

educational screening kit

Theme #literature

FLAMES OF GOD

Directors: Mashakai Wolf

Production country & year: US, FRANCE, FYROM 2010

Writers: Mashakai Wolf, Pierre Chopinaud

Length: 84 min

Producer: Mashakai Wolf

Camera: Costa Asmanis

Editor: Mashakia Wolf

Music: Muzafer Bislim

Official Website: <http://www.flamesofgod.com/>

Buy / Rent DVD: <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/flamesofgod>

Synopsis

On an invitation from the International Poetry Biennial, Muzafer Bislim, a struggling poet and songwriter from the Roma community of Shutka, Macedonia (FYROM), travels to Paris, France, in hopes of selling his life's work—a handwritten 25,000 word dictionary containing some of the oldest and most obscure words in the Romani language. But when the authenticity of the words comes into question, Bislim is forced to confront the sobering prospect of returning to his family empty-handed. The journey puts Bislim's resolve to the test as he re-encounters old friends who have successfully escaped Shutka's hardships, and experiences the seduction and wealth of Paris. *Flames of God* is a story of language and identity at the edges of Western civilization, revealing one man's vision of the Romani people— united and literate.

Biography

Meshakai Wolf, born in 1979, is an artist, photographer, and documentary filmmaker. He studied philosophy and anthropology at university and studied film at the New York Film Academy in New York City. His first film, *Gussie*, an intimate portrait of his 105-year-old great-grandmother, was screened at film festivals across the United States and won an award for best documentary feature at the Magnolia Film Festival. In 2006, *Dengbêj: The Bards of Turkish Kurdistan* was selected to take part in the IFFI Film Market's Documentary Work-in-progress section. He also serves as director of film and video projects for Cultural Cornerstones, a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting the creative voice in crisis-affected communities. He currently lives and works in New York City.

Contact

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What to read to get some useful background information?

★ For a comprehensive approach to romani culture

You can check the Roma Fact Sheet produced by Council of Europe

<http://romafacts.uni-graz.at/>

Sections we recommend in particular:

- Section on Roma Literature

http://romafacts.uni-graz.at/view_pdf.php?t=literature&s=li_0_0&l=en

- Section on Roma language

http://romafacts.uni-graz.at/view_pdf.php?t=language&s=l_0_0&l=en

★ To go further, you can take a look at

- “Romani in Europe”, a paper by Mihaela Zatreanu, Ministry of Education and Research, Romania, and Dieter W. Halwachs, HALWAHS Department of Linguistics at the University of Graz

https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/roma/Source/RomaniEurope_EN.pdf

- The Romlex Graz Romani dictionary, a lexical database that contains data representative of the variation in the lexicon of all Romani dialects, and offers almost complete coverage of the basic lexicon of the Romani language

<http://romani.uni-graz.at/romlex/lex.xml>

- “To understand the Roma, you need to read their literature” an article written by Cécile Kovacshazy (2015)

<http://theconversation.com/to-understand-the-roma-you-need-to-read-their-literature-36534>

Question for discussion after the screening

- Why is Roma tradition mainly oral?
- Can a language survive only through oral tradition?
- What do you think about the stereotyped view of the musical aspect of Roma culture?
- What do you think motivates Muzafer in his work?
- Why are music and poetry close to each other?
- Do you know about Roma writers and poets in your country?
- Did this movie reinforce some positive stereotypes you might have about Roma?
- What are pros and cons of having an official Romani language?
- Do you know how many Roma dialects exist?
- In your opinion what is the role of music in building a community?
- For many Roma people, their mother tongue is not an official language in the country that they live in. What challenges does this create? Do you have a mother tongue that is not the official language of your country? If so, have you encountered any challenges in learning, speaking, reading, etc., in your mother tongue or in an official language? What was the role of your parents? What was the role of other people (friends, family, school teachers, etc).

Workshop outline ideas

Objectives:

- Gain info about Romani language
- Think about the relationship between identity and language - how does language shape community, how does it preserve community, how does it separate communities from one another?
- Explore difficulties of translation between languages (words that can't be directly translated, meanings that depends on context, etc.)
- Discover 2-3 main Romani writers (for example, Maximoff, Papusa)
- Raise awareness about the effect on social status and possibilities of a mother tongue that is not an official language in one's country

1. Me and my languages

Objectives:

- Share personal relations to languages
- Think about the relationship between language and identity, language and community

Sit in a circle and briefly discuss the reasons behind learning and speaking a language:

- What are the languages that you speak?
- Why and how did you learn them?
- Where and how often do you use them?
- How are they connected to your identity?
- Is there any language that you still want to learn? Why?

2. Lost in translation

Objectives:

- Explore the connection between language and context/culture/environment/community
- Share examples of expressions that exist only in a particular context

In advance, write down some of the following definitions on different pieces of paper. Each definition corresponds to a word that exists only in one language and may be untranslatable to other languages (do not share this point with participants!). Distribute the definitions to participants and ask them in small groups to try to find the equivalent word in their own language.

Reflect in the full group about the idea of untranslatable words, and how culture and language are connected.

Mångata: The road-like reflection of the moon in the water (Swedish)

Samar: Staying up late long after the sun has gone down and having an enjoyable time with friends (Arabic)

Meraki: Pouring yourself wholeheartedly into something such as cooking, and doing so with soul, creativity, and love (Greek)

Kilig: The feeling of butterflies in your stomach, usually when something romantic or cute takes place (Tagalog)

Vacilando: Travelling when the experience itself is more important than the destination (Spanish)

Szimpatikus: When meeting someone for the first time and your intuition tells you that they are a good person you can refer them as szimpatikus (Hungarian)

More can be found in “Lost in Translation: An Illustrated Compendium of Untranslatable Words from Around the World” by Ella Frances Sanders (2014)

3. Debate on language

Objectives:

- Improve debating skills
- Inspire participants to think about language-related issues

The facilitator will read out statements related to language. Participants decide whether they agree with the statement or not, and separate into two groups according to whether they agree or disagree. In their group, they discuss arguments in support of their side. For the debate portion, one person from one group begins by discussing one argument for their side. Then a person from the other group gives one argument for their side. A person from the first group can react to the others' argument and offer another argument from their side. Then the second group has its turn. Continue until there are no new arguments on any side. Tell them that they may also change sides during the debate.

Possible statements:

- A community lives through a language
- A dictionary is a piece of art
- Too many dialects is a problem
- Having one official dialect is necessary

4. Sing in Romanes!

Objective:

- Learn a song in Romanes together with the group

Muro shavo, by Ternipe

Song: https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=5&v=0tICfolzSo0

Lyrics: <https://gypsylyrics.net/2011/08/23/muro-shavo-kiki/>

Loly phabay, by Satra

Song and lyrics: <https://gypsylyrics.net/2011/08/06/loly-phabay/>

Bar, by Driton Berisha

Song:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7aj3sHVzBY>

Lyrics:

Bar (Original)

Me djav kutka hem katka

But djene khelen manca

Nadjenava kaske te verozjav me

Kudaleske kaj na mukhelman tele

Zoralo sjum sar bar hem savore djanen

Siman o mangipe katar me chave

Zorale sjam sar bar hem ako sjam phage

Phirasa hem amare sere si vazle

Amen sjam djande hem bisterde

Ko kas muchas tele

Da li tumen ili amen

Tuj te ovas romane

Zoralo sjum sar bar hem savore djanen

Siman o mangipe katar me chave

Zorale sjam sar bar hem ako sjam phage

Phirasa hem amare sere si vazle

Stone (Translated in English)

I go there and here

Many tease me

I don't know who to trust

The ones who won't let me down!?

I'm strong as a stone

And everybody know that

I have the love of my child

We are strong as a stone

Even if we're broken

We walk with our heads high

We are famous and forgotten

Who disappointed who

Is it you or us by only being Roma

I'm strong as a stone

And everybody know that

I have the love of my child

We are strong as a stone

Even if we're broken

We walk with our heads high

5. Romani roots

Ask the participants if they know any words in their own language that have Romani roots? You can share these examples depending on the languages spoken within your groups.

In Hungarian: *csávó* (from *shavo* = boy), *csaj* (from *shej* = girl), *lóvé* (from *love* = money), *kéro* (from *kher* = house).

In French: *Michto* - synonym in french *bon* (from *michto* = good), *latche* - synonym in french *honte* (from *latche* = shame), *Love* - synonym in french *argent/ tunes* (from *love* = money), *gadjo/ gadji* - synonym in french *un mec/une meuf* (from *gadjo/gadji* = non-roma man, non-roma women)

In English: *lollipop* (from *loli phabaj* = red apple)

In Romanian: *barosan* (from *baro sjan* = you are a tall / important person), *gagic/gadgica*/lover (from *gadjo/gadji* = non-roma man, non-roma woman)

5. Roma writers

Objective:

- Inspire participants to get to know Roma writers, authors

Divide participants into small groups and ask them to research online or in the library about Roma writers from their own countries. You can also give them examples of specific authors to research -- for example: Menyhért Lakatos, Matéo Maximoff, Bronislawa Wajs, and Ceija Stojka.

After the research, the groups present what they have learned to the others. You can ask them to read out a part from one of the texts or to make a poster about the author for the presentation.