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# Intercultural Competence in the Foreign Language Classroom. Pedagogical Applications of Literary Texts on Migration and Exile

Liv Eide<sup>a</sup>, Camilla Skalle<sup>b</sup> and Anje Müller Gjesdal<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Department of Education, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway; <sup>b</sup>Department of Foreign Languages, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway; <sup>c</sup>Faculty of Business, Languages, and Social Sciences, Østfold University College, Halden, Norway

## ABSTRACT

The development of intercultural competence is a crucial part of foreign language (FL) education, yet it remains under-explored in teaching materials and teacher education. Transnational perspectives on FL teaching, and specifically literary texts on migration and exile, may help expand teaching beyond the traditional monocultural focus and stimulate the development of intercultural competence. The article presents case studies of three literary texts that can be used for this purpose. The texts may contribute to the development of the students' intercultural competence as they give access to other perspectives, while simultaneously encouraging students to reflect on their own life-world. However, the texts are highly dependent on contextualization and adaptation of classroom activities, thus underlining the crucial role of the teacher in the development of students' intercultural awareness.

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Foreign language education; Intercultural competence; Bildung; Literary texts; Transnational perspectives

## Introduction

This article presents a reflection on the contribution of literary texts on migration and exile to foreign language education, and specifically to the development of intercultural competence. In a world increasingly characterized by migration, exile and globalization, the foreign language subjects can play a crucial role in developing students' intercultural competence, and the development of intercultural competence is also at the heart of numerous policy documents on education in general, and on language education in specific (Council of Europe, 2001, 2008, 2018). As an example from the Scandinavian context, the Norwegian curriculum for Foreign Languages has Intercultural competence as one of its' core elements (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020). However, due to textbook bias (e.g., Canale, 2016; Eide, 2012; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Vajta, 2011), and the fact that teacher education does not always include intercultural competence to a sufficient degree (e.g., Haukås & Vold, 2012; Leung & Valdés, 2019; Lund, 2008), there is a risk that foreign language education will remain within a monocultural perspective. The teaching of colonial languages such as French, Italian, and Spanish may also carry with it challenges linked to the perceived relation between language and national culture, and historical, imperial power structures (Kramsch, 2019; Macedo, 2019). Furthermore, the notion of intercultural competence, and its application in the classroom and in teaching materials, also run the risk of reproducing power structures and cultural stereotypes, and therefore need to be approached critically (Gorski,

**CONTACT** Liv Eide  liv.eide@uib.no  Department of Education, University of Bergen, P.O Box 7807, 5020, Bergen, Norway

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2008). In this respect, teaching materials play a crucial role as they may carry stereotypes, yet they also represent a potential for conveying critical approaches to intercultural education.

In this paper, we argue that literary texts are especially suited for working with intercultural competence, as they may act both as a mirror, allowing for the reflection of students' own life-worlds, as well as a window into the life-worlds of others (Glazier & Seo, 2005, p. 688). We provide an exploratory analysis of a selection of literary texts on migration and exile, to show how they can be used for this purpose. Moreover, we argue that such texts provide a realistic representation of the language areas in question, as these are characterized by porous borders due to migration, globalization as well as their colonial pasts. Texts on migration and exile may also provide tools for engaging with intercultural competence in a more critical manner, in order to allow for intercultural *Bildung*.<sup>1</sup> Our main research question in this article is therefore: How can literary texts on migration and exile provide a useful material for stimulating the development of intercultural competence in the foreign language classroom?

The article is structured as follows: First, we present an overview of how transnational perspectives might enhance the development of intercultural competence, and of the limitations of using existing textbooks as teaching materials. We then argue that literary texts on migration and exile are an important source for the FL teacher in encouraging the development of students' intercultural competence. In the next step, we present the materials and methods, and provide case studies of literary texts in the foreign languages French, Italian, and Spanish. Finally, we discuss how literary texts on migration and exile may provide an entry point to intercultural competence in the classroom, as well as the potential limitations of this approach.

## Intercultural Competence and Transnational Perspectives in Foreign Language Education

In the context of foreign language education, our understanding of intercultural competence aligns with Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), who argue that the goal of foreign language teaching is to “decenter learners from their pre-existing assumptions and practices and to develop an intercultural identity through engagement with an additional culture. The borders between self and other are explored, problematized, and redrawn” (p. 29). As stated in previous research (Bohlin, 2013; Gjesdal et al., 2017; Gregersen, 2009; Vold, 2014), intercultural competence is closely connected to *Bildung*. Within a traditional, hermeneutic frame, Gadamer (2004 [1975]) describes *Bildung* as the inner process of formation and cultivation, characterized by “keeping oneself open to what is other – to other, more universal points of view” (p. 15). Taylor (2017) claims that a post-modern and postcolonial perspective can widen the scope of the classical notion of *Bildung*, both by including more plural understandings of the self, by questioning the “universality” of Western values and by drawing attention to how values are interlaced with power. Gustavsson (2004) suggests that the classical concept of *Bildung* is transformed into a global, postcolonial concept when literary works from different parts of the world are mirrored in each other. *Bildung* in an educational setting must, according to Klafki (2001), take as its point of departure key problems that are universal and typical of the times we are living in. Today, migration, globalization and various forms of mobility are increasingly shaping the world around us, and the so-called refugee crisis is a good example of a key problem we must deal with, and find solutions to, globally.

While *Bildung* is an overarching aim of education in general, foreign language education in specific has the encounter with *otherness* at its core, making the subject an ideal point of departure for processes of exploring, reflecting, and decentering. Still, although developing accepting attitudes towards other cultures is a vital part of FL education, Fenner (2015) claims that “in many

<sup>1</sup>Gregersen (2009) argues for the use of intercultural *Bildung*, instead of *competence*, as it emphasises the open-ended nature of the process. Although our idea of the concept is in line with Gregersen's, we opt for intercultural competence, simply because it has gained broad acceptance and is applied both in research and in strategic documents concerning FL education.

classrooms, teachers never offer scope for learning processes that include personal interpretation, reflection, and discussion” (Chap. 5). Research shows that FL teachers are generally positive towards working with intercultural competence, but the understanding of the concept differ from teacher to teacher. FL teachers also report that they find intercultural competence hard to operationalize in their own classroom practice, both because of the priorities they have to make, the students’ lack of linguistic proficiency, and the lack of support in teaching materials (e.g., Fernández, 2015; Haukås & Vold, 2012). To develop intercultural competence, one needs not only to be exposed to and learn facts about the target language and culture. The language learner also needs to critically examine both the target culture and their own culture(s). However, the notion of “own culture” and the historically perceived cultural homogeneity of Scandinavia needs to be nuanced, as classrooms are increasingly diverse, with 30% of students in Oslo now being from so-called “minority backgrounds” (Qasim, 2019). Thus, the traditional binary relation between “own culture” and “target culture” is now further complicated by contemporary patterns of mobility.

Complex relationships between territories, identities, languages, and cultures have weakened the concepts and notions of borders and nationalities, suggesting we live in a *transnational world* (Blunt, 2007; Glick Schiller et al., 1995; Jackson et al., 2004; Stovall, 2015). In a globalized world, both target culture and the learners’ own culture(s) are multilingual and interlaced with other cultures. Risager (2017) points out that “all languages, except the very small and isolated, are spoken all over the world as a result of people on the move” (p. 151). As a result, a transnational paradigm began to emerge in language education as well during the 1980s and 90s (Risager, 2017, pp. 193–194). Consequently, the language learner should be motivated to critically engage with transnational aspects in order to avoid a simplistic and biased interpretation. This underlines the dynamic and transformative potential of FL, and the need to acknowledge the conflictual aspects of intercultural learning and cultural encounters, as well as the potential for developing empathy and self-recognition.

Bhabha’s notion of *third space* (2004 [1994]) provides a useful metaphor for describing this aspect of intercultural learning. In Bhabha’s postcolonial thinking, the third space is a space of “enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process” (p. 55), a space in which cultures, ideas and individuals may meet, where we are confronted with the unfamiliar. Through this conflictual space dialogue and recognition of cultural diversity may arise, in a process where the “meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew” (p. 57). Skalle et al. (2015) relate the position of the foreign language learners to this notion of third space, as the FL learners find themselves in between their own and the new language, between the known and the unknown, in a struggle to acquire new knowledge. In this process, both linguistic and cultural conflict and dialogue arise, and the learners themselves will never be static, but in constant negotiation and change (p. 259).

## **Intercultural and Transnational Perspectives in Foreign Language Teaching Materials**

Research shows that textbooks used in FL teaching often display a homogenous and static image of the target language. Risager’s analysis of FL textbooks (2018) shows the need for language learning materials to deal more seriously with knowledge of the world and its diversity. In another study of textbooks, Canale (2016) concludes that his data “indicates that the representation of cultural diversity boils down to comparisons between cultures” (p. 235), and Vajta (2011) finds that Swedish textbooks of French “tend to reinforce stereotypes and a static, national reasoning, at the expense of a pluricultural, heterogeneous world with dynamic identities” (p. 149). Likewise, in a study of Swedish textbooks of French, Aronsson (2019) finds that the distribution of literary texts is heavily skewed in the favour of Metropolitan France, and he argues that this reflects colonial power patterns and implicit eurocentrism. Eide’s study (2012) of textbooks of Spanish in Norwegian schools shows that they tend to reproduce stereotypes about Spanish as a language for tourism, and mostly convey

simplified images of Spanish speaking countries. Similarly, Gjesdal, Skalle, and Eide's analysis (2017) of textbooks in Italian in Norwegian upper secondary school shows that textbooks tend to promote a stereotypical picture of the Italian society emphasizing *la dolce vita*, art, design, and fashion confirming cultural prejudices rather than facilitating intercultural perspectives. Musumeci and Aski's (2010) survey shows similar results, and they affirm that first year textbooks in Italian tend to maintain a distinction between the target culture and the native culture through a comparison between the two.

The study by Gjesdal et.al. (2017) argues for the use of texts on migration and exile as a fruitful tool for developing intercultural competence in the foreign language classroom, and provides visual and textual analyses of such texts in textbooks of French, Italian and Spanish, that are currently used in the Norwegian education system. Even though the study finds a variety of texts representing migration, the authors claim the need for a more nuanced and contextualized portrayal of issues connected to migration and exile. The case studies we present in this article is a response to that call for representation of migration.

### Literary Texts on Migration and Exile as a Tool for Intercultural Learning

Numerous scholars (e.g., Bredella, 2006; Fenner, 2001; Kramsch, 1993; Hecke, 2013; Hoff, 2017; Reichl, 2013) have discussed literature in the FL classroom as a distinctive means of working with intercultural competence, arguing that the literary text is, in itself, an encounter with the other and with the worldview of another subject. Rodríguez and Puyal (2012) suggest that traditional textbook texts on culture can be supported by literary texts because they are more representative of the multilingual diversity of (English) language and culture (p. 109). They also state that "multicultural literature can provide a wide variety of values, beliefs and different perspectives which can enrich and enlarge our students' viewpoints" (p. 109). Previous studies (e.g., Hoff, 2017; Lee, 2013) confirm this hypothesis showing that working with (multicultural) literature in foreign language education, does strengthen students' intercultural competence.

In this article we propose the use of literary texts on migration and exile in foreign language education. Thematically, they focus on the experience of exile and migration, and associated phenomena, such as identity, culture, belonging, and gender. The definition is thus dependent on formal and thematic criteria, and independent of the author's *own* experience with migration and exile. Like Rodríguez and Puyal (2012), we claim that multicultural literary texts reflect diversity and thus represent an especially valuable means in the development of intercultural competence or awareness. Moreover, they affirm that the "affective component present in literary texts will lead to deeper processing and better learning of both language and content matter. This would allow students to become interculturally competent as they explore a topic from foreign viewpoints" (p. 110). Pulverness (2003) argues that reading literature may encourage language learners to decentre from their own perspectives and suggests that literary genres such as science fiction and texts of immigrants, may act as catalyst for engaging critically also with one's own culture because they have the potential to subvert the world we are familiar with. Pulverness and Tomlinson (2013) also suggest the use of literature dealing with the immigrant or second-generation bicultural experience, in order to "prepare learners for the encounter with the cultural Other and to promote greater intercultural awareness" (p. 401). However, literature representing these voices are typically omitted from the traditional canon (Glazier & Seo, 2005). Nonetheless, this kind of literature may, in our opinion, help students to identify with their own cultures, expose them to other cultures, and open the dialogue on issues regarding diversity. For this to happen

The text must [...] be interrogated from multiple perspectives and act as a comparison point for students' own lives in order for it to be transformative [...]. As a result, it must act as both mirror – allowing students to reflect on their own experiences – and as window, providing the opportunity to view the experiences of others. (p. 688)

Although the arguments for using literary texts in the foreign language classroom are strong, it is obvious that reading literary texts does not automatically develop into intercultural competence, as Dressel (2005) shows. The learners must somehow be led by the teacher to *engage* with the Other, and to problematize both target culture(s) and their own culture(s) through a decentring and restabilizing process of the Self. In this article, we will investigate how literary texts on migration and exile may provide a concrete way of working with intercultural competence, which may otherwise be hard to grasp and conceptualize.

## Materials and Methods

In the following, we present three case studies for using literature to engage with intercultural aspects: the short story “La préférence nationale” by Fatou Diome (2001, translated into English by Polly McLean (2011) under the title “Préférence Nationale” (Diome, 2011)), the autofictional novel *La mia casa è dove sono* (2010, *My home is where I am*) by Igiaba Scego, and the micro-story “El emigrante” (2005, “The emigrant”) by Luis Felipe Lomeli.

The three texts are chosen from a repertoire of literary texts built up during our own research on both migration narratives and language education, as well as during teaching in higher education. The texts correspond therefore with the linguistic and cultural expertise of the three authors of this article, i.e., French, Italian, and Spanish. Our selection also corresponds with the pedagogical principles of intercultural language teaching and learning presented by Liddicoat (2004), meaning that the texts are, in our opinion, especially suited for active construction, making connections, social interaction, reflection, and responsibility. In addition, the selection reflects Hadaway and Young’s (2010) consideration on the multicultural classroom and choice of literary texts as they state that:

The multicultural nature of classrooms and schools calls for books that speak to diverse cultures, language groups, and lifestyles [...] For the purposes of the criteria for text selection, cultural fit is used to encompass ethnicity or cultural background, language, geography, religion, socioeconomic status, and gender. (p. 48)

Furthermore, the present text selection represents the experience of migration in a nuanced manner, revealing both tensions and potential conflict related to the experience of migration. In addition, the material has been selected based on the criteria that they are not too challenging linguistically and aesthetically, yet of high quality, and they are of a length and format suitable for use in classroom settings.

In the case studies we adopt a contextual approach, similar to the pre-reading activities that will take place in the foreign language classroom, as well as close readings of the texts, to bring out different perspectives on migration and exile, such as how cultural factors shape the representations of gender and identity, or perceptions of the migrant’s position, both from the perspective of the migrant and of the host community. Furthermore, we propose ideas and approaches for the foreign language classroom, as well as specific activities, which take into account the implications of the close reading of these three texts.

## Analysis

### “La préférence nationale” by Fatou Diome

Fatou Diome is a French-Senegalese writer whose work focuses on the transnational experiences of migration and exile, and she actively participates in the public debate on these issues, advocating for humanist values and the values of the *République*. Her writing is rich with cultural references and a vocabulary that is relatively complex, yet her writings, and the short stories in particular, have been used as teaching materials in French language curricula in Scandinavia and South Africa (Aronsson, 2019; Horne, 2016) as well as in textbooks (e.g., Laulanié & Mandelik, 2015). Thus, Diome is

somewhat of an exception, as textbooks in French often focus on the canon of Metropolitan France (Aronsson, 2019).

The short story “La préférence nationale” (2001) tells the story of a young French-Senegalese woman seeking odd jobs for which she is over-qualified to earn her living after being left by her French husband just before the time limit required to get permanent residence in France. The short story’s title references the policies of the far right party Front National (currently Rassemblement National) which stated that there should be a “priority for French nationals over foreigners in jobs, housing and welfare support” (Shields, 2014, p. 495), a principle which was at the basis of the FN’s anti-immigrant policies in the 80s and 90s. Due to the relatively brief format of the short story, it is a genre that is suited to the FL classroom, and with some linguistic and cultural contextualization it is possible to work with the entire short story with students at level B1-B2.

“La préférence nationale” demonstrates the sometimes conflictual aspects of transnational situations, in the form of the harsh, racist discrimination that the main character encounters. However, the text also illustrates how racial discrimination interacts with class and gender identities, as the protagonist is a highly educated, well-spoken young woman, challenging existing stereotypes about migration, and giving a more complex picture of how these dimensions interact. In addition, the text illustrates the complex history of colonialism in the French-language countries. Thus, we argue that the text is well suited to explore diversity and decentring, crucial aspects of the development of intercultural perspectives.

To work through these questions, we suggest focusing on a scene where the main character enters a bakery to apply for an open position. The scene presents a stark contrast between the setting of the all-white Alsatian *boulangerie* and the Senegalese protagonist, which is reflected in the description of colours (white/black), of names (Pierre and Gertrude vs. Aïcha and Mamadou), and where the hostile baker is the incarnation of the national values, wearing a hat in the colours of France:

The next morning I went to the bakery. Apart from the chocolate cakes and a few overcooked baguettes, everything was white. The men were called Pierre, Paul, Joseph and Martin; the female sex was represented by Gertrude, Josiane and Jacqueline. No sign of Aïsha, or Mamadou.

The boss welcomed me with a German moustache, an Alsace accent and a hat in the colours of the French flag. From the way he stared at me, I could tell that I hadn’t made it through the qualifying round. This man didn’t like chocolate in the flesh. (pp. 143-144)

The baker is clearly sceptical, and asks the protagonist if she speaks the Alsatian dialect, which appears as nothing more than a pretext for refusing her the job, as she speaks perfect French and would have no problem making herself understood by the clients:

I thought, I’ve only been eating *kouglof* for two years, and already he wants me to adopt his language. I could see the refusal in his muddy-coloured eyes. As if to justify that refusal and humiliate me, he said, “Why don’t you go and work in your own country?”

He used the ‘vous’ form, but it wasn’t politeness - he’d used ‘tu’ before. It was a hold-all - yes, a vast bin bag for all the foreigners he would have liked to throw in the Rhine. (pp. 143-144)

The excerpt shows the tropes of every-day racism at work, but also the complexities of the French language as it is spoken across the world. Yet even a perfect command of French is not sufficient when faced with the petty racism of the baker, and the scene ends with the baker’s vicious use of the formal *vous* to humiliate the protagonist. In the text, there is no happy ending, and the ending clearly shows how hurtful the experience of racism is.

We suggest that teachers can use these excerpts to explore the complexity and transnational characteristics of the francophone world in order to relativize the historical distinction between Metropolitan France and the rest of the francophone world. Students can work in groups or individually to decipher the linguistic traces and cultural symbols of Alsace and Senegal, the life-worlds of the protagonist, which represent the diversity of the francophone world. Thus, students can be

encouraged to explore the cultural connotation of first names, as well as of culinary cultures, exemplified by the pastry *kouglof*, but also the presence of German and the regional culture of Alsace as represented in the text. Looking at the world through the eyes of the transnational protagonist may thus encourage the students to explore less eurocentric visions of the francophone world.

In addition, teachers can use the text to stimulate reflections on otherness as well as decentring of the students' perspectives. The text is rich with tension and enables an exploration of the complexity of intercultural competence. This is not an example of harmonizing cultural encounters, yet it is an example that may be recognizable and that can be compared with students' own experiences and knowledge of migration and the labour market. As above, these aspects can be examined in groups or individually by analysing the interaction of the protagonist and her potential employer. How do they express their perception of each-other? Again, it may be particularly useful to let students analyse the concrete, linguistic manifestation of this interaction, such as the formal and informal pronouns *vous* and *tu*.

Moreover, the representation of the protagonist's agency, her shame and hurt but also her resistance faced with the baker's shaming of her linguistic background, may be a fruitful topic to explore with students, as it may provide an opportunity to reflect on their own experience of linguistic and cultural "otherness". In this sense, the scene is an example of the "third space" as it allows for the exploration of the affective dimension of the intercultural encounter. Although this could be a sensitive topic for some students, it can be explored via creative writing in the form of poems, short stories or diary notes representing their own experiences or those of a fictional character.

### ***La mia casa è dove sono by Igiaba Scego***

In the following we show examples of how the autofictional novel *La mia casa è dove sono* (Scego, 2010) can be used in the teaching of Italian as FL. The author, researcher, journalist, and social activist Igiaba Scego was born in Italy by Somali refugees. She has published several novels and short stories thematizing issues such as exile, migration, everyday racism, and the situation for thousands of young people of the so-called second generation. *La mia casa è dove sono* tells the story of Scego's family: from the generations that lived in Somalia to the ones that now live dispersed all over the world because of the Somalian civil war. The account also narrates the story of the author's own life, balanced between Somalia and Italy, and between different languages and cultures. Scego's texts represent other nuances of the Italian society compared to the relatively homogeneous and harmonized picture one often meets in textbooks (e.g., Gjesdal et al., 2017). *La mia casa* is no exception to this, and the author thoroughly discusses notions such as cultural belonging and identity as well as the situation of many young, black Italians today. Literary texts such as this novel, may therefore present unfamiliar aspects of Italian culture and society compared to traditional textbooks, thus adding to a transnational shift of Italian as FL.

In this paper, we have chosen to focus on two excerpts from the novel's concluding chapter "Essere italiano per me" ("Being Italian to Me"). The chapter gathers up the book's thematic threads, and depending on the students' language proficiency, the teacher can choose to either work with the entire novel or with the concluding chapter only. Due to length and linguistic complexity the novel is suitable for students at level B1-B2. The following passages are, in our opinion, fruitful tools for the teacher to make the students engage with today's transnational Italy and examples of how the teacher can work with the development of intercultural competence.

The first example we will discuss, depicts a contemporary Rome that is quite different from how the city of Rome is usually represented in textbooks. This is how the autofictional Igiaba describes the transnational metropolis:

Today, as an adult, I am living in Torpignattara, a Rome that borders with Beijing and Dakka. It is an original Rome that not even I, Afro-Italian, always accustomed to living in the north of Rome, really know. In the morning I greet everyone with a *Ni hao* (good morning) and in the evening I take my leave with a *Scubro ratri* (good night). I know how to be nice to people asking them *Tu mi kemon a ciò* (how are you?), but if



it becomes necessary, I can also say *Pagol* (crazy), a small word that can always be useful if someone gets on your nerves. It is a Rome that no one expects. A Rome where globalization has become a reality. The area between the Rome-Pescara railway and Casilina street encloses entire universes and sometimes you do not realize that this is possible. (p. 58, italics in the original)<sup>2</sup>

The quote focuses on translinguistic presence and human geography in Rome, and in particular the transnational aspects of Igiaba's neighbourhood, Torpignattara. For this passage, we suggest a series of activities based on linguistic codes and geography as a point of departure for the teacher while working with intercultural competence. The activities can be adjusted according to the students' age and linguistic competence, and they are suitable for both individual work and group work. To delve into the above-mentioned aspects, the teacher can ask the students to identify the languages used in the paragraph. This activity has the advantage of involving the students' own background and knowledge: maybe some of the students recognize their own mother tongue or one of the languages spoken within their family? Perhaps they live in a neighbourhood similar to Igiaba's thus recognizing a comparable linguistic landscape? Another activity in connection to the linguistics and associated cultural aspect in the passage above, is to let the students examine numbers and statistics of migration from the language areas represented as well as Italian migration history: does the migration flow change from decade to decade? How come Torpignattara, this "Rome that no one expects" (Scego, 2010, p. 158) differs from other districts of Rome? What does the migration and demographic statistics state when looking into the numbers for their own district, area, or state?

Regarding the geographic aspects of the citation above, we propose that the students use the names of the mentioned streets and districts in order to achieve more familiarity with the Italian capital. We suggest they study maps, reference books and images of Rome mapping out the places that Scego mentions: where in Rome does the protagonist live? What characterizes this part of Rome? Can they find central monuments, buildings, or other significant aspects of this district? And what about the northern parts of Rome where Scego used to live? This work may take the form of picture and text collages, short and informative student texts, individual and group presentations and more.

The city of Rome described in the passage above is, as previously stated, closer to the real city of Rome as well as, in many cases, to the places the students themselves live. Thus, Scego's Rome may, in our opinion create stronger resonances within the language learners because of the similarities to other transcultural places. The example may prove useful in comparing the contemporary Italian society with those of the students' when it comes to, for example, immigration history, demographic characteristics as well as the multicultural and transnational realities they live in.

The novel, as stated previously, also discusses the notions of cultural hybridity, Italianness and identity, and in the following example, Scego emphasizes that she belongs to (at least) two cultures, a questioning of identity that many language learners, independently of cultural belonging and nationality, can recognize:

What does it mean to me to be Italian ... [...]  
 I had no answer. I had a hundred.  
 I am Italian, but also not. I am Somali, but also not.  
 A crossroad. A junction.  
 A mess. A headache.  
 I was a trapped animal.  
 A being condemned to eternal anguish.  
 Being Italian to me means ... (p. 158)

Although the protagonist ponders on the meaning of being Italian, her answers are recognizable for many readers independent of cultural identity, nationality, and age, thus acting as a mirror of their own experience of *in-betweenness* (Bhabha, 2004 [1994]). For this aspect of the novel, we suggest that the students examine the meaning of concepts such as *hybridity* and *in-betweenness*.

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<sup>2</sup>The translations from the Italian are the authors' if not otherwise stated.

There is a series of activities that can initiate students' reflection on these concepts and on their own intercultural awareness. We propose, as a starting point for further discussion and elaboration, that the students write a text, as an extension of Scego's text, on identity and what it means to them to belong to different cultures or groups: "Being [insert word of choice] to me means ...". Adopting creative writing can allow students to explore these issues in an unrestrained manner as "writing creatively in a second or foreign language promotes freedom of expression and allows learners – irrespective of their proficiency level – to bring out their innermost thoughts without being restrained by language issues" (Viana & Zyngier, 2019, p. 40). Using Scego's text as a starting point for mirroring one's own identity, can prove useful in the development of intercultural competence. Simultaneously, Igiaba's pain in the above quote, can act as a window into the world of another subject, encouraging the Self to decentre and develop awareness of the Other.

### ***"El emigrante" by Luis Felipe Lomeli***

The Spanish case is a micro-story by Mexican author Luis Felipe Lomeli: "El emigrante", from the collection of short stories *Ella sigue de viaje* (Lomeli, 2005). The micro-story ("microrrelato" in Spanish) is an established genre in the Spanish-speaking world. This text is considered one of the shortest, as it consists of only two sentences and thus belongs to what Lagmanovich (2006) calls "hypershorts" stories. In addition to the short format, the micro-story is characterized by certain narrative strategies that allow for an intense or condensed narrative, often based on an episode and including fantastic and/or unusual elements (Núñez Sabarías & Ribeiro, 2020). Intertextuality is another characteristic, and in the case of "El emigrante", the author explains that the story came from the sign he kept seeing when leaving buses or airplanes, saying *Olvida usted algo?* (Did you forget anything?). It made him think of all the things he would like to remember but could not, and the other things he would prefer to forget. He added the answer *¡Ojalá!* (If only!/I wish!) (Ibarra, 2011).

Linguistically, the text is simple and easy to understand. Consequently, it could be suitable even for students at level A1-A2. Still, as Núñez Sabarías and Ribeiro (2020, p. 5) point out, the genre is demanding, and depends on the cooperation of a reader who will tolerate the ellipses, the hints and the intertextuality of the story. As for form and content in "El emigrante", there is a lot going on "between the lines", but with the help of the teachers' contextualization, it can open for reflection, imagination, and creativity. Although very brief, the text is a dialogue between two voices, but it does not provide the reader with any information about the protagonists, thus leaving it up to the reader to form their own image of the two. The point of departure is something very "common": a sign on a bus or a plane, that you read briefly as you disembark, asking if you have forgotten anything. On a deeper level, the text deals with the essential human experience of travelling, of leaving something behind, and of arriving somewhere new. A journey can be conducted in many ways and represent a myriad of different experiences, but the act of travelling is universal. All students, regardless of background, will be able to relate to that experience, and can be encouraged by the teacher to use their own experiences when working with the text. Another characteristic that makes this text especially suited for working with intercultural competence, is the fact that the content is not constrained by a national or monocultural perspective, thus highlighting the fact that migration is a truly transnational phenomenon.

To work with the micro-story "El emigrante" in the FL classroom, we suggest several activities that may be adapted to different levels and contexts. The activities include both individual work, group work and plenary sessions. At a very basic level (A1), the students can draw the situation, and name the different elements included in the drawing, or they can draw a cartoon. A classroom discussion (not necessarily in the target language) about what possibly happened before and what happens after the dialogue, would also be a fruitful tool in encouraging the students to use their imagination in active construction. If their knowledge of Spanish is more developed (A2-B1), they can write down how they imagine the continuation of the dialogue, or they can play it out

as a role play, thus engaging in social interaction that may allow them to “experience difference during communication, to share perceptions and to discuss and try out possible responses” (Liddicoat, 2004, p. 21). These activities urge the students to be creative and to imagine what the protagonists look like, how their life is, and what their feelings are, allowing them to engage with the Other. Working with these activities, possible stereotypes linked to the students’ perceptions of migrants may appear and can be discussed and dealt with in the classroom.

Another possible activity, suitable for levels A2-B2, is to make the students find and connect factual knowledge to the micro-story, for instance by exploring background information about migration to and from, and even within, the Spanish-speaking world, make a poster about it or perform a television news report. By doing so, the transnational perspective of the FL is enhanced, as the students link the content of the story to a transnational phenomenon and the porous borders of the language area are revealed. Furthermore, the teacher may encourage the students to play with the form of the text and make their own micro story, or to express themselves through another format: a poem, a song, or a personal diary. Some students may choose to express their experiences with travelling in general, and some may possibly be able to relate to the experience of migrating. Some may choose to write a personal text; others may try to take the perspective of the Other. Both ways, the text and the suggested activity can act as a mirror, allowing for the reflection of the student’s own life-world, as well as a window into the life-world of the Other.

## Discussion

The case studies in this article represent three textual genres (the short story, the novel, the micro-story) that may require different degrees of contextualization, but they all provide nuanced perspectives on the experience of transnational situations. However, they represent different facets of this experience; while Diome’s short story focuses on racism, stereotypes and the colonial legacy, Scego zooms in on a transnational way of living, the complex experience of the so-called “second generation” subject and the experience of in-betweenness. While Lomeli’s micro-story has a universal perspective, Scego and Diome address the unique, individual experience of transnational encounters. All the texts present the transnational experience as a form of “third space” (Bhabha, 2004 [1994]), in the sense that they present the conflictual aspect of this experience, but also the potential for dialogue, or at least for recognition.

As we have argued, literary texts on migration and exile may represent a way of encountering the myriad of worldviews, cultures and languages represented in both the target language area and the world of the FL learners. We follow Skalle et al. (2015), who argue that stories of migration may challenge existing, static conceptions of culture. The texts demonstrate the plurilingualism and multiculturalism of the target language area, as shown in the analysis of passages from Scego’s novel, and represent an important contribution to expanding intercultural insights and associated perspectives.

In addition, stories of migration and exile may connect with the language learners’ own experiences, if not with migration, then at least with travel and other forms of mobility. The texts may also help the teacher in creating ties between FL and the multicultural diversity that already exists in the classrooms, and even create a sense of identification for students who have migration/exile backgrounds. In this sense, the texts we have studied echo the metaphor of “window and mirror”. For instance, when working with Lomeli’s text, the students can choose to use their own personal experience, or they can use their imagination and try to take the perspective of “the other”. However, it should be noted that while literary texts on migration and exile may present materials that reflect students’ own life worlds, care should be taken in order to address the situation of students who have experienced migration and exile. Classroom discussions of topics such as immigration and racism may spark unexpected dynamics despite the teacher’s best intentions and may put students in a vulnerable position (Svendsen, 2014), and the risks should be assessed beforehand.

Also, while literary texts on migration and exile may function as *window* and *mirror*, we should emphasize their function in questioning harmonizing approaches by exemplifying conflictual

aspects of cultural encounters, as in the analysis of Diome's short story. As Hoff (2020) affirms, "the process of critically examining one's own bias and motivations may therefore be deeply disconcerting, because it requires a willingness to uncover potentially unpleasant truths about oneself" (p. 66). Although challenging, such an approach "may provide a basis for authentic, meaningful, and potentially transformative learning processes in the classroom" (p. 66).

Transformative learning processes involve the affective dimension of learning, and literary texts are, as previously noted, especially suited for this purpose. Glazier and Seo (2005) suggest that: "Because all readers bring their own emotions, concerns, life experiences, and knowledge to their reading, each interpretation is subjective and unique" (p. 689). Still, for a transformative learning process to take place in the FL classroom, the teacher must make room for reflection and discussion. As Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) point out,

the intercultural emerges not from the text as an authentic language resource but through the engagement between the cultural worlds of the text and the language learner. It is in the process of interpretation, of seeing the cultural in the text, that literature becomes a resource for intercultural language learning. (p. 97)

As stated earlier, previous research has proven textbooks to be lacking when it comes to representations of the experience of migration and exile. Consequently, the FL teachers who want to explore these perspectives with their students, might have to look elsewhere. The texts analysed in this article might serve as examples of the types of texts suitable for this purpose. Still, the texts are highly dependent on contextualization, and in our case studies we have aimed at drawing attention to the aspects of the texts which can be used by the FL teacher to promote intercultural learning. Following Liddicoat and Scarino (2013), the texts and the activities connected to them need to be adapted or supplemented, "so that there are links to the life and experiences of the learners and multiple paths to engagement" (p. 05). The text itself does not encourage the development of intercultural competence; the process is dependent on the teacher as a catalyst for the students' engagement.

## Limitations

The case studies led us to note the following limitations to our approach: First, there is a limitation related to the target audience for the texts and activities proposed in this article, as they are primarily aimed at students at level B1-B2 in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Second, while Diome's and Scego's texts are, we believe, interesting examples of texts that may provide a third space for stimulating intercultural competence, they may to some extent be seen as an example of the domestication of multicultural literature, where texts are selected and adapted according to the dominant aesthetic and cultural values of the "home culture", thus running the risk of reproducing cultural homogenization. Both these authors live in France and Italy, and are public intellectuals in these countries, something which is often made relevant in the reception and mediation of their work. Thus, the case studies may be argued to somewhat reproduce an implicitly Eurocentric perspective (cf. Aronsson, 2019, p. 59).

## Conclusion

As noted previously, literature is by many scholars considered an ideal medium for the intercultural encounter because of the inherent presence of another world. We assert that *texts on migration and exile* even more so represent a favourable starting point for the explorations of intercultural awareness and transnational perspectives in the FL classroom, and they may therefore complement existing strategies to teaching intercultural competence. As our classrooms become more and more diverse, the use of texts that represent the experience of migration and exile may also create a sense of identification for students with migration/exile backgrounds. When all students are given the opportunity to contribute with their own experiences, a fruitful "third space" of dialogue

may develop in the classroom. However, for FL teachers it is important to bear in mind that the students' critical thinking and intercultural awareness are not automatically developed through reading and working with literary texts. Also, the process of selecting texts, of contextualization and adaptation of texts into classroom activities for the purpose of developing the students' intercultural competence is highly dependent on the FL teacher's knowledge of the concept and how to operationalize it in their own classroom practice, as well as on their own intercultural awareness. Consequently, both teacher education and higher education in general must draw attention to teachers' intercultural competence.

## Disclosure Statement

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