

The Poetics and Politics of Borders: An Archive

*A Zine from the Borders Research Group,
UBC Centre for Migration Studies*



Issue 1, Dec. 2023



Photo: Taken by Helena Zeweri,
Passport exhibit, Victoria Immigration Museum,
Melbourne, Australia



UBC Vancouver Campus Flickr album

The Borders Group conducts its activities on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the $x^w m \theta k^w \dot{a} y \dot{a} m$ (Musqueam) people. This acknowledgment invites us to think about how the study of borders is inextricably linked to the struggle for decolonization, human liberation, and the reconfiguration of relationships with land, with each other, and with the broader global communities with whom we are interconnected.

Rethinking the 'Border' of Migration Studies

The CMS Borders Research Group introduces the first issue of its bi-annual zine, *The Poetics and Politics of Borders: An Archive*. Each issue of the zine will feature the work of graduate students who will be invited to engage with a particular concept related to borders that has both popular and scholarly resonance. Concepts such as borderlands, arrival, sovereignty, refuge, and place, tend to be overdetermined in migration and border studies.

The zine aims to offer short ways to disentangle the assumptions that policy, academic, and activist worlds have attached to such concepts, thereby undoing the 'common sense' that tends to cohere around them without the methodological and empirical demands of a typical scholarly publication. Invited contributors will be invited to use the medium of their choice (which could include: writing, mixed media, or visual art) to offer a critical perspective on a concept. The idea is to deconstruct a concept related to critical border studies, which entails: (1) critically assessing how it has been mobilized in scholarly, artistic, advocacy, activist, and/or other public spaces and (2) reimagining the concept's critical potential in furthering a more nuanced understanding of migration and borders today.

When thinking about borders, we often ignore the disciplinary borders that shape how we make sense of mass displacement today in favor of easy concepts that are already firmly within the public discourse, including the notion of 'legality' and 'rights.' In this first issue, Lorenia Salgado-Leos examines how the classroom can be used to rethink rights-based discourses in human and more-than-human worlds through the language of 'waywardness'. While this first issue is modest in its content offering, we aim for future issues to be more extensive in content. In this issue we also introduce readers to our mission as a research group and provide a recap of events in term 1 and upcoming events for term 2.

By calling this an archive, we signal that this initiative is ongoing and serves as an enduring space current and future scholars and students could look to for inspiration. We also provide an archive of events hosted by the Borders Group and events to come in the next term.

~Helena Zeweri, Borders Group Coordinator, 2023-2024

Thinking Beyond the Legal

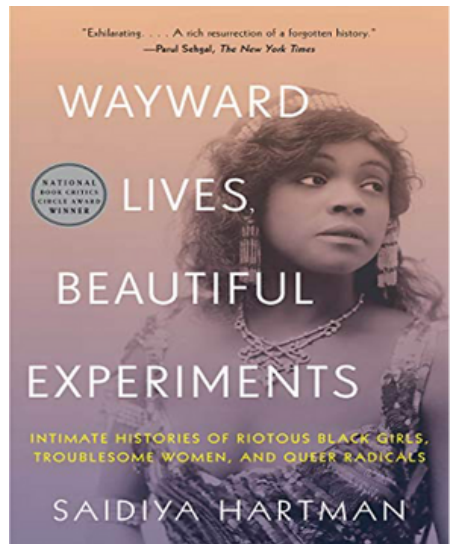
Lorenia Salgado-Leos



Course website: [GRSJ 226](#)

Wayward: A Short Entry on the Possible

“Wayward, related to the family of words: errant, fugitive, recalcitrant, anarchic, willful, reckless, troublesome, riotous, tumultuous, rebellious and wild. To inhabit the world in ways inimical to those deemed proper and respectable, to be deeply aware of the gulf between where you stayed and how you might live. Waywardness: the avid longing for a world not ruled by master, man or the police. The errant path taken by leaderless swarm in search of a place better than here” —Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*



Saidiya Hartman's book cover
Wayward Lives: Beautiful Experiments



GRSJ 226 Buchanan Classroom, University of British Columbia, Photo taken by author

In Spring 2023, as an Instructor for the Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice I taught a 200-level course “Human Rights and Artistic Expression: Thinking Beyond the Legal” (GRSJ 226). Inspired by an excerpt in Saidiya Hartman’s *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* titled “A Short Entry on the Possible,” the course set out to examine both the potential and the shortcomings of current regimes and mechanisms of social and environmental (in)justice within and beyond normative structures of legality and governance.

As a class, we sought to reflect upon how to (re)think and unsettle general conceptualizations of “rights” and justice- based discourses and practices in their political and legal forms. Focusing on contemporary issues and case studies in global contexts, alongside artistic mediums and alternative modes of expression “beyond the legal,” we looked at how human and more-than-human rights can be (and have been) expressed within and beyond the logics of the university, politics, and law.

The course engaged critically with weekly readings and investigated themes and concepts “beyond the legal,” such as “wayward,” “borders,” “protest,” “trans,” “femicide,” “fugitivity,” and “sound,” alongside artistic mediums selected or created by students.

Cultivating critical understandings of the ethical, legal, or political challenges and potencies that can arise in the arts and other modes of expression, the course experimented with teaching and learning methods, including flexible approaches, open online platforms, and multimodal collaboration.

The course's hybrid and collaborative format included lectures, experiential learning labs, and reflections (synchronous and otherwise) whereby students selected artistic works (including their own) through which to discuss, cultivate and develop critical understandings and approaches individually or in groups. The course's ecology of practice included:

1. Flexible Projects. For their Reflection Posts, students chose weekly concepts to engage with and proposed their own. Students also selected works of art (including their own creative projects) to reflect upon. For their Event/Book Commentary, students attended gallery exhibitions, talks, theatre or film events (online or in-person), participated in protests, or selected readings related to the themes, topics, and concepts discussed in the course. For their Final Project, students proposed a topic and chose either to produce a research paper or presentation or (perhaps as part of a group, and to be published online) a digital poster, Zine, Virtual Art Gallery, or even podcast or film.

2. Open Platforms. The course used a mixture of closed (Canvas) and open (blogs.ubc.ca) learning platforms as tools for collaboration, active involvement with public scholarship, and to build engagement beyond the classroom. Bridging digital media, artistic expression, and collaborative participation, student contributions collectively created a "Thinking Beyond the Legal" communal archive.

3. Multimodal Collaboration. In addition to contributing to a course blog, students collaborated on a Collective Bibliography, a Digital Humanities project to be transformed into a collective Wiki resource page.

With a blend of closed and open modalities, the course preserved some traditional teaching and learning assignments (such as a Midterm and Final Exams) and used Canvas as an online learning platform, while also emphasizing movement and more fluid and explorative pedagogical and student-centered approaches, pivoting from standard University methods in order to carve out (critically, responsibly, and thoughtfully) other spaces for thinking, teaching, and learning.

Waywardness, “the practice of the social otherwise”, enabled “new possibilities and new vocabularies” (Hartman 227-228), expanding and decentralizing our existing understanding of what “rights” are, have been, and who can claim them. While embedded institutional (b)ordering practices (in legal, political, and academic contexts) may externalize and proliferate forms of (im)mobility, a fugitive geography, for instance, taught us a thinking of the law in relation to nature (eco-law), an ecology of refusal “enacted through the unruly, noisy, destructive, gnawing chaos of water, wind, and land” (Boon, et al 72). This “practice of possibility” (Hartman 228), of listening through the entanglements of power, politics, and violence, provided us a thinking beyond the legal, a roaming that escapes and exceeds the current order:



Photo taken by author

“When I considered this exhibit in the context of our course, it reminded me most of the ‘Wayward’ reading, particularly the line: “Waywardness articulates the paradox of cramped creation, the entanglement of escape and confinement, flight and captivity” (Hartman 227). ‘The Willful Plot’ framed the garden in a similar way to how Hartman defines ‘waywardness.’ I left the exhibit pondering themes of nature versus man-made, violence versus growth, and what it means to be planted and put down roots versus natively growing somewhere. It challenged my notions of control and submission and prompted me to think further about how the garden as a concept can operate as a metaphor for the violence of settler colonialism and nature as a whole”(GRSJ226 course contributor, student) - “The Willful Plot” Exhibition event commentary excerpt, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, 2023.



“The Willful Plot” Exhibition handout image

Acknowledgments:

I would like to acknowledge what a privilege it is to have the opportunity to move, listen, teach, and learn on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the hənq̓əminəm̓ speaking Musqueam (x̣ʷməθḳʷəỵəm) people.

Many thanks to ...

- Helena Zeweri, the Borders Research Group, and the Centre for Migration Studies
- Kim Snowden, Mark Harris, and the Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice
- Jon Beasley-Murray, FHIS
- The Centre for Teaching, Learning, and Technology
- Arts Instructional Support and Information Technology

Most of all, thank you to my wonderful students (course contributors), who had a vital role within and beyond the GRSJ226 classroom.

Reference List:

Boon, Sonja, et al. "Erosion: Fugitivity." *Autoethnography and Feminist Theory at the Water's Edge: Unsettled Islands*. Spring International Publishing, 2018, pp. 69-73.

Hartman, Saidiya. "Wayward: A Short Entry on the Possible." *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments. Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*. W.W. Norton, 2019, pp. 227-228.

The Willful Plot. 13 Jan.-16 Apr. 2023, Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, Vancouver, Canada.

About the Author:

Lorenia Salgado-Leos is a Doctoral Candidate in Hispanic Studies at the University of British Columbia. Her dissertation, Infrastructures of Mobility, explores 21st century migrancy, literature, and culture. She focuses on movements from Haiti, Central America, Mexico, and the United States. Her research interests include infrastructures, borders, law/legal studies, (post)migration, and (im)mobility studies. Lorenia is a Sessional Lecturer at The Institute for Gender, Race, Sexuality and Social Justice, a Centre for Migration Studies Borders Research Group member, and a 2022-23 CMS-Graduate Fellow.

Borders Group Events Recap / Term 1, 2023

On October 17, 2023, the Borders Group hosted Dr. Renisa Mawani, Professor of Sociology and Canada Research Chair in Colonial Legal Histories at the University of British Columbia to give a talk titled “Enemies of Empire: Commerce and Confinement in Colonial India, Burma and Siam, 1914-1920.” The talk examined how colonial officials sought to redraw and control maritime and land-based borders in India, Burma, and Siam during the World War I.



Malte Brun Map Of India And Southeast Asia, www.picryl.com

On Oct. 27, 2023, the Borders Group hosted Dr. Nikhita Obeegadoo, Assistant Professor of Languages and World Literatures at the University of British Columbia-Okanagan. Dr. Obeegadoo gave a talk titled “An Archipelagic Node in Global Migration: A Literary Case Study from the Indian Ocean.” The talk examined the work of Mauritian author Nathacha Appanah through her novel *Tropique de la violence* (2016), and how it inscribed the Mahoran tragedies of colonialism and poverty within a global imaginary of migration.



Colonial official in Mayotte, www.picryl.com



Maritime Perspectives, www.artvee.com

On September 14, 2023 the Borders Group hosted a reading group on “Coloniality, Migration, and Maritime Worlds” to discuss the work of Dr. Mawani and Dr. Obeegadoo. We explored what centring a maritime perspective could allow us to understand about the border-making practices of empires, and how discourses about alterity get circulated across ocean worlds.

Save the Dates!

Upcoming Borders Group Events / Term 2, 2024

- **January 2024:** Reading Group on colonialism, feminism, and borders and its relevance to the current situation in Gaza (Date TBD)
- **February 29, 2024:** Virtual Film Screening of *Safe Haven* and Q&A with the Director and Producer. *Safe Haven* is a film produced by Dr. Alison Mountz (Professor of Geography, Wilfred Laurier University) and Lisa Molomot (Documentarian). As Molomot and Mountz describe, “*Safe Haven* weaves the powerful stories of U.S. war resisters who sought refuge in Canada during the wars in Vietnam and Iraq. The film shows how Vietnam era resisters participated in a movement to support the younger generation of U.S. soldiers and exposes myths and realities of Canada as refuge.”



Promotional Still,
<https://www.newday.com/films/safe-haven>

- **March 2024:** A talk by Prof. Lisa Sundstrom (UBC) on the mass exodus of Russian migrants to Georgia (Date TBD)
- Talks by Prof. Omid Tofighian, (University of Sydney), and artist and architect, Elahe Zivardar, on the history and impact of Australia’s offshore detention of asylum seekers:
 - **March 19, 2024- Green College**
 - **March 20, 2024-CMS Borders Group**



Omid Tofighian, Elahe Zivardar

The Borders Group

Mission Statement*

The Borders Research Group aims to advance interdisciplinary dialogues about border regimes and the lived experience of borders through reading seminars, speaker events, and written and creative expression. We seek to expand our understanding of the many ways borders can be conceptualized: as physical spaces that monitor, manage, and limit human mobility; as a set of bureaucratic practices and logics; and as historical formations that are deeply entangled with colonialism and empire in all of its forms. We value the work of artists, community leaders, community activists, and advocates in amplifying critical analyses of bordering practices today. Our members' research spans a range of topics including but not limited to: the securitization of borders, cross-border labour mobility, the mediation of gender and sexuality, the externalization of sovereignty, carceral border regimes, and resistance and political mobilization.

**Thank you to Borders Group members for their feedback and work on refining the research group's mission statement.*

Please email the Borders Group Research Coordinator Helena Zeweri (helena.zeweri@ubc.ca) or the Graduate Assistant, Atreyi Bhattacharjee (atreyi.bhattacharjee@ubc.ca) with any questions.

Please visit [our website](#) to learn more!