

Carleton University*
Fall 2023 Preliminary Course Outline
Department of English

ENGL 2920B
Topics in Migration & Decolonization:
Translating Refugee, Migrant, Displaced Persons Experiences across Distances and Dislocations

Prerequisites: second year standing

Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:05-11:25am
In-person, not suitable for online students

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***On the traditional, unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe Peoples**

******This is a preliminary syllabus only—texts and assignments are subject to change. A complete version will be available closer to the start of the term.******

From the mid-20th Century when Hannah Arendt identified the European Jewish refugee as a stateless person without rights through to the civil wars and violence that drive Syrians, Latin Americans, Afghans, Ukrainians, Sudanese, and Uyghurs to pursue migration routes across oceans and deserts via border security zones, the plight of the migrant is something that often feels remote and far away. Even when selected communities experience displacement and dislocation within North America or Canada, these experiences can feel removed in time and space. Poems, memoirs, graphic novels, fiction, plays, and animated film can help bring us closer to their stories and to question our responsibility to uphold the rights and well-being of migrants, refugees, and displaced persons. We will comparatively engage literary and visual culture from a diverse range of Jewish, Afro-Caribbean, Palestinian, Syrian, Vietnamese, Mexican, Tibetan, Rohingya, and Indigenous perspectives. What connects these experiences coming from such different spaces and stories of dislocation? What are their differences?

We will consider some of the large historical currents that contribute to creating the conditions of forced migration and dislocation both across and within nation states: colonialism and/or settler colonialism & its aftershocks, genocides, civil wars, war-time discourses, border security regimes, and state immigration policies each position some as more worthy of rights than others. How do migrant stories challenge normative views of who counts as a human worthy of human rights, a human worthy of a livable life and story? What stories does society tell that creates categories of humans as unworthy of life, as non-citizens, as illegal, and irregular? How do different protagonists in these

stories hold onto humanity, agency, community, resistance, and hope in the midst of the crises posed by forced dislocation. Do humanitarian and human rights discourses, NGOs, and workers enable or complicate the possibilities for a more livable and just future?

While considering each of the above questions, we will ask how different kinds of literary forms carry these stories and concerns forward. How does a graphic novel differ from a fictional memoir from a poem, from a play or from an animated film? What kinds of work of translating experience across time and place, culture and privilege can these different storytelling mediums and points of view do or not do? How do questions of truth, authenticity, documentary, and invention play out? Does it matter who is telling the story and what audience the story is reaching? We will have the opportunity to unpack the large questions these texts ask about refugee and migrant experience through reading responses, working group assignments, lecture, and class discussion. For detailed descriptions for key assignments, see below.

Literary Texts for Purchase: All books available at Haven (Bank and Sunnyside)

Art Spiegelman. *Maus I: A Survivor's Tale* (Jewish Holocaust, Graphic Novel, Family Memoir)

Leila Adelrazaq. *Baddawi*. (Palestinian refugee camp, Graphic Novel, Coming-of-Age)

Kiku Hughes. *Displacement*. (Japanese internment camp, Graphic Novel, Family Memoir)

Joe Murphy and Joe Robertson. *The Jungle*. (The refugee camp in Calais, France, Play)

Cherie Dimaline. *Marrow Thieves*. (Indigenous diaspora & displacement/Cli-Fi Novel)

Other Texts Available online:

Memoir: Viet Thanh Ngyuen (second generation refugee family from Vietnam War) and Reyna Grande (undocumented Mexican migrant in America)

Poetry: Primo Levi, Mahmoud Darwish, Warsan Shire, Tenzin Tsundru, Ocean Vuong, Marlene NourbeSe Philip, and Dionne Brand; selected poems from *I Am a Rohingya*

Positive/Negatives site: refugee narratives through **web comics:**

<https://positivenegatives.org/comics-animations/>

Graphic Novel: Kate Evans: Excerpts from *Threads: from the Refugee Crisis* (about the refugee camp in Calais, France): <https://www.cartoonkate.co.uk/threads-calais-cartoon-2/>

Stop Motion Animation: Amanda Strong: "Four Faces of the Moon": a Métis Family memoir, a young Métis person time travels to re-encounter the story of her ancestor's dislocation from land and culture by the agents of the settler state

Memoir & Documentary: excerpt from Inuit forced relocation narrative; excerpt from Uyghar forced "re-education camp" narrative

Animated documentary film: *Flee*: (gay male refugee story from Afghanistan) – available from Carleton library

Assignments

- **Attendance & Participation:** **10%**
**Note: Students who miss 50% or more classes will fail the course.
- **2 Working Group Assignments: 1000 words, 20% each:** **40%**
- **2 Key Paragraphs, Panels, or Scene Response Discussion Posts: 500 words, 10% each:** **20%**
- **Take Home Final Exam: two short answer (250 words each) and one comparative essay question (750 words); topics brainstormed with the class.** **30%**

2 Bi-Weekly Reading Response Posts (10 marks each): 500 words

For two weeks of the term, students from the assigned response groups A or B will select 1-2 arresting pages of graphic novel panels, key paragraphs, or scenes that illustrate a central issue, character development moment, or theme from the literary text we are reading for that date. They will then develop a three-four paragraph analysis (500 words) of the significance of the selected passages to the text as a whole. Typed responses are due on the discussion forum message board for that class date in Brightspace. The writing is intended to be exploratory and will be graded based on the student's abilities to look closely at what's on the page/in the text and to explain why artistic/narrative choices matter to our understanding of the work as a whole. This is one way I check in with you on how carefully you have completed and understood the weekly readings.

2 Working Group Discussion Papers (20 marks each): 1000 words

This small group work assignment requires individual out-of-class preparation and invites students to develop their own close reading and analysis skills while benefiting from the insights of their peers. Early in the term, I will divide students into 4 working groups. I will post working group topics on aspects of the text under discussion for each group on Brightspace one week before they are due in class.

****Note: You must be in class on each assigned group meeting date to meet in your group to get credit for this assignment unless you have a medical or other emergency**

Step-1: For each of the two working group classes, each student will **prepare two questions** on topics of interest that they believe are central to understanding the text. Questions should address issues, problems raised in the text in connection with attention to one or two key pages of panels or passages or 1 scene in a play. Please address the

artful construction of the text as part of your question. **For each of your questions, you will prepare a two - three paragraph answer.** These answers will be in short essay form with a topic sentence and detailed discussion of specific passages in the text (using direct quotation). **The average length of this assignment should be 4 pages, double-spaced, and typed (1000 words).**

****Note: If you consult any external resources, including Study Guides, Wikipedia, CHATGPT etc. you ****MUST**** be meticulous in citing them on a Works Cited and Consulted page.**

Step-2: For your in-class small group discussion, **bring your Questions and Discussion Papers to class.** You will meet with your working group to discuss your questions and insights. Each member of the group should take turns asking one of his, her, or their questions, getting feedback from the group and taking notes on new ideas from group members. When the discussion winds down, move onto the next person and their question. Make sure everyone in the group has a chance to present at least one question. The discussion should be as free and creative as possible, allowing room for tangents and respectful differences of opinion. Each student will take notes on the discussion; one student should be prepared to report group insights to the larger class if time permits. **Discussion Papers must be submitted with your class notes at the end of each working group class.**