

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY

Archive of the School of Social Science Seminars



2024-2025 | Politics of Migration and Displacement as a Form of Life

Cover photograph by Samuel Gratacap

Archive of the School of Social Science Seminars

2024-2025

Founded in 1973, the School of Social Science is the most recent and smallest of the four Schools of the Institute for Advanced Study. It takes as its mission the analysis of contemporary societies and social change. It is devoted to a pluralistic and critical approach to social research, from a multidisciplinary and international perspective. Each year, the School invites approximately twenty-five scholars who conduct research with various perspectives, methods and topics, providing a space for intellectual debate and mutual enrichment. Scholars are drawn from a wide range of disciplines, notably political science, economics, law, sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy, and literature. To facilitate intellectual engagement among the visiting scholars, the School defines a theme for each year.

Besides the informal conversations that take place all year long, the scientific activity of the School is mostly centered on two moments. The weekly Social Science Seminar offers the opportunity to all members to present their work, whether it is related to the theme or not. The Theme Seminar meets on a bimonthly basis and is mostly based on discussion of the literature and works relevant to the theme. In 2024-2025, the theme was “The Politics of Migration and Displacement as a Form of Life.” The program was led by Didier Fassin, James D. Wolfensohn Professor, and Visiting Professor David Owen of the University of Southampton.

**School of Social Science
2024-2025**

Faculty

Wendy Brown, UPS Foundation Professor
Didier Fassin, James D. Wolfensohn Professor
Alondra Nelson, Harold F. Linder Professor

Visiting Professor

David Owen

Professors Emeriti

Joan Wallach Scott
Michael Walzer

Affiliated Scholars—Science, Technology, and Social Values Lab

Marc Aidinoff
Tatiana Carayannis

Christine Custis
Marie-Therese Png

Members

E. Tendayi Achiume
Diana Allan
Mike Amezcua
Ulla Berg
Hannah Bloch-Wehba
Çetin Çelik
Paisley Currah
Sandipto Dasgupta
Nicholas De Genova
Ayten Gündoğdu
Brian Jordan Jefferson

Rajbir Judge
Nahoko Kameo
Leszek Koczanowicz
R. L'Heureux Lewis-McCoy
Iymon Majid
Jeanne Morefield
Ahmad Qais Munhazim
Juan Thomas Ordóñez
Mahua Sarkar
Bernardo Zacka

Visitors

Anne-Claire Defossez
Rebio Díaz Cardona
Gabriel Greenburg
Ellie Hisama

Raphaëlle Khan
Dorota Koczanowicz
Aisha Lewis-McCoy

Staff

Miriam Harris
Joey Cifelli
Nicholas Collins

Dylan Greifinger
Jenna Kelly

I

Social Science Seminar

EXILE AS A FORM OF LIFE AND THE POLITICAL VIOLENCE OF BORDERS

Didier Fassin

Every year, millions of men, women and children in Africa, Asia, America and Europe attempt to cross borders, often to escape dire conditions. Thousands of them die, from drowning or dehydration, in the Mediterranean and the Channel, off Florida and Australia, in the Sahara, the Sonora desert and the Darién Gap jungle. Thousands of them are held to ransom by armed gangs in the Sahel and Guatemala, kidnapped by militias in Libya and Mexico, arrested and locked up in detention centers in the United States, and even arrested by the police, beaten, stripped of their possessions and clothes at the gates of Europe. Borders have thus become some of the most violent places in the world. Even when it is in part linked to natural elements, this violence is almost always the result of human decisions. It is governments, especially in the West, that close borders, control passage with walls and police, externalize repression against exiles in countries of the Global South, and force these men, women and children to take ever more dangerous routes. Border violence is political. It manifests itself not against enemies but against people in search of protection who have been deemed undesirable in a context of nationalist policies.

Based on five-year research conducted with Anne-Claire Defossez at the border between Italy and France, in the Alps, more precisely in a French region called the Briançonnais, at one of the two main entry points in France for people coming from the Middle East and from Maghreb via the Balkan route as well as from sub-Saharan Africa, the ethnographic gaze offers a counter-discourse to current policies and public discourses that dehumanize these exiles by talking about flows, waves, crisis, deportation, public order, selective immigration, great replacement, relations with crime, administrative detention centers. It provides an account of their long and perilous journey from one continent to another, but also of solidarity deployed by volunteers, who rescue them in the mountain and shelter them in the valley, and even of the repression exerted by the police and military, who often come to doubt the meaning of their mission. The choice of the word “exile” to name these displaced people has four reasons. First, it reflects the etymology of the word, which combines the notions of being forced to leave and of having no determinate destination. Second, it avoids the alternative between migrants, as officials name them to ignore their request for protection, and refugees, as nongovernmental organizations tend to call them although this is not their actual status. Third, it democratizes a term that is usually reserved to great figures who have been banished from their country. Fourth, it means the recognition of a significant period of time in the existence of these people which is not a mere parenthesis, but corresponds to a form of life, often spanning over years.

The political violence of the border cannot be separated from the history of the past and present treatment of populations from the Global South and from the moral and political responsibility Western countries have toward them. The way exiles are treated – and mistreated – is definitely a signature of the time.

September 30, 2024

CORPORATE BORDERS

Tendayi Achiume

Most legal and political theory treats border governance as a function of nation-state sovereignty, and as primarily the domain of the state. Scholarship theorizing international borders and possibilities for their re-imagining tend to center nation-states as the bearers of the responsibility and capacity to constitute or reconstitute these borders. *Corporate Borders* marks a break from the orientation of this status quo, and explores the significant role of transnational corporations in constituting, articulating and governing international migration and nation-state borders. Central to this exploration is ways in which transnational corporations (colonial and contemporary) have made and used borders and race together as technologies of economic profit. At the heart of this project are (1) a conceptual mapping of “corporate borders” as material fact and theoretical lens with particular focus on the international law that structures corporate borders, and (2) a normative provocation regarding how accounting for corporate borders might shift ongoing demands internationally for more just borders.

Through a series of archetypical and illustrative examples from different geographic regions, this project maps the prominent facets of corporate borders offering a synthetic account of the primary ways in which transnational corporations determine international borders, with particular attention to the implications for international migration, and perhaps more significantly, the legal and political theorization of border justice. In other words, if the goal is the pursuit of just international borders and migration, what are appropriate demands we might make of transnational corporations in light of their role in border injustice, especially racialized border injustice? If international borders are significantly corporate borders, what are the implications for international law, and for the state-centrism of international legal theory of borders? What difference might it make to engage with corporations as de facto sovereign or super-sovereigns as the baseline from which border justice is re-imagined? If the neocolonialism of borders, and the racial injustices embedded in these borders are significantly a corporate affair, what sort of reorientation is required in scholarship, advocacy and policymaking on the future of borders and migration governance?

October 7, 2024

**ARCHITECTURE AS REPAIR:
THE INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE OF THE WELFARE STATE
Bernardo Zacka**

The state is a place. It is somewhere we go to do something, or somewhere we are summoned to have something done to us. This simple fact has not escaped the attention of scholars of the welfare state, but it has not held it either. Most remark in passing on the glum atmosphere of welfare offices, but only as a prelude to describing the human drama that unfolds in them.

What can we learn by looking more closely at the bland and generic spaces in which the welfare state greets us? Architecture will not change public policy, and no amount of interior design will make a trip to the benefits office a pleasurable experience. But what can architecture do? What can we reasonably hope from it, and how can it fail us? I explore these questions through an extended case study, reconstructing and critically interrogating the evolution of the interior architecture of public employment offices (Jobcenters) in Denmark.

October 14, 2024

LAND, POLITICS AND RELIGION IN KASHMIR

Iymon Majid

In this project, I am looking at the relationship between law, politics and religion in Kashmir. The project examines how the Indian state resorts to a careful strategy of controlling the people and the territory through certain measures, which are selectively applied or not applied. For example, the Indian state occasionally invokes legal frameworks but in other instances, refrains from doing so. What does this non-applicability of law mean? Is it management of religion? What does management of religion in Kashmir lead to? These are some of the questions I am interested in. The project has two parts. In the first part, I examine the legislative and executive branches of the Indian state, and in the second part the project tackles the judiciary. In this talk, I focus on land and its relationship to sovereignty using Kashmir as a site.

In August 2019, under a strict clampdown, a communication blockade which lasted months and a massive spree of arrests, the Indian government under Narendra Modi abrogated Article 370 and Article 35A of the Indian constitution. These two constitutional provisions gave Kashmir partial autonomy and safeguarded its land rights. A few months later, with India directly ruling the region, the government began to enact new laws that removed further protections on the land.

I make two arguments. First, the Indian state is using religion as a means to fully control the region. The second argument is related to land. While the recent land laws have been viewed through the lens of settler colonization and thus aimed at the complete annexation of Kashmir, there were earlier laws, particularly the agrarian reforms initiated in 1948, that are understood as part of a developmental agenda. These are usually taken to be two distinct strategies: economic development in the early period and settler colonialism in the latter period. In this talk I want to provide a different reading. Rather I argue that the land laws, in both cases, were instrumental in helping the Indian state to secure the territory. The control of territory was always the aim; this has to do ultimately with the denial of sovereignty. It would be helpful to remember that my focus remains on land, not on assimilation tactics or other forms of violence committed to secure Kashmir for India.

October 21, 2024

MUTING DISSENT

R. L'Heureux Lewis-McCoy

In this presentation, I examine what happens when liberal calls for integration transform from tools of possibility to cudgels of hegemony. Drawing from multiple years of fieldwork (interviews and observations) in New Rochelle, New York, archival sources, and a recent award-winning documentary film, I explore the histories of integration and their afterlives.

Integration's hegemonic turn is achieved by muting dissent—the purposeful dampening of selected voices with the goal of achieving a desired and seemingly unified sound. When I speak of muting, I do not mean simply going from sound to silence like one does with a television remote or cellphone. Instead, much like woodwind and brass musicians, muting is a practice of changing the timber, tone and volume of a note or set of notes.

In the middle of the 20th century, in the racially diverse suburb of New Rochelle, New York, Lincoln School sat with a nearly 100 percent Black student population. A combination of gerrymandering and a race-based transfer policies made Lincoln School severely segregated. A set of Black parents from Lincoln School brought legal suit against the city's school Board for de facto segregation. The Taylor vs. Board of Education (1961) was the first case following Brown v. Board of Education (1954) to be heard at the federal level, which led to New Rochelle being dubbed the “Little Rock of the North.”

As the city contemplated the future of Lincoln School, three camps emerged: 1) integrationists (racially mixed) who sought to close Lincoln School and have Black children bussed to other schools in the city, 2) status quo (predominantly White) supporters who held tight to the concept of neighborhood schools and did not support racially balancing schools, and 3) fortifiers (predominantly Black) who sought to improve the material and curricular resources at Lincoln School, but did not desire bussing to integrate students.

I apply the concept of muting dissent to explain how fortifiers who actively campaigned for an alternative to integration were muted by both integration and status quo camps. This occurred not only during the debate between camps leading up to the landmark Civil Rights case but in the retelling of the Taylor Case by progressive histories.

The muting of dissident voices, whether intentional or not, amplified integration as the sole solution to racial segregation. As a result of muting, our fuller understanding of the experiences of Black families under integration is stunted as well as our understanding of alternative possibilities for addressing racial segregation is circumscribed.

October 28, 2024

LISTENING FOR POLITICAL FREEDOM

Wendy Brown

Might liberal democracy be a historically exhausted form, incapable of addressing predicaments global in nature, extending beyond humans, or carrying residuals of long histories of damage? Predicaments of the climate and biodiversity emergencies? Of the unprecedented transnational powers of capital? Of the political deformations and inequalities that are the legacies of EuroAtlantic empire?

Global problems, lingering damages, narrowing futures, nonhuman life-- these have never been democracy's strong suits. This lecture adumbrates "reparative democracy" as a possible successor to liberal democracy and democratic socialism. It focuses on one element, political freedom, and one aspect of reparative freedom, listening.

November 4, 2024

FIGURES OF DEPORTATION

Ulla Berg

Human migration is one of the major issues of our time. As migrants across the world leave their home regions in the Global South to escape situations of economic insecurity, political upheaval, climate disasters, and multiple forms of violence, public and political debates about migration in the Global North have been dominated by punitive calls for increasing deportation of unauthorized migrants. Deportations of South Americans have until recently been only marginally addressed, but recent changes in immigration laws and policies have progressively illegalized and rendered South Americans deportable under ever shifting legal frameworks.

Whereas the figure of the “criminal alien” has come to dominate the public discourse on immigration in the United States, this project sets out to critique this singular migrant figure used to justify border violence against migrants and explores instead a range of figures which animate the broader reality of mobility and control in the Americas. A core argument in the book is that publics, legal frameworks, and circuits of migration across the region produce a range of figures associated with mobility and its criminalization. These figures include but are not limited to the coyote, the trafficking victim, the angel mom, the immigrant detainee, the activist volunteer, and the *kutichish kachashka*, which in Kichwa as spoken in Ecuador means one who is “made to return” against their will – a figure which evidences an Indigenous, and community-centered perspective on different types of returns. These figures of deportation all make reference to recognizable social and legal positions, but they do not equate fixed identities or specific persons. While critiquing the reductionism of such figures of deportation, I also analyze what they each accomplish through placing blame, redirecting attention, and creating grounds for intervention.

The project is based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork conducted (intermittently) between 2015-2020 with deported migrants, their families and communities in Southern Ecuador; and in urban neighborhoods of Peru’s capital Lima and the Port District of Callao, along with fieldwork among undocumented and illegalized Peruvian and Ecuadorian migrants in US detention centers and immigration courts. My book based on this research argues for the crucial importance of an ethnographic and migrant-centered perspective on deportation that goes beyond simplistic renderings of criminalization and/or victimhood asserted by states and humanitarian regimes. By moving beyond state-centric views of deportation as a one-way and one-time movement, and considering both what I call figural and counter-figural power, this ethnography offers a situated perspective on how and under what conditions Andean peoples subjected to global deportation regimes continue to carry out their vital projects between ongoing processes of mobility and immobilization.

November 11, 2024

**LIBERALISM'S DOPPELGÄNGER:
SEX TRAFFICKING AND THE GLOBAL IMAGINARY**
Jeanne Morefield

Over the last twenty-five years, what is often referred to as “the liberal world order” (known variously as the “American led world order,” the “rules based order,” or “the liberal international order”) has come in for heavy criticism by scholars concerned with its imperial origins. Born out of the legal, political, and material concerns of competing European empires in the nineteenth century, these scholars argue, this international system continues to operate for the benefit of these same states and settler states today, maintained by the military and economic might of the United States. In other words, “the liberal world order” originated in imperialism and is maintained today by American imperial power. At the same time, champions of this order continue to insist that its primary characteristics are not – and never have been – imperial but, rather, reflect the universal, liberal values of sovereign autonomy, multilateralism, democracy promotion, the rule of law, free trade, and human rights. The ideological disconnect – between the living, imperial history that sustains global hierarchy in the world today and the world as imagined by liberal internationalists – functions through a variety of rhetorical strategies aimed at pushing structural power to the periphery of our vision. This project is not concerned directly with those strategies but with what Edward Said might call the “imaginative geography” that replaces the now peripheralized realities of global power. For Said, the “poetic process” of imperialist place-making divides the world into “two unequal halves” – Orient and Occident, West and East, white and black, civilized and barbarous – and imbues these halves with fixed, imaginative characteristics.

My analysis begins in 1919 with the creation of the League of Nations, after which liberal imperialists are no longer able to use explicitly racial and civilizational language to imagine global order and must instead divide the world along another imaginary axis. Rather than “civilized v. barbarian” or “European v. child races,” liberal imperialists recast themselves as “liberal internationalists” and divide the world into “civil v. uncivil” (or “civil v. criminal”) spheres. In sum, after 1919, liberal worldmaking and liberal underworldmaking become part of the same process, a process that both resembles and enables fascist worldmaking. The project interrogates the “poetic process” by which liberals and fascists imagine the world by dividing it in two. I do this through an interrogation of two historical moments: the interwar era and the period from the end of the Cold War until today. Taking international, anti-sex trafficking crusades as my “problem space,” I focus on the emergence during both eras of a conception of humanity read through the vulnerable bodies of women and children and a conception of global criminality built up over time into a conspiracy theory. In the interwar era, the League’s campaign against the “traffic in women and children” not only displaced extant alternative visions of the international developed by socialist and anticolonial activists, it did so by actively embracing anti-Semitic conceptions of a global underworld, ultimately relying on figurative language and statistics used by both German and British fascists. In our post-Cold war era, the Clinton Administration refused to consider approaches to internationalism other than American imperialism and, instead, pushed hard for new international agreements concerning “human trafficking.” The language of “hidden in plain sight” and “open your eyes” implicit in the campaigns which followed this push not only mirrored but, I argue, laid the figurative groundwork for the conspiracy-driven worldview of contemporary fascism with its particular fixation on child sex trafficking. Both historical and contemporary, this interdisciplinary project brings together a variety of conceptual and intellectual resources to interrogate a bifurcated, “imaginative geography” of imperial unseeing world and underworld – with devastating consequences for our contemporary moment.

November 18, 2024

THE MIGRANT METROPOLIS

Nicholas De Genova

Migration and refugee movements are situated at the heart of manifold intersecting and opened global/ postcolonial struggles. The spectacles of “border crisis,” furthermore, have taken center stage in public debate and policy interventions in migrant-“receiving” countries, worldwide. These human mobilities are often associated with the impacts of external circumstances, ranging from violence and persecution to poverty and despair, that contribute to driving people from their places of origin or residence into more or less protracted and precarious journeys toward the uncertain prospect of resettlement in safer or more promising destinations; hence, they are paradigmatically associated with conditions of displacement. Nonetheless, the cross-border human mobilities always entail migrants and refugees’ exercise of an elementary freedom of movement that involves actively escaping or deserting intolerable social conditions and crossing nation-state borders, commonly without authorization, in disregard of those state powers’ prohibitions of their movement and often in defiance of their border enforcement authorities. Thus, the migrant and refugee mobilities are distinguished by an autonomy and subjectivity that involves more or less deliberate and therefore strategic appropriations of space, at every juncture across often extended transnational geographies of movement and eventual (temporary or permanent) resettlement in sometimes multiple new destinations. These purposeful appropriations of space, therefore, involve numerous processes of place-making, some tentative and ephemeral (such as refugee camps or self-organized migrant camps in border zones), others more durable and lasting (from migrant agricultural labor camps in remote rural areas to longstanding migrant neighborhoods in cities and suburbs).

Based on my current book project, this lecture proposes the idea of the migrant metropolis as a global conceptual framework to encompass this heterogeneity of distinct but interrelated places to designate the spaces where transnational migrants and refugees appropriate, inhabit, and transform contemporary social life, worldwide. This theoretical concept builds upon Henri Lefebvre’s formulations of the critique of everyday life, the urban revolution, the production of space, and the right to the city in order to elucidate how migration calls forth new formations of social life and urban space. Not reducible simply to “cities,” conventionally understood, this Lefebvrian understanding of the urban refers to a planetary fabric of social relations and active connections in which human mobilities such as those of migrants form a key vector of planetary urbanization. This project focuses therefore on the conjunctures and contradictions that arise between migrants and refugees’ diverse appropriations of space and the sociopolitical forces that variously work to block or decelerate their mobilities, entrap them in conditions of displacement, subordinate them through racialization, and otherwise exclude them from the substantive benefits of citizenship. It thus complements questions of displacement as a form of life with an inquiry into incipient and ongoing modalities of place-making and the reconstitution of life projects pursued by migrants and refugees in the aftermaths of dislocation, whereby urban place-making across multiple scales becomes a vital force for re-making life and thus re-making the world. This lecture, scheduled in the immediate aftermath of the 2024 election in the United States, also responds to the urgency of its specific historical moment by bridging this larger theoretical project on migrants’ global place-making with a provisional analysis of the immediate sociopolitical context of the return to the U.S. presidency by Donald Trump and his threats of a massive immigration enforcement crackdown and the largest deportation dragnet in U.S. history. Thus, the lecture situates more conceptual discussion of the migrant metropolis in relation to the brazen and unabashed authoritarianism that has been unleashed upon the United States by a second Trump administration.

November 25, 2024

**EXISTENTIAL ROBOTICS:
SOCIAL ROBOTICISTS AND THE DREAM OF KNOWING HUMANS THROUGH ROBOT-
MAKING
Nahoko Kameo**

Robots are evocative artifacts precisely because they resemble humans to some degree. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in a social robotics lab in Japan as well as archival materials of Japanese roboticists' writings, the talk argues that social robotics serves as a way to express Japanese roboticist's existential questions about humanity. I show how robot-making is accompanied by talk about humanness – human capacities and human “essence” throughout the production of robotic knowledge. Whereas social scientific literature on robots thus far emphasized the role robots and robot-making play in market capitalism, or their emancipatory qualities, the study shows that solving the missing piece of the puzzle – the existential robotics – is essential for our understanding of why and how social robots are made, and how they may permeate our society.

December 3, 2024

BODIES OF POLITICS: SOMAESTHETICS, SOMAPOWER, MICROPHYSICS OF EMANCIPATION AND NICHES OF LIBERATION

Leszek Koczanowicz

Everyday life is an often-neglected dimension of politics, although it is where most political struggles take place. The failure to recognize its importance is one of the main causes of the crisis of democracy we are witnessing in recent times. People's demands often arise from the problems they encounter in their daily activities, and if they are not adequately addressed by politicians, the very idea of democracy is rejected and replaced by the need for an authoritarian regime. My project aims to value the social movements that emerge from very concrete demands and that seem to have no political character. I focus on how such movements and pursuits can be conceptualized within the humanities and social sciences. The difficulty is that they are located at the intersection of two important, but inadequately researched, theoretical fields: the body as a vehicle of social critique and the relation between everydayness and politics. I would like to address these two issues by outlining the debates on them in the contemporary social sciences and humanities. This will enable me to identify the gaps in the current discourse and suggest, sketchily I'm afraid, how they could be bridged. The structure of my talk implies three basic themes: first, the relationship between everyday life and politics; second, the concept of the body as a vehicle of emancipation, which I refer to as somapower; and third, the aspirations for and fulfillments of emancipation in everyday life, a process I call the microphysics of emancipation, which takes place in the niches of liberation. To do this, I analyze the relationship between everyday life and politics in contemporary social theory. I identify three models: radical separation, political critique of everyday life, and political critique from everyday life. The third model is the most important. In terms of my argument, the most important issue is in how far individuals' corporeal/visceral/emotional reactions can serve as a vehicle of critique, and also in how far bodily activities can serve as a vehicle of emancipation, at least at the individual level. Emancipation, not in an eschatological sense, but as a phenomenon of everyday life. Generally speaking, such emancipation does not have a political character; originally, it is a-political or even anti-political, and its politicization is a secondary development triggered by the pressure of the power of the state. Such microphysics of emancipation unfolds in everyday life, where niches of liberation are created. Thus, niches are, so to speak, incubators in which new forms of human relations and ideas are engendered, nursed, and tested. They are on the whole not politically invested, but via existential tests they can make it possible to question the existing social reality. Therefore, they also support the expression and development of views that contradict the official ideology. For obvious reasons, the impact of niches of emancipation is limited. These circles deliberately situate themselves on the margins of official life, denying or ignoring it. Nevertheless, their very existence activates the mechanism of the microphysics of emancipation. Bodily, corporeal practices hold a prominent place among the various forms of micro-emancipation. The body is not only subject to the formative impacts of social conditions, but that it can also actively change these conditions in and through the process of augmenting its awareness by means of various techniques of corporeality enhancement. I call this ability "somapower." It appears when a personal body improvement project has to cope with the restraints imposed by oppressive social conditions. The resistance of the body is a value in and of itself. This point is central to somapower. By taking part in a demonstration, the body not only fights for liberation, but also liberates itself through the very fact of participation. For somapower, the body in a democratic assembly is ultimately constituted as a vehicle for emancipation. This happens in political struggles, where bodies are weaponized, and their intimate histories must confront the public feelings of injustice and solidarity. Yet the body is not reducible to its participation in a temporary event, powerful though this act may be. The body outgrows it and becomes ready for another political event, where readiness is not oriented to new experiences alone.

December 9, 2024

**REIMAGINING RESISTANCE IN THE “BLACK BOX SOCIETY”:
KNOWLEDGE, POWER, AND ALGORITHMIC AGNOTOLOGY**
Alondra Nelson

Many scholars have examined the relationship between knowledge and power, including how access to knowledge, or its unavailability, have animated practices of resistance. Theorized as the “politics of knowledge,” “contested knowledge,” and “experiential knowledge,” and more, these struggles over meaning have been central to efforts for social change. The algorithmic turn poses a challenge to longstanding strategies of resistance and of our understanding of them, for algorithms deepen the “black box” of knowledge, perhaps to the point of inscrutability. Drawing on cases from the history of medicine and medical sociology, as well as contemporary uses of advanced artificial intelligence in health and medicine, this lecture explores the relationship between the possibilities of knowing and possibilities for change.

January 21, 2025

**MOVING STORIES:
CONTEMPORARY GUESTWORK AND BANGLADESHI CONTRACT MIGRANTS
Mahua Sarkar**

Guestwork is a form of cross-border labour mobility regime designed to prevent the permanent settlement of outsourced workers in destination countries. Described variously as temporary worker programs, managed or circular migration, and temporary labour migration, guestwork require workers to tack back and forth between 'home' and, often, multiple 'abroads' in the course of a single working life, locking them into a pattern of long-term compulsory sojourner mobility. While there is no dearth of justifications for contemporary guestwork (workers earn more, sending countries benefit from remittances, employers get cheap labour), the chief aim of such labour mobility schemes, as understood since the end of the nineteenth century, is to enable affluent economies to tap into the surplus labour resources of low-income regions of the world without bearing long-term responsibilities for the social reproduction of such workers. Given the dual crises of declining populations in many affluent economies, and young, surplus workforces across the global South, temporary migration programs (TMPs) have emerged as something of a rage in global policy circles in recent decades. What remains obfuscated in this largely celebratory "triple win" migration policy discourse is the dependence of affluent host countries on such transient workers, who provide a slew of under-remunerated services essential for the functioning of these economies. Nor is there an adequate reckoning of the costs—beyond the financial—that this kind of compulsory circular mobility exacts from contract workers, their families and sending communities.

Moving Stories spotlights contemporary guestwork regimes, with a particular focus on low resourced male workers from Bangladesh. While the extant scholarship tends to see guestwork as 'temporary migration', this project approaches it as a form of constrained labour. It situates guestwork within larger debates in labour history over the place of coerced/constrained work under capitalism, highlighting the multi-sited mechanisms of dispossession and surplus extraction through which this mobile workforce is produced and reproduced. Drawing on extended life stories of workers, as well as ethnographic research in Singapore and Bangladesh, newspaper archives, multi-scalar statistical information, policy briefs, and a broad range of secondary literatures, the project creates a textured narrative of guestwork that tracks complex sojourner biographies forged at the intersection of multiple social structures working across borders and sociopolitical formations.

Moving Stories is not simply a structural analysis of the hardships involved in guestwork. The life stories of workers certainly index immense material and emotional losses and injuries, but they also resonate with sentiments of resilience, pride in hard work, camaraderie, adventure, even romance. As I argue in the book, a greater attention to these less obvious dimensions of the guestwork experience is necessary if we are to grasp why and how such a demanding livelihood strategy has come to be almost a rite of passage for so many millions of young men and, increasingly, women across the global South.

January 27, 2025

NEURAL STATES

Brian Jordan Jefferson

The brain and nervous system have garnered increasing, if unsystematic attention in political theory since the mid-1960s. In 1964 Marcuse sounded alarms about a new mode of social control that operated through communication networks to 'mentally coordinate' the masses. Foucault traced a specific mentality of governing that inscribed power effects on the 'surface of the mind.' Around the same time Burroughs cautioned of a nascent form of mind-control propagating through mass communication systems. Deleuze and Guattari wrote of social organization that expressed itself through multiplicities of nerve fibers in 'cerebral-nervous milieus.' Habermas warned of a teleological mode of rationality that was overtaking communicative action and reducing the world to mental states, while Haraway gave notice of a 'cyborg politics' spreading through 'scary new networks' of artificial intelligence. By century's turn, Hardt and Negri described a new mode of empire that attached 'cybernetic machines' directly to individual brains before reaching 'down to the ganglia of the social structure.' More recently Castells argued that, in the west, power-relations were increasingly defined by struggles over influencing the 'neural networks in the human mind by using mass communication.'

Neural States traces these observations to postwar encounters between cybernetics, the field of control and communication in animals and machines, and the US military. The paper explores how the neural expressions of power described above were only the most visible signs of a much deeper process: the infiltration of cybernetic elements – e.g. concepts, mechanisms, and terms – into state power. The paper examines this process by analyzing three major defense initiatives between 1950 to 1970: the Semi-Automatic Ground Environment Defense System; the Worldwide Military Command and Control System; and ARPANET. The paper stresses that neural metaphors about the military played a fundamental role injecting cybernetic ideas about nervous networks, heterarchy, self-organizing systems, and others into the state's lexicon and organizational matrix.

The paper emphasizes that this development was neither probable, seamless, nor the result of concerted efforts to apply the field of cybernetics to government. It was due instead to a host of contingent factors – the postwar military research landscape, existing technologies, personal connections, and cybernetic idioms that had been normalized throughout control and communication engineering circles at the time. And their efforts to rebuild the defense system ran up against formidable opposition by the Defense Department. These tensions reflect the fact that while the cybernetic mode of control originated deep in the siloes of the military complex, it was never fully reducible to state power. And to the chagrin of many state officials, control was never fully controllable.

February 3, 2025

**FORCED DISAPPEARANCES:
RACE, LAW, AND VIOLENCE AT THE BORDERS
Ayten Gündoğdu**

Border governance has come to operate as a regime of violence, terror, death, and disappearance with the adoption of ever more restrictive policies of immigration control particularly in the global North. As of April 2025, over 74,000 migrants have died or disappeared as they tried to cross borders since 2014, according to a conservative estimate of the International Organization for Migration. Overwhelming evidence points to a close connection between this troubling statistic and state policies that have criminalized migration, militarized borders, and pushed migrants to more perilous journeys. Yet, states adopting and enforcing such policies that systematically expose migrants to death and disappearance have so far remained unaccountable.

This project aims to understand the routinization of migrant deaths and disappearances by focusing on the Euro-Mediterranean, the world's deadliest border zone, and drawing on the resources of modern and contemporary political theory. For this purpose, it extends the concept of "forced disappearances," originally used in the context of military dictatorships, to border control practices such as incommunicado detention and clandestine expulsion that push people outside the pale of law and transform them into rightless subjects who could be wiped off the face of the earth with impunity. Moving beyond the conventional legal meaning of "forced disappearance," the project mobilizes the term phenomenologically to understand European borders as perceptual fields permeated by historically sedimented racial schemas that transform "non-white" migrants, particularly those from "sub-Saharan Africa," into phobic objects to be surveilled, disciplined, and immobilized, and render their rights and lives superfluous.

My presentation at the Institute for Advanced Study is based on a book chapter that critically engages with Hannah Arendt's analysis of the late 19th century European overseas imperialism in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Taking issue with Arendt's Eurocentric and racist representations of "Africa" and "Africans," it nonetheless locates two key critical insights in her analysis: First, the political harm of racism as an ideology lies not only in its dehumanization of its targets, which has been observed by many critics, but also its radical transmogrification of the sense of reality in ways that render even the most excessive forms of violence utterly ordinary and permissible. Second, racial violence is routinized in and through a bureaucratic administration designed for "the government of subject races"—a form of racial rule that operates in the mode of a permanent emergency, hides behind a veil of secrecy, and combines the indiscriminateness of mass slaughter with the administrative efficiency of a bureaucratic machinery. Without positing a direct, causal link between the 19th century imperial orders and contemporary border regimes, thinking these two orders together can shed crucial light on the kinds of ideological assumptions, administrative logics, and legal maneuvers that go into the routinization of racial violence and institution of a regime of impunity that condones it.

February 10, 2025

LATINO DOLLARS

Mike Amezcua

This project traces the role of Latino capitalists and their efforts to expand the reach of their businesses and communities across and beyond the United States, a decades long crusade that culminated in the 1993 passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). It pushes back against the retelling of NAFTA's development as a top-down, elite-driven project to consider the actions of external actors at the grassroots level who, in pursuing their own distinct capitalistic aims, helped push U.S. capitalism across borders. Examining the 1970s and 1980s, it explores linkages in production factories that business leaders facilitated; the dispersion of market knowledge to increase the heft of Latino enterprise; pushback from Latino workers; the role of new and revamped government agencies in expanding Latino business; and, finally how trade and policy officials were forced to take Latino free traders seriously. During this period, Latino USA was at the center of profound changes in North American capitalism as both a market space and an entrepreneurial hub. This project offers a new framework for considering how emergent Latino commercial power, operating at multiple scales, intervened in North American capitalism and neoliberalism. Small business crusaders responded to the broader economic turbulence of the 1970s and 1980s in ways that would give them greater control over what they saw as their marketplace, hoping to ensure its survival and prosperity by connecting their districts in the U.S. to broader networks of international commerce. This project also interrogates a key question: Did the embrace of capitalism, advocated by Latino business crusaders, deliver economic justice for Latino USA? This project argues that the economic crusaders' promise that entrepreneurship would help correct past injustices for Latino USA was doomed to begin with. However well-intentioned, the crusaders suggested Latinos seek empowerment in a deeply flawed and broken system, a system that by its very design yields a few winners at the expense of the majority of Latinos. More than a story about Latinos, however, this talk is about the American economy, its upswings, downswings, and its persistent reliance on exploitation in order to function. It centers on the stories of Latinos who in their pursuit of economic opportunities, wrestled with U.S. capitalism's underbelly both as disruptors and as adherents who contributed to its global expansion and endurance.

February 18, 2025

WHEN DISPLACEMENT IS TRANSIT

Thomas Ordóñez

Displacement in Latin America has, for many, taken on the form of indeterminate transits along different routes. The most visible of these are the journeys that lead to North America. Migration, however, does not always imply discrete directionalities for displaced people in this region and has changed dramatically over the last decade. More than 7 million Venezuelans have left their country, most for destinations in South America. However, post pandemic economic conditions in the region, along with ineffective policies to integrate them have led hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans to continue on to the US. Haitian, Cuban and African migrants once established in Brazil, Argentina, Chile and other countries have followed similar logics. The current deportation and border policies of the Trump administration will certainly have effects on these flows once again and the “final” destination for many will become just another place along an uncertain route.

The itineraries of migrants under these conditions include periods of immobility with uncertain duration that can appear as a wide range of phenomena, including tourism, settlement, or simply wandering around. Directionality and destination are not always stable and can change several times in people’s lives. This chapter explores brief snapshots of people on the move from 2018 to 2024 in Colombia and suggests fracture, rather than continuity in transit shapes migration in the region. The concept of fracture also allows me to explore some of the difficulties in studying migrants on the move under constantly shifting migration and border regimes which make following the lives of individual migrants almost impossible.

February 25, 2025

WHAT IS THE “PLACE” IN DISPLACEMENT?

David Owen

This talk argues that the world that we inhabit is one shaped by histories of displacement but that we see neither the extent to which this is the case nor its significance for our ethical lives. We fail to recognise the extent of displacement’s constitutive role in making the contemporary world because then process of displacement is all too often pictured as simply the event of forced movement. We fail to grasp its significance for our ethical lives because we limit ourselves to the register of the right rather than addressing the good life, that is, conditions of human flourishing.

In this paper I focus on the mistake of identifying displacement with forced migration and trying to identify the parameters of an adequate understanding of displacement, but I briefly outline the second issue which can be summed up thus:

Home, Human Flourishing and the Good life

1. Home is a social (& ethical) kind – hence what home *is* is not separable from how it is conceived and the practices of home-making through which it is enacted. It may be complex and multilayered in terms of scale or of linking different places (current home, family home, ancestral home) or both - or quite other relations (e.g., home as an online community).
2. Intrinsic to any practice of home-making is some idea and ideal of home, and of what it is to be at home.
3. Having somewhere that one can be at home is integral to human flourishing. But two issues arise:
 - a. Do your conditions of flourishing undermine the possibility of flourishing of others? Ideals of home can be such that the conditions of their realization undermine the possibility of home-making or being at home for others. These cannot be part of a good life given the relational conditions that a coherent conception of the good life must satisfy. Living well at the expense of others is not a form of good life.
 - b. The scope of where you can be at home (if anywhere) may be very limited – given, for example, patriarchy, racism, and other forms of structural oppression – hence while you may have someplace where you can be at home in the world, this place is not the world as a whole. [Decolonization as home-making]
4. Displacement is a process of unhoming.

Turning to the main part of the paper on displacement, I provide an account of forced movement as comprised of three conditions: the choice of migration from a constrained choice-set, the choice-set being such that at least one choice represents a fundamental value or interest, and the context of choice being one where choosing is necessary. The paper then argues that this fails to recognize (1) that forced movement does not necessarily entail the harm of loss of place [the unfortunate tourist] and (2) that the equation of forced movement with displacement cannot account for the phenomenon of ‘displacement in place’.

In search of better accounts of the harm of displacement, I review Cara Nine’s account built out from the extended mind thesis and Matthew Gibney’s account constructed in terms of the disruption of the social relations within which lifepans are formed. I do not reject the substance of these accounts, but argue that they are not sufficient.

To start the task of providing a more adequate account, I focus on the experience of disorientation that is ubiquitous among displaced persons where disorientation is construed as the experience of not feeling able to (know how to) go on as oneself. I focus on clarifying the character of disorientation in terms of engaged and disengaged concept use and the metaconceptual dilemmas that are confronted by displaced persons which are experienced as the practical dilemma of determining who one is and what one can become under unchosen conditions. On this view, a central part of the harm of displacement is that of having to address such practical metaconceptual dilemmas in which you are required to undergo unchosen transformative experiences.

The paper concludes by acknowledging the further steps needed for this account to be vindicated.

March 3, 2025

**INTIMATE REVOLUTIONS:
SUSTAINING LIFE UNDER WAR AND DISPLACEMENT
Ahmad Qais Munhazim**

Intimate revolutions, my book project is an ethnography. It is set in Afghanistan, the United States, Ireland and Canada narrating the everyday lives of Afghans living defiantly, surviving and loving in times of wars and displacements. It is an ethnography of everyday intimate politics that shake up war and displacement, making life livable and displacement only a short distance away from home and loved ones. From kissing in the backseat of a car to raqs (dance) to maishat (pleasure), andiwali (friendship), ishq (love) and sex (muqarebat), Afghans live in and around the everyday violence of war and displacement defying the odds and rebelling against the forces of such violence that is there to kill, wound, separate, maim and estrange.

Intimate revolutions center around the body as does intimacy. Body stands here as the revolutionary figure that resists, rebels, fights, struggles, remembers yet also thrives and pleasures, sexes, kisses, dances, loves and dreams for return. The Afghan body, gendered and sexed is an archive of wars and borders- multiple and protracted from 1970s to present, from Afghanistan to its exiles, displacements and diasporas. Yet, it is also a body that does intimacy in excess. It is this doing of the body that I am interested in. It is the everyday intimate politics of the Afghan and the Afghan body that spills over pages of this book and narrates stories of Afghan intimacies across multiple places and displacements. Intimate revolutions reveal the power of people, agency of people living under wars and oppressions, occupations, displacements and exiles who curve out affective possibilities and tender relations that become paradoxical to war and displacement, both of which exist to erase lives and the possibilities of life.

Intimate revolution is a book about undoing the orientalist epistemologies around the figure and everyday lives of Afghans who occupy news, books, fictions, policy papers, and nonfiction and above all the minds of westerners as dangerous, savage, damaged, unruly, violent, terrorist and deserving of ungrievable death, as Judith Butler put it. Intimate revolution reveals that nothing is more violent than the empire and its war machines. Nothing is more violent than the empire and its liberal subjects who support droning of other nations, genocide of Palestinians, occupation of Afghans and Iraqis, bombing of Yemenis. Nothing is more violent than borders. Afghans on the pages of this book are living their lives filled with love, friendship, sex, pleasure and play in the face of such realities. This book also centers mostly Afghan men. Afghan men like Palestinian men, like Muslim men, like Arab men, like brown and black immigrant men, have been dehumanized and turned into “monsters, terrorist, fags” as Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai (2003) have called it that the empire and refugee regimes warn people about.

My attempt here is to engage with intimacy through the everyday lives of these men and offer an uncensored yet complicated lens to observe the Afghan man, to place the Afghan man as the center of desire, in the gaze of love, on the beds of lovers, in the hearts of friendships and intimate circles of kinship. My attempt here is to pull the Afghan man out of the monster’s mouth, out of the empire’s terrorist representation and offer it the dignity he deserves. I am not here to save the Afghan man- but to offer a reading of the Afghan man that is tender, that is humanistic, that’s of love, of joy, of desires and pleasures. Intimate Revolutions centers around Afghan masculinities in Afghanistan and its diasporas that have been rendered as sites of threats and risk.

March 10, 2025

**LIVING ARCHIVES:
PALESTINIAN DISPLACEMENT IN LEBANON
Diana Allan**

This talk addresses the concept of “Living Archives,” which has evolved from my ongoing research as an ethnographer, filmmaker and archivist working with Palestinian refugee communities in Lebanon. It is premised on the reimagining of archive less as a collection of documentary records and objects than as community driven process and practice that recenters the lived experience of Palestinians today. The reframing is temporal--the gaze is prospective, reorienting sympathetic and analytic attention to Palestinian futures--but also material, concerned less with the remnant than with what lies in reserve (Pad.ma). A related aim is to explore camp spaces themselves as stateless archives, mnemonically embodied and enacted rather than institutionally housed. This research draws inspiration from recent theorizations of “refusal” and shifts in how Palestinian scholars, writers, and artists are rethinking mnemonic and documentary witness practices. The talk begins with a brief discussion of the Nakba Archive--a grassroots testimonial initiative that has documented oral histories of the forced expulsion of Palestinians in 1948, and the “prehistory” of this project, upon which it builds--before discussing the conceptual significance and potential challenges of approaching the camp as Living Archive.

March 17, 2025

HOUSEKEEPING

Paisley Currah

In this presentation, I suggest the Trump administration's "Defending Women" executive order of January 20, 2025 and similar state-level legislation represent not merely attacks on transgender people, but a broader assault on the administrative state. Through an analysis of the executive order and Montana Senate Bill 458—one of the earliest "Women's Bill of Rights"—I argue that, by imposing a uniform definition of sex across all state legal code, these global policies fundamentally transform how sex functions as a tool of governing.

Historically, government agencies have approached sex classification instrumentally, defining sex differently across contexts based on particular governing rationalities rather than adhering to universal biological definitions. For example, prison officials have often classified sex differently than Divisions of Motor Vehicles, even within the same jurisdiction, because each agency's operational needs required different approaches to sex classification.

The talk, a draft chapter from my book project, *Legislating Gender*, traces this shift from agency-level flexibility to political jurisdiction uniformity, examining how what was once a confusing but little-noticed bureaucratic patchwork has been transformed into stark partisan divisions between red and blue states. Montana's legislation, touching on 41 different parts of the state code, reveals how extensively sex classifications permeate legal frameworks—from anti-discrimination protections to sex classifications in marriage and probate law. The vestigial traces of sex in the code are reminders that sex was instrumental in earlier eras of nation-building and settler colonialism—through anti-miscegenation laws, laws governing homesteading and property rights, cross-dressing laws, and gender-based restrictions on immigration.

Using the metaphor of "housekeeping," I explore how these definitional battles illuminate broader questions of governance. First, housekeeping signals the historical importance of domesticity in constructing gender hierarchies within systems of racial and class oppression. Second, it refers to the informal administrative processes through which sex classification decisions were traditionally made, often considered matters of such little import ("housekeeping" rules) that they required no formal rulemaking. Third, housekeeping evokes domestic governance and the police power's role in promoting population health, safety, and welfare.

By mandating uniform biological definitions across all federal agencies and research, these policies undermine the state's ability to see and respond to population needs in granular detail. The cancellation of hundreds of millions of dollars in research funding—including studies where only a small fraction of subjects were LGBTQ—demonstrates how this "great unwinding" compromises the administrative state's capacity to attend to the needs of the population. Drawing on examples from COVID-19 research and cervical cancer studies, I show how rigid biological definitions produce less accurate, less useful research findings. The chapter concludes by arguing that the struggle for transgender dignity and the fight for accountable, context-attuned government are fundamentally linked. Both require moving beyond the imposition of abstract universals toward embracing contingent, specific approaches that reflect lived experience rather than constrain it.

March 24, 2025

INFORMATION NATION

Hannah Bloch-Wehba

New technologies for acquiring, analyzing, and sharing information are fundamentally changing governance. Nowhere is this more visible than in policing. Tech products and services expand police's capacity to surveil, monitor, and enforce the law. They do so not only by aggregating vast quantities of information but also by capitalizing on decentralization and distribution of information-gathering among widely scattered nodes and networks. Law enforcement's embrace of tech expands its capacity, but it also consolidates the power of the technology industry, which now wields unprecedented influence over policy, individual rights, and statecraft.

In examining how technology transforms law enforcement, this project probes how forms of private economic and technological ordering have increasingly overtaken public processes of governance. Increasingly, I argue, state power is being filtered through private activity. In the process, crucial legal and political safeguards have fallen by the wayside, because reliance on private actors both obscures responsibility and evades traditional doctrinal mechanisms for accountability. Law plays two roles in this transformation. First, legal institutions are crucial building blocks for informational capitalism, and have facilitated the rise of private control. At the same time, however, foundational legal institutions have also been transformed—and, often, weakened—by the rise of technology and private power.

The project takes law enforcement technology as a point of departure from which to examine these dynamics. Its aim is to consider the political and theoretical consequences of law enforcement's embrace of high technology. First, data and networked technologies have enabled law enforcement to embrace more inductive and empiricist modalities that defy conventional understandings of suspicion and probable cause. Relatedly, these modalities give rise to methods that are increasingly programmatic rather than individualized, often keyed more to the enforcement of social order rather than the prevention or detection of criminal offenses. Legal scholars often see these transformations as doctrinal weaknesses. My project, however, examines how technology has facilitated new ways of thinking and knowing that traditional doctrinal approaches overlook.

Second, networked technologies afford new ways of exercising biopolitical power. By redistributing information-gathering practices away from government actors and to private companies, informational capitalism has dispersed control of the population beyond the state, among a range of private stakeholders that use design, data, and corporate policy to govern. The choice to distribute that control is, itself, both an exercise and diffusion of biopolitical power. Constitutional law, however, remains grounded on the theory that control is concentrated in state actors. The result is a growing accountability gap as law enforcement exploits its partnerships with private enterprise to accomplish indirectly what it cannot do directly.

Finally, these partnerships are notable for their opacity. Basic transparency requirements do not extend to the powerful tech companies that supply and support police. The result is that, as law enforcement relies ever more heavily on private technology, the public is quietly losing its ability to hold police accountable, or even to understand how they are surveilling us.

March 31, 2025

**FAMILIAR STRANGERS:
PERCEPTIONS OF STIGMA AND RESPONSES AMONG SYRIAN REFUGEES IN TÜRKİYE**
Çetin Çelik

Türkiye currently hosts approximately 2.7 million Syrian refugees under Temporary Protection Status. While the Turkish government officially discourages further migration, it tacitly tolerates the *long-term presence* of Syrians in order to sustain a flexible and expendable labor force. However, as public attitudes have hardened and symbolic boundaries have been drawn against Syrian refugees as outsiders, the government has increasingly relied on moral and religious discourse to justify their continued stay—likely in response to fears of electoral backlash amid a deepening economic crisis and an increasingly polarized political climate.

This project provides a macro-level analysis of refugee protection in Türkiye as part of the broader externalization of the European Union's migration policies. It demonstrates that this externalization process is not limited to strict border control, but also entails the transfer of the EU's integration agenda to Türkiye—reframed under the term *social harmonization*. The project critically dissects this concept and its operational mechanisms, arguing that the harmonization agenda is strongly shaped by Islamist references. I contend that the discourse of religious brotherhood, central to this process, simultaneously excludes Syrians as legal subjects while including them as workers. This paradox forces many into the informal labor market, where they are rendered highly exploitable.

Analyzing this policy through the lens of the *moral economy*, the project shows that Türkiye's refugee governance frames the presence of Syrians not in terms of legal rights or political recognition, but through narratives of religious solidarity. This humanitarian and moralizing frame replaces political claims with discourses of benevolence—an example of what Didier Fassin calls the substitution of rights by compassion.

In order to assess how this moral economy operates in practice—how it is internalized, resisted, or reinterpreted by the majority society from the perspective of Syrian refugees—and how perceived boundaries shape Syrians' sense of belonging and their responses to exclusion, the project draws on 75 in-depth qualitative interviews with Syrian refugees.

Findings reveal that the moral and symbolic boundaries constructed against Syrians—manifested through stereotypes and stigmatization—function as expressions of everyday nationalism. These boundaries are deeply rooted in the historical and cultural repertoire of anti-Arabism, embedded in Turkish conceptions of nationhood, and intensified by the ongoing economic crisis and political polarization; Syrians perceive that they are not religious insiders but ethnic outsiders. At the same time, the precarious legal status and vulnerable socio-economic position of Syrian refugees significantly constrain their capacity to respond. While many engage in *moral boundary work* to reassert their dignity and legitimize their presence, this process also hampers the development of solidarity between Syrians and Turkish citizens—particularly workers—despite both groups being systematically exploited under prevailing governance strategies.

April 7, 2025

**THE CURRENCY OF LEARNING:
UNIVERSITIES, LABOR, AND THE CREDIT HOUR
Rajbir Singh Judge**

What is a university? Why do we speak as though there is a singular university system especially when the differences between institutions is so extreme? To answer these questions, I turn to a standard object in university infrastructure in the United States and Canada that creates institutional commensurability — one that has often been ignored—the student credit hour or the unit. Today, there is no university in the United States and Canada without the unit; it regulates our time and behaviors and makes professional academic knowledge possible and comparable.

I center the unit to further understand the contradictions about value within the university—and US culture wars more broadly—as well as to open questions about academic labor and knowledge production. The unit is particularly useful in this regard because even while diverse parties have intervened within the university, these changes, too, are premised upon the base measurement of the student credit hour.

Yet the unit is not an inert form. To appreciate the plasticity of the student credit hour, this project looks at a tension at its heart: a tension between a quantitative value premised on the unit's abstract communicative principles and a qualitative value premised on the concrete learning—recitations—that an “average boy” can complete in an hour. However, although it appears that units have radically shifted from measurements tied to solidified and fixed value—the average boy—to speculative value—unanchored to any ‘real’ measurement—I argue that perhaps the unit's very rationality is what gives form to its speculative delirium as the quantitative and qualitative continue to exist uneasily together in the Student Credit Hour and, therefore, the university.

April 28, 2025

II

Theme Seminar

The Politics of Migration and Displacement as a Form of Life

Although most people worldwide live in the country where they were born, the 3 percent who do not and, even more, the 0.5 percent who are forcibly displaced across borders, according to the United Nations, draw disproportionate political attention. Demographically marginal and often socially marginalized, they have come to occupy a central role in national imaginaries and ideologies of identity, often including xenophobic and racist motifs. While much has been written on immigration and asylum, on migrants and refugees, both from the normative perspective of moral and political philosophy and from the empirical standpoint of the social sciences, we focus on the connections between the politics of migration in its varied modes and displacement as a form of life. The theme explores the ways in which social sciences can inform normative approaches, and critical thinking can nourish empirical approaches.

What are the historical convergences and variations in the modes of governmentality that constitute and regulate migration statuses and the living conditions of the displaced? How are the contemporary politics of border control shaped by colonial past, imperial present and continuing practices of racial discrimination, regimes of membership and senses of belonging, technologies of surveillance and selection, regional arenas of cooperation and conflict, and the transnational externalization of migration governance? What tensions, or complementarities, exist between the logics of humanitarianization and securitization? Or between the exploitation of undocumented workers and the rejection of legal routes of entry and residence? How do people on the move invent individual and collective tactics of circumvention and strategies of resistance to carry out their projects? What forms of solidarity develop in relation to them? What affects and values are mobilized in the defense of exiles or the restriction of mobility?

These are only some of the questions we address. We are attentive to research conducted within various national and transnational contexts and from diverse theoretical perspectives, and we have convened scholars from different global regions and intellectual traditions.

DISPLACEMENT AND EXILE – OCTOBER 1, 2024

curated by Didier Fassin and David Owen

Readings

- Ali, Ali. *Conceptualizing Displacement: The Importance of Coercion*.
- Arnone, Anna. *Journeys to Exile: The Constitution of Eritrean Identity Through Narratives and Experiences*.
- Ramsay, Georgina. *Time and the other in crisis: How anthropology makes its displaced object*.
- Said, Edward. *Reflections on Exile* (Ch 17).

Archive

- Fassin, Didier and Anne-Claire Defossez. *Displaced people's perilous journeys: border violence as a public health issue*.
- Owen, David. *From Forced Migration to Displacement?*

BORDER ABOLITIONISM AND RACIAL FASCISM – OCTOBER 15, 2024

curated by Nicholas De Genova and Jeanne Morefield

Readings

- Toscano, Alberto. "Racial Fascism" in *Late Fascism: Race, Capitalism, and the Politics of Crisis*.
- Hernández, Kelly Lytle. *Amnesty or Abolition? Felons, illegals, and the case for a new abolition movement*.
- Stierl, Maurice. *Of Migrant Slaves and Underground Railroads: Movement, Containment, Freedom*.
- Brankamp, Hanno. *Camp Abolition: Ending Carceral Humanitarianism in Kenya (and Beyond)*.

Archive

- Tazzioli, Martina and Nicholas De Genova. *Border Abolitionism: Analytics/Politics*.
- Morefield, Jeanne. *The Belimed: Liberal Internationalism at its Eclipse*.

IMMIGRATION AND LABOR – OCTOBER 29, 2024

curated by E. Tendayi Achiume, Çetin Çelik, and Mahua Sarkar

Readings

- Chuang, Janie. *The U.S. Au Pair Program: Labor Exploitation And The Myth Of Cultural Exchange*.
- Kadarag, Sibel and Deniz Sert. *(Non-)deport to Discipline: The Daily Life of Afghans in Turkey*.
- Hahamovitch, Cindy. *Creating Perfect Immigrants: Guestworkers of the World in Historical Perspective*.
- Mahmud, Tayyab. *Cheaper Than a Slave: Indentured Labor, Colonialism and Capitalism*.

Archive

- Çelik, Çetin. *'Having a German passport will not make me German': reactive ethnicity and oppositional identity among disadvantaged male Turkish second-generation youth in Germany.*
- Sarkar, Mahua. *Outsourcing the Working Class: Guestwork in Turbulent Times.*
- Achiume, Tendayi. *Empire's Refugees.*

BORDERS AND BOUNDARIES – NOVEMBER 26, 2024

curated by Çetin Çelik, Ayten Gündoğdu, Thomas Ordóñez

Readings

- Ataei, Aliyeh. "The Border Merchant" in *Seeing Like a Smuggler: Borders from Below.*
- Balibar, Étienne. "What is a Border?" in *Politics and the Other Scene*
- Fassin, Didier. *Policing Borders, Producing Boundaries. The Governmentality of Immigration in Dark Times.*

Archive

- Gündoğdu, Ayten. *Border Deaths as Forced Disappearances: Frantz Fanon and the Outlines of a Critical Phenomenology.*
- Ordoñez, Juan Thomas and Hugo Eduardo Ramírez Arcos. *Border Jobs: The Business of Work on the Colombia/Venezuela Border.*
- Çelik, Çetin. *Immigrants and Refugees, Tourists and Vagabonds: Why and How They Integrate Differently.*

MULTIMODAL APPROACHES TO DOCUMENTING AND ENGAGING WITH THE EXPERIENCE OF DISPLACEMENT – JANUARY 28, 2025

curated by Diana Allan, Ulla Berg, Qais Munhazaim

Readings

- Achilli, Luigi and Alice Massari. "Enter the Boogeyman Representations of Human Smuggling in Mainstream Narratives of Migration." in *Global Human Smuggling.*
- Lê Espiritu, Y[m] and Lan Duong. *Feminist Refugee Epistemology.*
- Wester, Tom. *Listening with Displacement: Sound, Citizenship, and Disruptive Representations of Migration.*

Archive

- Allan - What Bodies Remember: Sensory Experience as Historical Counterpoint in the Nakba Archive." in *An Oral History of the Palestinian Nakba.*
- Berg, Ulla. "Unfortunate Visibilities: The Transnational Circulation of Image-Objects." in *Mobile Selves: Race, Migration, and Belonging in Peru and the US.*
- Munhazim, Ahmad Qais. *Clandestine fashion amidst war and migration: Murat, trans Afghan women and politics of (un)belonging.*

AI AND DIGITAL BORDERS – FEBRUARY 11, 2025

curated by Ulla Berg and Ayten Gündoğdu

Readings

- Chaar-López, Iván. *Sensing Intruders: Race and the Automation of Border Control*.
- Molnar, Petra. "The Growing Panopticon of Border Technologies" and "Recognizing Liars' AI Lie Detectors, Voice Printing, and Digital Incarceration" in *The Walls Have Eyes: Surviving Migration in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*.
- University of Essex. *Digital Border Governance: A Human Rights Based Approach*.

Archive

- Achiume, Tendayi. *Digital Racial Borders*.
- Browne, Simone. *Digital Epidermalization: Race, Identity and Biometrics*.
- *International Migration*. Selected commentaries from Special Issue on "AI and Borders."

CHILDREN, PLACE AND MIGRATION – FEBRUARY 25, 2025

curated by Catherine Allerton (London School of Economics and Political Science)

Archive

- Allerton, Catherine. *Discordant temporalities of migration and childhood*.
- Allerton, Catherine. *Impossible children: illegality and excluded belonging among children of migrants in Sabah, East Malaysia*.

DISPLACEMENT – MARCH 11, 2025

curated by E. Tendayi Achiume, Nicholas De Genova and Jeanne Morefield

Readings

- Malkki, Liisa. *Refugees and Exile: From "Refugee Studies" to the National Order of Things*.
- Papadopoulos, Dimitris & Vassilis Tsianos. *After citizenship: autonomy of migration, organisational ontology and mobile commons*
- Said, Edward. *The Art of Displacement: Mona Hatoum's Logic of Irreconcilables*.
- Tzouvala, Ntina. *Invested in Whiteness: Zimbabwe, the von Pezold Arbitration, and the Question of Race in International Law*.

Archive

- Achiume, Tendayi. Final Climate and Racial Justice Report of the UN Special Rapporteur: *Contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance*.
- De Genova, Nicholas. *The 'native's point of view' in the anthropology of migration*.
- Morefield, Jeanne. "A Cluster of Flowing Currents: Theory Unresolved and Groundless" in *Unsettling The World*.

SOLIDARITY – APRIL 8, 2025

curated by Anne-Claire Defossez, Leszek Koczanowicz, and Mahua Sarkar

Readings

- Biao, Xiao. *Compliant Bodies?*
- Rodrik, Delphine. *Solidarity at the Border: How the EU and US Criminalize Aid to Migrants.*
- Tazzioli, Martina. *What is Left of Migrants' Spaces? Transversal Alliances and the Temporality of Solidarity.*
- Wilder, Gary. "Solidarity" in *Thinking with Balibar: A Lexicon of Conceptual Practice.*

Archive

- Bauman, Zygmunt. *Solidarity: A Word in Search of Flesh.*
- Koczanowicz, Leszek. "Non-Consensual Democracy: Dialogue, Solidarity and Democratic Politics" in *Politics of Dialogue: Non-Consensual Democracy And Critical Community.*
- Jaeggi, Rahel. "Solidarity and Indifference" in *Solidarity In Health And Social Care In Europe*
- Bojadzije, Manuela et al. *Solidarity.*
- Symposium on "Transdisciplinary Approaches to Migrant Solidarity" in *Theory, Law, and Praxis.*
- Forst, Rainer. *Solidarity: Concept, Conceptions, and Contexts.*
- Tazzioli, Martina and William Walters. *Migration, Solidarity, and the Limits of Europe.*

FINAL CONFERENCE TO DISCUSS UPCOMING COLLECTIVE VOLUME – APRIL 22, 2025



INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY
1, EINSTEIN DRIVE
PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY 08540
www.sss.ias.edu