

DH M155/CL M155: Decolonizing Refugee Data From Rome to Vietnam
Spring 2025 | MW 12:30-1:45PM | Dodd 146

The Department of Classics at UCLA acknowledges the Gabrielino/Tongva peoples as the traditional land caretakers of Tovaangar (the Los Angeles basin and So. Channel Islands). As a land grant institution, we pay our respects to the Honuukvetam (Ancestors), 'Abiibirom (Elders) and 'Eyoohiinkem (our relatives/relations) past, present and emerging.

Instructor: Professor Kelly Nguyen
Office Hours: Weds 2-4 PM, Dodd Hall 289B
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course investigate the politics of forced displacement in ancient and modern contexts (with a focus on Greco-Roman antiquity and contemporary Vietnamese history) through the lens of Critical Refugee Studies and with the aid of digital archaeology tools. We move beyond understanding refugee experiences through sensationalized visualizations, dehumanizing statistics and state-centered policies, and instead through refugee narratives and materiality. We will examine how refugees have been discussed, portrayed, and treated, as well as flip the script to explore refugeehood through the perspectives and experiences of refugees themselves. Students will gain hands-on experience working with digitized artifacts from our community partner, the Vietnamese Heritage Museum, as they work towards their final project: digital exhibits that feature the museum's artifacts alongside those from the ancient Greco-Roman world with a view to helping us better understand refugeehood across space and time.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

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

- Articulate a more nuanced understanding of the different portrayal and treatment of forcibly displaced peoples in ancient and modern contexts
- Conduct detailed analysis of material culture and literary works from the ancient and modern world
- Critique the politics of displacement, especially in connection to race, ethnicity, colonialism, and imperialism
- Engage in discussions of forced displacement in a reflective and comparative manner
- Communicate complex ideas to broad audiences through a variety of media (written, oral and visual)

COURSE MATERIALS

- Espiritu, Yến Lê et al. 2022. *Departures : An Introduction to Critical Refugee Studies*. University of California Press. ISBN: 9780520386389. [available online via UCLA library]
- Virgil. 2021. *The Aeneid*, translated by Shadi Bartsch. Random House. ISBN: 978-1984854100.

All other course materials will be posted on BruinLearn.

EVALUATION

Engaged Participation	20%
Artifact Analysis	20%
Personal Exhibit	25%
Personal Exhibit Presentation	5%
Comparative Refugee Exhibit	25%
Comparative Refugee Exhibit Presentation	5%

*****Please submit all work through BruinLearn*****

Engaged Participation: I understand that everyone has different learning styles and different stresses on their time. This grade is based on how you contribute to our class, which need not only be speaking up during class though that is of course always appreciated. There will be different touch points for you meaningfully participate in ways that resonate with you, e.g. sharing during smaller group discussions, responding to your peers' blog posts, sharing your writing from our mini in-class writing sessions, or coming to office hours. What I care about is that you take on an active role in building a supportive learning community.

Blog Posts: If you are less comfortable with speaking up in class, or if you prefer to take time outside of class to process the materials before sharing your thoughts, you will have the option to write “blog” posts on BruinLearn (under “Discussions”) in response to each week’s course materials. You may approach these blog posts in a variety of ways: for example, you may do close readings of passages that you found interesting, inspiring, baffling, or perhaps even troubling; put different texts/materials in conversation with each other, including materials from outside of the course that you want to compare and contrast; think through a piece of scholarship that you want to engage with further, whether to praise or to critique; or reflect on your positionality in relation to the course materials of the week. These do not have to be polished or long; the format, length, and writing style are entirely up to you.

These blog posts are meant to be an alternative to and/or in addition to speaking up in class, and thus, are meant to be flexible. You may write them whenever you’d like and may return to previous weeks’ posts whenever you like. This is meant to be an asynchronous space for us to all co-think together. I will take your blog posts/responses into account when calculating your final participation grade.

Artifact Analysis (due week 4, April 25): Conduct a close analysis of one ancient Greek or Roman artifact and one contemporary Vietnamese artifact. You will need to do additional research to contextualize your artifact. For each artifact, write 1-2 pages (double-spaced, with 12-point Times New Roman font and 1-inch margins) examining its 1) historical context and provenance, 2) materiality and form, 3) function and symbolism, and 4) narrative and perspective. In a final, closing paragraph, consider the artifacts in comparison to each other, identifying common themes or differences in how displacement is expressed through material culture. I will provide further guidelines in class.

Personal Exhibit (due week 6, May 7): What would you bring with you if you had to leave the country as a refugee tomorrow? **Select 8-10 things** that you would bring with you (that can fit into a large hiking backpack). They can be practical, nostalgic, or a mix of both. Then, **create a digital**

exhibit via StoryMaps that features these items. Think about how you want to group, display and describe them. For each item, write a description about it that includes its 1) historical context and provenance, 2) materiality and form, and 3) function and symbolism.

In addition to this exhibit, **write a 2-3 page essay** (double-spaced, with 12-point Times New Roman font and 1-inch margins) reflecting on the selection and curation process. Why did you choose these objects? Why did you display them the way you did? What details would be lost if archaeologists were to just find these objects and not have your narrative to help do the memory work? I will provide further guidelines in class.

Personal Exhibit Presentation (May 7): During week 6 of class, you will share your personal exhibit through a presentation. The purpose of this presentation is for you to practice giving a presentation under low stakes. We will split into smaller groups and each of you will prepare and give a 10 minute presentation of your exhibit to your respective groups. Each person in the group will give you written feedback on your presentation so that you will be better prepared for your final presentation. I will provide feedback worksheets. Please send each other your feedback and please submit your peers' feedback onto BruinLearn. This will be graded on a completion basis.

Comparative Refugee Artifact Exhibit (due week 10, June 6): In groups of 3-4, you will work on a digital exhibit featuring refugee material culture from the ancient Greco-Roman world and the contemporary Vietnamese refugee community. You will have the opportunity to choose artifacts from the Refugee Material Culture Initiative database and will work as a team to design a digital exhibit featuring them on StoryMaps. You will also select art and/or artifacts from the ancient Greco-Roman world (2-4) that you think would be interesting to compare with your Vietnamese refugee artifact selections. How does comparing these ancient and modern artifacts help shed light on refugee issues (e.g. critique xenophobic or romanticized representations of refugees; evaluate the relationship between forced displacement and axes of oppression, like race, gender and sexuality, class, etc; expand our understanding of refugeehood)? For each artifact, write a description about it that includes its 1) historical context and provenance, 2) materiality and form, and 3) function and symbolism. I will provide further guidelines in class.

In addition to this exhibit, each team member will **write a 2-3 page essay** (double-spaced, with 12-point Times New Roman font and 1-inch margins) reflecting on the digital curation process. What issue(s) related to refugees did you and your teammates decide to highlight through this exhibit and why? How did you decide to present the objects and why? What challenges did you run into and how did you overcome them? What went well and what did you enjoy about the process? Most importantly, how did creating this exhibit help you better understand Critical Refugee Studies? Be sure to also discuss how the workload was shared among all the teammates and how you contributed to the final project.

Milestones for the final project

- **Proposal workshop (week 7)**
 - You will have the opportunity to workshop your proposal in class with your peers and to get feedback before submitting your project proposal.
- **Project proposal due (end of week 7, May 16)**

- Write a one-page proposal outlining the theme, structure, and selected artifacts for the digital exhibit. Include the distribution of labor and projected workflow.
- **Exhibit workshops (weeks 8 and 9)**
 - You will have the opportunity to workshop your exhibit-in-progress in class with your peers and to get feedback before submitting a draft of your exhibit.
- **Final Exhibit (due June 6)**
 - Each team member must submit the team's final exhibit and their individual reflection essay via BruinLearn.

Comparative Refugee Exhibit Presentation (week 10): During the last week of class, each team will share their Comparative Refugee Artifact Exhibit through a 15 minute.

CONTENT WARNING

Students in this course will study a series of texts and images in their original historical context, many of which will be shocking or upsetting. We introduce you to this material because we believe grappling with it is essential to your learning in the class. However, inclusion of this material does not signal endorsement of their perspectives. The fact that a reading is on the syllabus does not mean that the instructor shares the views stated or implied by that reading. The fact that students study and learn from the material does not mean that students endorse their perspectives either. All students are encouraged to read all course material critically. In particular, please be aware that some of the texts for this course contain references to the physical and symbolic violence of conquest and colonization. Some of the texts and images in this class may be troubling to everyone, but especially to those who are experiencing or have experienced trauma in their lives. *If you need to take a break and leave the classroom briefly whenever we are engaging with difficult materials, please do so.*

COURSE POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Academic Integrity

UCLA is a community of scholars. In this community, all members including faculty, staff and students alike are responsible for maintaining standards of academic honesty. As a student and member of the University community, you are here to get an education and are, therefore, expected to demonstrate integrity in your academic endeavors. You are evaluated on your own merits. Cheating, plagiarism, collaborative work, multiple submissions without the permission of the professor, or other kinds of academic dishonesty are considered unacceptable behavior and will result in formal disciplinary proceedings usually resulting in suspension or dismissal. If you use ChatGPT and/or any other AI technology to assist you in your work, please cite them accordingly and note how you used them. Additional information can be found on the website for the Office of the Dean of Students: <https://deanofstudents.ucla.edu/student-conduct-code>

Accessibility

If you are registered with the Center for Accessible Education (CAE), please let me know as soon as possible so that I can make sure appropriate arrangements will be made. Students needing academic accommodations based on a disability should contact the Center for Accessible Education (CAE) at (310) 825-1501 or in person at Murphy Hall A255. When possible, students should contact the CAE within the first two weeks of the term as reasonable notice is needed to coordinate accommodations. For more information visit www.cae.ucla.edu.

Assault, Harassment, and Discrimination

Title IX prohibits gender discrimination, including sexual harassment, domestic and dating violence, sexual assault, and stalking. If you have experienced sexual harassment or sexual violence, you can receive confidential support and advocacy at the CARE Advocacy Office for Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, 1stFloor Wooden Center West, CAREadvocate@caps.ucla.edu, (310) 206-2465. In addition, Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) provides confidential counseling to all students and can be reached 24/7 at (310) 825-0768. You can also report sexual violence or sexual harassment directly to the University's Title IX Coordinator, 2241 Murphy Hall, titleix@conet.ucla.edu, (310) 206-3417. Reports to law enforcement can be made to UCPD at (310) 825-1491. Please note, I am legally required to share information of this nature with the Title IX office.

Undergraduate Writing Center

The Undergraduate Writing Center offers UCLA undergraduates one-on-one sessions on their writing. The Center is staffed by peer learning facilitators (PLFs), undergraduates who are trained to help at any stage in the writing process and with writing assignments from across the curriculum. PLFs tailor appointments to the concerns of each writer. Sessions can focus on how to approach an assignment, on formulating a thesis, on fleshing out a plan/outline for a draft, on reading a draft with the writer to check for clarity and flow, on incorporating and citing sources, on revising a paper based on instructor feedback, or on tackling grammar or sentence structure problems. You can make in-person appointments, walk-in appointments, or online sessions. <https://wp.ucla.edu/wc/>

Classics-related Resources:

Sportula: Sportula provides microgrants ranging from \$5 to \$300, no questions asked, to Classics/Classics-adjacent undergrads and grads in the US who need it. You can contact them using the "Contact Us" form at <https://thesportula.wordpress.com/>. They will directly Venmo you money.

Asian and Asian American Classical Caucus: A group of/for Asian and Asian American students and scholars of classical antiquity interested in studying the reception of the classical tradition in contemporary Asian and Asian American culture and committed to increasing the diversity of the field of Classics.

Classics and Social Justice Group: The purpose of the group is to bring together scholars who are working in various ways on social justice, using Classics.

CripAntiquity: An international advocacy organization for disabled and neurodivergent students, teachers, scholars, staff, artists, and writers in ancient studies.

Eos: *Eos* exists to create a supportive, dedicated community for studying Africana receptions of ancient Greece & Rome and to foster collaborative research and pedagogy between Classics and other disciplines.

Hesperides, Classics in the Luso-Hispanic World: An international scholarly organization highlighting Greco-Roman engagements throughout the Luso-Hispanic world.

Lambda Classical Caucus (LCC): A coalition of queer Classicists--including, but not limited to, lesbians, bisexuals, gay men, and transgendered people--and their friends and supporters.

Mountaintop Coalition: Composed of students and scholars of the ancient Mediterranean world and its reception (broadly defined) with a shared interest in advancing the professional goals of Classicists who identify as members of ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented in the field.

Multiculturalism, Race & Ethnicity in Classics Consortium (MRECC): The Multiculturalism, Race & Ethnicity in Classics Consortium (MRECC) works to raise awareness and support the study of multiculturalism, race, and ethnicity in classics and classical archaeology at all levels.

Trans in Classics (TIC): This group is for trans and non-binary folx and their friends to meet and discuss trans-issues in Classical Studies, to provide resources to benefit and broaden our academic community and to improve scholarship touching on trans-identities or readings.

Women's Classical Caucus (WCC): Women's Classical Caucus fosters feminist and gender-informed perspectives, especially those with intersectional and global approaches, in the study and teaching of all aspects of ancient Mediterranean cultures and classical antiquity.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

March 31:

- No reading; overview of the course
- Fill out entry survey

April 2:

- *Departures*, "Prologue" and "Introduction"
- Agamben, Giorgio. 1995. "We Refugees," *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures* 49.2: 114-119.
- Wiener, Jon. 2018. "'Call me a Refugee, Not an Immigrant': Viet Thanh Nguyen," *The Nation*, 11 June 2018: <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/call-refugee-not-immigrant-viet-thanh-nguyen/>

WEEK 2: Decolonizing the Archive

April 7:

- Caswell, Michelle and Marika Cifor. 2019. "Neither a Beginning Nor an End: Applying an Ethics of Care to Digital Archival Collections." In Hannah Lewi, Wally Smith, Dirk vom Lehn, and Steven Cooke (eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook of New Digital Practices in Galleries, Libraries, Archives, Museums, and Heritage Sites*. Routledge, pp. 159-168.
- Risam, Roopika. 2019. *New Digital Worlds: Postcolonial Digital Humanities in Theory, Praxis, and Pedagogy*. Northwestern University Press: Ch 2 ("Colonial Violence and the Postcolonial Digital Archive").
- In class workshop: explore different digital humanities and digital histories projects

April 9:

- Risam, Roopika. 2023. "Connecting the Dots: Refugee Data Narratives," in Gandhi, Evyn Lê Espiritu and Vinh Nguyen (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Refugee Narratives*. Routledge, pp. 153-164.
- Vo Dang, Thuy. 2023. "The Preservation and Production of Diasporic Knowledge: Oral History and Archival Contributions." In Linda Ho Peché, Alex-Thai Dinh Vo and Tuong Vu (eds), *Toward a Framework for Vietnamese American Studies: History, Community, and Memory*. Temple University Press, pp. 273-286.
- In class workshop: explore different DH projects related to refugee data

WEEK 3: ETHICAL MEMORYWORK

April 14

- Martin, Stephanie. 2023. "Materiality in Transit: An Ethnographic-Archaeological Approach to Objects Carried, Lost, and Gained During Contemporary Migration Journeys," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 23.1: 3-24.
- Kiddey, Rachel. 2023. "We Are Displaced, But We Are More Than That: Using Anarchist Principles to Materialize Capitalism's Cracks at Sites of Contemporary Forced Displacement in Europe," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 28: 182-207.
- In class workshop: artifact analysis (from different museum databases)
 - Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology. 2016. "A Guide to Looking: Researching Objects at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology." Cambridge: Harvard University, pp. 1-7.

April 16

- Nguyen, Viet Thanh. 2013. "Just Memory: War and the Ethics of Remembrance," *American Literary History* 25.1: 1-20.
- Nguyen, Cindy A. 2023. "Collecting Through Absence: Fragmenting Vietnamese Refugee Archives." *Wasafiri*, 38.4: 22-30.
- Explore:
 - <https://uploads.knightlab.com/storymaps/97ebf75cc269acaf2e31d94112351660/vietnamese-refugees/index.html>
 - <https://www.britishmuseum.org/exhibitions/troy-myth-and-reality>
 - For background on the Trojan War:
<https://www.britishmuseum.org/blog/myth-trojan-war>
- In class workshop: curatorial ethics (RMCI and SJVM)

WEEK 4: LAW AND REFUGE

April 21

- *Departures*, Ch. 1
- Nguyen, Vinh. 2019. "Refugeetude: When Does a Refugee Stop Being a Refugee," *Social Text* 37.2: 109-131.
- In class workshop: 3D scanning

April 23

- Euripides' *Medea*

- In class workshop: Intro to StoryMaps (with Deidre Brin)

[Artifact Analysis due April 25]

WEEK 5: FEAR AND ASYLUM

April 28

- *Departures*, Ch. 2
- Hoang, Tuan. 2023. "The August Revolution, the Fall of Saigon, and Postwar Reeducation Camps: Understanding Vietnamese Diasporic Anticommunism." In Linda Ho Peché, Alex-Thai Dinh Vo and Tuong Vu (eds), *Toward a Framework for Vietnamese American Studies: History, Community, and Memory*. Temple University Press, pp. 76-94.
- In class workshop: virtual exhibit planning

April 30

- Aeschylus' *Suppliant Women*
- In class workshop: feedback on personal exhibit plans

WEEK 6: EXILE

May 5

- Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus*
- Said, Edward. 2000. "Reflections on Exile," in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Cambridge: 137-49.

May 7

- Personal exhibit presentations

[Personal exhibit & reflection essay Due May 7]

WEEK 7: REFUGEES AND EMPIRE

May 12

- *Departures*, Ch. 3
- Haines, David. (2015). "Learning from Our Past: The Refugee Experience in the United States," *Perspectives*, American Immigration Council, pp. 1-7.
 - Explore: <https://www.uscis.gov/about-us/our-history/stories-from-the-archives/refugee-timeline>
- Lê Espiritu, Yen. 2006. "The 'We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose' Syndrome: U.S. Press Coverage of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the 'Fall of Saigon'". *American Quarterly*, 58.2: 329-352.
- In class workshop: final exhibit proposal

May 14

- Virgil, *The Aeneid*, Books 1-3
- *Optional*: listen and compare with Aeneas' escape from Troy:

- “Three Days Old – Part 1,” Ep. 2, *The Vietnamese Boat People Podcast*:
<https://www.vietnameseboatpeople.org/podcast/episode/6cfebb1d/2-three-days-old-part-1>
- “Three Days Old – Part 2,” Ep. 3, *The Vietnamese Boat People Podcast*:
<https://www.vietnameseboatpeople.org/podcast/episode/3902329b/3-three-days-old-part-2>

[Project proposal due May 16]

WEEK 8: POLITICS OF RESETTLEMENT/REPATRIATION

May 19

- Virgil, *The Aeneid*, Books 6.994-1204, 7, 8.788-955, 12

May 21

- Lipman, Jane. 2020. In *Camps: Vietnamese Refugees, Asylum Seekers, and Repatriates*. University of California Press, Ch. 4 (“Hong Kong: Deterrence, Detention, and Repatriation, 1980–1989”).
- Lê Espiritu, Evyn. 2018. “Vexed Solidarities: Vietnamese Israelis and the Question of Palestine,” *Literature Interpretation Theory* 29.1: 8-28.
- In class workshop: feedback on exhibit-in-progress

WEEK 9: REFUGEE FUTURES

May 26

- HOLIDAY – No Class
- [read this for discussion on Weds] *Departures*, Ch. 4, “Conclusion” and “Epilogue”

May 28

- Nguyen, Ly Thuy. 2020. “Queer Dis/inheritance and Refugee Futures,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly* 48.1-2: 218-235.
- Nguyễn-võ, Thu-hương. 2024. *Almost Futures: Sovereignty and Refuge at World’s End*. University of California Press, Ch. 7 (“Untimely Habitation: Irreconcilability and Refugee Memory”).
- In class workshop: feedback on exhibit-in-progress

WEEK 10: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

June 2: Final Presentations

- No readings; prepare your final presentations

June 4: Final Presentations

- No readings; prepare your final presentations

[Final project & reflection essay due June 6]