



The One who Saw the Deep, The One who Sees the Unknown

Generating New Narratives

NOV 17 - 25 - 2018

Running between the 17th and 25th of November, Mahalla is a travelling festival of contemporary art, film and literature, with several ancillary events running alongside it.

The Mahalla Malta Festival 2018 is dedicated to the Topics: *language and migration, communities and diversity, new city cultures, mobile citizenship and future demands.*

Conceptual Frame

The general vision of the festival is to question a dystopian reality of excluding “the other” in the form of the migrant, the poor, the opposite sex, the animal, the environment, the unknown.

The Title, Mahalla, refers to the word mahalla used in many languages and countries meaning neighborhood or location originated in Arabic mähallä. from the root meaning ‘to settle’, ‘to occupy’ derived from the verb halla (to untie), as in untying a packhorse or camel to make a camp.

Different from a Nomad, who shuttles between locations, migrants travel out of different reasons to settle somewhere. Reflecting Exile and Creativity Vilém Flusser underlines in “The Freedom of the Migrant-Objections to Nationalism” that the migrant has to question his own narratives as soon as he enters a new order formed by language, rules and patterns and naturally “poses a challenge to the natives by reminding them of the contingency of their truths, and by witnessing realities that may counter circulating rhetoric’s”.

Flusser was a philosopher and writer, who was born to a family of Jewish intellectuals in Prague. His ideas about communication and identity are rooted in the Judeo-Christian concept of self-determination and self-realization through recognition of the other. The Terror of the Nazi-Regime exiled him first to London, then to Brazil, where he spent three decades. After a military Takeover, he left for France in 1971. Flusser published his writings in several languages. While he was analyzing language as the context for a cultural collective conscience he was always emphasizing the importance of breaking the codes. He claims as a task of the creatives, the energy to rebuild themselves and their tools constantly.

Maltese Poet Antoine Cassar's *mużajki* or *mosaics* poems combine a minimum of five languages, mainly English, French, Italian, Maltese and Spanish, often in the form of a Petrarchan sonnet. These poems, the first series of which was published in July 2007 in the anthology *Ħbula Stirati (Tightropes)*, engage in the braiding of words and sounds in the different languages used whilst maintaining a coherent rhythm and logical poetic sequence. Among the main themes explored by the mosaics are the vanity and futility of life, love unrequited or fulfilled, the absurdity of colonialism and its after-effects, and the at once exhilarating and disorienting feeling of variety itself:

Original	English translation
<p>Run, rabbit, run, run, run, from the womb to the tomb, de cuatro a dos a tres, del río a la mar, play the fool, suffer school, żunżana ddur iddur, engage-toi, perds ta foi, le regole imparar, [...]</p>	<p>Run, rabbit, run, run, run, from the womb to the tomb, from four to two to three, from the river to the sea, play the fool, suffer school, the wasp goes round and round, get involved, lose your faith, learn the rules, [...]</p>

Today artists like Erkan Özgen are creating new sounds and esthetics highly influenced by the experience of a war that is taking place specifically in their region, the Southeast of Turkey. While in the Western provinces of Turkey and in Europe these realities are consequently ignored, both artists chose to stay in Diyarbakir. An ancient city facing the demolition of its history right now. It is a place in the neighborhood of Syria, Iran and Iraq. An ignorant president labeled the region once as part of the axes of evil, while it is one of the cradles of civilization.

The oldest handed narrations of humanity were developed in the areas around Efrat and Tigris. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* is a Sumerian epic poem from ancient Mesopotamia that is often regarded as the earliest surviving work of literature dating from the Third Dynasty of Ur (c. 2100 BC). The later "standard" version dates from the 13th to the 10th centuries BC and bears the incipit *Sha naqba imuru*. "The one who Saw the Deep", in modern terms: "The one who Sees the Unknown". The story is about Gilgamesh, King of Uruk, and his friend Enkidu. Together, they make a six-day journey to the legendary Cedar Forest, where they kill the Bull of Heaven. As a punishment for these actions, the gods sentence Enkidu to death. In the second half of the epic, distress about Enkidu's death causes Gilgamesh to undertake a long and perilous journey to discover the secret of eternal life. He eventually learns that "Life, which you look for, you will never find. For when the gods created man, they let death be his share, and life withheld in their own hands".

The metaphor of a journey with dangers and losses and the human search for enlightenment is a universal motive. Postmodernism is generally defined by an attitude of skepticism, irony, or rejection toward the meta-narratives and ideologies of modernism, often calling into question various assumptions of enlightenment rationality. Poststructuralism had an important impact on artists in the Periphery to define the importance to unveil power structures in discourses. The idea of ambivalence in postcolonialism sees culture as consisting of opposing perceptions and dimensions. Indian Critical Theorist Homi K. Bhabha claims that this ambivalence—this duality that presents a split in the identity of the colonized other—allows for beings who are a hybrid of their own cultural identity and the colonizer's cultural identity. Colonial signifiers of authority only acquire their meanings after the "traumatic scenario of colonial difference, cultural or

racial, returns the eye of power to some prior archaic image or identity. Accordingly, the colonial presence remains ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference.

In the area of Post factualism Middle-Eastern Artists rediscover classical elements of Poetry as a source for creating new storylines untouched by a domination of Western discourses in Art Theory. Sufi-Poetry in a masterful way already implies dualism and dialectical reflections and currently serves as a rich source for conceptual frames in the art-production. “The conference of the birds” by Persian Philosopher and Poet Farid ud-Din Attar (1142-1220) is about the search for an ideal spiritual king. 30 Birds have to travel seven valleys until they discover that the journey itself was the goal and matures them to get a distance to the wish to be ruled. Attar obviously had a low opinion of most earthly rulers; he usually presents their behavior as capricious and cruel, and at one point in the poem he specifically says it is best to have nothing to do with them.

Turkish artist Eda Gecikmez is preparing a new metaphorical narrative around the “memory of the birds” for the Mahalla Festival. The current displacement from North-Syria is caused by ongoing armed conflicts. She looks back to the big forced migration at the brink of the Fall of the Ottoman Empire. Migrating Birds as narrators connect to Attar's poem and recall the repetition of ongoing disaster manifested in other obstacles to free moves.

Regarding the current presence of unpredictable rulers in world politics the search for new references in classic poetry isn't a recollection of the central myths, but more a search for fresh metaphors and motives used in a playful, contemporary way. Breaking the code, distorting the storyline, revising the look on the flow of time is an essence of the works of several rebellious, unconventional complex art-works right now.

Malta is located at a strategical point between Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Like in all spots at the border of the EU the population is scared about its territorial future and cultural identity. Maltese artists attend with powerful works around the shifting social and ecological environment. Artist and Curator Raphael Vella shows a new reflection on the sick stage of society using maps and parts of medical scientific Literature. The common sources of orientation are just shifting, much quicker than the human organism is able to adjust. Margerita Pulé stages a bakery for cement-nutrition questioning the construction-boom on the tiny island. The artwork is supported by public demonstrations around this topic. Victor Aguis revives the overwhelming history of Festa in a ritual-columns installation at a historical Palazzo. Sara Pace is searching for the traces of a history patterned by battles and conquests with a poetical installation of gold threads at the same location. Darrin Zammit-Lupi is working since two decades as a crisis region photographer. For the Mahalla Festival he selected works shot during the monitoring of rescue missions in the Mediterranean. His camera sensitively freezes moments of hope, fear, happiness and despair from a respectful distance. There is no posing, all photos have a hyper realistic touch, none is victimizing. The migrants are masterfully portrayed as powerful witnesses of a humanitarian catastrophe in which they are the victims, not the perpetrators.

As Italian Theoretician Rosi Braidotti points out in her work on the EU, the political and practical reality of living in the European Union is one that challenges the traditional notions of national belonging, both due to the direction the political union is taking and due to global trends. We inhabit a world where a simple relationship to the place we live in no longer exists, not either for ourselves or for our neighbors. We are exposed daily to people that cross national boundaries, defy language barriers and unsettle cultural traditions. In order to fully inhabit this world, we need to shift our own sense of identity, according to Braidotti. However, such a shift is not without its perils. As she argues in *The Becoming Minoritarian of Europe in Deleuze and the Contemporary World*, “Fear, anxiety

and nostalgia are clear examples of the negative emotions involved in the project of detaching ourselves from familiar forms of identity. Achieving a post-national sense of European identity requires the dis-identification from established, nation-bound points of reference.”

Artist Fikret Atay moved from Batman in the Southeast of Turkey close to the Syrian and Iraqi border to Sweden last year. His Video “The Flood” reconnects to the picture of Noah’s arc. A ship that is stranding on a mountain. His Video shows refugees in Gotland/Sweden and questions radically the myth of a better life in exile and the reality of an unbearable risky journey refugees from war-regions are exposed to. The Video was produced in cooperation with young artists from Örebro, Atay’s current residence. The group of artists from Örebro are displaying works at the Mahalla Festival around the search for identity, the distorting urban changes and other topics relevant in one of the wealthiest and internationally extremely idealized countries of the world

The Mahalla Festival dedicates its mission to create a space to condemn dystopian structures without forming new dogmas. The Festival attempts to create new visions for diverse ideas on utopia contra the growing current dystopia. The changes of orientation structures regarding territories and urban structures are one central focus.

In “the Poetics of Space” French Philosopher Gaston Bachelard applies the method of phenomenology to architecture. He is basing his analysis not on asserted origins but on lived experience in spaces and their contexts in nature. He focuses especially on the personal, emotional response to buildings both in life and in literary works, both in prose and in poetry. He is thus led to consider spatial types such as the attic, the cellar, drawers and the like. Bachelard implicitly urges architects to base their work on the experiences it will engender rather than on abstract rationales that may or may not affect viewers and users of architecture.

In a similar frame the Mahalla Festival wants to discover new visions of elaborating spaces and sites in an interdisciplinary way sharing experiences, methods and narration styles with other artists, reflecting the traces we are all walking on. The Palazzo in Zabbar as a Venue in its unconverted stage is a monument of history and a manifestation of architectural beauty scared by the traces of time. Zabbar as a location was founded by the last Grandmaster of the order of St. John, Ferdinand von Hompesch zu Bohlheim. A German aristocrat who lost the islands to France in 1799. The Palazzo is a place breathing the strategical importance of the location in former times, while today the South is regarded peripheral in Malta. It served as a police station during the British colonial times and was partly burned down during the anti-colonial uprisings in the 1958. The building is currently for sale heading towards an unknown future. The artists of the Mahalla Festival working there are invited to work with the space. The Festival attempts to leave a statement around the direction the use of the building could be heading for.

In their Photo-Text-publication, “The Seventh Man- Migrant workers in Europe” (1975) John Berger and Jean Mohr analyzed the mechanisms of “economical fascism” already more than forty years ago. Their assumptions about a world economy exploiting workforce and creating a poisoning competition in between populations are getting more relevant every day. Globalization is hitting the workforce hard. Many people are affected by layoffs, underpayments and manual labor displacements. The Mahalla Share House in Museum Fortress Builders in Valletta displays artworks related to dystopian realities of global economic capitalism, ecological destruction, conflicting gender roles and their effects on life. The esthetics and the frame of the productions of the artworks, fabrics and objects are transporting utopian visions representing the mission of the Festival. In a stage of post-factualism, post-humanism and global disinformation the plead for a rediscovery of ethics in esthetics is meant as a statement. German political philosopher Ulrich Beck developed a

model of a so called “reflexive modernism”. He underlines that the limitation of mobility for parts of the world-population is based on historical inconsistency demanding active responsibility from the benefitting mobile part.

The incipit of the Gilgamesh-Epos, *The One who Saw the Deep, The One who Sees the Unknown*, implies various possibilities of interpretation most wanted regarding the productions during the Festival. Artists from different regions of the world are going to work and inspire each other. Presenting the unknown and unconventional is appreciated. In the Frame of the Mahalla Festival the vision of the questionability of a common truth is a central task. Migration is seen as a real or also internal process to rewrite common narratives.

During the first Mahalla Festival in Istanbul 2017 artists, curators, activists and institutions working on migration, identity-building and racism emphasized that in view of a global migration crisis the art scene has to give more voice to forced migrants themselves. A horizontal perspective and spaces for new forms of expression are fundamental principles of the Festival. Which includes global topics like gentrification, ecological destruction and economic hardships as dystopian realities affecting everybody.

Link to Mahalla Istanbul 2017: <http://mahalla.inenart.eu>

In this context Mahalla is a metaphor for a space of diversity and inclusion in the field of arts and culture. Dedicating a Festival to the potential of migration is an attempt to create a place for discussing displacement, identity, racism, inclusion and other topics related to a human heritage omnipresent in Malta. The different layers of history and culture manifested in the language and in archeological sides are related to battles, conquests and power fights, which are dynamics of forced migration until today.

Theme

Generating new artistic practices and narratives on the topic's *language and migration, communities and diversity, new city cultures, mobile citizenship and future demands*.

Globalization invents new share-concepts continuously in the economic sector. Car-sharing, house-sharing, technology-sharing to optimize the spirit of raising profit by rationalization. The Festival is dedicated to the spirit of sharing ideas, traditions and cultural patterns to raise value by the optimization of common minds open to generate new narrations. We invite cultural initiatives and artists to revise the concept of classifications and border settings in historical, political, esthetical and discursive dimensions. Patterns of identity classified in races or ethnics, gender roles, language conventions, melody-forms, storylines, choreographies and visualization conventions can be quoted, transformed, ridiculed or overtaken. The main topics identity, exile and migration are alignments.

The participants of the Festival in Malta are able to pick up the idea of transforming dystopia in any kind of form or media. The main task is to reflect how communication styles are working out narratives about identity, cultural references, territorial borders, the right for or restriction of mobility, the possibilities of personal development and the participation in public representations connected to the results of communication in a globalized world characterized by a certain dualism regarding the access to resources, mobility, technology and safety. The concept for the artistic production is free for metaphorical interpretations in any direction.

Venues

The National Museum MUZA (Muzew Nazzjonali tal-Arti) for Art and Community in the Capital Valletta is going to be officially reopened in spring 2019. The Ground-Floor is

nevertheless before its opening one Venue of The Mahalla Festival as part of the Program of MUZA.

MUZA's Senior Curator, Alexander Debono, developed a concept for National Museums as an Open Space for communities and debates. The Mahalla Festival will present 52 artists from twenty countries as part of a concept emphasizing the strength of new narratives in an international context inspired by current political questions.

The Literature-event, a Round Table Talk, a Film event displaying new Films from African directors and a screening of Films produced by Locals and Migrants in the frame of the Mahalla Film-workshop in the past eight months in Malta are hosted at MUZA. The Contemporary Art Exhibition is located in Museum Fortress Builders, Studio 87, Valletta Contemporary and in a historical unconverted Palazzo in Zabbar. The closing event will take place in the Chinese Garden in St. Lucija.

Festival Curators: Thomas Büsch, Sabine Küper-Büsch, thomasbusch@diyalog-der.eu, sabine@inenart.eu

Venue Designer for the Mahalla Share House Shop: Tom van Malderen

Contact in Malta

Fortress Builders, Mo-Fr, 9:00 am - 4:00 pm and Sa, 9:00 am - 1:00 pm

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The first Mahalla Festival took place in Istanbul 2017 in the frame of the Istanbul Biennial. Istanbul is the base of the association Diyalog Derneği as the organizer of the Mahalla Festival. The main Curators, Thomas Büsch and Sabine Küper-Büsch, are in the board of the association.

Information about the first Mahalla Festival 2017 in Istanbul: <http://mahalla.inenart.eu/>

Contact in Istanbul

The activities of the association Diyalog Derneği: www.diyalog-der.eu

The websites of the curators: www.doc-film.de; www.inenart.eu

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