

DTS402H1— Advance Topics in DTS
Borders and Border Cities
Centre for Diaspora & Transnational Studies
University of Toronto
Winter 2025

Instructor: Dr. Alejandra González Jiménez

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Day and Time: Thursdays 10 a.m. – 12 p.m.

Office Hours: Thursdays 2 p.m. – 3 p.m.

Territorial Acknowledgment

We acknowledge the land we are on is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit. We are grateful to live and work in this territory.

Course Description

In the era of rapid and massive transnational flows of commodities and capital, people's mobility is forcefully constrained by heavily securitized borders. This course focuses on borders and their adjacent cities to examine current processes constituting neoliberal capitalism. Borders index geopolitical, symbolic, and legal boundaries. They simultaneously function as sites for gendering and racializing bodies and are a stage for violent encounters. Border cities are places where different forms of Otherness coalesce. By examining borders and processes of boundary-making in the Americas, Europe, and the Middle East, this course explores the ways race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality intersect in shaping how people live (and die) along borders. While exploring 'dehumanization' as a mechanism that normalizes violence against Others, we will also discuss attempts to re-imagine a world without borders. In this course we will ethnographically explore borders, boundaries, and borderlands to examine processes of border and boundary-making, (de)territorialization, (im)mobilities, and porosity in our contemporary world.¹

Learning Outcomes

This course aims to cultivate students' critical reading and writing skills and equip them with tools for interdisciplinary research. By the end of the course students should be able to:

1. Understand how anthropology examines borders and boundaries.
2. Apply an ethnographic sensibility to the study of borders and boundaries.
3. Understand how anthropology can contribute methodologically and theoretically to the interdisciplinary field of border and immigrations studies.
4. Have a critical, conceptual, and empirical understanding of the processes and challenges shaping contemporary human (im)mobility.

¹ In designing this syllabus, I used as a model the syllabus of my colleague and friend Dr. Sevil Dagtas, an Associate Professor at the University of Waterloo.

5. Critically assess and debunk anti-immigration discourses in contemporary global politics/policies.
6. Understand the ethical connections between our own lives and those of others separated through communal, temporal, symbolic, territorial, and racial boundaries.

Course Materials

Required Books

- Shahram Khosravi. 2010. *Illegal Traveler: An Auto-Ethnography of Borders*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Ian Kalman. 2021. *Framing Borders: Principle and Practicality in the Akwesasne Mohawk Territory*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Malini Sur. 2021. *Jungle Passports: Fence, Mobility, and Citizenship at the Northeast India-Bangladesh Border*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Articles, and books chapters can be found at Robarts Library. Some articles and book chapters are posted on Quercus.

Expectations

Students are required to attend class, to do all required reading, and to participate actively in class discussions.

Methods of Evaluation and Due Dates

Participation/Attendance	10%	Ongoing
Presentation and Lead Discussion	10%	Assigned Date
Reading Responses (5)	5 x 5% = 25%	Pick 5 weeks
Talk and Paper	15%	February 6 th
Paper # 1	20%	March 6 th
Paper # 2	20%	April 3rd

Participation and Attendance

Students are expected to attend all classes and to come to class well prepared with questions and comments about what they have read and ready to participate actively in class discussions. Participation will be evaluated according to the frequency and quality of interventions and the extent to which they contribute to class discussions. Note that effective participation also requires paying attention to, and engaging with, your peers' perspectives and reflections.

If you find the class readings difficult, don't hesitate to come to my office hours.

In-class Presentation and Lead Class Discussion

Each week, a group of students will lead class discussions about the week's readings; a sign-up sheet has been posted on Quercus. **The students leading discussion are encouraged to review their peers' reading responses (see below) and to integrate them into their discussion questions.** The discussions are an opportunity for students to flag difficult passages, point to ideas of interest, and identify core arguments in the text.

Please note that if your co-presenters are unable to present on the week you chose, this doesn't release you from doing the presentation. Presentations are graded individually, not collectively. If you find yourself in such situation, make sure to get in touch with me as soon as you can.

Reading

A careful and critical reading of all the assigned texts before class is crucial. I recommend that you underline important arguments, mark passages that confuse you, and look up difficult terms. Try to not read only for content and information, but also ask yourself the following questions:²

- How is the text argued? How does it reach its conclusions?
- What kind of evidence is presented?
- What kind of audience does it seem to be written for? Who is it in dialogue with?
- Are there inconsistencies in the argument? Could the evidence be interpreted differently?

Reading Responses

You will submit 5 reading responses. Each response should be about 300 words long, and it should ideally engage all the assigned readings. Please note that these responses are not a summary of the readings. Instead, I want to hear your own voice in your reading response. What is the most important or interesting relationship you discovered between the assigned materials? How did you make that connection? Do you see any tensions or contradictions between (or within) the readings? Is there an idea that the readings challenged you to think about from a new or unexpected perspective? Your reading response should build up to a question that could initiate a lively discussion in class.

The reading responses must be posted by Wednesday 11:59 p.m., the day before our class meets. Late postings will not be accepted. Reading responses will be graded with regards to clarity, evidence of a close and careful reading, and depth of engagement. 5 means excellent; 4 means very good; 3 means adequate; 2 means you should try harder; and 1 means insufficient. If you post more than five times, I will count the highest marks. I strongly encourage you to read the other students' postings before coming to class.

Talk and Paper

This assignment has two components:

- 1) On January 30th you will attend Professor Alyshia Gálvez's talk which is part of the CDTs Winter 2025 colloquium. The talk will be held at 100 Jackman Building, 170 St George Street from 3:30 pm – 5 pm. Please register [here](#).
- 2) You will then write a brief essay about the talk (1000-1500 words). The essay should include a sketch of the talk and its main argument. Then you will write your response. Think about the following:
 - How and why is she presenting that argument?
 - What is her evidence?
 - Is her argument consistent?
 - Are there any tensions in the argument and proposal?

² Adapted from Deborah Knott's "Critical Reading towards Critical Writing."
www.utoronto.ca/writing/advise.html.

- What are the assumptions underlying her argument and proposal?
- Make sure to connect your essay to at least 4 readings from the course.

Written Assignments

You will write two essays (1200-1500 words each) throughout the term. Essays will be based on class readings and lectures. I'll provide you with the question two weeks in advance. Essays are a form of formal writing so you must proofread your work before submitting it. **You are not allowed to cite sources from other classes in your essays.**

Penalties

A student may take a 72-hour (three-day) grace extension with no penalty **for the essays**. After that, a penalty of 5% per day will be applied to the grade received on the assignment (e.g., if the assignment is one day late and receives 80%, once the penalty is applied the assignment would receive 75%). Assignments submitted one week past the original due date will not receive feedback, only a grade.

Please note that this grace period does not apply to the Reading Responses. If you don't submit these on time, there won't be an extension.

AI

The use of ChatGPT or other generative AI tools is not permitted in this class. These tools tend to create [fake references](#), especially when it comes to recent publications or living authors, and they are playing a growing role in [spreading misinformation](#). They drive a trend towards [homogenization](#), and they have detrimental effects on the [environment and climate change](#).

Cellphones

Use of cellphones in class is prohibited so make sure you put your cellphone away as soon as lecture begins. If you use your cellphone during class, I'll ask you to leave the room.

Citation and References

Make sure to use a coherent citation system and to indicate all sources. Plagiarism (i.e., the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another) will not be tolerated. Please bear in mind that the following is plagiarism and will be treated as such: material taken without citation from the web; material taken from any book or other publication without citation; any ideas that can be traced to another source that you are not citing; the use of AI. These are all forms of cheating and will subject you to serious consequences.

Course Schedule

Week 1: January 9 – Introduction to the course

I. Analytical Foundations

Week 2: January 16 – Borders and Boundaries

- Barth, Fredrik. 1998 [1969]. "Introduction." In *Ethnic Boundaries Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Illinois: Waveland Press, 9-20.
- Balibar, Étienne. 2002. "What is a Border?" In *Politics and the Other Scene*. London: Verso, 80-86.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira et.al. 2016. "Introduction." In *Bordering*. London: Polity, 1-9.
- Agier, Michael. 2012. "The Elementary Forms of the Border." In *Borderlands: Towards an Anthropology of the Cosmopolitan Condition*. Translated by Daivid Fernbach. Cambridge: Polity Press, 15-36.

Week 3: January 23 – Colonial Underpinnings: Modern Relationship between Borders and Boundaries

- Fassin, Didier. 2001. "The Biopolitics of Otherness: Undocumented Migration and Racial Discrimination in French Public Debate." *Anthropology Today* 17(1): 3-7.
- Stoler, Ann Laura 1992. "Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Colonial Southeast Asia." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34 (3): 514-551.
- Ngai, Mae M. 2004. "Migrants at the Margins of Law and Nation," In *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 93-95.
- Rosas, Gilberto. 2010. "Cholos, Chántaros, and the 'Criminal': Abandonments of the New Frontier." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 17(6): 695-713.

II. Contemporary Border Regimes

Week 4: January 30 –The Naturalization of Brutalization and Death

- Heller, Charles. 2021. "The Human Despite All." *Border Forensics* (on Quercus).
- De León, Jason. 2015. "Prevention Through Deterrence." In *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying in the Migrant Trail*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 21-37.
- Walia, Harsha. 2021. "Bordering Regimes." In *Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 77-92.

** Check out these exhibitions

[*Fencing In Democracy*](#) and [*State of Exception*](#)

Week 5: February 6 – Bordering and Boundary Making Tactics

- Dick Parson, Hilary. 2019. "'Build the Wall!': Post-Truth on the Mexico-US Border." *American Anthropologist* 121(1): 179-185.

- Anderson, Ruben. 2014. "Time and the Migrant Other: European Border Controls and the Temporal Economics of Illegality." *American Anthropologist* 116(4): 795-809.
- Mitropoulos, Angela. "[Bordering Colonial Uncertainty](#)." PoLAR: Political and Legal Anthropology Review (online).

III. Navigating Borders and Boundaries

Week 6: February 13 – Contestations

- Reeves, Madelaine. 2007. "Unstable Objects: Corpses, Checkpoints and 'Chessboard Borders' in the Ferghana Valley." *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 25(1): 72-84 (on Quercus).
- Hammami, Rema. 2019 "Destabilizing Mastery and the Machine: Palestinian Agency and Gendered Embodiment at Israeli Military Checkpoints." *Current Anthropology* 60(19): S87-S97.
- Wilson, Alice. 2017. "Ambivalences of Mobility: Rival State Authorities and Mobile Strategies in a Saharan Conflict." *American Ethnologist* 44(1): 77-90.

February 20: No Class – Reading Week

Week 7: February 28 – Crossing Borders and Boundaries

- Khosravi, Shahram. 2010. *Illegal Traveler: An Auto-Ethnography of Borders*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan (whole book).

IV. Un/Making Life in the Borderlands

Week 8: March 6 – Transborder Livelihoods

- Sur, Malini. 2021. *Jungle Passports: Fence, Mobility, and Citizenship at the Northeast India-Bangladesh Border*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press (**Select chapters TBA**).

Week 9: March 13 – Waiting in Limbo

- Balaguera, Martha. 2018. "Trans-Migrations: Agency and Confinement at the Limits of Sovereignty." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 43(3): 641-664.
- De León, Jason. 2024. "Clavo," "El Camino," "La Reina del Sur," "Breakfast of Champions," and "Visa." In *Soldiers and Kings: Survival and Hope in the World of Human Smuggling*. New York: Viking, 69-126

Week 10: March 20 – Interrupting Borders (Part 1)

- Kalman, Ian. 2021. *Framing Borders: Principle and Practicality in the Akwesasne Mohawk Territory*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press (**Select chapters TBA**)

Week 11: March 27 – Interrupting Borders (Part 2)

- Kalman, Ian. 2021. *Framing Borders: Principle and Practicality in the Akwesasne Mohawk Territory*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press (**Select chapters TBA**)
- Simpson, Audra. 2014. “Borders, Cigarettes, and Sovereignty.” In *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*. Duke University Press, 115-135.

IV. Critiques, Alternative Imaginaries, and Possibilities

Week 12: April 3– Anti-Border Politics: Approaches and Arguments

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. 1999 [1987]. “La Conciencia de la Mestiza / Towards a New Consciousness.” In *Borderlands / La Frontera*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 99-113 (on Quercus)
- Red Nation. 2021. “Abolish Imperial Borders.” In *The Red Deal: Indigenous Action to Save Our Earth*. Brooklyn: Common Notions, 31-32.
- Riva, Sara et. 2024. “Introduction,” “Unfolding and Flourishing,” and “Surplus People of the World, United!” In *Border Abolition Now*. London: Pluto Press, 1-8;19-51.
- Washington, John. 2023. “The Case for Urgency, or the Environmental Argument.” In *The Case for Open Borders*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 121-140