

# ASIA AM 178: Critical Refugee Studies

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**QUARTER:** Fall 2021

**PLACE:** UCLA acknowledges the Tongva-Gabrielino peoples as the traditional land caretakers of Tovaangar.

This undergraduate lecture course introduces students to the field of critical refugee studies. Rather than depict the refugee as a victim of displacement or an object of sociological study, this course centers the refugee as a subject of knowledge production. We inquire what critical analyses of war, empire, militarism, and humanitarianism are illuminated via a refugee epistemology. This course is transnational and intersectional in analysis. We begin by mapping the field of critical refugee studies, examining how the refugee highlights the limitations of the nation-state order to guarantee human rights. We will then focus on how particular refugee subjects—Vietnamese, Lao, Cambodian, Palestinian, Iranian, Central American—negotiate their refugee status via practices of storytelling, home-making, and activism. The central question guiding this course is: What critiques of nation-state violence, imperial intervention, and humanitarian discourse does a critical refugee studies epistemology make possible?

## COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- critically analyze how refugees are represented in government documents, political speeches, and popular media
- understand and articulate a critical refugee studies framework
- apply a critical refugee studies framework to other refugee populations not discussed in class
- explain why critical refugee studies is an important part of Asian American Studies

## STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Throughout this course, students will learn how to:

- identify the main argument in different disciplinary texts
- put different texts in conversation with one another
- discuss sensitive topics in a critical, generous, and productive manner
- engage in cultural critique and formal analysis
- research, draft, and record a podcast

## TEXTS

The following books are available in e-book format through UCLA Library. Hard copies are available for purchase through the UCLA Bookstore. All other readings can be found on CCLE.

- Souvankham Thammavongsa, *How to Pronounce Knife: Stories* (New York: Little Brown and Company, 2020)
- Dina Nayeri, *The Ungrateful Refugee: What Immigrants Never Tell You* (New York: Catapult Books, 2019)
- Valeria Luiselli, *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2017)

## **WEEK 1: Introduction & Post-WII Production of Refugeehood**

**Sept. 27:** Heaven Crawley, “The Politics of Refugee Protection in a Post-COVID-19 World,” *Social Sciences* 10, no. 81 (2021): 1-14.

“[Afghanistan in Focus with Mariam Hotaki, Nawa Lodin, and Malalai Farooqi Ramadan](#),” SWANA (South and West Asia and North Africa) Region Radio.

**In-class: Introductory lecture, review syllabus.**

**Sept. 29:** Hannah Arendt, “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man,” in *The Origins of Totalitarianism (1951)* (New York, Harcourt Inc: 1976), 267-302.

## **WEEK 2: Refugees as Bare Life?**

**Oct 4:** Hannah Arendt, “We Refugees,” in *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile*, ed. Marc Robinson (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994), 110-119.

Giorgio Agamben, “We Refugees,” trans. Michael Rocke, *Symposium* 49, no. 2 (1995): 114-119.

**Oct 6:** Debarti Sanyal, “Calais’s ‘Jungle’: Refugees, Biopolitics, and the Arts of Resistance,” *Representations* 139 (Summer 2017): 1-33.

## **WEEK 3: Critical Refugee Studies: Space and Time**

**Oct 11:** Y n L  Espiritu, “Critical Refuge(e) Studies” and “Military Refuge(es),” in *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)* (Berkeley: UC Press, 2014), 1-48.

Evyn L  Espiritu Gandhi, “[Ep. 3: Operation New Life](#),” *Memoirs Pasifika Podcast*.

**Oct 13:** Vinh Nguyen, “Refugeetude: When Does a Refugee Stop Being a Refugee?,” *Social Text* 37, no. 2 (June 2019): 109-131.

S2 Ep. 1-3 of “[Distorted Footprints: A Critical Refugee Studies Podcast](#).”

**In class: Pass out study guide, introduce podcast proposal assignment.**

## **WEEK 4: Recap, Podcasts, and Midterm**

**Oct. 18:** S2 Ep. 4-9 of “[Distorted Footprints: A Critical Refugee Studies Podcast](#).”

**In class: Discuss “Distorted Footprints” episodes. Review study guide. Form podcast groups and discuss podcast proposal.**

**Oct 20:** Suggested: “[Critical Refugee Studies: Reconceptualizing the Refugee Crisis with Dr. Yen Le Espiritu and Dr. Lila Sharif from the Critical Refugee Studies Collective](#),”

SWANA (South and West Asia and North Africa) Region Radio

**In class: Open book midterm (in class or via Zoom)**

## **WEEK 5: Refugee Home-making: Lao Refugees**

**Oct. 25:** Souvankham Thammavongsa, *How to Pronounce Knife: Stories* (New York: Little Brown and Company, 2020), “How to Pronounce Knife” - “The Universe Would Be So Cruel.”

Phillipe Thao, “[Sunisa Lee didn’t owe the U.S. gold](#),” *Washington Post*, 29 July 2021.

**In class: Work on podcast proposal, [Interview](#) with Thammavongsa (question about BLM, contemporary moment 11:49-16:35).**

**Oct. 27:** Souvankham Thammavongsa, *How to Pronounce Knife: Stories* (New York: Little Brown and Company, 2020), “Edge of the World” - “Picking Worms.”

Suggested: Rita Phetmixay, “[E0: Rita Phetmixay](#),” *Healing Out Lao’d Podcast*.

**In class:** [Interview with Thammavongsa](#) (question about want, refugee experience, 16:35-19:21, question about writing refugees 19:21-23:19, question about form of short story and refugee refusal, refugees in Canada 26:34-33:12)

**Podcast proposal due before class. Discuss podcast research worksheet and paper.**

### **WEEK 6: Refugee Temporality: Vietnamese and Cambodian Refugees**

**Nov. 1:** Ly Thuy Nguyen, “Queer Dis/inheritance and Refugee Futures,” *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (2020): 218-235.

**In class:** Guest speaker, Ly Thuy Nguyen. [Register for the Zoom meeting link.](#)

**Nov. 3:** Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, “Cambodian American Memory Work: Justice and the ‘Cambodian Syndrome,’” *positions* 20, no. 3 (2012): 805–830.

**In class:** Watch [Donuts for Dollars](#). Work on podcast research worksheet and paper.

### **WEEK 7: Exile and the Refugee Settler Condition: Palestinian Refugees**

**Nov 8:** Edward Said, “Reflections on Exile,” *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 137-149.

Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Sarah Ihmoud, “Exiled at Home: Writing Return and the Palestinian Home,” *Biography* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 377-397.

**Nov 10:** Evyn Lê Espiritu Gandhi, “Vexed Solidarities: Vietnamese Israelis and the Question of Palestine,” *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory* 29, no. 1 (2018): 8-28.

“[Episode One: Khansaa's Story](#),” *Refugee Stories Podcast*.

**Podcast research worksheet and paper due before class. Talk about podcast script.**

### **WEEK 8: Refugee In/gratitude: Iranian Refugees**

**Nov 15:** Dina Nayeri, *The Ungrateful Refugee: What Immigrants Never Tell You* (New York: Catapult Books, 2019), Part One, pp. 1-67.

**In class:** Work on podcast script.

**Nov 17:** Dina Nayeri, *The Ungrateful Refugee: What Immigrants Never Tell You* (New York: Catapult Books, 2019), Parts Two and Three, pp. 68-265.

**In class:** Guest Speaker, Dina Nayeri. Q&A session via Zoom.

### **WEEK 9: Asylum Narratives: Iranian Refugees**

**Nov. 22:** Dina Nayeri, *The Ungrateful Refugee: What Immigrants Never Tell You* (New York: Catapult Books, 2019), Parts Four and Five: pp. 266-346.

**Nov. 24:** Elif Sari, “Lesbian Refugees in Transit: The Making of Authenticity and Legitimacy in Turkey,” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 24, no. 2 (2020): 140-158.

“[Episode Eight: Nadim's Story](#) - A Bangladeshi asylum seeker living in the UK,” *Refugee Stories Podcast*.

**Script of podcast due before class.**

## **WEEK 10: Border Regimes: Central American Refugees**

**Nov. 29:** Valeria Luiselli, *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2017), Introduction, Chapters I and II: 1-54.

**In class: Work on final podcast.**

**Dec 1:** Valeria Luiselli, *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in 40 Questions* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 2017), Chapters III and IV, Coda: 55-106.

### **FINAL: Monday, December 6, 2021**

Please submit your final podcast materials to [Distortedfootprintsod@gmail.com](mailto:Distortedfootprintsod@gmail.com) by **midnight on Saturday, Dec. 4**. Then, by **midnight on Monday, Dec. 6** please complete the Final Podcast Discussion-Based Activity on CCLE and submit your Final Podcast Individual Evaluation Form.

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### **GRADE BREAKDOWN**

Midterm Participation: 10%

Final Participation: 10%

Midterm Exam: 25%

Final Podcast Project

Podcast Proposal: 5%

Podcast research worksheet and paper: 10%

Script of podcast: 15%

Final Podcast Discussion-Based Activity: 10%

Final Group Podcast: 10%

Final Podcast Individual Evaluation: 5%

### **PARTICIPATION**

Lectures will be supplemented with in-class discussions. As long as you are healthy, you are expected to come to class on time ready to discuss the assigned readings. Please wear a mask during class to ensure collective well-being. For those who cannot attend due to COVID or other health-related issues, please tune in via the Zoom live-stream or watch the Zoom recording at a later time. PowerPoint slides for all lectures will be posted on CCLE after class. Please notify the professor if you have to miss class.

Please prepare for class by reading the assigned readings generously but critically. What is the central argument of each text? What are some potential limitations of the text? How does the text relate to others we've read for during this course? Your participation grade will be based on a participation self-evaluation form that you will complete during Weeks 5 and 10 and will take into account pandemic accommodations.

### **MIDTERM EXAM**

The open-book midterm exam (Week 4) will consist of vocabulary definitions and short-essay questions that will cover key themes and topics discussed throughout the course. Students may take the exam in-person in our assigned classroom or at home via Zoom. Students must

complete the exam during the allotted class period (1 hour and 15 min) unless alternative accommodations are made.

### FINAL PODCAST PROJECT

Throughout the quarter, you will work in groups of 3-4 students to conduct research on a refugee topic not discussed in class. You can choose to either focus on a population not addressed during the course—such as Somali or Rohingya refugees—or provide another perspective on a population discussed during the course. The goal is to analyze your case study using a critical refugee studies framework.

### **GRADE CALCULATION**

A, 93 and above	C+, 77-79.99
A-, 90-92.99	C, 73-76.99
B+, 87-89.99	C-, 70-72.99
B, 83-86.99	D+, 67-69.99
B-, 80-82.99	D, 60-66.99
	F, 59.99 and below

### **LATE SUBMISSION POLICY**

Late submissions will be docked 5% for each week that they are late unless alternative accommodations are arranged. Given the ongoing pandemic, please don't hesitate to reach out if you need an extension.

### **EXTRA CREDIT**

Several times throughout the quarter there will be extra credit opportunities to attend online and in-person events related to this class. If you attend one of the approved events and would like to receive extra credit, please upload to the "Extra Credit" folder on CCLE a photo/screenshot of yourself at the event plus a one-paragraph reflection. You may earn up to 3 extra credit points over the course of the quarter.