

Winter 2024

Hum105/L105: Franco-Maghrebi and Franco-Asian Identities in Contemporary France.

This course examines the representations of the Maghrebi and the Asian immigrants in contemporary France, two groups perceived differently by the native French. The first five weeks focus on the analysis of the Maghrebi community. *Memoires d'immigrés: l'héritage maghrébin*, a documentary film by Yamina Benguigui, recounts the Maghrebi history on the French soil through the testimony of the men who came to work at the request of France, their wives whom the law authorizes to join, and finally their children whose story in France lies between the origin of their parents and their own. These experiences are further illustrated in *Un homme, ça ne pleure pas* by Faiza Guène. This novel celebrates Algerian traditions and describes the difficulties the Maghrebi face integrating their different selves. The text documents not only the protagonists' uneasy negotiation with their biculturality, but also French society's mixed feelings regarding its Maghrebi citizens. *La plus haute des solitudes* by Tahar Ben Jelloun continues this cultural examination. His narrative highlights the trauma linked to uprooting, exile, and its transgenerational impacts. The last five weeks of the term concentrate on the study of the Asian immigrants in France. Laurence Jourdan's documentary, *Asiatiques de France*, provides the historical context. The political immigration of the 1970s, marked by the tragedy of the South Asian refugees, was followed by the economic immigration of the 1990s, mainly from Chinese nationals. In addition, the film emphasizes the new aspirations of the younger generations who reject the discreet integration advocated by their Asian parents. Two books also relate the Asian immigrants' struggles. One is *Une chance amère* by Alice Dumas Koi who recounts her grandmother and her mother's sufferings, prisoners of their past and traumatized by forced departure. Arriving in France in 1975, after fleeing Cambodia, they keep the memory of the war in their bodies and pass it on to their children. Koi lifts the veil on their bruised silence and their inner conflicts to rise above their hardship despite uprooting and poverty. Far from stereotypes and prejudices, Koi offers a true picture of the tormented psychology of these Cambodians who chose France as their new home. The second text on Asian immigrants is *Une longue route pour m'unir au chant français* by François Cheng. Cheng invites the reader to travel "the long road" which led him from China to France. Despite the extreme material precariousness of the first decades in his adopted country, and his cruel interior torments, Cheng narrates the slow metamorphosis of his Chinese mental universe towards an overflowing love for France, its language, and its literature. Although generally well accepted by the native French, the Asian immigrants have recently encountered discrimination during the Covid pandemic. The course also reviews some of their testimonies.

[Hum105/L105 will be conducted in French. Vocabulary lists will be provided for the readings.](#)

**Requirements and Responsibilities:**

Hum105/L105 will generally be run in a seminar format, therefore keeping up with the reading is essential. Informed participation is a requirement and will be figured into the final grade.

Students will email their response to the reading before each class meeting. These messages can take the form of a commentary, a series of questions with some tentative answers, or any kind of

analytical response. They should ideally lead to discussion in class. They can be in French or in English.

**Two papers** (five double spaced pages, typed) are required **in L105, three in Hum105**. Students will be allowed to rewrite their works for a better grade. In L105, at least one out of two will have to be written in French. In Hum105, the three essays must be in English. All assignments are to be prepared for the date on which they appear in the syllabus. Late submissions will be accepted only if prior permission has been granted.

Grades will be based on class participation and email commentaries (1/3), and papers (2/3).