

enmc 8500 The Refugee
tues 6:30-9 pm, Wilson 142
prof. Mrinalini Chakravorty
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar will explore how refugees have portrayed themselves and have been portrayed in literature, memoir, testimony, film, and art. Mindful of the current political crisis over refugees, we will focus mainly on the post-45 years and contextualize our study of refugee art by reading widely from law, political and globalization theory, border studies, anthropology, history, and policy. The 1951 Refugee convention adopts a human-rights framework for extending rights to those forced to migrate from the country of their nationality for fear of persecution. Tensions arise when the right of refugees 'to seek and enjoy asylum' conferred by the UN is confronted by the lack of obligation felt by particular nation-states to receive them. As a consequence, the political discourse over refugees is often framed in terms citizenship, host state policies, legal bans, rights, humanitarianism, aid, lack of agency, border security, disasters, war, and strife. Further, a whole new lexicon distinguishing refugees, asylum seekers, migrants, and aliens describe displaced persons with varied legal and political nuance. In our study we will attempt to parse these differences to gauge their significance within contemporary refugee regimes.

Becoming stateless, however, entails seeking refuge elsewhere and this is more than a legal and political problem. In so doing, the refugee often becomes a limit case for ideas about hospitality, sympathy, sharing, compassion, estrangement, and notions of cultural bearing. How, we will ask, do artistic representations of refugees mediate the personal, social, psychological and material terrain of forced migration given the rights-based legal framing that exists? Our study will take certain mass displacements as flashpoints – Jewish and Palestinian displacements, the Partition of India, decolonial wars in Africa, Vietnam, and Syria – to see how the refugee experience is given depth through artistic engagements. We will consider how the experience of being in camps, journeying across borders, homelessness, dispossession, familial loss, and trauma shapes the precarious condition of refugees. Our goal will be to appraise whether and how aesthetic attempts to capture the condition of refugees respond to and at times revise political discourses about those in exile.

Our reading list includes work by Hannah Arendt, Primo Levi, Giorgio Agamben, Edward Said, Gloria Anzaldua, Liisa Malki, W.G. Sebald, Mahmoud

Darwish, Caryl Phillips, Sadaat Manto, Ghassan Kanafani, and Viet Nguyen.

This seminar is open to all students interested in thinking more about the refugee crisis. Please be ready to read widely and across disciplines, and to engage experts in other fields such as the law, social work, and politics. The course will also involve some outreach work.

Required texts available from UVA bookstore

Primary Texts

Jeremy Harding, *Border Vigils* (Verso)

Edward Said, *After The Last Sky* (Columbia UP)

Ghassan Kanafani, *Men in the Sun* (Lynne Reinner)

Viet Thanh Ngyuen, *The Refugees* (Grove Press)

W.G. Sebald, *The Emigrants* (New Directions)

Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* (Touchstone)

Marie Beatrice Umutesi, *Surviving the Slaughter* (University of Wisconsin Press)

Caryl Phillips, *A Distant Shore* (Vintage)

Kamila Shamsie, *Burnt Shadows* (Picador)

Mohsin Hamid, *Exit West*. (Riverhead)

Dinaw Mengestu, *The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears* (Riverhead)

Anita Desai, *Baumgartner's Bombay* (Mariner Books)

Ben Rawlence, *City of Thorns* (Picador)

note: all other critical/theoretical readings are on uvacollab

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- **attendance and participation – 15%**

All seminar participants are expected to read all assigned material critically and with care. Additionally, it is mandatory that you come to class prepared for active engagement with course topics, and are open to collaborative learning. Effective engagement with the issues raised in our class can only happen through your active, vocal participation. Please keep in mind that the more you speak, the more lively and productive our classes will be. Because this is a graduate seminar, it is expected that you will proactively offer critical insights and intervene in discussions so as to shape the direction of the course. As part of your participation you will also be required to periodically generate discussion questions and/or comments about assigned readings that you should email to me before class.

You must attend all class meetings, and you must be on time. Arriving late and leaving early are disruptive and will affect your participation grade adversely.

Other ways to get involved: While offered through the English department, this course is meant to be broadly interdisciplinary in its investigation of the figure of the refugee – in anthropology, sociology, political theory, philosophy, law, and history. To that end, you are strongly encouraged to participate in volunteer activities related to the course topic in the world at large. You are also asked to integrate these activities into our discussions, your papers, and your research project to shed additional light on our work in the classroom. For example, you may want to compile oral histories with willing participants (whose identities may be masked) so that these life narratives become a living record of people's journeys and lives. You may design an online site where these stories are published, or integrate these interviews into a research project in some way.

Some helpful organizations and resources to contact to facilitate your work with refugee activism:

- International Rescue Committee, Charlottesville: <https://www.rescue.org/united-states/charlottesville-va>
- Refugees International: <https://www.refugeesinternational.org/what/>
- The Critical Refugee Studies Collective: <http://criticalrefugeestudies.com>
- Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals at UVA: <http://daca.uva.org>
- UVA Immigration Law Clinic: <http://content.law.virginia.edu/academics/clinic/immigration-law-clinic>
- Charlottesville Legal Aid Justice Center: <https://www.justice4all.org>
- Human Rights Study Project, UVA: <http://content.law.virginia.edu/academics/program/human-rights-program?section=student-organizations>

- **response papers – 20%**

This course is about acquiring a conceptual vocabulary as well as developing a critical and historically informed understanding of the most pressing concerns related to refugees at the contemporary moment. Additionally, it is also designed to hone specific skills in close-reading and textual analysis that are integral to literary study.

Towards these ends, you are asked to submit TWO formal two-page (single spaced) responses. One of them must address a conceptual, legal, social, or historical problem that affects refugees. This response must deal with one of the critical readings for the course, alongside a real-world instance of the problem you research. You may integrate field-work observations into your response if you are participating in any voluntary activities involving refugees.

The other of your responses, must also address a critical text but as it pertains to an aesthetic one (novel, art work, memoir, film). Working closely with both texts, your response should provide a succinct but careful exegesis of an issue in the critical text and its representative resonance in the artistic one.

On occasion you will also be asked to bring a brief (one to two paragraph) response to class on the day's readings. These responses are to be less scripted (can be associative and free ranging) in the manner in which they raise questions or propose answers to any of the readings.

- **class presentation - 15%**

You will be responsible for leading class discussion (15-20 minutes) on assigned material for one meeting during the semester. The presentation is your opportunity to develop a pedagogical relationship with the material covered. You should think of the presentation as a way to develop your teaching skills by presenting a critical assessment of the texts that provokes sustained discussion (you are not expected to read a paper). Your presentation should illustrate your engagement with the topic and give an original interpretation of the material that frames the material by highlighting the most relevant aspects raised in it. Ideally, your assessment will be generative of our critical journey through the text for that day. You should plan on preparing a handout that a) summarizes your main points; b) references one or two passages from our reading which we are to examine more closely in class; and c) raises relevant questions for the class to consider (no more than three). You may bring in any additional materials – texts, film, photographs, maps, charts, cultural artifacts etc. to supplement our discussion.

- **research paper - 50%**

The final paper (~20pp; ~8000 words) should explore issues raised in the course but extend these ideas to research beyond the syllabus. In this paper you may further explore theoretical materials and methodologies of this course in ways that are relevant to your own research interests. Specifically, you should either i) develop a line of argument that engages one or more of the key theoretical concepts explored in the course in the context of a primary literary or filmic text; or ii) engage in a sustained critical analysis of a well-defined theoretical problem or concept.

As part of your research, you will be expected to consider the most salient critics (not limited to ones we have read) on the topic and demonstrate how your own work is situated within the critical discourse. You have a fair amount of latitude in choosing your topics, but I would like you to consult with me about your topic

by the 9th week of class. The paper should be in scholarly prose, and adhere to MLA guidelines.

COURSE SCHEDULE

- Week 1 Aug 22 INTRODUCTION
- Week 2 Aug 29 DEFINITIONS – The Early Years
- 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees
 - 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights
 - Andrew Shacknove, “Who is a Refugee?”
 - David Martin, “The Refugee Concept: On Definitions, Politics, and the Careful Use of a Scarce Resource”
 - Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*
- Week 3 Sept 05 STATELESSNESS & DISPLACED PERSONS
- Hannah Arendt *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1948), Chapter 9
 - Benedict Anderson, Selection from *Imagined Communities* (2 parts)
 - Margaret Macneill, From *By the Rivers of Babylon*
 - W.G. Sebald, *The Emigrants* OR Anita Desai, *Baumgartner’s Bombay*
- Week 4 Sept 12 CAMPS
- Giorgio Agamben, Selections from *Homo Sacer*
 - Rosemary Marangoly George, Selection from *The Politics of Home*
 - Sarah Lischer, from *Dangerous Sanctuaries: Refugee Camps, Civil Wars and the Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid*
 - Ben Rawlence, *City of Thorns*
- Week 5 Sept 19 FORCED MIGRATIONS
- Liisa Malkki, “Refugees and Exile: From “Refugee Studies” to the National Order of Things”
 - Jacqueline Bhabha, “Embodied Rights: Gender Persecution, State Sovereignty, and Refugees”
 - Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”
 - Marie Umutesi, *Surviving the Slaughter*
- Week 6 Sept 26 (IN)SECURITY & ASSYLUM
- Michel Foucault, Selections from *Security, Territory,*

Populations

- Anne Hammerstad, "Securitisation and Forced Migration"
- Matthew Price, "Persecution Complex: Justifying Asylum Law's Preference for Persecuted People"
- Eyal Weizman, "Checkpoints" from *Hollow Land*
- Caryl Philips, *A Distant Shore*

****First response paper due**

Week 7

FALL BREAK – SEPT 30 - OCT 03

Week 8 Oct 10

BORDER CROSSINGS

- Edward Said, "States" & "Interiors" from *After the Last Sky*
- Ghassan Kanafani, "Men in the Sun;" "Letter from Gaza"
- Etienne Balibar, "At the Borders of Europe"
- Gloria Anzaldua, Selections from *Borderlands*
- Jeremy Harding, *Border Vigils*

Week 9 Oct 17

**DIALOGUE: Professor David Martin (UVA Law) & DREAMERS @ UVA
WRITING WORKSHOP**

Week 10 Oct 24

QUESTIONS OF HUMANITARIANISM

- Lisa Malkki, 'Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization,'
- Prem Rajaram, "Humanitarianism and Representation of the Refugee"
- Hugo Slim, "Doing the Right Thing: Relief Agencies, Moral Dilemmas and Moral Responsibility in Political Emergencies and War"
- Mohsin Hamid, *No Exit*

Week 11 Oct 31

FILM: *Fire at Sea* (dir. Gianfranco Rosi, 2016)

****Second response paper due**

Week 12 Nov 7

RESETTLEMENT & EXILE

- Oliver-Smith and de Sherbinin, "Something Old and Something New: Resettlement in the Twenty-first Century"
- Edward Said, Selections on Exile
- Sadaat Manto, "Toba Tek Singh"

- Viet Thanh Nguyen, *The Refugees*

DIALOGUE: INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMISSION
(Harriet Kuhr, Director, International Rescue Committee-
Charlottesville)

Week 13 Nov 14

REPATRIATIONS

- Yen Le Espiritu and Lan Duong, "Feminist Refugee Epistemology"
 - B.S. Chimni, "From Resettlement to Involuntary Repatriation: Towards a Critical History of Durable Solutions to Refugee Problems"
 - James Hathaway, "The Meaning of Repatriation"
 - Dinaw Mengestu, *Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*
- DIALOGUE: Lan Duong (CRITICAL REFUGEE STUDIES COLLECTIVE, Professor, UC, Riverside)

Week 14 Nov 21

FINAL PROJECTS ROUNDTABLE

THANKSGIVING RECESS – NOV 22-26

Week 15 Nov 28

POST-9/11 HOSPITALITY

- Jacques Derrida, Selections from *Of Hospitality*
- Matthew Gibney, "Security and the Ethics of Asylum after September 11" & "A Thousand Little Guantanos: Western States and Measures to Prevent the Arrival of Refugees"
- Kamala Shamsie, *Burnt Shadows*

Week 16 Dec 05

NEW DIRECTIONS: CLIMATE CHANGE & OPEN BORDERS

- Teresa Hayter, *Open Borders: The Case Against Immigration Controls*
- Joseph Carens, "The Case for Open Borders"
- Jane McAdams, "Conceptualizing Climate-Related Movement"
- Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History"

****Research paper due to my mailbox Monday Dec 11th, 5 pm**