



Bodies of Language: The Anatomical Poetics of Refugee Writing



**An online meeting with
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**introduced by
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In this paper, through readings of (among others) Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003), Hassan Blasim's disturbing short fiction collection *The Madman of Freedom Square* (2009), Zana Frailllon's young adult novel *The Bone Sparrow* (2016), and Behrouz Boochani's philosophical prison memoir *No Friend but the Mountains* (2018), I touch upon the body as material fact, the very thing that is displaced, jolted, compressed and contained, and the dead, wounded, deconstructed body, inert but enduringly resonant in its dis-animation. Interestingly, in another form of border crossing, Blasim and Boochani are read in translation, ported across from their native language. As with physical movement, necessarily something cultural is lost in this process of migration, but the texts remain powerful comments on the experience of displacement and the body. Here, I demonstrate that embodiment is fundamental to the refugee experience, as bodies are threatened with destruction, smuggled across borders, static in camps, resettled in alien environments, or, for many, left lifeless along a journey without end. Bodies make statements, can be exploited to say things to or by refugees, or, as we see in the brutal writing of Blasim, can be deconstructed, broken down into bloody signifiers and reconstituted in a macabre somatic semiotics. Examining the increased medicalisation of the refugee body, Didier Fassin and Estelle D'halluin have argued that the 'body is the place, par excellence, on which the mark of power is imprinted. It is an instrument used both to display and to demonstrate power' (2005, 597). Still a degree of ambiguity; the body is a place but also an instrument. To be a refugee is to be made aware of the presence of the body, its needs, and its fragile precarity, and to express the condition of refugeehood is to write with, through, and on the body.



Peter Sloane is a scholar of 20th and 21st century global anglophone literatures, with a particular interest in experimental or innovative forms. He joined Buckingham in 2023, having previously worked at the University of Bristol, and the University of Lincoln. Peter's current research interests are in migration, refugee, and genocide studies, and his present monograph project is *Fictions of Dys-Placement: Contemporary Refugee Writing and the Environment*.