

Voicing Refugee Experiences in Art, Literature and Cinema

9 September 2016



This workshop of the Platform for Postcolonial Readings will be devoted to a postcolonial reflection on the capacities and limits of art, literature and cinema when it comes to giving a voice to refugees. According to literary scholar Bishupal Limbu “[t]o be a refugee is to lose certain rights, and in the absence of these rights, a person is no longer recognizable as such, devoid of significance, and meaningless to prevailing schemes of representation” (2009). Taking this claim as our starting point, we will ask ourselves if, and if so how, literature, art and cinema can artistically represent lives

that are severed from representation politically? Are there modes of artistic representation available and/or imaginable that succeed in effectively and non-reductively voicing the migrant experience, in many cases a liminal experience that appears beyond words and images? Can artistic practices give voice to those who are generally seen as voiceless? And is doing so a responsibility, a challenge or rather an undesirable instance of appropriation and ultimately silencing?

As T.J. Demos (2006) has pointed out the documentation and representation of what has come to be called the “naked life” of refugees is closely aligned with the exercise of power. Moreover, when producing a spectacle of misery, suchlike representations of refugees run the risk of contributing to a violent abstraction that not only excludes the voices of refugees themselves, but also obliterates the role of structural agents, such as states and corporations, from our understanding of the causal conditions behind the various forms of forced dislocation. Can art, literature and cinema provide alternatives to the images of refugees as victims, as objects of humanitarian intervention, or as disruptors of the national order that are omnipresent in today’s media coverage of the so-called “refugee crisis”? Or have these representational conventions seeped into aesthetic languages as well?

These and other questions will be addressed during the 18th meeting of the Platform for Postcolonial Readings on VOICING REFUGEE EXPERIENCES IN ART, LITERATURE AND CINEMA that is organized in collaboration with Voice4Thought, an academic-artistic project that strives for alternative forms of knowledge production (see). As part of the second annual V4T Festival, themed “People in Motion: Refugees, Migrant and Travellers”, the Platform invites in particular junior researchers for a meeting that will consist of:

- an introductory lecture by **Sudeep Dasgupta** (UvA)
- a collective close reading and discussion of pivotal contributions to the debate on the representation of the so-called “refugee crisis”;
- junior scholars presenting their own research in the light of the day’s topic;
- a public debate on “**People in Motion**”, organized by **voice4thought.org**

A reader will be distributed in preparation of the workshop which is open to all researchers, Research Master and PhD students working in the field of postcolonial studies. Please register with Eloë Kingma of NICA/OSL (). Active participation by Research Master students may be credited with 1 or 3 EC (without/with presentation). For more information, contact Eloë Kingma (nica-fgw@uva.nl) or Janna Houwen (j.j.m.houwen@hum.leidenuniv.nl).