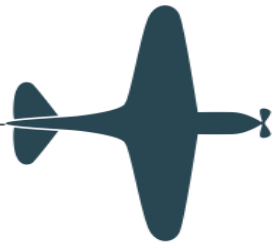




Porco Rosso
Circolo Arci ★



ISULA MESTIZA

"To survive the Borderlands
You must live *sin fronteras*
be a crossroad."
(Gloria Anzaldua, 1987)

"Isula mestiza" brings together the Sicilian isula/isola ("island") with the concept of mestizaje developed by Gloria Anzaldúa — understood as a condition of "mixture," of being shaped at once by plural elements of identity, gender, languages, and cultures — and evokes Sicily as a borderland along the Central Mediterranean route. An island that, in the face of a Europe imposing ever more racist and repressive border policies, forcefully asserts its mestiza and migrant soul — by choice, by history, by geography, and by culture. As a socio-legal support and listening space, we have chosen this name to highlight the human relationships that take shape in our space, beginning in Ballarò, a neighborhood in the beating heart of Palermo, giving prominence to the movements, to the daily acts of freedom and ordinary resistance, carried forward by the people — with infinitely plural gazes — who pass through it.

Antiracist Accompaniments: a Column from the Sans-Papier Desk (Sportello)

Every Wednesday for ten years now, the Sans-Papier Desk has offered a space of mutual aid in Ballarò, the storied market of Palermo. On other days, the Desk's members traverse the neighbourhood's borders in hopes of carrying the practices of listening and guidance to other places in need. Every Friday from November until March, for instance, the Desk's mobile team crosses the harvest fields along Western Sicily (fields we will talk about in upcoming issues). The remaining weekdays, then, you can find us along the waiting lines of the registry office, the police headquarters, the post offices, or the city's public hospitals.

In these bureaucratic early mornings, amid the city's traffic and crowded buses, we accompany those who don't yet know how to navigate the city and reach the relevant public offices. The Sportello members speak Italian but often times have only been in the city for a few years themselves, making this a novel experience for them too. Further troubles are caused by the constantly shifting landscape of rules and regulations: updated protocols, personnel changes, and an ever-evolving legislation mean that the true continuity is often only that of institutional racism.



Take Suleyman, for example, who has arrived recently and wants to apply for protection via asylum. In contrast to any Italian citizen, he cannot consult any police station for help as for him there exists only a single authority to turn to, the Immigration Office at the Boccadifalco police headquarters.

At the Immigration Office, however, requesting asylum has become increasingly difficult as of late. As if it were not enough to leave one's country behind and make the arduous irregular way of arriving in one of those countries that has ratified the Geneva Convention (1949), ratification alone does not necessarily translate into effective practice.

Indeed, for some months now, the Immigration Office has only been accepting a few asylum requests per day. On Suleyman's Monday there are only three slots. A visibly ashamed mediator confides in me that in the recent months, they have made it to five acceptances on the better days. About thirty people, on the other hand, are forced behind a railing between 7 and 10 in the morning. Challenging their destiny, once more, standing tall and defending their position in the huddled mass of a queue, ready to demonstrate their willingness whenever the Immigration Office's mediator nears them to select that day's applicants. The lucky ones, predominantly male, will then have to make their way around the visitors' entrance to have an appointment set for filling in the relevant C3 form.

Near the entrance there is another group of individuals, little more than a dozen, that throughout the course of the morning – it is already 9:30 – have had the possibility to exchange some words with mediators in passing and receive sparse information. In this case, we are speaking of individuals with appointments, seeking to receive or extend their residence permit (*permesso di soggiorno*).

The individuals seeking asylum, however, cannot make appointments. They cannot even speak to the mediators. They come every day, at 7:00, and wait behind the railing. Someone said that it is important to stay as close to the railing as possible, in hopes that the mediators might remember your face and soon enough, aware of how many days you have spent vying for the chance, will let you pass. Who knows how long somebody waits without an all-too memorable face.

Souleyman looks around, searching information, understanding that he will need to return for days to come, maybe weeks. Missing work, however, worsens his situation. He is paid by the day and there is a risk that in the meantime his boss finds someone else to do his work. Souleyman suffered an accident some time ago and his leg has been hurting ever since, staying on his feet doesn't do him well either. His greatest despair, after two bus rides and the wasted days, derives from the fact that in the Immigration Office there is not even a proper queue.

This degrading treatment – the arbitrariness in selection practices, the induced competitiveness, the abandonment amid a lack of information – is not accidental. It is a system that rewards aggressiveness, physical fitness, perseverance. It is a trap game, in which the participating bodies are put to the test and in which the chances of slipping are enormous. After all, Hannah Arendt once wrote that the true condition of the refugee is that of someone who does not even have the right to have rights. The right to wait in dignified conditions, to receive respect for one's time, to support one's companions and brothers-in-waiting, to have some minimal certainty that one's application for asylum will, a day not too far ahead, be taken into consideration.

To learn more, visit our website: [Arci Porco Rosso](http://Arci_Porco_Rosso), write to us at sportellosanspapiers@gmail.com, or follow us on Instagram @arciporcorosso.

And if you want to support us, with just **5 euros a month** you can become a **Porco d'Oro**: a monthly donation that helps keep the shutter open every week of the year.

