

NYU. Voice to the Migrants Lost at Sea

Natasha Lardera (January 30, 2014)



On the occasion of the US Premiere of the performance of Rumore di Acque (Noises in the Waters) by Teatro delle Albe at La MaMa Theater, Casa Italiana Zerilli Marimò presented a panel discussion with scholars and artists who analyzed Marco Martinelli's book, published by Bordighera Press and translated by Thomas Simpson, which is the source of a play that protests our indifference to the everyday reality of boats crowded with migrants that sink at sea

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The panel, moderated by [Teresa Fiore](#) [5], Montclair State University, included [Marco Martinelli](#) [6] author and director, Alessandro Renda, actor and videographer, Ermanna Montanari, actress and set designer, and Francesca Degiuli, sociologist from Farleigh Dickinson University. Teatro delle Albe, founded in 1983 by Marco Martinelli, Ermanna Montanari, Luigi Dadina and Marcella Nonni, is one of the most important theatre companies on the Italian and international scene.

Rumore di Acque is the tragic account, accompanied by the music of the Mancuso brothers, of the desperate deaths of immigrants in the Mediterranean. Set on a volcanic islet in the strip of sea between Europe and Africa that has been the location of a devastating tragedy for the past fifteen years, the play is an intense and grotesque monologue on an every day tragedy that is widely spoken about in Italy but in torpor. In this case, theater is the occasion to explore the sociological, literary, and artistic aspects of this topical issue in Italy today.

"Last July, Pope Francis made an unexpected visit to Lampedusa, an island off the Southern coast of Sicily to pray for the hundreds of African migrants who die at sea trying to reach the coast of Italy escaping hunger, war and all sorts of exploitation in their countries. For many people around the world, it was the first time they became aware of this ongoing massacre," [Stefano Albertini](#) [7], director of Casa Italiana, explained in his invitation to the event. "Something changed in the public eye," Martinelli continued, "people woke up to the issue and this gave us strength, gave us more prominence. The performances have increased and we are now ongoing a US Tour."

Some facts, "October 3rd, 2013 is known as the day of the Tragedy of Lampedusa. 518 migrants were traveling to Sicily from Eritrea. Just a few miles from land the boat caught on fire and sank. 155 people were picked up, the rest died at sea," Francesca Degiuli said. "These tragedies are not uncommon.

More than 7000 people died in that stretch of water between 1994 and 2013, but it is difficult to come up with a specific number in regards of immigration because you never know how many people are on those boats. These are people who are fleeing from areas of conflict and unrest and oftentimes this is the last leg of a much longer journey."

An interesting fact to know is that, differently from common belief, the majority of illegal immigrants residing in Italy is not coming in by boat "but they come in by plane with a visa, then they overstay or they transit to another country. Yet the people we are now talking about are the ones who try the most desperate routes to get into the country and often lose their lives doing so," Francesca Degiuli continued.

Specifically Rumore di acque depicts a soul of the underworld, wearing a general's uniform, who has been employed by the the Ministro dell' Inferno (a play on words for Ministro dell' Interno) to make a census of the dead at the bottom of the sea, bringing order to a desperate state of bookkeeping. The General, played by Alessandro Renda, is standing on a small volcanic islet, a gateway to the kingdom of the dead, whose "policy of welcome" is opposed to the driving away of the migrants who landed there.

In a scratchy, distorted voice, he tells, with his monologue, the stories of the faceless dead lost, refugees named Sakinah, Yusuf, little Jean-Baptiste and Jasmine. His indifference, his anger toward the fish, "pigs of the sea," who render the bodies faceless and make his job hard, and his sardonic tone makes the audience very indignant to his indifference.

"I based my character on Gaddafi," Alessandro Renda said, "He was a strange character. He was a cruel dictator, a controversial man of power but also a curious 'showman,' with female Amazonian bodyguards." "We read his speeches, looked at his photographs," Martinelli said, "But it would've been too easy to take it out on him, to palm the blame off on this sly and bloodthirsty dictator. He's certainly guilty, and very much so, that umpteenth incarnation of Pa Ubu, but what about us? Are we innocent or guilty? Can I say I'm not responsible for all the tragedies that happen elsewhere?"

The play is in Italian with some fragments acted out in English and English supertitles. Martinelli's words are interwoven with poetic and lyrical music by Enzo and Lorenzo Mancuso - voice, harmonium, baglama, Turkish flute and marimba.



Performances: January 30 to February 16, 2014

La MaMa E.T.C. (First Floor Theater), 74A East Fourth Street

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Presented by La MaMa E.T.C. in association with Teatro delle Albe, Ravenna Festival, Regione Siciliana, Circuito Epicarmo, Sensi Contemporanei in collaboration with Teatro Italiano Network powered by [KIT-Kairos Italy Theater](#) [8].

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