This course is an exploration of Southeast Asian political narratives – fictional, official, ethnographic, cinematic, poetic and otherwise. In addition to being a “survey course” of the region’s historical, philosophical and cultural underpinnings, this course attends to what Ranajit Guha’s has termed “the small voices of history” (1999), or what Edward Said (1978) has called “contrapuntal” readings of a place. This means, we look at not just the “official” narratives of the region – those stemming from governments, colonial administrators and academics – but also narratives produced by Southeast Asian minorities, refugees, poets, filmmakers, activists and prisoners. We read these marginal narratives “against the grain” of history. We are interested in looking at this region from a diversity of perspectives, and therefore we draw upon a vast array of texts, films and other sources that provide insights into the making of modern Southeast Asia.

Southeast Asia is in many ways an *imagined community*, one that has undergone the upheavals of empires, colonial mastery projects, economic crises, massive displacements, genocide and authoritarian rule. Yet historical upheavals in the region have also been punctuated by periods of peaceful cooperation. Mainland Southeast Asia – consisting of Thailand, Burma/Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Malaysia, and insular Southeast Asia – consisting of Indonesia, the Philippines, Brunei, Singapore and East Timor – is a diverse region, defined more by its heterogeneity than its similarity. In many Southeast Asian nations you will find Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Christians and Animists living alongside each other. This radical heterogeneity does create tensions in many areas, as we see in Southern Thailand, and in Burma/Myanmar between Muslims and Buddhists, or in Indonesia between Muslims and Christians, and we attempt to understand the historical underpinnings of these tensions by looking at the region from the time of colonialism to the present. Due to the limitations of time, we will not be able to treat each country in equal measure, but I invite you to explore themes you feel are missing in your final paper. The instructor’s empirical experience lies primarily with mainland Southeast Asia, namely Thailand and Burma, so these nations will receive more attention during the course. However, we will also be exploring films, narratives and politics affecting the rest of the mainland, as well as insular Southeast Asia.

Our course meets online, which presents unique challenges and opportunities to our learning experience. We will take advantage of online media tools in order to enhance our learning over the course of the semester. Tools such as our class website, YouTube, Prezi, Netflix and other online media will be used throughout to gain broader
proficiency in online learning and general digital literacy. Reading makes up a bulk of this course, but you will mainly be evaluated on your writing. As a Writing Intensive (WI) course, this class requires that you write weekly reflection essays in the form of critical reflections on our reading assignments; that you weekly comment on your classmate’s work, and finally; that you produce a research paper (6-8 pages) that is constructed around one or more of the narrative texts we explore in this course.

Course Objectives

By the conclusions of the course each student is expected to:

✓ To gain a firm understanding of the historical underpinnings of present politics in the region. A historical understanding of Southeast Asia grounds our knowledge and emphasizes the importance of key figures and historical trajectories;

✓ To become conversant with the narrative and affective dimensions of political, historical, religious and cultural events in Southeast Asia;

✓ To gain an understanding of how narrative affects political thinking by actively engaging in the production of critiques and reflections about the diverse readings we explore in this course;

✓ To become critical of power - students will be expected to learn to identify the workings of power in various forms, including power in language, in institutions, and in daily life. The ability to analyze power effectively, to ask critical questions about authority and legitimacy, are central to a robust understanding of politics;

✓ To use writing as a way to understand course readings. Based upon regular feedback from the instructor on all writing assignments, your are evaluated not just on the quality of your analysis, but on your ability to improve your writing based on feedback.

Grading and Assignments

Grading

Weekly Reflection Essays* (8) – 40%
Online Participation and Comments* – 10%
Final Paper * – 40 %
Final Paper Proposal* – 10%

At the end of the semester, your grade will be assigned according to the following scale: A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D (60-69), and F (below 59).

*Denotes a Writing Intensive assignment.

Weekly Reflection Essays *

Weekly reflection essays will be due each Wednesday at 4pm (HST), uploaded to our website as a blog post. You may choose one reading or media assignment due for that week and write a one-page essay where you reflect on and critique the ideas presented in the assignment. Each essay is worth 5 points, you will write 8 essays for or
a total of 40 points. The reaction papers will be one page (12 point font, Times New Roman), and will answer the following questions: 1) **What argument(s), message or theme is this text expressing?** 2) **What is the purpose of the text or what is it trying to do?** 3) **How does the text change or impact your understanding of politics?** Complete your reaction essay by asking the class a question that you wish to have answered. Feel free to supply any audio, narrative visual or performative methods that aid in presenting your thoughts.

**Online Participation and Comments**

In addition to posting your weekly reflection essay, you must respond by commenting on a reaction post at least once per week. Your responses should consist of a minimum of 250 words that reflect your engagement with the course material, answering questions brought up in the reaction post and your own analysis. The comments are due every **Friday at 12pm (HST).** There may also be brief pop-quizzes and assignments that all count towards your participation points.

**Final Research Paper**

This class is designed to explore the narrative voice in Southeast Asian geopolitics, and as such, your final paper will be your opportunity to write on a topic that is important to you. Your final research paper will consist of a narrative critique that can take two general forms:

1) An analysis of a narrative text we cover in this class (i.e.: *Burmese Days, From the Land of Green Ghosts* or *Noli Me Tangere*).
2) Or an analysis of a Southeast Asian narrative text (broadly construed) of your own choosing (but must first be approved by me).

Throughout the semester you will work on your research project, which will engage, at a minimum, two of the readings we cover in this course. You are expected to conduct independent library research regarding the socio-political “milieu” and context within which the narrative text you analyze took place.

**Research Paper Format:** Your final paper should be between 6 and 8 pages in length, double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font and include a bibliography. This will be a complete and extended version of your project proposal and first draft (see below). Make sure you have your name, the date and page numbers on your assignments. I do not grade on grammar and spelling, but please read and edit you work properly before handing it in. It is a good idea to find someone to help edit your paper.

**Final Paper Proposal**

You will need to turn in a proposal outlining your preliminary research ideas (2 pages). This will be the first draft of your final paper, for which you will receive extensive feedback from me. See the Final Research Paper and proposal Resources section of our website ([www.POLS307NarrativeSEA.com](http://www.POLS307NarrativeSEA.com)) for details pertaining to this assignment. You must include:
1) A tentative title
2) A brief summary of your paper’s theme (150-200 words)
3) A paragraph explaining why you chose this particular reading, how it is important to you and why you think it may be important for our understanding of a particular place, person or phenomena.
4) An expanded outline
5) A tentative conclusion
6) A bibliography with a minimum of 5 bibliographic entries.

Feedback: My grading has two basic aims. The first is to assess the strengths, weaknesses, depth, clarity, complexity, quality, organization and creativity in your writing. The second is more nuanced. Since each of you will arrive at this class with varying writing abilities and previous experiences, your evaluation is also based on your ability to incorporate feedback from me into your writing, as well as grow as a critical thinker through an engagement with the course material. This “progress” will be evident to me through your weekly reflection papers, your proposal and your paper drafts – for which you will receive feedback. In general, your ability to produce careful, nuanced thought in your writing is more important than your ability to follow genre conventions or to “write like an academic.” You are asked to discuss your progress in the class (via phone or Skype), as well as the final paper project, at least twice during the semester.

Required Reading
The books listed below can be found at the UH-Manoa bookstore, as well as online.
2. George Orwell, Burmese Days
3. Pascal Khoo Thwe, From the Land of Green Ghosts
4. Jose Rizal, Noli Me Tangere (Touch Me Not)
5. Supplemental readings found on Laulima: https://laulima.hawaii.edu/portal

Reading Schedule

Section I: The Making of Modern Southeast Asia

Week 1: The Politics of Southeast Asia
6/6-6/10
Introductions, Syllabus overview, course expectations.
George Orwell, Shooting an Elephant (Laulima)
Owen, “Changing Names” (p.17),
“Introduction: Places and People” (p. 26).
Kuhonta, Slater and Vu, The Contributions of Southeast Asian Political Studies
(Laulima)
Class activity: write a brief autoethnography (ungraded).

Week 2: Peasants, Sovereignty and Governance
6/13-6/17
Owen, Ch. 2 “Inner Life and Identity (p 35-51),
Ch. 3: The Struggle for Political Authority (p 52-70) and
Ch. 4: Dynasties and Colonies, Boundaries and Frontiers, (p. 75-82)

**Section II: A Contrapuntal Reading of Colonialism**

**Week 3:** Thailand, the only nation not colonized?

6/20-6/24
Owen, Ch. 14: Consolidation of Colonial Power and Centralization of State Authority, pp. 201-221,
Loos, *Subject Siam: Family, Law and Colonial Modernity in Thailand* (excerpts on Laulima)
Submit your final paper proposal.

**Week 4:** “The White Man’s Burden” in Vietnam, East Indies, and Malaysia

6/27-7/1
Ch. 16: Perceptions of Race, Gender, and Class in the Colonial Era, pp. 243-251
Owen Ch. 23: Vietnam 1885-1975: Colonialism, Communism and Wars, pp. 335-349
Owen Ch 20: British Malaya, pp. 312-321.

**Section III: Engaged Scholarship: Researching Southeast Asia from the Ground**

**Week 5:** Ethnographic Research in Southeast Asia

7/4-7/8
Rosaldo: *Grief and a Headhunter’s Rage* (Laulima).
Watch: *The Act of Killing: Reenacting War Crimes with Indonesian Gangsters*

**Week 6 Engaged Southeast Asian Scholarship**

7/11-7/15
Watch: *Burma VJ*

**Section IV: Narrating the Political**

**Week 7:** Reading Orwell in Burma

7/18-7/22
George Orwell, *Burmesse Days*
Owen, Ch. 5: Myanmar Becomes British Burma, pp. 83-92
Owen, ch 22 “British Burma and Beyond” (325)

**Week 8:** Narrating the Nation

7/25-7/29
Owen Ch. 11: The Spanish Philippines, pp. 147-157
Owen Ch. 19: The Phillipines, 1896-1972, pp. 283-295
Jose Rizal, *Noli Me Tangere* (Touch Me Not)

**Week 9: Beyond Borders I: Voices from the Diaspora**  
8/1-8/5  
Pascal Khoo Thwe, *From the Land of Green Ghosts* (Part I)  
Owen: ch. 37 “Burma Becomes Myanmar”  
Tangseefa, Decha, “Temporary Shelter Areas” and the Paradox of Perce  
ptibility: Imperceptible Naked-Karens in the Thai–Burmese Border Zones. (Laulima)

**Week 10: Beyond Borders I: Gender Justice and Situated Ethics**  
8/8-8/12  
Pascal Khoo Thwe, *From the Land of Green Ghosts* (Part II)  
Final Paper Due at 4pm Thursday on Laulima

**Helpful Resources**  
I encourage you to keep up on the current affairs in the region. There is a great deal of information available on the Internet.

**Regional Newspapers:**  
The Straits Times (Singapore daily) [www.straitstimes.asia1.com.sg](http://www.straitstimes.asia1.com.sg)  
The Jakarta Post (Indonesia daily) [www.thejakartapost.com](http://www.thejakartapost.com)  
The Bangkok Post (Thailand daily) [www.bangkokpost.com](http://www.bangkokpost.com)  
The Nation (Thailand daily) [www.nationmultimedia.com](http://www.nationmultimedia.com)  
The Philippine Daily Inquirer (Philippines Daily) [www.inq7.net](http://www.inq7.net)  
The Philippine Star (Philippines Daily) [www.philstar.com](http://www.philstar.com)  
Irrawaddy (Burma & Southeast Asia) [http://www.irrawaddy.org/](http://www.irrawaddy.org/)  
The Myanmar Times (Myanmar Weekly) [http://mmtimes.com/](http://mmtimes.com/)  
SaigonBao.com (Collection of Vietnamese media) [http://www.saigonbao.com/](http://www.saigonbao.com/)

**Additional Websites:**  
AsiaSource (The Asia Society) [www.asiasource.org](http://www.asiasource.org)  
Center for Southeast Asian Studies (UHM) [http://www.cseashawaii.com/wordpress/](http://www.cseashawaii.com/wordpress/)  
Democratic Voice of Burma [http://www.dvb.no/](http://www.dvb.no/)  
Inside Indonesia (quarterly) [www.insideindonesia.org](http://www.insideindonesia.org)  
SEAsia on-line news services [www.niu.edu/acad/cseas/seanews.html](http://www.niu.edu/acad/cseas/seanews.html)  
Thai Development Research Institute [www.tdri.or.th](http://www.tdri.or.th)  
The Brookings Institution [http://www.brookings.edu/](http://www.brookings.edu/)
General Policies and Advice

*If you have concerns about your performance in the course, please come see me or email me as soon as possible.* We have a lot to cover and it may be easy to fall behind. Taking 1-2 days “off” may severely affect your grade.

**Late work will not be accepted.** It is to your advantage to stay on top of your assignments. Given the short amount of time we have to cover such a large amount of material, if you fall behind it will be extremely difficult for you to catch up. If you miss an exam or a due date because of illness or an emergency, you must have a note from your doctor for me to accept late work.

*A problem with your computer is not a valid excuse for turning in late assignments.* If you are having problems with your computer please plan ahead.

*You must be self-motivated to do well in this class.* This course requires about 9 hours of study/class/research time per week. You will need to schedule time to complete the readings and assignments as indicated in the syllabus.

*Students are advised that academic dishonesty (cheating and plagiarism) are prohibited by the UH "The Student Conduct Code"* - if you are having problems with the class, please come and discuss them with me. Plagiarism or cheating will likely lead to you failing the course, or other academic sanctions.

*If you have a hidden or visible disability, which may require class or testing accommodations, please talk to me as soon as possible or let me know via email.* If you are a student with a documented disability and have not voluntarily disclosed the nature of your disability and the support you need, you are invited to contact the The KOKUA program on campus (956-7511), which coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

*I uphold the University of Hawaii’s nondiscrimination policy in my classes.* UHM does not tolerate discrimination in employment, educational programs, and activities on the basis of race, national origin, ancestry, color, creed, religion, sex, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, political affiliation, arrest and court record, or associational preference. In addition, my classroom, office, and by extension Laulima courses, are UH-designated Safe Zones. The Safe Zone program is committed to creating and maintaining a positive social and academic environment for gay, lesbian, bisexual and trans gendered students. Again, any discriminatory acts or language (on Chat, Messages or Forums) on the basis of sexual orientation will not be tolerated.

**Final Note**
Your learning is my principal concern, so I may modify the schedule or syllabus if it will facilitate your learning. For example, we may discover that we want to spend more time on certain topics and less on others. I’ll consider changing the schedule if such changes would benefit most students’ learning in this course.