ASIA AM 178: Critical Refugee Studies  
Evyn Lê Espiritu Gandhi, PhD

**TIME:** Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:00-12:15pm  
**PLACE:** Public Affairs 2270  
**CONTACT:** elegandhi@ucla.edu  
**OFFICE HOURS:** Thursdays 1:30-4:30pm in Rolfe 3327

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 made visible via a refugee epistemology. This course is transnational and intersectional in analysis. We begin by mapping the political and theoretical field of critical refugee studies, attending to the ways in which the refugee figure highlights the limits of the nation-state order to guarantee human rights. We will then focus on how particular refugee subjects—Vietnamese, Cambodian, Lao, Syrian, Iranian, Palestinian, Central American—negotiate their refugee status and stories via cultural production. During this course, we will identify what criticisms of state violence, imperial intervention, and humanitarian discourse a refugee epistemology makes possible, as well as inquire how the different formal qualities of each piece of literature or film dictate the shape and meaning of the refugee intervention.

**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**
Please acquire the following books. All other readings can be found on CCLE.
- Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* (New York: Penguin, 2019)
WEEK 1: Post-WII Production of Refugeehood

Jan 7: In class: Introductory lecture, review syllabus


WEEK 2: Refugees as Bare Life?


Extra Credit: Jan 13: Dr. Manu Karuka, “Empire’s Tracks,” 3:00-4:30pm in Young Research Library, Main Conference Room. Student workshop, 5:00-6:00pm in Rolfe 2125.

WEEK 3: Critical Refugee Studies: Space and Time


WEEK 4: Recap and Midterm Exam


In class: Discuss podcast proposal. Review study guide.

Jan 30: In-class Midterm.

Extra Credit: Jan 31: Conference on Central American Migration, 9:00am-5:00pm, Luskin School of Public Affairs Building, Room 2355

WEEK 5: Vietnamese Refugees and the Afterlives of War


In class: Guest lecture by Janet Chen on audio recording tips. Work on podcast proposal.


Podcast proposal due. Discuss podcast research worksheet and paper.
WEEK 6: Surviving and Thriving: Rita Phetmixay on Healing out Lao’d

In Class: Screen Rita Phetmixay, Phetmixay Means Fighter (2017).

Feb 13: Rita Phetmixay, “E0: Rita Phetmixay,” Healing Out Lao’d
Rita Phetmixay, “E13: Ova Saopeng,” Healing Out Lao’d

In Class: Guest lecture by Rita Phetmixay.

Extra credit: Feb 14: Lamis Abdelaaty, “Discrimination and Delegation: Explaining State Responses to Refugees,” 12:00-1:30pm, Bunche Hall, Room 10383

WEEK 7: Feminist Refugee Epistemology and Militarized Archives

In class: Guest lecture by Lan Duong. Podcast research worksheet and paper due.


In class: Guest lecture by Davorn Sisavath. Brunch served starting at 10:30am.

WEEK 8: Palestinian Refugeehood and Vexed Solidarities under Settler Colonialism


Extra Credit: Feb 28: Conference on Venezuela’s Refugee Crisis, 12:00-3:00pm in Haines 352

WEEK 9: Negotiating Refuge in the Wake of the Iranian Revolution


Script of podcast due.

Extra Credit: Mar 6: Lucy Mayblin, 12:00-1:30pm, Bunche Hall, Room 10383

WEEK 10: Central American Refugees and U.S. Empire


Extra Credit: Mar 13: David FitzGerald, “Refugee Beyond Reach: How Rich Democracies Repel Asylum Seekers,” 12-1:30pm, Bunche 10383

FINAL: Wednesday, Mar 18: 3:00-6:00pm
Final Podcast due. Final Podcast Presentations.

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GRADE BREAKDOWN
Participation: 15%
Midterm Exam: 25%
Final Podcast Project
  Proposal: 5%
  Podcast research worksheet and paper (4-5 pages): 15%
  Script of podcast: 15%
  Final Podcast Presentation: 10%
  Final Podcast: 15%

PARTICIPATION
Lectures will be supplemented with in-class discussions. You are expected to come to class on time having read the assigned readings. Read the assigned readings generously but critically. What is the central argument of each text? Does the historical evidence support the argument? What are some potential limitations of the text? Please formulate discussion questions in preparation of class regarding material you either do not understand, or want to probe further. Unexcused absences will negatively impact your participation grade.

MIDTERM EXAM
The midterm exam (Week 4) will consist of vocabulary definitions and short-essay questions that will cover key themes and topics discussed throughout the course.

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

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LATE SUBMISSION POLICY
All late submissions will be docked 10% for each day that they are late.

EXTRA CREDIT
Several times throughout the semester there will be extra credit opportunities to attend events related to critical refugee studies on campus or in LA. Some of these events are listed on the syllabus. I will let you know of other eligible events as they come up. 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 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.