

Sorry, I Didn't Understand. Can You Say That Again? Notes on Gestures of Untranslatability

From December 11 to 17, Qalqalah قلقلة (represented by Virginie Bobin and Vir Andres Hera) was invited to conceive a one-week program of workshops, seminars and activities, as part of UNIDEE Visiting Curator Chiara Cartuccia's two-year long project *Neither on Land nor at Sea. Meeting by the Mediterranean Im/Possible*, hosted by UNIDEE Residency Programs and Cittadellarte – Fondazione Pistoletto in Biella, Italy. Twelve participants were selected by Chiara Cartuccia on the basis of an open call: Noemi Alfieri, Omar Al-Zo'bi, Tewa Barnosa, Emma Ben Aziza, Diyae Bourhim, Allison Grimaldi Donahue, Danae Io, Joyce Joumaa, Assel Kadyrkhanova, Nona Markarian, Engy Mohsen and Thais Akina Yoshitake Lopez.

As part of our program, Qalqalah قلقلة invited three external guests to each propose a workshop. Artist, educator and curator Anna T. shared a series of tools for hijacking language based on her research into queer slangs from different regions around the world, looking for words that could reflect and empower minor positions and communities. Editor, writer and researcher Andrea Ancira presented selected projects edited with their Mexico-based publishing house Tumbalacasa, introducing the concept of translucination to foster an approach to translation that would welcome failure and vulnerability, opening a space of negotiation and encounter rather than extractivism. Writer and editor Mirene Arsanios shared excerpts from companion writings, asking what language requires of us in this specific moment in time [while a genocide is taking place in Gaza], when language has become such a battlefield. A quote by Ruanne Abou-Rahme particularly resonated, and offered a possible orientation for the collective work that followed: "It's a question of how to be in the thing that's lacking, how to be in the negative and in the loss, and create different possibilities of being and breathing." ("Being in the negative: An interview with Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme", 2020)

Following their different interventions, our collective discussions, and a series of exercises proposed by Qalqalah قلقلة, the participants jointly decided to produce a publication, which you are invited to download, read, print and assemble below. Titled "Sorry, I didn't Understand. Can you say that again?", it is a witty reflection on the potentials of untranslatability, and the ambiguous relations of power and solidarity that play through acts of translation as well as through the kind of institutional settings that allowed for our encounter to take place. It encompasses tender and resistant gestures of address, marked by intimacy, opacity, and care.

V.B.

"Sorry, I didn't Understand. Can you say that again?" features contributions by/with/from Omar Al-Zo'bi, Noemi Alfieri, Emma Ben Aziza, Tewa Barnosa, Virginie Bobin, Diyae Bourhim, Chiara Cartuccia, Allison Grimaldi Donahue, Vir Andres Hera, Danae Io, Joyce Joumaa, Asel Kadyrkhanova, Thais Akina Yoshitake, Nona Markarian and Engy Mohsen. It was designed collectively.



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More images are available on the website.

Sorry, I didn't Understand.
Can you say that again?

To print and assemble the different parts of the publication, follow the instructions at the bottom of this page.

Notes on Translation

Duo Translations

Hijacking the Space of the Bio

[Download Here](#)

During the workshop, Qalqalah قلقلة invited each participant to bring a fragment of text in a language of their choice, either by them or by another author, which could serve as material for a collaborative translation with another person—it could also be an image, a sound piece, etc. Translation duos were randomly formed, with the person bringing the material and the person acting as translator not necessarily knowing each other's languages. Thus, different strategies had to be devised and negotiated in order to produce possible (un)translations of the original material.

“Hijacking the Space of the Bio” derives from an exercise proposed by Mirene Arsanios during her workshop to unsettle the predetermined form and value of individual biographies: “Write a biography as anything but a biography. Write your biography as a call. Address the elephant in the room.” The exercise was inspired by Fargo Nissim Tbakhi's essay “Notes on Craft: Writing in the Hour of Genocide”, published the week before our gathering, in which he offers several tactics to reclaim writing as “a space in which to fight”. These include “hijacking the space of the bio”, as he himself does at the bottom of his text—“calling on you to join with the revolutionary masses across the globe in fighting for the survival and liberation of Palestinians and all oppressed people.”

Gelato al forno

[Download here](#)

“Gelato al forno” is a collective translucination of “On Pussy”, [a poem recited by Vanessa Place](#), which Andrea Ancira played for us a few times while we frantically and laughingly attempted various possible translations in real time on a pirate pad. The title is both a tribute to the sexual charge of Place’s poem, and to a decadent dessert encountered in a local pizzeria.

Glossary

[Download here.](#)

A collection of untranslatable terms in languages we “smoke, lick, or lose”.¹



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More images are available on the website.

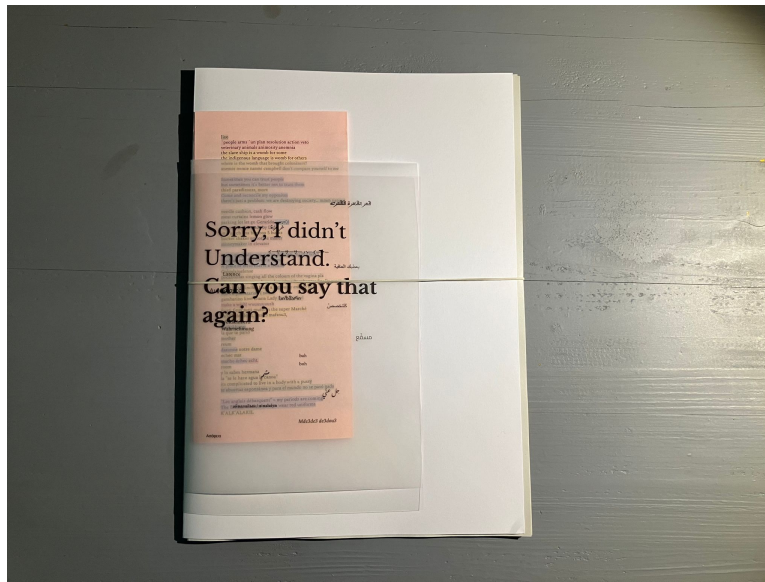
How to print and assemble the publication

The *Glossary* document (1 page) should be printed in a regular clear acetate sheet. This is the cover of the print.

The *Gelato al forno* document (2 pages) should be printed in a colored sheet, on both sides, green and blue work well with it. It should be folded in two.

The *Notes on Translation*, *Duo Translations* and *Hijacking the Space of the Bio* comme in the same document, they should be printed double-sided in regular A4 sheets.

The *Gelato al forno* once it is folded, serves as a folder to hold all the pages together. The cover comes right above all. Enjoy your reading and feel free to share this document.



“Sorry, I didn’t understand... Can you say that again?” Collective publication, 2023. Photo by Nona Markaian.

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More images are available on the website.

Qalqalah قَلْقَلَة would like to thank UNIDEE Visiting Curator Chiara Cartuccia as well as well as UNIDEE Residency Programs and Cittadellarte – Fondazione Pistoletto for their invitation and support.

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1. In *Notes on Mother Tongues*, Mirene Arsanios writes: “She collected languages, like objects she could smoke, lick or lose.” (2020, p.8) ↩

<https://qalqalah.org/en/notes-on/sorry-i-didnt-understand>