

Migration and Literature: Round Table at the Ibero-American Book Fair at Saint Joseph's University

Thursday 4th March 2010, Beirut, Lebanon

Reported by Basma Abdel Khalek, LERC Project Manager

The Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC) at Notre Dame University-Louaize participated in the activities of the Ibero-American Book Fair at Saint Joseph's University in Beirut from the 4th to 6th March, 2010. The Latin American embassies in Lebanon represented by Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Mexico, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Venezuela as well as the embassy of Spain exhibited the literary work of their respective writers.

The Ibero-American Book Fair was also an occasion for the writers to participate in several round tables and discussion sessions about various topics related to the Latin-American literature such as migration, gender, and intercultural dialogue.

A round table was organized to bring up the topic of migration and literature. Those present included, the Ambassadors of Mexico, Venezuela, Uruguay, and Cuba, along with the embassies' staff and other people interested in the topic. LERC was represented by Liaison Officer for Latin America Mr. Roberto Khatlab and Project Manager Ms. Basma Abdel Khalek, who attended the session and met with the writers of Lebanese origin, Mr. Luis Fayad (Colombia) and Mr. Milton Hatoum (Brazil).



Mr. Milton Hatoum, Brazilian writer of Lebanese origin with Dr. George Abdelnour posing before the panel (Mar 2010).

The panel was moderated by Dr. George Abdelnour, who introduced the writers Milton Hatoum, Luis Fayad, Rigoberto Menendez Paredes and Pablo Armando Fernandez (Cuba), Maruja Torres and Karim Hauser (Director of *La Casa Arabe* in Madrid, Spain), and Luis Britto Garcia (Venezuela). The floor was then left for the writers to talk of their diverse experiences in approaching the topic of migration and cultural integration in their writings.

Mr. Milton Hatoum told the story of the migration of his family from Lebanon to Brazil and stressed the fact that in Latin America in general and Brazil in particular, people are neither identified nor classified relatively to their origins. Brazilian society is an assimilation of diverse cultures without any kind of hierarchy. According to Milton Hatoum and to Luis Fayad, emigration could be considered as a loss of some origins in order to be assimilated to a new culture.



From L to R: R. Menendez Paredes, L. Britto Garcia, K. Hauser, and M. Hatoum (Mar 2010).

In addition, the panel was an occasion for the writers to exchange many ideas and perceptions of migration in literature, focusing on the fact that migration is not simply the physical displacement of people from a place to another, but is also the creation of a new space of cultural exchange.

In conclusion, the floor was left open for the public to present points of view and converse with the speakers.



Mr. R. Khatlab and Ms. B. Abdel Khalek posing with Brazilian writer Milton Hatoum (Mar 2010).