member of an online poetry group that has explored e-poetry in the post-pandemic era under the name “postpoetry.”

FROM SILENCE TO POLYPHONY: EXPLORING MULTILINGUALISM AND UNTRANSLATABILITY IN MIGRANT EXPERIENCES

SIMONE TOJI & PUO-AN FRANCISCA WU FU

UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD & FREIE UNIVERSITÄT BERLIN

In our paper proposal, we explore the interrelated concepts of silence and polyphony as they manifest in our research and writing processes. Positioned as migrant subjects, we navigate the polyphony of living across and within multiple languages: while we share English as an academic language, we communicate in Portuguese and Spanish, at times, without translating. Simultaneously, we grapple with the silence of languages left unspoken, those our parents did not or could not pass on to us and, coincidentally, share a silent script: Japanese and Taiwanese.

Through our collaboration, we investigate how these dynamics of silence and polyphony intertwine, converging and diverging across our experiences. Specifically, we address the challenges and possibilities of writing as a form of polyphonic labour, embracing nontranslation and untranslatability as both methodological and conceptual tools in our scholarly and personal modes of understanding. These practices invite us to rethink the role of silence— not as absence but as a fertile space for listening and resisting hegemonic language hierarchies—and to critique the tensions between the silences embedded in academic texts and the vibrant, polyphonic dialogues of classrooms, conferences, fieldwork and interviews.

By engaging with the CFP's emphasis on multilingualism, writing as refusal, and the politics of untranslatability, our proposal contributes to an understanding of silence and polyphony as interdependent, counter-hegemonic tools. We situate our reflections within broader debates on collaborative writing and minoritized linguistic practices, advocating for a reimagining of academic labour that prioritizes difference, listening, and solidarity across linguistic divides.

Simone Toji is an anthropologist and writer exploring human mobility, urban life, memory, and cultural heritage. She is the author of *The Immensity of Being Singular*.

Puo-an Francisca Wu Fu is a Chilean philologist and translator/interpreter based in Berlin, Germany. Her interests are polyglotism, toponymy, and autobiographical writing.

THE POISON IN THE CAKE. A FRAGMENTED, COLLABORATIVE WRITING ABOUT TRUTHS, LIES, AND SILENCES

FRANCESCA MORRA & ARINAS USORO

UNIVERSITY OF TURIN & INDEPENDENT RESEARCHER

The ethnographic encounter with the “opaque” (Throop, 2010) and the “uncertain” (Stevenson, 2014) entails a constant movement of articulation, oscillating between ambiguous and chaotic impressions, to coherent and shareable meanings. The movement is tangled and unstable as some experiences defy comprehension, lingering between communicability and incommunicability. This paper focuses on the dialogue between two writers engaging with objects that escape and defy language: Francesca, an anthropologist employing notes of psychotherapy sessions as ethnographic objects, and Arinas, a migrant woman writing fragments, gradually assembling a novel to find the truth in her family history. In conversation with the ethnographer, Arinas makes, remakes, and unmakes her truth firstly through self-translation, then through a multilingual conversation, and finally through fictional writing. The two writing practices mingle, becoming fragmented and polyvocal, and offering the possibility of inventing, and not just making sense of, experiences. Thus, truth appears as a multidimensional, paradoxical object: intimacy appears in violence, violence in affection, and poison in a piece of cake. This paper critically reflects on the possibilities and challenges of a collaborative research that combines ethnographic and creative/fictional writing practices, both as a method of inquiry, and of dissemination. The combination of languages, genres and voices explodes a story into a heteroglossia (Rabinow, 1986), thus opening up a possibility, as well as a risk, of transformation – of imagining a new world.

Francesca Morra is an anthropologist and clinical psychologist. She is currently working as a post-doc researcher within the PASSI project (DIST - Politecnico di Torino), where she carries out research on the interplay between the social imaginaries of a desirable life and the personal desires of geographical and social mobility, in the trajectories of international university students. She experiments with collaborative forms of creative writing with research participants, to find new ways to explore and account for elusive experiences.

Arinas Usoro is a Moroccan writer and PhD researcher based in Europe. Trained as an engineer, she later transitioned into academia and returned to writing after many years, reclaiming it as a space for reflection and resistance. Her work, deeply rooted in personal experience, navigates the intersections of family, colonial history, gendered violence, and self-expression. Through fragmented storytelling, she explores the blurred lines between truth and silence, healing and betrayal. Arinas uses fiction and ethnographic reflection to challenge dominant narratives and to imagine new possibilities for self and society.

STORIES IN THE MAKING: CO-DESIGNING ANTI-RACIST NARRATIVES IN GRAPHIC FORMS

MARIA LOFTUS & FIONA MURPHY

DUBLIN CITY UNIVERSITY

In this presentation, we discuss an Irish Research Council-funded initiative to create an anti-racist, co-designed graphic book—a collaboration with displaced persons, student educators, early school leavers, and activists. The project wrestles with urgent questions of storytelling: How do we narrate experiences of displacement without falling into extraction, oversimplification, or voyeurism? How do we create something that resists tidy resolutions while making space for recognition, connection, and possibility? The graphic book is as much about the process as the stories within it. Co-design workshops became spaces of negotiation—where trust and mistrust coexisted, where silence carried as much weight as voice, and where what was spoken and unsaid shaped the work. Silence, we learned, is not an absence but a presence—a force shaping the contours of stories, interrupting easy flows, and demanding deeper listening. The book holds these silences alongside its words and images, making room for what lingers in the in-between. This presentation explores the intricacies of co-creation: balancing visibility and anonymity, navigating the tensions of shared authorship, and confronting the ethical challenges of working across differences. It traces the project's journey from idea to collaborative object, shaped by the voices, refusals, and imaginations of those involved. The graphic book serves as both a tool and a reflection—a way to foster dialogue about racism, forced displacement, belonging, and possibility, while revealing the constraints and transformative potential of collaborative storytelling. This presentation invites reflection on creating stories that honour complexity, tension, and difference.

Dr. Maria Loftus is an assistant professor in French language and French literature and cinema in the School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies. Her research interests pertain to Pocket Cinema and Students as creators of Interactive Video Content in the language learning classroom. She embraces any opportunity to bring the multimodal into her teaching and flex her creative muscles. More recently, research outputs draw on the co-design of anti-racism artefacts such as graphic novels and short documentary films.

Fiona Murphy is an anthropologist working in Dublin City University. Her work explores the politics of forced displacement. She works with the Stolen Generations in Australia and people seeking refuge in Ireland and the UK and is passionate about cross-genre experimentation in anthropology and politically engaged storytelling.

EXPERIMENTS IN COLLECTIVE NARRATIVES: REFUGEE HISTORY IN GLASGOW

KATHERINE MACKINNON

UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW

In the UK, a very strict narrative is expected of asylum seekers if they are to be permitted to stay in the country and be accepted (to a point). How can collaborative poetry be used as a tool of resistance to this narrative, without harming people subject to this epistemic and testimonial injustice, alongside the everyday structures of border violence?

To explore this, I will draw on part of my PhD research which uses collaborative poetry writing workshops alongside oral history interviews to explore and document the history of refugee lives in Scotland. I will explore the ethical and methodological challenges and advantages of this approach, illustrating the power of a poetic and sonic space that is collaborative, weaving together fragments of many lives into each poem.

I also argue for poetry as a form of methodological resistance against extractive models of research which seek the most extreme refugee narratives. In a collective poem the each contributor is one writer among many, feeling security in anonymity. The poet's words can also be a shout, a lifted voice drawing attention to thriving lives and joy as resistance.

These words and poems forms part of, and serve as an expression of, the refugee archive – which is incomplete and fragmentary. As line breaks in a poem draw attention to the spaces between words, so poetry in research draws attention to what is not documented and what remains unsaid.

Katherine Mackinnon is working on a PhD at the University of Glasgow, using archival research, collaborative writing, oral histories and community workshops to document and explore refugees histories of Scotland.

LISTENING TO SILENCE: TACTICAL, AFFECTIVE AND THERAPEUTIC SILENCES IN DUTCH DECOLONIAL PRACTICE

GERLOV VAN ENGELHOFEN

LEIDEN UNIVERSITY

In Dutch society's discussions about working through the colonial past, voice is often used as a metaphor for empowerment ('raise your voices!'), whereas silence is often used as voice's negative counterpart, signifying a loss or lack of power (break the silence!).

Yet, raising one's voice from the (diasporic) margins is empowering only if society is ready to listen to it, a readiness not always present in postcolonial societies such as the Netherlands. If such readiness to listen is insufficiently present, deliberate silence can be an alternative articulation strategy, indicating for instance a refusal to expose one's voice to judgment or appropriation, or to give expression to experiences too complex to grasp in words.

In my current research project (2024-2028) I explore the empowering potential of silence in a series of narrative interviews with decolonial activists, artists and curators in the Netherlands. In this presentation I will share the first results of these interviews. All interviewees deploy silence actively in their work, but in different ways. Their silences are used as a *tactical* omission of particular words, opinions, or identifiers; as an *affective* method of communication through visual, musical and performative arts; or as a *therapeutic* space created and held to enable deep listening and embodied solidarity.

Perhaps the problem was never people's ability to speak, but society's ability to listen. When raising one's voice has reached its limits, silence can be a fresh invitation to listen differently: a powerful act of resistance, of resilience and even of healing and recovery.

Dr. Gerlov van Engelenhoven MED is an assistant professor at Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society (LUCAS), teaching courses on postcolonial memory and heritage, law & culture, and cultural interaction. His most recent book is titled *Postcolonial Memory in the Netherlands: Meaningful Voices, Meaningful Silences*. It was published open access by Amsterdam University Press in 2023. From 2024 to 2028, he runs a research project called *Listening to Silence: Powerful Silences in Dutch Decolonial Memory Practice*, funded by the Dutch Research Council (NWO) through a Veni Talent Program grant. His research methodology is a combination of participatory research with discourse analysis and (auto)ethnography.

ROUNDTABLE

CO-CREATIVE WRITING ALLIANCES

EN PALABRAS, BARCELONA

GIGI RÍOS

EXILED WRITERS INK, LONDON

JENNIFER LANGER

THE POETRY PROJECT, BERLIN

ANNA HÖLLMÜLLER & THERESA RÜGER

THE POST COLLECTIVE, BRUSSELS

MIRRA MARKHAËVA & ELLI VASSALOU

CHAIRS:

MARIALENA AVGERINO & SONJA FAAREN RUUD

KU LEUVEN

EN PALABRAS, BARCELONA

En Palabras [relatos migrantes] is a collective writing project based in Barcelona that brings together migrant and refugee communities—mainly women from Latin America, but also participants from Africa and Asia—to share and explore their life stories through creative writing. The workshops, held in Spanish, offer a space to write about the emotional, bodily, and cultural experiences of migration, and to project both individual and collective voices through short stories, poems, letters, essays, and other formats.

The project seeks to create new narratives that challenge stereotypes and dominant discourses around migration, while fostering community and connection. In addition to publishing books and fanzines, En Palabras has developed public formats such as live readings, performances, and exhibitions to bring these stories into broader cultural spaces.

Gigi Ríos is a Colombian literary editor and cultural producer based in Barcelona, where she has lived for the past 10 years. She is a partner at Connectats Cooperativa, where she leads En Palabras [relatos migrantes] and Fes! Cultura #AccióMigrant, two collective and community-based projects that support creative expression and cultural participation among migrant communities.

EXILED WRITERS INK, LONDON

Exiled Writers Ink, founded in 2000, brings together established and developing writers from repressive regimes and war-torn situations and it equally embraces migrants. Providing a safe, welcoming space for writers to be heard, the organisation develops and promotes their creative literary expression, increases their representation in the mainstream literary world, develops cross cultural dialogue and advocates human rights and social justice through literature and literary activism. Exiled Writers Ink provides a platform through live literature events, creative writing workshops, mentoring, translation, publications, including *Exiled Ink* magazine, symposia and theatre.

Jennifer Langer is founding director of Exiled Writers Ink (www.exiledwriters.co.uk). Her debut poetry collection is *The Search* (Victorina Press, 2021) and she is editor of five anthologies of exiled literature. She holds a doctorate in Cultural Memory from SOAS, University of London and is a SOAS Research Associate.

THE POST COLLECTIVE, BRUSSELS

The Post Collective is an autonomous platform for co-creation, co-learning and cultural activism, created by people with different means and access to artistic production and education due to their legal status. We wish to share personal and collective stories that originate from our experiences within different social and political systems, and the landscape of Art institutions. Stories do not just show who we are but also what we have in common with others; not just who we think we are but also what shared circumstances shape our lives and our interdependent destinies.

Mirra Markhaëva is a visual artist from Republic of Buryatia based in Brussels. While working with various mediums and disciplines, she always centers the storytelling and detribalized-indigenous perspective in her work.

Elli Vassalou (Greece) is a Brussels-based transdisciplinary artist, architect and activist. She designs participatory and collective conditions for artistic creation, knowledge production and social change.

THE POETRY PROJECT, BERLIN

The Poetry Project is an innovative literary dialogue project that supports young people with refugee backgrounds as they express their experiences through poetry. The project specifically uses the poetic form to express and preserve feelings and stories in verse. Things that seem unspeakable at first are transformed into an artistic dialogue; conversely, things that once seemed “foreign” become more familiar.

Anna Höllmüller is a transdisciplinary artist and facilitator based in Berlin, working across the fields of theatre, performance and education. She explores process-oriented and collective approaches to generating (dramatic) literature. Since 2025, she has been project coordinator at The Poetry Project.

Theresa Rüger studied Comparative Literature, Portuguese, and English Philology in Berlin and Essex. Since 2018, she has worked with The Poetry Project to create spaces for multilingual poetic exchange among young refugees.

WORKSHOP

CO-EDITING OF THE PAPERLESS ART ALLIANCE CONTRACT (PAACT) WITH THE POST COLLECTIVE

MIRRA MARKHÄEVA & ELLI VASSALOU

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Our experience, stories and ongoing reflections are formalized into a working document: the Paperless Art Alliance Contract (PAACT), a set of mutually agreed conditions from which we would like to work within and beyond the collective. We invite others to further develop the PAACT with us, and we continue the discussion in the form of a public assembly. We invite you to enter our common space and contribute to our reflection by sharing yours. (Optional workshop, by registration)

CLOSING REMARKS

CONCLUSION OF THE SYMPOSIUM:

MARIALENA AVGERINOI, NÚRIA CODINA SOLÀ & SONJA FAAREN RUUD

KU LEUVEN