REFUGEE LITERATURE WORKSHOP

4 et 6 July 2017

4 July (3.00 pm – 6.00 pm)
Documentary screening and discussion
INHA, Auditorium, 2 rue Vivienne or 6 rue des Petits-Champs, Paris, 2e

6 July (12:00 am – 3:30 pm)
GIS-MOMM Congress
INALCO, 65 rue des grands moulins, 75013 Paris
Morning Session – Salle B 3.03 9:30 – 12:00 am
Afternoon Session – Salle B 3.03 1:00 – 3:30 pm

Convener: Claire Gallion, claire.gallion chez univ-montp3.fr
The current refugee crisis affecting large parts of the Middle East and the Mediterranean world today has given new prominence to the corpus of refugee literature written by Arab writers in Arabic, English, French, and other European languages. This workshop aims to unpack the category of ‘refugee literature’ and its ideological underpinnings as it relates to question of nationalism and neo-imperialism, but also as it questions and reshapes national literatures by taking refugees out of quarantined zones and into shared literary, cultural, and social spaces.

The speakers of the workshop aim to interrogate the validity of the category of ‘refugee literature’ not only because it homogenizes vastly disparate experiences and capitalize on suffering and pity, but also because it is established on the premise of a binary opposition with the equally problematic concept of ‘national literature.’ What does this sub-category reveal about the position of refugee literature in relation with national canons and the idea of the nation? By using the category, are we not, as scholars and critics, reproducing an asymmetrical power relation that ultimately reproduces the confinement of these writers to a sub- or minor genre?

Related to other forms of trauma literature, the workshop reflects on the translation of refugee experiences. Does one have to be a refugee to write refugee literature? How can the experience be translated, and by whom? Non-written forms of cultural productions, such as oral literature, shall be taken into account, along with the conditions of production, collection, and transmission of refugee experiences in the camps and the role/commitment of translators in the West and beyond.

Finally, the workshop invites comparison between the various recuperations of the term ‘refugee’ by the authors themselves and the status of refugee literature in various countries of the Middle East, North Africa and Europe, but also in Iran, Pakistan, and India. Why would a writer prefer to resort to the elitist category of ‘exile’ rather than call her/himself a ‘refugee writer’? How does refugee literature reconnect with Shahrazad’s paradigmatic interpretation of literature as refuge? Would not the concept of ‘displacement’ be more fitting to characterize texts which relate an experience of displacement but also fundamentally displace categories (author, translator, editor, inside, outside, fiction, surreal, real...) and readers?
This paper engages with new discursive categories which come under the broader label ‘Refugee Literature’. I aim to problematize this term and its role in both establishing and ‘categorizing’ narratives concerned with migration. Does the term refer to published accounts written by refugees? Or could this also include fictional narratives about refugees' experiences?

MELISSA CHAPLIN
University of Durham

Exploring the Positioning of Refugee Authors in Contemporary Literature: Negotiating Identities from the Middle East to the UK

This paper explores the extent to which it is legitimate to use the term ‘refugee author’. Drawing upon publicly available work by refugee writers Afro-Palestinian poet Ibra Al-Thibeh and the Somali-British Muslim writer Warsan Shire, and fieldwork involving Iranian and Iraqi writers in a creative refugee writing group in the UK, it will consider the affordances and shortcomings of grouping authors from diverse backgrounds and cultures this way. This is an interdisciplinary paper, bringing together intersectional feminism, literary criticism, and qualitative research methods.

Questions to the Speakers

9:00 – 10:45
CONTESTING THE TAG
Chair: LAETITIA ZECCHINI

MARIANGELA PALLADINO
Keele University

‘Refugee Literature’? Narrative of Journeys across Africa and the Mediterranean.

This paper explores the extent to which it is legitimate to use the term ‘refugee author’. I aim to problematize this term and its role in both establishing and ‘categorizing’ narratives concerned with migration. Does the term refer to published accounts written by refugees? Or could this also include fictional narratives about refugees' experiences?

FRÉDÉRIK DETUE
Université de Poitiers

“This is no Refugee Literature”

In my paper, I study testimonial projects of authors such as Wali Mohammadi, Fabien Didier Yene and Mahmoud Traoré, whose writings offer reflections on their experiences of exile. While undertaking this reconstruction, I will criticize the concept of ‘refugee literature’, which fails to do justice to the projects in case.

Questions to the Speakers

10:45 – 11:30
LUNCH BREAK

11:00 – 12:00
NARRATING AND TRANSLATING EXPERIENCE (1)

Chair: NAJLA NAKHLÉ-CERRUTI

NATHALIE BONTEMPS
traductrice littéraire

Être chez soi, être en exil, écrire. Réflexions autour de la traduction d’Aram Karabet, Yassin Al Haj Saleh, Joumana Maarouf, Majid Al Dik et Golan Haji.

Cette intervention portera sur cinq personnes de nationalité syrienne, actuellement en exil, et interrogera les liens entre leur pratique de l’écriture, leur engagement dans leur pays, et leur actuel statut de « réfugiés ». On tentera ainsi d’explorer la manière dont se combinent ces trois éléments, de manière spécifique et personnelle à chacun d’entre eux.

CATHERINE COQUI
Université Paris Diderot


Questions to the Speakers

12:00 – 12:45
AFTERNOON SESSION – SALLE B 3.03

12:45 – 2:15 pm
NARRATING AND TRANSLATING EXPERIENCE (2)

Chair: MARIANGELA PALLADINO

VALERIE ANISHCHENKOVA,
University of Maryland in College Park

The Battle of Truth and Fiction: Documentary Storytelling and Contemporary Refugee Discourse

Documentary cinematic production about refugees are important cultural texts that define cultural terminology and societal perceptions of refugees by the host culture(s). The paper argues that documentaries serve to "organize" this complex discourse for the general audience and offer a typology of refugee prototypes and their stories. The primary case studies include Salam Neighbor (2015), Lost Boys of Sudan (2003), God Drew Tired of Us (2006), A World Not Ours (2012), A Man Returned (2016).

Questions to the Speakers

2:15 – 3:00
LUNCH BREAK

3:00 – 4:15 pm
NARRATING AND TRANSLATING EXPERIENCE (3)

Chair: MELISSA CHAPLIN

OLIVERA JOKIC
John Jay College, CUNY

Yugoslavian Literature of Muslim Displacement and the Reading of Pity

This paper examines U.S. fiction focusing on violence against women during wars of the 1990s. These texts invite outrage and pity as appropriate responses to the spectacle of women’s suffering, depoliticizing readers’ interest in sexual violence and Islamophobia.

CLAIRE GALLIEN,
Université Paul Valéry Montpellier 3/CNRS

‘Just Bomb Into It’ – Radical Deconstructions in the Art and Poetry of Gerry Judah, Emily Jacir, and Suheir Hammad

I have selected Judah, Jacir, and Hammad to talk about the critical take that contemporary Arab artists and poets, often living in Western countries as exiles or refugees, assume with regards the ‘refugee crisis’. Rejecting the language of sympathy towards refugees, their broken art reflect on the origination of violence and replicate inside – that is on the canvas, pages, and words – the violence and damage Western societies safely conduct outside.

Questions to the Speakers

4:15 – 5:00
CLOSING WORDS

Chair: CLAIRE SAVINA

6 July 2017