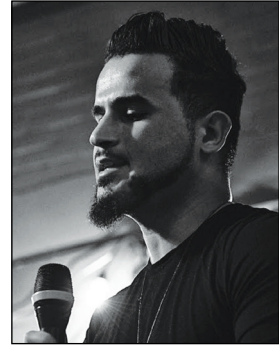


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New era of literature commencing in Finland

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How has the situation concerning the multilingual writers devolved throughout different phases in Finland? How did the personal experiences play an important role in shaping the opinions of the mentioned writers? To what extent, language barrier has been exceeded?

Could literature be a way to create a better understanding towards certain issues?

It hasn't been a fleeting instance, the literary scene materializing diversity casting a new light on contemporary Finland: Do immigrant authors transform Finnish literature?

The vague view was finally deciphered by Finnish Literature Society (SKS) conducting large scale research, unveiling that more than 80 migrant authors dwelling in Finland, getting ready to attain their presence via writing.

Sadik Lazim a poet from Iraq arrived in Finland during the 1990s, after having to flee the dictatorship of Saddam Husséin, said:

The situation has changed spanning the two decades I lived in Finland, nowadays, we're more able to take part in the poetry activities and literary sessions. Something has changed to better.

Sadik shrugged when I asked him if he was satisfied over the literary scene of multiculturalism in his exile:

We're sieged beyond the language barrier that entails tremendous efforts to exceed it. It needs very competent translators and huge sums pumped into the whole process. There was a while after my arrival, I couldn't write and publish, nor gain any literary visibility. That situation had lasted for long before I got to publish some of my poems in an anthology issued by "Vi-eraalla maalla" Multilingual writers group founded by Marja Mäenpää in Turku.

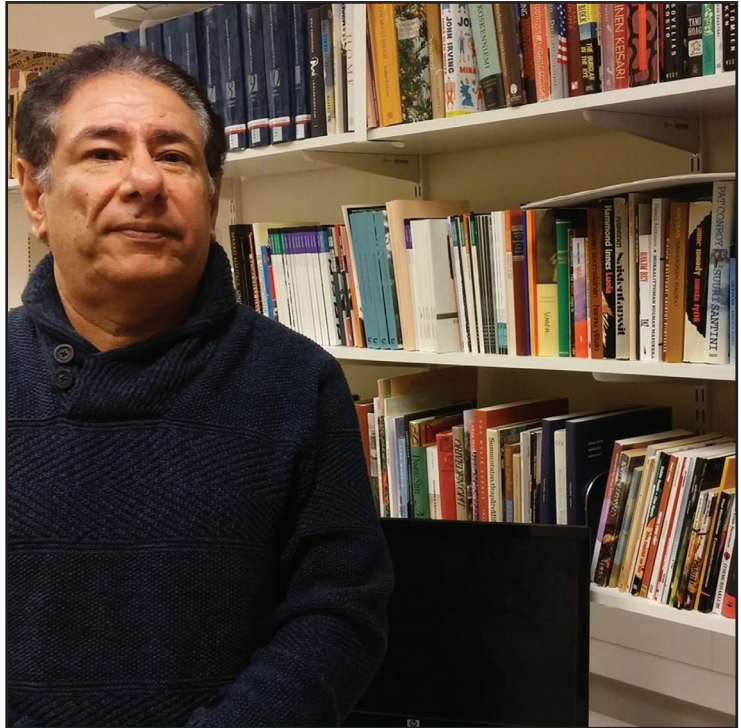
Sadik reminisced the days back in Iraq saying:

War and love we've left in Iraq. I used to write even during the wartime, I sang for peace while I was forced to serve in the army.

Finland was not the optimal place for immigrant authors

The disappointment and feeling of being thwarted that Sadik experienced once he arrived the country attributed to:

Once you arrive in Finland, no one would guide you and show you the way. We suffered an acute shortage of the Arabic materials at Finnish libraries. The translation process passes into three languages Arabic,



Sadik Lazim. Photo: Ahmad Zaidan.

English, and then Finnish, and that would weaken our texts. The source text would lose a lot of its meaning while being translated from three languages. Many writers feel that they're isolated from the Finnish society at different level, that's why something should be done erasing the walls between immigrant writers and the Finnish society.

Sadik sees himself as an Iraqi writer in Finland, and as a part of the Finnish society, has a lot to say in favor of showing the unseen dimension of the story.

The Iraqi environment is full of ongoing and past events and our duty is to convey what Finns need to know about us. It could be a bid to eliminate that alien image taken about us, we need to show them our culture, and tell them in such a literary way; who we are.

Sadik believes that the spatial factor is important: "The writers who live in Helsinki are granted much more accessibility than those who live elsewhere the country," he commented.

Gleam of hope looming

For Mehdi Ghassemi things seem to be a hope-flavoured, since he is persistently work-

ing on resurrecting the exiled writers by bringing them to the Finnish mainstream of literature. Ghassemi is originally from Iran, a researcher and author at the University of Tampere and Turku now:

I am working on project SKS, which is the Finnish literature society and at the same time I am a writer, I have published 3 books of fiction related to Finnish history, and society.

Ghassemi has recently interviewed 15 writers of various migratory backgrounds, sampling their literary works to beef up his research. Ghassemi has read some of the interviewees' texts to have an in-depth and analytical discussion with them.

The conducted research is a glimpse on the immigrant authors, aiming to condense the scattered experiences into a coherent database, reliable and authentic, allows the Finnish diverse institutions to access the literature produced by immigrants residing in Finland.

We have done a database, and in the database which is updated on the regular basis. We have collected some information. So at the moment, we can say that we know how many authors are here, and what they

have done, what they are going to do, and this would help us, Ghassemi said.

Ghassemi strives through his project awarding the immigrant authors more visibility, readability, thinking of expanding the scope of literature being produced in Finland. Ghassemi goes further:

I am preparing for the publication of an anthology which includes some of the literary works of immigrant authors in Finland.

On other hand, promising organizations and projects have popped up in the recent years, which could be considered as the looming lanterns spreading hope for the multilingual writers who live in Finland, such as Vieraalla maalla in Turku that paved the way for immigrant writers to walk through the gate of literature in Finland.

The project Sivuväli that even exceeded the national borders, by collaborating with similar organizations across the Nordic countries, advancing magnificent literary names to the Nordic platform. Sivuväli has published for the Burmese poet Ye Yint Thet Zwa a collection entitled *We Hate War, Mom* (2016). Despite the project did not get the fund of last year, the project is still active and attended in the literary scene in Finland.

“Culture for all” is keen to promote the literature produced in multiple languages in Finland.

[The organization] promotes cultural services that are inclusive and take diverse audiences into account. We offer information and tools for workers in the cultural field to improve accessibility and knowledge of diversity, according to their website.

“Turku Open Mic” a monthly happening held in Turku has always opened the doors, welcoming the writers to step in and recite their poetry, regardless to the language barrier.

Runoviikko [Poetry Week], the huge poetry activity that consists of series of gigs, is keen to invite poets from around the world to perform in their languages alongside poets who write in Finnish and Swedish.

According to the developing poetry scene of the multilingualism in Finland that seems going beyond the so called dominant language, the best is yet to come, and the language hasn't been a barrier barring the international poets who managed to create a popular base in Finland such as the English poets as Andy Willoughby, Joelle Taylor and Bob Beagrie, who constantly are being invited to meet with their Finnish audience and spark new collaborations involving more poets from increasingly diverse backgrounds.

Andy Willoughby who had his collaborative collection with Beagrie – *Sampo: Heading Further North* – poems inspired by Kalevala translated into Finnish by Kalle Niinikangas for Sivuväli and will have his last collection *Between Stations* translated soon for Enostone comments.

I have been performing and collaborating with Finnish poets and organisations since the early 2000s and it has been great to see and hear the diversity of voices and languages growing in live events and publications over the last few years with us being able to work through our press Ek Zuban on projects like Building Bridges in 2017 with writers from multicultural backgrounds responding to ekphrastic stimulus and explore difference and commonalities in both the UK and Finland.

However, despite the rapid growth of multilingualism in Finland the Finnish Writers Union still abstains from recognizing the writers residing in Finland as “Finnish writers” unless they write in either the Finnish language or Swedish, while even the Sami language is still excluded.