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Refugee States: Reconfigurations of Citizenship in the Asian Diaspora

This panel explores how the figure of the refugee puts pressure upon national frameworks of citizenship and the rights that this concept ostensibly confers. Within modern formulations of political citizenship, the refugee occupies a liminal position. As a non-citizen and frequently stateless, the refugee can only claim the protections provided by human rights—which, as Hannah Arendt points out, are frequently unenforceable. This predicament, moreover, acquires urgency in the wake of the Asian diaspora triggered by the upheavals of war in the twentieth century. The papers presented within this panel focus upon representational strategies offered within literary and visual cultures as means whereby new articulations of citizenship, from “multicultural citizenship” to a critical “refugee citizenship,” to the ways that the shifting signifier of the boat (the refugee’s vehicle of passage) might contest the limited parameters of belonging offered by the nation-state.