

COLT 385 – LITERATURE AND JUSTICE

Olivia C. Harrison * M/W 12-1:20pm * THH 112



“They are together and have the hope of a revolution.”
Jean Genet, center, quoted in *Twenty-Two Hours*, directed by Bouchra Khalili (2018).

What is literature? For French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, the answer is political. Writing in the wake of World War II and the discovery of the death camps, Sartre argued that literature must be politically engaged, stamping the field of literary production for generations after him, not only in Europe but across the decolonizing Global South. Despite wide-ranging efforts to emancipate literature from the exigencies of justice, Sartre’s notion of “committed literature” (*la littérature engagée*) has found renewed energy in the wake of the global forms of commitment dubbed solidarity movements, from indigenous rights and the Palestinian question to Black Lives Matter and #MeToo. But planetary forms of solidarity are less recent than neoliberal narratives of globalization would lead us to believe. Anticolonial, antiracist, and antifascist movements were transnational from the start. In this class we will travel back to several key moments that will help us articulate the points of convergence and friction between literature and justice: the Haitian revolution, World War II, the Algerian war of independence, and the contemporary migrant rights movement, to name a few. Our corpus will stretch the borders of the literary across genres and media, with essays by Jean Genet and Valeria Luiselli; novels by Anouar Benmalek and Nathacha Appanah; films by Jean-Luc Godard and Gillo Pontecorvo; multimedia work by Mohamed Rouabhi and Bouchra Khalili; and literary journals of the Global South such as *Lotus* and *Souffles-Anfas*.