

Voices from Bolzano

Performative Conversation by BEK

At: Lungomare, Via Rafenstein, Bolzano

Date: 30th June, 2016

Characters:

B, E, K and a narrator

Spatial Setting:

- Questions hand-written on the walls:

"Where are You? What are you leaving behind? Who is the other? What do you see? Where is the border?"

- Book of Greek drama with the story of Medea open to the page of the chorus *"O my country! my home!..."*, plastered onto the wall with a black tape.

- tall table with the Book of the Refugee Convention open (place for the narrator).

- a piece of marble cut along the contours of *linea insubrica* placed on a low table in the center.

- projector for images.

Prologue

Narrator walks to the tall table and reads out a passage from the book

Refugee convention 1951, *Article 33, para 1, pg. 1392*

The shared burden of proof:

While the burden of proof in principle rests on the applicant, the duty to ascertain and evaluate all the relevant facts is shared between the applicant and the examiner indeed, in some cases, it maybe for the examiner to use all the means at his disposal to produce the necessary evidence in support of the application. Even such independent research may not, however, always be successful and they may also be statements that are not susceptible of proof. In such cases, if the applicant account appears credible, he should, unless there are good reasons to the contrary, be given the benefit of the doubt.

(Projector Image 1: Billboard advertisement for a holiday in the mountains representing a happy family in the alps)

K: Where are you?

E: I am here. I am in a place after having crossed the hottest desert, the most dangerous sea, wild forests, and big cities.

But, where are you?

B: I am in a prison taken by smugglers in the middle of the desert.

K: Who are they?

B: I am in a metal container.

1.5 meters underground and 50 cms above.

The wall to my back is burning my skin.

So it should be the west.
From the south-east comes the sounds of the prayer.

E: Where are we?

K: We are at the border.

E: Where is the border?

B: Non vedi come mi guardano. questo e' il confine.

K: Just don't look back, look down, just sit like the way they sit. Behave normally till you cross the border.

B: Are we in Europe?

E: Here I feel like I am in Asmara. My grandfather, everytime he was angry, he preferred to curse in Italian. Testa di gallina!!!!
He found no more words in Tigrinia for his anger.

K: We are at Latitude: 46°29.4402' N and Longitude: 11°20.3892' E. This is exactly where we are.

B: But you? Where are you?

(Projector Image 2: Zoomed in image of a marble fountain in Bolzano)

E: I am also where you are but you just don't see me.

K: What do you see? Do you see rocks or water?

B: I see the mountains floating in the horizon and the sea hardening beneath my feet. I don't see you.

K: You don't see me because I am Medea, the foreign woman, the barbarian. *"A foreign woman coming among new laws and customs, needs prophetic powers to find out what her home could not teach her: how to treat the man whose bed she shares... They say that we at home live free from danger, while they venture out to battle - fools! I'd rather stand three times in the front line than bear one child. But the same arguments do not apply to you and me. You have this city, your father's home, The enjoyment of your life, and your friends' company. I am alone; I have no city; now my husband insults me. I was taken as booty from a land at the earth's edge. I have no mother, brother nor any of my own blood to turn to in this predicament."*

(Projector Image 3: Image outside the toilet at the Brenner border point of a man dressed in a typical Tyrolean costume)

Narrator walks to the tall table again and reads the following passage:

Refugee Convention 1951, Article 1 b: General Provisions, page 476.

Definition of European Countries

It is true that the 1951 Convention does not deal with citizenship or residence but with the place where the events occurred. The deciding question therefore is whether events in overseas territories or countries are to be seen as area belonging to Europe or not. If this question is to be answered in the affirmative a victim of persecution would be eligible under the 1951 Convention under any circumstance regardless of his or her residence. If, in contrast, the 'event' is considered as having taken place outside Europe, the persecuted individual would not be covered by the 1951 Convention except as regards such States which explicitly extend its scope to events occurring 'elsewhere'.

E: Here I give you half of this stone that has travelled across many seas and passed through many hands. It has travelled from Cairo to Napoli, Nablus to Mumbai, and Addis to Breda to Bolzano. Now, with this I am part of your network and you of mine.

(Projector Image 4: Image of the sign of the Cafe del moro - with a typical arabic man with coffee - opposite the train station of Bolzano)

B: They used to call it *tessere hospitaes*.

Narrator walks to the marble placed in the center of the audience and reads the following:

Il marmo è una roccia metamorfica

In geologia per metamorfismo si intende la trasformazione alla quale viene sottoposta una roccia preesistente per mezzo di una variazione delle condizioni ambientali. Tra le principali cause del metamorfismo si possono citare: aumento di temperatura, aumento di pressione, variazione dell'ambiente chimico.

Il metamorfismo si verifica ogni qualvolta i minerali di cui sono costituite le rocce si vengono a trovare in un ambiente che non gli permette di rimanere stabili: la trasformazione conduce ad una modificazione strutturale o chimica della roccia, fino al conseguimento di una nuova stabilità, di un nuovo stato di equilibrio.

Il processo metamorfico si svolge all'interno della crosta terrestre, in condizioni di temperature e pressione elevate.

B: So, where is the stone going next?

K: To the mountains where there is incessant metamorphosis. A horizon of mixing tongues, mixing bloods, mixing smells, mixing traces, ...

B: Where is the border then?

E: The Border is always moving because the mountains have been and are always moving.

B: What are you leaving behind?

K: walking up to the wall with the book, and facing it

Oh my country, my home!

May the gods save me from becoming a stateless refugee.

Dragging out an intolerable existence

In desperate helplessness

What is the most pitiful of all griefs

*Death is better. Should such a day come to me
I pray for death first
Of all the pains and hardship none is worse
than to be deprived of your native land*

(Projector image 5: Of a window with fading frescoes on the walls and a "for rent" sign)

E: I left you some Schuettelbrot on the table in the kitchen.

K: I take with me the smell of fenugreek from your blouse.

B: Take a handful of fenugreek seeds.

Soak it in water overnight.

Drain the water.

And take a spoonful in the morning on an empty stomach.

Narrator, while sitting among the audience:

I would not eat it because my sweat will start to smell.

[Close screen of projector]