



The University of Western Ontario

## English 9167A Refugee Narratives

UC 4415; Tuesdays 12:30-3:30pm.

Office Hours: UC 4432 on Thursdays 12:30pm-2:30pm.

To schedule a meeting during office hours or at another time, please email me: [tphu@uwo.ca](mailto:tphu@uwo.ca)

**Professor: Dr. Thy Phu**

### Course description:

In 1951, the UNHCR ratified the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, a landmark document that defined the refugee, what his or her rights are, and the responsibilities of states with respect to claims for asylum. Because asylum seekers are expected to tell their stories as part of this process, the document highlights the importance of narrative as a means of making “refugeeness” legible. This seminar explores the significance of narrative, focusing on formal conventions and subversions to these conventions. Though it takes as one starting point the UN definition of refugee, as an interdisciplinary course, the seminar also develops a cultural studies approach to narrative, *beyond* legal frameworks. We will turn take account of other cultural forms for creative expression of this condition and experience, including literature, popular storytelling, film, and photography, which we will explore by drawing on the analytical tools afforded by the emerging interdisciplinary field of critical refugee studies. Through close engagement with select cultural texts, which we will analyze drawing on these critical tools, this course will consider stock figures and common themes in refugee narratives—including gratitude and ingratitude; displacement and resettlement; problems and solutions—and the cultural work that they do. We will also examine the ways forms of refugee subjectivity and the function that the figure of the refugee serves in upholding and unsettling settler colonialism.

### Course objectives:

Students in this course will learn to analyze contemporary cultural texts; to summarize, synthesize, and engage with theoretical writings in critical refugee studies; and to develop and apply skills in research, oral presentation, and critical writing.

**Required texts:** Course readings (I will make them available to you electronically)

**Novels and short stories: (available at the University Bookstore)**

Leila Abdelrazack, *Baddawi*

Jennifer Erpenbeck, *Go, Gone, Went*

Rawi Hage, *Cockroach*

Thomas King, *The Back of the Turtle*

Kim Thúy, *Ru*

Nam Le, *The Boat*

Mohsin Hamid, *Exit West*

### Film/Video

Available for viewing on-site at the AV library in UC 1126 or through Netflix)

*District 9* (Dir. Neil Blomkamp, 2009)

*Children of Men* (Dir. Alfonso Cuarón, 2006)

*Human Flow* (Dir. Ai Weiwei, 2017) – this will be screened in-class.

**Evaluation**

Attendance and participation	15%
Weekly reflection pieces (due by 5pm Monday before class)	15%
Annotated bibliography and final paper proposal	10%
Presentation (20 minutes)	20%
Symposium presentation (6-7 minutes)	5%
Final essay (4000-5000 words)	35%