

Migration and Women's Rights in Literature and Film  
Roxana Galusca ([rgalusca@uchicago.edu](mailto:rgalusca@uchicago.edu))  
Office: Gates-Blake Hall 403  
Class time: TR 12PM -1:20PM  
Place: GSRP 103

Office Hours: By appointment only

### CLASS DESCRIPTION

This class is an interdisciplinary exploration of the ways in which migrant women's rights are documented and represented in late twentieth and twenty-first century film and literature. The globalization of markets, coupled with the financialization of capital and the development of digital technologies, has triggered changes in labor migration. This change is perhaps best reflected in the emergence of so-called global cities with their large migrant labor force concentrated in the service and maquila industries. Migrant women supply the majority of labor in these globalized urban spaces, a phenomenon to which scholars often refer as the "feminization of labor." Taking into consideration these economic and social transformations, this class examines literary and cinematic representations of women's work migration and the struggle for migrant women's rights. The class will focus on the production and global circulation of a wide variety of narratives of migration, such as discourses on domestic and sex work, human trafficking, undocumented migration, and mail-order marriages. An important emphasis will be on practices of documentation and cultural representation as instances of knowledge production that can both offer alternative understandings of labor migration, promote women's rights, but also reinforce the socio-economic status quo.

Class readings and discussions will revolve around studies of media aesthetics, political theories of human rights, and literary and filmic narratives of migration. Some questions we will consider revolve around the role of cultural works in promoting women's rights, the politics and ethics of representation, the testimonial value of literature and cinema, the modalities of gender such cultural works promote, their global circulation, as well as their potential to open up alternative understandings of migration and new forms of feminist praxis.

### COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course students should:

- be familiar with major debates about women's rights and work migration in the twenty-first century;
- use class texts and discussions as a platform for rethinking women's rights in a global context, including different local approaches to women's rights and gender justice;
- be able to discuss critically the politics and ethics of representation, as well as to recognize the ways in which literature and film contribute to ongoing debates about rights and migration;
- understand the potential of such cultural texts to suggest alternative approaches to women's work migration;

## REQUIRED TEXTS

Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Polity, 2013)

Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton UP, 1995)

Jacques Ranciere, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2010)

Chika Unigwe, *On Black Sisters' Street* (Ohio UP, 2012)

Maria Elena Viramontes, *Under the Feet of Jesus* (Plume, 1996)

Teju Cole, *Open City* (Random House, 2012)

Films: Vicky Funari and Sergio de la Torre, *Maquilapolis* (2006)

Ursula Biemann, *Remote Sensing* (2001)

Ursula Biemann, *Sahara Chronicles* (2006)

Film screening will be announced in advance. All articles will be on Chalk.

## CLASS ACTIVITIES AND ASSIGNMENTS

This class will take the form of a seminar organized around class discussions and students' presentations.

Class assignments consist of one class presentation, 3 two-to-three-page response papers, and one 15-20-page research project.

Each of you will be responsible for one presentation on an in-class text. I will circulate a sign-up sheet at the beginning of the quarter and ask you to choose a date for presentation. In addition, three response papers are due at different times during the quarter. These are short writing pieces on a text discussed in class. You will also conduct a research project on one of the topics discussed in class. Separate prompts for these assignments will be available on chalk.

## GRADING

Attendance and Participation	20%
3 Response papers	10% each
Presentation	20%
Research Project	30%

Schedule (TR 12-1:20)

**Week 1**

April 1

Introductions

April 3

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Hannah Arendt, “The Perplexities of the Rights of Man,” in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*

Jacques Rancière, “Who is the Subject of the Rights of Man?”

**Week 2**

April 8

Catharine MacKinnon, “Are Women Human?”

Neferti Tadiar, “Life-Times of Becoming Human”

Samera Esmeir, “On Making Dehumanization Possible”

Neferti Tadiar, “If Not Mere Metaphor... Sexual Economies Revisited”

April 10

Wendy Brown *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*

**Week 3**

April 15

Wendy Brown continued

April 17

Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political*

**Response Papers #1 Due**

**Week 4**

April 22

Butler continued

April 24

Mieke Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis*, Chapters 1 and 5

George Yudice, *The Expediency of Culture: The Use of Culture in the Global Era*, Chapter 1

T.J. Demos, “Exile, Diaspora, Nomads, Refugees: A Genealogy of Art and Migration”

**Film Screening April 25, Room and Time TBA**

**Week 5**

April 29

Film discussion: Biemann, *Remote Sensing*

**Film Screening April 30, Room and Time TBA**

May 1

*Sahara Chronicles*

Demos, "Video's Migrant Geography: Ursula Biemann's Sahara Chronicles."

**Response Paper #2 Due**

**Week 6**

May 6

Ranciere, *Dissensus*

May 8

*Dissensus* continued

**Week 7**

May 13

*On Black Sisters' Street*

May 15

*On Black Sisters' Street* Continued

**Response Paper #3 Due**

**Week 8**

May 20

*Under the Feet of Jesus*

**Film Screening May 21, Room and Time TBA**

May 22

Film discussion: *Maquilapolis*

Read about the Maquilapolis Project: [http://www.maquilapolis.com/project\\_eng.htm](http://www.maquilapolis.com/project_eng.htm)

**Week 9**

May 27

Teju Cole, *Open City*

**Proposal Due**

May 29

*Open City* continued

**Week 10**

June 3

Wrap-up session

**Final Project Due June 10 by E-mail**