

## **A laboratory for narrative videos to construct an archive of African Migrants Memory in Italy by ZaLab**

Talking about media, it is not the technical capacities of new medias that can reach any place of the planet that really can determine a growth of democracy, participation and justice within the global society. It is the real spreading and the possibility of using in a responsible way the communicative resources offered by the new medias.

From a global audience of passive spectators to a plural society of well-aware narrators.

ZaLab is a cultural association based in Roma that carries out laboratories about self-narration and participatory video in contexts of geographic and social marginality. Currently ZaLab coordinates, within the zalabTV project ([www.zalab.tv](http://www.zalab.tv)), financed by the Anna Lindh Foundation, laboratorial video productions in various countries of the Mediterranean: Biddu (Palestine), Kerchaou (Tunis), El Jem (Tunis) and Barcelona (Spain). In Italy the association ZaLab has carried out permanent video laboratories for young people of the Isle Eolie (Stromboli and Salina), a laboratory with refugees and asylum seekers in Bologna (in collaboration with the degree in "Public and Social Communication and Politics" of the University of Bologna, within the field Equal-Integrarsi) and another laboratory with the refugees and asylum seekers in Rome (in collaboration with the association Asinitas and AMOOD - Archive of the Workers Movement). Besides laboratorial activities ZaLab is engaged in the production of social documentaries ( "A Sud di Lampedusa", by Andrea Segre, "Solchi" by Stefano Collizzolli and Sara Zavarise, "Carmine" by Sara Zavarise)

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The world of refugees and immigrants risks to remain strange since our feelings and thoughts are more and more projected and constructed by others, mainly by politics and mass media, experts, associations of the third - sector or NGO's, while the connection of reality and common imagination for the foreigner and refugee is missing. Before sharing images and reality it is necessary to share space and time, to construct sociality within the contexts of encounters and of listening, which results something educative for everybody.

The encounter with the other is often led without any orientation, since it makes one participating at the history, the stories, the narration, the traces and plot lines of the individual and the collective, but this does not have much in common with the real chronicle but with the History of our time and the destiny of thousands of people.

Refugees, as people coming from other countries and continents, are the testimonies of our time.

There are two words in Latin for *the testimony*. The first one *testis* etymologically means the one that functions as a third person; the second one *superstes*, indicates the one that has experienced something, has passed through something until the end and can therefore give a testimony of it. It becomes clear that within many situations, the people we are talking about are not a simple third person, but *superstiti*, survivors of the war, of persecutions, journeys, racism, immigration and asylum laws, labour world, impersonal and standard acceptances, marginalisation.

We understand that the main task is to construct an archive of memory, which will contribute to the existence of the voices that make us understand the surroundings and the roots of migration and asylum.

The laboratory for narrative videos took part between spring and summer 2007 and it was

addressed to a group of refugees coming from Ethiopia and Sudan. It was born within the Italian School for Refugees and Asylum Seekers. The Italian School is an initiative founded by the association Asinitas Onlus (education and care centre for refugees, [www.asinitas.org](http://www.asinitas.org)) with the aim to contextualise and soothe the memory of suffered trauma and experienced disorientation. The school, an open structure of continuous and daily formation, is based on the voluntary work of a group of educators. They work for a better Italian learning starting from trails and plot lines of the own students using the technique of a “free text” and the methods of an active education. At school the immigrants are being listened to within a caring community of people who emphasizes autonomy, creativity, communication, cooperation, the capacity of creating a net for the ones that are in need, the renewal of significant relations after (and during) the trauma of disorientation and the frailty and marginalisation.

This relation of caring based on reciprocity and the confidence, that is created through the student’s testimony within the group, the oral history, the reminiscence of the trauma and the memory of belonging somewhere, as well as the phrasing of wishes, hopes and projects, provides to the group the capacity of recovering a structure of belonging and to the individual its own form. Through the own testimonies and participation this contributes in an active and personal way to the project of maintaining the internal memory of migration, wish risks to get scattered.

The laboratory of audiovisual self-formation for migrants and refugees created in collaboration with the Audiovisual Archive of the Working and Democratic Movement (AAMOD) of Rome and the laboratory ZaLab coordinated by Andrea Segre was born with this presumption of carrying out different forms of self-representation of a migrant’s condition in a way to give a testimony of the collective memory usable within the intern communities of the participants and towards a external wider public.

A laboratory of audiovisual self-formation needs to be compared with the documentary language and technical instruments on one hand. On the other hand, being a laboratory it needs to invest in very personal, deep and intimate fields, that are connected with learning, the relations within the group, the capacity and availability to open oneself and to deal with the memory, the relation with the own context of belonging and the origins, the escape, the adventures during the journey, the arrival and the critical presence, work, health and dreams for the future, the changes and the realisation of expectations and hopes.

Therefore the aim is to plan a laboratory of audiovisual self - narration within a socializing context that is able to accompany the person towards an expression/creation/communication, which is most possibly free from external factors and respectful with the individual times of each one, according to its migration history.

It is a self-formative experience that invests in the person with its integrity and complexity made of lights and shadows, contradictions and limits.

And as in every educational and formative route the aim is to create space and time where collective liberating activities take place that reassure, improve and change the situation.

Within our reflection we have ideated some “memory places” where we would like to carry out our research by collecting testimonies and narration.

These memory places can be synthesized in the following way:

- 1) country of origin: family, house, neighbourhood, studies, work, significant experiences, friendships,
- 2) memory of violence and violence of the memory
- 3) migration movement as a necessary serial of migration passages, within the own country, from one city to another, from one country to another, that allows to construct the identity of the person as migrant
- 4) the intense journey even seen as an adventure and as initiation rite to pass the age of an adult
- 5) the arrival

- 6) identification centres, territorial commissions
- 7) acceptance centres and informal and community places
- 8) the jobs
- 9) the Italian schools
- 10) urban spaces as places to recover one's own community: streets, squares, churches, stations, bar, restaurant and internet cafes/ points
- 11) the assistance services
- 12) the police headquarters
- 13) the community of belonging: net of friends and family

From this roman experience of a laboratory for narrative videos, the documentary “Il deserto e il mare (the dessert and the sea)” by Dagmavi Dagmawi Yimer, Sintayehu Aschetu, Solomon Moges, Menghistu Andechal and Adam Awad was born. A documentary about the stories that tell in first person the memory of the journey, the tired arrival and the hopes for the future.

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More info: [www.zalab.tv](http://www.zalab.tv) , [www.asinitas.org](http://www.asinitas.org)