

Border and Identity Negotiations: An Analysis of 19th Century Migrations in the U.S

Faith Oloruntoba

International Graduate Centre of the Study of Culture (Giessen)

Contact: Faith.oloruntoba@gcsc.uni-giessen.de

Abstract:

Through archival research in libraries in the U.S and Mexico, Lim reveals the hidden history of racial categories and journeys that have been largely erased from both countries' national consciousness by tracing the racial openness of the border from the 1880s to racial differentiation by the 1930s. Through laws, policies, and enactments, both states enforced national and racial uniformity, in turn, limiting migrants' ability to cross these boundaries. Yet the immigrants employed the state's political instruments, survival techniques, taking up different identities, maneuvering their claims to citizenship and belonging as different situations arise. Lim's historical account stimulates a reflection on the challenging history of multiracial migration and the influence of opportunity structures in limiting or expanding immigrants' mobility.

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Lim, Julian: *Porous Borders: Multiracial Migrations and the Law in the U.S-Mexico Borderlands*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017. 320 pages, 32,50 EUR. ISBN: 978-1-4696-3549-1.

Abstract:

Through archival research in libraries in the U.S and Mexico, Lim reveals the hidden history of racial categories and journeys that have been largely erased from both countries' national consciousness by tracing the racial openness of the border from the 1880s to racial differentiation by the 1930s. Through laws, policies, and enactments, both states enforced national and racial uniformity, in turn, limiting migrants' ability to cross these boundaries. Yet the immigrants employed the state's political instruments, survival techniques, taking up different identities, maneuvering their claims to citizenship and belonging as different situations arise. Lim's historical account stimulates a reflection on the challenging history of multiracial migration and the influence of opportunity structures in limiting or expanding immigrants' mobility.

In *Porous Borders: Multiracial Migrations and the Law in the U.S-Mexico Borderlands*, Julian Lim explores the historical trajectory of multiracial migration in the U.S. She examines ways in which citizenship and belonging were negotiated by immigrants within the U.S-Mexico borderlands in the 19th century. The book provides fresh lenses within the literature on border studies by showing how the processes that enabled migratory movements at that time became the same processes that enabled its erasure from history. Through archival research in libraries in the U.S and Mexico, Lim reveals the hidden history of racial categories and journeys that have been largely erased from both country's national consciousness by tracing the racial openness of the border from the 1880s to racial differentiation by the 1930s. Sieving through newspapers, government records, commentaries, guides, maps, pictures, and other sources, Lim extracts evidences of multiracial relations while reflecting on her position and the limitations inherent in the racial categorization methods of libraries and archives. Lim brilliantly delves in-depth into the measures taken by both countries as well as the interactions between their policies and how, in their different ways, they achieved the goal of racial exclusion (or inclusion) and

mobility control. The chapters thus show chronologically the ways in which the border transformed from a place of hope and freedom to one of discrimination and marginalization.

Comprising five chapters, the book highlights the complexity of border relations and the problematization of multiracial relations in the past, which is usually celebrated as a signifier of the uniqueness of the U.S. Chapter 1 provides a background on how the Native Americans became displaced on their own lands. This displacement, characterized by wars, negotiations, and imprisonment, created a population vacuum which the new immigrants filled. A unique feature of this chapter is that it connects the erasure of the footprints of Native Americans on the borderlands to the arrival of the marginalized immigrants. The chapter also examines how economic development emanating from the construction of the El Paso railroad which connected the U.S. and Mexico ushered in a new dawn for whites, African Americans, Chinese, and Mexicans. While White America believed that the development is a good sign of civilization and progress, African Americans, Chinese and Mexicans used the new development to create a freedom bubble for themselves within the U.S. It allowed them to relate with those of other races and provided economic opportunities for financial growth. Chapter 2 unpacks the various ways in which these immigrants arrived in El Paso and their attitudes towards their newly found freedom. It examines the racial mixing that ensued as a result of interracial marriages as well as the surprised reactions of individuals who visited the borders from the north, the U.S. The border witnessed the convergence of marginalized races, opening up economic and social prospects which hitherto would have been impossible in other places. The border was an alternative space for emancipation that transcended the narrow nation-state paradigm of the 1880s. These racial interrelations of the migrant groups, which challenged the separatist racial policies predominant in the U.S. at the time, did not go unnoticed by the state.

As chapter 3 shows, at the start of the 20th century, the state put in place different regulations to control the movement of the Chinese population especially to, from, and between El Paso and Ciudad Juarez. Yet these immigrants maneuvered through the rules by using methods such as moving to friendlier cities, wearing Mexican attire, capitalizing on legal loopholes, and invoking humanitarian sentiments to their advantage. In turn, the state further intensified its regulations which became more restrictive as analyzed in Chapter 4. For the first time, the borders were manned by federal troops, foreshadowing the militarization of the borders today. While the military protected the borders, the immigration officers created more restrictive migration policies. But despite the aggressive regulations, the immigrants still used their personal networks in both countries to circumvent their restrictions. The Mexican revolution of 1910 was a significant turning point for the immigrants and their relationship with the U.S. It enabled them to renegotiate their right to citizenship using the state apparatus and institutions.

One of the most striking features in the book is the parallelism of both U.S and Mexico's migration policies in the oppression of minorities inspired by racial exclusion and nationalistic sentiments. Both countries' laws and policies, although different, were in tandem with the aim of achieving the same goals. As chapter 5 analyzes, both countries expanded the restrictive policies and internationalized their migration policies. Thus, Lim argues that citizenship and belonging served as inclusionary and exclusionary tools simultaneously, proving that borders are not static. As migrants sought to subvert the power of the state to regulate the borders, the state power was influenced by some of the experiences and identities of the migrants. Another point present throughout the account but which Lim does not fully acknowledge is the newspapers' role in promoting the prejudiced racial views that influenced the discriminatory policies.

In conclusion, despite the disparate racial groups and their respective struggles of belonging and acceptance by the state, Lim weaves their stories seamlessly together into a single narrative that is easy to follow. The account also shows the interdependency of the relationship between the state and immigrants. Still, rather than ascribing too much power to the immigrants in their negotiation of the borders or overemphasizing the nation-state, Lim balances the importance of the national frame, on the one hand, and immigrants' agency and transnational border interactions, on the other hand, as valid lenses in investigating border and migration studies, although the limitations of both approaches are not discussed in detail. While she did not satisfactorily explain how she overcame the methodological challenges encountered in this multiracial historical study, Lim did a great job in explaining in detail the processes undertaken during the archival research. This book will be relevant to not only border and migration scholars but postcolonial, race, and media scholars. It is recommended for those who seek to understand the impact of migration policies and racial ideologies on border shaping and regulation from a historical perspective.

German Abstract:

Verhandlungen von Grenzen und Identität: Eine Analyse der Migration in die USA im 19. Jahrhundert

Durch Archivrecherchen in Bibliotheken in den USA und Mexiko deckt Lim die verborgene Geschichte von Rassenkategorien und Reisen auf, die weitgehend aus dem nationalen Bewusstsein beider Länder gelöscht wurden, indem sie die Offenheit der Grenze von den 1880er Jahren bis zur ethnischen Differenzierung in den 1930er Jahren verfolgt. Durch Gesetze, Richtlinien und Erlasse erzwangen beide Staaten nationale und ‚rassische‘ Einheitlichkeit, was wiederum die Fähigkeit der Migranten einschränkte, diese Grenzen zu überschreiten. Doch die Einwanderer nutzten verschiedene Überlebentechniken, z.B. die politischen Instrumente des Staates, nahmen unterschiedliche Identitäten an und manövierten ihre Ansprüche auf Staatsbürgerschaft und Zugehörigkeit, je nachdem es ihre Situation zugelassen hat. Lims historische Darstellung lässt uns daher über die herausfordernde Geschichte der multiethnischen Migration nachdenken. Sehr deutlich werden auch die Auswirkungen von Möglichkeitsstrukturen bei der Einschränkung oder Ausweitung der Mobilität von Migranten.

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