

MULOSIGE Modules:

‘Reading together’ Literary Texts in Multilingual Contexts

Course Description

This course attempts to break down the common practices of reading literary traditions in multilingual contexts offering case-studies from three multilingual contexts: Morocco, North India and the Horn of Africa. Dominant reading practices are based on binary oppositions between texts written in different languages in the same context placing them in independent literary traditions with the presupposition that they have no impact on each, thereby reifying each tradition. These reading practices tend to produce selective single language literary histories (Arabophone or Francophone in Morocco, Hindu or Urdu in North India, Amharic or Oromo in Ethiopia), which in turn foreground communal, religious, and regional divisions that are more reflective of modern and contemporary divisions in these multilingual societies (Orsini 2012). The course offers a ‘reading together’ – or an entangled comparative reading of literary traditions in multilingual contexts, a reading that privileges the specificity of the literary traditions rather than language categorisation, and that considers these texts’ mutual historical, cultural, geographical, political, and aesthetic interweaving and implications as well as their co-constitution (Laachir 2016). The course offers case-studies from Morocco, North India and the Horn of Africa on how to ‘read together’ literary texts in these multilingual contexts.

Course Collaborators:

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Week 1. Why “reading together”?

- i. Orsini, Francesca (2015) “The Multilingual Local in World Literature” *Comparative Literature*, 67 (4). pp. 345-374.
- ii. Orsini, Francesca (2017) “Reading together Hindi, Urdu and English Village Novels” in *Indian Literature and the World: Multilingualism, Translation and the Public Sphere*, eds. R Ciocca, N Srivastava (London: Palgrave Macmillan), pp. 61-87
- iii. Marzagora, Sara (2015) “African-language literatures and the ‘transnational turn’ in Euro-American humanities” *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 27 (1). pp. 40-55.
- iv. Laachir, Karima (2016) “The aesthetics and politics of ‘reading together’ Moroccan novels in Arabic and French” *Journal of North African Studies*, 21 (1). pp. 22-36.

Week 2. Morocco Decolonizing Language

The relationship between Arabic Fusha, Darija (or spoken Moroccan Arabic), Tmazight, French, and Spanish constitutes crucial aspects of the multilingual landscape in Morocco. The position of French language is an important aspect of this discussion given that some of the most influential Moroccan intellectuals were educated and trained in French during the colonial period (or late colonialism). This session examines how two influential Moroccan critics and novelists renegotiated the terms of this multilingual exchange from the point of view of decolonizing national culture. Abdelkebir Khatibi (1938-2009) and Mohamed Berrada (b1938) both experienced French colonialism and were largely exposed to and influenced by French thoughts and ideas. In their critical and fictional works, both writers seek to historicize and

reterritorialize French theory by re-reading it from a postcolonial perspective. In this session, we explore how the act of intellectual decolonization takes shape in Khatibi's well-known autobiographical text *A tattooed memory: the autobiography of a decolonized person* and Berrada's semi-autobiographical novel *Like a Summer Never to be Repeated*. Berrada's novel traces the author's time in Cairo during the late 1950s and 60s and dwells on the question of decolonization in Maghrebi/Mashreqi (or Arabic Middle East) relationship at a time when Pan-Arabism was reshaping the Arabic critical and literary sphere. What does reading these two autobiographical texts together reveal about the aesthetic and political dimensions of multilingualism and decolonization? How do they represent the relationship of Arabic and French/Western critical traditions?

Primary Texts:

- i. Abdelkebir Khatibi: *Mémoire Tatouée* (1971) translated to English as *Tattooed Memory* (2016) by P Thompson (Paris: Editions L'Harmattan).
- ii. Mohamed Berrada: *Mithla Saifin Lan Yatakarrar* (2001) translated to English as *Like A Summer Never to Be Repeated* (2009) by C Philips (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press).

Secondary Texts:

- i. Mamdani, Mahmood (1994) "The Intelligentsia, the State and Social Movements in Africa." In *Academic Freedom in Africa*, edited by Mamadou Diouf and Mahmood Mamdani, 247–262. (Dakar: Codesria Book Series).
- ii. Sharaby, Hisham (1988) *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press). pp. 61-85.

Week 3. Morocco: Remembering and gendering the memory of Lead-Years

This session uses the practice of "reading together" to connect multilingual literary traditions in Morocco, particularly in Arabic and French. This selection of readings shows how literary texts in Arabic and French talk to each other and to their own context through the prism of imprisonment and the political oppression of the Lead-Years. Morocco's recent history has

been marked by the traumatic events of the Lead-Years in the 1970s and 1980s when thousands of people were arrested, tortured, and imprisoned because of their political views. There have been sporadic literary publications on prison experiences in the form of semi-autobiographical accounts from the 1960s to the 1990s, and a real outburst of literary production referring to the trauma of these years since the death of Hassan II in 1999 but they have been mainly dominated by male voices. This session reads comparatively the works of two authors who were both imprisoned in the 1970s/80s for their political views and activism. First, the autobiographical text of the Leftist feminist and militant Fatna El Bouih's *Talk of Darkness* (2001), which traces a gendered memory of incarceration and violence in a way that foregrounds the role of Moroccan women as active political and social players. Second, Youssef Fadel's *A Rare Blue Bird that Flies with me* (2013), which represents a fictional account of the physical and symbolic violence of prison experiences, solitary confinement, and torture of a political prisoner in the notorious (real life) secret prison in Tazmamart, where prisoners of opinion were confined in the 1970s and 1980s. Reading the two texts together, the session addresses the following questions: what are the aesthetics of this prison literature? Can we talk about an aesthetics of confinement? How does autobiography and novel form retell the stories of confinement and violence? The session demonstrates how Arabophone and Francophone literary texts deconstruct the political divides constructed around French and Arabic languages.

Primary Texts:

- i. Fatnah El Bouih: *Hadith al-'Atamah* (2001) translated to English as *Talk of Darkness* by M Kamal and S Slyomovics (Austin: University of Texas Press 2008).
- ii. Youssef Fadel: *Ta'ir Azraq Nādir yuhaliq ma'l* (2013) translated in English as *A Rare Blue Bird that Flies with Me* by J Smolin (New York: Hoopoe 2016).

Secondary Texts:

- i. Elinson, Alexander (2009) "Opening the Circle: Storyteller and Audience in Moroccan Prison Literature." *Middle Eastern Literatures* 12 (3): 289–303.

- ii. Slyomovics, Susan (2012): "Fatna El Bouih and the Work of Memory, Gender, and Reparation in Morocco" *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, Volume 8, Number 1, Winter, pp. 37-62.
- iii. Hafiz, Sabry (2002) "Torture, Imprisonment and Political Assassination in the Arabic Novel." *Al Jadid Magazine* 8 (38).

Week 3. North India: One form, two different historical imaginations

The *Musaddas* (*Ebb and Flow of Islam*, 1879) by the Urdu poet Altaf Husain Hali provided a powerful example of a new type of historical-exhortative poem which criticised the current "fallen state" of the Indian-Muslim community and evoked an ideal past. The poem was a resounding success and inspired many other versions, which carried their own, at times very different, historical imagination and idea of community. One of them, explicitly inspired by Hali's *Musaddas*, was the Hindi poet Maithilisharan Gupta's *Bhārat bhāratī* (1912), which instead of addressing the community of Indian Muslims in Urdu, addressed the community of Indian Hindus in Hindi. What happens when we read the two poems together? How do we think about the circulation of forms across linguistic and literary communities that have similar concerns but divergent orientations?

Primary texts:

- i. C. Shackle and J. Majeed, trans. (1997) Hali's *Musaddas: The Flow and Ebb of Islam* (Delhi: Oxford University Press).
- ii. Partial translation of Maithilisharan Gupta's *Bhārar bhāratī* in F. Orsini (2002) *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940: language and literature in the age of nationalism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002, ch. 3, pp. 192-203.)

Secondary readings:

- i. Introductions by V. Dalmia and C. Shackle to Shobna Nijhawan (ed.) (2010) *Nationalism in the vernacular* (Permanent Black) – an anthology of literary writings in Hindi and Urdu on nationalism across several genres.

Week 4. North India: One writer, two scripts

The seminal Urdu-Hindi writer and novelist Premchand (1880-1936) started writing in Urdu but, in order to reach a wider readership, turned to publishing and writing his works also in Hindi. While he advocated that the two languages were one and, in the controversy between supporters of Hindi and Urdu he supported the middle path of Hindustani, his texts in Hindi and Urdu reveal significant differences in vocabulary, and occasionally more. What do these differences tell us about what he perceived to be different Hindi and Urdu audiences?

Primary texts:

- i. Premchand, *Sevasadan* (tr. S. Shinghvi) (2005) (New Delhi: OUP).
- ii. Premchand, *Courtesans' quarter: a translation of Bazaar-e-Husn* (tr. with notes by Amina Azfar) (2003) New York: Oxford University Press.

Secondary readings:

- i. V. Dalmia, 'The House of Service of the Chronicle of an Un/holy City', Afterword to the E tr. of *Sevasadan*.
- ii. Foreword by Ralph Russell and introduction by M. H. Askari to E. translation of *Bazaar-e-Husn*.
- iii. A. Safadi, 'The "fallen" woman in two colonial novels', *Annual of Urdu Studies* 24 (2009).

Week 5. Horn of Africa: Against the modernist bias

A thriving literature in Ge'ez developed in the Christian highlands of present-day Ethiopia starting from the 5th or 6th centuries AD. Over the following centuries, a diglossia developed between Geez as written language of the Orthodox Church and imperial court and Amharic taking over as spoken language. In the nineteenth century, Amharic supplanted Geez as official written language of the imperial court and, later, of the Ethiopian state. Amharic literature took off starting from the beginning of the twentieth century. Scholars tend to assume that the beginning of Amharic fiction marked a profound break with erstwhile cultural production, going as far as

considering the translation of a foreign text, Bunyam's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, as the single catalyst and main inspiration for Amharic writers. This interpretation is underpinned by a modernist and diffusionist bias, common to many theories of world literature today. As a result, Ge'ez and Amharic literature are rarely read together. In this session we propose to bridge this scholarly rupture and show instead the deep historical continuities in terms of genres, narrative style and themes. We will read a classic of Ge'ez literature, the fourteenth century *Kəbrä Nəgäst*, together with the first novel in Amharic, published in 1908 by Afäwärq Gäbrä-Iyyäsus. What does it mean for Afäwärq to refashion the Ge'ez literary heritage, from his position of Amharic language teacher in Naples at the beginning of the twentieth century? In what ways does he refashion the Ge'ez heritage for a new global public – namely, his Italian students of Amharic, to whom he assigned his novel as translation exercise? In what ways was he updating Ethiopia's nationalist narrative, with an eye to his international readership? And finally, how do the *Kəbrä Nəgäst's* theme of transformation through travel itself allude to the worldmaking agency of historical actors?

Primary Texts:

- i. *Kəbrä Nəgäst* ('Glory of Kings', 14th century, Geez)
- ii. Afäwärq Gäbrä-Iyyäsus *Tobbya* (Naples 1908, Amharic)

Secondary texts:

- i. Yonas Admassu (1995) 'The first-born of Amharic fiction', in *Silence is not golden: a critical anthology of Ethiopian literature*, eds. Taddesse Adera & Ali Jimale Ahmed, Red Sea Press, Lawrenceville (NJ), pp. 93-112.
- ii. Taye Assefa (1995) 'The form and content of the first Amharic novel', in *Silence is not golden: a critical anthology of Ethiopian literature*, eds. Taddesse Adera & Ali Jimale Ahmed, Red Sea Press, Lawrenceville (NJ), pp. 61-92.

Week 6. Horn of Africa: Colonial relations

This session takes as its starting point *Ignorance is the Enemy of Love* by Faarax M. J. Cawl, one of the first novels to be published after the orthography of Somali was standardized in the

1970s. Published by the Somali Ministry of Culture and Higher Education, *Ignorance is the Enemy of Love* promotes literacy while telling the story of the Somali armed resistance against British colonizers. We will read *Ignorance is the Enemy of Love* together with *The Conscript*, a novel in Tigrinya first written under Italian colonialism in 1927 and published in 1950 under the British Administration of Eritrea. Telling the story of an Eritrean soldier sent by Italian colonial authorities to Libya to suppress the anti-Italian resistance of the local population, *The Conscript* offers an internationalist view of colonial violence. Postcolonial theory and world literature tend to reproduce a center/periphery way of reading the world, in which literary peripheries constantly attempt to write back to the former colonizers and subvert colonial narratives. *The Conscript* and *Ignorance is the Enemy of Love* write about colonialism, but in indigenous languages, and contribute to local debates rather than addressing European discourses. How do these two texts challenge the center/periphery paradigm?

Primary Texts:

- i. Faarax M. J. Cawl (1974) *Ignorance is the Enemy of Love* (Mogadishu, Somali)
- ii. Gebreyesus Hailu, (1950) *The Conscript* (Asmara, Tigrinya)

Secondary Texts:

- i. B. W. Andrzejewski (2011) "The rise of written Somali literature", *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 23:1, 73-80
- ii. Ghirmai Negash (2009) "Native Intellectuals in the Contact Zone: African Responses to Italian Colonialism in Tigrinya Literature", *Biography*, 32:1, pp. 74-88

Week 7. Reflection on the method of reading

This final session is reserved for concluding thoughts about the course material and the method of reading literary texts in multilingual contexts. These final set of readings encourage us to consider the current debates in Comparative Literary studies including the history and politics of language practices that underpin debates on World Literature.

- i. Mufti, Aamir (2010) "Orientalism and the institution of world literature", *Critical Inquiry* / Spring 2010, 448-493
- ii. Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ wa (2005) "Europhone or African Memory: The Challenge of the Pan-African Intellectual in the Era of Globalization." In *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development*, edited by Thandika Mkandawire, 155–164. (Dakar: CODESRIA Books).
- iii. Kilito, Abdelfattah (2016) *The Tongue of Adam*, translated from French by Robyn Creswell. London: W. W. Norton & Company.
- iv. Orsini, Francesca (2012) "How to Do Multilingual Literary History? Lessons from Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century India" *Indian Economic Social History Review*. April–June 49 (2): 225–246.

*** A brief note about the languages:**

Hindi & Urdu: Modern nomenclature is not reflected in earlier categories, and the North Indian vernacular in North India is generically referred to either as *bhākha* or *bhasha*, i.e. "language", or *Hindi*, *Hindui*, *Hindavi*, i.e. "Indian" or "of the Hindus" (in Persian sources) irrespective of the script used. Since the 19c, instead, a strong language ideology has established a continuum of script-language-literature-community sharply distinguishes between Hindi in (Deva)nagari script that draws on Sanskrit roots for abstract vocabulary, and Urdu in the Perso-Arabic script that instead draws on Persian and, increasingly, Arabic.

*MULOSIGE Modules seeks to foster research and pedagogy that highlights comparison across and between languages and that is attentive to the 'significant geographies' of each context. Readers can create and submit syllabi based on their own collaborations with other scholars at LINK.