

Introduction

This volume compiles texts from two international conferences: “Diasporic Voices: Tears, Silences, Laughter” and “In a Different Voice: Resonances, Silences, Counterpoints, and Performances.” Held in Cluj-Napoca on April 14, 2022, the former was a collaboration between the Phantasma Centre for Imagination Studies, the Centre for African Studies, and the Centre for Middle-Eastern and Mediterranean Studies at the University Babeş-Bolyai, Romania. The main objective of this conference was to explore the notion of diaspora through the prism of literary studies and political science while emphasizing the intertwining of tragedy and comedy. Held in Montreal from October 5 through 7, 2022, the latter (“In a Different Voice”) was an experimental workshop between Département de littérature française, Département de littérature et langues du monde, Université de Montréal, the Phantasma Centre for Imagination Studies at the University Babeş-Bolyai, and Unité Plurielles, Université Bordeaux Montaigne.

As coordinators of this volume, we emphasize the striking connections between the two conferences since both explored deviances, experiments, suppressed words, and, above all, silences and performances.

The conference “Diasporic Voices: Tears, Silences, Laughter” laid the foundation for this compilation by exploring the interplay of the tragic and the comic within the diaspora, with scholars from diverse backgrounds converging to examine the subtleties of diasporic cultural production. Throughout discussions, questions of time and place, and the intersections of reception with belonging and displacement emerged as central areas of exploration, emphasizing the emotional depths found in diasporic artistic expression.

One significant insight was the uncovering of a wide range of perspectives that showed how similarities and differences, repetitions, and adaptations are intertwined, emphasizing the roles of both uniformity and diversity, as well as originality and uniqueness. Primarily concerned with an inquiry into the tragic and the comic, the conference unveiled new understandings of literary works that shed light on the diverse experiences within the diaspora, directing attention to three core aspects: the presence of tears, moments of silence, and bursts of laughter.

Through the application of a diasporic framework to recent and classic works alike, the presentations provided unexpected interpretations that challenged conventional readings. Discussions revolved around the processes of evaluating cultural production within

the diasporic context, questioning identity discourses and acknowledging the intricate and ever-evolving facets, as well as the fluidity of diaspora. Covering a diverse range of human emotions, these conversations enriched and broadened the examination of diasporic cultural production and served as a reminder of the ongoing significance of diaspora studies.

By examining well-known texts through a diasporic lens and engaging with lesser-known literature, the conference encouraged a re-evaluation of criteria used to assess artistic production within the diasporic context. This highlighted the distinctiveness of the notions of place and nostalgia, as well as the frequently overlooked importance of the interplay between light-heartedness and gravitas.

An opportunity to explore how diasporic communities navigate issues of space, time, and memory was provided by the conference, shedding light on how the intertwining of tears, silences, and laughter functions as coping mechanisms and expressions of resilience. It also became apparent that among diasporans, creative artistic voices are emerging as responses to the challenges and opportunities within the diaspora, often integrating innovative approaches in blending the tragic and the comic.

While the presentations and discussions reflected upon audience engagement with diasporic cultural production, they also prompted questions of interpretation within the field, and delved into the intricacies of understanding and evaluating diasporic cultural artifacts. The conference fostered a reconsideration of the audience's role in shaping the perception and interpretation of diaspora, while also underscoring the significance of both tragedy and comedy in this ongoing conversation on the aesthetic value of diasporic cultural production.

Within the following pages, the examination of diaspora is featured prominently throughout various artistic landscapes. Transgressions of diaspora within the world of Commedia dell'arte are highlighted, shedding light on the role of improvisation in challenging cultural boundaries. Diasporic experiences come into focus through examinations of the works of Leila Aboulela, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Monica Ali, with a particular emphasis on the connection between geography and identity. The complex discourses within Jewish-Romanian interwar literature are navigated, inviting exploration into projective spaces. Familiar texts by Philip Roth and Nicole Krauss are reevaluated through the lens of counterfactual narratives. Humour, laughter and self-critique within the Muslim diaspora are examined in narratives set in European superdiverse urban contexts. Jewish identity within Philip Roth's *The Plot against America* is subjected to re-examination through counterfactual storytelling. A mapping the crossroads where Africa, jazz, politics, and revolution intersect within the diasporic context, in turn, creates pathways for exploring how diaspora develops and questions of identity arise.

Personal reflections on diasporic nostalgia are offered, encouraging a connection with the emotive aspects of displacement. The elements of tragedy in Malika Mokkedem's work are likewise examined, encouraging a reassessment of their presence within the narrative. Hidden narratives within the literature of descendants of harkis are uncovered, urging engagement with the silenced voices in the diasporic context. Spaces of self-discovery and transformation in Lynda-Nawel Tebbani's work are presented for exploration,

with a spotlight on the role of interstitial spaces in diaspora. The literary contributions of Andrei Codrescu are reconsidered, shedding new light on his work, and creative responses to displacement and nostalgia within C.D. Florescu's short stories are discussed.

While the conference "Diasporic Voices" addressed the diversity of diasporic experience, the conference "In A Different Voice" was inspired by the fortieth anniversary of the publication of Carol Gilligan's 1982 book *In a Different Voice*, a groundbreaking text introducing *care* studies. The idea was to advance the book's discourse and explore the different voices that could give rise to new *care* practices. We focused mainly on the encounters highlighting the sensitive experience of the voice viewed as the expression of attention shown towards oneself and others, briefly as the foundation of relational ethics of interdependence and vulnerability. As organizers, we underlined the apprehension of the voice as a material phenomenon, pre-language and spontaneous vocal composition, the entanglement of human and non-human voices, and the voice of affects.

Our role was also to facilitate discussions and convey knowledge non-traditionally, based on experiments with voice, intensities, affects, and rhythms, and with different layers of lecture and orality of poems. The most challenging part of this workshop was the encounter between researchers in letters and philosophy and researchers in *care* studies.

As a keynote speaker, Carol Gilligan of New York University addressed the performative aspect in her presentation, "Resonating Voices: Toward an Embodied Care Ethics." She expounded on the under voice notion and the idea of freeing the natural voice. Gilligan considers the *voice* a literal barometer of relationships. Furthermore, her presentation focused on liberation ethics, reason and emotions, suffocated voices deciphering and increasing the capacity to learn how to read the under voices through radical listening. The latter stems from the crucial question: What happens to the voice? How do we retrieve it? Under these conditions, the most important experience would be the passage from judgment to curiosity, cultivating disruptive voices through theater and writing – performative acts that express themselves against the "forces that go in the world."

Moreover, the conference proposed rethinking the ethical implications of conceiving the voice as a physical phenomenon whose materiality resonates in our discourses without being reduced to them, thus prolonging the essential questioning concerning voices that express, manifest, and mobilize the difference.

On the background of these theoretical and practical remarks, several workshops took place, namely the sound installation "Hallway Whispers" (created by students), workshops on "Choir of Emotions," a somatic and auditory experience that aimed at attaining the catharsis without necessarily passing through discursive language; "Give Voice to Emotions," through which we understood that the voice (placed between human intelligence, anatomy, and verbal expression) has a vital role in the expression of emotions. The particular vocal timbers of different voice devices are all singular despite the influence of DNA, language, culture, or hierarchical and generational conventions on how we express our voice. The workshop has allowed the participants to explore different vocal colors related to emotions and recognize their muscular and physiological support, which enlarges the specter of dynamics useful to their transmission.

Another workshop explored “the animal voice,” the hybridity of the human and animal voice inspired by practices highlighting the sacred spirit of animals in the Innu world. This was followed by the workshop “Valleys” and the idea of “sympoiesis” of the ecofeminist artist Donna Haraway, creating choirs made out of human voices and land sounds, reworked in the studio. The materiality of the voice served to explore the connection of human time to other temporalities (geological or ecological) to respond to the question of how to form a non-anthropocentric choir and to learn “to stay with the trouble.” The last workshop, “The Mirror Lecture,” was articulated in two tempos, starting in a low voice and finishing aloud, allowing the participants to seize the difference between the intimate reading of a literary text, compared to a public lecture of one’s own text.

As a follow-up to these two international conferences and workshops, we aimed to investigate how new and different voices can emerge: first, on the large scale of the *Diasporic Voices*, and second, by scrutinizing texts that highlight other, *Different Voices*. These intertwined voices result in volume 45 of *Echinoux Journal*, *Diasporic Voices / Different Voices: Resonance, Silence, and Performance*.

We have thus put together contributions from various disciplinary fields (performative studies, literary studies, political studies, etc.), which explore the multivocality of diasporic struggles with an emphasis on the intertwining of the tragic and the comic, “the dialectical relationship between the idea of displacement and nostalgia for a lost time and space” (Ato Quayson), voices that provide a distinctive past to the person or community, involving satire, laughter, irony, and manifesto – but also texts which underline the apprehension of the voice as a material phenomenon; pre-language and spontaneous vocal composition; the entanglement of human and non-human voices and the voice of affects.

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