Asylum and Refugees

SOC 496-002: Topics in Sociology – Spring 2020 (3 Credits)
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Tuesdays, 2:30pm – 5:00pm
Sewell Social Sciences 6112

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30pm-1:30pm (by appointment)

The numbers of forced displacement today are unprecedented in human history. In 2018, over 70 million were forcibly displaced globally, and 3.5 million people were awaiting decisions on their asylum claims. But these number are only part of the story, and numbers do not speak for themselves. Who is a refugee, and what does it mean to be one? This course examines the meanings, boundaries, and consequences of the “refugee” category and how they shift across sociohistorical and geographic contexts. In particular, it situates these questions with a focus on sovereignty, human rights, and humanitarianism. It critically engages the classifying criteria and screening procedures employed in refugee status determination, while also investigating the treatment and experiences of those seeking asylum, those deemed refugees, and those denied.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

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

- Discuss the emergence, components, and functions of key refugee doctrines and institutions, and explain their roles in the classification, movement, and restriction of forced migrants
- Evaluate different political and ethical perspectives on our responsibility – as states, as members of a global human community – to refugees, and their varied consequences
- Analyze the varying interests, practices, tensions, and consequences that arise from state sovereignty, human rights, and humanitarianism at global, national and local levels
- Compare and contrast the views and perspectives of asylum from above (the view of governments, aid organizations) with the view from below (the personal experiences of forced migrants)
- Analyze the meanings and consequences of the terms used to make sense of different forms of migration – including refugee, asylum seeker, economic migrant, “bogus” asylum seekers, climate “refugees,” internally displaced peoples
- Articulate how race, gender, nationality, and colonialism configure the shape that refugee protection takes
- Evaluate the extent to which the international refugee regime ameliorates, justifies, maintains, or produces human suffering and inequality
READING

All readings are available as PDFs in “Modules” on Canvas, with the exception of the reading for the week on “Seeking Asylum” which is linked as an ebook via the UW Library.

Please bring the readings to class.

You are expected to complete the assigned readings before class session so that you are versed in the material we will discuss together. You are assigned an average of 60-100 pages per class; completing this reading is essential to succeeding in and getting the most possible out of this course. It is my hope that you will find the readings engaging and sometimes provocative. You are not expected to agree with everything you read, I do not agree with everything I have assigned. You are, however, expected to academically consider and evaluate the readings. Some of the readings will be easier than others; your readings include a variety of texts from personal testimonies to theory. I suggest that you plan accordingly when figuring out how and when to do your reading. Finally, active reading is the best reading – underline, highlight, write notes in the margins, engage the text! This not only aids in your comprehension and retention of the material, it will also make studying for exams easier.

COURSE ASSESSMENT

You will be assessed based on reading responses, a research project, and class participation.

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<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Reading Responses</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research Topic</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>Sun Feb 23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annotated Bibliography</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>Sun March 8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper Outline</td>
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<td>Sun March 29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Research Paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Fri April 17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group Presentations</td>
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<td>Participation Grade</td>
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**Reading Responses. Due by noon on the Monday before class.** (3% each, 21% total)
You are responsible for a total of seven (7) written reading responses over the twelve (12) reading weeks of this course. These should be no more than 300 words and be submitted via Canvas.

While this averages to a reading response for just over half of the weeks, the number of responses required of you varies by unit and it is at your discretion which weeks you choose within these parameters.
- One (1) reading response for “Unit I: Introduction”
- Two (2) reading responses for “Unit II: Frameworks”
- Four (4) reading responses for “Unit III: Policy, Practice, Experience”

Based on the assigned readings for that week, responses have two parts:

1. **Reflection or commentary.** Discuss something that surprised you, that resonated, that might be useful for your paper, that you disagree with and why, etc. The best responses will make connections across the readings, and to prior class discussions and materials, where appropriate. Do make sure to introduce the ideas that you are engaging to the extent necessary for me to follow your train of thought, but do not summarize the readings in their entirety. Though brief, these responses should be thoughtful and demonstrate your deep engagement with the assigned texts.

2. **Question/topic for class discussion.** A question, set of questions, or topic you would like to discuss in class. It does not have to be related to the first part of your answer, though it can be.

I strive to incorporate reading responses into our discussions and will always anonymize them: students will not know who posed what question or comment.

I suggest you use your “off” weeks wisely. When deciding when to write your responses, I recommend you take into account your semester course load more broadly, what themes and topics you may engage, and the possibility that unexpected issues may come up for you during the semester. You may also submit more than the minimum of seven (7) responses if you wish.

**Research Paper.**
You will write a paper on a subject of your choosing related to the course. Your Research Paper will be based on an analysis of an empirical case through which you engage course themes. You are to dive deep into something that interests you in order to gain a deeper understanding into a particular arena related to asylum and refugees.

You are to put one (or more) key perspectives (sovereignty, human rights, humanitarianism) into dialogue with a particular case (e.g., detention centers in the United States, the Dadaab refugee camp complex, Doctors Without Borders). You will put relevant required and supplementary course readings in conversation with your own research into that case study. Under each week’s module on Canvas, I include supplementary readings that provide further guidance for research that you are to use to further develop the theoretical grounding of your research papers.

Thus, your paper will not to be purely empirical – you will not only be learning facts, but learning facts in order to critically analyze the realities of asylum and refugee protection and regulation. However, if you have a different question, or a different type of paper you’d like to write for this course, let’s discuss it! I’m also open to you using an individual refugee memoir as your case, for example.

Through a specific case study, your paper will address a research question, such as:

- Should those impacted by climate change qualify for refugee status?
- Is humanitarianism good for refugees?
- Should we pursue open borders?
- How do refugees experience time?
- What relationship is produced between the state and forced migrants as they navigate the asylum-screening process in contemporary France?
- What are the tensions between the rights of refugees and state sovereignty when it comes to family reunification?
- Should refugees have the right to a passport?
- How has the way the UK has envisioned asylum seekers changed over time?
- What are key themes and absences in the refugee portraits and narratives that proliferate in the contemporary public sphere?
- What is the UNHCR’s role regarding Syrian refugees in Lebanon today?
- What are the economic consequences of refugee encampment?
- Why were Hmong refugees resettled in Wisconsin?

For a resource for possible ideas, see the Migration Policy Institute: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/

- **Research Topic.** Due Sunday February 23. (5%)
  o Submit a general research topic, possible question you’d like to answer that will drive your paper, and a summary of how you plan to go about addressing that question. This should be roughly a paragraph.
- **Annotated Bibliography.** Due Sunday March 8. (10%)
  o Your Annotated Bibliography will include 4-6 sources that include both relevant readings from the course’s supplementary materials for your paper and your own gathering of readings on your specific case study. For each reading, you will write a brief summary of the reading, as well as a discussion of its relevance for research project.
- **Detailed Paper Outline.** Due Sunday March 29. (14%)
  o Your paper outline will be a detailed, written-out early draft of the various components of your paper – not a collection of bullet points.
- **Final Paper.** Due Friday April 17. (30%)
  o Your final paper should be 5-7 pages in length (double-spaced, 12 pt Times New Roman font), not including the bibliography. It will include an introduction highlighting the relevance of your paper topic, review of relevant theories and debates, synopsis of your empirical case study, a discussion of given theories in light of your case, and a conclusion.

Full assignment instructions for the Research Paper and its components will be posted on Canvas. If you need help with writing, the Writing Center is a wonderful resource: (http://writing.wisc.edu).

**Group Presentations.** Due Tuesday April 28. (10%)
Based on your research topics, I will organize you thematically into groups of roughly three for final presentations. You are each responsible for reading the research papers of your fellow group members. For your presentation, you are to put the group’s papers into conversation in order to produce a summative reflection of key takeaways of what you learned, individually and together, that you think we should know. These presentations should synthesize your group’s research, rather than address each paper individually.

**Participation Grade.** (5%)
Your participation grade will be based on engagement in the course. Class thrives on the participation of its students, and the quality of discussion depends on each of us. Participation means attending, showing up on time, demonstrating that you have read the assigned readings, contributing productively to class discussion, and asking relevant questions. Discussions are a vital part of this course. I suggest you take your participation grade seriously. You will be penalized for excessive absences, as well as for disrespectful, disengaged, or inappropriate behavior; on the flip side, you will be rewarded for attentive, thoughtful engagement.

COURSE POLICIES

**Late Assignments.** Assignments submitted after the time they are due will be considered late. For assignments related to the final research paper, each day late will result in half a letter grade being docked (i.e., 5% off for each day), this includes weekends and is regardless of the reason it is late. Reading responses submitted after the related class session will not be graded and will receive a zero. No assignments will be accepted via email; you must upload the file in the proper location on Canvas for it to be graded. Assignments will be graded via Canvas.

**Final Grades.** The grades you receive will be based on the following standard scale.

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<td>AB</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>60 – 69.9</td>
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<td>F</td>
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I do not curve individual assignments or final grades. The grade you receive in this class is the grade you earn, not a grade given to you. If you are concerned about your grade, you are welcome to meet with me to discuss what you can do to improve it.

**Class Environment:** Our class environment will be one of mutual respect and professionalism between professor, teaching assistants, and students. The topics in this course are often controversial, and you will not always agree with arguments presented in the readings, lectures, discussions, or class activities. You are encouraged to voice your opinions about these issues, but I ask that you support opinions with evidence. To ensure a stimulating, tolerant, lively class atmosphere, please bear in mind the following points:

- We are all knowledgeable in different ways. Each of us has something to learn and something to teach. Respect one another’s knowledge and life experiences.
- Be aware of the particular set of knowledge and assumptions you bring to the classroom, and approach discussions with an open mind.
- Hostile, damaging words and actions will not be tolerated – this includes racist, sexist, classist, homophobic, transphobic, ageist, or ableist language.
- Speak one at a time and refrain from interrupting.
- We demonstrate professionalism and respect for our classmates and instructors by maintaining our focus on the lectures or discussions.
- Appreciate different styles of learning, sharing, and participating.
- Please ask questions! If one student is confused, others likely are as well. It improves everyone’s understanding when you ask clarifying questions.
• Show up on time, and show up prepared. Regular attendance, reading, and note taking are expected.

**Email Policy:** Please check your email regularly. I may not check email in the evenings and on weekends. I will not respond to questions when answers can be found: 1) in the syllabus; 2) in your notes; or 3) from a classmate. This means I won’t respond to emails such as: “What are this week’s readings?”, “I was absent today, what did I miss?”, “I don’t remember the Westphalian perspective on sovereignty – can you remind me?”, or “Is it okay if I turn in my paper in late?” Emails should be written professionally – with a greeting, your question, and a signature.

**Electronics Policy:** Please note that laptops may only be used to reference the readings and take notes. Students using laptops, cell phones, and other devices in class at inappropriate times or for irrelevant reasons will have their participation grade lowered. Please recognize that when you are distracted, you distract others and detract from the learning environment.

**Office Hours:** I maintain weekly office hours to meet with you and address any questions you may have about the class. If you plan to come to office hours, you must schedule an appointment via this link:
-  https://kcjensen.youcanbook.me/
** If I do not have a scheduled appointment, I will not necessarily be in my office. **
If you cannot meet during my office hours because you have a formal conflict (e.g., another course session), you may schedule an appointment via email. If you schedule an appointment with me, I expect you to keep it; if you fail to keep an appointment, I will be strongly disinclined from scheduling another.

**Canvas:** Students should regularly check Canvas. The syllabus, course readings, assignments, grades, announcements, and supplementary materials will be posted on Canvas. I suggest you turn on Announcement Notifications for this course so you are kept up to date on any changes and updates made. You are to submit all writing assignments via Canvas.

**Academic Integrity:** By enrolling in this course, each student assumes the responsibilities of an active participant in UW-Madison’s community of scholars in which everyone’s academic work and behavior are held to the highest academic integrity standards. Academic misconduct compromises the integrity of the university. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these acts are examples of academic misconduct, which can result in disciplinary action. This includes but is not limited to failure on the assignment/course, disciplinary probation, or suspension. Substantial or repeated cases of misconduct will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct & Community Standards for additional review. For more information, refer to the following websites:
-  https://conduct.students.wisc.edu/academic-integrity/

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:** UW-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform me of their need for instructional accommodations
by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. I will work either directly with you, with your teaching assistant, and/or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA.

Religious Holidays: Students must notify me and their TA within the first two weeks of class of the specific days or dates on which they request relief for religious holidays. Make ups may be scheduled before or after the regularly scheduled requirements.

Note: The following course schedule is subject to changes in order to meet the needs of the course. I will announce any changes in class as well as post them as announcements on Canvas. It is your responsibility to remain up to date on course assignments and requirements.

COURSE SCHEDULE

I: INTRODUCTION

January 21. Wk 1: Introduction
Overview of course learning goals, topics, and assessments. Introduction to contemporary global realities of forced migration.

In-class screening: Human Flow, documentary by Ai Wei Wei (Part One).

January 28. Wk 2: Contemporary Formations (75 pages)
Who and where are refugees today? What international norms, laws, and institutions govern who counts, and what the rights and obligations are for those who search for, obtain, and provide refuge? What is the difference between asylees, refugees and other immigrants? What are the key trends in the international refugee regime today? What role does deterrence play in circumscribing refugees access to international human rights? What is the relationship between the principles and practice of refuge? What are the key moral debates surrounding these questions?

In-class screening of Human Flow, documentary by Ai Wei Wei (Part Two).

**February 4. Wk 3: Historical Foundations (72 pages)**
What are the origins of the international refugee regime? What was the political context of its emergence? To what extent does that matter for what refugee protection looks like today? How do the roots matter? What does this history illuminate about the power and pitfalls of contemporary assistance and regulation?


**II: FRAMEWORKS**

**February 11. Wk 4: Sovereignty (53 pages)**
What are the rights and obligations of states? What is the relationship between state sovereignty and immigration generally, and refugees specifically? Do refugees produce or challenge state sovereignty? Are refugees a natural consequence of living in a a world system of nation-states? Should states have the right to exclude? What, if any, are or should be the limitations of that right? What is the case for open borders?


**February 18. Wk 5: Human Rights (54 pages)**


*** Sunday February 23: Research Topic Due ***

**February 25. Wk 6: Humanitarianism (66 pages)**
What is the moral and political economy of humanitarianism? What political and moral work do aid, relief, and compassion do? What is the relationship between humanitarianism and
refugees? What are the meanings and consequences of humanitarian refugee assistance? Must the recipients of aid be exemplary, must they be victims? Can they be agents or subjects of their own lives? Does compassion come with repression?


III: POLICY, PRACTICE, EXPERIENCE

**March 3. Wk 7: Constructing Asylum (68 pages)**
How and why do the boundaries of asylum protection shift over time and space? What drives who and how someone is recognized as an asylee? What underwrites those transformations? How is asylum constructed by and through gender, race, nationality, and geopolitics?

*Guest Speaker:* Sara McKinnon (Communication Arts, UW-Madison)


*** Sunday March 8: Annotated Bibliography Due ***

**March 10. Wk 8: Screening Asylum (75 pages)**
How do officials determine who is a refugee and who is a “bogus” claimant? What are the organizational cultures and practices like for those responsible for deciding who qualifies for safe haven? How do those vary across individual, time, and space? What is truth? How is it constructed? Where is it and how can it be found? What does it mean to search for it and what does it mean to tell it?

In-class documentary film screening: *Well-Founded Fear* (*Excerpts*).

**SPRING BREAK.**

**March 24. Wk 9: Seeking Asylum (328 pages)**
What is the experience of seeking asylum and navigating the requisite legal processes? What does an asylum seeker feel and think as they do? How do the political and legal structures of asylum and immigration impact individual lives? How does this perspective differ from that seen “from above”?

- Kenney, David Ngaruri and Philip G. Schrag. 2008. *Asylum Denied: A Refugee’s Struggle for Safety in America.* Berkeley: University of California Press. ([NOTE](#): This book is available online for download via the UW library system)

*** Sunday March 29: Detailed Paper Outline Due ***

**March 31. Wk 10: Refugee Camps (57 pages)**
What is a camp? What does it do, and for whom? Why do they exist? What do they look like, and how and why does that vary?

- Picker, Giovanni and Silvia Pasquetti. 2015. “Durable Camps: The State, the Urban, the Everyday.” *City* 19(5):681-688

**April 7. Wk 11: In Their Own Words: Exile, Liminality, Otherness (Pages, TBD)**
What is the experience of being a refugee? How do refugees narrate and make sense of their own lives and experiences?

In-class screening of *On Exile*, with Q&A by director José Carlos Teixeira (Art, UW-Madison)

- Teixeira, Documentary Booklet and Monograph (Pages, TBD)

**April 14. Wk 12: Those Who Are Not (Pages, TBD)**
Who are those who fall outside of the international refugee regime? Why do they? Should they? Does refugee status, as a highly exceptional and valorized category of immigrant, make us numb to other types of suffering? What are the treatment and experiences of different types of forced migrants who do not qualify as refugees because (1) they are not fleeing individual persecution (but instead climate change, natural disasters, gang violence, poverty and famine) or (2) they have not crossed a national border (i.e., internally displaced persons – IDPs)?
Guest Speaker: Ted Gerber (Sociology, UW-Madison)

- Reading on Internally Displaced Peoples (TBD)

*** Friday April 17: Final Paper Due ***

April 21. Wk 13: Refugee Resettlement (63 pages)
What is the experience of those “lucky few” -- the 1% of refugees -- who are resettled? How are refugees prepared to resettle in a third country? What happens after they do? What are their experiences as they navigate their new “home,” and various organizations and institutions? What do those interactions tell us about the politics and culture of the country to which they have been resettled?


April 28. Wk 14: Final Presentations
Final group presentations and course summation.

- No assigned reading.