Call for Papers

International Conference
Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen
Interdisciplinary Centre for Global South Studies
1-3 October 2020

Subjectivities of Migration:
Poetics and Genre in the Literary Imagination
of Migrant Experience since 1989

The term ‘migration’ occupies a central place in political discourse where it most often refers to refugees, asylum seekers and unskilled labour migrants. The full range of phenomena covered by the umbrella term is much more diverse: there are undocumented migrants, return migrants, retirement migrants, forced migrants and political exiles, religious specialists servicing migrants, highly skilled professional migrants, information technology workers employed through global ‘body shopping’, trained occupational specialists drawn back from diasporas to contribute to the development of their homelands, etc. The possible responses to such diverse kinds of migration include intensification of ethnic identity and solidarity as well as a sense of exile, development of cosmopolitan consciousness and hybrid identity, exclusive identification with the new nation, retreat into ‘inner exile’, split between public persona and clandestine undocumented identity, and many others.

Especially since the end of the bipolar world order in 1989 and the following era of accelerated globalization, the field of narratives, plays and poems concerned with migration has been in constant flux. Recent literary refractions of migrant experience suggest that the experience of immigration, the assimilation and search for identity of first and second generations, and vistas on past postcolonial migratory movements, are all informed by the socio-economic effects of accelerated globalization. They suggest new groups of migrants and types of migration, as well as a keen awareness of the ways in which different forms of migration correlate with phenomena as distinct as climate change, cosmopolitan sensibilities, and capitalist demand for workforce mobility. The Penguin Book of Migration Literature (2019) is the first anthology of migration literature with a global, comparative scope. Its publication is symptomatic of how recent globalisation has changed our perspective on migration literature, and its content reflects how globalisation has shifted the ways in which migrants themselves make sense of their movements.

The conference “Subjectivities of Migration” relates the subjectivities of migration featured by narratives, dramas and poems published since 1989 to the thematic and formal properties of the texts and performances. Exploring the diverse poetics of migration literature, it considers genre as a category that accounts for the similarity of experiences: genres of migration literature are constituted by a set of thematic, and possibly also formal, resemblances that tend to evoke – and are often evoked by – similar experiences. The literary instances exhibit some or many but never all thematic and formal qualities of the genre (‘family resemblances’).

Keynotes will be presented by Elleke Boehmer (Oxford), Susan Koshy (Illinois) and Roy Sommer (Wuppertal). Yvonne Owuor and Elleke Boehmer will read from their fiction.
We invite contributions from across the spectrum of literary studies to address the following or related questions:

- Which literary genres and poetics are associated with specific subjectivities of migration? How are multi-perspectivism, intertextuality, heteroglossia, wandering consciousness, but also monologism, essayistic strategies, use of untranslatables and other techniques applied in genres of migration literature?
- How have genres such as travelogue, elegy, *Bildungsroman* been appropriated, hybridised or subverted in recent migration literature? Which non-Western genres inform it? How have TV series and the aesthetics of drone images and Google Maps shaped the literary imagination of migration?
- What is the current state of the relationship between genres of migration literature and autobiography?
- Can genres concerned with migrant subjectivities help to complicate categories such as diaspora, refugee, exile, immigrant and cosmopolitanism?
- Does the (multi)direction(ality) of migration (e.g., from the Global South to the Global North or vice versa, South-South etc.) correlate with particular poetics?
- How do the categories of gender, class, ethnicity and nationality intersect with specific genres and poetics featuring subjectivities of migration?
- How do particular genres negotiate the relationship between individual and collective experience, individuality and solidarity?
- Which scales do we apply to define genres that comprise a substantial number of texts and feature distinctive enough qualities?
- How have poetics and genres of migration literature migrated around the globe?

Please send your abstract of max. 300 words with a short biographical note to subjectivities.of.migration@gmail.com.

The deadline is 1 February 2020.

Expenses for travel and accommodation can partly be covered for invited speakers.

Conference organiser: PD Dr. Kai Wiegandt (Tübingen)