Home and Exile

Seminar Leader: Kerry Bystrom
Times:  Monday 9:00 – 10:30
       Wednesday 13:30 – 15:00
Email: k.bystrom@berlin.bard.edu
Office Hours: Monday and Thursday from 2-3pm in P24.01.006 (or by appointment)

Course Description

Both the right to a nationality and the right to “seek and enjoy asylum” are guaranteed through the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its related Covenants. Even as increasing numbers of people are forcibly displaced from their homes and homelands, however, there is no corresponding obligation for nation-states to accept refugees and asylum seekers. Many people are thus left in precarious positions with little recourse to their rights. This course explores the multiple dilemmas created by this situation—and through experiences of exile and migration more generally—through a close analysis of refugee narratives in a broad range of media, such as personal testimony, fiction, and film. It pairs these narratives with theoretical essays, anthropological texts, and international legal covenants on questions of home, exile, refugee status, internally displaced peoples, and “statelessness.” Bringing “the aesthetic” and “the political” together, the course aims not only to use literature and film as a way to understand refugee experiences more fully, but also to explore how forms of representation shape these experiences.

The course will proceed in three sections. First, we will focus on the period leading up to, during, and following World War II in Europe to see how modern understandings of the “refugee problem” and the institutions set up to address it developed. We will then consider more recent accounts from Rwandan refugees in the Congo and from Palestinian refugees and exiles, in order to explore the paradigm of the refugee camp and the reigning narrative of humanitarian aid associated with it. Finally, we will turn to the reception of refugees and other migrants in England, the USA, and Germany—our current “homeland”—and ask to how these can become more hospitable societies. Key questions we will consider throughout the semester include: What is the importance of having a physical and a national “home”? What are the emotional, psychological, and socio-economic effects of losing specific houses and homelands? In what ways can new homes be shaped and what role does memory play in this process? How should life in refugee camps be understood and how can inhabitants be assisted most effectively? Through which aesthetic forms can one represent the experience of exile and its legacy on future generations? Through which forms can refugees best demand their rights? How does representation more generally impact the way refugees and other migrants act and are received in local and global contexts?

Required Course Texts
--Primo Levi, Survival in Auschwitz
--Beatrice Umutesi, Surviving the Slaughter: The Ordeal of a Rwandan Refugee in Zaire
--Caryl Phillips, A Distant Shore
--Edwidge Danticat, The Dew Breaker
Additional required reading materials are printed in a course reader (CR), will be handed out as Xeroxes (X), and/or available on-line.

Assignments
This course has four formal assignments: three essays (5-7 pp. or 1500-2000 words each) and an independent group project and project presentation (the presentation should be approx. 15 minutes plus Q&A). It also has informal assignments, including writing and disseminating reading responses and/or discussion questions in advance of seminar meetings at least three times over the course of the semester. Since this is a seminar, active and informed participation in class is a required and graded element of the course.

Your final grade will be calculated according to the following formula:
Essay #1: 20%
Essay #2: 20%
Essay #3: 20%
Group Project and Presentation: 15%
Class Participation (including informal assignments): 25%

Policies
Attendance:
Class attendance is mandatory. Accordingly, any unexcused absences will have a negative impact on your participation grade, and having more than four unexcused absences for the semester will automatically reduce your final cumulative mark by one full letter grade (from B+ to a C+ for example). Further, please note that the ECLA of Bard attendance policy stipulates that missing more than 30% (in this case, eight) of the required class meetings means that you cannot receive credit for the course; missed classes in first week of the semester count double. You should review the full ECLA of Bard attendance policy stated in the Student Handbook, which also outlines what does and does not count as an excused absence.

ECLA of Bard Late Paper Policy:
All essays are to be submitted via the ECLA of Bard electronic collection system, and thus will receive a time stamp. Late essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (again, from B+ to C+, for example). Essays that are more than 24 hours late will also be downgraded one full grade and cannot earn a grade higher than a C. Essays that are more than 72 hours late will not be accepted.

Academic Integrity:
In this course, we aim to conduct ourselves as a community of scholars, recognizing that academic study is both an intellectual and ethical enterprise. You are encouraged to build on the ideas and texts of others; that is a vital part of academic life. However, you are also obligated to document every occasion when you use another’s ideas, language, or syntax. When you use another’s ideas or language—whether through direct quotation, summary, or paraphrase—you must formally
acknowledge that debt by signaling it in the MLA parenthetical format (http://www.mla.org/style). Please come see me if you have questions about when and how to cite. Further note that even one occasion of academic dishonesty, large or small, on any assignment, large or small, will result in reporting of the offense to the Academic Administration and may result in failure for the entire course. The full ECLA of Bard policy on academic integrity is detailed in the Student Handbook and you should familiarize yourself with it.

**Cellphones and Laptops:**
Cellphones should be switched off for the duration of class. Laptops are allowed only when necessary for class activities.

**Provisional Course Outline**

**Part One: The Rise of the Refugee**

**Week One**
- Monday Sept 2: Introduction

**Week Two**
- Wednesday Sept 11: Levi SA, pp. 62-123

**Week Three**
- Monday Sept 16: NO CLASS (Kerry at conference; make-up=Kurgan talk)
- Wednesday Sept 18: NO CLASS (Kerry at conference; make-up=Petti and Hilal talk)

**Week Four**
- Monday Sept 23: Levi cont’d; Group Project Work Day (Come with a researched and written paragraph describing one idea for collective consideration)
- **Tuesday Sept 24 7:30-9:30pm SCREENING Hiroshima Mon Amour (France, dir. Alain Resnais, 1959)**
- Wednesday Sept 25: *Hiroshima Mon Amour* cont’d

**Group Project teams and topics due in class**

**Week Five**
Part Two: Exile, the Camp, and the Humanitarian Imperative


Paper #1 due Friday Oct 4 at 5pm

FALL BREAK

Week Six
- Monday Oct 14: Umutesi, STS, Ch. 1-3, pp. 1-70
- Wednesday Oct 16: Umutesi, STS, Ch. 4-8, pp. 71-164

Week Seven
- Monday Oct 21: Umutesi, STS, Ch. 9-11, pp. 164-236
- **Tuesday Oct 22 Special Evening Lecture: Terry Kurgan, Hotel Yeoville Artist Presentation** 7-9pm in P98a **Read in advance Bloch and Heese, selections from I am an African: Stories of Young Refugees in South Africa (CR)**
- Wednesday Oct 23: Kurgan cont’d; Kanafani, “The Land of Sad Oranges” (X); Recommended: Farsoun “After al-Nakbah” (X)

Week Eight
- Monday Oct 28: Kanafani, “Letter from Gaza” (X); Feldman “Gaza’s Humanitarianism Problem” (X); UNRWA “At a Glance” Brochure (X) and 60 years video, online at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLa5mzbvyc
- Wednesday Oct 30: Petti and Hilal cont’d; Abourahme and Hilal, “The Production of Space, Political Subjectivization, and the folding of Polarity: the case of Deheishe Camp, Palestine” (X)
- **Oct 30-Nov 1 SPECIAL EVENT “Decolonizing Berlin” at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (downtown near the Reichstag at John-Foster-Dulles-Allee 10)”**

Week Nine
- Monday Nov 4: Decolonizing Berlin wrap-up; Group Project Work Day (Submit one written paragraph outlining group progress to date)

Part Three: North America and Europe as Homeland?

- Wednesday Nov 6: Dawes “Interrogation,” pp. 76-91 (CR); Fassin “Truth Ordeal” and “Ambivalent Hospitality” (CR); Getter, “Asylum in the ‘Land of the Free’” (CR)
- **Thursday Nov 7 7:30-9:30 pm SCREENING: In this World (England, dir. Michael Winterbottom, 2002)**
Paper #2 due Friday Nov 8 at 5pm

Week Ten
- Monday Nov 11: In this World cont’d

Week Eleven
- Monday Nov 18: Phillips DS Part II, pp. 64-170

Week Twelve

Week Thirteen

Wrap-Up

Week Fourteen
- Monday Dec 9: Group Project Presentations

Group Projects due
- Wednesday Dec 11: Group Project Presentations cont’d and Conclusion; read Agamben, “Beyond Human Rights” (X)

Paper #3 due Weds Dec 18 at 5pm