



# *Writing or Translating Otherness?*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The paper intends to investigate a new voice in the Italian literary panorama, a voice which highlights how the notions of nationality, literary canon and mother tongue should be re-visioned and rethought. As a matter of fact, in this age of intensified migration in Europe (and in Italy) transnational women writers are an enriching and challenging factor in many European literatures for the many issues discussed in their novels, among which identity, nationality, ethnicity, gender and language. They are part of a challenging phenomenon which helps us understand key issues about migrancy, European and Italian identity. Many 'migrant' writers do not write in their mother tongue but in the language of the country where they live, the 'host country'. Therefore, language and self-translation become central issues in their novels, texts where the hybridization of European contexts is made clear and where authors renovate the language and enrich the culture of the country where they work. Writers 'translate' their own experiences on the page demonstrating how life writing follows

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<sup>1</sup> The essay has been thought by both authors. Eleonora Federici has written part 1, 2, 3 and 4; Vanessa Leonardi has written part 5 (text analysis).



the complex dynamics of cultural production “where aesthetic concerns and the choice and manipulation of form serve as signifying aspects to experiences and subjectivities” (Baena 2007: vii). National identity and mother-tongue do not coincide anymore and an analysis of these texts, that we can define as ‘transnational’, brings us to rethink our traditional notions of identity, national belonging and literary canon.

Starting from the recent debate on World Literature and Transnational Literatures (Damrosch 2003; Ascari 2011; Moretti 2000) we will demonstrate how this discussion is strictly related to the idea of translation as a hermeneutical category. If postcolonial writers defined themselves as “translated men” (Rushdie 1991:17), migrant writers adopt a new language deeply influenced by their mother tongue but enmeshed with the ‘adopted’ one. It is a language of loss, belonging and identity. Transnational writers are subjects in transit, people who, for economical, political or personal reasons, move across national borders. Still anchored to their past nonetheless they are deeply influenced by the languages and cultures of the host country(ies). The term ‘trans’ indicates the passage among different cultures and languages and the trespassing and widening of national borders.

The essay is divided into two main parts:

- 1) a theoretical approach aimed at
  - a) outlining the recent debate on World Literature and Transnational literatures,
  - b) rethink the fruitful discussion within Translation Studies in the last decades, and
- 2) a second part which will provide a textual analysis of a novel, *Con il Vento Nei Capelli*, written by a Palestinian woman novelist, Salwa Salem.

## 2. FROM WORLD LITERATURE TO TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURES

In the last decades we have witnessed a fecund reflection on literature in a globalised era (Pendergast 2004; Casanova 1999; D’Haen, Damrosch and Kadir 2012). The works by Franco Moretti on World Literature (1998 and 2005) opened a discussion on the definition itself because, as he underlines, world literature is “a problem [...] that asks for a new critical method” (Moretti 2000: 55). Similarly, in his studies on World Literature David Damrosch (2003; 2009) referred to the relations between Western Europe and the rest of the world deriving from the dramatic acceleration of globalization that have “complicated the idea of a world literature” (Damrosch 2003: 4). Moreover, he outlined how we should think about World Literature not as a canon of texts but as a mode of reading and interpreting them. More recently, a book by Mads Rosendal Thomsen (2008) challenged even more the traditional Goethian notion of ‘World Literature’ through the concept of “constellations of works”. The scholar affirms



that we have to look for “patterns in World Literature through shared properties of works written apart in time and space” (Rosendal Thomsen 2008: 6).

However, the circulation of texts among different cultural contexts is never devoid of hegemonic implications, that is to say, the crossing of national borders (in translation) can never transcend the power relations embedded in the publishing market. So, as Moretti highlights, world literature is affected by asymmetries of power.

The debate on World Literature is strictly connected to the development of Transnational Studies, a field that is affecting both Comparative and Translation Studies. Both disciplines in fact, have witnessed the flourishing of new theoretical perspectives inviting a decentering of world literary systems and a more open discussion towards non-European approaches aimed at a de-Westernization of theories and practices. In an article written with Vita Fortunati (Federici and Fortunati 2013) we have underlined the points of convergence and the synergies between Translation and Comparative Studies in the debate about World Literature and Transnational Literatures. These synergies have made clear how the notion of World Literature should be re-discussed taking into account a planetary perspective, not only a Western one. Nowadays the term World Literature cannot avoid taking into account the risks of globalization, the rules of the global market that also invests literary production. One of the positive aspects of Transnational Studies – a field which challenges our thinking with national frameworks – is not only a critique of the global market that wants to level literary production, but also the deconstruction of the idea of the nation-state in a period of continuous migratory fluxes that have redrawn the world map. The crisis of the concept of nation in Literary Studies has eroded the category of national literature and the idea of literatures beyond national borders or literatures deeply interwoven with more than one language and culture characterizes the contemporary world of migratory flows, hybridization among cultures and envisions a new concept of national identity and citizenship. Today transnational literatures are fundamental tools to understand “displacement, disorientation and agency in the contemporary world” (Seyhan 2000: 7). The term ‘trans’ itself embodies an idea of something in movement, fluid, always changing and adapting to new contexts. The transnational perspective permits to re-analyze the global cultural/literary scene not only from an economic or sociological perspective but also a literary and cultural one. On the one hand, Transnational Studies have criticized the homogenization of cultures derived from the capitalist and neoliberal logics and, on the other, they have unveiled the complexity of migratory fluxes. Furthermore, the “Transnational Turn” in Comparative and Translation Studies has provoked a critique to a Western and traditional perspective and has widened and deepened the scope of Postcolonial Studies within the European context. From this perspective the term ‘transnational’ recuperates the possibility of exchanges with extra-European countries underlining people’s movements and writings about new configurations of geographical and cultural spaces.



### 3. TRANSNATIONAL THEORIES OF TRANSLATION?

The notion of transnational literature is strictly connected to the new ideas about Translation Studies, which has always been a transdisciplinary field but has become even more so today in a context of discussion and questioning of globalization and rethinking of theoretical approaches and translation practices. Today the presence of cross-cultural texts, linguistic creolization and multilingual situations has highlighted the importance of transnational writing, emphasising the necessity to redefine theoretical approaches and practices of translation.

In recent years the necessity of a new cartography for knowledge transformation has been foreseen by non-Western scholars who have put under discussion Western and European theories of translation. These scholars have underlined how the binary comparison 'West and the Rest' needs to be deconstructed for a fruitful multivocal dialogue, for achieving an equal relationship among Western and non-Western literatures. Moreover, the perception of European models and methodologies outside the Western world has opened new insights which have demonstrated how the established Anglo American translation theories and Postcolonial critical models that have been so powerful in the last few decades seem today to be too narrow and inadequate to analyse and translate transnational texts.

One of the main TS scholars in China, Wang Ning, has observed that the process of globalisation is positively influencing the development of humanities, and that a dialogue between China and the West can constitute a new course of this development. He argued that translation is capable of removing the boundaries between the centre and the periphery and pointed out that the field is undergoing great changes from literal translation on the linguistic level to cultural interpretation and representation. Being translation an act of dialogic practice among author, translator, text and reader, the transnational text can help us to analyse the concepts of national identities and literatures today. As a matter of fact, transnational texts cross national borders and to have a 'continued life' in another setting must be translated properly and efficiently. For him the translator becomes "a dynamic interpreter" (Ning 2010: 7) who renders the work canonical in another language realising the "travelling of literature" (Ning and Sun 2008: 85) from one context to another. From this perspective translation becomes part of a cultural transformation encouraging a 'transnational spirit' for texts consumption abroad. Therefore, according to Ning globalisation does not necessarily homogenise national cultures but brings about the diversity or plurality of cultures: "in the age of globalisation, along with people migrating from one place to another, their national and cultural identity will also split into multiple and different identities" (Ning and Sun 2008: 85). From his point of view "world literature denotes literary works with 'transnational' and 'translational'" meanings (Ning and Sun 2008: 86). The Asian context has been enriched also by women's voices on translation, who have deepened the question of translation and



internationalization of texts. Martha Cheung's work on the history of translation in China has helped to open up the debate of what it means to translate cultural difference and to realize how important the tradition of TS in this geographical area is, while Zhongly Yu's analysis of the translation of Western Feminist works in China has demonstrated the complexities of translating feminist theories and issues in a totally different cultural context. Another scholar, Xuefei Bai has reflected on the myth of Europe widening our perception of 'centre and periphery'. Asian scholars have demonstrated how this rethinking of translation theories and practices from a critical perspective has been united to the dismantling of the notion of 'nation', its ideological and discursive construction. The Japanese scholar Naoki Sakai has deconstructed the notion of nation in his famous essay "Dislocation in Translation" outlining how translation is part of a 'political global process' that envisions the nation as a "geobody", a fixed, homogeneous, closed entity. Translation becomes a way to trespass national borders and to create a dialogue among different cultures. Referring to the scheme of co-figuration – also used by Comparative scholars in order to deconstruct the dichotomy East/West – Sakai talks about a global shared vision of the world where the translator is "a subject in transit" (Sakai 2009: 87) who renders difference representable. Co-figuration and 'transculturality' are two important issues that demonstrate how translation is born from social relationships. This is why through the study of translation practices we can analyse concepts such as nationality, ethnicity, race.

This debate outside the West has influenced also translation scholars who work in Europe or North America, creating a fruitful dialogue among different theoretical positions. Maria Tymockzo declared to be aware of the markedly Eurocentric presuppositions of TS grounded on "a rather small subset of European cultural contexts based on Greco-Roman textual traditions, Christian values, nationalistic views about the relationship between language and cultural identity, and an upper-class emphasis on technical expertise and literacy" (Tymockzo 2005). Similarly, Theo Hermans in *Translating Others* (2006) and *The Conference of the Tongues* (2007) offered a critical reflection on translation theories and methods and referred to translation as an interpretative category for an analysis of multilingual and multiethnic European texts and contexts.

The aim of de-Westernizing theories and practices of translation goes hand by hand with another important aspect, that is the ethical positioning for scholars and translators. Western scholars and translators should start opening up to new models of translation practice and to a non-Western reservoir of conceptualizations about translation and practices of translation. Certainly the issue of ethics in translation is not a new one, but from the last decade scholars have begun to underline the problems linked to the work of the translator and his/her capacity to transpose a culture into a new cultural context. A translator is considered as responsible for the final work and its reception. As G. C. Spivak outlined already in the 90s the translator should be an



interpreter between two socio-political and cultural worlds, s/he should be aware of the difficulty of translating cultural specificities.

#### 4. TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURES AS TRANSLATION?

Borrowing Damrosch's idea to read "across time", "across culture" and "in translation" Valerie Henitiuk affirms that we need to be mentally "translated readers" (Henitiuk 2012: 34) and able to interpret the transcultural text. Henitiuk considers translation as an instrument for the internationalization of texts and their re-packaging for different markets. The circulation of literary texts worldwide, their transmigration from one linguistic/cultural context into another certainly is a major issue within the globalization process. We are well aware of the economical and material conditions at the basis of the publishing market together with the practices of translation which can influence the circulation of texts, but a positive perspective about the internationalization of texts is the idea of 'cultural enrichment' through translation, a means of meeting among cultures. Through a 'globalized' translation Western readers can read works which we could not access without the translation into a European language. Translation brings cultural diversity to us, it widens our perceptions on the world.

Moreover, hybridization of languages and cultures is today present in a same geographical space and this is a great change for an updated discussion within the field of TS. In a recent volume Alvstad, Helgesson and Watson (2011) have mapped out alternative geographies of Translation Studies where translation is no longer an instrument to overcome national borders but a way to analyse the multiplicity of writing, languages and cultures in one nation. As a matter of fact, as Bachmann Medick underlines, the literary text cannot be seen as "unmistakable, individual identity rooted in its cultural origin" (Bachmann Medick 1996) because this notion is in evident contradiction with texts and experiences arising from multicultural and multilingual contexts.

The example we are dealing with is one of the many we could have chosen in the Italian panorama of non-native writers in Italian. It exemplifies the act of translation into Italian (even if through the help of a native speaker), an act that is material – the use of the language of the country the writer lives in – but also symbolic – the sense of double belonging to the mother-country and the host one. The acquired language is the result non only of a linguistic adaptation but of an identity process, or we could say of an identity in process, in transit between two languages and cultures.



## 5. TEXT ANALYSIS

SOURCE TEXT		TARGET TEXT	
Author	Salwa Salem	Translator	Yvonne Freccero
Co-author	Laura Maritano		
Title	<i>Con il vento nei capelli: Vita di una donna palestinese</i>	Title	<i>The Wind in My Hair</i>
Publishing details	Florence: Giunti, 1993	Publishing details	Northampton: Interlink Books, 2007

In recent years, women's travel writing and immigrant literature have become object of intensive research. This study supports Sara Mill's study (1991), *Discourses of Difference*, in claiming that women's travel and migrant writing are dominated by the discrepancies between the ambivalent discourses of female identity and imperialism. In both cases, travelling is described as a liberating experience, which entails freedom, re-orientation, search for equality and a new identity. Salem's memoir is, paradoxically, both an example of integration into the Italian community and, at the same time, a work which marks and reminds readers of her 'different' identity.

Salwa Salem was a feminist Palestinian woman born in a prosperous Muslim family in a war and conflict land. She was born in 1940 and she was only eight years old when she and other Palestinians were uprooted by the Zionists in what Palestinians call *al-Nakba* (the catastrophe/disaster).<sup>2</sup> Her childhood was suddenly and profoundly marked by this event and, though very young, she could feel threatened and confused, thus narrating that:

From then on every gunshot, every flash, frightened us. My brothers and I cried all the time. We asked our mother why the Jews were so evil, why did they want to kill us and take our city. My mother did not know what to answer. Like all the people of Jaffa, she was confused and could not understand what was happening (Salem 2007:14).

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<sup>2</sup> In 1948, a group of Zinonist soldiers entered a Mosque in Jaffa and began shooting at the crowd. This disaster or catastrophe, *al-Nakba*, led to the involuntary mass exodus of nearly three quarters of the Palestinians and to the foundation of the State of Israel.



Salem described the second traumatic disaster experienced in her life, which occurred in 1967 (the so-called *Six-Day War*), with grief explaining that many Palestinians, including herself, could no longer go back to their homeland occupied by Israel in 1948. Salem asserted that

[a]fter 1967 we often wept and raged at what was happening to Palestinians both within and outside of Palestine. [...] All this was tragic. The Palestinian people, at the mercy of other countries' interests and conflicts, have always had to pay for it all. Sometimes they were exploited; at other times they were driven on by so-called friends. (Salem 2007:193)

Despite this tragic experience, Salem did not give up her fight and, once in Italy, she decided to resume her political activism.

Salem was politically and intellectually influenced by her older brother Adnan. Aged fifteen, she joined the outlawed Ba'ath party and she organised subversive actions against the Jordanian government. She was even shot in a leg by Jordanian soldiers during an all-female demonstration. When she woke up in hospital, she remembers her mother crying while scolding her for ruining her new suit. Salem, however, explains later in her memoir that "[...] her tears were the result of the tear gas that impregnated my clothes" (2007: 50).

After her coming of age, Salem moved to Kuwait where her beloved older brother lived, and there she worked as a schoolteacher to gain financial independence. Salem described how hard it was to convince her father to let her go and study abroad. A compromise was reached to move to Kuwait so that her brothers could watch over her. Surprisingly, Salem could not enjoy her freedom as her brother Adnan, who had always supported her in Nablus, once in Kuwait became too protective and would not let any men get closer to her.

A few years later, she married an Arab man living in Vienna and she was able to move to Europe, which Salem considered as a beautiful place to live and study and have her children growing up. Vienna, however, did not really meet her expectations and after giving birth to her two children, she moved to Italy where her third child was born. Salem was happy in Italy as she met with several women activists and she was able to resume her political activism. In those years, nevertheless, she also learnt that she could no longer go back to her homeland and, therefore, all her contacts with her family became very difficult and even impossible.

Salem was both an immigrant and a feminist activist and in her work, *Con il vento nei capelli*, she was able to combine and describe two forms of exile, as a woman and as an immigrant. Her work clearly shows, indeed, how immigrant women face double discrimination in their search for equality, identity and nationality. As a woman, from a feminist perspective, she is proud of telling her readers how she was free to choose her own husband and her own work, to be able to read Simone De Beauvoir and other European works alongside Arab literature. This sense of freedom is expressed in the





title of her memoir itself and it is better explained in the text where there is a chapter devoted to the expression 'with the wind in my hair'. She explains that in her native language the expression *ala hall shariha* (with loose hair) is used to refer to girls who are too free, although Salem has never thought of this expression in offensive terms. Fearing that Salem could go *ala hall shariha*, her family forced her to cover her hair with the *mandil*, but she refused. "On one occasion they made a serious attempt to make me wear it. I remember getting furious. I took it, threw it on the ground, and stamped on it, screaming: 'I will kill everyone if you make me wear this horrible scarf'. And so it was that I never wore the *mandil*; nor did my sisters" (2007: 45).

Salem's memoir also raises questions related to translation and, more precisely, 'self-translation', as her work is in itself a work of *trans-latio* aimed at switching between languages, cultures, times and mixed feelings in an attempt to define the notion of *difference* in more positive terms.

Her memoir was written in collaboration with Laura Maritano who helped gathering and transcribing information about Salem and her major life events as well as working on the linguistic matters of the publication. Salem's memoir begins with Maritano's introduction, which deserves a careful reading as she explains how the book was conceived, planned, developed, written and eventually published.

Maritano, in her introduction, describes Salem as a rebellious, curious and adventurous woman who had fought all her entire life and did not want to let go. Salem's story, indeed, begins from her final days in which she realises that death is approaching. It is interesting to see how her words are able to capture in a few lines her attitude to life:

I try to look on the positive side, at what has gone well. I cling to life as I always have. [...] I have always tried not to be passive, but now there seems to be nothing more I can do. The disease is conquering my body, my soul, my willpower, my courage. I've told the doctors that I am still willing to struggle, to hope and to bear it with courage, to fight back so that I can have the privilege of continuing in this world and being a part of life. [...] Changing and adapting to the nature of each season has been a constant pleasure. [...] I hate the void, I hate disappearing [...] But no one is indispensable. [...] This is why I want to tell my story and make it into a book. (2007: vii-viii)

In the Italian text, however, readers find one more line, which has not been translated in English. Salem, indeed, explains why it is important to have her story published into a book, claiming that "Perché è una cosa materiale, palpabile di me". This line, although very short, is undoubtedly loaded with emotional words. It is interesting to note how, by choosing to write in Italian, somehow, Salem wishes to show her belonging to this country, to this new culture and identity as if she truly felt a part of it. At the same time, her continuous references to her land and people, seem to symbolise a way to bridge the gap between past and present, between lost and found,



between two identities she feels belonging to her. Her choice of writing in Italian could also be a way of avoiding the sense of *otherness* in a sort of mediation between *us* and *them*.

Salem and Maritano had met in 1991 thanks to Elisabetta Donini<sup>3</sup> and Maritano learnt that Salem was interested in having her life story written and published as a memoir. This desire was stronger and stronger each day, especially with the outbreak of the *intifada*, which brought her to resume her political activity. Finally, Salem decided to do it when she was struck by a serious illness and felt her death approaching.

After determining the most important events in her life, Maritano was able to put them together into a memoir, which was finally published in 1993, although Salem died earlier in 1992. As far as the final writing was concerned, Maritano decided to emphasise:

[...] the thematic organization in order to maintain a significant chronology for the events and places in Salwa's life; some chronological details were modified. I integrated and reworked her thoughts based on what I had learned. I enriched some of the settings and images from my own knowledge and experience of the world described by Salwa. Some portions were completed from later information (2007: 217-8).

In the English translation of this Italian memoir, there is an important omission dealing with the explanation and the need for Maritano to intervene heavily in the text to make it more fluent and acceptable to Italian readers. Although Salem had spent many years in Italy, her Italian was not impeccable, thus justifying Maritano's decision to intervene linguistically in the text in order to suit the target language conventions. Furthermore, in this omitted part, Maritano explains how it was decided to adopt a more narrative rather than documentary style on the basis of a mutual decision between her and Salem.

The years spent in Nablus were remembered with nostalgia whereas those spent in Kuwait were described with greater calm. Nevertheless, the most complex and challenging years for Salem were those concerned with her emigration to Europe and her marriage, which profoundly marked her life, thus making it clear that Salem embodied more than one identity. Salem experienced at quite an early age the sense of displacement, which will characterise all her life and, in her story, she recalls how

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<sup>3</sup> Elisabetta Donini (former Professor of Physics at the University of Turin) is one of the founders of the pacifist and feminist network called DiN (*Donne in Nero*, meaning Women in Black) in Turin. This house of women is a focal point of feminist culture and politics in the city. It houses several activities including groups responding to domestic violence, and concerned with women's health and self-determination.



confused she was at the beginning of her long exile experience due to her young age. As she narrates:

I can remember them speaking in a corner of the room one dawn after the five o'clock prayers. They were making plans and I heard the word "Nablus" repeated and thought maybe it was the name of somebody. I found out that Nablus was a city when my father greeted us one morning and said that we would soon be leaving (2007: 17).

Not many details were provided about Salem's resumed political activity and:

[...] it was essential for Salwa to feel she was still involved in them but she could not speak of them at the time because her illness precluded any ongoing responsibility. At the same time, she dreaded speaking of them in the past tense, as it would imply that she had no future. This is why, at the end of the story, Elisabetta has written a few pages in which she records Salwa during those years of activity and initiatives on behalf of Palestine. (2007: 220)

Maritano, in her introduction, describes Salem's many qualities by reminding us of how she broke away from the traditional stereotype of passive Arab women. Salem was able to play an active role in a man's world through her independence and activism. The main feminine models followed by Salem, namely her grand-mother and her mother (the latter also referred to as the "rock"), help us understand how many Arab women seek to establish their independence, though not always successfully. Interestingly, Maritano points out how Salem, despite following her mother's model, had often criticised her, thus assigning to a man, her beloved older brother Adnan, the merit of having helped her to freely express herself and her independence through study and travelling experiences. On the one hand, most women mentioned by Salem in her memoir provide us with a wide range of different roles played by Arab women, those who are undoubtedly more emancipated as compared to traditional Arab women. On the other hand:

The men who appear in her narration, even though she often refers to them as models because of their initiative and their freedom of movement, are subjected to profound and often harsh critical scrutiny, which sometimes results in silence concerning the masculine universe that surrounded her. It is a fact that it was at the urging of other women that Salwa decided to tell her story, and she told it to a woman. (2007: 222)

Differences between men and women are also found in Salem's story when she claims to feel marginalized by the same men who had initially supported her political activism and her independence. Women, however, showed support to Salem and thanks to them she decided to resume her political activism, thus asserting that:



In Italy it is the women, most of all, who give concrete support, who join in solidarity with the intifada. I think there is more solidarity among the women because they do not have very official roles, and are not afraid of losing any benefits. They have the courage to make their opinions known with more clarity and strength. (2007: 197)

Salem had always displayed a very a strong attitude towards feminism, as she rejected and rebelled against the restrictive gender roles of her own family and, later on, she joined feminist activists in their political campaigns. In her memoir, Salem mentioned gender differences between brothers and sisters in her family as she remembered that she could not start school when her brothers did and when she was eventually put in the same class as her younger brother Ihsan:

This gave me a huge complex. I felt terrible when people said: "Poor girl, she doesn't do well at school. Just think, she is in the same class as her brother who is younger than she". [...] I began to compete with Ihsan [...] I was always first or second in my class, but no one took any notice: it was to be expected since I was older and was doing the same class as Ihsan. I almost hated him, and hoped that he would fail. He was the symbol of a great injustice as far as I was concerned [...] in times like these, the first to pay the price were the girls. (2007: 23-4)

Salem's memoir blends personal feelings and family stories with historical and political events, thus switching between glorious and joyful moments and tragic events and failures. Diaspora is at the centre of Salem's autobiography through the description of her struggle as an exiled Palestinian woman, which provides the readers with a representation of the Palestinians' diaspora. In this respect, Maritano claims that an understanding of Salem's ethnic identity as a Palestinian can help us better understand Salem's relationships developed throughout her life. Her identity makes us aware of how the Palestinians of the diaspora lived and live every day in contact with different people and different regimes within and outside the Arab world. Salem's work depicts the history of a diaspora through the description of how Palestinians attempted to resist forced exile and how they were scattered across many national borders, although she never "aspires to write a history representative of a people or a nation" (Parati 1999: 35).

Furthermore, Salem's memoir also reveals interesting insights into the different social class division within Palestinian society and Salem, in particular, had always identified with the intellectual middle class in any place she lived and studied. Salem's social class status allowed her to better face racism, especially in Vienna where she even brought her wedding album to university to show her peers how Arabs could be "civilised" and "[t]hey looked at me astounded and compared me with the photographs, because they could not come to terms with the idea. I had greatly



confused them. They could not imagine that such a wedding and ceremony could be for an Arab woman" (2007: 120). In Italy, however, she did not experience any form of racism as "she found her appropriate social level with the Italian intellectual middle class" (2007: 224).

Salem's memoir can be defined as diasporic literature and her work has managed to achieve visibility in the Italian literary world as well as worldwide thanks to its translation into several languages. Diasporic literature, as also remarked by Curti (2007: 66) has struggled for years to achieve visibility and be published, although things are nowadays changing. Curti defines diasporic writing as works where "the contact with difference leads to a new sensibility and a hybrid location, an unhomely place that is transformed and 'translated'" (Curti 2007: 66). Works written in Italian by immigrants in collaboration with Italian native-speakers are becoming more and more common as a consequence of linguistic difficulties experienced by immigrants. This literature is viewed either as inferior literature or as interesting intercultural works aimed at bridging gaps between different linguistic and cultural communities (Portelli 2004). Salem's work can be seen as "a way of opening up the Italian literary system still closed to the voices of women on the margins" (Barbarulli 2003: 169).

Through her migration experiences, Salem developed different identities, more precisely an Arab and a Western identity, which have characterised her entire life. Salem's memoir is, in other words, a good example of both linguistic and cultural identities merging into one person who is, simultaneously, a member (insider) and a stranger (outsider) of the Italian community. It is also a perfect example of double discrimination or gendered exile, as she experienced exile as an immigrant and as a woman, thus making her a female immigrant. Tragedies and difficulties, displacement and injustice faced by Salem throughout her life could possibly explain the reasons why she decided to follow a radically different path as compared to her family.

Her work is also an example of linguistic and cultural (self)translation as not only words, but also cultural references are translated and adapted to suit the Italian readership. It is interesting to note how some words used by Salem sound familiar to the Italian readers, thus allowing them to draw a comparison with their own history. Words such as *partigiano*, *resistenza* and *clandestinità* are all well-known concepts to Italians. These words and concepts are used to refer to Fascism and World War II, for instance. Salem also mentions bombings, sirens, screams, massacres and street warfare in order to make readers realise how hard it was for all Palestinians to live in those difficult years. The same feelings were experienced by Italians during Fascism and World War II, although Italians were able to defeat Mussolini and had a happy ending as compared to Salem and all the Palestinians' story, which ended in tragedy with no happy ending.

Salem provides readers with an historical and, to a certain extent, personal narrative of the Palestinian Question and, in her story, four crucial points were given particular attention: 1) the origins of the Palestinian problem, 2) Israel's war of



independence, 3) the relationship between Palestinians and the other Arab regimes and 4) the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. In her memoir, she devotes a chapter to “what it means to be Palestinian” where she explains that:

I wanted my children never to forget that they were Palestinian, that they were born of Palestinian parents, and that they had a land and roots where their grandparents lived. I wanted them never to lose interest in anything that concerned Palestine; I wanted to bind them to their origin. I used to tell them the history of our land, of how it had been torn apart, of how the Palestinian people, who were so proud, strong, tenacious, and aggressive, had been tricked and massacred. (2007: 183)

Salem’s work is the story of displacement and exile experienced by all Palestinians. From her story, Salem emerges as a determined woman who rebelled against specific political and gender impositions while still respecting, to a greater or lesser degree, her family’s wishes. It is worth noting how Salem, despite all the challenges and obstacles faced in her life, never settled for passive or second-class status, thus displaying a very strong, determined and active attitude to life, both as a woman and as an immigrant.

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