

Course Syllabus Proposal: Selected Topics in Labour Studies

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Migrant Workers and Transnational Organizing: A View from Canada

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Migrant Workers and Transnational Organizing: A View from Canada	
Week 1	Course Introduction
Week 2	Globalization, Workers Without Work and the Urgency to Migrate
Week 3	Mapping Global Geographies of Migration
Week 4	Made in China... (by the world's largest invisible migrant workforce)
Week 5	The Shift towards Disposable Workers, Disposable Peoples in Canada
Week 6	Women Serving the Nation: Latina Exotic Dancers, Female Farm Workers and Live-in-Caregivers in Canada
Week 7	Mid-term test
Week 8	Where to Turn for Labour Rights among the Stateless Non-Citizens
Week 9	Framing Transnational Organizing Efforts through the Work/Experiences of Families Left Behind
Week 10	Transnational Union & Organizing within North America
Week 11	Transnational Organizing Lessons for the Canadian, Hamilton-Niagara Local Context
Week 12	Community/Labour/Migrant Worker Panel Discussion in Class
Week 13	Organizing within the Global City: Final Exam Review

Course Evaluation Breakdown

Class Engagement (Attendance & Participation) =10%
2 Reading Summaries/Responses @ 5% each=10%
Mid-term test/take home=20%
Case Study Proposal=10%
Case Study Essay= 20%
Final Exam: 30%

Translated from the Spanish lyrics of “Emigrantes” by the Orishas, Cuban musicians based in France

*...I have built with my own hands, cities, towns, places
You have colonized me and now discriminate my race...
Crazy, sad the person who has left behind his/ her sun, his/ her people, his/ her shirt
without thinking, that being far away changes everything ...
and the nostalgia tears you apart...
I am singing for my people
Those who are called migrants, they are common people
Listen my people
For having another colour, another way of thinking
Two distinct cultures, I cannot stay...*

Course Rationale:

In the last few decades globalization has produced displacement and the urgency of movement for millions of workers across the world. Migration can thus be explained as a crisis and also a function of capitalism that creates flexible and cheap labour pools in various regions throughout the world. And many workers, particularly low-income Third World workers have to contend with precarious ways of moving and working in the 3Ds (dangerous, dirty and demeaning jobs). This precariousness is organized and reinforced through immigration/citizenship status, race, class, gender and sexuality that fluctuate according to the regional/local contexts in which migrant workers find themselves. However the function to exclude and marginalize are the same. This marginalization more often than not renders migrant workers stateless wherein they are stripped from (nation-state based) citizenship to make claims for tangible human and labour rights.

In this course we will focus on these dilemmas and the ways in which migrant workers and their allies are organizing and fighting back. Migrant workers and their allies across the globe are constructing innovative organizing strategies that are indeed challenging stagnant trade union organizing tactics based on the Fordist production regime. We will look at these issues in the context of Canada and depart from the notion that we are all workers in order to counter a divide and conquer mentality and nationalist protectionism that may fuel racism and xenophobia against “workers on the move.” We will turn to the theory and practice of transnational organizing and contemplate how the movement for migrant workers (also known as “temporary foreign workers”) and all workers in Canada should be strengthened. The formulation of effective transnational organizing strategies also has to consider migrant workers’ families and communities and the (invisible) work and hardships involved in facilitating labour migration for survival.

Course Pedagogy

The pedagogy of the course is premised on transformative and embodied learning. The course director will assume the role of facilitator and emphasize concepts, theories and issues by taking them further with applicable examples. We will engage in critical thinking by probing the issues through diverse angles. Students’ knowledge, interests and lived experiences will be incorporated and called upon as much as possible. Migrant workers’ voices and agency in particular will be privileged by the use of film and multimedia. The class will also create a space for migrant workers (who are no longer tied to an employer for various reasons and who will not face reprisals for participation) along with key community and labour organizers as a way to bridge theory and practice and to democratize knowledge production and the ivory tower.

Since the course consists of numerous students in a space of a lecture hall we will collectively negotiate what transformative learning may look like throughout the progression of the semester. Although the exact pattern of the lecture will vary from week to week, the emphasis is on collaborative and student-led learning.

The course readings are intensive however there are no assigned readings for the day of the panel discussion in order to allow students the chance to catch up and work on the case study assignments. As labour scholars and activists, our study of these issues should be rigorous and our theorizing should be solid in order to strengthen the movements that we form part. You are not expected to completely coincide with the analysis of the course director. This course will emphasize democratizing knowledge production, critical thinking and the formulation of innovative ideas.

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