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ELPIS Artistic expression, performance  
and social innovation:  
the role of the educator for the  
accessibility of the arts



idrisi  
CULTURA E SVILUPPO



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*ELPIS – Artistic expression, performance and social  
innovation: the role of the educator for the  
accessibility of the arts*

***Narratives of Violence, Conflict, and Migration: A Dramatic Script to  
Educate and Raise Awareness on the Issue of Female Trafficking***

***Work Package no. #2, “Guidelines and Theatrical Production:  
Performance and Non-Formal Methodology for Arts Accessibility”***

Coordinated and promoted by Idrisi Cultura e Sviluppo ETS

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*This dramatic script served as both the working material and the outcome of the cycle of creative writing and dramatic workshops organized by Idrisi Cultura e Sviluppo ETS, in collaboration with its partners, during the first half of 2024, within the framework of "Work Package no. 2" of the ELPIS project. The base text was provided by the artist, writer, and performer Cetta Brancato of Idrisi Cultura e Sviluppo ETS and served as a template for the participants' amateur adaptations, mainly senior women residing in the Metropolitan Area of Palermo. Translated and further adapted to meet project goals, it was ultimately translated by the partners to circulate as an educational and civic awareness tool, lending itself to additional adaptations, stagings, and dramatic readings.*

**FEMALE VOICE 1**

My mother was Muslim. I am Christian because my father is Christian.

**MALE VOICE**

But love is flesh; it doesn't recognize god. Christ and Muhammad were outside our door, or perhaps they lived there together.

**FEMALE VOICE 1**

My mother was killed by her Muslim relatives who could not accept her marriage. She simply died alongside others, like so many others. This is how it happens in Nigeria.

**FEMALE VOICE 2**

I remember her well. I was fifteen. When she left, I was still in school.

**FEMALE VOICE 3**

Out of fear, my father and I fled to another city, becoming poor due to their enemy idols, sharing the fate of my people.

**FEMALE VOICE 4**

I abandoned my studies. I managed to find work as a cook in a restaurant.

On a bare stage with only a bench in the center, Lucy enters with a dancer. She wears traditional attire and carries a cloth sack.

The light is cold, as cold as the authentic pain of a memory with sparse traces of recollection. It then turns to a twilight punctuated by lights like speeding cars.

Memory of drums reflected in the mirror. In the black cold that defies waiting, two more Lucys enter.

Against a background of faint whispers, they together convey the murder of a future that confines the telling of youth to the martyrdom of the mother: the loss of the words of love, loyalty, and relationships.

**LUCY**

It could have been a lonely night.

**LUCY 1**

But the tree and the shadow shared a common green.

**LUCY 2**

It could have been a night of tears.

**LUCY**

But playful shadows were shaken by laughter.

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**LUCY 1**

It could have been a night of terror.

**LUCY 2**

But the light breeze sang of salvation.

**LUCY**

It could have been a dark night.

**LUCY 1**

But the moon scattered a million sparks.

**LUCY 2**

It could have been a night of worries.

**LUCY 1**

But the calm waters spoke of peace.

**LUCY**

And he said to me:

It is the day of happiness,

It is the day of marriage,

It is the day of solitude,

It is the day of death.

The two Lucys exit.

**PART TWO**

Lucy sits on the bench, warming her hands by clasping them and blowing into them.

Photo montage: central station at night. Images in slow succession. It seems as if a car is stopping.

(Last image remains static with sound effects.)

**LUCY**

If it weren't for the station's wall clock, I wouldn't even know what time it is. But twelve hours of waiting... twelve...

I am hungry and thirsty. I tighten my stomach so much that I almost don't feel alive.

I fear night will fall, and I'll be left waiting for the bruised dawn of the metropolis in the steel forest of this square. With only the faint suggestion of a warm lamppost where hope dissolves.

Surely something must have happened. They'll remember my arrival.

(She stands abruptly, leaping.)

Italòs! I'm here, italòs! Here I am! I'm coming! Finally...

(The car lights recede. Lucy stumbles, falls.) Wait... wait... Give... me... time, damn you!

(Still on the ground.) It wasn't for me! Their hearts are stone. I don't even know who I'm waiting for in this unrecognizable port of darkness. Abandoned in a land where I recognize no scent of homeland.

(She rises, stomping the ground.) God, it's so cold!

This December is damp. The air is choked with car exhaust: a bitter fog on my lips reaches my palate.

I hear a voice: someone is calling me.

(She enters the darkness.) I'm here! Italòs, I'm here! But where are you?

From the same darkness, two men enter. Antonio is part of a private police force, Ali is African. They enter as if talking on the phone. (Street effect with distant sirens).

**ANTONIO**

They let the girls hang around the station district at this hour. It's full of everything: homeless people, outcasts, unlucky souls. And schemers, pushers.

In my day, women stayed at home, eh? Locked up, protected.

**ALÌ**

Our women are drops of onyx: they have souls of quartz.

**ANTONIO**

So? It's the mothers' fault: too much independence.

(To the audience.) Haven't you seen a young woman on that bench?

**ALÌ**

You saw right! She's my sister.

**ANTONIO**

(On the phone.) She's his sister. Yes, she's African.

**ALÌ**

Free like gazelles before your traps.

Silence!

**ANTONIO**

(Vulgarly.) We barely feed our own children, and we should split our bread with yours! Why don't you roll up your sleeves and work in your country under your own flag?

**ALÌ**

Because of the wars that starve us, the diseases that kill us, the unbearable injustice of the world.

Alì exits.

**ANTONIO**

(On the phone.) They contaminate, they plunder our civilization. They occupy the patch of sun our fathers left us.

(Looking around, morbidly.) But where did she go? Where? Of course, they vanish into the darkness.

Disappeared... evaporated.

Antonio enters the darkness and exits. Lucy reenters from the same darkness in which she had disappeared.

**LUCY**

(With a sudden surge of courage.) But they'll come, and my life will change.

The two Lucys enter.

**LUCY 1**

(With showy gestures.) I'll be beautiful and rich like the princesses who return to Benin City. Welcomed by families relieved from hardship, after paying off the debt for the journey.

Working, I'll earn a hundred million naira in a year.

And then I'll return in a white Mercedes, the one with the long hood, air conditioning, and even leopard seats.

Just like my neighbor. She took care of a child, she said. Maybe they'll entrust one to me too.

**LUCY**

(As if in an ad.) Destiny didn't let me raise children.

**LUCY 2**

(Desperate.) My mother, whose eyes nourish more than corn kernels, says that love alone is enough to make them grow.

**LUCY**

(As if in an ad.) But mine are dead: the eldest was eight, the second only three.

**LUCY 1**

(Desperate.) In Africa, there's no saving from pneumonia, from a common infection. Voodoo decides if a child will live or die.

**LUCY**

I prayed to my god not to take them away.

**LUCY 2**

We no longer remember their names now.

**LUCY**

I've swallowed them down, somewhere within my amputated soul, buried in the shadowy clods of sorrow.

In the background, an image lights up, showing a young Nigerian woman undergoing a voodoo ritual.

The three Lucys (dancers) move, flowing to the left.

The Babalau's words are narrated by mime.

**BABALAU**

Be wary! Be wary, Lucy! We have dedicated you to the gods.

We invoke them to bind you to harshness, chaining you, before the journey, to the periphery of flesh. Nails, hair, menstruation, chicken hearts, all upon the female altar of oppression, in the ultimate bond of intimacy.

It's not enough to be born unfortunate. Misfortune encourages misfortune: it's a genesis dense with abuses.

In the temple of Adeswa House, I told you not to reveal the names of those who would accompany you to Europe.

Why, Lucy? Didn't you fear deceit? What did you sign with ink and with blood?

Your father begged you not to go. Yet you fled, secretly, for a journey into the darkness of old Europe.

The three Lucys and the Babalau exit.

**PART THREE**

I left in a car covered by a Muslim veil.

I joined two hundred other women. Gathered like cattle, we slept at the station for three weeks.

In Turku, many of us were abused. They threatened to slit our throats or abandon us.

Out of fear of the police, we traveled by night. We walked while the guides rode on horseback. We ate only crusts of bread and drank little water. We slept on the ground. We crossed mountains. No one could turn back because we had no money.

Photo with journalist. Voice-over. (Images that commodify death.)

They don't hear. They don't listen. The message doesn't convince them. It's not right. Advertising can't be wrong: it must be correct. This approach offends the common sense of decency.  
I have never seen corpses in ads.

Lucy enters, trying to swallow an object that is too large.  
Prop: door labeled "Men." A bombed-out gap is visible.

**LUCY**

The maman gave me some money. I'd wrapped it in tape and swallowed it. I was to pass it out with a medicine when I needed it.

I saw corpses in many villages until the border, where, for yet another month, I waited for maman to send more money.

In the meantime, twenty of us died.

(She pulls the Lucys out by their feet from the bathroom.)

I arrived in Sabir, hidden in a tanker.

We were guests of a Ghanaian in a large house for immigrants. I couldn't go outside, but they cared for me until the Zodiac arrived on the beach.

(Twists the arms and legs of the three Lucys as if they were dead. Almost a deconstruction.)

A woman, often, is stronger than her own pain. (Collapses.)

Footage to be created. The screen image enlarges until it pixelates into colors. Then it's dawn, with its timid lights.

A fifty-year-old woman enters, lean, efficient, cold. She holds white cloths that give a sense of duty and hospital corridors.

**MAMAN**

Come with me, Lucy.

**LUCY**

Did the italòs send you?

**MAMAN**

(Harsh.) Come!

**LUCY**

I've seen you pass by many times. You'd look at me and walk away. Why didn't you stop immediately?

**MAMAN**

No questions! There's a lot of police around. If they catch you, you go back to Nigeria. Enough fuss!

**LUCY**

Thank God you came. With someone who speaks my language, I'm safe.

(She laughs, almost hysterically.) I knew... I knew that fortune would meet me.

**MAMAN**

Hurry up, I said!

**LUCY**

God bless you!

**MAMAN**

Get moving, Lucy, get moving!

Lucy grabs her bag and they exit together.

#### PART FOUR

LUCY

From this shabby place on the outskirts, the sky rises up through the miserable canopies of the balconies.

I found a single plate of rice and tomatoes that I shared with other sisters, like I used to at home.

But they speak little; they have a forest darkness in their eyes and a tangle of thorns in their hearts.

They might betray me, rob me, hurt me, to survive their fear, just like mine.

BABALAU

What are you looking at? What does the night horror offer to the eye? There are only shadows and gashes. Rubble and jackals.

It's night. You can imagine what it was, but not what it is. You can imagine what it will be.

LUCY

Tonight, a bed battered by poverty has welcomed me.

Could you see what it will be? Will all this cold still be here?

BABALAU

You will shine on a bed of remains. They are like you, as you soon will be. Yes, the cold will end. There will be warmth, too much warmth. Unbearable. You will live, Lucy, only by accepting the unacceptable.

The Babalau sets off a stage firecracker that illuminates a hidden part of the stage where another maman sits on an old colonial chair, still and collected like a mummy within water skins.

LUCY

I can call her maman. But her hands scratch.

LUCY 1

Maman is fifty, and her wrinkles reach even her heart.

LUCY 2

Maman speaks my language but doesn't smile. She doesn't want friendship to grow in the house, nor does she let us watch television.

LUCY

She smells of sulfur between her thighs. I heard her panting in the other room with a man. When they came out, he had a master's grip on his leather belt, and she was wrapping herself in her gown, still half-open.

The Babalau gestures as if showing Lucy's thoughts.

LUCY 1

Maman wears a deathly lipstick on her lips; when she eats, a salty, sad trickle reaches her neck.

LUCY

Maman has the Babalau's eyes; with a cursed blade of prayer, she steals your breath.

LUCY 2

Maman demands gratitude; you have to buy her skin-lightening creams. They're expensive because they come from Canada or America. And a couple of bottles of gin to please her.

LUCY

You must thank her so that every morning she says, "I pray for you every morning."

And when you finish paying off the debt, you still have to work for the thanksgiving celebration. In public, in front of witnesses, declare your gratitude for all she has done for you.

The lights dim. Maman appears from behind the colonial chair with a feline attitude. She moves close to the girl, covering her shoulders with her arms.

In the half-light, she begins to undress her.

Two dancers enter. A dance full of colors (Baush).

LUCY 1

Sister, don't teach her to accept the unworthy fire of the streets.

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LUCY 2

Don't strip her of the clothes of the earth: the scorched yellow of fields and the red of certain bloody sunsets.

LUCY 1

Leave her the broad modesty of her hips, the game of her headwrap, the liquid smile of her dark eyes.

LUCY 2

If a woman lowers her arms, the sky falls, and if she bows her head, the clouds scatter the horizon. Denying her smile, the earth aborts in the seed of every genesis.

Maman dresses the girl as a prostitute.

(Photo montage).

Ironically, she horribly mimics the agony of a rooster with a colorful scarf. Scene goes black. Cut to street sounds. The scene continues with street effects. The street lights come back on, calibrated shadows and dancers mimicking streetwalkers exaggerating obscenities and drawing schematic diagonals.

BABALAU

Lucy, you have become a slave in the infamous temple where all our gods find an altar. May those who, like me, invoke them to consecrate a woman to shame be cursed!

Now, if you break the rules, you will end up like the rooster I killed after making small cuts on your breast to protect you from any form of deportation.

Forget who you are now. Show everything you have. And the wig will keep you warm on winter nights. No one looks at a woman with short hair.

Lucy, you are in Europe, but it is as if you were still in Africa.

LUCY 1

Africa is nostalgia, a powerful mother.

LUCY 2

Its dirt roads are tracks toward high snowy peaks. Around us, only rocks, sand, thirsty shrubs. We traveled kilometers, meeting scraps of parched skin and a few animals that, stopping, scrutinized us before resuming their journey in unknown peace.

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LUCY 1

There is silence in Africa. The deafening call of a vast womb that, revealing man's insignificance, returns greatness to him.

Bausch.

The scene freezes. The story that connects the previous scene to the next depends on the meeting with the choreographer.

PART FIVE

Two men enter with their backs turned. Two predators in elegant uniforms. Armed. They belong to those who organize war. They saw the scene from above and came down to check the quality of the work done. Two Arab Jews, pro-American.

MOHAMED

(Holding an object in his palm.) They said there wouldn't be any traces left.

JOHNNY

Not even human lives... Everything dissolved.

MOHAMED

And indeed, there are no presences... Not even bones remain... Here, human density was considered excessive.

JOHNNY

Then they were right. (To himself.) So much explosive, yet so little... enough to achieve the objective of annihilating men and things.

MOHAMED

They're all dead... all gone. Something of the buildings is left. Those we saw from the helicopter arrived later.

Let's go; we need them.

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(Laughing.) We'll even have to save them.

JOHNNY

They're back there... a small group... they're strange... they seem involved in a ritual. We'll send these to Carson. He'll pay us well for his television services. Get the camera.

MOHAMED

Here it is! (He works with the camera and films the mummy and the group with the Babalau.)

JOHNNY

Hey, watch out! The skipper is coming. Hide! Let's also film the boarding. Now they're all getting onto the dinghy.

They all exit. Port scenes.

PART SIX

We shed all our clothes before boarding the Zodiac.

In the salty toil of the waves, in the violent backwash, the vast voice of the sea suggested the unpredictable possibility of death.

We were an identityless mass, a single black soul. Two hundred hearts of women and men: one breath, one courage.

For three days, nothing but foam-bound borders.

The smuggler was white. Or maybe a Filipino.

He knew where to go. But many of us died. The salt devoured their lips, dried their breath.

They gave us bread, but not enough for so many of us.

We had nausea. We kept washing our faces and mouths.

But the blue sea untangled every knot of misery after the landing on the flat land of Lampedusa.

Nothing from the past arrived on the Sicilian shores.

PART SEVEN

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LUCY

Now the night brings cold stars. My dark skin doesn't turn red, but violet because of the cold.

My Italian dream is three meters long: a sidewalk damp with fog.

I even pay for the dust: two hundred and fifty euros a month. That amount is the equivalent of about twenty clients, except for the occasional tip from someone satisfied or a little infatuated.

We also pay for rent and food. The same plate of rice and tomatoes every day. Plus, the heating when there is any, and the indecent clothes to wear on the street.

Not even in my saddest moments would I have imagined ending up walking on the marina boulevard, even on Christmas Day.

LUCY 1

No guarantee of a future: if the soul were flesh, it would be stolen from us.

The stinging solitude of sex with your men brands us as whores.

LUCY 2

We keep our real names to ourselves. We use the names on fake documents. Or those of a murdered sister. That way, you end up forgetting it and start being someone else.

LUCY

Every night I tell myself, 'Maybe I'll meet someone who will help me.' And then immediately after, 'Let's hope nothing bad happens to me.'

LUCY

Where do the tears that don't fall in crying go? Where do they get lost? What do they set on fire?

The two Lucys walk away.

Behind Lucy, Antonio enters.

ANTONIO

Ah, here you are! I told you I'd find you. You disappeared into the darkness the last time I saw you.

But, as you see, I'm back to find you. Because women like you, with moon-colored skin, aren't seen often.

(He circles her.) How much do you want? Don't get full of yourself, eh?

Because here you come to rob us of our bread and peace. Peace, yes! If you weren't here to tempt me, I'd be with my wife. Instead, since that night, I can't stop thinking about you.

Do you see the disorder you bring?

And we trust you, even entrusting our elders to you.

And you? To thank us, you go in and out of our jails, where we have to support you, too.

In your countries, they'd cut off your hands for far less.

Aren't you perhaps scandalizing an honest family man?

If you weren't on the street, I wouldn't have come looking for you, even paying you.

How much do you want, beautiful?

Remember, to be with you, I steal a piece of bread from my children.

What is the price of your beauty for us, Lucy? Certainly, in your villages, you don't make such a fuss about granting yourself. Only here do you become as capricious as our women. You learn quickly, eh? To give yourself a price.

And we, idiots, fall for it. When has a man ever had a choice? How much do you want, Lucy?

LUCY

Go away! I'm not for you!

ANTONIO

(Threatening.) What do you come here for, then? Go back to your home in your underwear or in the forest, with the monkeys.

LUCY

I told you to go away!

ANTONIO

I'll teach you! I'll take care of you! That way, you'll learn, you black woman.

PART EIGHT

LUCY

My father is dead. Maybe, even from hunger.

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Maman told me with her usual yellow autumn face, handing me a letter with just a few lines.

LUCY 2

As if a drop of water had gone down the drain.

LUCY 3

A relative called me, asking if I could come, but I don't have the documents. They have them, holding me prisoner.

I can't close his eyes to the light; they have already reached the gate of the ancestors.

LUCY

The only funeral drum is my heart beating in the chest's casket.

LUCY 2

I never sent him money because I give it all to maman.

LUCY 3

I rarely spoke with him. He always told me not to prostitute myself. I reassured him, but it wasn't true.

LUCY

There, he won't be hunted by poverty, nor by masters who continually reminded me that if I didn't make what was owed, he would pay, even with his life.

LUCY 2

Threaten him now, in the land of the dead, you dogs!

LUCY

Don't reach me, father, not even in dreams!

With the handful of lime never cast on your grave, I will blind the insatiable hunger of their money-fueled lust, even if fear keeps me from knowing if I am alive or feeling dead.

A policeman enters behind Lucy. Bausch-style ballet inspired by Goya.

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POLICEMAN

You can't stay here!

LUCY

The blood of Jesus covers me and protects me!

POLICEMAN

Haven't they told you that you can't be on the streets?

LUCY

You defile God!

You think the bodies of mothers should be hidden in the name of creation, while ours are sold to the impotent fantasies of domination?

You think your flesh receives forgiveness while ours is, in some way, related to hell?

The soul doesn't carry the scent of a moment's pleasure but the incarnate aroma of love.

POLICEMAN

(Hinting and domineering.) How much do you charge?

LUCY

Thirty euros, thirty... just thirty.

We're like flies. You swat one, and three more appear. You kill ten, and a hundred arrive.

"Found Nigerian prostitute dead near the port" — that's what the papers say.

Because often, we have no name, no face when they leave us on the street with swollen, unrecognizable faces.

We are invisible women, but on obscene display in the meat market.

POLICEMAN

Do you have documents?

LUCY

No! Maman took them.

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In my country, war slaughters the innocent, but your indifference is a fierce island, without refuge.

POLICEMAN

Then you'll have to come with me!

LUCY

Better a prison, free of the bars of a forsaken fate. We come as slaves to your world, deceived by a journey of imaginary happiness. We escape death only to enter marginalized lives, deprived of language and the red horizons of Africa's land.

Without dignity, it's hard to live in this world.

Bitter is the Eucharist of this brotherhood: the bread turns stale, the wine to vinegar.

No prophet ever shared money at the table of men. But the fruits of the earth, they multiply the miracle of being, in equal possibilities of seasons.

Lucy exits, following the policeman. The stage goes black.

The sound of drums, like a sentence, a warning, a cry. Lucy re-enters and hides behind a small curtain on stage, emerging in a white dress. The two Lucys join her, each dressed to represent their respective choices. Lucy 2 wears traditional attire, while Lucy 3 is still dressed as a prostitute.

LUCY 2

I've taken the colors of Africa from the trunk. Here, I learned everything: how to think myself dead, how to survive my own death. But the help of so many, just men, allows me life. I return with a small sum, enough to open a little shop. Whole woman, amputated, free.

LUCY 3

My soul is broken: nickel, perfectly numb. In Nigeria, they say you never tell where the money came from. They call us rapido: skilled at showing ourselves, quick to identify the client, indifferent to any pain. I will never be a black Madonna, but soon a maman.

LUCY

I found shelter: a pastor took me in, protected, hid me.

I only paid fifteen thousand euros of the debt. Then I erased every trace of my life: the memories, the cell phone card. Even the pain.

I wear the white dress of the future: a possible baptism into a new life. Now, a daughter of the world, with the homeland of only my own heart.

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