**ENGL 373: Global Literatures—Literatures of Immigration/Migration**

**Spring 2017--Instructor: Peter Chilson**

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**Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 10 a.m. to noon, and by appointment.**

**\*\*This is a no-technology classroom. Remove computers from your desks. Put away cell phones unless specified for a class exercise. The only technology exception i grant is for Kindle and Nook readers. Cell phones are not acceptable reader devices.**

**List of Required Books:**

\**The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*, Riverhead Books, by Dinaw Mengestu

\* *Devil’s Highway*, Back Bay Books, by Luis Alberto Urrea (this book will be accompanied by a set of poems by Urrea. You will get the poems by handout).

\* *The Crossing: My Journey to the Shattered Heart of Syria*, Ebury Press, by Samar Yazbek.

**Why Literatures of Immigration/Migration**

When you think about themes of global literature, some obvious examples come to mind. Love, music, war, sports, food, and land. Yes, land: how we live on it, take it for granted, love it, exploit it, abuse it, love it more. Yet this semester we’re going to explore how writers of fiction, nonfiction, poetry and film crack open the most sensitive issue of our global world: forced human immigration.

To get at this subject we will read a novel by Ethiopian-American writer Dinaw Mengestu; a work of literary journalism about the U.S.-Mexico border by Luis Alberto Urrea; and a memoir about fleeing and then returning to war-torn Syria, by Samar Yazbek. In handouts we’ll read essays and short fiction by Canadian, Arab, Italian and African writers, as well as poetry by Mary Jo Salter, Juan Felipe Herrera (U.S. Poet Laureate), Naomi Shihab Nye, Langston Hughes, Eliza Griswold, and Luis Alberto Urrea. We’ll also watch films, including the acclaimed 2014 film, TIMBUKTU, about the war in Mali. We will also watch the recent PBS FRONTLINE documentary, EXODUS, which involves individual stories of recent refugees and migrants in Europe.

Recent news has given nearly all of us some awareness of immigration issues. Here are some facts: The world now faces the largest refugee crisis since the end of World War II. In 1945—with the surrender of the Axis powers of Germany, Japan, and Italy, and the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan—vast parts of Europe, the Middle East, and Asia lay in ruins and 40 million people had fled their homes. But, when anyone uses the word “fact,” be skeptical. Check everything out. Here are more facts and some sources.

The World War II refugee figure comes from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), which collects more refugee statistics than any international agency and has a field staff to gather the statistics.[[1]](#footnote-1) THE UNHCR reports that the number of people presently displaced worldwide by economic and political unrest, or natural disaster, is more than 65 million people, the largest number of displaced persons in recorded human history. For more information, please see <http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html>. Also, for a good overview of forced human immigration, see this UNHCR Report published in 2000: <http://www.unhcr.org/4a4c754a9.html>. The report of course stops before the Arab Spring uprisings of 2011, but it offers a good and accurate history. The current refugee crisis is largely rooted in the impacts of the Arab Spring, which we will study and discuss this semester.

One of the biggest international immigration stories involves refugees from unrest in the Middle East and Africa who have crossed into Europe. An August 10, 2016 report in The *International Business Times* says “Roughly [one million](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-idUSKCN10L13T?utm_campaign=trueAnthem:+Trending+Content&utm_content=57ab49a504d3014b48c2ef61&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=twitter) refugees fled Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria and made their way to Europe last year” (see, <http://www.ibtimes.com/refugee-crisis-2016-europe-death-toll-migrant-arrival-increases-statistics-show-2399933>). Many are also seeking asylum in the United States.

Some of you remember the photo of the three-year-old Syrian boy whose body washed up on a Turkish beach on September 2, 2015 after the small rubber boat he was in with his family sank in the Mediterranean Sea while trying to reach Greece. The boy’s name was Alan Kurdi. He drowned with his mother and older brother.[[2]](#footnote-2) Moreover, on some level we’re all aware of our national discussion over the United States-Mexico border. Immigration is a sensitive, unstable issue, which is why writers and artists are attracted to the subject. Immigration is one of the great human dramas. It is full of tragedy, joy, death, and birth. The responsibility of every writer—every novelist, essayist, journalist, poet, and screenwriter/filmmaker—is to capture, explain, and show the human experience. As the British-Indian novelist Salman Rushdie once wrote: A poet’s work is “to name the unnamable, to point at frauds, to take sides, start arguments, shape the world and stop it from going to sleep.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

Many of the refugees that have fled to Europe and the United States in recent years have left sub-Saharan Africa, where I’ve spent much of my life as a writer and journalist—especially these past five years—writing about conflicts that have forced millions from their homes. From 1985 to 1987, as a Peace Corps volunteer, I lived in a village that became a refugee camp for people fleeing drought and starvation. The drought that hit the African Sahel region in the mid1980s displaced a half million people and killed more than 100,000. These are figures I again got from the UNHCR, as well as Care International and the *National Geographic Magazine*. I lost students. A woman lay down and died in front of my house. The truth and emotion of what I experienced explain why I take research and establishing what is fact so seriously.

In 2012 I met a man named Ilagala Ag Amin in a refugee camp in Burkina Faso, West Africa. Ilagala had fled there from a war in his native Mali, where war cost him his home and livelihood raising cattle and camels. He was a 59-year-old herdsman and former rebel soldier. Most of all he was a Tuareg, member of a nomadic tribe of people who roam the land with their cattle and camel herds. He was a wiry, compact man. When I talked to him at the Mentao Red Cross Camp in Burkina Faso, he wore a blue cotton tunic and leggings with a black turban. He pulled up his shirt to show me the bullet wounds across his stomach from his younger days as a mercenary soldier in Chad and later with Tuareg rebels in several uprisings in Mali. But now he was too old and weak to fight. He’d become a refugee, dependent on the graces of a foreign government and the Red Cross. As we talked, he folded his arms and smirked. “You are a man who drinks water from a faucet,” he said, striking his chest. “But I am a man who drinks from a puddle. You are a man who eats salad. I am a man who eats meat.”

Ilagala’s words showed me that even in this situation—driven from his country—his dignity and identity were imperative. He’d lost everything, but his sense of himself as a proud Tuareg nomad was intact. In our reading we’re going to encounter characters like him: men and women and children from all over the world. Each situation is different but their experiences teach a universal lesson about the human condition.

**GOALS**

At the end of this semester, you should:

**First,** have a better idea of how writers handle tense and unstable subjects to argue a point of view through fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction, on film, and manage to hold the interest of an audience. A writer’s opinion and point of view mean nothing if she does not have the skill with language to make a strong argument, tell a good story, and tweak the readers’\ emotions.

**Second,** have a strong sense of the history and geopolitical issues at the center of immigration and why subjects of this magnitude make such attractive material to writers.

**Third,** have a clearer sense of your own place in the immigration debate.

**Fourth,** have developed sharper writing skills, including stronger research skills and the ability to move back and forth between first and third person points of view with a clear idea of the purpose of each point of view.

**Grading Standards:** Students in this course are expected to write in focused, logically organized prose that is crisp, clear and clean, though I encourage you to take stylistic risks in both third person (traditional nonfiction point of view) and the more personal first person. Students must do thorough research for every paper and sources must be carefully cited. Evidence derived from thorough research is critical for the papers students will write. I discourage dependence on Internet sources.

Papers will be graded on the “A” to “F” scale as defined in Rule 90 of WSU’s academic regulations (available in the Washington State University General *Catalog*. Briefly, those standards state that an “A” represents excellent scholastic performance, “B” superior scholastic performance, “C” satisfactory performance, and “F” unsatisfactory performance.” Class participation is also assigned a letter grade on this scale in calculating the overall course grade.

**ABSENCES/LATENESS:**

**Success in this class requires commitment. I start class on time and expect students to be on time. Students must follow the absence policy: I allow two absences without penalty. All absences must be preceded with a note in advance of your absence from class. You will lose a letter grade for every unexcused absence. Students who simply disappear—meaning those who miss numerous classes without explanation and then show up begging forgiveness—must drop the class. Extended medical absences require a medical excuse and will probably require you to take an incomplete.**

**\*\*\*\*\*ALSO UNDERSTAND THAT AS WRITERS WE OFTEN DEAL WITH DIFFICULT ISSUES. THIS IS PART OF THE WRITER’S JOB—TO EXPLORE DEEPLY AND ASK DIFFICULT QUESTIONS. IN THE LITERATURE WE READ AND DISCUSS, WE WILL DEAL WITH UNCOMFORTABLE ISSUES, INCLUDING CONTROVERSIAL SITUATIONS DEALING WITH RACE, GENDER, SEX, POLITICS, ILLNESS, ABUSE, LOSS OF LIFE, ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS, EVEN MURDER, TO NAME A FEW. I RUN AN OPEN DISCUSSION ENVIRONMENT. THIS MEANS THAT IN CLASS WE DISCUSS THE FULL SPECTRUM OF ISSUES THAT DRIVE THE STORIES WE READ AND TOPICS WE WRITE ABOUT.**

**\*\*\*\*\*BRING THE ASSIGNED READING TO CLASS EVERY SINGLE DAY. THIS IS MANDATORY. IF YOU ARE PRESENT IN CLASS WITHOUT THE READING, I HAVE TO ASSUME YOU HAVE NOT DONE THE READING AND I WILL ASK YOU TO LEAVE THE ROOM.**

***!!!! WSU policy: I will ONLY be able to respond to emails sent from your WSU email address.  I will NOT be able to respond to emails sent from your personal email address.  When you first enrolled as students at WSU, the IT Department switched the “preferred” email address in your myWSU to your WSU email address.***

**Requirements:**

**Class participation:** This is about commitment. Your participation in discussions and activities, including presentations and semi-weekly response papers, is 30% of your grade. This is a big number, which means I take your active participation very seriously. I pay attention to the totality of your daily involvement, your completion of class activities, and your very presence in class.

**Papers**

**\* All papers must be accompanied by a works cited page that uses Modern Language Association citation format.**

1. Write a response to Mengestu’s novel: Why do you think Sepha Stephanos, the main character, chose to leave Ethiopia for the United States? What are the central challenges he faces in his new country and how are they different from those faced by non-immigrant citizens? Explore these questions and others of your own in a 4-5-page paper. The main source for this paper will be Mengestu’s novel, but this will require some background reading into the history of Ethiopia. Please cite at least two good secondary sources. Be very careful how you use and cite Internet sources. I will be checking them. (15%)

2. Your immigration story: Chart the path of your own or your family’s movements. Start with the earliest date you can find and end with today. Track this using a map and a chart demonstrating the passage of time. Back this up with a 2-3 page paper that summarizes the journey and the reasons behind your or your family’s journey. 15%. You will each do a brief presentation in front of the class, using notes and your map. Be very careful how you use and cite Internet sources. I will be checking them. (15%)

3. Group project. These will be accomplished in small groups. I will assign each group a specific Immigration issue. The group will research and map out the geography of this issue and present it to the class in a four-page paper. Be very careful how you use and cite Internet sources. I will be checking them. (15%)

4. Final Project: You have wide leeway here. You can expand on paper number two, “Your immigration story,” to do an expanded exploration of that journey. Or, writing in the third person, you can investigate an immigration story of special interest to you.

Whichever direction you take, the first person or third person project, this will take research and planning. Primary sources will be paramount, including doing interviews. You must demonstrate a thorough knowledge of history in order to tell this immigration story in context. Be very careful how you use and cite Internet sources. I will be checking them. (25%)

5. You will write occasional one-page response papers to the readings. These are part of your overall participation grade. See the weekly syllabus for due dates.

**Weekly Class Schedule:**

**NOTE: Each date is followed by the name in parentheses of the writers we are focusing on during those weeks (Mengestu) or (Urrea) or (Yazbek), for example. Under the heading of “Read” for each scheduled day, various essays, short stories, and theoretical texts will be assigned from the anthologies listed on the reading list. I will also hand out copies of additional readings in class.**

**WEEK ONE: Jan. 9, 11, 13, 2017 (Mengestu and Primo Levy)**: Introduction to the course, including an overview and discussion of immigration as an international issue and subject of art and literature. We will examine brief readings from each of the three writers whose books are listed for this course. As an introductory exercise I will ask everyone to map out, using pencil, their own immigration journeys. We will come back to this map during the course of the semester and look at how each student immigration map changes and evolves.

Overview of the difference between MIGRATION and IMMIGRATION

Explanation of **Paper One** and **Final Project** (paper #4) **Please see note above under “Papers,” regarding the Final Project. I will go over the final project this week. Remember, for your final project you can choose between using First Person and Third Person.**

Final Project Research: Workshop on fact-checking, using internet searches.

Plagiarism: I read all your papers carefully. I deliberately search out situations where students lift language from web sites and drop it in their own work, sometimes slightly changing the language and sometimes not bothering to do that. When I discover this sort of thing, I fail the paper immediately. You will receive and email from me and a request for a meeting.

READING AND DISCUSSION: I will hand out an excerpt from *The Truce,* by the Italian writer Primo Levy, who was released from the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz in 1945. We will only read a short excerpt of *The Truce, which is* his refugee’s memoir of what he saw as he crossed war ravaged Europe back to his native Italy.

We will also begin discussion of Dinaw Mengestu’s novel, *The Beautiful Things that Heaven Bears*. REMEMBER: DO NOT WALK INTO CLASS WITHOUT YOUR BOOK OR READING HANDOUT. DO NOT COME TO CLASS UNPREPARED.

We will also do an in-class writing exercise.

**Week Two, January 16, 18, 20 (Mengestu)**: Reading and Discussion of Mengestu Novel. Brief overview of Ethiopian history. Brief overview of African immigration to the United States. We will focus on the writer’s choices and how he connects Ethiopian culture and history to the story. He makes this connection between story and history, though this is not a historical novel. How does he do this?

One-page response paper Due on Friday: Write a one-page rhetorical analysis of Mengestu’s novel. Focus your paper on a stylistic issue of the novel that interests you. We will cover this material in class.

In-class writing and editing Exercises related to Paper One.

**Week Three, Jan. 23, 25, 27 (Mengestu):** Continue Reading and Discussion of Mengestu novel. Brief history of African immigration to the United States from slavery to the modern day.

In-class writing exercise connected to Paper One

Paper One due Wednesday, January 25.

Introduction to Paper Two. To prepare for this we will do another mapping exercise related to your own immigration stories.

**Week Four Jan. 30, February 1 and 3 (Mengestu and Urrea): Read: We will finish with Mengestu and begin reading and Discussion of Luis Alberto Urrea’s *Devil’s Highway*.** We will discus research issues between essays and fiction and briefly discuss a definition of Creative Nonfiction as we get into Urrea’s nonfiction work.

Brief historical overview of U.S. Mexico border situation. I will have some reading handouts concerning border literature.

The theory of the Unstable Place as a tool of fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry.

In-class writing exercise related to Paper Two.

One-page response paper due on Friday February 3 regarding Urrea’s Devil’s Highway. What makes his research content believable, or not believable?

We will watch the film, TIMBUKTU, this week.

**Week Five Feb. 6, 8, 10 (Urrea, both *Devil’s Highway* and some poems, Gloria Anzaldua handout)**:

\*\*I will be away on Feb. 8 and 10 at a writers’ conference in Washington, D.C. We will meet, of course on Monday. You will have a guest lecturer on Feb. 8 and assigned exercises for Feb. 10.

Brief discussion of Final Project questions. Brief overview of U.S.-Mexico border issues. Part of what we will focus on with these readings is the role of research in creative nonfiction.

Discussion: As a work of nonfiction, Do you see the writer, Luis Alberto Urrea, doing anything different from nonfiction forms you are used to? Are you skeptical. Do you have questions about his information, the integrity of his argument?

In-class Writing Exercise connected to Paper Two

**Week Six Feb. 13, 15, 17 (Urrea, both Devil’s Highway and some poems, with Gloria Anzaldua essay handout, and essay by the geographer Mark Monmonier).**

**Paper Two Due February 15.**

Overview of U.S. Mexico border issues in the context of other border issues around the world.

**Introduction of Paper Three.**

**Discussion: How to read maps.** Examining maps as historical artifacts, and how they have been used and abused. We will read the essay, “How to Lie with Maps,” an essay by Mark Monmonier about the darker history of maps and cartography in terms of manipulating the movement of human beings.

**Week Seven Feb. 20, 22, 24 (Poetry by Luis Alberto Urrea):** In addition to finishing Urrea we will look at the work of a few poets writing on immigration issues. We will do some literary analysis, comparing the way poets work as opposed to prose writers. Urrea writes fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry.

**Discussion:** Do you see the poet working in Urrea’s nonfiction?

**Paper Three workshops.** Groups will present their projects on March 1.

**Week Eight Feb 27, March 1 and 3 (Samar Yazbeck memoir, also Alice Munro story handout: “The View from Castle Rock”)**: Wrap up Discussion of how poetry influences prose in our work and in the assigned reading. Discussion for Munro reading and European immigration to north America.

**One-page Response Paper to Alice Munro Story due March 3. In case you lose your copy of Munro’s story, here is a link to it in *The New Yorker*:** <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/08/29/the-view-from-castle-rock>

**Paper Three Due March 1: Group Presentations.**

**Final Project overview and Discussion. NOTE: Students should be focusing on the Final Project from this point on.**

**Overview of Civil War in Syria.** Background includes The Arab Spring and its impact on the Middle East, Africa.

**Week Nine March 6, 8, 10 (Samar Yazbek memoir of Syria):** In-class writing and editing exercises with focus on Final Project. REMEMBER--THE FINAL PROJECT INVOLVES INDIVIDUAL PRESENTATIONS DURING THE LAST TWO WEEKS OF CLASSES.

Overview of Civil War in Syria. Overview of The Arab Spring and its impact on the Middle East, Africa.

Discussion of Yazbek’s memoir.

Documentary film on Civil War in Syria.

In-class writing and editing exercises with focus on Final Project. Discussion of writing and point of view: First Person and Third person.

**March 13-17--SPRING BREAK – Reserve some time to work on Your Final Projects.**

**WEEK TEN March 20, 22, 24 (Samar Yazbek and handouts):**

More overview of The Arab Spring and Violence in the Middle East, Africa: I hope to have a guest speaker from the city of TIMBUKTU this week. He will talk about the Arab Spring and its impact on the global migrant crisis.

Discussion of Yazbek memoir on Syria.

One-page response paper on Yazbek

Preparation for the final project. **Discussion and exercises**.

**WEEK ELEVEN March 27, 29, 31 (Samar Yazbek memoir of Syria):**

Discussion of Yazbek in context of the response papers.

Final Project mini workshops

First draft of final project due. Editing exercise. Focus on structure.

FROM THIS POINT ON THE FOCUS IS ON THE FINAL PROJECT: DISCUSSION, EDITING, AND FINALLY THE PRESENTATIONS BEGINNING THE WEEK OF APRIL 10, WHICH COINCIDENTALLY IS FIVE DAYS BEFORE YOUR FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL TAXES ARE DUE.

**WEEK TWELVE April 3, 5, 7:** Final Project editing workshop. This session will be focused on issues and problems of research.

DISCUSSION and EDITING EXERCISES.

**WEEK THIRTEEN April 10, 12, 14:** DISCUSSION and EDITING EXERCISES.

PRESENTATIONS.

**WEEK FOURTEEN April 17, 19, 21:** PRESENTATIONS

**WEEK FIFTEEN April 24, 26, 28:** PRESENTATIONS

**Monday May 1, Final Project Due.**

1. The UNHCR gathers data from its field staff, from governments, the International Committee of the Red Cross, The Red Crescent, and other international aid agencies. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bryan Walsh. “Alan Kurdi’s Story: Behind the Most Heartbreaking Photo of 2015.” *Time*, Dec. 29, 2015: <http://time.com/4162306/alan-kurdi-syria-drowned-boy-refugee-crisis/>

   -----The facts of the Alan Kurdi story can be crosschecked with *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, CNN, *The Washington Post*, Reuters, other reputable news organizations, and the international human rights watchdog Human Rights Watch. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Salman Rusdie. *The Satanic Verses: A Novel.* (New York: Random House, 2008), 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)