Outside Field // Gunther Peck
Mobility as Methodology
Course Introduction

Mobility as Methodology

Last November President Barack Obama offered a speech addressing the country’s immigration policy and the actions he planned to set in motion during the final leg of his presidency. The measures he described included increased security on the U.S-Mexico border to mitigate illegal crossings, the facilitation of ‘high-skilled’ immigrant settlement in this country and new legalization procedures to reduce the number of undocumented immigrants that work and live in the country already. Obama emphasized the fact that although the United States is a nation of immigrants, it is “also a nation of laws.” As the president of the United States, Obama is presumably vaguely familiar with the nation’s immigration legislation history. When referring to those desirable high-skilled migrants, perhaps he recalled the text of the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which indicated that both skilled and non-skilled Chinese laborers were unwelcome in this country. Or maybe as he defined the national character by claiming that “rounding up” and “deporting” millions of undocumented immigrants is not something “Americans” do, it slipped his mind that ethnic and ideological immigration restrictions were only abandoned by this country’s government a few decades ago—and that he is still dealing with the legacy of those reforms today. Perhaps, the exigencies of war, or smaller numbers like hundreds of thousands, are the kinds of historical contingencies our president concerns himself with. As I recall the speech, I imagine a backdrop, a screen displaying a moving image. As the minutes of the speech tick on, fences, security roads, and barricades along the U.S.-Mexico border expand in size and depth. Eventually that image fades and bleeds into a still of a map of the world with a line of demarcation indicating the imposed hemispheric divide between the Global North and South—with superimposed arcs representing the patterns of mobility of those
people shuffling throughout the eight major world migration systems operating today. Finally, the president is engulfed by the 3-D projection of the image and his voice seems to fade, all you can hear is an echo of his voice repeating the same phrase again and again, “Are we a nation... Are we a nation... Are we a nation...,” second half of the question never becoming quite clear. The audience is left with the question, “Are we a nation?”

David Jacobson would argue that the answer to that question is becoming increasingly unclear. According to him, those particular measures the president put forth, movement to legalize more undocumented immigrants in particular, undermine the “citizen-alien” distinction on which national identity depends.¹ Additionally though, the president’s question “Are we a nation?” has nagged migration studies generally, and immigration history specifically, for decades. Many historians agree that it is necessary to expose the myths of national character as those espoused in the president’s speech, in Mae Ngai’s opus on this country’s immigration history, she states her project is precisely that, “to detach sovereignty and its master, the nation-state from their claims of transcendence and to critique them as products of history.”² If we agree that concepts like the nation-state and citizenship must be historicized, shouldn’t we demand the same for social and cultural notions of mobility? Scholars have shown that the questions of nationality and sovereignty are only revealed when people are set into motion. Rather than focusing on the consequences of mobility for those who seek to police it, this course asks questions like how mobile subjects’ identities are transformed over the course of migration, what meanings are attached to mobility in different historical and cultural contexts, and how do

moving people negotiate forms of power that seek to control, disrupt, or manipulate their patterns of mobility?

Migration studies began with scholarly interest in why people move. Ravenstein’s seven laws of migration helped scholars explain migratory patterns; teleological macro- and micro-economic theories emerged and constituted a dominant approach in the field, marching patterns of migration toward a telos—the final halt once the world has reached a state of international wage equilibrium; and systems theories were developed to chart the course of capitalist development and expansion to predict future patterns of migration. With the now eight major systems of migration operating, it seems those kinds of big analytical approaches are vital to understanding global migration, and they are here to stay.³

What, then, of migration studies that examine closely the contingencies and complexities of human movement at the small group or individual level? What of the texture of migration do macro-analyses of world systems miss? There remains a contingent of migration scholars that continue to examine migration at the micro, community, family, and even individual level; much of their work is included in this course’s readings. My course, though, will push students beyond either approach toward a methodology of historical analysis. I propose that a new methodological approach emerges out of this wealth of migration scholarship, one that takes into account insights from studies of world migration systems, embraces the complexities exposed by comparative analyses, and also focuses attention on the human experience of movement.

Through this course, students will have the opportunity to learn as many scholars in recent decades have charged their peers to think. Organized thematically, the course will deal

each week with themes like identity, culture, and state power as they relate to human mobility. Movement is a realm of contestation and conflict. As a result, the selected readings are more often concerned with those whose mobility has been somehow constrained, policed, forced, interrupted or all of the above, by different forms of “legitimate” power. Gender analysis is central to deploying mobility as methodology but has not been designated to a specific week or section of the course because it penetrates every dimension of our inquiry here. Also, where I can, I have included non Euro-Atlantic centric content, however, given the influence of my personal research interests in the construction of the course, and also the fact that migration systems in Asia, Africa, and China remain understudied that was not always possible. Yet, students will have the opportunity to engage with systems of migration across a broad chronological and geographical span.

In the first week, students will be grounded with a brief introduction to the field of migration studies. But that grounding will be shaken immediately as we discuss the poem Zong! by NourbeSe Philip. Zong! is a powerful text that exposes the limitations of existing methodologies in accessing histories of trauma related to mobility. The Zong massacre was a tragedy of forced mobility and a discussion of Philip’s poem will introduce students to the kind of thinking they will be asked to do in the course. The rest of the semester will be divided into sections. Overall, the assigned readings will include a mixture of book chapters, articles, and historiographical essays when they speak to how scholars have dealt with theme in question. In the first section, students will consider how identities in motion and contact were reconstituted in colonial borderlands. They will learn that identity is mutable, socially constituted, and

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4 Lucassen, Lucassen, and Manning, Migration History in World History Multidisciplinary Approaches, 14.
historically contingent. They will also understand, through the Brooks article, that women served a unique role in the shaping of their own and others’ identities in highly mobile colonial borderland populations. The second section deals with the various ways that power relations are embedded in spatial arrangements, and how those boundaries are transgressed. The most clear and teachable applications of James Scott’s conceptualization of “rival geographies” I have encountered are included this section’s reading. In addition, Simpson’s chapter describes how, even in the face of execution, Nat Turner transgressed the boundaries imposed on his mind, body, and spirit by the southern slave system. In the section titled, Mobility and Capital, Gunther Peck’s discussion of “global commons” draws our attention to migrants’ (and migrant) environments. The students will then consider what forces create, reorganize, or destroy those environments by reading Cowie’s *Capital Moves* and Lindquist’s *The Anxieties of Mobility*. The latter also introduces the theme of the psychological impacts of mobility. Some historians have broached the difficult task of examining the unique dimensions of non-white female mobility; a few of those works are included in Section 4’s reading. Many different themes emerge in this week as women of color are considered, whose unique and multi-faceted experiences of oppression have made their histories hard to find and harder to interpret. Section 5, Culture and Mobility, includes interpretations of popular culture related to migrants or migrant experiences. And the second part of this sections belongs to the body of work of a late generation of Thompsonian social historians concerned with laborer subjectivity. Akin to the earlier readings on identity and mobility, these readings will pose new questions about the political possibilities of culture in motion. The readings in Section 6 remind students of the very real power of the “state” in regulating and policing mobility. They will engage with questions of citizenship and belonging as they are defined, expanded, or limited by mobility. The Dhupelia-Mesthrie article is
an insightful exploration of the construction of an archive of mobility, as well as its limiting factors and possibilities for the descendants of those it has memorialized. In the final section of the course, students will think about statelessness and refugeeism as statuses of mobility that are conceived through geopolitical conflict, codified in law, and yet often transgressed by those who bear the title.

The major assignment for this course will be a research paper that students complete over the course of the quarter. By the third week, students will have settled on a research topic of their choosing that takes, in some way, mobility as a category of analysis. The instructions for the project are intentionally vague as, throughout the course, students will learn to consider mobility less an event and more as a historical category of analysis. Each section in the first half of the course is accompanied by a question the students will be instructed to ask of their projects and think through together. By the end of the course, then, students will have been challenged to think critically about historical methodology and apply not just new information, but new ways of thinking, to their own research questions.
Course description:
This 10-week research seminar will provide upper level undergraduates and beginning graduate students the opportunity to develop and carry out a research project related to theme of mobility. The course will begin with an outline of immigration history in the US and an overview of migration history methodologies. Throughout the course, though, students will challenge the boundaries of that scholarship by learning how scholars talk about mobility in other contexts. By the end, students will have gained experience engaging historiographical debates and developing interesting research questions based on a critical evaluation of prevailing methodological paradigms. I anticipate and invite a range of research topics that will be enriched by the reading and discussion in this course. The course will culminate in a mock conference. Students will be organized into moderated panels where they will give abbreviated presentations of their papers and field questions from the audience.

Course Requirements:
Reading: The readings in this course are meant to help students formulate interesting research questions and challenge their thinking as they complete their research papers. In class, students will have a chance to discuss and grapple with the ideas and themes that emerge from the readings and apply them to their own projects. This requires engaged reading of all assigned materials. All readings should be completed before the appropriate lecture. Some readings will be available for purchase at the bookstore, otherwise the selection will be posted on Sakai [See Course Bibliography for complete reading list]

***Class participation, which includes active reading and participation in discussion, will make up 25% of your course grade.

Writing: The research paper is the primary writing component of this course. Occasionally, though, students will be asked to report on their work in various ways. An explanation of the research question/project, a description of sources, and finally, a short presentation on research findings will provide the opportunity for students to present their work to an audience and give/receive critical and insightful feedback. The page length of these assignments will vary but each is an important component to your success in this course.

***As this is a research seminar, the final research paper, expected to be 20-25 pages in length, will constitute 50% of your grade; the periodic presentations, taken together, will make up 25% of your course grade.

Week 1
Introduction: Beyond Migration History

Week 1/Day 1 Introduction
Lecture/Discussion Notes: Is it possible to understand the Zong massacre through the prevailing paradigms of migration history? The introductory lecture will be an address on state of the field of migration history. In addition, I will explain that the course begins with a consideration of prevailing methodologies because, throughout the course, we will be exploring how irregular forms of movement challenge those approaches.

Week 1/Day 2 **Immigration Policy in the US**
Reading: Daniels, Ch.1 “Beginnings of Immigration Restriction, 1882-1917,” Ch. 7 “Lyndon Johnson and the End of the Quota System,” and Ch. 9 “Immigrants from other Worlds: Latinos,” in *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants since 1882*; Brown, Ch.1 “Waning, Sovereignty, Walled Democracy,” in *Walled States, Waning Sovereignty*


Have students sign up for research findings presentation date

Week 2

**Section 1 Mobility, Identity, and Violence in New Worlds**
Question: How does identity shift over space and time? How do you plan to track identity or use it as a category of analysis in your research project?

Readings: Weber, “A New Borderlands Historiography: Constructing and Negotiating the Boundaries of Identity” in *Alta California: Peoples in Motion, Identities in Formation, 1769-1850*
Ch.1 “Vesey’s Challenge” and Ch. 2 “Time and Space” in Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South*
Brooks, “This Evil Extends…Especially to the Feminine Sex: Captivity and Identity in New Mexico, 1700-1846”

Recommended:
Rogers and Brubaker, “Beyond Identity”

**Week 3**

**Section 2 Insurgent Geographies**

RESEARCH QUESTION DUE

Question: Who/what governs spatial arrangements in the historical place or moment you are examining; in what ways are those spaces contested?

Readings: Miki, “Fleeing into Slavery: The Insurgent Geographies of Brazilian Quilombolas (Maroons), 1880-1881”
Introduction and Ch. 2 “Women, Men and Truancy” in Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*


**Week 4**
**Section 3 Mobility and Capital**

*Question:* What is the dynamic between relations of production/capital accumulation, mobility (of goods, humans, ideas, or otherwise), and the environment in your project?

**Readings:**
- Peck, "Migrant Labor and Global Commons: Transnational Subjects, Visions, and Methods"
- Cowie, *Capital Moves: RCA’s Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labor*
- Lindquist, *The Anxieties of Mobility: Migration and Tourism in the Indonesian Borderlands*

**Week 5**
**SPRING BREAK**

**Week 6**
**Section 4 Archives of Mobility I**

*SOURCE DESCRIPTION DUE*

*Question:* How have you used the critical lenses of race and gender in critiquing your archive or forming new research questions?

**Readings:**
- Ch. 5 “Circulations of Body and World: Women’s Slave Narratives” in Roberson, *Antebellum American Women Writers and the Road: American Mobilities*
- Ch.1 “Seeking Sacagawea” in Scharff, *Twenty Thousand Roads: Women, Movement and the West*

Recommended: Ch.3 “Secret Circuits, Fugitive Motives” in Simpson, *Trafficking Subjects: The Politics of Mobility in 19th Century America*

**REPORTS ON RESEARCH FINDINGS BEGIN NEXT WEEK**

**Week 7**
**Section 5 // Part 1 // Culture and Mobility**
“Bollywood on the Train” in Aguiar, *Tracking Modernity: India’s Railway and the Culture of Mobility*
Carby, “It Jus Be’s Day Way Sometime: The Sexual Politics of Women’s Blues”
Introduction and Chapter 3 “The Economy of the Night” in Lindquist, *The Anxieties of Mobility: Migration and Tourism in the Indonesian Borderlands*

**Week 8**
**Section 5 // Part 2: Transplanted or Uprooted? // Culture and Mobility**

Readings: Fink and Dunn, *The Maya of Morganton Work and Community in the Nuevo New South*
-or-
Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation*
-and-
Ch. 3 “Stir it Up”: Jamaican Guestworkers in the Promised Land” and Ch. 4 “John Bull Meets Jim Crow: Jamaican Guestworkers in the Wartime South” in Hahamovitch, *No Man’s Land: Jamaican Guestworkers in America and the Global History of Deportable Labor*

**Week 9**
**Section 6 Archives of Mobility II // Migrant Legibility**

**PAPER DRAFTS DUE/ORGANIZE CONFERENCE PANELS**

Readings: “The Form, the Permit, and the Photograph: An Archive of Mobility between South Africa and India” (Dhupelia-Mesthrie, 2011)
Ch. 6 Regulating Intimacy and Immigration in *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (Shah, 2011)
Chapter Two: "One Hundred Kinds of Oppressive Laws": Chinese Immigrants in the Shadow of Exclusion in Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America (Lee and Yung, 2010)

**Week 10**
**Section 7 Statelessness and Refugeeism**

Ch. 10 “Refugees and Human rights: Cubans, Southeast Asians, and Others” in *Guarding the Golden Door* Garcia, *Seeking Refuge: Central American Migration to Mexico, the United States, and Canada*

Strongly Recommended: *The Beast: Riding the Rails and Dodging Narcos on the Migrant Trail* (Martinez, 2014)

**FINAL SESSION:**
**CONFERENCE STYLE PAPER PRESENTATIONS; PANELS WILL BE ORGANIZED IN ADVANCE.**
COURSE BIBLIOGRAPHY


