

To Researchers on Modern Arabic Literature all around the world

## Call for Papers

Phil.-histor. Fakult t

**Institut f r Islamwissenschaft  
und Neuere Orientalische  
Philologie**

Berne, May 2004

The *Institute for Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies*, University of Berne, in cooperation with the *European Association for the Study of Modern Arabic Literature* (EurASMAL) and the *Soci t  Suisse Moyen Orient et Civilisation Islamique* (SSMOCI), is planning to hold a conference in Berne, 15/16-18/19th March, 2005, on

### ***The Creativity of the Diaspora***

At the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, the literature produced by Middle Eastern writers who had emigrated or been exiled from their home countries played an important role in the spread of new ideas and innovative political and social thought in the Middle East. Turkish nationalism or the quest for democracy within the Ottoman Empire, ideas of social justice or a new concept of the individual, for example, can hardly be thought of without the impulses that came from the diaspora then.

The situation at the beginning of the 21st century in many respects resembles that of a century ago. The political, social and ideological conditions in Western Asia and North Africa have caused many writers to leave their countries and settle in the West. Here, a lively literary activity can be observed. Many writers go on writing in their mother tongue, producing literature primarily for a reading public in the Middle East or the diaspora community. Others switch to writing in the language of the host country. In both cases, the distance from the country of origin often encourages writers to tread new ground, exploring and experimenting with new themes and forms, breaking taboos prevailing in their home countries (especially where sexuality, religion, and social and political order are concerned), and developing new ideas. In some cases, diaspora has ensured a Middle Eastern literature's very survival (under Sadd m Husayn, for instance, non-panegyric Iraqi literature was produced almost exclusively outside Iraq), in others the works of diaspora authors have been able to challenge the literary canon of their home countries. Furthermore, if a language switch has taken place stimulating irritations can be witnessed in the literary landscape of the host countries.

The conference should deal less with the *problems* resulting from living in exile / diaspora – life as a foreigner, experiencing marginalisation, identity crises, etc. It should rather explore the

*creative and innovative potential* equally inherent in the exile / diaspora situation, and give insight into the processes of its emergence and development. This potential is all the more significant since writers (and intellectuals in general) of the diaspora are creating alternatives which could serve as models once the actual conditions in North African and West Asian countries have changed, or which are already contributing to bringing about change from a distance. Moreover, as agents of mediation, diaspora authors may differentiate or, as the case may be, correct the images the West and the East are constantly producing of each other. In this way, they often show the way, in their host countries, to integration and possibilities of creatively appropriating elements of the cultures involved.

The conference aims to contribute to the current discussions about the behaviour of local cultures in global contexts. It profits from the research, already existing and far advanced, on exile / diaspora / migrant literatures; it will however focus on the diaspora literature *written in the mother tongue*, since this aspect has been rather neglected so far by scholars.

From among the participants,

- the *authors* should contribute their individual experiences as writers of the diaspora,
- the *specialists of modern Arabic, Persian and Turkish literature* should speak on their studies on diaspora writers and writing in the diaspora,
- and *discussants* from outside (i.e., non-Oriental studies, e.g. English or French or Comparative Literature who have shown interest in diaspora literature written in non-Oriental languages) should enrich the discussions with their experience and ideas.

*We are looking for people to give talks (15-20 min.) in the following areas of interest:*

- Literary life in the diaspora: journals, societies/clubs, cultural centres, publishing houses, ...
- Reception of diaspora literature in the home countries
- Diaspora literature crowding out home-grown Arabic (Persian, Turkish, ...) literature?
- Diaspora and politics, diaspora and religion, diaspora and the social order, ...
- Differences between diaspora literature written in the mother tongue and that written in non-Oriental languages
- Before and after emigration: What changes in writing and/or in attitudes to language?
- Diaspora and humor
- Diaspora and history
- Orientalizing oneself as a danger?
- Diaspora writers as agents of mediation

Please send your submission to [guth@islam.unibe.ch](mailto:guth@islam.unibe.ch) or [sgmoik.ssmoci@tiscali.ch](mailto:sgmoik.ssmoci@tiscali.ch).