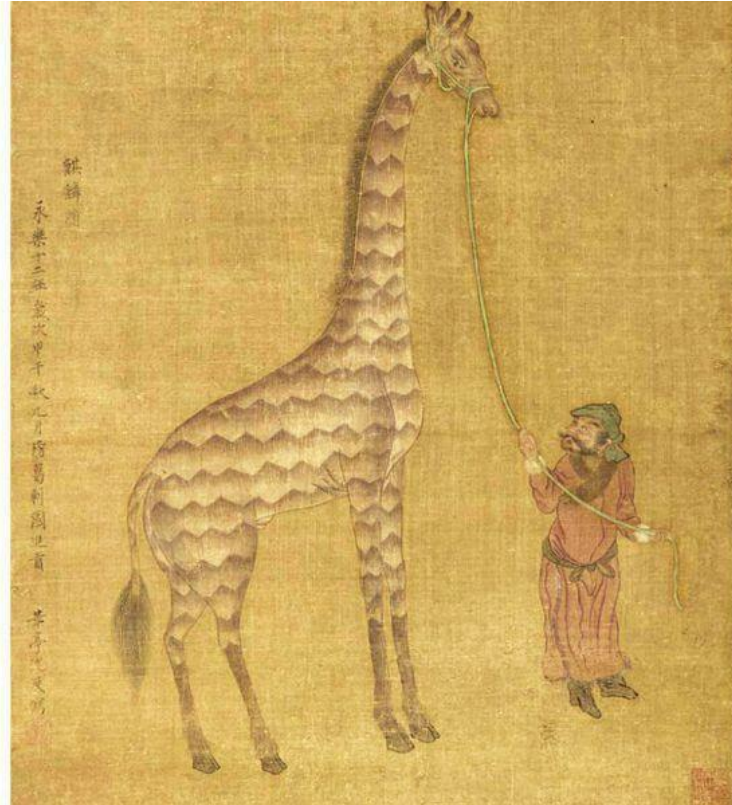


Ocean as Method
28 September - 07 October 2021
Jamia Millia Islamia

Course Outline



A painting depicting a tribute giraffe and a handler sent to China in the 15th century. (Philadelphia Museum of Art)

Course level: Advanced Undergraduate/ Postgraduate

Instructor: Prof Dilip M Menon, Mellon Chair in Indian Studies, University of Witwatersrand

Host Faculty: Prof Nishat Zaidi, Department of English, Jamia Millia Islamia

Contact details: dilip.menon@wits.ac.za

Lecture hours: Week 1: Tuesday – Thursday 5 pm – 7 pm IST

Week 2: Tuesday – Thursday 5 pm – 7 pm IST

Registration Link: [Google Form](#)

Course Description:

Through a thematic exploration of some of the central concerns of social sciences and history, it explores the possibility of an alternative to a historiography centred on land, states, and empires. What does it mean to conceptualise fluvial geographies and

the idea of space as determined by the movement of people rather than thinking about space as territories within which people move i.e., nations, regions etc. The oceans press on our consciousness particularly given the alarming prospects of global warming and rising waters. We need to think with the ways that humans have engaged with the sea and the ocean to escape the incarceration of our terrestrial imaginations.

This course tries to chart a new post colonial history through working against nation centred thinking on historical processes as also questioning the dyad of colonialism and nationalism that structures our understanding of change. How do we think the histories of Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean together through the connections they have always had through commerce, religion, and the movement of capital and unfree labour, and not least, the circulation of ideas? Both the spaces and times of history writing need to be rethought. Is it sufficient to think of the history of India or South Africa under the rubric of precolonial, colonial and post colonial alone? Or indeed through the maps drawn by colonialism reflecting competing understandings of territory between colonial powers which paid little attention to the territories created by the movement of people? If we think with the connections generated by the movement of people and the circulation of ideas, we are forced to engage the connected histories that preceded, sat alongside, and continue beyond the colonial and national.

The course consists of 12 contact hours, which run over two weeks (September 28 to October 7, 2021). Instruction is based on an inclusive teaching model, in which students are active participants in the learning process. Each meeting will consist of a short lecture in which the instructor introduces the day's topic, situating the readings within a broader bibliographic landscape. The lecture will be followed by student-led discussion.

Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this course students will demonstrate:

- An understanding of a paradigm of thinking history with the oceans at the centre of analysis.
- Competence in the analysis of secondary sources, including identifying and evaluating their central arguments.
- Greater fluency and coherence in both oral and written communication.
- A basic ability to adapt historical methods and frameworks to original research.

Requirements:*Readings*

Readings form the core learning materials and students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss the assigned texts. Readings will be pre-circulated via a shared Dropbox folder in the weeks before the class.

Seminar presentations response papers

Students are expected to choose one reading, for which they are to provide a 5–10-minute presentation that draws out key themes and questions for class discussion. In addition to the presentation, students will submit a 500 –750-word written response to the reading. Responses should be submitted 24 hours in advance to the instructor.

A roster will be pre-circulated for students to sign up for their seminar of choice.

Meeting Schedule

The class meets for two-hour seminars three times a week.

Day 1: Thinking with water

28 September 2021, Tuesday

Readings

Stefan Helmreich, "Introduction: Life at Sea", in Helmreich, *Alien Ocean: anthropological voyages in microbial seas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), pp.1-30

Melody Jue, "Thinking through seawater", in Jue, *Wild blue media: thinking through sea water* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020)

Steinberg, Philip, and Kimberley Peters, "Wet ontologies, fluid spaces: giving depth to volume through oceanic thinking", in *Society and Space*, 33, 2015, pp. 247-64

Day 2: Oceans as Method

29 September 2021, Wednesday

Readings

Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Verso, 2002), chapter 1

Jeremy Prestholdt, *Domesticating the World: African Consumerism and the genealogies of Globalization* (University of California, 2008), chapter 3

Renisa Mawani, *Across Oceans of Law: The Komagata Maru and Jurisdiction at the Time of Empire* (Duke University Press, 2018), chapter 1

Day 3: Slavery

30 September 2021, Thursday

Readings

Megan Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mauritius* (Duke University Press, 2005), chapters 1 and 8

Marina Carter, "Slavery and Unfree Labour in the Imperial Mode," *History Compass* 4/5 (2006): 800-813

Saidiya Hartmann, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (Navayana, 2011), chapter 1

Day 4: Race

05 October 2021, Tuesday

Readings

Jonathon Glassman, *War of words, war of stones: racial thought and violence in colonial Zanzibar*

(Indiana University Press, 2011), chapter 1

Paul Gilroy, "Modernity and infrahumanity", in Gilroy, *Against Race: imagining political culture beyond the color line* (Harvard University Press, 2000), Chapter 2

Achille Mbembe, "The thing and its doubles", in Mbembe, *On the postcolony* (University of California Press, 2001), chapter 4

Day 5: Gender

06 October 2021, Wednesday

Readings

Tejaswini Niranjana, *Mobilizing India: Women, Music and Migration between India and Trinidad*

(Duke University Press, 2006), chapter 1

Shalini Puri, "Race, Rape and Representation: Indo - Caribbean Women and Cultural Nationalism," *Cultural Critique* 36 (Spring, 1997): 119-163

Hortense J Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book", *Diacritics*, 17, 2, 1987, 64-81

Day 6: Refugees and Global Warming

06 October 2021, Thursday

Readings

Dilip Menon, "Walking on Water: globalization and history", *Global Perspectives*, 1,1 (2020) <https://doi.org/10.1525/gp.2020.12176>

Omar el Akkad, *What Strange Paradise* (Penguin, 2021)