

This course is offered in the Humanities and Arts unit of the college as course recommended for second and third-year students.

TRAVELING IDENTITIES: MIGRATIONS IN FILM, FICTION AND MEMOIR

Instructor: Eva Rueschmann, Professor of Cultural Studies

Course Description

In an age of increased movement of people across the globe, this seminar focuses on past and present experiences of (im)migrants, which have inspired a number of recent and contemporary novels, feature films, documentaries, memoirs, and theoretical debates about cultural identity, place and displacement. Using cultural studies of travel, diaspora, ethnicity, and theories of identity and home as critical frameworks for discussion, we will examine some of the following issues addressed in narrative film, fiction and memoirs: the complexities of adaptation or resistance to new cultures; culture transfer, hybridity and biculturality; the journey as metaphor, escape, physical ordeal and psychological odyssey; the meanings of nostalgia and home; intergenerational conflicts between tradition and modernity; representation and negotiations of national and ethnic identities; the cultural and psychological consequences of border crossings; and the interconnections of language, culture and sense of self. Some of the questions we will address are: How can fictional narratives provide us with insight into different perspectives and experiences of migration and displacement? How does film/literature capture a different imaginary relationship migrants must create to a new homeland?

Required Texts: Available at Amherst Books, 8 Main Street, Amherst, MA 01002, (413) 256-1547 and on Library Reserve

Caryl Phillips, *A State of Independence*. New York: Vintage/Random House, 1995. (available as scanned text on Moodle site)

Julie Otsuka, *The Buddha in the Attic*. New York: Anchor, 2012.

Julia Alvarez, *Afterlife*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2021.

Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*. New York: Penguin Books, 1989.

Karla Cornejo Villavicencio, *The Undocumented Americans*. New York: One World Trade Paperback/Random House, 2021.

Fae Myenne Ng, *Bone*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993.

Note: Links to all additional required readings are available on the course Moodle site. Please bring a copy of each day's required reading to class, as we will work with the text(s) in our discussions.

Course Goals:

In this course you can expect to gain the following by the end of the semester:

1. A familiarity with key terms in migration and diaspora studies;
2. An appreciation of the ethical, political, geographic, and imaginative articulations of home and belonging in an era of mass migrations and past periods of immigration;
3. An ability to think and write critically about literature and film, their aesthetics, narrative structures and ideological/cultural meanings;
4. An understanding of different ethnic and national groups' experiences of migration and displacement;
5. Confidence in reading and writing critical/theoretical essays.

SCHEDULE

Week 1 Introduction: Overview of syllabus. Assignments. Course expectations.

Reflections and Definitions of Terms

Week 2 ***Virtual Gallery Walk***

Upload onto Padlet 1 or 2 images that resonate with you in terms of (im)migration/home/displacement. Include your name and a brief explanation of why you chose the image(s).

Amy Burge, "What Can Literature Tell Us About Migration?"

Edward Said: "Reflections on Exile"

Salman Rushdie, "Imaginary Homelands"

Core concepts: "Home and Memory" and "Migration"

Historical Passages I: The Black Atlantic

Week 3 Caryl Phillips, *A State of Independence*, part I & II

Discussion of *A State of Independence* and *Sugar Cane Alley*

⇒ Watch *Sugar Cane Alley/Rue Cases Nègres* (Martinique/France, 1984, dir. Euzhan Palcy, 107 minutes) on Hampflix for today.

Readings:

Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora"

Christine M.M. Gaudry-Hudson, "'Raising Cane': A Feminist Rewriting of Joseph Zobel's Novel [Sugar Cane Alley](#) by director Euzhan Palcy"

Susan Linfield, "Sugar Cane Alley: Interview with Euzhan Palcy"

Historical Passages II: Japanese Picture Brides

Week 4 Julie Otsuka, *The Buddha in the Attic*

Discussion of *The Buddha in the Attic* (contd.) and *Picture Bride*

⇒ Watch *Picture Bride* (USA, 1995, dir. Kayo Hatta, 95 minutes) on Hampflix for today

[Companion website for Picture Bride](#) (resources on the making of the film, Japanese sojourners in Hawai'i (1885-1920), sugarcane plantations in the 1800s, early Japanese immigrant clothing, and a bibliography of further references.

Readings:

Mei T. Nakato, "Immigration 1860-1924," "The Family," and "Work and Leisure" from *Japanese American Women: Three Generations, 1890-1990*.

Lena Ahlin, "All we wanted to do, now that we were back in the world, was forget: On Remembrance and Forgetting in Julie Otsuka's Novels"

Generational Migrations in the Americas

Week 5 Julia Alvarez, *Afterlife*, prologue and chapters 1-8
Vivian Nun Halloran, "Travel and Family in Julia Alvarez's Canon"

Alvarez, *Afterlife*, chapters 9-16, and *Identifying Features*

⇒ Watch *Identifying Features* (Mexico, 2020, dir. Fernanda Valadez, 99 minutes) on Hampflix for today

Atlantic Crossings: Senegal/France

Week 6 In-class screening of *Atlantics/Atlantique* (France/Senegal/Belgium, 2019, dir. Mati Diop, 106 minutes)

Discussion of *Atlantique*

Suzanne Enzerink, "Black Atlantic Currents: Mati Diop's *Atlantique* and the Field of Transnational American Studies"

Gigi Adair, "The Spirit of Migrancy: Mati Diop's *Atlantique*"

Sahar Hamzah, "Ghost Story as Social Commentary: A Look at Mati Diop's *Atlantics*"

Language, Identity, and the Immigrant Memoir

Week 7 Eva Hoffmann, *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language*, Part I (Paradise) and Part II (Exile)

Eva Hoffman, *Lost in Translation*, Exile (part III)

Julia Beltsiou, "Seeking Home in the Foreign: Otherness and Immigration" (X)

Portraits of Undocumented Americans

Week 8 Karla Cornejo Villavicencio, *The Undocumented Americans*, introduction & chapters 1-3

Karla Cornejo Villavicencio, *The Undocumented Americans*, chapters 4-6

Midterm paper due

Chinese Families in Diaspora

Week 9 Fae Myenne Ng, *Bone*

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Lisa Lowe, "Decolonization, Displacement, Disidentification: Writing and the Question of History" (X)

Juliana Chang, "Melancholic Remains: Domestic and National Secrets in Fae Myenne Ng's [Bone](#)" (X)

The Wedding Banquet (Taiwan/US, 1993, dir. Ang Lee, 106 minutes)

Gina Marchetti, "The Wedding Banquet: Global Chinese Cinema and the Asian American Experience"

South Asian Diaspora in Britain: Redefining National, Ethnic and Sexual Identities

Week 10 Hanif Kureishi, "The Rainbow Sign" (autobiographical essay) and short story "My Son the Fanatic"

Discussion of *My Beautiful Laundrette*

⇒ Watch *My Beautiful Laundrette* (UK, 1985, dir. Stephen Frears, 98 minutes) on Hampflix for today

Readings:

Susan Torrey Barber, "Insurmountable Difficulties and Moments of Ecstasy: Crossing Class, Ethnic and Sexual Barriers in the Films of Stephen Frears" (X)

Alberto Fernandez Carbajal, "Of internethnic (dis)connection: queer phenomenology and cultural and religious commodification in Hanif Kureishi's *My Beautiful Laundrette* and *The Buddha of Suburbia*" (X)

South Asian Immigrant Women and Generational Differences

Week 11 Jhumpa Lahiri, "The Third and Final Continent"

Proposal for final project due

Discussion of *Bhaji on the Beach*

⇒ Watch *Bhaji on the Beach* (UK, 1993, dir. Gurinder Chadha, 100 minutes)

Avtar Brah, "Gendered Spaces: Women of South Asian Descent in 1980s Britain" (X)

Julia Rascanu, "Who is Afraid of Hybridity? Re-visiting [Bhaji on the Beach](#) and perspectives on multiculturalism in Britain" (X)

Second Generation Immigrants in France

Week 12 Excerpts from Zahia Rahmani, "Muslim" A Novel

Discussion of *La haine* – a banlieue classic after 26 years

⇒ Watch *La Haine/Hate* (France, 1995, dir. Matthieu Kassovitz, 98 minutes)

Readings:

Yosefa Loshitsky, "Intifada of the Banlieues: La Haine Revisited" (X)

Keith Reader, "After the Riot" (X)

Looking Back: Italian American Immigrants in the 1950s

Week 13 Discussion of *Big Night*

⇒ Watch *Big Night* (USA, 1996, dir. Stanley Tucci and Campbell Scott, 107 minutes)

Sarah Iammarino, "A Celebration of Italian American Culture: Stanley Tucci and Campbell Scott's *Big Night*" (X)

Thomas J. Ferraro, "Table: Cine Cucina" (X)

Week 14 ***Presentations on Final Projects*** (be prepared to speak for 5-6 minutes) and Call Wrap-up.

Complete Portfolio due, including final project

REQUIREMENTS FOR AN EVALUATION:

Class participation:

Regular attendance and active participation are essential elements to the success of this class. We all have something to contribute and bring our own valuable experiences to the class. I expect you to complete all readings and screenings in time for our seminar discussions, and you should be prepared to contribute your ideas and insights on a regular basis. This means you will need to see the films before our discussions, carefully read the assigned articles and books by the dates indicated on the syllabus, and take notes. All comments and questions should demonstrate consideration and respect for the other students in the class. Even as we disagree with each other and take positions on certain issues, there are basic norms that we as a group can and should expect every member of our community to follow. We will discuss these norms throughout the semester and as our conversation evolves. Some basic considerations are: listen carefully to others and try to understand their argument(s), critique or challenge this arguments or ideas, not the person.

Attendance Policy:

Your attendance is mandatory and will contribute positively to developing community in our class. Three (3) unexcused absences will jeopardize your evaluation. In the event of an unavoidable absence, please contact me before class, if possible. If you are absent for any reason, it is your responsibility to find out from another member of the class what you missed, and I would encourage you to ask explicitly for 1-2 people's phone number/contact info at the beginning of the term. If you have questions after you have acquired the notes from someone and talked with them, I am very happy to meet with you.

Weekly Entries in the Moodle Forum:

In preparation for each Wednesday class, each student will submit a short (1 page ~ 300 words) journal entry on the Moodle Forum exploring any aspect of the readings or films to be covered that week. Journal entries must be submitted via Moodle by 9:00PM the night before class. These entries can be quite informal and should serve as a record of your engagement with the material before we have had the opportunity to discuss it in detail as a group. Appropriate topics for this assignment might be literary form, perspective, themes, observations, responses to critical articles...or anything else that catches your eye. You can use the film notes and discussion questions as a jumping-off point. By the end of the semester, you should have contributed at least 9 out of the 12 responses.

Presentation and Discussion Starter:

During the semester, I would like each one of you to sign up for one of the classes to present background on the literary text or film and provide an opening for our discussion. You may also team up with another student for this assignment.

Midterm Paper:

A midterm paper (4-5 pages, double-spaced) is due on March 22. This paper should address an aspect of migration and its representation in one of the literary or film texts discussed up to that point. We can talk in more detail about the kinds of topics that you might want to consider for this assignment.

Final Research Paper or Creative Project:

The final research project can take several different forms depending on your personal interests. It can be a comparative essay (8-10 pages, double-spaced) on two or more of the literary texts and/or films. You might also write a creative piece or create a video essay on the issue of migration, diaspora, hybridity or other related topics. A small group project is also a possibility as long as individual students' rules and contributions are clearly defined. During the next to last class, on Monday, May 8, you should be prepared to give a 5-minute presentation on your final project.

You should submit the original paper copies with my comments, and either upload it onto the Moodle site or send it to me as a Google doc folder.