

CULS5209B: Special Topics in Intercultural Studies: Capitalism and Empire in the Borderlands

Term 2, 2025/26

Day and Time: Friday evening 6:45 to 9:30 pm

Venue: CKB UG03

http://www.avsu.cuhk.edu.hk/en/classroom_service/lower_level_rooms_detail/27/

Language: English

Instructor: Gabriel Antonio Solis

Office: TBD

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Course Description

This course is designed to introduce students to classic and emerging scholarship in borderlands studies, with a focus on the U.S.-Mexico Border and borderlands in the Asia Pacific. Students will be introduced to foundational works in borderlands studies, recent historiographical and theoretical debates, and interdisciplinary approaches to the study of borders. The course will focus on how race, gender, capitalism, and imperialism have figured as important categories of analysis and sites of political intervention in the study of borders and borderlands regions. Students will engage a broad range of scholarship and cultural production to analyze the question of how borders—construed broadly from economic enclosures and international boundaries to zones of intercultural contact and/or struggle—have become a central mechanism in the evolution of global capitalism and colonial projects around the world. The course will incorporate both lecture and group discussion, and will be conducted in English.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes

After completing this course, students will be able to a) identify and discuss the major theoretical debates in comparative border studies; b) apply insights from border studies to their own research and writing in cultural studies; c) be familiar with historical processes of bordering and border-making in the U.S.-Mexico border and in East Asia; d) analyze and be able to discuss the relationship between modern borders, capitalism, and imperialism in distinct historical contexts.

Honesty in Academic Work: A Guide to Students

The Chinese University of Hong Kong places very high importance on honesty in academic work submitted by students, and adopts a policy of zero tolerance on cheating and plagiarism. Any related offence will lead to disciplinary action including termination of studies at the University. All student assignments in undergraduate and postgraduate programmes should be submitted via VeriGuide with effect from September

2008: https://academic.veriguide.org/academic/login_CUSCS.jsp

Use of Generative AI tools

All use of AI tools is prohibited in assignments and assessment tasks. For assignments and assessment tasks that count towards the final course grades, students are not allowed to submit

work which is produced with the collaboration of or supported by the use of any generative AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT, Gemini, DeepSeek, etc.).

Any breach of the regulations will be considered an act of academic dishonesty and will be handled according to the University's Procedures for Handling Cases of Academic Dishonesty. In case of queries, students should seek advice from the course teacher.

Readings

As a graduate course, students are required to read extensively every week. Students are expected to complete each week's readings before our class meeting, where we will be discussing themes, methodologies and theoretical frameworks from the assigned texts. Reading quantity ranges from 80-200 pages or more each week, and sometimes includes films. **All films and readings will be provided in electronic format to students in the beginning of the course.**

Assessment Methods

- 10% - Class Participation and Attendance.
- 30% - Weekly Responses. Every week students must write brief responses of 500-700 words to each week's readings, due by **10:00 am each Friday**. These responses should highlight theoretical and methodological themes that resonate with you, and how they connect to your own intellectual interests. These responses are ultimately designed for **the benefit of students and to help you think through new ideas!** Grades for these responses will focus on each students' analysis and discussion, rather than grammar or formatting. **No weekly responses will be due the first week of class.**
- 20% - Presentations. Students will collectively present a primary source relating to a particular week's set of readings. Sources can include anything from a newspaper article, a photograph, a historical map, or a music video, a song, a found item, or a commodity item (i.e. Flaming Hot Cheetos, vendor mango slices, gum, etc.) you feel is important for borderlands studies. The presentation should be no longer than 10 minutes. Students will be assigned groups in the second week and can contact the instructor for assistance locating pertinent items/sources.
- 30% Final Paper. Students will have the choice of writing a final theoretical or research paper related to the borderlands (construed broadly and written within your discipline). In the fourth week, students will submit a proposal on their topic of choice for approval with a preliminary bibliography for approval. The paper should be between 7,000 to 10,000 words and include at least two readings from the course. More information will be provided in class. **(Due April 24).**
- 10% Final Project Proposal: Students will write a 500-to-1000-word proposal for their final paper. This proposal must also include a tentative bibliography. **(January 30)**
- **The use of generative AI in any written assignments or presentation materials is prohibited, and is detrimental to your life as a scholar, an intellectual, an artist and a human being.**

Week 1, Jan 9: Ballads of the Borderlands (No weekly response due this week)

- Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893)
- Lord Curzon, "Frontiers" (1907)
- Bolton, Herbert Eugene. "The Mission as a Frontier Institution in the Spanish American Colonies." *The American Historical Review*. Vol. 38 (1932-33): 448-474.
- Paredes, Américo. *With His Pistol in His Hand: A Border Ballad and Its Hero* (1958).
Read: Chapter 1: The Country.

Week 2, Jan 16: Contemporary Debates and Perspectives in Borderlands Studies

- Gutiérrez, Ramón and Elliot Young. "Transnationalizing Borderlands History." *Western Historical Quarterly* 41, no. 1 (2010): 27-54.
- Adelman, Jeremy and Stephen Aaron. "From Borderland to Borders: Empires, Nation States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History." *American Historical Review*. Vol. 104, no. 3, (June 1999): 814-841.
- Ebner, Nina. "A borderland analytic: Thinking uneven development from the US–Mexico borderlands." *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space* 55, no. 4 (2023): 1080-1088.
- Manan Ahmed, "Adam's Mirror: The Frontier in the Imperial Imagination," *Economic & Political Weekly*, 46:13 (2011): 60-65

Week 3, Jan 23: Theories of Conquest and Coloniality

- Marx, Karl, *Capital Vol. 1* (Chapter 26: The Secret of Primitive Accumulation)
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1867-c1/ch26.htm>
- Lenin, Vladimir, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*
- Wolfe, Patrick, (2006) "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native," *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8:4, 387-409.
- Paret, M. and Levenson, Z. (2024), "Two Racial Capitalisms: Marxism, Domination, and Resistance in Cedric Robinson and Stuart Hall." *Antipode*, 56: 1802-1829

Week 4, Jan 30: Mapping and Contesting Borders (Final Project Proposal Due!)

- Rachel St. John. *Line in the Sand: A History of the Western U.S.-Mexico Border. America in the World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011. (Chapter 1)
- Hinojosa, Alana de. "El Río Grande as Pedagogy: The Unruly, Unresolved Terrains of the Chamizal Land Dispute." *American Quarterly* 73, no. 4 (2021): 711-742.
- Taylor, Jeremy E. 2002. "The Bund: Littoral Space of Empire in the Treaty Ports of East Asia." *Social History* 27 (2): 125–42.
- Denise Y. Ho, "Oysterman and Refugee: Hong Kong and China Between the Tides, 1949–1997," *The American Historical Review*, Volume 128, Issue 2, June 2023, Pages 561–587.

Week 5, Feb 6: Maritime and Oceanic Borderlands

- Alison Bashford, "Terraqueous Histories," *The Historical Journal* 60:2 (2017): 253-272.
- Engseng Ho, "Empire through Diasporic Eyes: A View from the Other Boat." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46, no. 2 (2004): 210–46.

- Rob Wilson, "Oceania as Peril and Promise: Towards Theorizing a Worlded Vision of Transpacific Ecopoetics," in *Oceanic Archives, Indigenous Epistemologies, and Transpacific American Studies*. Edited by Yuan Shu, Otto Heim, and Kendall Johnson. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2019.
- Kelly, Philip F., Melissa Marschke, and Peter Vandergeest. "Migrant Labour, Working Conditions and Complex Jurisdictions in Asian Distant Water Fisheries." In *New Directions in South-South Migration*, pp. 349-366. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2025.

Week 6, Feb. 13: Fronterizx Revolutionaries and Prophets

- David Romo. *Ringside Seat to a Revolution: An Underground Cultural History of El Paso and Juárez, 1893-1923*. El Paso, Tex: Cinco Puntos Press, 2005. (Read pgs. 3-139 and pgs. 233-244).
 - I highly recommend you read the entirety of the book!
- Desirée A. Martín. *Borderlands Saints: Secular Sanctity in Chicano/a and Mexican Culture*. Rutgers University Press, 2014. (Chapter 1, Saint of Contradiction: Teresa Urrea, La Santa de Cabora)
- Paco Ignacio Taibo II. 2008. *Pancho Villa: Aquí y Allí*. (Film)

FEB 16-20: LUNAR NEW YEAR! HAPPY YEAR OF THE HORSE!

Week 7, Feb 27: Chicax Interventions in the Borderlands

- Denver Youth Conference, *Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* (1969)
- August 29th Movement, *Fan the Flames: A Revolutionary Position on the Chicano National Question* (1975), (<https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/ncm-1a/atm-fan-flames.pdf>)
- Anzaldúa, Gloria, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (Chapter 1: The Homeland, Aztlán)
- Gutiérrez, David G. "'Sin Fronteras?': Chicanos, Mexican Americans, and the Emergence of the Contemporary Mexican Immigration Debate, 1968-1978." *Journal of American Ethnic History* 10, no. 4 (1991): 5-37.

Week 8, March 6: Cold War Diasporas

- Kung, Chien-Wen, Sayaka Chatani, and Taomo Zhou. "Strategies of Belonging in the Bandung Era: Diasporas and Cold War Asia." *Journal of World History* 36, no. 2 (2025): 297-324.
- Nancy Ko, "The View from Jeju: Behind Nancy Fraser's Hidden Abodes" *The Drift*, Issue 9, February 28, 2023.
- Nava, Gregory. 1983. *El Norte*. (Film)

Week 9, March 13: Capitalist Transformations in the Guangdong-Hong Kong Borderlands

- Zhou, Taomo. "Leveraging Liminality: The Border Town of Bao'an (Shenzhen) and the Origins of China's Reform and Opening." *The Journal of Asian Studies* 80, no. 2 (2021): 337-61.

- Mary Ann O'DONNELL, Jonathan BACH, and Denise Y. HO, "Transformation of Shen Kong Borderlands," in *Made in China*, Volume 5, Issue 3, 2020.
- Xiao, Yao. "Who needs Cantonese, who speaks? Whispers across mountains, delta, and waterfronts." *Cultural Studies* 31, no. 4 (2017): 489-522.
- Fan Lixin. 2009. *Last Train Home* (Documentary)

Week 10, March 20: Borders and Global Policing

- Walia, Harsha. *Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism*. Chicago, Illinois: Haymarket Books, 2021.
- Cheech Marin. 1987. *Born In East L.A.* (Film)

Week 11, March 27: Dystopia, Devaluation and Labor

- Ebner, Nina. 2024. "From Paso Del Norte to the Borderplex: Labor Devaluation, Bordering, and the Remaking of Uneven Development in the US–Mexico Borderlands." *Economic Geography* 100 (4): 351–76.
- Bui, Long Thanh. "Glorientalization: Specters of Asia and Feminized Cyborg Workers in the US–Mexico Borderlands." *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism* 13, no. 1 (2015): 129-156.
- Rivera, Alex. 2009. *Sleep Dealer* (Film)
- Funari, Vicky. 2006. *Maquilapolis* (Documentary)

APRIL 3rd NO CLASS FOR GOOD FRIDAY.

Week 12, April 10: Queering Borderlands Studies

- Pérez, Emma. "Decolonial Border Queers: Case Studies of Lesbians, Gay Men and Transgender Folks in El Paso/Juárez," in *Queering the Border*, Houston, Texas: Arte Público Press, 2023.
- Zapata, Joel. "Queer Sanctuary on the Borderlands." *Southern Cultures* 28, no. 2 (2022).
- Luibheid, Eithne, and Lionel Cantu. "Migrancy, Modernity, Mobility: Quotidian Struggles and Queer Diasporic Intimacy." In *Queer migrations: Sexuality, US citizenship, and border crossings*, pp. 146-160. University of Minnesota Press, 2005.
- Loza, Mireya. *Defiant Braceros: How migrant workers fought for racial, sexual, and political freedom*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2016. (Chapter 2: In the Camp's Shadows: Intimate Economies in the Bracero Program)

Week 13, April 17: Militarization and 21st Century Border Violence

- Agnew, Heather Robin. "Reframing 'Femicide': Making Room for the Balloon Effect of Drug War Violence in Studying Female Homicides in Mexico and Central America." *Territory Politics Governance* 3, no. 4 (October 2, 2015): 428–45.

- Nina Ebner and Gabriel A. Solis, “Near-Shoring, Border ‘Security,’ and the Transformation of the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands into a Militarized Industrial Zone,” *NACLA Report on the Americas*, Special Issue on Militarism, Fall 2023.
- Primary Sources on “Operation Hold The Line”
- Frontline, 2020. *Targeting El Paso* (Documentary)
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/documentary/targeting-el-paso/>

April 24: Final Paper Due!