



# The Ungrateful Refugee

Written by Dina Nayeri

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# The Ungrateful Refugee

By Dina Nayeri

## The Ungrateful Refugee Review

What is it like to be a refugee? It is a question many of us do not give much thought to, and yet there are more than 25 million refugees in the world. To be a refugee is to grapple with your place in society, attempting to reconcile the life you have known with a new, unfamiliar home. All this while bearing the burden of gratitude in your host nation: the expectation that you should be forever thankful for the space you have been allowed.

## The Ungrateful Refugee Pdf

Aged eight, Dina Nayeri fled Iran along with her mother and brother, and lived in the crumbling shell of an Italian hotel-turned“refugee camp. Eventually she was granted asylum in America. She settled in Oklahoma, then made her way to Princeton. In this book, Nayeri weaves together her own vivid story with the stories of other refugees and asylum seekers in recent years, bringing us inside their daily lives and taking us through the different stages of their journeys, from escape to asylum to resettlement. In these pages, a couple falls in love over the phone, and women gather to prepare the noodles that remind them of home. A closeted queer man tries to make his case truthfully as he seeks asylum, and a translator attempts to help new arrivals present their stories to officials.

## The Ungrateful Refugee Nayeri

Nothing here is flattened; nothing is simplistic. Nayeri offers a new understanding of refugee life, confronting dangers from the metaphor of the swarm to the notion of "good" immigrants. She calls attention to the harmful way in which Western governments privilege certain dangers over others. With surprising and provocative questions, *The Ungrateful Refugee* recalibrates the conversation around the refugee experience. Here are the real human stories of what it is like to be forced to flee your home, and to journey across borders in the hope of starting afresh.

"You never forget the moment you were part of a shivering horde, when another human threw you your food, when you slept in mud alongside your confused children, when you shoved and grunted beside other faceless people, some of them former architects, doctors, teachers. It can break your spirit as fast as hunger."

I simply cannot imagine what it is like to be forced to leave your country, the only home you've ever known, the place you grew up and that nourished your soul. To leave behind all the "You never forget the moment you were part of a shivering horde, when another human threw you your food, when you slept in mud alongside your confused children, when you shoved and grunted beside other faceless people, some of them former architects, doctors, teachers. It can break your spirit as fast as hunger."

I simply cannot imagine what it is like to be forced to leave your country, the only home you've ever known, the place you grew up and that nourished your soul. To leave behind all the people you've known, not knowing if you will ever see them again. To head off into a hostile world, not knowing where you will end up or if you'll ever see your home again.

As a child, Dina Nayeri was forced to leave her home. Along with her mother and younger brother, they made their way first to the UAE, then to Italy, and finally to the USA. Dina's mother had converted to Christianity and was facing threats from the Iranian government. In *The Ungrateful Refugee*, Ms. Nayeri relates what it feels like to be a child without a home or a country. What it feels like to be in limbo, plopped in a place that is not home and yet you are forced to stay in. To go to sleep at night not knowing where you will end up. This book is also about several other immigrants, and tells their stories as well.

There were times I was brought to tears, not just because of the subject matter, but because it was written with such passion and anguish and heart-rending prose. At such times, I was utterly captivated. However, not all the book was written with this intensity and clarity. Just as I was absorbed into the pages, the tone would change, the topic would change, and I'd be plopped back into the real world, my attention diverted to my own reality. I found this frustrating. Of course, no one owes us their story nor their pain, but when I read a memoir, I expect to get to know the author as much as is possible through a book. Perhaps the matter was just too difficult to write about that Ms. Nayeri wasn't able to stay in it

## The Ungrateful Refugee

for long and would need to switch topics, I don't know. Surely this could not have been an easy book for her to write. There was a lot of repetition and too many holes; it wasn't written chronologically but instead jumped all over the place. I don't feel like I got to know her at all; for these reasons I'm giving this 4 stars instead of 5 (actually, 3.5 but I usually round up).

Still, this book was well worth reading. I appreciated the opportunity to expand my mind, to see more what it is like to be a refugee, and especially to see how hurtful it is to expect refugees to be overcome with gratitude. Why? Why do we expect this? These are people who have known great pain and suffering and we just expect them to be so thankful for their plight? Heap praise and songs of thanks upon us for allowing them into our countries? It is demeaning to people to demand their gratitude; we are not giving selflessly if we demand thanks in return. Ms. Nayeri relates how it feels to be expected to be grateful to people when your dignity has just been shattered in your need for charity, how exhausting it is to be expected to show gratitude to everyone you come into contact with. Gratitude comes freely to most and yet it is "so costly if you're tapped for gratitude by everyone you meet."

She also tells how immigrants are often treated, beginning in the detention centers where they are often imprisoned. She pleads for change in the way we handle refugees and immigrants. She asks that immigration officers not be so harsh in their demands for a story without zero contradictions. These are people who have just suffered great trauma and sometimes there will be holes in their stories, not because they are lying but because they have been through so much that the brain has blocked out some things. I did find it irritating though, the expectation that immigrants be given priority over a country's citizens. For instance, she thinks it unfair when they have to wait for subsidized housing. Well, so does everyone. In several cities in the US, one can no longer even be put on a waiting list for subsidized, low income housing because the wait time is decades long. In a perfect world, no one would have to wait for affordable housing, but it's not a perfect world, and if a country is not taking care of its citizens, why should we expect them to treat immigrants better? I hope that does not make me sound xenophobic; I am not. I think we in the West should be doing everything we can to help immigrants, but not by giving them preferential treatment. That only breeds contempt and animosity, and there is more than enough hatred towards immigrants and refugees as it is. We can do better and we must do better, towards all people.

As the effects of climate change worsen, there will be less resources, more unrest, and more immigrants. Countries need to be working now towards a solution that can assimilate as many people as possible; find ways to create jobs for more people, force corporations and billionaires to pay a fair share of taxes so that there is more money to go around for everyone. I don't know what the answer is. It's imperative that we work on it though. If a solution can be found, we need to do all we can to find it.

Do I recommend this book? Absolutely. It might sometimes be frustrating and repetitive but it is still an important book to read, to help us better understand our fellow human beings, and to learn how to do better when it comes to our expectations of immigrants. We owe our fellow humans compassion and understanding and thus it is crucial to learn as much as we can and reading books like *The Ungrateful Refugee* is a good place to start.

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The Ungrateful Refugee

(Thank you to Counterpoint Press for inviting me to read this book and providing me with an ARC in return for my honest review. My thanks also to the author Dina Nayeri and the publisher Catapult.)  
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## The Ungrateful Refugee Catapult

I'm very torn on what rating to give this book. On the one hand, some parts of it are so beautifully written that it should be praised to the rooftops. On the other, it rambles about and loses its sense of direction far more often than I liked.

I found the concept of the 'ungrateful' refugee very compelling. Why should the West treat immigrants as if they somehow hit the jackpot when they arrive in a nice 'safe-ish' democracy and we lock them up in detainment camps and assume everything they tel I'm very torn on what rating to give this book. On the one hand, some parts of it are so beautifully written that it should be praised to the rooftops. On the other, it rambles about and loses its sense of direction far more often than I liked.

I found the concept of the 'ungrateful' refugee very compelling. Why should the West treat immigrants as if they somehow hit the jackpot when they arrive in a nice 'safe-ish' democracy and we lock them up in detainment camps and assume everything they tell us is a lie? The people Nayeri describes left their home countries because their lives were at risk and some - such as she and her mother and brother - left behind beautiful homes and very comfortable lives. Her mother was a Christian convert and so apostate in the eyes of the Iranian regime. Their exodus from Iran was more comfortable than many but still no bundle of laughs. They were eventually accepted in the USA, she got a great education, and subsequently wrote about and campaigned for the rights of refugees.

There are fascinating cultural observations. That an Iranian seeking asylum in the Netherlands has an almost insurmountable barrier to break through that's not about language so much as story-telling. An Iranian can't start a story at the beginning - she tells us. He has to start way back before the beginning and travel a circuitous route to eventually come to the point. A Dutch immigration official has grown up with brevity, precision, and a culture of always coming quickly to the nub of the matter. One thinks the story has to be told in overwhelming detail. The other sees detail as a way to trap people into inconsistency.

In the first half of the book, there are some fascinating accounts of the personal challenges and tragedies of other refugees and these are always insightful. In the second half, things just start to ramble about rather too much.

I was up against a deadline to return my ebook and this lack of structure in the second half had me dragging myself through the final chapters. With a little more focus, this would have been a four-star read for me. I appreciate the insight and the quality of the writing, but that lack of direction has me giving this just a 3-star rating this time. ...more

In her first work of nonfiction, winner of the 2018 UNESCO City of Literature Paul Engle Prize Dina Nayeriâ€”an author whose â€œexploration of the exileâ€™s predicament is tender and urgentâ€• (The New Yorker)â€”examines what it means to be a refugee through her own story of childhood escape



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The Ungrateful Refugee

from Iran, and through the stories of other refugees and asylum seekers.

## The Ungrateful Refugee Book

"you have to understand, / no one puts their children in a boat / unless the water is safer than the land."  
-Warsan Shire, "Home"

THE UNGRATEFUL REFUGEE is a clarion call for human dignity, especially for those who have been forced from their home countries. Nayeri details her experience fleeing Iran as a child and ties it to several other refugees' stories--people who fled persecution and certain death to give themselves and their families a better life. She tears the flimsy distinction between "you have to understand, / no one puts their children in a boat / unless the water is safer than the land." -Warsan Shire, "Home"

THE UNGRATEFUL REFUGEE is a clarion call for human dignity, especially for those who have been forced from their home countries. Nayeri details her experience fleeing Iran as a child and ties it to several other refugees' stories--people who fled persecution and certain death to give themselves and their families a better life. She tears the flimsy distinction between "economic migrant" and "refugee" to shreds as she argues for a common humanity no matter the circumstances and reveals callous and inhumane Western attitudes and policies towards immigrants. This is a book that should be read by everyone, especially those who are white and American or European-born--it acknowledges that nuance is the rule, not the exception, especially when telling a story filled with pain, loss, and indignity. Above all, Nayeri urges us all to go beyond shallow political maneuvering to see the real, human stories hidden within the people we meet. ...more

This was a book that really grappled with the refugee and asylum seeker experience, from someone who has lived this experience first hand and has worked with those in the process. There is lots to unpack in what this book covers, and I think for that reason this would be a wonderful choice for a book club read. For me, one thing that particularly stood out was the discussion about language in both the way people are described, and the way in which people need to wield it to navigate the process. This was a book that really grappled with the refugee and asylum seeker experience, from someone who has lived this experience first hand and has worked with those in the process. There is lots to unpack in what this book covers, and I think for that reason this would be a wonderful choice for a book club read. For me, one thing that particularly stood out was the discussion about language in both the way people are described, and the way in which people need to wield it to navigate the process.

I also appreciated hearing insights into the author's own experience, particularly how it continued into her time in the US and the impact it had on the direction her life took. There was a section at the end of the book that I think explored this really well when she was discussing options for leaving Iran for her half-sister, and the similarities/differences to her own position, including a reflection on how different her life would have been if she had not left Iran. Highly recommend this one!

Thanks to the publisher for a review copy via edelweiss. ...more

## The Ungrateful Refugee Amazon

When she was eight years old, Dina Nayeri's mother began to be harassed by members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard and morality police. It wasn't long before thing got so bad that she packed up her two children and fled Isfahan. The Ungrateful Refugee is a blend of memoir and nonfiction that recounts Nayeri's experiences as a young refugee, with additional narratives from other refugees from Iran who looked to Europe and the United States as safe havens only to go through years of brutal hardship. When she was eight years old, Dina Nayeri's mother began to be harassed by members of Iran's Revolutionary Guard and morality police. It wasn't long before thing got so bad that she packed up her two children and fled Isfahan. The Ungrateful Refugee is a blend of memoir and nonfiction that recounts Nayeri's experiences as a young refugee, with additional narratives from other refugees from Iran who looked to Europe and the United States as safe havens only to go through years of brutal hardship and callous bureaucracy. It should come as no surprise that this book is full of righteous anger at the way refugees are treated by the Western world. This is absolutely a book for our times...

Read the rest of my review at [A Bookish Type](#). I received a free copy of this book from the publisher via Edelweiss, for review consideration. ...more

Nayeri's candid work about her own and other refugees' experiences is eye opening and inspiring as she gives voice to those who have none. She describes her family's journey from Iran, to Europe and to the US as well as the deeply psychic journey for those seeking refuge or asylum.

Clearly, much needs to be changed in this process by world governments. Our expectations of what it means for people to assimilate and what that looks like to the native born, also needs a reality check.

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Dina is a passionate and heart-breakingly honest chronicler of her still amazing journey. She is rather repetitive throughout, however, and all over the place in terms of feelings. I'm guessing that's how it goes.... as she challenges the lifelong gratitude one is supposed to have for those countries of refugee and asylum.

Not certain that open borders is realistic or advisable, and to me she didn't make the case for it particularly well; but certainly much, much more needs to be changed with how the bureaucracies of

The Ungrateful Refugee

governments deal with refugee crises.

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## The Ungrateful Refugee Goodreads

The title got my interest especially as I know a little bit of the author's backstory and had read other works by her. I was intrigued to read what she had to say, especially in light of the ongoing conversation of refugees seeking a better life, safety and hope for the future.

The author lays out her own journey from being a refugee to living in a new life in an unfamiliar and strange land that is not at all like what the media might have portrayed it as. Interwoven are also the stories of other refugees and their stories of what they fled, what they left behind and a little of what they have now. The title got my interest especially as I know a little bit of the author's backstory and had read other works by her. I was intrigued to read what she had to say, especially in light of the ongoing conversation of refugees seeking a better life, safety and hope for the future.

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It was a disappointment. I wasn't really into the author's other works but I had hoped I might like this one. Sometimes it's really interesting and readable. But I felt it was rambling and disjointed. I never really felt I could really connect with either the author's story or the others she wrote about.

I think the author's writing style just isn't for me, but lots of people liked her books. Library borrow was best. ...more

Dina Nayeri has written an open raw book a book that reveals what it's like to be a refugee. She shares with us her life as a refugee from Iran and the experiences of refugees from other countries. In today's climate this is an enlightening real look at what it takes to escape your country your homeland and adjust to a new life new world. Highly recommend this thoughtful revealing book a look at a world I knew nothing about thanks #edelweiss #catapultpublishers for my advance copy.

## The Ungrateful Refugee Kindle

I don't usually write reviews but this phenomenally defiant book is just a thing of beauty. A must-read, regardless of who you are or what you care about.

I wish that everyone, but especially everyone from my home country and any other northern European countries, would read this book. It opens your eyes and your heart, makes you rethink what you think you know about refugees, and it is beautifully written!

## The Ungrateful Refugee Book Review

Thanks to Edelweiss for the review copy. I know it took me a while to finish it but the subject matter could be hard to read at times. I love Nayeri's style of writing. I enjoyed learning more about this author. I learned a lot about what all refugees go through.

I'm deeply inspired by this book and it has been such an eye opening to me: to make something happen while in waiting period. Being a refugee means leaving behind the old life and embarking to an unknown path to the future filled with uncertainties and waiting period.

If you are curious about the struggles of the refugee in general, then this book is for you. The story of this author and Kaweh will be forever the motivational ones for me in striving the best for future and to make the full use of what I have to achieve the result that I want. ...more

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