Migration history in global perspective

Migration has always been prominent field in global history. As transnational migrants cross national boundaries ever since these existed, it is an obvious example for the problems of the national frame for history writing. This seminar aims to give an overview of theoretical approaches to migration history as well as case studies and conceptualizations of migration on a global scale. As migration history in global perspective is a huge and diverse field of research, theoretical approaches can help to grasp and structure this and case studies show how these theoretical tools are put to work.

The first, conceptual part will give an overview of theoretical approaches to migration history from a global perspective. After an introduction to recent discussions in the field, selected terms and issues are taken up. While maintaining a focus on historiography, we will also look at concepts that were developed in other disciplines and taken up by historians.

The second, empirical part is dedicated to case studies taking the three oceans as a way of regional structuring long-distance migrations. This is not to argue that other migrations (inner-continental or internal) do not matter, but rather a way to focus on the entanglements, connections and flows of migrations and not to fall back into national categories. There are no permanent settlements in the ocean waters, but they are spaces of exchanges, encounters and entanglements. To this ocean-based regionalization we will add in the last two sessions a turn towards the recent history, focusing on the emergence of the refugee regime after World War Two and looking in the last session at the EU's southern border.

All texts will be provided on moodle.

Lecturer: Jochen Lingelbach (PhD Candidate)
Time: Tuesday 11am – 1pm
Place: GESI Room 3.15
j.lingelbach@uni-leipzig.de

--- Course requirements ---
- summary of the core arguments of the assigned text in 3-5 sentences and 3 questions to discuss (to be submitted every week before the session)
- presentation of one of the additional texts (once)
- writing an essay on a selected topic (suggestions will be provided, but own topics are welcome)
- active participation

--- Recommended literature ---
A short, accessible, up-to-date and highly recommended introductory book on migration history is: Harzig, Hoerder and Gabaccia (2009): “What is Migration History?”

Other general books on migration history:


--- Conceptual part ---

13.10.15 - Introduction
In the first session we will talk about our own migration and academic backgrounds and discuss your
expectations to the seminar. Furthermore I will provide the practicalities of the seminar. We will then start speaking about the first text, that gives an overview of current approaches to migration history in global perspective.


20.10.15 - Migration history writing
In this session we will address general approaches to migration history. We will discuss the history of the field, categorizations of migrations and periodizations. The guiding question will be: How to conceptualize migration in global perspective?


Additional readings:

27.10.15 - Transnational migrants
While early migration research understood immigrants as people that had to learn the new ways and assimilate into the new societies, the transnational turn of the 1990s has put emphasis on the continuing transnational links of migrants. Changing the place of residence does not imply that one drops all cultural baggage and cuts the ties to the homeland. Is this a new phenomenon or can a transnational (or transcultural) perspective be applied to older migrations?


Additional readings:

3.11.15 - Diasporas
Diasporas seem to some as the archetype of a transnational community that helps to overcome the assimilationist dogma of a single national culture. As the literature on diasporas spread during the 1990s (termed the “diaspora craze” by some), so did the critique of the term. We will try to track the debate, discuss the conflicting opinions and the value of the concept for researchers.

As the *homo migrans* is often implicitly perceived as a man, female migration systems and experiences have long been overlooked in historiography. The recent discourse in migration studies around a contemporary “feminization of migration” makes it worth looking into the history of female migrations. As domestic labour provided and still provides the biggest field of employment for migrating women, we will have a look into the related migration systems.


Additional reading:

The image of the migrant is usually that of an adult making an independent decision to go and look for greener pastures elsewhere in the world. Instead migration decisions are not individual decisions by unattached persons, but embedded in social structures. Different forms of families and the individual position in it influence the decision-making and forms of migrations.


Additional reading:

While migration is as old as humanity, nation-states are a rather recent invention. With the rise of the nation-states came the control of the mobility of its citizens. In this context, passports emerged as a central means of controlling mobility across borders as well as within the state territory.


Additional reading:
Empirical/regional part

1.12.15 - Indian Ocean I
Following Braudel’s 1949 analysis of the Mediterranean as a historical region there has been a rise in recent scholarly production that takes the oceans as regions of study. While the dominance of the United States after World War Two privileged Atlantic studies, the current post-Cold War era privileges global approaches that challenge the Eurocentrism implicit in Atlantic studies and highlight the Indian Ocean as an integrated region of exchange already before European intervention.


Additional reading:

8.12.15 - Indian Ocean II
Continuing on the Indian Ocean with more in-depth case studies on South Asian indentured workers and memories of descendants of slaves in popular culture around the Indian Ocean.


Additional reading:

15.12.15 - White Atlantic
Much of migration history scholarship has concentrated on the North Atlantic and herein the migration of Europeans to North America. This has changed considerably in the last decades. In this session we will look into a case study about the role of race for white migrants in the US.

Additional reading:

5.01.16 - Black Atlantic
Borrowing Paul Gilroy's term, we want to look into the experiences of migrants who were forced from Africa to the Americas and their descendants. The perspective of enslaved Africans shows that even in the brutally constrained circumstances they could keep some agency. The Haitian revolution as an entangled history within the Black Atlantic shows that they were not only passive victims but actors in shaping Atlantic history.


Additional reading:

12.01.16 - Pacific Ocean
The Pacific ocean as the biggest of the three water basins is also the most difficult to cross. While some scholars discuss, if it constitutes “a Mediterranean in the making” we will take a closer look on the history and localized composition of Chinese migration to North America.


Additional reading:

19.01.16 - Post-WW II Europe - The making of the international refugee regime
The Second World War and its aftermath created along with the largest population of refugees and displaced persons (DP) in modern history also the establishment of an international regime dealing with these and later following refugees. As the “refugee” and its housing in camps and the whole humanitarian organization complex around it are so omnipresent today, it makes sense to ask, when and how this developed.

Additional reading:

26.01.16 - Today: The Mediterranean
The current tragedy in the Mediterranean is making headlines in the European press. Out of the many migration systems currently existing around the world, we will look at this and some scholarly approaches to grasp and understand what is happening. We will discuss these approaches with our background from the history of migrations.


Additional reading:

2.02.16 – Conclusion
In this last session we will try to sum up what we learned in the course of this seminar. Furthermore every participant should relate his essay-topic to some of the literature (cases and theoretical approaches) and we can discuss open questions in regard to the essays. Last but not least this is the place to give feedback about the seminar.

-- Topics for Essays --
- Inner-continental migration systems (within Africa; China-Manchuria; Russia-Siberia; within the Americas)
- History of a certain diaspora (Italian, Jewish, African, Polish, Greek…)
- Migration history of a region/country/city
- Rural-urban migrations to a selected city
- Circular migrations
- Methods in migration research: Oral history and life-stories
- History of refugee camps
- Migration along the Swahili coast
- The “un-mixing” of nations in East Central Europe after WW II
- Migration in the Cold War
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