

VINH NGUYEN

LIVED

GRATITUDE, RESENTMENT, RESILIENCE

REFUGE



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Lived Refuge

Lived Refuge

Gratitude, Resentment, Resilience



Vinh Nguyen



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Preface

The Tiny, Fragile Human Body

For never has experience been contradicted more thoroughly than strategic experience by tactical warfare, economic experience by inflation, bodily experience by mechanical warfare, moral experience by those in power. A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn streetcar now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath these clouds, in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny, fragile human body.¹

—WALTER BENJAMIN, 1936

Walter Benjamin describes the decline in value of experience, in the ability to “exchange experiences,” that was the result of the First World War’s catastrophic transformations.² What the violence of war did was “contradict” and call into question the most ontological and basic, the most immediately reliable aspect of human existence—experience. The new technologies of violence could reduce, if not altogether eradicate, what we know, perceive, and remember. Benjamin would live to see the beginning of another period of intense violence—the Second World War—although not long enough to witness the horrors of the Holocaust, arguably one of the biggest devastations to modern human experience.

Like many other intellectuals, Benjamin fled Berlin for Paris as Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party rose to power in the early 1930s, beginning their transformation of Germany into a fascist state, systematically targeting Jewish populations, among many others. After several austere years in Paris trying to eke out a living and applying for French citizenship, Benjamin was briefly interned in a concentration camp as the Nazis invaded Poland and war encroached on France. In 1940, after failing to obtain a French exit visa, Benjamin attempted to cross the Pyrenees into Spain, with the intention of eventually joining his exiled colleagues in New York City at the Institute for Social Research. Denied entry into Spain at the border, Benjamin ended his life with a dose of morphine.³

Benjamin's experience—of uprooting, statelessness, concentration camp, visa denials, and border crossing—is recognizable to us today as that of a refugee.⁴ He wrote many of his most powerful works, including the ones cited here, while in exile or in the midst of seeking refuge. Although he never wrote about the specific conditions of refuge or the refugee, Benjamin might be considered a “refugee writer,” in that his monumental thinking on experience, history, and memory is indelibly shaped by war and refuge seeking, by the material circumstances of displacement, and by the ways that fascism assaulted his capacity to live and think.

Benjamin's words, written over three-quarters of a century ago, both describe what occurred in one major war of the twentieth century and presciently characterize what would transpire in another. Grimly, they also place a finger on a devastating reality of modern warfare—that war is an assault on human experience. Bombings, fires, chemical weapons, genocides, displacements, camps, and closed borders—these are all experiences that erode and alter humanity, that wear away at *the very possibility of experience* for us all. In the midst of this bombardment is the human body, tiny and fragile, standing unprotected in the field of “destructive torrents and explosions” that humankind has created. The target of war is this human, not the human that needs the validation of political rights, but a breathing body exposed to life's dizzying array of impacts and intensities. The notion of experience, particularly in a time of war, a time that modernity has made its default, coalesces in this figure of the tiny, fragile human body.

Benjamin is perhaps best known for his articulation of human history as a totality of ruins. Musing on Paul Klee's painting *Angelus Novus* in his essay “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” Benjamin captured, in the figure of the angel of history, an image of historical movement, of how history is fixed on contemplating the past while it is forcefully drawn into the future. The angel, caught in flight in the wrong direction, appears disconcerted—“His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread.” Benjamin continues:

His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.⁵

The debris of the past, which can only be perceived in fleeting moments, is what we must attempt to grasp and transform. The angel, propelled into the future, cannot stay in the present, which quickly joins the wreckage pile of the past, but only observe its cumulative effect, its buildup of utter destruction. If the angel of history is irreparably pulled into the future while he looks back, then the tiny, fragile human body is the one that *lives in* the catastrophe of human experience. The human body is one that has yet to attain transcendence and become an angel who takes flight

and sees history in retrospect. In this way, the human body is not a contemplator of history but an experienter of the present, a figure of the expansive here and now.

In a contemporary moment of unprecedented mass displacement and asylum seeking, the refugee might be *the* representative *experienter*—the figure in which experience’s impacts and effects are most apparent. Marked by a profound vulnerability—one that is about not just the potential to be harmed, but also the potential to be with others—the tiny, fragile human body of our time is the refugee seeker.⁶ Its fate, as a historical figure, is yet to be determined. What is certain, however, is that the refugee withstands all this violence, even while subjected to the global war machine and the technologies of the state. There, beneath the clouds—from which a bomb, perhaps, has just been dropped and is finding its path to the ground, where the moment of impact will be followed by thunder and blinding light—the refugee is not just a target but a *presence in the world*, part of our collective conscience, our stubborn will not to be erased.

Benjamin dedicated a considerable amount of his writing to diagnosing the modern crisis of experience, which he saw as “spiritlessness” and complacency in his early essays, and as a kind of collective poverty later in his career.⁷ While this impoverishment threatens the very possibility of politics, it also occasions a *tabula rasa*, an opportunity to begin creating the world anew. It is the starting ground for the social, political, and aesthetic avant-garde, for the spirited capacity to dream and foster compassion that Benjamin invested in the category of youth. For him, poverty forces us to “start from scratch; to make a new start; to make a little go a long way; to begin with a little and build up further.”⁸ This crisis of experience is not just a lack or deprivation, but is a condition of necessity ushering in change. Thus, the need to restart is the foundation for building another experience that is different from the one we are currently stuck in. This alternate experience, or act of (re)starting, also aptly describes the refugee’s passage through time and space. *Starting again* might be a provocative verb of “refuge.” To start again is to renew experience. As Raymond Williams reminds us, it is to *try*—in the sense of both attempting and testing—all “kinds of evidence and its considerations.”⁹

. . .

This book finds its central locus in experience. Throughout these pages, I examine lived experiences to offer a different view of what refuge might look like or what it could be beyond, but still entangled with, the dominant juridical-political formation. Experience, as I take it, is not a categorical reality or defined conclusion. Rather, it is hypotheses or acts of trying, working out, and imagining that direct our attention to how people make sense of being a refugee and living in refuge. That is, experience emerges from reflection, (self-) representation, and storytelling in the still-active present moment. Benjamin’s discussion of storytelling as providing “counsel” in an “exchange of experience” is useful here.¹⁰ How we experience is connected to how we tell stories and exchange knowledge, whether that be

through literature, human actions, or ways of relating to others. If the figure of the refugee is an experiencer, then it is also crucially a *storyteller*.

It is difficult to think of a figure that more starkly embodies the urgency and value of narrative in the contemporary moment. For many refugees, matters of life and death hang on a single narrative; or, more specifically, on *how* that narrative is told—its qualities of believability, consistency, and clarity.¹¹ The “right” story becomes a token that opens a door to political rights and protection. A story is exchanged for a new life, or a story forecloses its possibility. And so, refugees must learn to become storytellers: to prove persecution to officials, to describe trauma to reporters, to express gratitude to the humanitarian state, and to articulate their success to the national community. Or to remain silent. Or, compellingly, to protest, organize, and enact politics. What it means to be a refugee and to experience refuge is inextricably bound up with narrative. And narrative, of course, is never neutral, bringing with it a world of affordances as well as demands.

This book not only explores stories but is itself an act of storytelling. More precisely, it is an attempt to tell a story of refuge that highlights experiential complexity, how refuge is made and remade by the very people who have an embodied investment in its possibility. I am one of these individuals, and in writing this book I am also writing about what I have seen and known, what moves me. Every single word on these pages is motivated by my own experience as a refugee subject, as someone who has been on a boat, crossed borders, lived in camps, and sought refuge in Canada. I have recounted this story elsewhere.¹² I have written about my family history and its connection to what is known as the “Vietnam War,” and have argued for the value of research that is personally significant, that takes as its starting point the embodied knowledge of the researcher. In this project on the experience of refuge, however, I have refrained from beginning with my own experience. I do so not because I want to create critical distance or hide myself behind my work. Rather, I wish to resist the desire for a *confession* as an entry point to an idea.

I hesitate because someone like myself, who researches the subject matter that I do, is expected to locate and reveal their personal stakes—and of course there are so many—in order to even begin. I have been advised, more than once, to include my own compelling personal narrative in this project and to show my deep attachment to its ideas. This (auto)ethnographic reveal, I understand, can be productive and empowering, especially because there was a time when I was discouraged from disclosing such information, lest my research come across as less rigorous and, as a result, not of epistemological value. My desire here is to question what embodied or attached research could look like. Or what it means to write *about* an experience or idea. Can what seems to be detachment hold the most intimate of desires? Is not my writing, whatever it may be about or whatever the routes I take to get there, already indelibly shaped by my personal experience of refuge?

This is the reason I begin this book on refuge with Walter Benjamin’s words. Benjamin lived and died before the contemporary legal category of refugee came

into existence, but his experience would have been socially recognized as such. His ideas and way of thinking are useful for us today in trying to comprehend experiences of refuge. That is to say, Benjamin wrote about refuge and what it was like to be a refugee, even though these were not the explicit topics of his oeuvre. He did so simply by writing, or by allowing his experience to animate his expansive thinking on human crisis and the hope of an awakening. Benjamin's ideas are deeply situated in his social and political context, and in what that context did to him. I suspect that this is the case for all of us who engage in thinking—even, or especially, in cases that seem to eschew the biographical life of the thinker.

I am moved to tears when I imagine Benjamin in his final days, carrying a heavy suitcase containing a manuscript that had to be saved from the hands of the Gestapo at all costs, ascending and descending the mountainous slopes between France and Spain.¹³ I weep because, for me, this image is a lightning flash that strikes next to one of my family and me on a small boat in the open seas, the wind picking up, as we spot the shores of Thailand in the distance. It is an image that helps me to recognize my now, and to yearn for the existence and safe arrival of many more manuscripts. In his moment of danger, Benjamin knew that writing must be preserved—that our ideas, thoughts, and experiences are to be protected because they are the most precious parts of ourselves. They are the things that will endure and reach others on distant shores. The work of writing and thinking, as I have learned through this process, is a form of finding refuge, one that propels us onward in the unending journey.

Although opening with Benjamin's words, of the time during and after the Second World War, which produced the modern category of "refugee," this book turns to refugees from the wars in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, which were consequences of the political landscape the Second World War created, of Third World decolonial struggles and the splitting of the world into capitalist and communist superpowers. As participants in one of the largest and most visible cases of global refugee migrations in the twentieth century, refugees of these wars in Southeast Asia provide us with an important entry point into accessing and assessing the concept of refuge. I focus on Southeast Asian refugee displacement as my context of investigation because this is a historically and culturally rich case study, and because this is where my heart lies.

Wrapped up in U.S. foreign policy, Western imperial ambitions, and international refugee resettlement, the Southeast Asian refugee case study is instructive for analyses of war refugees in other geopolitical contexts. It shows how refuge is produced in histories of violence and how it is lived in ongoing struggle. By no means, however, does this make Southeast Asian refugees or the experiences of war refugees (as opposed, say, to sexual orientation and gender identity refugees or climate refugees) exemplary or prototypical for "lived refuge." Rather, Southeast Asian war refugees offer only one illuminating path of many possible paths into analyzing the experience of refuge. Moreover, I recognize that the English-

language and Global North–centric focus of my assembled materials limit the parameters of my insights. Yet my hope is that the ideas explored in this book keep little embers of thought alive for more ambitious projects in the hands of more capable scholars. Thus, while the affective experiences I foreground in this book—gratitude, resentment, and resilience—might resonate with other groups of refugees or in other fields of study, my task is not to produce a total theory that could be imported into and mapped across sociohistorical and disciplinary contexts. Rather, my modest aim is to ask a conceptual question and attempt to offer some working hypotheses.

Lived Refuge is thus an exploration of a concept and how that concept is experienced. I am interested here in the conceptual, not as abstract but as lived and represented. I am convinced that the best path to the conceptual is to wander through the specificities of human lives. The value of what we call “case studies”—of where I come from—is that they do not just demonstrate a concept, but also create and define it. Such attempts to create and define, which is to know and feel, is an entire life’s work. That I have the time and space to take the intellectual journey of this book (a beginning, really) is sometimes incomprehensible to me. Certainly, such an endeavor was not within the realm of possibility in my younger years, or in other moments of life lived elsewhere in another language. In the end, this is my modest investigation into the concept of refuge—what it is and what it might mean.

What, for a refugee subject, is more attached and invested than that?

Introduction

Experience of Refuge

THE LIVED FORM

How is refuge experienced?

This question focalizes refugee subjects in understandings of refuge. While such a focus might seem obvious, theoretical knowledge of the concept has not fully reckoned with the very people who undergo and live through it. A robust theory of refuge that begins with refugee experiences has yet to be formulated, developed, and tested. By this I do not mean that refugee experiences have not been examined. Indeed, there is no shortage of academic, journalistic, artistic, and legal documentation that make refugee lives “knowable.” Yet this knowledge remains knowledge about refugees either as “objects of investigation”—as people to be studied and managed—or, more recently, as agential subjects who author their own lives, actively resisting the conditions that imperil them. This book considers how refugee knowledges, which are distinct but not mutually exclusive from knowledge about refugees, might inform knowledge *about refuge*. That is, I examine accounts of refuge that emerge from an epistemological standpoint centering what refugees think, do, and feel within the time-space that refuge opens up.

Contemporary notions of refuge rooted in the political genealogy of the state—as a form of governance that coalesces around the city in ancient times or the nation in modern times—rely on sovereign authority as a condition of possibility. The form of political refuge we know today is not possible without the existence of a self-determining authority that decides on asylum for seekers of political protection from outside its jurisdiction. This capacity to protect is invested in the form of the nation-state because, in the “national order of things,” only this formation has the power and legitimacy to make an individual “human”

through “rights.”¹ Asylum, as Ranjana Khanna reminds us, is the right of the state.² Accordingly, asylum is not just an expression of sovereignty but is constitutive of sovereignty itself, such that determinations of refuge (its granting *and* denial) come to define the character and self-governing authority of the nation-state.³ Underlying this juridical-political conceptualization of refuge is the state’s capacity to determine the outcome of asylum claims, in a biopolitical enactment of “make safe and let perish.”⁴

As an exertion of sovereignty, refuge thus prioritizes the presence of the state as primary guarantor and arbiter in matters of migration, protection, and political subjectivity. The category of refuge can be seen as an apparatus of the state that expediently describes its authority to include and exclude, its international diplomatic relations, and its formulation of self and community. As such, dominant modalities of refuge such as legal protection, human rights, hospitality, and humanitarian rescue tell us more about the state than they do about refugees. More precisely, they describe a certain relationship of power between the state and refugees that reifies and naturalizes the former’s primacy as sovereign actor, reference point, and teleology.

Nevzat Soguk and Yǎn Lê Espiritu have each pointed out how, rather than being “problems,” refugees provide “solutions” to the quandaries of statecraft, or the state’s ability to produce and reproduce itself.⁵ Refuge functions in the same vein, allowing the liberal state to resolve, in gestures of welcome or refusal, the various pressures that threaten its community and its participation in a global community of communities. Within a contemporary globalized, capitalist network of nation-states that is less about the waning of national borders and more about how globality is still predicated on the unit of the nation-state, prevalent understandings of refuge, which take liberal rights and movement toward the Global North as the ideal form, construct refuge as both privilege and humanitarian act—a coveted gift that the state generously gives to refugees. If, in our current moment, refuge is tantamount to papers and documents, or official recognition through legal designations, then it is first and foremost a bureaucratic process that depends on the sovereign’s authorization. In other words, there is no political refuge without the nation-state, and it is through refuge that the nation-state further fortifies its authority.

The reliance on a sovereign state—or on other politically viable institutions, such as the United Nations (UN)—to sanction and certify asylum might be called the *juridical-political* form of refuge. The modern concept of refuge is overdetermined by this form, and its culmination is a singular moment of sovereign decision-making that renders refuge a possession, a right that one does or does not possess. A fixation on the moment of decision produces refuge as an event, one that is finished and complete once the decision is made. The categorical quality of the juridical-political form localizes refuge within a narrow time-space, as always something that is past.

Once refuge is achieved, it is paradoxically no longer refuge; what occurs after is just life to be lived in another form, as resident, citizen, individual with rights—as a subject now (re)equipped with the opportunity to pursue the “good life.” While it has been the most important legal instrument for the material protection of millions of refugees and migrants in the years following the Second World War, juridical-political refuge is conceptually limited and incomplete. As a fixed form, it cannot account for the complex ways in which refuge continues to unfold as something to be lived, something that is not yet over or that is still to come.

A more dimensional concept of refuge needs to consider its long duration, a temporality that extends beyond the bureaucratic moment of decision-making, in order to perceive how refugees experience refuge. This book offers an understanding of refuge as affective experiences and social relations—refuge in its *lived* form. This lived experience is human embodiment and contingency that cannot be contained within the rigid bounds of a legal category. It is the texture of structural forces as seen in ongoing concrete relations and meanings. Lived refuge unfolds in the active present of psychic and social life, gaining quality as it unfurls in thinking, feeling, and doing. Refuge comes into meaning precisely by being lived in human time—what Henri Bergson calls enduring the new and unforeseen flow of duration.⁶ Duration is when experience, as consciousness and sociality, emerges in time. Focusing on experience thus sheds light on what refugees *do* with refuge, how they make and remake it for their own purposes, needs, and desires.

Experience, as I am using the term, does not refer to a fully formed reality, a transparent phenomenon with ontological stability. Rather, as Raymond Williams and others have taught us, experience carries with it the sense of experiment, of “a conscious test or trial” and a “consciousness of what has been tested or tried.”⁷ I argue that the experience of refuge is an *experiment* in which ways of being “protected,” claiming “rights,” and feeling “safe” are tried and tested. Such experiments point to the social ongoingness of refuge, to how it is a living formation that transforms and develops as refugees move through the world in encounters, emergences, and transitions.

Experimentation keeps the meaning of refuge open to and in tension with the exigencies of life. It demonstrates that refuge is not a predetermined sociopolitical “good,” but a continual process in which refugees negotiate, revise, and recalibrate what it means to exist in, with, and under refuge. The experiment of experience allows us to ask not only what is good about refuge, but also whether it is good, and for whom, and at what or whose expense. Under what conditions is refuge good, and for how long? How might it be good in ways that were not intended or supported by those who “give” it?

The lived form is not necessarily oppositional to or discrete from the juridical-political form. Recognizing that the legal definition is central to our current understanding of refuge, but that it is also ultimately inadequate, the lived form gestures to an extended duration of experience that is in dialectical tension with legal and

state directives. We know that the state has a firm hand in producing and shaping the experience of refuge, but we know little about the creativity—ways of enduring and transforming—that refugees call upon as they navigate social and historical conditions.⁸ Moreover, we do not know how this creativity could redefine our established notion of refuge. While refugees do not hold the political authority to determine whether they receive legal protection or not, experience as experimentation highlights their social participation in setting the terms for how refuge is received and how it is ultimately lived.

THROUGH THE OPENED DOOR

A crystalline moment in lê thi diem thúy's semiautobiographical novel *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* captures this lived refuge with sharp clarity. Providing an account of Vietnamese refugees resettled in San Diego, California, in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, the narrator describes refuge as an *opened door* that refugees apprehensively walk through. Recalling the first moments of her family's arrival in the United States, she explains how their American sponsor failed to comprehend the refugees' response to the offer of refuge: "He didn't remember that we hadn't come running through the door he opened but, rather, had walked, keeping close together and moving slowly, as people often do when they have no idea what they're walking toward or what they're walking from."⁹

This simple but profound image of refugees hesitantly passing through an opened door concretizes the idea of refuge as an experience. While the metaphor of the opened door neatly illustrates the bureaucracy and management of (in) hospitality, lê's description urges us to pay attention to the individuals who pass through the door of refuge and their embodied reactions to such passages. The uncertainty and suspension that mark the refugee family's movement are typical responses, but their slow walk signals another, more complicated, relationship to refuge. If a full-tilt run through the door is a categorical acceptance of refuge and its promises, then a hesitant walk demonstrates caution, or a refusal to completely give one's self over to its grand embrace. The collective slow walk, as a temporal experience, is an affective disposition that conveys the refugees' desire and capacity to determine the pace of refuge, and to receive the "gift" on their own terms. Although the door's frame—as bureaucracy, threshold, and relation of (in) hospitality—is already constructed for refugees to pass through, *how* they pass through matters.

The experience of refuge, then, is never overdetermined by the institutional powers that attempt to shape its outcome. The refugee's hesitation, for example, already signals a different relation, a testing of and friction over the meaning of refuge that is offered to them. This book investigates these different relations to refuge: How exactly do refugees pass through the door, and what happens next? What does refuge look and feel like? How do people experience it? And how do

they express such experiences? These are questions that concern the temporality of lived experience. The partial and necessarily provisional answers that emerge from these questions, I contend, comprise the very substance of refuge, its most essential meaning.

To say that experience exceeds bureaucracy is not a controversial point, but it might be more destabilizing to say that such experiences constitute the kernel of what refuge is, and therefore should be integral to its conceptualization. This book wagers that affective experiences of refuge offer its most illuminating definitions and most rigorous conceptions. Refuge is a much more complex and experientially expansive formation than the juridical-political form would have us believe, and we need a discourse that reflects this larger horizon.

This book proposes three affective experiences—*gratitude*, *resentment*, and *resilience*—to examine the lived “structure of refuge.” These affective experiences bring together crucial dimensions of refugee experience: gratitude as a dominant expectation and intersubjective relation; resentment as an expression of injury that is socially prohibited in the prolonged struggle for protection; and resilience as the storying of continual presence. They shed light on some of the constitutive relations of refuge and the refugee’s being in the world. Extending *lê’s* metaphor, if refuge is an opened door that leads into a house, then gratitude, resentment, and resilience are the windows that provide glimpses into how refugees inhabit this house, as well as the contours of its interior. They are windows that lead into the rooms where relations and ways of being are practiced and transformed. These experiences show the limits and possibilities of refuge, and are the temporalities in which these limits and possibilities are consolidated and challenged. The house, then, is never complete, never an immutable reality for refugees to enter.¹⁰ Its very frame, scaffolding, and foundation are instead constantly shifting and transforming as experiences unfold within and beyond the house of refuge.¹¹

To think through the lived structure that refuge takes, or to say that refuge has identifiable experiences, is not to accept that it is a fixed and fully defined entity. Rather, it is to emphasize that the house of refuge is built in time, by the state, citizens, and refugees alike, and as such holds the potential for renovation, for both minor revisions and radical change. In contemplating gratitude, resentment, and resilience as affective experiences, I understand them expansively as modes of living in refuge. They are the feelings, thoughts, and relations that illuminate the experiential structure of refuge. As I discuss in dialogue with Raymond Williams below, this structure takes form through, and also holds, lived experiences.

The opened door of refuge, as *lê* sketches out for us, receives refugees and delivers them into this structure. Indeed, upon their arrival in the United States, the family in *lê’s* novel is compelled, first and foremost, to feel grateful: “What could we do but thank him. And then thank him again.”¹² Gratitude already exists as a relation for these refugees to enter into, and the rhetorical phrasing of the narrator’s question conveys how it is a force of expectation that directs being and

behavior, shaping individual and collective experiences of refuge. What could we do—what could the refugees do but give their gratitude in return for refuge, and continue to do so in perpetuity? Even when the family senses that something is not right, realizing that the sponsor had inherited them from his deceased father, and that they were his reluctant and perhaps unwanted responsibility, gratitude prevails: “We should always remember that he opened a door for us and that this was an important thing to remember.”¹³ The sentence’s repetitive syntax—how the double emphasis on remembering bookends the opening of refuge’s door—underscores gratitude’s deep and encompassing presence.

And yet this gratitude, which entails a sense of benefit, is not the total sum or end of the refugees’ story. In lê’s account of the difficult fractures they live with, and the hauntings that refuse to disappear, refuge is a struggle to survive as well as a fight for the unclaimed present. In the narrative, the lived meaning of refuge is constituted by various disappointments, dissolutions, and unresolved grief. The attainment of refuge does not resolve life’s complications, but initiates them. As much as it binds people together in intimacy and solidarity, the shared experience of migration and refuge also creates irreparable tears that keep them apart, and in search of places to land. The subject of refuge is not so much gratefully “settled,” but more so, as Ma Vang would say, “on the run,” continually seeking the very safety that refuge promises, as lê’s narrator poignantly reminds us: “When haunted, I would leap out of windows and run. If there were no windows, I would kick down doors. The point was to get to the street, at any cost. I would come to see running as inseparable from living.”¹⁴

The house is not always a home. Running is inseparable from living—this is also an experience of refuge, one that might not align with, but that crucially nuances, the prevalent image of refuge as safe arrival. For Vang, a “permanence of running” marks the refugee.¹⁵ Acts of “running” in *Lived Refuge*—from contesting deportation to engaging in solidarity activism, from wrestling with genocide to achieving success, from inventing the self to destroying life, from recovering experience to writing refuge into being—show how refugees are, as the word’s root suggests, fugitives, always escaping the capture of established meaning and legal prescriptions to figure different ways to exist. To understand the refugee as a fugitive is not only to reinvigorate an archaic meaning embedded in the term, but also to see the practice of refuge as marked by a sense of continual movement that seeks to evade the impulse to pin down and calcify its meaning for bureaucratic and institutional ends. This book explores how *refuge* and *refugee* are not fully formed, transparent categories that are easily reducible to positivistic definitions. They are, instead, dynamic and complex concepts that name a range of both defined and unarticulated ways of being in the world. Refuge is a long duration of encounters and struggle, of experience and experiments, in which refugee subjects continue to live within an unfinished arrival.

Refuge never ends.

EXPERIENCE AND EXPERIMENT

If refuge never ends, then it is always being experienced. This continuous experience, or making and remaking of refuge, is analytically captured in a “structure.” What I call a lived *structure of refuge* gives form to affective experiences that, under the weight of power, might elude perception or scrutiny.¹⁶ At the same time, the experiential shape of refuge comes into view through a wide range of experiences, three of which are examined in this book.¹⁷ Structure of refuge is a framework for analyzing experience and, through it, a way to perceive the appearance that refuge takes.

But the idea of structure is often thought to be laden with immutability and permanence, and to approach refuge as a structure risks reifying it as a finished entity, a fully developed meaning ready for analysis and application, which is counter to this book’s foundational premise that refuge is a living formation in which meaning is struggled over.¹⁸ I employ *structure*, building on Raymond Williams’s well-known concept of *structures of feeling*, because it is an evocative and useful frame for bringing into relief experiences of refuge as they are socially lived.¹⁹

Conceived as a way for Williams to investigate active cultural forces, structures of feeling describes social life as “forming and formative processes,” as opposed to fixed and “formed wholes.”²⁰ This is experience in its most dynamic and charged state, suspended in the capacity to actualize in various relationships, formations, and institutions. Although it can be mistaken for ideology, which is often set and explicit, Williams’s concept instead names the very forces that keep ideology in tension, putting pressure on that which is established or fully articulated to usher in new and different social consciousness. Experience could one day become ideology, but currently exists as feeling—which covers both thought and emotion and is the meeting point for the personal and the social.

Although Williams did not elaborate on his choice of *structure* as terminology, it is clear in his writing that structure is a constitutive carrier for “what is actually being lived . . . a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material, but each in an embryonic phase before it can become fully articulated and defined exchange.”²¹ Accordingly, structure could be taken as that which allows for feeling to be organized and seen. Structure, as Williams indicates, while “firm and definite,” holds the “most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity.”²² Here, structure is the locus of the embryonic, a womb if you will, for the development of inchoate ideas, impulses, and desires. It is the temporal grounds for what is actually being lived, which is another name for undifferentiated experience—“thought as felt and feeling as thought.”²³ In this way, structure may be the best place to comprehend and analyze the deeply embodied but elusive idea of experience.

In *Marxism and Literature*, Williams mentions that “structures of *experience*” might be a more appropriate term for describing emergent social thoughts and feelings that exert palpable influence on a culture but have yet to be formalized

into worldview or ideology.²⁴ He concedes that *experience* is “the better and wider word” but hesitates to use it, because “one of its senses has that past tense which is the most important obstacle to recognition of” the living presence that the structures of feeling concept seeks to define.²⁵ The past tense of experience—accumulated knowledge that hardens into lessons—stands in contradistinction to the immediacy and flux of social experiences that are in the process of forming. Bearing heavily on experience, this past tense is the sedimentation of experience through cognitive processes of reflection and analysis, the conversion of experience into knowledge.²⁶ It is this past experience that forms the basis for identifiable social forms like subjectivity, community, and culture. The seemingly finished quality of past experience is incompatible with—indeed an obstacle to—sensing the unfolding, visceral present.

Yet, as Williams points out in his book *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, experience also has a present tense—as awareness or consciousness—that is active and ongoing. He writes that the present tense of experience is “the fullest, most open, most active kind of consciousness, and it includes feeling as well as thought.”²⁷ The present tense is a diffuse, as yet undefined, experience that is nonetheless lived and felt in the here and now. It is this meaning of *experience* that makes it a suitable, albeit unchosen, term for structures of feeling.

There is, however, also an archaic, and latent, meaning of experience that undergirds Williams’s concept. Derived from the Latin *experientia*, which denotes “trial, proof, or experiment,” the word *experience* was interchangeable with the word *experiment* until the eighteenth century.²⁸ The close relationship between experience and experiment points to the operations of testing and trying that are at the root of experience. The suppositional quality of the experiment means that experience, too, is subject to trial and error, to temporary claims and future revisions.

To be experienced is to be tested and proven, but the very experiences that give rise to the state of being experienced are themselves constantly involved in testing and recalibration. The very nature of the experiment, which seeks to erase and upturn established permanence, means that experience is not stable or absolute, even when it has been incorporated as lessons learned or fixed knowledge.²⁹ As the foundation upon which new experiences are judged, mediated, and absorbed, past experience is simultaneously subjected to trial with the passage of time. Accumulated knowledge necessarily shifts and changes as it is confirmed, amended, or challenged by subsequent layers of experience. The past tense of experience appears not merely as calcified knowledge, but more so as established standards and hypotheses awaiting perpetual trial, evolving as other experiences take shape.

Through the lens of experiment, the past tense of experience must be understood as truths that are undergoing verification and confirmation with the present progressive. The past is thus not over and done with, and experience retains a deeply present temporal orientation in which knowledge and consciousness are never entirely static or immutable. The logic of experience, past *and* present,

thus requires its constitution to be continually revised. To sense experience is to see how the social can be changed, and as Anthony Barnett reminds us, “Williams’s development of the concept ‘structure of feeling’ is designed exactly to restore the category of experience to the world, as a part of its mutable and various social history.”³⁰

It is strange, then, seeing how Williams privileged experience in his work and given the potential embedded in its meanings, that he bypassed the term *experience* in favor of *feeling*.³¹ Experience as experimenting is a potent descriptor for social experiences that are still actively involved in developing into, or receding from, more fixed and explicit expressions. In fact, the concept of structures of feeling is most powerfully articulated through descriptors of experimentation. In the most lucid definition of the concept, Williams characterizes it as a chemical experiment in which liquid elements are in the midst of a reaction—mixing, transferring energy, forming chemical bonds, and changing physical states. He writes that “structures of feeling can be defined as social experiences in *solution*, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been *precipitated* and are more evidently and more immediately available.”³² In contrast to cultural precipitation—recognizable and finished forms that have taken shape as clear “relationships, institutions, and formations”—social experiences in solution are suspended in an interval where their shape and final effect are still to be determined, but their impact permeates throughout lived culture, human action, and a milieu.³³ The force of *in solution* is dynamic and interactive, and experiences remain elusive to formal capture but are not absent in the organic flux of social alchemy.

Williams consistently employed the notion of experiment to describe structures of feeling. Such consistency indicates how the experiment is not just a vehicle for articulating the concept, but is actually integral to its meaning. Structures of feeling are thus experiments. They are attempts to inaugurate social change and to signal possibility without solidifying those changes or possibilities into a past tense. Structures of feeling are experiences that, by definition, resist formalization, that surmise instead of conclude. Williams tells us that once a structure of feeling is formalized, another structure of feeling necessarily arises to keep the totality and coherence of any formation, period, or culture in deep tension.

Continuing with the experiment, he explains that the methodology of structures of feeling could be called “cultural hypothesis,” which indicates a potential in the form of what might be, but never a firm conclusion or finality to experience.³⁴ As a method of hypothesizing, structures of feeling are experiences that require renewed feedback with observed actuality and evidence, to be proven and disproven, over and over again. Thinking about experiences as hypotheses and as in solution means that they are provisional, even when they are immediate, real, and authentic to a subject or group of subjects. A focus on experience thus re-imbues structures of feeling with the residual quality of experience as experiment.

STRUCTURE OF REFUGE

The critical confluence of experience and experiment in Williams's structures of feeling concept makes it a generative model for my thinking on the lived form of refuge. We could, accordingly, understand structure as where and when lived experience unfolds, and this unfolding as a duration in which the meaning of refuge is created and recreated. As such, structure of refuge functions as a hypothesis for comprehending how refuge is experienced as feeling and thought, or how refugee subjects participate in the possibilities and uncertainties of social life. This hypothesis proposes that refuge is dynamic and ongoing, and experiences like gratitude, resentment, and resilience evince this ongoingness. As I demonstrate in this book, gratitude's relational attachments, resentment's expression of past injuries, and resilience's reproduction of experience shed light on refuge *in solution*—as a protracted and unfixed form.

Experience tells us that refuge is highly contested, its meaning in constant flux. This processual structure of refuge takes shape through experience, but it also holds these experiences so that they can be seen and examined. The relationship between structure and experience can be described as a delicate oscillation. As opposed to a unilateral, causal relationship, structure and experience emerge through movement, whereby the specificity of experience strikes a light on the structure and the structure, in turn, reflects back on experience, illuminating further views. *Structure*, here, designates not a complete and discrete construction, but rather a process of building. This is the active sense of the term, one that reveals how the structure of refuge is always under the continuous action of transforming into another lived meaning.

Building on the sense of *experience* as ongoing experiment, I examine "lived experience" not as some raw and unmediated property verified with the force of truth and authenticity. Rather, experience lived is experience mediated through representation, or through acts of present reflection and expression. Lived experience is how refugee subjects come to know, understand, and construct how they experience life or live experience. Martin Heidegger has philosophized living, in the sense of *Dasein* or Being, as a *presencing* (determined by time and materiality) whereby living is a being-in-the-world.³⁵ This means that life is a being-with in a network of "involvements" that reveal the relational basis of existence.³⁶ To live experience, then, is to relate in the everyday experiments—acts of doing and trying—of being present.

That which is lived, I suggest, is a process of negotiating experience, often through modes of self-representation or storytelling, to both make sense of and bring into existence a presence in the world. Writing about narratives in forced migration research, Marita Eastmond makes a useful distinction between "*life as lived*, the flow of events that touch on a person's life; *life as experienced*, how the person perceives and ascribes meaning to what happens, drawing on previous

experience and cultural repertoires; and *life as told*, how experience is framed and articulated in a particular context and to a particular audience.³⁷ I, however, am less convinced about this academic distinction. It appears to me that how life is lived is inseparable from how it is experienced, which is inseparable from how it is told. Experience emerges in the narrative of living and being, and to establish relationality is to provide an account of oneself and one's story with others.³⁸ The affective experiences discussed in this book are ways that refuge undergoes experimentation and acquires meaning through the narratives we tell about ourselves and about those who share experience.

Thus, I do not turn to literary and cultural productions as evidence or case studies that demonstrate the ethnographic transparency of lived experience. Rather, in analytical close readings, elements of the structure of refuge emerge for us to apprehend its constructed and contested nature. Experience comes into being via the forms of representation people use to make meaning; this is where aesthetic form helps us to think through the complex entanglement of living, experiencing, and representing. Yet, although aesthetics does not provide some privileged access into lived experience, through it we can see how people attempt to understand, process, and mediate living, and this is perhaps the closest we can get to lived experience. My close readings of the assembled texts, thus, are not excavations of sociohistorical knowledge, even though I believe that literary and cultural productions *are* valuable sources of such.³⁹ Rather, in these aesthetic representations, I read how experience is made, remade, and contested.

Christopher Lee reminds us that attending to form “reveals the mediated relationships among knowledge, representation, and subjectivity.”⁴⁰ Kandice Chuh asserts that aesthetic inquiry “affords recognition of both the relations and practices of power.”⁴¹ And Timothy K. August argues that “refugees use aesthetic force to redefine how their work and experiences are received.”⁴² These scholars reiterate Jacques Rancière's dictum that aesthetics is political. In analyzing experience, emotion, and refuge, this book also takes part in the recent aesthetic turn in the humanities in general and in Asian American studies in particular. In doing so, it contemplates aesthetic representations to elucidate that refuge has a long duration, extending well beyond the event of its initial receipt, taking form and changing shape as refugees move through time and space.

This more expansive understanding punctures the tight parameters of the juridical-political form, which discursively constructs refuge as a switch mechanism that regulates the instantaneous transition from one status to another, one mode of nonbeing to a mode of living. A refuge tied to rights and state protection is categorical and absolute, because either an individual has refugee status—orienting them to a certain world of possibility, even if much of this world might not be accessible to them—or they do not. The juridical-political form is absolute in the sense that one cannot have partial refugee *status*—not that this status

cannot be reversed, as denaturalization and deportation cases make clear, or that there cannot be partial protection. As an administrative function, the temporality of juridical-political refuge is short. While the process of refugee claims or applications often lags, taking years sometimes to conclude, the all-important bureaucratic moment that culminates this process, as a switch, occurs in a moment. In one instant, one does not have access to rights and protection; in the next instant, through the existence or absence of an official document, one is fully in the ambit of refuge or is condemned to social, and possibly literal, death.⁴³

As a mode for examining lived experience, structure of refuge can help us think beyond the confines of the bureaucratic moment and grasp refugee's expanded temporality. While the bureaucratic moment is compressed, arrested in a past and firm definition, the duration has personal and social texture. The experiment of refuge is a practical and hermeneutic means to shift how we understand the established configurations of bureaucracy and state discourse. It assures us that the power of the law, the will of the state, and the pressure of social prescriptions are not absolute and all-encompassing in defining the parameters of refuge. In this view of refuge as experiment an interval is left open, when the exertion of power and the corresponding responses are not predetermined or complete. In other words, the *doing* of refuge is prolonged, its final form deferred in time. Operative in the structure of refuge, then, is the time in which the recipients of refuge take experience into their hands and do something with it—to ask how this came to be and what they can do. The experience of refuge turns the noun into a verb—refuge as something to do, to be done, and to be in the process of doing.

In this active duration, the interplay between subjects and institutions might, and sometimes do, lead to something like subjectivity, politics, and sociality. But the lived structure of refuge is, at heart, relationalities *in process*. Instead of consistent definitions, we get sporadic and intermittent meanings and articulations; instead of a full and final picture, we get imagistic snapshots. Analyzing refuge through experience means that its final form is never immutable and forgone. Yet, even though refuge is not finished, it can take shape in concrete relations that are then deployed in ideological ways, exerting real material effects on people and politics.

The lived structure of refuge offers a view—or rather sketches—of these concrete relations and ways of being. Gratitude, resentment, and resilience are forces for experiential and affective experimentation; they are the means for people to make new thoughts and feelings, to endure the present and struggle for the future. As such, I do not take them as mere emotions or their expressions, which they are and which is how we may come to recognize them, but as indicative of our larger social lives and images in time of how people try to live. Attending to the structure allows us to perceive how lived refuge is where the individual comes up against the institution, the biography meets the social, and the private blurs into the political. These experiences make visible relational patterns and ways of

being, enabling a broader outlook of how refuge comes to be and how it might be experienced.

WHAT IS REFUGE?

To fully grasp the necessity of conceptualizing refuge through its lived form, we must first understand how it has been conceived historically.⁴⁴ Taking a step back to consider established meanings and practices clarifies the intervention that the concept of structure of refuge makes in the study of refuge. While the term circulates widely and its general usage seems uncontroversial, the idea of refuge has developed a complex historical life across the centuries, overlapping with those of sanctuary, safe haven, and asylum. Refuge is, with deeper inquiry, a cluster of ideas that are difficult to pin down, that complicate any attempt to define it as coherent and consistent. Perhaps it is crucial to begin, then, with the premise that there is no singular notion of refuge, but rather multiple versions or understandings that are incommensurately related and slip into one another. My purpose here is not to provide a detailed historical or genealogical overview, but rather to narrate the conceptual logic of refuge to comprehend its development—particularly its development into rights, or the juridical-political form—as one of the fundamental and contested concepts of Western modernity.⁴⁵

In considering moments in which ideas of refuge come into sharp relief, I clarify how legal protection from a sovereign nation-state becomes the dominant or hegemonic understanding of refuge in the contemporary moment.⁴⁶ Moreover, I suggest that *permanent resettlement* in the Global North emerges as the ultimate form of this legal protection, even as the majority of refugees live in the Global South.⁴⁷ While the forms of refuge are multiple and wide-ranging, a very specific idea and ideal of refuge coalesces in the current historical moment of uneven globalization to define its value as attached to and situated in liberal-democratic, capitalist Western nation-states. Because a history of colonialism and capitalism has shaped our world through the unequal distribution of wealth, resources, and life opportunities, it is not inclusion in any political community that counts as refuge. Rather, according to a late capitalist logic, it is movement from the unstable, developing Third World to a select and small corner of the world—the industrialized, developed, and “democratic” First World—that is commonly recognized as such.

While the refugee is, as Giorgio Agamben claims, the paradigmatic figure of refuge in modern times, refuge is not tied exclusively to refugees.⁴⁸ That is, refuge is a much more encompassing category that has historically provided protection—in the form of asylum, sanctuary, and hospitality—to various subjects marked for exclusion, punishment, and persecution, including criminals, slaves, fugitives, exiles, and migrants. A core principle of non-extradition threads through the concept’s history, undergirding the ancient Greek and biblical traditions of asylum and enthroned in the UN’s Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, the

modern legal instrument of refugee rights.⁴⁹ In its most basic sense, refuge thus can be understood in the negative, as what it is not—it is not to be surrendered, expelled, or deported to a jurisdiction where the refuge seeker might face persecution or unjust prosecution (or, more generally, danger). As a defense against extradition, the protection of refuge is not about the conferring of rights on an individual; it is about suspending, however momentarily, the taking away of rights through punishment.⁵⁰ While the positivistic “protection” that refuge enables may vary, it can most clearly be understood as the *absence* of punishment.

Within the Western tradition, asylum began in ancient Greece and Rome at religious sites such as temples and altars, which guaranteed this safeguard from unjust punishment or retribution.⁵¹ The inviolability of these sites, attached to the sanctity of the gods, provided a reprieve from the law for fugitives who committed crimes as well as slaves who fled from their masters. Asylum allowed time for an investigation and trial to occur, and an opportunity for the accused to provide evidence and make their case. In this way, asylum made possible just judgment on a particular case and ensured the proper carriage of justice.

The biblical “cities of refuge” played a similar function, sheltering individuals who had committed manslaughter. In refuge, time was given, in the form of temporary immunity, so that a determination could be made as to whether the murder was involuntary or intentional. We thus see the importance of temporality to the experience of refuge—it is, on a basic level, the gift of time to determine justice and to live. In cases where the act of murder was found to be accidental, the accused was allowed to permanently stay in the city.⁵² Because blood vengeance was a sanctioned response for those seeking criminal justice, asylum was meant to prevent the escalation of violence into an endless cycle of murder and revenge. By harboring those who sought asylum from punishment, refuge was an attempt at maintaining social order by controlling the proper course of justice.

After the official recognition of Christianity in the Roman Empire with the Edict of Toleration (311 A.D.), the role of religious asylum came under the purview of the Church. This form of refuge took the name of “sanctuary” and, as Matthew Price points out, was a “vehicle for mercy” as opposed to an “instrument of justice.”⁵³ Contemporary humanitarian logics share this mercy principle, which remains a foundation for the hierarchical giving and receiving of refuge. While sanctuary expanded the concept of refuge, extending it to the guilty as well as the innocent, it shared with earlier forms of asylum the principle that certain religious sites were sacred, and legitimacy was based not on worldly laws but on a higher principle of morality.⁵⁴ Even when the authority to grant sanctuary was made possible by the king’s decree, its justification still came from ecclesiastical authority.⁵⁵ By staging the tension, and the sometimes complementary relationship, between the Church’s canon law and the sovereign’s state law, the practice of sanctuary brought to light questions of competing authorities and separate jurisdictions that lie at the heart of refuge.⁵⁶

During the seventeenth century, however, church sanctuary as an institution disappeared—despite still existing as a practice—as the state monopolized the right of asylum. The solidification of the nation-state form, especially in the Peace of Westphalia (1648), meant that asylum became an important apparatus of state sovereignty, one that was crucial to defining territorial integrity, legal jurisdiction, and interstate relations.⁵⁷ At around the same time, the religious wars and state persecutions that attended the Reformation emphasized the need for an international reckoning with asylum practices. The right of asylum slowly came under the provenance of the state or sovereign in bounded territory. This, however, was not a new development, as territorial asylum also existed in the Greek city-states alongside religious asylum. What is new is the increased prominence of territorial asylum during the solidification of the nation-state system. Accordingly, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, “political offenses” such as treason or dissent, instead of common crimes such as murders, came to define the kinds of acts that required protection. Persecution was consequently understood as coming from states, rather than from individual avengers.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, practices of refuge remained securely under state sovereignty, and were specific to national laws that responded to local realities and to individual groups seeking asylum. How the Jews fleeing Nazi Germany were either granted asylum or denied entry in different parts of the world is a prime example of this. Existing alongside individual state sovereignty, however, was the increasing need for international cooperation. The League of Nations, an intergovernmental organization that preceded the UN, worked to assist refugees from various fallen European empires in the interwar period.⁵⁸

During the Cold War period, however, a major shift occurred when refuge was officially codified in international law, most notably in the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees (1951). These documents were attempts to respond to the social devastation, redrawing of borders, and mass displacements of the Second World War. The UN’s Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees (1967) expanded the temporal and geographic constraints of the 1951 Convention beyond European and postwar refugees. As individual states adapted and proliferated the principles of the Convention and Protocol, the political nature of these legal documents—of rights themselves—became clear. As an example, for the United States, a “refugee” was almost exclusively someone fleeing left-wing, communist governments. The idea of refuge in Western democracies was premised on human rights infractions perpetrated by the Soviet Bloc and affiliated states. Refuge in this context became affixed to civil and political rights and freedom.

In the latter decades of the twentieth century, when the blazing Cold War cooled off, refuge was recast as humanitarianism. That is, the requirements for refuge were based not on ideological concerns, but on considerations about the

human need for protection. Acts of assisting and resettling refugees were understood as moral practices that aid the collective relief of a world vulnerable to various social, political, and environmental instabilities, and as practices of altruistic national generosity. The humanitarian view, however, is not a departure from the political dimension of refuge; indeed, its brilliant ideological maneuver is that it masks the politics that deeply inform states as they enact their power to grant or deny refuge.

Whether understood as “political” or “humanitarian,” the idea of refuge as a *right* has emerged as the dominant definition in the contemporary moment. Enshrined in international and national law, legal protection confers rights and privileges on refugees. Through legal instruments such as the UN Convention, refugees have the right to seek the rights that asylum affords. The right to *seek asylum*, embedded in Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is itself a right to *have asylum*.⁵⁹ Thus, refuge is a human right, whereby legal protection is regaining what Hannah Arendt called the “right to have rights” through reincorporation into a political community.⁶⁰ Yet, as Arendt famously argued, the right of refuge is seen not as an inalienable right of “man” at all, but as a right tied to reincorporation into the nation-state form. Only the state can grant the rights of “man” to “men,” and only the state can take them away. As a benefit, then, refuge is a right that is also an incredible *privilege* given to those who are deserving or lucky. The understanding of refuge as a coveted privilege comes to define refugees as “guests” in a relation of hospitality with the “host” nation. This host-guest power dynamic undergirds a rights-based, juridical-political definition of refuge.

The logic of this juridical-political form stipulates that refuge is not possible without the nation-state. Legal protection from the state is the most fully realized form of refuge in our current political system organized around rights and nationality. It must not be mistaken as the only form of refuge, however, given that migrant justice activism, “no borders” networks, and sanctuary movements in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have challenged, to varying degrees, the state’s monopoly on refuge and, in doing so, provided alternatives to the juridical-political form.⁶¹ While different kinds of refuge exist, not all of them are of equal value. The different times and spaces of refuge confer differential access to legal protection and psychic safety.

As the centerpiece of legal protection, *resettlement* is the ultimate and most desirable form of legal protection, even though it may be the most difficult to achieve of the three UN-sanctioned “solutions” to the refugee “problem.”⁶² In contrast to other solutions—repatriation and local integration—resettlement is coded as movement toward the countries of the Global North. Capitalism has made these places—as opposed to others in the Global South—the most economically, socially, and politically desirable for those seeking a new life after loss and deprivation. Here, the meaning of refuge is entangled with the calculations for achieving the “good” life of late capitalist modernity. Refuge as resettlement in the Global

North is tantamount to the opportunity to participate in capitalist citizenship, to produce and consume in the free market, and to become new entrepreneurs in the competition of life.

This is the neoliberal iteration of refuge, one that, like other forms of subjectivity, has developed as a result of, and as a response to, the economic and political pressures of contemporary life. Not all refugees are able, or given the chance, to participate in this way, but the “good refugees” are the ones who take advantage of resettlement and attain success in the capitalist sense. This contemporary development of refuge as a legal right within a nation-state—attained through resettlement and, consequently, access to freedom and economic mobility in the Global North—has become a hegemonic understanding. While many may desire this kind of refuge, and others may wish to prevent its actualization, the meaning of refuge as rights in resettlement undergirds constructions of, and policies around, global asylum.

Despite the availability of legal protection as a hegemonic and common definition of refuge, ultimately it is still difficult to define and pinpoint. This difficulty arises, in part, because refuge is also understood in general terms as a feeling of safety. That is, the internal consistency of refuge as legality begins to crack when experience is taken into account. In writing about the tension between the two founding truths of asylum—the right to protection and the ambivalence of hospitality—Didier Fassin has articulated this inconsistency in slightly different terms.⁶³ That is, the possession of a right does not guarantee welcome and safety. While legal protection and feelings of safety often overlap and become extensions of one another, this is, of course, not always the case, and the simple question of precisely *when* refuge is attained opens up this tension.

Does refuge come into effect only when official refugee status is approved and legal papers are signed? Is the asylum-seeker who escapes danger to arrive at a refugee camp in possession of refuge? Is refuge achieved at the moment of temporary asylum in a receiving country, or is it gained through permanent resettlement in a third country? Relatedly, *where* is the site of refuge? Is it the camp, the other side of the border, the hold of the boat, another city, the country of resettlement, a shelter, a state of mind, or any place beyond the reach of danger and persecution?

Answers to these questions about time and space are necessarily provisional, context specific, and, to an extent, subjective. Their hypothetical abstractness, however, points to the actual slipperiness of refuge as an experience: refuge can be present without the legal designation, and the legal designation does not always guarantee safety. While the refugee is the paradigmatic figure of refuge in modernity, it is indeed possible to have refuge without refugee status, and to have refugee status without refuge. There are forms of refuge that do not require the state’s approval—that may exist affectively, psychologically, interpersonally, and communally—and they press at the limits of a seemingly coherent juridical-political definition of refuge.

This is a fundamental problem for the concept and for our study of it. The complexity of refuge complicates unproblematic attempts to anchor its meaning solely in legal protection, and the legal category promulgated by the UN, and proliferated in national policies, is not the only possible or the most encompassing conceptualization. Lived experiences pull into tension refuge as an existing social reality and refuge as a legal category. This tension necessitates a deeper investigation into the conceptual core of refuge, and my hypothesis of a lived structure of refuge is an attempt to explore what refuge is or what it might be.

ON WARS

That violence undergirds the experience of refuge is one of the key insights that the field of critical refugee studies has offered to the study of refugees. Scrutinizing the conditions that make refuge possible shifts the question from “What is refuge?” to “How does refuge come to be?”—and the answer is often through and with forms of control, governmentality, and destruction. It is not simply that there is hidden violence behind the façade of humanitarianism, but that war and refuge actually overlap. The “safety” of refuge is not easily distinguishable or separated from the “danger” of war—one may require the other to validate its existence, or both may be different names for the same force. For Yén Lê Espiritu, Mimi Thi Nguyen, Eric Tang, Eryn Lê Espiritu Gandhi, and other scholars concerned with a critique of U.S. imperialism and its consequences, refuge is not a break from the violence of war, but is contiguous with the logics and mechanisms that facilitate death, destruction, and displacement.⁶⁴ Refuge, they show, is another means for the ideological forces that buttress liberal empire, militarism, and race to insert themselves into the lives of refugees whom the empire has uprooted through war.

Building on their insights, this book on refuge is also inevitably a book on war, on what war has ruined and made possible. Anchored in a particular history of violence—what is known as the “Vietnam War” or the “American War”—it understands refuge not only as a lasting consequence of war, but also as a shaping of life in its wake. In these pages, I wander through different, sometimes conflicting, images of refuge to contemplate displaced lives and power’s inability to capture the totality of their experience. Any attempt to speak of a “lived form,” as I do here, needs to historicize and contextualize to offer a picture of what refuge might look like at a specific moment in time. Experience of refuge is necessarily “*an* experience” and thus cannot be generalized. Nonetheless, these images can lend insight to more abstract and conceptual understandings. Such conceptual understandings enable a wider perspective in which cross-historical connections can be made, linkages between seemingly disparate events and ideas are established, and deeper consciousness or expanded views emerge.

The conceptual is useful not because it can be employed to universalize particular experiences, but because it holds the potential to reveal how the particular is

tied to something bigger, to forces like war and racialization that also shape experience for people in other times and places. The particular combination of affective experiences that I trace in this book comes out of my situated thinking on the legacies of the wars in Southeast Asia—collectively referred to by the misnomer “the Vietnam War.”⁶⁵ Specifically, I meditate on how the global “refugee crisis,” a defining feature of those wars’ afterlife, engendered modes of being and relating that indicate the long temporality of refuge and, as a result, raise larger questions about violence, protection, subjectivity, and experience in our contemporary time of ceaseless war and refuge seeking.

The United States either initiated or sustained the wars in Southeast Asia, which were complex events entangled in decolonization processes, revolutions, civil wars, global Cold War politics, and imperialist projects. They produced one of the largest transnational movements of refugees in the late twentieth century. In the years following the “end” of the wars in 1975, at a time when the region’s social, economic, and political infrastructures had been destabilized or destroyed by decades of power struggles, and as communist regimes attempted to forge new socialist societies, over three million refugees scattered throughout Southeast Asia and the globe.⁶⁶ Many refugees were displaced because of communist persecution, which included imprisonment, prosecution, indoctrination, execution, and, in the case of Cambodia, genocide.⁶⁷

The direct “cause” of these refugees’ asylum seeking is typically understood to be the violence that communist states imposed on them in the postwar period. That communist violence has complex geopolitical origins; French, Japanese, and American imperial violence, as well as capitalist-democratic interests, played a central role in shaping the sociopolitical situations of postwar Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. While many of these refugees continue to understand themselves and their community through an anticommunist ideology, questions of causality are always complicated. The lines of complicity and responsibility are often difficult to untangle, especially when the events in question are part of a global war’s *longue durée*, involving many international and local actors. While acknowledging communist atrocities, I follow scholars in critical refugee studies in highlighting a historical framework that sees American war making and intervention as inextricably involved in producing the violence that necessitated escape and asylum seeking.

This book follows a historical narrative that views American foreign policy and imperial ambition, in the containment of communism and the protection of capitalist resource extraction, in Southeast Asia—funding and fighting alongside South Vietnam, launching secret wars and bombing campaigns in Laos, and conducting massive air wars in Cambodia—as a major shaping force in creating the conditions of refugee displacement. The violence wrought from American political investments and policy developments—from the domino theory to pacification, military escalation to counterinsurgency, economic aid to trade embargoes, Vietnamization to humanitarian rescue—indelibly shaped the course of history

for these nations and the peoples who stayed and left when the last shots were fired and the final bombs dropped. In short, the wars that it fought in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia deeply implicate the United States in the “causes” of transnational displacement after the fighting ended.⁶⁸

Moreover, the role of the United States in producing refugees is not limited to its participation in the wars, but includes how it handled the “refugee crises” in their wake through benevolent gestures of “rescue.” The United States resettled the most refugees from Southeast Asia, taking in a total of 1.4 million people over several decades. It contributed millions of dollars to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other aid organizations working to resettle “Indochinese” refugees. While some see support for refugees as acknowledgment of responsibility to a past ally, such humanitarian care for the displaced in the face of defeat constitutes what Gil Loescher and John A. Scanlan call America’s “calculated kindness,” a recognition that refugees fleeing communist regimes were “valuable ‘assets’ in an ongoing struggle with Communism.”⁶⁹ Admitting Southeast Asian refugees into the country had enormous ideological significance for the United States as it hoped to do politically what the military could not achieve—namely, discrediting Marxism and gaining moral authority in the Cold War power struggle. As they escaped newly established communist governments and sought refuge elsewhere, Southeast Asian refugees, like others who fled communism before them, were configured as casting a “ballot for freedom” by “voting with their feet.”

Because of this, and most interestingly, the United States pushed the international community to recognize those fleeing Southeast Asia in the wake of war as refugees instead of evacuees, exiles, or temporarily displaced persons.⁷⁰ At the beginning of the refugee crisis, the UNHCR “doubted that the Indochinese were *bonafide* refugees,” viewing them instead as American allies who needed to be evacuated; this evacuation was, in their view, solely an American operation and responsibility.⁷¹ The United States thus had a stake in making sure that these people were fitted into the refugee category, to be named as such, first because it needed international support to handle the refugee population and second because it was politically expedient and ideologically crucial in the continued fight against communism. American intervention had a major hand in shaping the crisis, and in the production and view of Vietnamese, Laotians, Hmong, and Cambodian displaced persons as “refugees.” This kind of political maneuver, to discursively and legally *create* refugees, is contiguous with the militarized violence that led to the event of asylum seeking.

As such, American war and militarism in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia were forces that both destroyed lives and created specific forms of living. These forms of living—as *refugees*—both index and transform the world that comes into being as a legacy of war. In refuge, we see the effects of war, how it continues to play out as life in all its variegated forms. This book’s purpose is not to demystify the war

violence that created refugees—historical accounts of American deeds already do that work.⁷² It is not a historical examination of neo-imperial wars and political interventions that created social and political instability and uprooted populations, but instead asks, “And then what?” What do these forms of living look like and what can they tell us about living on after war? In this way, it is not a historiography, but an investigation into what a specific history of war experientially engenders for a conceptual understanding of refuge.

BEYOND THE MEMORY IMPERATIVE

Memory is used to access, recognize, and contest the haunted afterlife of wars, especially wars that, like those in Southeast Asia, are long lasting and have “endings that are not over.”⁷³ The struggle for and over memory is the struggle for and over history. As Viet Thanh Nguyen reminds us, “all wars are fought twice, the first time on the battlefield, the second time in memory.”⁷⁴ At stake in this second waging of war is the power to rewrite history, and to shape political narratives of the present. In the Southeast Asian refugee context, the burgeoning of memory production and scholarship is a critical reaction to America’s organized amnesia, in which those who were most affected by the wars are either forgotten or misremembered.

Consequently, Southeast Asian refugees’ memories function as counter-memories—filling in gaps, challenging official histories, seeking justice, and producing alternative visions. Memory has thus been an especially resonant mode of cultural and historical recovery, a tool for establishing contemporary presence. In the context of Cambodian genocide, for instance, Cathy Schlund-Vials compellingly demonstrates how transnational memory catalyzes “unrealized juridical processes” in the production of alternative modes of justice.⁷⁵ Khatharya Um similarly states that “the struggle to remember is also a struggle for relevance” within a fractured refugee lifeworld.⁷⁶ Because of its association with truth, ethics, and justice, memory is perhaps the most crucial meaning-making mechanism for the human survivors of war, those who may not have recourse to the instruments of history proper. That is, memory enables refugees to become subjects of their own history.

The unequivocal virtue of memory as a process or tool for those who have experienced violence, loss, and trauma constitutes what I call a “memory imperative” in migration studies in general and critical refugee studies in particular.⁷⁷ This imperative shapes migrant discourses and directs individuals and communities to remember as a way to participate in the world. As many scholars have convincingly demonstrated, it allows refugees to fashion a corrective to the asymmetrical power dynamics that structure relations during and after the wars, opening up a space for survivors to witness, remember, know, and represent. This imperative is thus crucial in producing sovereign subjects with free will and agency, ones invested with the important capacity for political resistance. Memory makes

possible claims to history and to a past, particularly one of injury, and thus can mobilize experience in service of justice.

While memory is a profound resource for refugee politics, we also need to find ways to interpret refugee expressions and practices beyond or in addition to memory work, as forms of relationality, affective negotiations, and participation in worldbuilding. This book departs from the general tendency in critical refugee studies to take memory as an organizing analytic method, exemplified in the important work of Y en L  Espiritu, Cathy Schlund-Vials, Viet Thanh Nguyen, Khatharya Um, and Long T. Bui.⁷⁸ Although its affordances are undeniable, memory is not without limits. The memory imperative places a heavy onus on refugees themselves to remember, even though scholars have also acknowledged the value of forgetting and of silence. Memory work is demanding on the psychic and material well-being of those tasked with recalling the past. Yet my hesitation in regard to memory is not based on this major limitation, but rather on its main advantage—that memory lends itself to subjectivity.

Memory’s call to subjectivity can fix refugees into predetermined modes of being, understanding their function as people who must remember (or, on the flipside, as those who must forget). The mechanism of memory, as a technology of the self, situates refugees as “memory subjects” who remember differently, who are defined in opposition to the historical narratives and state discourses that have attempted to constrain and determine them, whether through memory or erasure. In this way, memory can make refugees legible as knowing and knowable agential subjects, giving them an identifiable purpose (resistance and reconstruction) and an action (to remember). It defines a collective “project” that they may undertake in variegated forms.

To be clear, I am not opposed to these memory projects, and I recognize how crucial and generative they are to what it means to live on in the wake of war. The critique that I am trying to articulate is a reservation about the risk of an over-reliance on memory that reifies the refugee’s place, as both a possible subject and its constitutive relations, within a national and transnational schema of migratory passages. Memory gives rise to a “subject-based” understanding of refugees (a term I borrow from Kandice Chuh), whereby an incidental flattening of the category accompanies the process of coming-into-subjectivity.⁷⁹ Refugee expression and politics might slip into predictability. Or, more accurately, our modes of analyzing refugee expression and politics become predictable, and a normative and prescriptive standard of resistance to the nation-state calcifies.

Pivoting away from memory does not devalue its importance or deny the existence of a subject. Rather, it underscores that any attempt to know the subject through memory must reckon with forms of experiential complexity that threaten to deconstruct claims to coherence and consistency. Viewing refuge as affective experiences generates a mode for comprehending how being affected and affecting the world might not presume or require a knowable subjectivity. Affective

experience can pick up where memory reaches its limit in explaining and clarifying the complex relationships that structure life after war and migration. There is thus no grateful subject or resentful or resilient subject, but instead there are those who express and articulate these forces, and we cannot know in advance what kind of relationality, politics, or ways of being they may precipitate.

Of course, a refugee subject is part of the equation, but that subject is processual, in solution in the same way that refuge is also being lived and experimented with. Experience is a framework for examining refugee expressions without defining who the refugee is and what the refugee could or should do. It allows subjects to be active in the process of experimenting with new ways to exist, to escape, and to forge different relational possibilities. I recognize that memory also facilitates this labor of living, and remembrance is itself an experience. Memory is a memory of something experienced, and memory can structure how we experience. That is to say, there is a close and imbricated relationship between the two. The distinction I make here is that experience does not yet have legitimated projects or fully articulated outcomes attached to the work that it does.

Experience, I suggest, is a more diffuse and less precisely defined mode of participation in the social world. Experience present and experience past, as Williams reminds us, open up to the immutability and fortuity of living in the now. At stake in stepping back from memory as an analytic tool is a different and more indeterminate understanding of refugee subjects and cultural politics, and also how these are formed in relation to the state, to other refugees, to other subjects, and to the contingencies of living in the world. What I am arguing for is a shift away from a refugee subject who remembers, to focus on affective experiences that could tell us how subjectivity might become possible, that illuminates the networks of relations, attachments, and disruptions that tangle around an as-yet-undefined subject and its links to the social.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

I focus on experience to understand subjectivity differently and to return to the textures of experience-in-solution. This shift should be understood, in the vein of this book's theoretical framework, as a hypothesis on the potential of experience as analytic device and as material for conceptualizing refuge. If experience does not define a refugee subject into being, then it also enlarges who these subjects might become. In other words, experience challenges the clear and fixed legal parameters of *refugee*, of who is or is not a refugee and who does or does not have refuge. Throughout this book, I use the term *refugee subjects*, in addition to and interchangeably with *refugees*, to gesture to the different and wide-ranging positionalities and experiences that might fall under the ambit of lived refuge.

In the way that it is currently used, the term *refugee*, associated with bureaucracy and the juridical-political form, is limited to those who can fulfill and prove a very

specific set of conditions. *Refugee subjects*, instead, are those who have sought, are seeking, or will imminently seek refuge. Many have attained refugee status and many have not, but they all share similar experiences of moving through the legal designation—both the ones that it recognizes and the ones it does not. I return to this interrogation of *refugee* more fully in the book's conclusion, as I think through refugee subjectivity and the potential of relational politics.

To get there, however, I first dwell in and move along three constitutive affective experiences of refuge. Gratitude, resentment, and resilience are constitutive in the sense that they make visible the structure of refuge. They constellate some of the most pressing and prevalent problematics of refugee experience—what it means to be “good” or “bad,” what counts as success or failure, how to become recognized, how to hold loss, how to survive, how to recreate the self, how to live life with others, and how to tell a story. These experiences are “affective” in the sense that they gain expression through feeling, and in that they are also the forces and capacities that drive thoughts, actions, and ways of being.⁸⁰ Affect—whether we understand it as precognitive intensities or as differentiated emotions—is what the body experiences. Together, gratitude, resentment, and resilience encapsulate a range of embodied and relational possibilities that refugee subjects take up or initiate.

The logic of their grouping in this book begins with gratitude—which is, as I have suggested above, the primary feeling that refugees are expected to embody once refuge is granted. This expectation arises because refuge is understood to be a coveted political benefit that requires recompense, binding refugee subjects to the benefactor—the nation-state and its citizens—in relations of interminable debt. Gratitude is socially agreed upon as *the* appropriate and acceptable response to refuge. Consequently, an investigation into the experience of refuge must necessarily begin with gratitude. In making refugee subjects legible, gratitude also confines them to narrow notions of success and goodness.

Chapter 1 explores gratitude as a force of expectation and potential, a means through which refugee subjects develop social bonds. These bonds or attachments, I argue, are crucial for making sense of the self that survives war and displacement, that has found itself in refuge. While gratitude is a way for “rescuers” and “benefactors” to discipline refugee subjects into national devotion, into subjects of liberation and freedom, it can also be the relation that fosters a meaning of personhood (and refuge) indexed to the fate of others, both living and deceased. In close readings of Kim Thúy's autobiographical novel *Ru*, Loung Ung's memoir *Lucky Child: A Daughter of Cambodia Reunites with the Sister She Left Behind*, and Tri Nguyen's activist pilgrimage “The Gift of Refuge,” I think through the intersubjective affordances of gratitude, how it is a form of living with, living for, and living strategically in the long duration of refuge.

If refugee subjects are supposed to be grateful, how can other, more negative, feelings such as anger, frustration, and disappointment be lived and expressed? Chapter 2 examines resentment as the outlawed experience of refuge. As a response

to the benefit of refuge, resentment is incongruous and unthinkable within the nation-state and is therefore socially prohibited. Yet, I contend, resentment is a central experience of refuge, especially for refugee subjects of a war whose violent effects are not yet over. Examining stories from Aimee Phan's collection *We Should Never Meet*, the Sacramento hostage crisis of 1991, and Studio Revolt's activist videos "My Asian Americana" and "Return to Sender," I explore resentment as an expression of past injury's unresolved reckoning in the present.

Following not only gangsters, hostage takers, and deportees, but also the straight-A student, resentment shows us that refuge is a prolonged struggle in which refugee subjects are made to find and refind elusive protection. Through physical violence, mundane failures to capitalize on life, yearnings to be accepted into institutions of belonging, and pleadings for readmittance through expressions of patriotic love, resentment not only becomes an indictment of the nation-state's promise of refuge, but also reveals how its cracks and shortcomings begin to show. Resentment demonstrates how refuge, both its giving and its taking away, does not heal over the open wounds of war, racialization, and punishment, but further gnaws at them.

While gratitude and resentment are dialectically related in their entanglements with the nation-state, chapter 3 turns to resilience to consider how refugee subjects survive or live with loss in refuge. Loss is a foundational experience of refuge. To be in refuge is to have known some kind of loss. But how do refugee subjects continue to live without leaving loss behind? How do they engage with and carry loss in life? As opposed to a neoliberal bouncing back from devastation or thriving despite collapse, I suggest that resilience is reckoning with loss by way of understanding presence. Resilience tells us how refugee subjects claim presence in the world, how they figure out ways to be present, not in the place of, but rather with, absence. Thinking with Souvankham Thammavongsa's book of poems *Found*, Ocean Vuong's novel *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, and Kao Kalia Yang's memoir *The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir*, I contemplate the continuance of stories as a duration in which refuge is given new form and further life in different time-spaces. The chapter focuses on acts of writing as modes of recovery, recounting, and recording that extend and reproduce experience. Resilience emerges in the process of storytelling, whereby more life is made possible.

These three chapters elaborate on the ongoing, extended temporality of refuge. This is refuge's experiential structure. Gratitude, resentment, and resilience demonstrate that refuge is ongoing because refugee subjects are still shaping its meaning. Those who have seemingly received refuge continue to search for it, and they insist that refuge is tied to others who do not or cannot have it, keeping its meaning active and in process. In the conclusion, I build on these insights about refuge to discuss refugee subjectivity and the potential for relational politics. I conceptualize "refugeetude" as a consciousness of the forces that shape, produce, and manage refugee subjects. My thinking here is indebted to Khatharya Um's

foundational work in *From the Land of Shadows*, where she first coined the term *refugitude* to discuss the agential subjectivity of “refugee-survivors.”⁸¹ Analyzing 250 interviews with survivors of the Khmer Rouge genocide, Um illuminates how memory can “rewrite the individual, the human, back where necropolitics had sought to vacate.”⁸² Refugitude is thus a crucial memory project for examining the impact of trauma and for framing the fortitude and complexities of refugeehood.

Refugitude, developed through ethnographic methods, archival research, and artistic analysis, is a theoretical framework that richly intervenes in studies of revolution, political science, peace and conflict studies, diaspora, and memory studies, among others. Refugeetude, on the other hand, is conceived through literary and cultural analysis, and seeks to examine the affective, experiential, and representational aspects of refugee political consciousness. Refugeetude builds on the conceptual ground laid out by refugitude, extending the focus on memory and on questions of survival and resistance in the wake of violence to center affect and highlight the possibilities for relational politics, activism, and social critique.⁸³

Refugeetude begins with refugee experience but does not end there. I employ refugeetude, as a conceptual expansion of refugitude, to think about how refugee experiences might be mobilized toward decolonial aims, and to understand the links between refugee displacement and structures of violence such as settler colonialism and anti-Black racism. My conceptualization follows Um’s concerns with refugee subjectivity and consciousness, but extends the conversation toward developing a political orientation, or a way of seeing one’s relatedness with others who have gone through or are undergoing similar processes of displacement and subjection. Refugeetude fundamentally gestures to the potential of *being with others*.⁸⁴

A consciousness of “refugee” is a critical awareness of how one got here and what experiences shape one’s reality. Knowing this is knowing that “refugee” is produced relationally, that refugee subjects are connected to others, in different times and spaces, who may be undergoing similar and incommensurate processes of state-sponsored violence, displacement, and discipline. Taking up the notion that violence attends and undergirds refuge, I examine the kinds of relationalities and solidarities that might become possible when refugees find refuge in settler-colonial nation-states. Because refuge is predicated on the dispossession of others, namely Indigenous peoples, refugeetude requires different political orientations that are not rooted in assimilationist politics. Rather than an essential identity, refugeetude is a politics that informs ways of being in the world and the kinds of decolonial relations that might arise when people recognize themselves with others.

Each of the three thematic chapters is organized around a similar argumentative structure. My aim is to comprehend the conceptual logic of the affective experience under question and how this logic (in)forms an experience of refuge. I thus begin these chapters by outlining the conventional and commonplace understandings of gratitude, resentment, and resilience before offering images of how,

in the duration of refuge, refugee subjects experiment with and through them. The intellectual work that these chapters perform is a nuancing of how refuge is offered and how it is experienced. I use experience to conceptualize, to grasp meanings that do not dovetail with expected and established modes of being, and finally to better sketch a larger concept.

In order to provide particular meanings of affective experiences, and also of refuge, I rely on close reading, which might be understood as an “exacting immersion in the details of a material content.”⁸⁵ Taking inspiration from Walter Benjamin, my analyses seek to present “imagistic” views of how refuge is made and remade. The textual analyses in this book are imagistic in the sense that they individually hold a specific and contained meaning of refuge but, at the same time, lend themselves to constellation. That is, they act as stand-alone pieces of meaning, but also sit together within a larger mosaic, forming a whole (sketched and contingent) picture—or, we might say here, structure.⁸⁶

Benjamin’s method in his monumental *Arcades Project* endeavors to “carry over the principle of montage into history,” whereby the image, condensing past and present, comes to a dialectical “standstill.”⁸⁷ Time is not progressive or homogeneous, and the past that had been historical detritus is now recognized in a lightning flash. Montage is key to the production of dialectical images, or the possibility of historical meaning.⁸⁸ The grand scale and scope of Benjamin’s project, to capture an epoch and the historical life of capitalism in the nineteenth century, is something that perhaps can never be replicated again, but his method teaches us that the fragment and its details constitute the fundamental building block of experience and knowledge. He writes that to recover history via montage is to “to assemble large-scale constructions out of the smallest and most precisely cut components. Indeed, to discover in the analysis of the small individual moment the crystal of the total event.”⁸⁹ For Benjamin, the small image of meaning cradles totality, and totality is made up of these small images. To closely read and examine the specific textures of detail, then, is to dive into the “total event”; it is, as Elizabeth Freeman writes, “a way into history, not a way out of it.”⁹⁰

The bulk of each chapter consists of textual analysis, in which I present snapshot images of the “small individual moments” of refuge. The close readings of texts and events in the chapters are not applications of a guiding theory, but rather are the very materials for conceptual thinking. When I move from discussing, for example, how philosophers understand gratitude to a close reading of a novel in a chapter, I am not making a distinction between the two, but am rather placing them in proximity, to conceive and assemble something larger. The close readings of cultural productions in this book are not portals into the text, and their purpose is not to provide a new or more profound interpretation, although I hope that this might also be the case.

My close readings of texts function, first and foremost, to provide insight into affective experiences, into the concepts that guide how people live and

experience. Freeman describes close reading as a temporal activity—“to linger, to dally, to take pleasure in tarrying.”⁹¹ This method, which takes time, converges with this book’s conceptualization of refuge as a long duration. *Lived Refuge* partakes in this gift of time to more fully grasp refuge and its relationship to temporality. If we can understand refuge as a kind of “buying time,” as it was in ancient Greece and Rome, biblical accounts, and medieval England, where asylum in sacred sites or cities provided a reprieve from punishment, a chance for justice to be arrived at through investigations and tribunals, then the duration of refuge in the contemporary moment is where the trial of life occurs.

Gratitude

A REFUGEE EXPECTATION

To receive refuge is to encounter the weight of gratitude. Often, the first words out of a refugee's mouth upon arrival are *thank you*. Both those who give and those who receive refuge readily recognize that gratitude is the most proper response, the most appropriate affect for refugees to embody. In the duration of refuge, gratitude exists as a psychic and social force of expectation—what refugees ought to feel toward those who have made refuge possible. To be worthy of refuge, refugees must express gratitude to the state and its citizens. This entrenched and normalized expectation to be grateful arises because, in our global political system organized around the capitalist nation-state, refuge is a precious benefit. For those who lack the rights and protection of a national community, this benefit confers the most valuable of possessions: physical safety, political subjecthood, and social life. As such, it is sensible and logical for the recipients of refuge to feel thankful.

On the fortieth anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War in 2015, for example, refugee subjects gathered on Parliament Hill in Ottawa, the capital city of Canada, carrying banners that read: “Thank You Canada From Vietnamese Canadian Community.”¹ Decades after finding refuge, these refugees continued to pay tribute to the nation-state that had “saved” them. Their gratitude provided them public visibility and a political platform. It rendered them good and worthy beneficiaries of refuge. Or, more precisely, their “goodness” is what allowed them to be “seen” within the national imaginary, and gratitude is key to this recognition of goodness. For refugees, gratitude is an unmitigated virtue. It is through gratitude that refugee subjects are confirmed as good, and it is through gratitude that the good of refuge can be perceived and collectively agreed upon. Articulations of gratitude facilitate the formation of social bonds, connecting the nation-state and refugees in mutual agreement of what has been given and what should be returned.

Gratitude's powerful social pull thus gathers strength through common sense and does not invite critical questioning—to be grateful is, indisputably, good. A relation of gratitude between the nation-state and refugees allows the former to display its moral generosity and the latter to gain legibility as social subjects. Accordingly, gratitude becomes the primary social relation between the nation-state and refugees. Ingratitude in the face of benefit does not make sense and must be dismissed as unthinkable and repugnant. To be recognized, refugees need to fulfill the expectation of gratitude, one that prescribes and produces a certain kind of good subjects—those who are successful and devoted to the nation-state, who are economically mobile, law-abiding, and consciously thankful for the benefit given to them. Gratitude not only expresses goodness but also produces it, and the grateful refugee emerges as representative of the sanctioned way to be in refuge.

While gratitude can make the refugee a sociopolitical subject, it does so through the constricting logic of a benefit that incurs debt and then repayment. To return the benefit of refuge with gratitude is to be good, and to be good is to be limited in subjective capacities, in the kinds of feelings, thoughts, and actions that are possible. Good refugees are thus indebted, locked into a fixed relationship of giving and return between benefactor and beneficiary. This logic of debt repayment has deep ideological significance. A relation of gratitude, as scholars of critical refugee studies have shown, is the most common(sense) way in which refugees become attached, for better or for worse, to the nation-state. Grateful refugees become evidence of war's "appropriateness," demonstrating freedom's power to inspire and justifying past and present neo-imperial interventions overseas.² The expectation of gratitude, as a disciplinary force, can define a successful refugee who subscribes to the ideological tenets of liberal nationalism while also proving them. But such a singular view of gratitude—to equate gratitude with success, assimilation, and nationalist ideology—would flatten the complexity of this important and useful affective experience. While structural critiques of refugee gratitude and how it gets deployed are crucial and urgent, they often cannot account for the nuanced specificities of how refugees "make it," in the broadest sense, in terms of success but also of bringing life into existence.

This chapter explores gratitude as a force of expectation that is both restriction and potential. I focus on what I call gratitude's affordances of intersubjectivity—describing the subjective and relational possibilities it brings into being. How might gratitude be an important affective experience for the very subjects who must re-member—picking up and piecing back together—the fragments of a life that war and displacement have broken? What relationships or solidarities could gratitude establish between refugees and others, especially those who are also searching for refuge? How does gratitude perform critiques of the nation-state even while it pays tribute to it? These questions revolve around gratitude's intersubjective dimension—how it informs a making sense, and an extension in time and form, of refuge.

As an experience of living in refuge, gratitude is important to the meaning of an inchoate self and to understanding how that self might not be the end point. Although it is imperative that refugee subjects step into gratitude, they can inhabit it in ways that make forms of meaningful experience possible. Through considerations of Kim Thúy's autobiographical novel *Ru*, Loung Ung's memoir *Lucky Child: A Daughter of Cambodia Reunites with the Sister She Left Behind*, and Tri Nguyen's activist pilgrimage "The Gift of Refuge," I nuance the uses of gratitude as ways to think of the self and its connectedness to others. Following the conceptual logic of gratitude, I discuss the ontology and praxis, or being and doing, of refugee gratitude. This being and doing unfolds as the necessary strategies that refugees call on to live in refuge, which is a living with and a living for others.

DEBT AND INTERSUBJECTIVE AFFORDANCES

Throughout its history in the West—from classical philosophy to contemporary self-help and spirituality—the idea of gratitude is extolled as a personal virtue and civic good.³ Whether connected to God, as in the writings of Thomas Aquinas and other medieval theologians, or to society, as in those of Seneca, Thomas Hobbes, and Adam Smith, gratitude is consistently considered a positive affective state that should be cultivated because of its value to both the individual and the collective.⁴ Robert C. Solomon states that it is "an essential emotion of the good life as well as the virtuous life," and Edward J. Harpham adds that "it builds bonds of harmony and community in the world."⁵ As an incontrovertibly positive emotion, gratitude is the glue of social cohesion, promoting ethical exchange among virtuous subjects and creating the foundation for democratic society. This cohesion is produced because gratitude is ontologically defined by a bond of indebtedness between benefactor and beneficiary, requiring cycles of giving and return.

The basic structure of gratitude begins first with a benefit received, followed by a drive for reward, "to recompense, to remunerate, to return good for good received."⁶ This impulse to reciprocation is heightened when gratitude emerges from *undeserved* benefit, when the "grateful person recognizes that he or she did nothing to deserve the gift or benefit; it was freely bestowed."⁷ David Steindl-Rast elaborates: "If what we receive is ours by right, our appreciation will not pick up that special flavor of something *undeserved*, something gratis. But this is essential, as even the stem (*grati*) of the word *gratitude* indicates."⁸ Thus, gratitude carries with it a notion of debt to be repaid, specifically for an undeserved generosity.

Unlike other categories of migrants, refugees are not required to prove that they can contribute to the nation or to demonstrate possession of a valuable asset; they are required principally to prove fear of persecution. Accordingly, admittance of refugees into the nation's borders is primarily construed as an act of humanitarianism. This is what makes "refugee" a unique class of immigration. The offer of refuge is understood to be a result of the state's moral generosity, and not of

its political obligation, self-interest, or complicity in creating the conditions for displacement.⁹ In this way, refuge is a benefit that refugees have done nothing to deserve; rather, it is what has been done *to* them, their suffering and victimization, that determines eligibility. Juridical-political refuge thus points to the nation's fulfillment—voluntarily—of an international moral and legal principle. Although the right to seek asylum, which is also the right to asylum, is enshrined in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a basic tenet of human dignity, it does not occur naturally but depends on bureaucratic authorization to come into existence—the state enters to bestow a human right as an unearned benefit. Gratitude, as a facilitating bond between the state and refugees, arises because refuge is understood precisely as a benefit and not as a natural right.

As such, there is an obligation for recipients of refuge to repay the state and its citizens for the special favor. This obligation is felt and does not necessarily need to be explicitly articulated because it is built into our common understanding of both refuge and gratitude. In this way, the nation-state, whose appropriate motives and intentions are based in altruistic humanitarianism, is established as the proper receiver of gratitude. In turn, the “good” refugees who follow the right path and do the appropriate thing become the proper giver of gratitude. In such a relation, the refugee's personal goodness blossoms into a more universal and shared goodness.

Therefore, according to Adam Smith it is not difficult to sympathize, in the sense of hearts beating in time, with gratitude. He writes: “When we see one man assisted, protected, relieved by another, our sympathy with the joy of the person who receives the benefit serves only to animate our fellow-feeling with his gratitude toward him who bestows it.”¹⁰ The scene of benefit received and gratitude repaid produces good feelings in both the participants and the observers of the interaction. Thus, sympathy for grateful feeling as a response to benefit arises freely. To give a good and to return a good is, without doubt, *good*. Smith's account of gratitude's relational logic describes how it comes to be naturalized in social relations as a virtue: rational-minded individuals can easily perceive and agree upon its inherent goodness.

In this way, gratitude pulls many refugees into a form of grateful relation with the nation-state. And, under the latter's hegemony, refugees are compelled to turn toward gratitude, toward what Sara Ahmed calls the national “happiness duty,” in which migrants are bound to “telling a certain story of [their] arrival as good, or the good of [their] arrival.”¹¹ This “telling” serves a national ideal of integration and likeness, whereby proximity, or the aspiration to proximity, breeds good and correct feeling—and, in turn, national harmony and happiness. The expression of grateful feelings, or the good of refuge, means that unseemly narratives (of racism, colonialism, oppression) or irreconcilable attachments (to the past, homeland, and injury) retreat from the foreground. What surfaces is the preference for and primacy of gratitude over other, less palatable, affective experiences such as anger and melancholia.

While public displays of refugee gratitude are crucial to the formation of social goodness, a more structural—and less explicit—relation of gratitude emerges when refugees appropriately utilize refuge to become good citizens and “succeed” in the neoliberal sense. Their assimilated existence already speaks to what refuge is capable of inspiring. A relation of gratitude is a debt of becoming, which lasts at least as long as a lifetime and then is often transferred to other generations. In her incisive examination of what she calls the “gift of freedom,” Mimi Thi Nguyen demonstrates that refugees can never repay the debt that freedom incurs. As both a “target” and “instrument” of this force, refugees are locked into endless debt, not least because the gift is always contingent and forthcoming.¹² The gift of freedom, which takes refuge as its cornerstone, functions as a coercive “will to subjectivity,” governing the anomalous and anachronistic peoples of the world into modernity, a passing from illiberalism to liberal freedom.¹³

The debt of gratitude, as Nguyen’s analysis illuminates, does not always unfold as the positive social good that Adam Smith and others exalt, but instead can function as a form of subjection to power. For Lisa Yoneyama, indebtedness “disciplines those who are identified as the liberated,” so that they “can never enter into an evenly reciprocal relationship with the liberators.”¹⁴ The bond that gratitude creates can also be viewed as a kind of interminable bondage, whereby benefit chains the beneficiary to the benefactor’s will. The figure of the refugee brings into sharp relief the contradictions of an agreed-upon social virtue such as gratitude, showing how certain subjects who have received a benefit from the state might live in the restrictions it imposes, restrictions that are often not seen as such, because of gratitude’s common sense. The grateful subjects produced through freedom’s subjection are crucial instruments through which the force of freedom—often as liberal war—reproduces itself.¹⁵

The receipt of refuge thus can become a burden, and gratitude is the relation that puts refugees into a bind. These subjects and their gratitude are, moreover, readily appropriated and co-opted to serve the state’s political agendas of consolidating nationhood, launching foreign interventions, and making war, in order to create more freedom and bring about more refuge. This fundamental bind of successful refuge in the Global North is thus an insidious form of repayment. As a moral sentiment, gratitude is not just about living harmoniously with others or about virtuous relationships, but also, and more crucially, about *living under* the weight of power’s governmentality. Social harmony is created precisely because grateful refugees are so important and valuable to the nation-state and its various sovereign operations, whether we understand those to be the propagation of freedom, militarism, war, humanitarianism, race, or refuge.

It cannot be disputed that gratitude restricts and circumscribes forms of refugee subjecthood. Yet we also know that power is never absolute, that any structure, institution, or relation holds within it the means for creative resistance and repetition with a difference.¹⁶ Thus, gratitude also exists as opportunities for refugees to

shape the experience of refuge for themselves and for others. While expressions of gratitude enable the nation-state to further its political ends, and while grateful relations can lock refugees in debt, those expressions and relations can also facilitate the formation of ways of being and relating with others that are in excess of, or that contravene, gratitude's national prescription. If gratitude is produced as an imposition of power, then the "ways of using" it by the very people imposed upon (to follow Michel de Certeau) create productive situations of ambiguity in which the intended outcome is not guaranteed.¹⁷ I argue that gratitude is much more than political fodder or a provider of alibis for the state's national and imperial projects.

If gratitude can be understood through the operation of social bonds, whether as harmony or debt, then we cannot know in advance the exact direction or outcome of these bonds. It is worth stating that the nation-state is not the only object to which gratitude is directed, and that, once expressed, gratitude may serve a range of purposes, often simultaneously and sometimes in contradiction to one another. In the hands of refugees, gratitude is an experiment of refuge. Grateful relations uncover a point in time, a position, in which something is being worked through. These relations open into a space of unresolved experience between refugees and a multitude of others. While the debt of freedom seems determined, it can actually point "toward a different social order, keeping us in contact with alternate collectivities of others who bear the trace of human freedom."¹⁸ Debt may turn into a surprising condition for intersubjectivity, facilitating contacts and relations unintended by the violence of freedom and the promise of refuge. As such, expressions of gratitude are not affixed to a prior politics or a pre-constituted end, and may be experienced by refugees as a way to live with, live for, and live strategically in the interminable duration of refuge.

RELATIONAL SELFHOOD

If gratitude is politically valuable for the nation-state, then it is an equally potent relation for the refugee, who has lived through (and might still be living with) war, who knows intimately the threat and reality of destruction, disappearances, and death. The renewal of life and the attainment of socioeconomic success are significant and profound when physical survival has never been guaranteed. A coherent conception of self (as a biological being and a social subject) still matters for war refugees, despite recent theoretical debates that attempt to move the question of race in the direction of post-identity or post-humanism. In this way, expressing gratitude might be integral to the intertwined processes of physical survival and subject formation for refugees who must make sense of a life's displacements and extreme oscillations. The refugee who has stepped foot onto a small boat, knowing that everything is in danger of being swallowed up by the sea, must somehow hold this experience when she flies across the Pacific Ocean in a first-class cabin later in life—as is the case in Kim Thúy's *Ru*. But how does one live such contradictions,

or create meaning in the face of enormous incongruities? A relation of gratitude, I suggest, is one crucial mechanism for understanding a life that has passed into refuge, made up of radical changes and incompatible fragments.

For many refugees who have successfully rebuilt another life, present prosperity and past suffering are points of incredible conflict. Segments of experiences may seem to belong to entirely different lives. In *Ru's* impressionistic vignettes, the narrator gestures to the dizzying changes of fortune and the experiential breaks that refuge engenders.¹⁹ Describing how her relatives lead a comfortable life in Canada, especially in comparison to their refugee past, she writes: "Nowadays . . . [t]hey travel first class and have to stick a sign on the back of their seat so the hostesses will stop offering them chocolates and champagne. Thirty years ago, in our Malaysian refugee camp, the same Step-uncle Six crawled more slowly than his eight-month-old daughter because he was suffering from malnutrition. And the same Aunt Six used the one needle she had to sew clothes so she could buy milk for her daughter."²⁰ The negotiation of these seemingly irreconcilable disjunctions—of deprivation and luxury, lack and abundance—that press at the limits of a coherent conception of self is precisely what gratitude makes possible. A grateful relation is a powerful device for explaining the disparate realities that coalesce to form the subject in refuge; it is a way to *examine* a refugee life and its various passages through time and space. *Ru* explores how refugee subjects embody multiple, oftentimes discrepant meanings, narrativizing the difficulty of occupying that interstitial space where the legal designation of refugee has dissolved but refugeehood still lingers.

After recounting a story of war, migration from Vietnam, and resettlement in Canada, Kim Thúy ends her narrative with an image of rebirth and renewal: a phoenix rising from its ashes. The narrator writes that "all those individuals from my past have shaken the grime off their backs in order to spread their wings with plumage of red and gold, before thrusting themselves sharply towards the great blue space, decorating my children's sky, showing them that one horizon always hides another and it goes on like that to infinity, to the unspeakable beauty of renewal, to intangible rapture."²¹ The novel's overarching theme of resilience and triumphant final note strike the perfect pitch as a refugee success story. Indeed, various glowing reviews in national newspapers have hailed the author as "the perfect immigrant" and praised her story as one following the path "from riches to rags to riches."²² In turn, the critical and commercial success of the novel reinforces the image of the author as a model refugee.²³

Less than a decade after its original publication in French, the book has achieved canonical status in Canada, consolidated by its win in the nationwide battle-of-the-books competition Canada Reads in 2015.²⁴ In his defense of the novel, Cameron Bailey, then artistic director and cohead of the Toronto International Film Festival, passionately waved his passport, proclaiming, "This is my Canadian passport. If you're born here it is pretty easy to get one of these, but ask someone who wasn't

born here what it took to get their Canadian passport. My mother, my father, they fought, they worked their asses off to get one of these, and *Ru* brought me back to that, that struggle, what it takes to become a Canadian.”²⁵ Cast in these decidedly nationalistic terms, in a project of identity formation through shared literature and reading publics, *Ru*’s narrative of successful refuge and achievement resonates because it can be interpreted as evincing the immigrant’s struggle and eventual reward (the coveted passport)—thereby shoring up Canada’s benevolence, its mythology as the “peaceable kingdom.”²⁶

A large part of *Ru*’s mainstream success can be attributed to its aesthetic qualities—a poetic style and unconventional form that make for a pleasurable reading experience.²⁷ But the novel’s (inter)national celebration is arguably a reflection of its narration of a success story and, more importantly, its expression of refugee gratitude.²⁸ *Ru* is structured like an inventory of gratitude, unfolding as tributes to the people who have made the narrator’s present a reality. Kim Thúy has said that the novel is an homage to Canada and the heroes of her past. The narrative itself is a testament to the benevolence and generosity of the Canadian nation. How this testimony circulates in Canadian society, while extremely important to understanding the cultural politics of gratitude, is not my primary concern here. Rather, I focus on what gratitude affords the refugee subject—which is nothing less than the capacity to integrate disparate experiences into a conception of the self in refuge.

Ru provides a model of selfhood predicated on grateful relations, one that enables the refugee who has had the stability of meaning pulled from under her to (re)construct a self and to link that self with others. What emerges is a notion of individual subjecthood as relationally constituted. As such, an expression of gratitude toward Canada is a fundamental component of the refugee’s autobiographical narrative of coming into refuge. The narrator accordingly expresses gratitude to the Canadian nation through its nearest representatives, the small Quebec town of Granby and its inhabitants. Granby is described as a “warm belly” and “heaven on earth,” while its people are characterized as “angels” who were sent to care for the refugees: “By the dozen they showed up at our doors to give us warm clothes, toys, invitations, dreams.”²⁹ She depicts the Canadians who guided the refugees in their early days as mothers and caretakers. Marie-France, the narrator’s first teacher in Canada, was “like a mother duck,” walking “ahead of us, asking us to follow her to the haven where we would be children again. . . . She watched over our transplantation with all the sensitivity of a mother for her premature baby.”³⁰ Jeanne, another teacher, “liberated my voice without using words. . . . It was thanks to [her] that I learned how to free my voice from the folds of my body so it could reach my lips.”³¹

This picture of a nurturing and inclusive community aligns neatly with official state discourse, rehearsing the common belief in Canada’s cultivated civility.³² Yet what also surfaces through this narration of gratitude is the narrator’s formative moments of an inchoate self, seedlings for a possible future: Jeanne’s example

taught the silent refugee how to utilize her voice; the sway of Marie-France's full bum gave the angular narrator her "first desire as an immigrant" and the "power to look ahead, to look far ahead"; the kindness of Granby's residents reaffirmed hope for what is to come.³³ While gratitude undoubtedly feeds into a liberal discourse of Canada's "humanitarian exceptionalism," the refugee herself needs to acknowledge that the state and its citizens facilitated her transition into another life, giving her the opportunity to begin anew, because such experiences are real for her and cannot be denied.³⁴ That is, the articulation of gratitude is as much for herself as for the nation-state. The narrator's present conception of a livable, unified self crucially requires an account of these moments in the form of thankfulness, especially because the self was previously in danger of being extinguished. The importance of gratitude, then, must be read in the context of the material and existential uncertainty that threads through her narrative.

For example, the narrator provides a description of her boat journey, relaying in visceral detail the paralyzing fear felt by passengers as they drift in the hold of the boat:

Heaven and Hell embraced in the belly of our boat. Heaven promised a turning point in our lives, a new future, a new history. Hell, though, displayed our fears: fear of pirates, fear of starvation, fear of poisoning by biscuits soaked in motor oil, fear of running out of water, fear of being unable to stand up, fear of having to urinate in the red pot that was passed from hand to hand, fear that the scabies on the baby's head was contagious, fear of never again setting foot on solid ground, fear of never again seeing the faces of our parents, who were sitting in the darkness surrounded by two hundred people. . . . [F]ear was transformed into a hundred-faced monster who sawed off our legs and kept us from feeling the stiffness in our immobilized muscles. We were frozen in fear, by fear. . . . We were numb, imprisoned by the shoulders of some, the legs of others, the fear of everyone. We were paralyzed.³⁵

Fear suspends the refugee subject, and the many threats to life foreclose the future, petrifying the self in a physical, psychic, and affective hold. In an interview, Kim Thúy describes the experience of living in a refugee camp as a life-altering event in which "everything went down to zero" and thus "everything else came as a gift afterwards."³⁶ She says that "after that four months of emptiness, of nothingness, you don't compare with what you have before, you're just, I'd say, thankful that you have a new life, that you have a new beginning. Starting over, you're just thankful."³⁷

Early in the novel, the narrator recalls how this condition of suspended self is exacerbated when the refugee encounters the newness of Canada in another paralyzing moment—the one of arrival. Upon landing in Quebec, she writes, "I was . . . unable to talk or to listen, even though I was neither deaf nor mute. I now had no points of reference, no tools to allow me to dream, to project myself into the future, to be able to experience the present, in the present."³⁸ The gratitude that comes *after* the emptiness of boat, camp, and arrival is thus a profound way for the refugee to experience her life *in the present*—the chance to begin again—and

to fully comprehend its significance. The full affective force of gratitude is brought into relief against a backdrop of absence and impossibility.

If, as *Ru's* narrator tells us, war, displacement, and asylum seeking are experienced as disorientation and suspension, then gratitude might provide a compass for the refugee to reorient herself through relational attachments. Gratitude's stickiness, its function as a social binding agent, fastens her to kin, lovers, teachers, benefactors, and strangers in moments of giving and exchange. It is worth remembering that the refugee's gratitude is multidirectional, and that it arrives most impactfully, and profoundly, at the steps of other refugees and survivors. As it celebrates Canada, the novel also makes room for a telling of the quotidian (but extraordinarily so) generosity, wisdoms, and altruisms of other Vietnamese refugees.

For example, she pays tribute to Anh Phi, a family friend who found and returned the lost taels of gold that the narrator's family eventually used to pay for their passage out of Vietnam. His selfless and heroic act during postwar Vietnam's "chaotic peacetime," when "it was the norm for hunger to replace reason, for uncertainty to usurp morality," established the condition of possibility for the narrator's survival and escape.³⁹ Her Aunt Six, who labored in a chicken processing plant in Quebec, enabled the narrator to form her own dreams of the future. By giving the narrator a simple gift of ten pieces of paper, on each of which was written the name of a possible profession, her aunt showed her that there were other options besides medicine, a career that many refugee parents expect their children to enter into because of its prestige, earning potential, and perceived stability. She writes that "it was thanks to that gift . . . that I was allowed to dream my own dreams."⁴⁰

Furthermore, Monsieur An, a survivor of the communist reeducation prisons, taught her about the important notion of nuance. His tale of facing the barrel of the execution gun and surviving through a defiant upward gaze to search for the sky's blueness is a lesson in the importance of life's subtleties and the power of resistance. Monsieur Minh, another reeducation survivor, who had "written" many books in his mind, "always on the one piece of paper he possessed, page by page, chapter by chapter, an unending story," during his incarceration, was "saved . . . by writing."⁴¹ He gave her the "urge to write" and the gift of words, showing the narrator the power of stories and storytelling in the struggle to stay alive.⁴² The narrator's parents, who were "unable to look ahead of themselves" because of the opportunities closed off to them in Canada, "looked ahead of us, for us, their children."⁴³ She emphasizes that "for us, they didn't see the blackboards they wiped clean, the school toilets they scrubbed, the imperial rolls they delivered. They saw only what lay ahead."⁴⁴ The gratitude expressed here acknowledges her parents' hard work and sacrifice as the foundation for the narrator's own success. She renders the "gifts"—material and immaterial—from various individuals as pieces that fit together to create a whole refugee self.

Taken together, these vignettes of gratitude constellate a subject whose boundaries are blurred, and whose presence is built on the sediments of others' dreams, lessons, and sacrifices. The kernel for the self is an assemblage of the "enigmatic traces of others."⁴⁵ And writing catalogues gratitude so that the self might emerge in the duration of refuge, showing us that the gift of refuge is meaningless, indeed impossible, without ordinary generousities and the mundane relations between people. *Ru* gives us a method for creating a refugee self through a relation of living-with. Here, *with* indicates a dependency or a necessary recognition that whatever "success" or life there may be for the individual refugee subject, it is always predicated on the presence of others, on their actions and reactions. Gratitude, then, is a relational device for refugees seeking to understand how they have come to be in the world. What forces, individuals, and capacities have made the existence of a person in refuge possible? This is a crucial question, not so much because it involves a genealogical excavation of the subject, but more because the very possibility of that subject is an incredibility.

The elliptical and fragmentary form of the novel, mimicking memory and everyday storytelling, already lays bare this method of narrating (inter)subjectivity. But the marketing of the book as a novel, even though it was written as a memoir, is a brilliant strategy that both creates authorial distance and draws attention to the literary quality of Kim Thúy's writing, a quality that is often judged as missing from ethnic writing in general, and from life writing by immigrants and refugees in particular. The simple mechanism of a name change—from Kim Thúy to Nguyễn An Tịnh—recalibrates the entire narrative and how it can be read. This is an experimentation, not just in how to tell a refugee story, but also in how to think of the refugee subject in charge of narrating herself into being. Stepping outside the ethnographic frame, while at the same time revealing much ethnographic content, Kim Thúy achieves a speaking voice that does much heavy lifting. This voice holds expectations and demands while carving out a space for individual expression, showing us a beautiful process of self-creation via gratitude.

LIVING FOR OTHERS

Kim Thúy's text demonstrates how gratitude facilitates self-reconstruction in refuge. *With gratitude* is one way for the refugee subject to exist. And to exist is to comprehend that—even though it may be experienced as singular and individual—a life is always a living-with, because without this "with" there cannot be an "I." We could understand gratitude, first and foremost, as a relation of living through—or by way of—what others have built for us. But this relation of gratitude might also mean *living for* others, as an obligation to build what others could not have or never had the chance to have—to be a presence in the place of loss. If living-with allows the subject to receive fragments of the self from others, and to see the self as grafted from these offerings, then living-for adds weight and

meaning to a life, providing impetus to personal experience. In her memoir *Lucky Child*, Loung Ung, a survivor of the Khmer Rouge genocide, comes to the haunting realization that her life, or the very capacity to live, acquires significance because it acts as a vehicle for the dead. She reminds herself: “*You have to live for them because they died.*”⁴⁶ This simple yet infinitely complicated truth deepens and challenges the meaning of an individual life.⁴⁷

This idea is echoed in the opening pages of Kim Thúy’s novel, where the narrator explains that the “purpose” of her birth was to “replace lives that had been lost.”⁴⁸ Because she “came into the world during the Tet Offensive” of 1968, one of the deadliest battles of the Vietnam War, her life and its meaning are inextricably tied to the “blood of the two million soldiers deployed and scattered throughout the villages and cities of a Vietnam that had been ripped in two.”⁴⁹ To view one’s life not as one’s own, but as an extension of the lives that have been lost, is to view living as an experience that is intimately bound up with the deaths of others. In histories of war and genocide, an individual’s life is lived, as Ung and Thúy suggest, on behalf of kin, of fellow countrymen, of those whose lives were cut short.

It is not merely the idea of individual success that is at stake, and the purpose of a life is not only the achievement of self-actualization and personal development. Instead, the intention of a life, its coming-into-being, is to exist for others. It is to counteract the forces of violence (state and otherwise) that continually seek to annihilate life. An individual life is thus never separated from the sociopolitical context, or from what is happening to other people and the unpredictable historical contingencies of the world. It is always already a living-for—but in genocide, this living-for is tethered to an organized catastrophic decimation of a culture, a family, a life.

In the wake of American military withdrawal from Southeast Asia, the region succumbed, city by city, to communist regimes. From 1975 to 1979, the Khmer Rouge, led by Pol Pot, embarked on a totalizing program to forcibly return Cambodia to “year zero”—a revolutionary state based on agricultural economy and the elimination of foreign influence. Through torture, starvation, forced labor, execution, and “disappearances,” the Khmer Rouge killed approximately two million people, a quarter of the total population. When all was done, the country and its people were left in devastating ruins, and the material and psychic effects of the genocide continue to be experienced, at home and abroad.

Ung’s memoir shows that the meaning of a life after genocide is defined not so much by how a subject lives it, but by the loss that motivate its very living. Significantly, she comes to this understanding the moment she recognizes the possibility of putting her experience into words, an experience that she shares with her family and other Cambodians. A note in her first memoir, *First They Killed My Father*, reads: “This is a story of survival: my own and my family’s. Though these events constitute my experience, my story mirrors that of millions of Cambodians. If you had been living in Cambodia during this period, this would be your story too.”⁵⁰

As philosophers such as Martin Buber remind us, language and speech are the very mechanisms that link individual subjects, bringing into relation the I and the You. Because linguistic consciousness enables our participation in the social world, language is the primary means of establishing intersubjective relations.⁵¹ The genesis of Ung's two best-selling memoirs can be traced to this moment of intersubjective realization, when she as subject begins to see the significance of her survival and its subsequent narrativization.⁵² Having struggled to make sense of her family members' deaths in Cambodia and her own life in the United States, Ung comes to view her refuge as a continuation of their lives: "*You have to live for them because they died.* This thought suddenly snakes its way on to the white page on my desk. I put down my pen and clasp my hands together. *Did they die for me? Did they die for me?* My mind repeats the question like a dark spell."⁵³ The very question—"Did they die for me?"—bridges the living and the dead. It undoes individual subjectivity to suggest gratitude arising from the ultimate human debt: the benefit of life predicated on the death of others. This benefit is neither a magnanimous sacrifice on one end nor a marker of worthiness on the other; it is but a cruel fact of war and genocide, where many die and some survive. Beyond a psychologizing interpretation of such debt relations as survivor's guilt, I suggest that this difficult knowing is precisely what connects the individual—who cannot explain the discrepancies of fortunes, the random workings of fate, and the disruptions of history—to the social world. It allows the individual subject to see that meaning in her life depends on how she is connected to the lives and deaths of countless others.

In this way, gratitude is a debt that the living "owes" to the dead. Gratitude manifests in the obligation to live or survive *for* others in refuge. This obligation means that one's life is not just one's own, and a grateful relation is not only about thankful expressions or repayment to a benefactor, but is also about the actions that sustain one's life, which is a vessel for holding others. For the refugee who knows loss, gratitude inheres in the acts that make life livable, whatever that may look like. A relation of gratitude, then, allows us to see another method of living, not living to merely fulfill the self, but to understand that doing so is to imbricate and entangle the self with the future of the dead, a future that depends on how the refugee lives.

The consequences of life—what the refugee subject manages to do or achieve—extend to those who are no longer living it, and her actions acquire an aura of multiplicity, buttressed as it is by the dead's propinquity. Instead of public verbalizations, recompense, or correct being, gratitude is the refusal to die because others have died already, and to not be defined by death but to carry the dead in the animate duration of the everyday. The notion of living-for opens up an understanding of gratitude whereby the subject situates the possibility of, and the reason for, living in the deaths that have taken place.

In the beginning of *Lucky Child*, which picks up from *First They Killed My Father's* chronicle of life under the Khmer Rouge, a ten-year-old Loung Ung arrives

in the United States with two siblings after spending time in a Thai refugee camp. She has survived years of mass killings, starvation, and manual labor in postwar Cambodia, which took the lives of her parents and two other siblings. Ung is chosen by her eldest brother to make the journey to the United States because she was “still young enough to go to school, get an education, and make something of herself,” an opportunity that was not offered to other surviving siblings.⁵⁴ Thus begins a life that diverges from those of her family members and from the experiences of the past. Yet the past refuses to let go of the subject. Ung writes, “In my new country, I immersed myself in American culture during the day, but at night the war haunted me with nightmares.”⁵⁵

The difficulty with having two lives is that day and night often bleed into one another. In a chapter titled “Minnie Mouse and Gunfire,” the narrator recalls her first Fourth of July, when the fireworks celebration, with its terrifying “smell of burnt powder, the brightness of the bombs, and the haze of smoke,” hurled the past into the present, blurring war there and peace here: “I am outside of time and space and in a world where Cambodia and America collide, with me stuck somewhere in the middle. A baby screams as the soldiers reach into the bomb shelter and pull out a woman. Her clothes are black and dirty and her face is muddy. She clutches her baby to her breast and begs for mercy, taking me back to the death of Ma [mother] and Geak [sister]. All of a sudden, my world goes red and I am back in America, disoriented and terrified.”⁵⁶ A conventional reading might view this disorientation as the effect of trauma or the consequence of post-traumatic stress disorder, but I suggest that it is a psychic reckoning with the meaning of living for the dead. To live-for is a relationality that is imbued with the dead from the past, such that the past is not past, and the dead are not dead but *live* through what the subject experiences in the present. While it can weigh heavily on the subject, to be haunted in this way is to experience the “for” of living. The intimacy of the dead means that the past and its violence are never far away, and the individual must continue to feel their pulsing contemporaneity.

Instead of articulating gratitude for a new American life, *Lucky Child* focuses on finding a mode and rationale for living in refuge. As Ung comes to terms with being alive, the haunted presence of the dead is emphasized more than anything else. While the narrative depicts the usual difficulties of starting anew in a different country, it is interestingly devoid of conventional gratefulness. In response to an American sponsor who assumes that the newly arrived Cambodian refugees are unfamiliar with common household items, the young Ung blurts out, “These people know nothing! They think we’re backward villagers and peasants!”⁵⁷ This candid reaction prompts her elder brother to remind the narrator to exercise more gratitude, because these people “don’t have to help us at all but they do, so you be grateful.”⁵⁸ In another scene, American charity invokes a deep sense of shame in the refugees as they purchase groceries with food stamps. For Ung, who knows firsthand the desperation to acquire food during years of forced hunger under the

Khmer Rouge, it might seem that receiving food via government assistance would be a small indignity to bear. Yet feelings of shame and embarrassment arise from consciousness of how Americans see the refugees, or of what refuge looks like from the other's resentful eyes: "I turn my gaze from the pineapple to look at the clerk and notice that his once cheerful face is now an unmoving plastic mask and his mouth is a straight line. He keeps his eyes focused on the red numbers of his machine as he takes the food stamps from Meng's [brother] hand. Afterward, he hands Meng and Eang [sister-in-law] our groceries with a thank-you that sounds to me more like 'I am angry you foreigners come here and eat free while I have to work for my food.'"⁵⁹ Through the condescension and bitterness of those who look down upon them, the refugees' benefit—of food stamps and refuge—turns into shame. Ung's brother encourages her to remember this because it will propel her beyond her pitiful situation: "Pay attention. See how he stares at us because of the food stamps," Meng tells me in Khmer. "Be embarrassed and ashamed by this, and don't forget it."⁶⁰ This interplay of "nativist" resentment and "refugee" shame is a real consequence of the giving and receiving of benefit, of what it means to be locked in refuge together. Refuge does not always inspire good feelings, and the refugee is left with a complicated mix of reactions.

Accordingly, gratitude toward the U.S. nation-state is superseded by indignation and hatred toward the Khmer Rouge for the life Ung must currently live—even if, and indeed because, she is the "lucky child," lucky to be alive and to have refuge while others are dead or suffering. In her narrative, which also tells the parallel struggle of her sister in Cambodia, Ung is haunted by the terror of genocide that has shattered everything she knows. In refuge, she must find a sense of purpose and come to grips with having a body that breathes here, in the present moment: she "didn't want to die" and had not yet learned "how to live with the ghosts."⁶¹ To live in the wake of genocide is to be haunted, and this haunting is also a living for others. As she comes to the realization that she must exist to honor the dead, that to live a meaningful life she must live it for them, Ung enters a complex relation of gratitude. What this gratitude looks like is survival and, more specifically, a kind of survival that recognizes its condition of possibility in those who have tragically lost their lives. Although Ung does not express or experience gratitude in the conventional way, her relationality with the dead, which impels her to live—"You have to live for them because they died"—is a powerful way in which gratitude develops in refuge.

In this sense of gratitude as living-for, the refugee is highly attuned to the dead and the suffering of others. Ultimately, to live for the dead is to seek justice, because the refugee subject knows that violence will never end. So, as the United States begins its invasion of Iraq during the first Gulf War, for example, Ung relives the destruction of war, the horror of deaths to come: "I want to crawl back into bed, curl into a fetal position, and cry until I am all dried up. For I know that when each one of those lights hits the earth, somebody's mother will lose a child, somebody's

son will no longer have a father, and some daughter will be orphaned.”⁶² When the 1984 drought in Ethiopia “brought daily images of children dying from starvation,” Ung saw her deceased sister and “remembered how all she wanted was to eat.”⁶³ In this way, the “war crossed over from” her “dreamworld to reality.”⁶⁴

For Ung, living-for means that the subject cannot relegate the dead to the past, or the past to the dead. Rather, living gratefully involves a worldly immersion with those who have died, those who might die, and those who will still live. This intersubjective state of being drives the individual to “do something,” to attach her living to a meaningful cause. How else could such an experience be rationalized, but through an affective compulsion for the body and mind to act? Ung thus sought to “work with programs that dealt with issues of war, child soldiers, and genocide” after graduating from college.⁶⁵ This leads her eventually to become involved in various humanitarian projects, first with the Campaign for a Landmine-Free World and then with the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation.

Regardless of the material outcomes or underlying politics of Western humanitarian gestures, which critics have critiqued for their imperialist ramifications, such work offers the refugee survivor a chance to live for others. Ung explains: “As I tell people about genocide, I get the opportunity to redeem myself. I’ve had the chance to do something that is worth my being alive. It’s empowering; it feels right. The more I tell people, the less the nightmares haunt me. The more people listen to me, the less I hate.”⁶⁶ Living-for has a dimension of personal redemption, not for a wrong that was committed, but for making a life worthy. Ung shows us that the worth of a life that survived genocide is its service to others, to stay with the dead so that more deaths, more suffering, more genocide may be prevented. Here, it is to share experience so that the dead acquire value beyond private remembrance.⁶⁷ Ung’s activist and humanitarian work is an engagement with the dead and an acknowledgment that living derives meaning from those who did not survive. This meaning is to extend life so that others may have a chance to continue living. Gratitude in this sense is a complex praxis, a way to live a life that opens to other life forms, material and otherwise.

STRATEGIC GRATITUDE

To live with and to live for is to live strategically, so that the actions of a life acquire purpose and meaning in and beyond the individual self. As Kim Thúy and Loung Ung demonstrate, gratitude affords refugee subjects a way to fulfill a desire. It is a means for them to achieve a particular objective—to reconstruct the self or advocate for others—in the absence of other social and political resources. Because of its uncontested virtue, gratitude enables those who may not have a public voice to be recognized, to be seen and heard. It is a powerful platform, or aesthetic form, through which refugee politics or desire may be delivered to a wider public. In this

way, gratitude crucially facilitates the refugee's various social work, particularly within the confines of the nation-state.

On March 18, 2014, Tri Nguyen, a Baptist pastor, along with three Iranian asylum seekers, set out on a walking pilgrimage from Brunswick, a suburb of Melbourne, to Canberra, the capital city of Australia and the seat of its government. Pulled along on the journey was a miniature replica of the boat on which the pastor and his family fled Vietnam in 1982. Emblazoned on the wooden boat were two words: "Thank You." The plan was to walk the boat across three states and multiple country towns to arrive at their destination on Good Friday and present the boat to the Parliament of Australia as a gesture of gratitude for the "gift of refuge" the Nguyen family received three decades earlier. Nguyen explained that he wanted to thank Australia and its people for welcoming the family. He writes that "[we] were given the most hospitable welcome and care by the people of Australia. We arrived at Midway Hostel, in Maribyrnong in 1982, with nothing in our hands. We were weary and overwhelmed, but the care and generosity of people fill us with great joy. We were free and we were welcome!"⁶⁸ Such generosity inspired Nguyen's eventual entry into the ministry and his lifelong work with underprivileged and marginalized youths, evincing gratitude's long-lasting impact.⁶⁹

Nguyen's pilgrimage, however, was simultaneously a display of appreciation for a past benefit and a condemnation of Australia's current refugee regime, one characterized by restrictive and inhumane practices.⁷⁰ The impetus for the pilgrimage—entitled "The Gift of Refuge"—was sparked when an increasing number of asylum seekers began showing up at Nguyen's church. While seeing many parallels between his experience and those of these contemporary refugee subjects, the pastor also recognized that "their situation is a lot more difficult than mine, coming to an Australia that is not hospitable."⁷¹ He recalled his arrival as a "boat person" decades earlier, saying, "It was an amazing time to be a refugee, cause we were so welcome and care by the community [*sic*]."⁷²

In the intervening thirty years, Australia's political stance on refugees had shifted toward the aim of *deterrence*, effectively declaring "war on asylum seekers."⁷³ The contemporary response to refugees is defined by a discourse of migrant threat and criminality, or what Richard Devetak calls Australia's "politics of fear."⁷⁴ From mandatory detention to the Temporary Protection Visa program, to the Border Protection Act, to attempts to resettle refugees in nearby countries such as Cambodia, Australia's refugee policies of the past several decades display a deep sense of anxiety around racial purity and foreign invasion, one that stretches back to the nation's settler-colonial "founding."

Within this historical moment of intensified xenophobia and assault on asylum seekers—charges of illegal "queue jumping" and detention in "cruel and degrading" offshore processing centers—Nguyen's pilgrimage strategically

conjures up an image of Australia's benevolence to launch a critique of the nation-state. While the politics of refugee gratitude is often understood as assimilationist or nationalist, it can, as Nguyen's project demonstrates, also challenge the nation and its ideological constitution. Indeed, critiques of the nation-state by former refugees become legible precisely through the mechanism of gratitude, which is a strategy in the sense that it is a sanctioned vehicle for social voice, and strategic in the sense that said voice may be utilized for divergent ends. Thus, the purpose of recalling generosity of the past through gratitude is to make stark the ungenerosity of the present.

In "The Gift of Refuge," gratitude to the Australian nation-state is prompted not by an obligation of debt, but rather—and more significantly—by a feeling of dissonance, an unease with political discourse and government policies. Public gratitude here is a reminder that the nation is capable of better, rehearsing a version of national conduct more in line with its stated commitment to liberal democracy. It is, to borrow a phrase from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, used for a "scrupulously visible political interest."⁷⁵ Nguyen's retelling of his past through gratitude illustrates what the present and the future could be, providing an alternative possibility—one that has been—to the hostile and inhumane treatment of migrants that is. The pilgrimage, in the end, is one refugee's affective instruction in compassion.

A strategic gratitude is deployed for a particular purpose, by one conscious of its usefulness as a means to a political end. This is not to say that such an expression of gratitude is insincere or false. On the contrary, the heartfelt genuineness of gratitude is precisely the quality that resonates affectively, that draws others in and opens up their capacity to be affected. Sincerity is, indeed, a core strategic marker of gratitude. As such, Nguyen's pilgrimage discursively embarks with a highly personal and emotional story of his family's boat migration. In one early post on the pilgrimage's official website, dated Friday October 18, 2013, Nguyen re-narrates experiences common to many Vietnamese "boat people": "My family made several traumatic attempts to escaped Vietnam after the war. . . . We then endured four days in a raging storm, which almost swallow us to the deep. . . . Before we could rejoice that we were alive, we were surrounded by pirates, who took anything that was of valued. We were then caged, tortured and some were harmed for a few days, before they gave us up to United Nations Troops, who took us to a refugee camp on an Island call Pulau Bidong [*sic*]."⁷⁶ Calling attention to the perils of seeking refuge on a boat, Nguyen's autobiographical story establishes context for gratitude, emphasizing how the difficulty and danger involved in finding refuge make it so coveted. When he ends his note with "Thank you for giving my family this gift of refuge and freedom and thank you for your extraordinary hospitality and care. You have model[ed] to me what life can be and what is worth working for," the expression of gratitude clearly testifies to the importance of both providing and receiving asylum.⁷⁷ Nguyen's story of suffering and trauma is compelling and comprehensible because it aligns with the common notion of refugee pity. Of course, this

is not to say that such public telling is not meaningful, authentic, and generative for the refugee himself. This tension, of stereotype and authenticity, is at the crux of how gratitude becomes strategic.

If gratitude is easily recognized and digested, then the note, which provides a rationale for the pilgrimage, makes Nguyen and his cause legible to the nation-state. It exalts the nation for the refugee subject to emerge into public consciousness. In Nguyen's gratitude, Australia functions as a "model" of generosity and goodness, one that has fostered the grateful refugee's own sense of altruism and justice. For Nguyen, advocacy for and compassion toward asylum seekers is a quintessentially Australian characteristic, intrinsic to the country's national constitution, even if laws and policies of the day may not reflect such principles. The practice of "modeling," then, is central to Nguyen's performance of gratitude. The emphatic and headline-grabbing act of pulling a boat across the country is a form of repayment for a benefit received, yet it "repays" the nation by mimicking what it has done and could do—but refuses to do—by simply *showing* hospitality to asylum seekers.

The pilgrim's radical act of solidarity was to extend the invitation to three Iranian asylum seekers, whose claims were pending at the time. The inclusion of Majid, Mohammad (Daniel), and Linda in the pilgrimage was an opportunity for Nguyen to model what hospitality looks like for the nation, and, more importantly, for the three asylum seekers themselves. Through advertisements on social media and through church networks, Nguyen was able to secure accommodation for his team from ordinary citizens in small towns along the pilgrimage route. Australians—individuals and groups—opened their homes to the pilgrims, providing them food, shelter, and conversation, repeating the warmth and generosity that was given to the Nguyen family thirty years ago. In this way, the Iranian asylum seekers, who have known Australia primarily through detention centers, gain a different "view" of the country and its people as they "tour" the countryside.

Reflecting on the efficacy of the pilgrimage, Nguyen says, "in a sense it might not make much difference, but for us it's made a difference, it's made a difference for the guys who are coming on this journey because they have been welcome, their experience of being welcome means the world to them."⁷⁸ For the pilgrims, the walk itself is a consequential end as they seek to forge a reality different from what currently exists. "The Gift of Refuge" is a grassroots intervention in the sense that it focuses on social change by affecting how individuals feel, think, and experience the world. The scale of Nguyen's project may be small, but the intent is grand and symbolic: anyone, from ordinary folks to politicians to the nation-state itself, could provide the necessary welcome to transform the lives of a few or a multitude of people seeking asylum. It is through human relationships that refuge can be built and understood.

As such, the presence of Majid, Mohammad, and Linda in small Australian towns *instructs* the larger national community in the ordinary humanity of

asylum seekers, as an alternative to the populist constructions of them as terrorists and corrupt “queue jumpers.” At stops along the pilgrimage, the three individuals were able to interact and engage with locals through public events, discussion panels, concerts, and school and church visits. These forums allowed them to tell their stories and for people to learn more about how and why asylum seekers seek refuge. It is these kinds of personal contacts, the project suggests, that open new avenues of thinking, feeling, and action—“touching” people, affecting their worlds and worldviews.

Through the bodies of refugees, the pilgrimage gathered bodies in modes of action and participation to counteract the state’s dehumanizing regulation and administration of asylum seekers. The physicality of the pilgrimage aimed to arouse the capacity and involvement of Australian citizens, asking them to join in and contribute what they could, whether it was time, resources, or physical presence.⁷⁹ A promotional video, with an accompanying song by Kim Beales, was also produced as a call for participation.⁸⁰ The video features footage of people from all walks of life pulling the replica boat around Brunswick and Melbourne. The point was to gain visibility, spark curiosity, and make the sight of the boat a part of the Australian landscape. By rallying the participation of ordinary Australians across the country in support of asylum seekers, Nguyen’s pilgrimage attempted to show that gratitude is not just a feeling that refugees and immigrants feel for the nation, but a shared affect that all subjects, familiar and strange, can partake in together.

The act of walking together is a way of orienting bodies, hearts, and minds in a common direction, moving away from fear. Moreover, the pilgrimage draws on protest methods of the American civil rights movement, particularly Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s brand of civil disobedience, to articulate its critique of the government. For Nguyen, it is a citizen’s duty to condemn the government’s moral and political failure. In a series of tweets on the pilgrimage’s Twitter account, Nguyen documents the injustices meted out to asylum seekers by the government, linking to news articles with titles such as “Perverse Migration Bill Shreds the Rule of Law,” “Silence on Missing Asylum Seeker Boat a Disgrace to the Nation,” “Tony Abbott [the prime minister] Fails Another Leadership Test,” and “Ethics All at Sea: Stopping the Boats and Corrupting the State.” The tweets paint a picture of a nation in moral crisis, in the midst of a campaign to “stop the boats” that disregards both law and human dignity.

On April 20, 2014, when Nguyen and his team reached Canberra, they were greeted by a crowd of supporters. The pilgrimage came to a successful completion, having gained wide coverage in mainstream media outlets.⁸¹ Having begun the journey with a note of thanks, Nguyen ended it with another. After reiterating his gratitude to Australia and to various individuals who made the journey possible, Nguyen borrowed Dr. King’s famous line, “I have a dream,” to make a concluding appeal for a humanitarian approach to asylum: “I too have a dream! That in thirty two years time, your [asylum seekers’] children will walk from towns and cities to

Canberra to thank the Australian people and the Australian parliament for giving their parents the gift of refuge. I too have a dream, that Australia will continue to be a nation that welcomes the strangers, that cares for the vulnerable and gives fair go to all who are seeking refuge. That's the Australia to be proud of. Thank you Australia!"⁸² Nguyen thus projects the reproduction of grateful feeling, which is intimately tied to the gift of refuge. A generous nation, he declares, will continue to be celebrated, inspiring gratitude as the primary modality of social exchange. Yet the idea that Australia should be a nation that "continues" to welcome asylum seekers is not a statement about the factual present, but an aspiration for the future.

The pilgrimage's optimism is a "utopian promise" that performs possible futures, assembling people and communities in social relation.⁸³ Narrating the past, pulling a boat from town to town, expressing profuse thanks, and criticizing state policies all function coterminously to enact a more hospitable nation, a refuge to come. Through a personal expression of gratitude, the pilgrimage directs "itself to the broader sociopolitical context, to seek affirmation, understanding and acceptance and/or protest."⁸⁴ Such a refugee performance, of critique via gratitude, as Michael Balfour and Nina Woodrow would contend, "seeks to insert unfamiliar narratives into familiar bureaucratized or mediatized stories," and thereby resist "bureaucratic, dehumanizing portrayals of refugee[s]."⁸⁵

The expression of gratitude strategically undermines the mainstream discourse of fear by foregrounding refugees as thankful, even if this image risks confining them to a liberal, essentializing stereotype of "goodness." It is through such a "non-threatening" figure that Nguyen is able to petition others to join his cause, and to understand the need for change. Nguyen strategically utilizes the rhetoric of gratitude to gain visibility, however conflicted, for the specific purpose of advocacy. Yet, if the pilgrimage was Nguyen's gesture of refuge, then the Australian government's response was an unambiguous rejection: No boats allowed! A January 6 post on Facebook reads: "I just learned that Parliament won't received the boat as a gift of gratitude [*frown emoticon*] / so after doing the rounds in PM's offices—We may have to bring it home [*frown emoticon*] / maybe we can make it a permanent display on Sydney Rd. / Or take it on the road again, until it is receive [*sic*]."⁸⁶ In refusing the gift, the government explicitly commits to its hardline, "fortress Australia" stance on immigration, unwilling to even accept the refugee's gratitude or make a symbolic commitment to refuge.

The refugee subject is thus denied the opportunity to be generous or to repay a debt, and his advocacy work remains officially "unheard" and "unrecognized" by the state. The Parliament's decision can be interpreted as a move to maintain a power dynamic, reserving agency and executive judgment solely for the state. Meanwhile, asylum seekers coming to Australia continue to be detained, sent to offshore centers, and denied basic human rights. While the government's refusal of the boat might signify a kind of failure for Nguyen, it is powerful justification for, and bittersweet affirmation of, the importance of his pilgrimage in the name

of asylum seekers suffering in inaccessible places “unknown” to Australia and the rest of the world. Nguyen’s activism shows that refugee subjects need, again and again, to instruct the nation-state in the lesson of compassion. This lesson is perhaps one of the most virtuous and meaningful recompenses for the gift of refuge, a magnanimous gratitude that the nation-state may not yet be ready for.⁸⁷

RETHINKING OBLIGATIONS

Discussions of refugees and gratitude inevitably lead to the question of obligation. Because refuge is conceived as a special benefit, it always places some expectation or responsibility on the refugee. Jason D’Cruz, for example, argues that gratitude is the principle that best explains the political obligations that refugees owe to the “host” nation-state, namely to obey its rules and laws. He further elaborates that gratitude requires “that one refrain from acting so as to undermine one’s benefactor’s interests. It is the disregard for the state’s needs that warrants the charge of *ingratitude*.”⁸⁸ In other words, gratitude compels compliance and correct behavior—it is to bend oneself to the interests and needs of the benefactor and maintain the status quo. This account, which attempts to determine and define the refugee’s duty, exemplifies the logic of gratitude as a force of expectation, a debt that binds refugees to the political community that has provided refuge. Such conceptualizations of gratitude—which are pervasive as common sense—begin and end with the unquestioned premise that refuge carries with it an unshirkable duty.

In her essay “The Ungrateful Refugee,” Dina Nayeri describes the insidious ways in which this duty, not just a political obligation but also a social one, comes to envelop the refugee subject’s world. Through overheard “chatter” and offhand remarks of sympathy, the refugee is made to believe that “if I failed to stir up in myself enough gratefulness, or if I failed to properly display it, I would lose all that I had gained, this Western freedom.”⁸⁹ The expectation of gratitude stays with her as she assimilates, becomes a citizen, and emigrates from the United States. In the process, it asks for her “salvation story as a talisman” while simultaneously requiring the shedding of her “old skin” and “former identities.”⁹⁰ The demand for gratitude, she shows us, incurs great costs for the refugee. Nayeri consequently turns the expectation back on the state and its citizens, suggesting that the obligation is not the refugee’s gratitude but the state’s protection: “It is the obligation of every person born in a safer room to open the door when someone in danger knocks. It is your duty to answer us, even if we don’t give you sugary success stories.”⁹¹ She insists that refuge is not contingent on gratitude, and gratitude should not be exchanged for refuge. Published in *The Guardian* in 2017, amid daily headlines announcing that refugees were crossing the Mediterranean, Nayeri’s widely read essay attempts to shift the discourse of duty and obligation away from the refugee’s

gratitude toward the state's obligation of providing asylum in an unstable, interconnected world.

Nayeri's reflections point us to the international community's obligations to refugees, assented to in documents such as the UN's Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and contained in liberal-democratic principles such as humanitarianism and cosmopolitanism. To focus on the state's moral and political responsibilities is to take the weight off the refugee's shoulders and move away from requiring gratitude. This chapter, however, has stayed with gratitude to contemplate its existence, asking what it does to and for refugee subjects, and how and why it becomes established as an appropriate and desired relation between the nation-state and refugees. While gratitude can confine refugee subjects to an ideal of "goodness" and is used to ideologically buttress both the nation-state and its war making, it can be the means through which other forms of subjective and intersubjective relations are developed in refuge. My analysis has explored obligations to live with and live for, to make something else out of refuge, in ways that are not solely for or directed at the nation-state. The close readings suggest an understanding of gratitude not just as constraint or debt, which of course it is, but also as experiences of living on after war and displacement with one's self and with others. What they seek to describe are the obligations of gratitude that piece back together a being in refuge that feels and knows itself to be more than singular, more than just the immediacy of the here and now. The kinds of relational being that gratitude might make possible for refugee subjects gesture to obligations that tether one to history, to people, to the fates of those who did not have a chance to seek refuge or for whom refuge has not yet arrived.

Resentment

OUTLAWED

If gratitude to the nation-state is considered a refugee virtue, then resentment is a vice, an immoral feeling that is incongruous with refuge. Resentment is especially ill-fitting on subjects who have received not just any benefit, but the most precious benefit of all—political protection and the “right” to be “human.” Resentment disrupts the social harmony produced when a community of citizens “welcomes” strangers into the fold of their nation. It is unexpected and unacceptable, indeed inconceivable, coming from those who have pleaded for and been given asylum. As an inappropriate response to benefit or the possibility of benefit, resentment is the ultimate form of ingratitude. To lack appreciation and thankfulness in the face of generosity is to be illogical, undeserving, and dismissible. Even when refuge is withheld or denied, any resentment expressed by asylum-seeking supplicants is interpreted either as an attitude of entitlement or as proof of ineligibility. Resentment, in short, renders refugees *unsuitable* for refuge. It is an “outlawed emotion” marked by an “incompatibility with dominant perceptions and values.”¹ Its emergence, as a social impossibility, is out of sync with the affective flow and the cultural “mood” of society.²

Of course, resentment is not completely foreign to refugees. They have always been *objects* of resentment—nativist, xenophobic, and fascist forces have consistently found in refugees and (im)migrants a ready vehicle, either as threats or burdens, for the expression of their resentment, which blurs into and overlaps with material and existential fear.³ States, too, in their criminalization of asylum seekers and securitization of borders, express a form of resentment toward those whom they see as transgressing the law, cheating the system, and threatening the integrity of sovereign borders. In these instances, refugees are construed as those who impose a kind of injury, a blow, to the nation and its citizens. Understood as “waves” or “influxes” of outsiders invading a bounded territory, refugees impinge

on resources, lands, and rights they have no entitlement to, disrupting an established way of “settled” life.⁴ At best, refugees are a public nuisance, and at worst charges of terrorism mark them as a source of violence against the nation-state. The existence of refugees and migrants is therefore experienced as a loss for the nation and its citizens; their very being activates an anxiety about personal and communal diminishment. A perceived disadvantage or potential injury underpins this national form of resentment.⁵

At the same time, the asylum-granting authority encourages refugees to direct resentment toward the nation-states from which they have fled and condemn the governments that have oppressed them. In doing this, they reinscribe the impetus for migration and the injuries that created the need for refuge. This refugee resentment is crucial to the asylum-granting state’s narrative of generosity toward and rescue of refugees, as well as to the legitimation of its sovereign power on the international stage. It bears reminding here that one of the key functions of refuge is to express political values and enact foreign policy. That is, an offer of refuge is a geopolitical maneuver whereby one state criticizes and condemns another state. Refugee resentment aids this international relations work. Vietnamese refugee subjects in the diaspora, for example, who condemn Vietnam’s human rights abuses, evince the exceptionalism of capitalist democracies like the United States and Canada. Their articulations of injustices suffered at the hands of Vietnamese communists produce a clear picture of victimizers and saviors in the international power play of refuge.⁶ Resentment toward the refugee’s home country is as crucial to exalting the asylum-granting nation as is gratitude.

Resentment is thus only incongruent or unacceptable in a specific context and through a specific relation: between refugee subjects and the asylum-granting nation-state. The feeling of resentment and the experience of refuge are seemingly incompatible because resentment, at its core, emerges from an injury or injustice. But if refuge is one of the most coveted and valuable benefits of modern life, then there can be no way for legitimate resentment to develop. When it does develop, resentment must be suppressed—the refugee made illegible or refuge revoked. To put it another way, refugee resentment is *outlawed*—criminalized and socially prohibited. Through this process of outlawing, resentment becomes a transgression of the norms regulating national belonging and sociality.

As a transgression, resentment is most readily tied to criminality and pathology, materializing in expressions of antagonism, anger, and violence. The state, accordingly, considers the subjects of resentment to be “bad” refugees, those who do not uphold their end of the bargain, who fail to make something out of refuge. These are individuals who cannot be reproduced in the image of refuge as success, as gratefulness, as law-abiding and, for one reason or another, cannot be fully assimilated into the neoliberal existence of refuge. They are criminals, gangsters, deportees, dropouts, working poor, outcasts, or underachievers—those who

are generally unsuccessful, who stray from the script of refuge as an unmitigated “good” that also produces goodness.

These “outlaws” are thus the exemplars of refugee resentment. In following subjects who have been deemed “bad” or not good *enough* for refuge, we see how resentment further entangles them in complicated relations with the nation-state and with other subjects in prolonged acts of refuge seeking, in which they enact the meaning of the *re-* prefix—once more, again, turn back—in both fleeing and feeling.⁷ As a form of relationality, resentment allows us to perceive the regulatory mechanisms that determine who the proper subjects of refuge are and the often difficult and unacknowledged ways in which refuge is actually lived, not as successful assimilation and hope but as struggles with historical and ongoing injuries. In these struggles with what are perceived as failures, resentment does not let go of unresolved histories, but rather carves out space for speaking to the lived shortcomings of a political ideal—to seek, again and again, more from refuge.

Attending to the nuances of resentment, we can comprehend not just the incompleteness and limitations of refuge, but also the unremarked struggles to actually achieve it. This chapter tracks how resentment brings into view the injuries that complicate refuge as a finished experience. I examine resentment as an affective experience that addresses a host of past and present injuries—of war, displacement, racism, criminalization, denials, and deportation.⁸ Contemplating stories drawn from Aimee Phan’s *We Should Never Meet*, from the Sacramento hostage crisis of 1991, and from Studio Revolt’s activist videos “My Asian Americana” and “Return to Sender,” I consider how refugee resentment seeps through or surfaces in moments of violence, frustration, desire, and love, against a social prohibition that stunts its possibility. These moments show how resentment is marked by an extended temporality, a long attachment to injury, and a delayed or blocked articulation. Moving through close readings of the gangster’s vengeful violence, the hostage taker’s unassimilated everyday, the compliant refugee’s endeavor to belong, and the deportee’s love for the nation, I present images of resentment that sketch an open and precarious refuge marked by continuous unsettlement. In this way, resentment clarifies the actions and reactions of those who must continue to hold on to the past, who presently live the effects of a past that is not yet past and who attempt to reach the refuge held out to, and also withheld from, them.⁹

INJURY AND (IN)EXPRESSIBILITY

As ways of being that deviate from normative expectation, resentment shows the cracks and ruptures in refuge, one of the most precious of modern political categories. It allows us to see what happens when legal status does not result in a livable life, and how refugee subjects experience and negotiate these realities. While philosophical accounts of resentment differ on its function—ranging from a pathological and destructive disease in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche and

Max Scheler to a moral passion with claims to justice in Adam Smith and Joseph Butler—all agree that it arises from conditions of inequality, whether from a natural division between slave and master or from a locatable injury or injustice.¹⁰

The basic constitution of resentment develops from a *wound*, one that sheds light on the organization of power and the critical fissures within a given social structure.¹¹ The refugee's relation of resentment with the asylum-granting state brings to surface past and ongoing injustices obscured by the notion of refuge as a social good. Although the giving of refuge might cover over the hurt of war and displacement, paving the road for gratitude to develop, resentment is an inevitable consequence of histories of war and imperial violence. That is to say, the wounds of war are not always healed through refuge. Moreover, in refuge, these wounds might be further aggravated, picked over and over again.

These wounds endure in time, becoming the basis from which actions and reactions develop, from which relations are formed and social life is lived. One of the most visible ways we come to know resentment is through outbursts of anger or violence. These outbursts are not resentment itself, however, but are indicative of a more diffuse underlying structure. Thinking about how resentment comes to be conveyed brings us to one of the concept's founding tensions—the question of its (in)expressibility. This tension arises from the fact that the emotion we know of as “resentment” has two distinct intellectual strands that overlap and are often understood interchangeably: *resentment* and *ressentiment*.¹²

Resentment, as a social passion, following the moral sentiment approach of Adam Smith, is understood to be a mechanism for denouncing injustice and making grievance. Resentment names moral norms and seeks to restore the social order disrupted by transgressions of those norms. For Smith, resentment, when moderated and tuned to the right “pitch,” can inspire sympathy in the impartial spectator. The way in which this “unsocial passion” gains sociality is precisely through the participation of others; moral resentment requires an audience to witness and judge its proper channeling into protest and acceptable articulation of injustice. In this way, resentment is crucial to the formation of social bonds and to the maintenance of equilibrium in democratic societies. This “normative” understanding of resentment presupposes not only that resentment can be articulated, but also that these articulations can be shared and recognized.

Ressentiment, on the other hand, is a pathological condition that finds its expression blocked and thwarted. For Nietzsche, resentment lacks ontological integrity. As an inferior reaction that depends on external stimuli to exist, resentment produces a “slave mentality” that skews valuation of the world and slowly poisons the individual so that “his soul *squints*; his mind loves dark corners, secret paths and back-doors, everything secretive appeals to him as being *his* world, *his* security, *his* comfort; he knows all about keeping quiet, not forgetting, waiting, temporarily humbling and abasing himself.”¹³ Ressentiment is a constant and degenerative hidden suffering that indicates a larger social moral decay.

Scheler similarly views resentment as a reactive impulse that is “always preceded by an attack or an injury.”¹⁴ Yet this reaction is marked by an inexpressibility or a blockage to its fulfillment. Resentment is a wound that by definition must fester, simmering below the surface. According to Manfred S. Frings, resentment (here the same as ressentiment) has an extended temporality that clearly differentiates it from an emotion like anger. Describing its emotive structure, he writes: “The constant state of resentment is distinguished sharply from furious reactions or outbursts of anger. Whenever a prosaic resentment-feeling finds satisfaction by way of, say, successful revenge and retaliation, there is no resentment proper at hand.”¹⁵ Resentment proper can, by definition, never be expressed or find fulfillment, except when it becomes something other than itself.

This unresolved tension between the articulated passion of normative resentment and the degenerative festering of Nietzschean resentment is inherited in the contemporary term *resentment*. While it could encompass a range of articulated “negative” emotions such as anger, hatred, and revenge, resentment is not formally any of these emotions. Rather, *resentment* describes a wider sense of dissatisfaction, frustration, and rage that is not necessarily verbalized or acted upon but is nonetheless powerfully constitutive of moments of outward verbalization and action. While, on a purely taxonomic level, Frings’s distinction is useful for understanding the nuances between interrelated emotions that overlap, the imbrication itself is significant, given that brief, reactive “outbursts” of anger can tell us much about underlying resentment. Because it is ontologically defined by a repression or delay, we come to know resentment only indirectly, through more recognizable affective forms. Resentment, then, could be understood as that which propels an emotion like anger, and anger is resentment’s precipitation or residue. Even as resentment is characterized by an inability to act directly or a sublimated expression, it is still accessible through moments when other emotions “flare up” or materialize.

GANGSTER DREAMS

An outburst of refugee resentment can bring the violence the state commits abroad home to roost within the national space. It can be a brutal apparition of the continuing battles that are being, and still need to be, fought in the duration of refuge. Aimee Phan’s “Visitors,” from her cycle of interconnected short stories *We Should Never Meet*, concludes with a gangster, Vinh, brutally attacking an elder, Bac Nguyen, during a home invasion.¹⁶ The gangster, who is an orphaned refugee, views his violent actions as a crucial reminder to law-abiding, upwardly mobile refugee subjects that their endeavors to find economic success in the United States are ultimately futile. Surveying, with resentful satisfaction, the domestic battlefield of overturned cabinets and drawers, broken dishes, and spilled papers that his gang had inflicted on the Nguyen family home, Vinh imagines the destruction as a literal shattering of the American Dream.

For him, the violence of the scene exposes the illusory fiction of belonging that America holds out to refugees and immigrants. In this moment, material violence slips into symbolic violence, bringing with it a sobering insight, that complete and unconditional national inclusion will forever be out of reach: “Vinh convinced himself that they [the gang] were ultimately doing these people a favor. All of them in such a delusion about attaining this material dream of fortune and comfort, but at what expense? Didn’t they realize they’d always be under the thumb of this government? . . . They were fools to believe they could actually live among the Americans and become one of them. They never would. They would never be allowed.”¹⁷ In the gangster’s violence is an explosion of resentment that bitterly condemns the hegemonic nation-state, first for conducting war, and then for failing to provide true refuge. The “expense” of belonging that never arrives, as Vinh attempts to communicate, is a form of subjection, extending from a history of injury to a present of denials, which is far too high a price for only false returns.

Yet, because resentment works through deflection and indirection, the gangster’s violence ironically lands on the lives of other refugees and immigrants. Unable to be directly launched at its target, resentment finds a symbolic substitute in racialized immigrants whose material achievements prove American opportunity. They are, for the disenfranchised gangster, the most proximate representatives of the ideological state. Displaying what Scheler calls resentment’s “value delusion,” or an envious inversion of established order, the gangster reevaluates the “good” of refuge—if he cannot attain refuge, then no one else should, or refuge itself must be shown to be a sham.¹⁸ While the methods of resentment are envy and bitterness, the critique it launches questions sovereign power’s promises and its narrative of refugee uplift. By shattering the material possessions gained through playing the game of capitalist accumulation, and smashing the face of one who believes so ardently in the American Dream, the gangster seeks to show how the game itself is tragically broken.

As Vinh and his gangster “brothers” destroy what Vietnamese refugees have labored to accumulate, they preemptively prevent false inclusion in neoliberal citizenship based on consumption. The gangsters brutally seek to demonstrate that such capitalist accumulations, no matter how vast, are ultimately futile for racialized immigrants and refugees in a nation built on racial hierarchies and the entrenched institutionalization of inequality. Violence, here, cleaves the industrious and hopeful immigrant from the American Dream that requires such subjects in order to sustain itself. The irony of the situation, one that Vinh fails to see, is that Bac Nguyen and the other victims of his violence are survivors who, having already experienced the traumatic impacts of war and state violence, may desire inclusion, no matter how imperfect and illusory, because they have known worse fates and need to stay in this world.

Although his outburst is misdirected and flawed, the gangster’s violence reveals the unresolved histories that prevent unchecked assimilation into an

unquestioned community. The gangster—a recipient of asylum who becomes a criminal—is perhaps one of the most exemplary figures of refugee resentment, hanging on to the past because the present is a country where he must reexperience the effects of old injuries and the stings of fresh ones. He is a subject who lives out the long temporality of transnational American war in the absence of recompense. As a destabilizing “paradigm of the American Dream,” the gangster sheds light on resentment, not so much because he is in conflict with society, but because his presence activates the anxieties and contradictions at its very core.¹⁹ The refugee gangster is a dreamer who calls into question the dream, indexing the failures of American-style freedom.

Regardless of whether such failures are privatized within the individual or explained structurally, by virtue of “failing” to achieve refuge as neoliberal success, the refugee who is also a gangster complicates the narrative of American rescue and liberation of foreign others. Because the hegemonic liberation narrative is so dependent on “good” refugees of a past war to prove its thesis, the gangster is inconvenient evidence within this logic of intervention and ideological victory—for surely the United States did not save these individuals only for them to turn into violent criminals; that would be a failure of the civilizing mission, of liberalism itself.²⁰ Refugees from the wars in Southeast Asia who become criminals and gangsters pose a significant ideological, symbolic, and political “problem” for the U.S. nation-state, for they threaten to un-script and derail a founding myth of American exceptionalism. In doing so, they complicate the conventional understanding of refuge as a modern political good. Accordingly, they must be forcibly expelled, an issue that I take up later in this chapter.

This “problem” of Southeast Asian gangs in the United States became a mainstream issue in the early 1990s, when rising gang activity across North America, but particularly in places of concentrated refugee settlement such as New York and California, attracted local and national media coverage. A deadly shootout at the funeral of an assassinated gang leader in July 1990 became a “popular news item” and subsequently a “defining event, the moment at which the idea of Vietnamese gangsters in America entered the national consciousness.”²¹ While spectacular events like this shootout contributed to a public profile of Southeast Asian crime, in actuality, gang activity was largely confined to auto and retail theft, home invasions, and extortions, and the targets were almost exclusively Asian refugees and immigrants.²²

Inevitably, investigators and researchers sought explanations for why young male refugees joined gangs. Patrick Du Phuoc Long explains how cultural and socioeconomic conditions—including cultural conflicts, disintegration of the family, alienation at school, peer pressure, and racism and estrangement from American culture—contributed to gang involvement.²³ In addition to these factors, and without fail, journalists, academics, and policymakers returned to the brutality of the Vietnam War and its aftermath to account for present-day violence.²⁴ While

it is imperative to understand the lives and behaviors of criminalized refugees in the context of the war and its legacies, these accounts problematically produce a model of causality that *explains* gang violence through the violence of war. A striking example comes from an article in a criminal justice newsletter in which the authors draw a direct link between criminal activity in Vietnam during wartime and gang activity in North America:

Vietnamese gang membership dates back to the early Vietnam war era. . . . Gang members were usually former military personnel who had learned their tactics during the war. . . . Around 1975, many Asian refugees settled into camps where some were able to renew gang ties. These gang members were young Vietnamese who preyed upon their own people. . . . Aware that many Vietnamese citizens had left their homeland for employment in the United States and Canada, some gang members followed in the hopes of finding an open criminal arena. Gang members working as home invaders in the United States have now been able to recreate the horrors of the refugee camps by actively terrorizing members of the Asian community through criminal activity and violence.²⁵

This chronology neatly locates criminality and violence in Vietnam and in the bodies of the Vietnamese, bypassing larger sociohistorical conditions and American complicity in imposing violence during and after the war. The explanation of gang violence as an inheritance of war naturalizes criminal “character” as a result of personal background and historical experience. In other words, criminality becomes a foreign import that makes its way into the national space via asylum, as opposed to a category created by and within the American nation itself.

This discourse of wartime violence draws attention away from the military intrusions that played a large part in creating the conditions of “Vietnamese violence,” and away from structural marginalizations in the United States that drive gang membership. To emphasize the war in a way that figures it as a source for violence is to pathologize refugees while clearing the United States of moral responsibility. Phan’s discursive intervention, however, recalls the war to elucidate a connection not between war and individual pathology, but between gang violence and U.S. foreign policy, making possible a view of Southeast Asian American gangsters as human consequences of American militarism.²⁶ The gangster’s violence disputes the state’s benevolent giving of refuge by revealing a relation in which refuge is a result of injury, one that is then impeded or offered as contingency to both “good” and “bad” subjects.

Set in California, in Orange County’s Little Saigon district—the heart of Vietnamese America—“Visitors” builds its violent crescendo through a tangle of misinterpretations, assumptions, and incompatible understandings of history. The two central characters—Vinh, an “unaccompanied minor” boat refugee who was placed in the foster care system, and Bac Nguyen, an elderly immigrant recently arrived in the United States—collide when one is out scouting for potential home invasion targets and the other is trying to find his way home from a

trip to the market. After being led to mistake Vinh for an economics student, and assuming that he is part of both a traditional nuclear family unit and the wider Vietnamese American community, Bac Nguyen reveals that his son was gunned down by a communist sniper. When Vinh lies and tells him that his parents also died in Vietnam, the two experience a kind of refugee communion: the old man says, “We’ve lost so many people,” and the young man responds, “They’ve taken so much from us.”²⁷ While one pronoun, *we*, is uncontested, the other, *they*, is a source of confusion and misunderstanding. Bac Nguyen assumes that *they* refers to the communists, while Vinh means the Americans.

This moment of misinterpretation on Bac Nguyen’s end, assuming shared anticommunism, is also a moment of political reorientation as Vinh’s correction changes the site of critique, moving it away from the North Vietnamese to the Americans. The gangster’s resentment opens up the potential for expressing dissatisfaction with and anger at the United States, once South Vietnam’s ally in war and now the largest country of asylum for Vietnamese refugees.²⁸ The “unruly” expression of Vinh’s resentment—not directed at the right government, the right ideology, the right people—is incongruent with sanctioned refugee feelings such as grief, anticommunist hatred, and gratitude that Bac Nguyen, as a survivor of communist persecution and a newcomer to the United States, readily espouses. Resentment disrupts master narratives of the Vietnam War as a liberal project of rights promotion and freedom by forcing the recognition of those who have not benefited from such rights and freedom.

In a subsequent scene, Vinh unequivocally tells Bac Nguyen that the Americans “destroyed our country, then they left. To ease their guilty conscience, they took some of us in. It’s really simple.”²⁹ Bac Nguyen rightly points out that history is not black and white, yet Vinh’s simplified assessment of the war and its aftermath, what Jodi Kim calls his “productive unambiguity,” compels an alternative position to the pervasive narrative of liberal warfare in American historical and political discourse.³⁰ The problem for Vinh, unlike many others in the Vietnamese diaspora, is not that the Americans withdrew militarily and abandoned Vietnam during the final stages of fighting, but that the United States was involved in Vietnam in the first place, whereby an anticolonial war against the French and then a civil war in Vietnam subsequently became a site of proxy war between the U.S. and Sino-Soviet superpowers.³¹

As the title of the story emphasizes, the notion of visiting, whereby the host extends a finite and impermanent reception to refugees, is an apt descriptor for how resentment is experienced. In a poignant moment, Vinh articulates his utter alienation in the United States, telling Bac Nguyen: “Even though I don’t remember much of it [Vietnam], I still feel like it’s my home, and this place [the United States], while nice, isn’t. It’s like I’m visiting, and I’ve overstayed my welcome.”³² Resentment develops because the relation that becomes possible between a nonmodel subject like Vinh and the nation-state is one of overstayed

welcome, of provisionality and impending (r)ejection from the community. As a visitor—a perpetual foreigner—the gangster, who is a refugee and failed adoptee, is unable to form the kinds of traditional bonds that structure belonging and social integration.

The closest he comes to forging kinship ties, beyond his gang and on-again-off-again girlfriend Kim, is in his meeting with Bac Nguyen, who, at one point, hands him a family heirloom.³³ Such a gift, usually imparted to one's descendants as a sign of inheritance, symbolically pulls Vinh into Bac Nguyen's lineage.³⁴ It is a gesture of generosity on the old man's part that holds within it the possibilities of familial connections and intimacies. But later that same evening, while burglarizing his home, Vinh smashes Bac Nguyen's face, in loyalty to his gang, the moment the old man calls out his name. As Bac Nguyen is left bleeding on the ground, Vinh is again at the precipice of belonging—his “brothers” angry at him for divulging personal information that could compromise the gang—and the fleeting promise of connection is foreclosed.

Deeply flawed as it is, Vinh's resentment manifested as violence makes spectacular and nameable the insidious and everyday violence that the state enacts on its subjects of refuge, fixing them in place within the order of capitalist, white supremacy—to have refugees, as Vinh says, “under the thumb” of American governance. The extraordinary violence of the home invasion marks the refugee gangster's attachment to the past and its persistent apparitions, although not through the usual means of the “melancholic migrant”—in grief and backward glances that obstruct assimilation—but through the bitterness of resentment exploding in violence.³⁵ Such violence, the gangster shows, is an inevitable response to being subjects of and subjected to national governmentality in refuge, where resentment seethes and seeks forms of release that often come with tragic consequences for the very people eking out a life under the nation-state's thumb.

HOSTAGE TAKERS

Violence, protests, and vengeful lashing out are rightly considered primary manifestations of resentment. However, the sometimes dramatic visibility of explicit grievances often diverts attention away from another, more mundane yet perhaps more common, form of resentment found among refugees. This is the resentment of simply existing in a way that does not live up to what refuge *should* inspire and make possible. Often invisibilized, it takes root within the quotidian struggle to eke out a life within structural incapacities that make it unlikely or impossible for some to (re)produce the right kind of neoliberal subjectivity under contemporary capitalism. To live unexceptionally or with fallibility in the face of incredible benefit—to be poor and criminalized, to not get into the best school, to find it difficult to integrate or assimilate, to hold on to past traumas, to fail to thrive, to

not capitalize on refuge—pulls many refugee subjects into a relation of resentment with the nation-state. This much quieter resentment often goes unacknowledged or unrecognized and is therefore difficult to access.

On April 4, 1991, four young Vietnamese American men—brothers Loi Khac Nguyen, Pham Khac Nguyen, and Long Khac Nguyen and their friend Cuong Tran—entered a Good Guys electronics store in Sacramento, California, and took thirty-nine people hostage for eight and a half hours. When it was over, these refugees had killed three hostages and wounded ten others. The situation came to a conclusion when SWAT teams and sheriff's deputies stormed into the store, shooting at the four men. The only one to survive was Loi Khac Nguyen, who was wearing a bulletproof vest at the time.

The presence of resentment is not particularly apparent or tellingly embodied in the violence of this explosive, spectacular event, which made headlines across the nation in major media outlets.³⁶ Instead, the relation of resentment that the situation indexes is located in how the refugees had led (or were unable to lead) their lives. That is, resentment is most poignantly lived in the buildup to the hostage taking, in what the refugees did or rather “failed” to do with the refuge given to them, and not in the moment of their tragic deaths. This is revealed through accounts of their lives, which we can access only through an amalgamation, a reconstruction of media reports, of truths and interpretations. While I do not claim to “know” the lives of these young refugee subjects, I find in the narration of their lives by others, and in posthumous attempts to explain their actions, a significant indication of how resentment might be found and accessed outside of the violent event itself.

Brandishing 9mm pistols and a handgun, the group made a list of demands: \$4 million in cash, bulletproof vests, a helicopter, and thousand-year-old ginseng root. The motivation for this act of hostage taking has never become entirely clear, but the media wrongly identified the men as “gangsters” looking for attention. Sheriff Glen Craig claimed that the men did not intend to rob the store, that instead they wanted to make a statement and were attempting to gain “notoriety.”³⁷ If this had been the case, they had succeeded: the incident—broadcast live on national television—gained public attention and went down in history as one of the largest hostage rescue operations in the United States.

Reportedly, the group wanted to fly to Thailand to fight the Viet Cong in Vietnam. Their desire to continue to fight a war that was supposedly “over,” that had officially ended fifteen years earlier, may seem odd to the general public, but it is part and parcel of Vietnamese diasporic anticommunism in the late 1970s and '80s. In the years following the end of the Vietnam War, when many fled the country, the idea of “homeland restoration”—a conviction that the nation of South Vietnam could be restored by overthrowing the communist regime—fueled Vietnamese refugee politics. Within refugee communities, “the task of restoring the homeland was seen as a duty, a necessity.”³⁸

While it waned in prominence, and was eventually replaced by a form of “human rights” anticommunism in subsequent decades, homeland restoration was an organized and animating force for a whole generation of refugees. Anticommunism through homeland restoration insisted that the war’s battles were still ongoing, and that a return to the lost nation was possible. The young men’s demands for ammunition and passage to Thailand was not a wild, incomprehensible request, but a historically mediated articulation of refugee resentment. It arose from and expresses their community’s sense of loss and its refusal to accept the war’s outcome. The hostage situation made publicly visible, in spectacular fashion, the visceral resentment of an ethnic community on the national stage, and in doing so it dramatized a living legacy of the Vietnam War.

In making sense of the incident, commentators have zeroed in on this link to wartime. In particular, they pointed to the Nguyen patriarch’s staunch patriotism and his past in the South Vietnamese army. Andrew Lam has written movingly about how the brothers inherited their “father’s passion.”³⁹ Without class mobility in the United States, they were animated by the memories and stories of the previous generation. Lam suggests that the brothers “tried to bring dignity to their father by fighting his war. They wanted to be good Vietnamese sons: to assuage the old man’s grief, the young man must defeat his old man’s enemy.”⁴⁰ Such an explanation connects present violence and past war, blurring distinctions between here and there, beginnings and endings.

Yet intergenerational dynamics, anticommunism, and the legacies of war go only so far in explaining what has come to be known as the Sacramento hostage crisis. Reports of the incident reiterated, over and over again, how the four young men had experienced deep dissatisfaction with life in the United States—they had “problems with school, employment, and language.”⁴¹ The Nguyen family had been on welfare, struggling to get by in a shared two-bedroom apartment. Loi Khac Nguyen, in an audiotape of negotiations with the police, could be heard saying, “I hate the fucking U.S.A. I want to get back to my country.”⁴² Another lens through which to view this incident is that of failed assimilation, the inability of these war refugees to integrate into American society. The violence of the hostage taking becomes a symptom of the refugees’ personal shortcomings, their inability to become productive American subjects. To quote Sheriff Craig again, “They were very, very unhappy people.”⁴³ This view privatizes the “problem” of immigration, reinscribing deficiency and pathology in the refugee body.

As explanations for the refugees’ actions, both the war and failed assimilation are unsatisfactory—arresting them in a melancholic past on the one hand, and in individual inadequacies on the other. The hostage situation can only be understood in these terms as a consequence of war manifested in the actions of aberrant, unhappy individuals. The war and difficult resettlement are, admittedly, important contexts for understanding the event, but the structuring field of American refuge in which the young men lived and died seems to recede into the

background. American war making helped create, first, the military “defeat” that fueled anticommunism and, second, the refuge that fostered a sense of desperation and suffering.

More significant than why these individuals committed this hostage taking are other crucial questions: What might their actions tell us about the realities they had traversed or were trapped in? What might refuge have meant for the Nguyen brothers and their friend? The *Chicago Tribune* wrote that the men were “fed up with life in America and desperate for attention,” while the Associated Press reported that they were “unhappy with life in the United States.”⁴⁴ We know that by all accounts they did not “fit in,” but such struggles do not provide an explanation for their actions. Instead, the struggles reveal how a relation of resentment—in the sense that the refugee subjects were who they were in a country like the United States—clarifies the violence and bloodshed. What resentment shows is that if the young men’s resettlement was difficult, that was not due to their personal failings or their history, but is attributable to the kind of life in the United States that was available to them, their “refuge” in the present.

We see again here how resentment’s expression is oblique. Although the young men’s articulation of resentment was directed at anticommunist Vietnam, and their violence was enacted on the bodies of innocent civilians, their “message” was directed at the U.S. nation-state. A “statement” was indeed made, and it decried how the United States did not afford these young and wounded refugees a chance to live. Teeming with resentment is not the eight and a half hours of intense hostage-taking, but rather the years and years of having “problems” at school and working unfulfilling jobs, of not becoming happy and productive because the enabling social conditions were absent. I do not mean that the refugee subjects simply resented the United States, though this does seem to be the case. Rather, their very being—the shape of their lives, their actions of seeming failures, their *doing* in the everyday—already discloses a relation of resentment between the refugee and the nation-state. Such a relation arises because of the ideals of success and neoliberal subjecthood embedded in the concept of refuge, which refugees are then explicitly or implicitly expected to live out. To be gifted a coveted opportunity in the form of refuge and then to squander that opportunity in the seemingly unfruitful life one leads is a relation of resentment. The Sacramento hostage crisis shows us the lived stakes of success and failure, and how resentment resides intensely in the duration of refuge, embodied in the struggles of refugee subjects in the United States.

WAIT-LISTED

It would be misleading, however, to designate resentment as belonging exclusively to those who are deemed “bad” in the eyes of the nation-state. For the Nguyen brothers and their friend, a resentful relation plays out in the personal and

structural incapacities to achieve, or more precisely in what might be seen as their *failure to try hard enough*, to help themselves in the individual, entrepreneurial way that would make something out of refuge. Theirs is a failure of proper desire, for surely they would have turned out all right had they gone to school, gotten jobs, and been content with their station in life.

Yet resentment can also be seen in the refugee's yearning, in playing by the rules and doing the right things to gain the prize of success—especially when these actions continue to suspend one in uncertainty or in further yearning. Trying too hard can be a cause and sign of resentment. As demonstrated by Mai, an honor student in “Emancipation,” another story in Aimee Phan’s book, “good” refugees are also within the scope of resentment. The criminal and the honor student may occupy disparate social positions, but resentment tells us how they are both subjected, to different degrees, to the same disciplinary forces “under the thumb” of freedom.

Resentment blurs the line between the binary figures of Asian America, the good and bad, the model and failure. In a radical reversal—a clear indication of resentment—the gangster Vinh in Phan’s “Visitors” claims that the unwanted or rejected like himself are “better off” in comparison to model minorities because there is no ambiguity as to their relationship with the nation-state. He is convinced that “selling out to the Americans wasn’t worth it”: “Look what happened to those who did. The orphans adopted by American families didn’t even think they were Vietnamese anymore. And those who were left behind, unwanted, forgotten, had to suffer in foster homes. For a long time Vinh was angry about it, but now he realized they were better off. They knew where they stood with the Americans. The golden children didn’t.”⁴⁵ Being “better off” is being “free” of American patronage, and free of the privileges and successes that such patronage supposedly makes available. With outright rejection comes a kind of clarity that is missing for those “golden children” who continue to pay the price, selling out for the prospect of admission.

Mai, Vinh’s counterpart in the story collection, is one of the golden children who covet national belonging, who diligently work for upward mobility and social inclusion. While she is also an adoptee, one of those children evacuated from Vietnam during Operation Babylift, unlike Vinh, she grew up comfortably in a traditional foster family unit, and ardently pursues a better life through the path of higher education. Mai invests in the American Dream’s attainability and exemplifies what Emily Cheng calls a “model orphan,” a figure of assimilation and reconciliation.⁴⁶ In “Emancipation,” the narrative tension hangs on an admissions decision Mai is anxiously awaiting from her top-choice school, Wellesley College. Even though she perfectly fits the Ivy League profile, she is placed on the wait list, which aptly symbolizes her semi-secure but also precarious positioning with(in) the U.S. nation-state.

In her college admissions essay, Mai strategically engages in “refugee performativity, or ‘playing’ the refugee by ‘playing it up.’”⁴⁷ That is, she embellishes her story and exaggerates her emotions to elicit sympathies from decision makers. Despite playing the part by offering a narrative of grief, struggle, and triumph that makes for a compelling personal statement, and despite having “worked to ensure a future other children already inherited,” Mai is not guaranteed a spot at the prestigious college.⁴⁸ Condensed in this central conflict is the perpetual uncertainty that Vinh identifies as characterizing the “good” refugees who desire assimilation.

The events of the narrative unfold on Mai’s eighteenth birthday, the day she becomes an adult in the eyes of the state and is thus “emancipated” from its legal guardianship. The term *emancipation* is weighted in U.S. history, evoking abolition, the women’s rights movements, and moments of legal freedom that open up to long social struggles. The refugee subject’s legal freedom is ironically her entry into a lack of protection, to be thrown onto a neoliberal stage where she must fend for herself, relying on her own wits and abilities. There is no guarantee of success, and refuge must be found once again. It is on this day of major transition, when Mai is pushed to contemplate her future, that the contingencies of her situation become most pronounced. As she is released from the custody of one social institution, that of the nuclear family, she has yet to gain entrance into another, that of the academy.

The trope of the *wait list*, of being made to wait, evokes institutional power’s capacity to decide on the fates of individuals, to keep them suspended in limbo, within and simultaneously without. To “make wait” is a technology of power that selects and manages bodies, deferring their becoming, sometimes indefinitely, holding them between recognition and disposability. This is precisely the trade-off for “selling out” to the United States that Vinh pinpoints and critiques—to be locked into desire and then ambivalence. Resentment arises not only from a direct attack or injury, but also from disciplinary measures like wait-listing and bureaucratic processing.

The experience of waiting deeply marks the refugee, who is often understood as existing in a time-space of “in-between.” In Mai’s predicament, we can perceive the overlap between the refugee waiting for citizenship, the orphan waiting for adoption, and the model minority waiting for college admission. This condition of being held at the will of the nation-state imposes itself on categories that seem wholly incommensurate. The ostensibly “successful” immigrant is thus not so far removed from the pitiful refugee, because both are pegged to the determinations and caprice of American authority.

The drama of uncertain waiting is also compellingly played out in Mai’s domestic life. While the Reynoldses, a white American couple, gave her a safe home, Mai was never formally adopted as part of the family. She was “allowed a childhood, unlike her former foster brothers and sisters,” but never became a permanent family member:⁴⁹ “There were times she thought she could change their minds. She did

everything to demonstrate she'd make a nice daughter. She listened to them, never disobeyed house rules, and always respected curfew. The Reynoldses talked about how proud they were of Mai, what a fine person she was. That was where their admiration ended. They had so many years to make her a legitimate part of their family, but the possibility was never even discussed."⁵⁰ Again, Mai performs the role of the "good" refugee—here a dutiful daughter—but to no avail, as permanent integration into the family structure remains an impossibility. Mai's predicament proves Vinh's thesis regarding the golden children—that they do not know where they stand with the Americans, strung along in a game of desire, tantalization, and pursuit. While Mai dismisses Vinh as a "nobody," she does not realize that the two of them tragically occupy similar positions, that they are two sides of the same coin. In an antagonistic encounter between the two, Vinh tells her, "You may be smart, little girl. But don't think you're any better. Today, you've been released into the world, just like the rest of us."⁵¹ Mai's "emancipation" ends the state's responsibility toward her, and "freedom" means that the "good" refugee now has to fend for herself without the aid of the state, much like the unwanted orphans.

Vinh's blunt aggression fractures the fiction of Mai's refugee performance and the belief that such acting will result in permission, validation, and acceptance. He forces her to confront the failure of her efforts: "Don't you ever wonder why those hippies never adopted you? Why no one ever wanted to have you?"⁵² According to Vinh, Mai got her "American dream family" by selling out her former foster brother and sister, by maneuvering, or "playing it up," so that *she* was the one who was saved, the one who got placed in a good home, rather than Vinh or Kim.⁵³ Yet, as he makes brutally clear, in the end she never received what she desired, rendering the performance ultimately ineffectual, and the betrayal pointless. Referring to the sexual abuse that Kim experienced throughout her stays in foster homes, abuse that Kim often protected Mai from, Vinh queries, "Do you think it's fair what happened to Kim and never to you?"⁵⁴ He points out that she was not simply lucky or special, but that her good fortune was gained at the expense of others.

"Emancipation" demonstrates that the pursuit of the American Dream itself can become a source of resentment, especially when the pursuit is, from the beginning, coded with restrictions and limitations for the aspiring subject—or, worse yet, rigged for failure. At the story's end, when Mai arrives home visibly upset after the aforementioned devastating encounter with Vinh, she gets into a quarrel with her foster father. Seemingly about her late return, but actually about Mai's resentment at his lack of commitment to her as a "real" daughter, the fight takes a treacherous turn when he tries to help her up from her slumped position on the ground. As he goes to lift her, Mai screams at him: "Don't touch me! Don't you ever touch me like that."⁵⁵

At the moment when she is able to express her anger at the Reynoldses, and her frustration with the entire social system, Mai also voices the sexual trauma that her close friend and older foster sister Kim has endured. This dramatic

“taking on” or internalization of Kim’s injuries could be read as a result of Mai’s guilty conscience or as, once again, her playing it up for gain. It could also be interpreted as an incredible display of resentment, in which the model minority collapses into the bad subject, exposing how the discourse of American freedom—and the Dream—grinds all its subjects, good and bad, down.

In the story, failure to be a part of the loving nuclear family, the prestigious university, and the prosperous nation-state is intensified by the effort invested in its cause. Mai is resentful, frustrated, and hurt precisely because she tried in the first place, because she has worked so hard in a bid to earn her place. The climactic emotional outburst that concludes Phan’s story dramatizes the often invisible denials and slights that fasten the model minority into her place, aspiring for the always yet-to-come, the prize hung out for immigrants and refugees to covet. When Mai finally notices the large envelope from Wellesley on the kitchen counter, containing her acceptance letter, it has already become tragically clear that the enterprise is insurmountably stacked against her, and that admission does not, indeed cannot, guarantee refuge.

DEARLY DEPORTED

Yet admission—to be allowed (back) in—remains a coveted goal for many refugees, especially deportees, who have had refuge taken away from them. It is not only compliant, upstanding subjects like Mai, but also criminalized deportees who seek admission to, and inclusion in, the body politic. One of the “solutions” the state has adopted in response to the “problem” of Southeast Asian refugee criminality is detention and deportation. This practice, which physically expels from the nation the human remainders of American violence overseas, is perhaps the ultimate disavowal of war and its legacies. The forced return of subjects who have journeyed to America as war refugees is an example of what Peter Nyers calls a *deportspora*.⁵⁶ In such a formation, refuge is revoked and an “abject” class of stateless individuals, shuttled from one place to another, marks a global biopolitical process of migration management, drawing and redrawing the lines of citizenship and social life, reminding us of the tenuousness of political protection and the continuous and circuitous trajectory of the asylum seeker.⁵⁷

Deportation finds rationalization through *criminalization*, which is the ideological extension of crime. Indeed, many Southeast Asian American deportees are deported for minor misdemeanors like shoplifting, public urination, or bouncing a check, and have often already served prison terms for their behavior. The additional punishment of deportation is a “double jeopardy” that designates these refugee subjects as criminal and foreign—“criminal aliens”—ineligible and underserving of citizenship. Thy Phu calls this the United States’ “inhospitable politics of repatriation,” wherein criminalization functions to remove the claims for refuge, and the refugee subject not only loses the rights of citizenship, but also,

retroactively, the right to seek the rights of citizenship.⁵⁸ Criminalization effectively erases any compassion, sympathy, or pity that might have bolstered the refugee's attainment of refuge. This rendering of deportees as ineligible for rights, or what A. Naomi Paik calls the production of "rightlessness," occasions a resentful relation into being.⁵⁹

But for deportees seeking reentry into the nation, resentment often manifests in supplications and desires for reconciliation. Mai's act of waiting demonstrates that not all relations of resentment are resistant or adversarial—such relations may also exist as prolonged coexistence or intimacy with the arbiter, the wrongdoer, the state. While her outburst of hurt at the end of the narrative may be interpreted as anger, expressions of resentment can precipitate as resignation, hope, desire, or reconciliation. This is the expressive diversity of an affect that is often simply conflated with anger and easily dismissed. Resentment is sometimes most potent in articulations of love and friendship. Because it is marked by a repression, Scheler writes that resentment "bursts across the threshold of consciousness whenever the repressive forces happen to relax their vigilance," betraying "itself through a smile, a seemingly meaningless gesture, or a passing remark, in the midst of friendship and sympathy."⁶⁰ We might thus find resentment in a refugee's "benign" or "positive" feelings—for example, in the desire for inclusion and protection or in love for the nation.

In 2011, a group of deportees in Cambodia collaborated with Studio Revolt, an independent, artist-run media lab helmed by Anida Yoeu Ali and Masahiro Sugano, to produce a public service announcement, "My Asian Americana," which was submitted to the "What's Your Story?" Video Challenge sponsored by the White House Initiative on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (IAAPI).⁶¹ When the video won the challenge by popular vote but its creators did not receive an invitation to the White House, Studio Revolt made another video, "Return to Sender" (2012), as an appeal. Both videos feature exiled Khmer Americans exerting their essential "Americanness"—their ties to family, immersion in American culture, and allegiance to the United States—and imploring the nation-state to reconcile with them by rescinding extradition orders and allowing them to return. The video makers utilize the confessional form and appeal to human experience to construct a public "speaking voice," targeted at lawmakers and the general population. It is not an angry voice, and the videos do not directly criticize the United States. Indeed, the affective *tone* of the videos is loving and beseeching—pleading for mercy, pledging allegiance to the nation-state, and claiming a belonging to the American way of life. For the deported "speakers," American citizenship is a coveted political benefit that they earnestly desire to regain.

The deportee's display of patriotism, however, also seethes with resentment. It is precisely through expressions of love and desire that the contradictions and failures of American freedom are brought to the fore. Coming from the mouths of deported subjects, already marked for total exclusion from the nation-state,

professions of national allegiance underscore the injustice that the state has enacted on individuals to whom it had previously promised refuge. As they convey love for the United States, the speakers in the videos also lay bare the conditions of injustice that prompted the display of desire and devotion. This subtle incongruence between speaking subject and articulated feeling—a wronged subject who feels love for the wrongdoer—creates an affective dislodgement that allows resentment to seep through. To return injury with expressions of love may be one of the most damning indictments—the most vitriolic expression of resentment. In Studio Revolt’s activist videos, love is not a ruse for the articulation of resentment, nor is resentment somehow disguised as love in order to be heard or felt. Rather, the messiness of affective experience tells us that love and resentment can coexist or overlap, where the expression of love is simultaneously the utterance of resentment.

“My Asian Americana” begins with a medium-shot sequence of individual speakers, flanked by the star-spangled banner, reciting the Pledge of Allegiance: “I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.” Then each speaker describes their own version of “Asian Americana,” emphasizing their claim to belonging. What follows is a litany of popular culture references, American holidays, and personal memories. Two-thirds of the way through, they all converge on white steps, to stand, once again, with hands over their hearts under a single fluttering American flag. In the next series of shots, each speaker reveals their citizenship status, which determines their ability to go “home.” Finally, the screen fades to black and the following text appears: “Featured Khmer Exiled Americans (KEAs) served their time for mistakes they made in their youth. Upon release, they were additionally detained by U.S. Immigration then deported to Cambodia, a country they had never seen.”

The video petitions the administration to overturn extradition orders and admit deportees back into the fold of American society, because the United States is the only “home” they have ever known. The reappearance of exiled refugee subjects knocking at America’s front gates, seeking refuge once more, proves not only the continual need and want of American intervention, past and present, but also the value of the nation-state’s political protection. Yet, in re-seeking refuge, the deportees evidence how an injustice has put them in this situation, forcing them to find it again. Thus, when Anida Yoeu Ali emphasizes the words *justice for all* in the video by drawing out the syllables, the fact that justice has been denied to the very people who appear on screen renders the Pledge of Allegiance rhetorically hollow. Sentiments of loyalty and love flowing from the mouths of those who have been excised from the supposedly “indivisible nation” point out a failure to fulfill the ideals enshrined in the pledge. The image of the United States as torchbearer of freedom and land of opportunity falls short precisely at the moment when deportees avow love that comes from political grievance.

The irony that arises between deported body and patriotic speech underscores the deep injury of exile, where “virtually no relief from deportation is available from an immigration judge. . . . Issues of rehabilitation, remorse, family support, and employment opportunities are irrelevant.”⁶² The mercilessness of deporting refugee subjects betrays the seeming generosity of harboring them from the horrors of war and genocide just a few decades earlier. The worthy recipient of refuge quickly becomes the abject criminal who must be expelled from the body politic. A subtext of historical violence and suffering emerges to implicate the United States as an agent of displacement, not just during “foreign” wars in Southeast Asia but also in American “refuge.” This strategic invocation of the Pledge of Allegiance by deportees, then, both reinscribes American exceptionalism and exposes its fault lines.

The deported refugee’s continued loyalty in spite of the nation-state’s failed hospitality, moreover, shifts the quality of generosity away from the nation-state’s exclusive proprietorship. Embodying the capacity to give love (and to forgive), especially when the state commits a wrong against them by rescinding an offer of asylum, the deportees here occupy the role of benefactor, returning injury with undeserved devotion. In “Return to Sender,” Kosal Khiev, a deportee and spoken-word artist, defiantly declares: “No matter what decision you [the state] make, I still love you.” Unconditional patriotic love establishes those who have been rendered obsolete as feeling subjects and social agents that the nation-state cannot easily renounce. Here, the abject castoff refuses separation, lingering in stubborn attachment to the nation-state.

The speakers’ self-generated label “Khmer Exiled *Americans*” leaves open the possibility of return by retaining the specter of U.S. citizenship. In exile, deportees are still locked in a form of association with the nation-state, even if that state wants nothing to do with them. Each speaker in the video wears a black t-shirt on which is printed the Seal of the President of the United States encircled by the phrase “The United States of Exiled America.” While the stars and stripes of the flag appear in virtually every frame, visually reiterating the spoken contents of the pledge, the t-shirts cue an alternate “nation,” an abject shadow of the tolerant, inclusive America. This appropriation of the symbol of state power to illustrate how it has literally created another exiled “nation,” undeniably a part of, but involuntarily separated from, the motherland, calls into question policies designed to control migrant populations that are “the consequence of its decades-old imperial ambitions.”⁶³

While subversive, these expressions of loyalty-resentment also re-center the U.S. state as the site of politics, by aspiring to national belonging and trusting in its authority to confer social and political rights. Yet if we were to understand deportation, as Cathy Schlund-Vials does, through “a transnational set of amnesiac politics” that implicates American culpability in war and genocide, then beseeching the U.S. state to provide refuge (again) is a call for accountability, to demand what

is owed.⁶⁴ Y-Dang Troeung argues that such expressions are counterforces that reveal the “iterations of war—the historical repetition or continuity of state violence.”⁶⁵ Troeung further argues that “deportation represents another temporality of transition marked by traumatic upheaval, family separation, homesickness, and economic precarity in which Cambodian Americans have had to negotiate complex strategies of survival.”⁶⁶ The debilitation of this system manifests in what she calls “refugee aphasia”—the difficulty of speaking and imagining, in the case of Cambodian American deportees, a futurity outside of the circuits of U.S. carceral capitalism. As testimonials—a form common to refugee narratives, whether in the processing center, the adjudication board, or the media—the videos, and their deported speakers, evince a past of American violence that has created this current moment of deportation.

Studio Revolt’s video submission to the IAAPI “What’s Your Story” Video Challenge and subsequent epistolary piece addressing the state are examples of “abject cosmopolitanism,” whereby deportees return to demand, first and foremost, political speech, to “interrupt the dominant political (speaking) order not just to be heard, but to be recognised as a speaking being as such.”⁶⁷ This unwelcomed “participation” pushes at the limits of the political itself, asking anew who can and cannot speak, who is and is not a political subject. The pageantry of the White House’s IAAPI contest to showcase “good” model minority voices—of honorable community leaders and respected organizations—was disrupted, even if momentarily, by deportees insisting to be heard, testing whether “we” can “accept that our community includes an ‘unwanted’ group of forgotten voices.”⁶⁸

To seek participation in a state-sponsored project is not simply capitulating to a politics of belonging and inclusion. Rather, for the outlaw to refuse to be refuse(d) is to call into question the terms of the game, or the very premise of belonging and inclusion. The fact that the state must continue to censor and reject—which are, of course, still forms of engagement—those whom they have already made “bare,” those to whom they have renounced all responsibility, means that its monopoly on the political is not uncontested, that regardless of the outcome, agency is not its exclusive property. Here the state experiences a political haunting—the deported subjects cannot be completely shaken off or silenced.

Understanding the videos as acts of citizenship, as articulations of politics that attempt to change political processes, clarifies the contradictory coexistence of both patriotism and resentment in them. The case of Cambodian returnees shows that to claim citizenship is to make visible injustice and injury, and to express resentment is to hold the nation to a higher standard of accountability. The telling absence of an invitation to the White House and the lack of recognition in the face of success indicate not just a silencing, as the videos’ producers have pointed out, but effectively an outlawing—a placement outside the law, protection, and consideration. The lack of response from the IAAPI organizers is a refusal to register, not the outward love and longing for America

that deportees describe in the videos, but the deep resentment that oozes as they recount their exiled existences. While dismissed by those in power, these voices and their resentful registers continue to linger at the threshold of nationality and political recognizability.

EXPERIENCING WOUNDS

The decades-long U.S. program to criminalize and deport Southeast Asian refugees is incontrovertible proof that the receipt of refuge is never final. If refuge is something to be found, then it can certainly be lost or taken away. Since the mid-1990s, when the passing of a trio of immigration acts created the legal infrastructure for the detention and removal of “criminal aliens,” at least sixteen thousand Southeast Asians from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia have received final orders of deportation.⁶⁹ Many of these individuals were born in refugee camps and came to the United States as young children. Their removal to a “home” country they have never known is but one punishment in a much longer timeline of injury. Recent anti-deportation activism has made sure that this injurious past—of war and political turmoil, of refuge seeking and difficult resettlements—is foregrounded in campaigns for clemency and policy reversals.⁷⁰

Deportee claims to political protection are thus primarily founded on individual and historical injuries. This politics of injury, as Wendy Brown has reminded us, is a politics of resentment. Brown has, moreover, warned us of the dangers in staking politicized identity on “wounded attachments,” whereby injury becomes an identity and that identity becomes an “impulse to inscribe in the law and other political registers its historical and present pain rather than conjure an imagined future of power to make itself.”⁷¹ That is, identity politics’ protest against exclusion via *ressentiment* is an investment “in its own subjection,” which “reinstalls” liberalism’s structures of governmentality.⁷² A politics premised on injurious identities seeks recognition and rights in ways that reinscribe and leave intact the (neo) liberal state and its “humanist ideal” of “inclusive/universalist community.”⁷³ In its drive for recognition, resentment re-entrenches the capitalist and disciplinary terms of liberalism.

While pain and injury, through the mechanism of *ressentiment*, may become an identity (an “I am” as Brown would say) and a way of enacting politics, they are also experiences that are currently being lived, that are not yet incorporated because they are in the process of being negotiated. Resentment, as my close readings indicate, is injury experienced in a drawn-out and unconcluded duration, and to understand such experiences as an “identity,” as “politics,” or as “identity politics” may be premature. Brown contends, building on Nietzsche, that politicized identity is attached to its own exclusion or subjection, implicitly relying on a melancholic orientation to past injury. For identity politics to “enunciate itself,” it must be unwilling or unable let go of an injury, to be stuck in the wound.

My exploration of refugee resentment as relations of outlawing, repressions, and denials reveals how resentment is not just an attachment to past injuries, but is more crucially a continuous living of old and new ones in the present. In this way, it does not necessarily facilitate a foregone identity or politics but demonstrates the difficulty of receiving or acquiring the desired kinds of recognition or protection (as rights and status) from the state; if it makes any claim, resentment indicts refuge, a cherished and vaunted political “good.”

Glenn Coulthard’s discussion of a “righteous” Indigenous resentment, which is a recuperation of resentment for politicized identity, is an illuminating argument about the ongoingness of injury. Because the politics of recognition has not led to any form of meaningful reconciliation, Indigenous resentment is “entirely appropriate.”⁷⁴ Coulthard writes that resentment is “a politicized expression of Indigenous anger and outrage directed at a structural and symbolic violence that still structures our lives, our relations with others, and our relationships with land.”⁷⁵ For him, Indigenous resentment is legitimate because the injury is still occurring, and forms of settler-state recognition have not been able to register this experience. Following Frantz Fanon, Coulthard understands resentment as making possible the kinds of Indigenous subjectivities and “decolonial forms of life” that recognition and reconciliation have not been able to produce. Resentment, or an attachment to injury, insists that the state has not done and cannot do the work of repairing colonial relationships.

Coulthard’s account is useful for us in thinking about refugee resentment as experiences of ongoing injury—as racialization, criminalization, suspension, or deportation. Although it might appear that refuge is a repair for refugees, resentment exposes how enfoldment into rights and legal protection does not resolve relations of pain and injury, past and present, but further extends them. Similar to, but obviously not commensurate with, Indigenous resentment, refugee resentment is a continuing relationship of wounding with the nation-state—it is injury being lived in the here and now.

Yet, unlike Indigenous resentment, refugee resentment is rendered illegitimate. Because refuge is considered a benefit that is understood as repairing or healing over injury, resentment cannot be viewed as an appropriate response. Refugee subjects are not supposed to feel resentful because there is seemingly no injury—or, if there were injuries in the past, they have already been redressed by present refuge. And so resentment’s expression is stunted and deflected. It must find different ways to enunciate itself in love, desire, and violence. The ontological lacuna between “refuge” and “resentment” gives rise to a blocked articulation as well as a “bad” subjectivity that refugee subjects must traverse as they seek ways to exist in the duration of refuge.

For the nation-state, resentment makes refugees “bad,” evidencing their failure to receive or capitalize on the benefit of refuge. This failure is located in the bodies and psyches of refugee subjects who become criminals, gangsters, hostage takers,

or unsuccessful supplicants. As this chapter has endeavored to describe, however, the refugee's resentment is a relation that provides insight into the shortcomings of juridical-political refuge. It gives a view of how its protection is limited or contingent. Resentment is what arises when history is an open wound, when the present is still experiencing its pain, when refugee subjects are made to seek again and again the protection of refuge. Refugee resentment is to live historical injury in the present and to have expressions of such injuries blocked or prohibited by the logic of refuge as cherished social benefit. The refugee's resentment, then, is not (only or yet) the basis for political claims, but more a pointing to the ongoing relationships of seeking the "protection" that refuge promises.

Resilience

A WORLD OF SURVIVORS

Another name for survival might be *resilience*. At its core, resilience designates the capacities to withstand change, instability, or destruction. By definition, resilience is to cope through crisis and then bounce back. To survive war is already a resilient act (some may call this simply good luck or good fortune). But refugee resilience is a specific kind of survival, not just to live and exist, but to do so *out of and with loss*. That is to say, refugee resilience is dialectically related to loss, possible only within losses that are often finite and unrecoverable. Refugee resilience is not a bouncing “back” to a prior state of being but a bouncing away, a bouncing around in time and space.

For how does one “go back” when the city has been bombed to the ground, the country is no longer on the map, and the kin are long buried? Yet a melancholic or nostalgic backward glance—a psychic attachment to the past—often “afflicts” the migrant or diasporic subject. Thu-Hương Nguyễn-Võ writes that the “mode of expression” for Vietnamese refugees is “mournful of loss and evocative of trauma.”¹ This can be applied more broadly, I think, to any refugee group displaced by war. If loss and mourning are prominent cultural forms for diasporic refugee communities, then the resilience of these communities is intimately tied to the presence of loss. Bouncing back means a confrontation with what has been lost, and inhabiting the world of survivors involves naming loss, because the possibility of living assumes perseverance in and after destruction. Rather than being pathological or regressive, attachments to loss might be understood as a way for refugee survivors to mark that they are, in fact, still here.²

Because loss is the world that remains for refugees, it is a constitutive experience of being in refuge. This explains why loss has been and remains a dominant interpretive lens for understanding refugee lives. It powerfully gives shape to the traumas and difficulties of living on, providing an embodied framework for

the experience of suffering in the wake of war and migration. But there is always more than loss, more experiences of persistence and mundaneness that loss is entangled with, and resilience can point us to this wider horizon without leaving loss behind.

Acts of refugee resilience, I argue, are refusals to be wholly defined by such loss without canceling or overriding its existence. Resilience is a reckoning with loss by way of understanding presence. It is through resilience that refugee presence, or the many ways to be present, can be examined. Accordingly, we might ask how presence makes itself known, or what resilience looks like as an effect of refuge. This inquiry returns squarely to the driving question of this book: How is refuge experienced? I have tried to address this question with an exploration of gratitude and resentment, wrestling with the shaping forces of sanctioned ways of being and with how, within these forces, there is always room for a redefinition of refuge.

The dyad of gratitude and resentment that precedes this chapter points to the refugee's multiform relationships with the nation-state, with the self, and with others. Resilience is similar to gratitude and resentment in its drive for experience and recognition, but its mode of relationality is less expressively emphatic. Success and failure, conventionally tied to gratitude and resentment respectively, operate on a register of spectacularity—they are celebrations or grievances, elations, or disappointments. There is something or nothing to show for them. I have provided accounts of gratitude and resentment, however, that complicate such explicit and spectacular formulations, describing nuanced, ordinary, and deeply embodied versions of these important affective experiences.

The close readings of the previous two chapters could be considered “images” of refugee resilience in that they indicate various ways of trying to survive and build a life in the wake of war. This chapter further nuances resilience as *how to tell* the story of such lives. My focus on resilience here seeks to home in on the deeply intimate, and thus indelibly social, process of storying the survival of refugee life.³ I suggest that such storying is a distinct way of engaging loss. If gratitude and resentment are already, at a basic level, proof of resilient presence, then refugee resilience might be more specifically understood as ways of making presence that is not the inverse of loss.

Resilience is a relation of narration—of exchange and sharing, or ways of (re)connecting and extending toward—as much as it is about the content of refugee lives. It is *how* refugee subjects see themselves and others who live with loss, and the stories that continue to have some kind of life in the world. Resilience is a real and fictive life story that preserves presence, that tries to make meaning from the ruins of various losses. This act of meaning making, whether it be through poetry, fiction, or memoir, is one in which we may consider the intricacies and intimacies of lives, material and discursive, which pass through war and then emerge in refuge.

Refugee resilience clarifies for us that loss, although prominent and defining, is but one experience in the duration of refuge. Moreover, living with loss means that life is also simultaneously filled with pleasures, desires, and delights. This commingling of seemingly contradictory and disparate experiences is actually the indiscrete ordinary of resilience. The practices of writing a story can give us a glimpse into this resilience. Musing on Souvankham Thammavongsa's book of poems *Found*, Ocean Vuong's novel *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, and Kao Kalia Yang's memoir *The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir*, I conceptualize resilience as loss complexly experienced through narrative presence.

For refugee subjects, resilience can develop as attempts to tell stories and to bring a version of history into the present. Often, these are reckonings with a familial past deeply embedded in the historical fate of a country, a people, and a war. The unfoldings of resilience I contemplate in this chapter can be understood through the trope of intergenerationality. I approach the tension between presence and loss through how (grand)daughters and (grand)sons attempt to story experiences with and of previous generations. Such familial relations profoundly index questions of (dis)continuity, inheritance, and reproduction. While they are focalized in family, these questions are neither private nor individual; instead, they rehearse epistemological concerns about social life—what it is, how it is lived, and how it may continue in refuge.

In what follows, I focus on how individuals try to reconstruct experience for themselves and for those they cannot (or can no longer) reach. This kind of resilience occurs through narrative acts that seek meaning and (re)connection—to find a place and a story in the world. Resilience as the struggle for meaning in the afterlife of violence diverges from more conventional understandings, which rely on a triumphalist logic of overcoming adversity. I suggest that resilience is not getting over loss, but coming to terms with it. Refugee resilience is to continue living, via storying, in the world loss has created.

CONTINUANCE OF STORIES

The turn to resilience as a concept and praxis that responds to, and potentially ameliorates, the impact of disruptions has taken hold in many aspects of intellectual and public life. In diverse fields such as ecology, self-help psychology, engineering, security, business, sustainability, and governance policy, resilience has emerged as a particularly useful concept for the building and maintenance of equilibrium. It provides a way to understand, anticipate, and manage the unpredictability of modern life, marked as it is by the endless vulnerabilities of capitalist market forces, globalization, war, climate change, and political upheavals. Because it describes how people and systems recover from crisis and how continuity might be reestablished, resilience is a crucial method of working through our existential complexities.⁴

It makes (common) sense, then, to think of refugees and resilience together, for refugees have experienced major disruptions, of both the psychic and physical kinds. How do refugees absorb the shocks of displacement and come out on top? This question, and the condition it seeks to mitigate, is transparently desirable within our volatile global system. But to follow this question's directive is to slip into a neoliberal ideological project of human resilience that naturalizes the "terrifying yet normal state of affairs that suspends us in petrifying awe."⁵ It is to accept the inevitability of violence and, more crucially, to dictate a solution to its problems. The logic of resilience reduces life to survivability, demanding adaptation or death, or life in spite of catastrophe. The resilience imperative, then, is a drive to make failure productive. David Chandler notes that "changing our approach to failure is a central tenet of resilience-thinking," for not only is "failure to be expected in a complex world, but the key point is how we use failure or limits to enable progress."⁶ To progress in this sense is to transform an impediment into an advantage, capitalizing on even the most seemingly uncapitalizable aspects of life.

Mark Neocleous writes that resilience "comes to form the basis of *subjectively* dealing with the uncertainty and instability of contemporary capitalism as well as the insecurity of the national security state."⁷ Thus, to be trained in resilience is to develop into neoliberal citizenship and become well equipped for the many and endless disasters to come. For refugee subjects, the injunction to, and celebration of, resilience often prescribes certain qualities (resourcefulness, hard work, adaptability) as valuable while masking the often harsh reality and struggles of daily life created by systemic operations. This resilience is the survival of a certain kind of entrepreneurial subject, and while some policy goals and institutions may promote and celebrate this entrepreneurship in refugees, I am interested in another meaning of resilience, one that does not prescribe capitalist resourcefulness as a means to and of life.⁸

Resilience, as I conceptualize it, is akin to Gerald Vizenor's articulation of *survivance*. Writing not about refugee loss but about Indigenous genocide, which includes experiences of displacement, Vizenor theorizes survivance as native cultural practices that produce a sense of "presence and actuality over absence, nihility, and victimry."⁹ Survivance resists colonial dominance, particularly its imposition of erasure, through a "continuance of stories."¹⁰ This continuance of stories is not only an issue of narrative or aesthetics, but inheres in lived customs, collective memory, personal attributes, and worldview. A story here is a whole tradition and way of life. Stories, it must be understood, are crucial to the livelihood of those who are marked for violence, who have undergone systemic and organized imperialist oppression. Dian Million reminds us that "story has always been practical, strategic, and restorative."¹¹ To continue the story is to not only survive, but also practice a wily resilience that evades the capture of the dominant narrative plot.

Refugee resilience is similarly a *continuance of stories*, pointing beyond physical survival to immaterial forms of persistence and inheritance. Building on

Indigenous thinking about stories to understand refugee resilience is not to suggest that their histories and circumstances are commensurate or fungible. Rather, the deep thinking that Indigenous scholars have done in relation to dominant settler discourse and the counter-narratives that offer other cosmologies, epistemologies, and relationalities has much to teach us about surviving state violence.¹² My aim is not to suggest that the specificity of Indigenous storytelling is easily transferable or applicable to non-Indigenous contexts such as refugees. Rather, the practice of Indigenous storying to exceed victimization and erasure *models a path* for others who have also been targets of occupation and displacement. If Indigenous storytelling is about the resilience and survival of Indigenous peoples and cultures, then refugee storying is one practice in which we can perceive and examine how life continues after war, persecution, and resettlement.

A continuance of stories—via intergenerational relations, creative engagements with loss, and autotheoretical impulses—marks Southeast Asian refugee storytelling. In the late 1980s, Maxine Hong Kingston specifically identifies Southeast Asian refugees as the vanguard of storytelling. She writes that “storytelling seems to be dying” and it is only being “revived by the new refugees coming from Asia to the United States.”¹³ By storytelling, Kingston is referring to the practice of “talk-story,” a transformation of stories that challenges “traditional historiography.”¹⁴ Emphasizing stories as a mode of cultural exchange shared within intimate spaces of family, and retold via factuality and fantasy, talk-story describes a distinct Asian American form of storytelling as inheritance, as diasporic transmission of knowledge and experience. It is no coincidence, then, that Kingston singles out refugees as those keeping this practice alive, because refuge requires this relational act of storying—in mundane and exceptional circumstances, formal and informal contexts—to make sense of incredible migratory changes.

Continuance is the time in which the refugee’s story lasts. This is the long duration of living in refuge. In this duration, resilience can be recognized in processes of reproduction, not just in the biological sense, but in the human capacities—as creativity and relations—to project some kind of nonprescriptive presence to an as-yet-unknown future point in time. Continuing the story means that the end is not yet here, and the potential still exists for other plottings or ways of being in the world. Continuing the story means that new ones are told, and old ones may live on in them. Continuing the story means that old stories are told again, taking on new shapes. For the story to go on, resilience shows us, it must find different forms and different modes of expression. Resilience is a proliferation of experience in acts of storytelling, which demonstrate how there is always more than loss.

Walter Benjamin reminds us that storytelling is an “exchange of experience.”¹⁵ The act of telling and the story are ways of relating that evince some kind of presence in the world, and it is through and in them that the work of resilience can be seen. In this way, stories are not just representations of experience, but are integrally part of experience itself. Put differently, stories are how we experience, how

we engage “world-representation and world-building.”¹⁶ The presence of a story is, crucially, the presence of life.

A story indicates resilience because there is someone there to tell it, someone who believes that the story should have a life in the world. A story can also persist beyond the immediacy of our lives, and acts of storytelling such as recovery, recounting, and recording are the actions of resilience. The *re-* prefix that ties them to resilience is a backward movement, a return that paradoxically propels refugees into future existences. These are strategies for being present, holding the past, and entering into the here and now.

Through these activities of resilience, we can comprehend how storytelling is not a luxury or frivolous action contrasted with the necessities of staying alive.¹⁷ Rather, to tell a story is a way into survival, especially in moments when other forces confine refugee subjects to perishing. Moreover, what is crucial to grasping resilience is not the kind of story that is told (such as feel-good stories of defying the odds and overcoming struggles), but rather *how* and *why* they are told. The predicaments that necessitate story, and the techniques or style employed to tell them, lend insight into how refugee subjects create presence. The practice of writing is not “fictional,” and the “story” that I am talking about here exists because of what people have experienced.

Stories are material relations that capture what people have been through and the creative ways these people have devised to make it meaningful for themselves and for others. Storytelling is an ethical relation between subjects that locates refugees within social life and world history. As such, in the images this chapter focuses on, strategies of narration are strategies of living: to make poems out of objects her father had thrown away in *Found*, to write a letter in a language that his mother cannot read in *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, and to write a family memoir for a people who have had no written record of their existence in *The Latehomecomer* are practices of resilience. They are not just writing life, which is precisely what these texts are doing, but also raising the question of what a life is and how we can come to know what it has been through.

POETIC RECOVERIES

Resilience is most readily understood as a process of recovery, a return to a prior state of being. To recover is to get past or get over disruption and move on with life as it once was. Following the progressive course of healing, recovery mitigates the devastating effects of injury and loss. It is thus not difficult to see that refuge is a kind of recovery for refugees, who become “human” again, newly reequipped with rights and national community. Accordingly, resilience describes the repossession of political humanity and, with it, the consolidation of a subject with the capacity to move forward in time. Yet there is so much more for refugees to recover—memories, feelings, and experiences. That is, moments from the past sometimes

come back or are found again. A piece of information is revealed and a story emerges. Another life lived in a different time and place makes itself known.

Souvankham Thammavongsa, in *Found*, shows us that to recover is to find something that has been lost or hitherto undiscovered. It is to “get back,” as the root word *recoverer* suggests, what was left behind, taken away, or obscured by war, displacement, and migration. That is, recovery is also a capture, in an illuminating flash, of experience. In refuge, experiences come back, but sometimes these recovered experiences are ones that *belonged to others*.

Found begins with the recovery of an object: the poet finds a discarded scrapbook her father kept while living in a Thai refugee camp. Filled with “doodles, addresses, postage stamps, maps, measurements,” the scrapbook is an archive of experience, a record of how one man spent time, moving from one day to another.¹⁸ Thammavongsa’s poems “recover” this experience by hanging on to and contemplating the scrapbook’s miscellaneous contents. She “took only one thing and looked at it in bits and pieces” to salvage morsels of information, snapshots of a life.¹⁹

But how does one recover what was never one’s own? Are such recoveries possible? And what happens to experience along the way?²⁰ The relational process of writing the scrapbook into poems is one of resilience. It is to carry someone else’s experience and, in doing so, create experience for oneself and for others. In this sense, to recover is to give new form to experience—even, and perhaps especially, experience that is not one’s own. In acquiring new form, experience may continue to occupy time and take on additional life. The father’s act of throwing away the scrapbook might signal that the object has lost its meaning. It might signify a desire to forget or move on, or that the past was just too difficult to keep. While we cannot know for certain why he disposed of the scrapbook, we can recognize that, in the daughter’s poems, the father’s experience assumes a new shape.

Experience, however, is not easy to apprehend or reproduce. The scrapbook’s archive does not yield uncomplicated meaning to its finder. It exists in a language, Laotian, that the poet cannot read or write, and its contents do not come with explanation. The endeavor to recover is consequently marked by refusals and obstructions that highlight the limits of signification. Moreover, recovery is neither straightforward nor total because the subjective content of experience, what the father thought and felt, remains elusive. The only certainty is that he *did* experience something, and what can be recovered is this fact of experiencing. And so, rather than assign meaning to the objects in the scrapbook, fixing them to epistemological certitude, Thammavongsa gives them different bodies—that of poems—in which they retain something of the original but are also originals themselves.

These new forms do not reveal ethnographic substance, but instead convey a sense of persistence, insisting on the father’s presence in the world. They do not perform the work of fleshing out experience or revealing a biography. Carrie Dawson

sees this as the poems' "refusal of a confessional mode grounded in demonstrable truths and designed to affirm the innocence of its subject and the benevolence of its audience."²¹ As such, the poems in *Found* are not translations or transcriptions of the scrapbook's contents, whereby knowable meaning is transferred from one object to another.²² Instead, they point to breathing and thinking life—consciousness itself. In this function, poetry does not extract meaning or recover truths, but rather keeps the very possibility of meaning alive. Christine Kim compellingly argues that Thammavongsa's poetry creates "intimate minor publics," which open up ways of "seeing and hearing lives rather than political apparatuses, and subjects rather than categories."²³ Resilience, as *Found* shows, is lived experience recovered and transformed in the writing of poetry.

Found sketches a portrait of a man's experience, and while it is tempting to seek a narrative that reconstructs his remarkable life, focusing on how individual poems occupy space allows us to perceive resilience without requiring us to "know" the subject. The poems are "about" the poet's father, but they are also, and more crucially, about what the poet does with his experience. And it is by considering the poems' form and physicality that the remarkable resilience of the refugee in the camp can be seen. The way the poems look on the page, the cluster and arrangement of words, the physical shape they hold, radiate experiential intensities. Resilience inheres in the poems' formal details—it "resides" not only in the human body that survives, but also in the discursive representations that both facilitate and evince life's continuance.²⁴

More specifically, resilience "shimmers" in the figure of the line—straight and curved, written and drawn, physical and metaphorical—that moves through Thammavongsa's book.²⁵ The line embodies a kind of resilience that emphasizes presence without demanding the details (what, how, and why) that surround it. The line is a body, a marking of material recovery in the face of devastation. Tracing the various lines that appear in *Found* brings us closer to grasping the resilience of experience—of poems and fleshed bodies, of life in its essential forms.

The collection begins with an untitled establishing poem that sketches the contours of the physical body: "I took only / bone / built half / your face / left / skull and rib / as they came."²⁶ A body comes into view, but its material form is incomplete, still taking shape and in danger of falling into obscurity. Even as the poem directs us to the possibility of life, it complicates any reach for ontological certainty. The poem goes on to describe the process of piecing together a life with only bones, the barest structural parts—that which remains when feature and flesh (and accrued meaning) decompose. What emerges is the outline of an individual, of life in its skeletal form. The pieces in *Found* are, in the schematic that the untitled poem sets up, rearranged bones that constellate a body, or more precisely a frame, of experience. This reading understands the volume's immense brevity and the sparseness of individual poems as embodying the brittle quality of bone, of both hardness and fragility. The slender poems and the abundance of open space on the

page are an effect of Thammavongsa's refusal to "dress up" the scrapbook and her father's experience with definitive meaning and explicit explanation.

The creation of poetry, then, does not recover or accumulate meaning, but only seeks to describe living. Poems such as "The Heart" and "The Lung" relay the mechanical function of the bodily organs they reference. The heart, "the real / heart, / is ugly / Nothing / here / can break, / or be broken / And nothing / can come / from here / but blood."²⁷ As Kasim Husain notes, the traditional poetic metaphor of heartbreak is abandoned in order to emphasize the heart's circulatory purpose of maintaining life.²⁸ The lung also supports life, by taking "what it has / always taken / What / work it does / it has done / and has been doing / all these years."²⁹ Foregrounding the vital organs is a way for the poet to convey life in its most basic manifestation, and to make sure the reader is aware that so much—language, poetry, beauty, brutality, consciousness—depends upon the breathing body, with blood and oxygen coursing through its veins.

The shape of written language also gestures to bodily presence. In "My Father's Handwriting," curved and winding lines demonstrate an attempt to make sense of the world and create matter: "He carved / every letter / into / the sound / its / shape made / and every one took / a place / where nothing / stood."³⁰ Yet, in "What I Can't Read," the poet reveals that she cannot decipher these letters, and so must scrutinize their bodies, which gives rise to the body of her own poem: "Each letter / wound / around itself / drawing / a small dark / hole / an / inner ear / tiny / and landlocked."³¹ The tonal structure of the poems, which mimics the Laotian language, further facilitates the rippling of experiential presence, as "each poem begins by using a small set of words, and then the rest of the poem shuffles those words. . . . These arrangements give each small set of words the power to do more, to pull out a bit more meaning from themselves, each other, or the space around them."³² Using words in a way that maximizes their signifying potential by paying attention to how they can be reused throughout the poem and how they interact with elements on the page is a technique that allows experience to resonate and reverberate.

Take, for instance, "International Rescue Committee," which reads: "The exact address of / the International Rescue Committee / He wrote it down twice / the exact address / The first time in pencil / at the front / The second time in pen / in the middle / The second time in pen / he draws a box around it."³³ The repetition of the phrase "the exact address" in the first four lines, and "the second time in pen" in the last four, simulates the double copy of the address in the scrapbook, and the father's need to write it down twice. Emphasis on the "exact" address and a box drawn around it relays the importance of the information, which must be highlighted, reiterated in permanent ink rather than fleeting graphite. We do not know what the International Rescue Committee, a humanitarian aid organization, did for the refugees of Laos or the father, but the poem registers a sense of *urgency*—of contacting them, of knowing they exist, of keeping their address. The rearrangement

of words and recurrence of elements in the poem draw out the tension, of hope and passing time, that lurks within it.

Similarly, the poem “Laos” builds its emotional core through force and counterforce, referencing, more explicitly than anywhere else in the collection, the historical context of war that occasioned asylum seeking. Consisting of twenty-one words divided into six couplets, spaced out evenly in a slender vertical column on the page, the poem reads: “When bombs / dropped / here / we buried / the dead / then took / the metal / for stilts / to lift / our homes / above / the ground.”³⁴ The internal narrative of the poem depicts people performing ordinary but life-affirming tasks, burying loved ones and rebuilding their homes in the wake of bombing raids, while its external structure mimics the all-important stilt that supports life. Together, internal and external logics convey a sense of resilience against the terror of the bomb—that life persists despite and through the ever-present threat of death.

In a period of nine years, from 1964 to 1973, bombs weighing a total of 2.1 million tons were dropped on Laos. This was “equivalent to the entire tonnage the United States dropped on industrialized Germany and Japan during the whole of World War II,”³⁵ which averages out to “the astonishing rate of one bombing mission every eight minutes, twenty-four hours a day, for nine years.”³⁶ The air war—one of history’s largest, and conducted mostly in secret by the CIA—mainly targeted villagers, in particular the densely populated and historic region called the Plain of Jars. Fred Branfman writes that “American bombers killed and wounded tens of thousands of Laotians. Countless people were buried alive by high explosives, burnt alive by napalm and white phosphorous, or riddled by antipersonnel bomb pellets.”³⁷ Its legacy continues to this day, for as Branfman further explains, “U.S. leaders have cleaned up only 0.28 percent of the 80 million unexploded cluster bombs they left behind in Laos. As a result, there are probably no people on earth who have been tormented for so long by U.S. war-making.”³⁸

It is within this historical and ongoing context of catastrophic assault by bombs that Thammavongsa’s poem takes shape. The downward trajectory of the bomb and the upward rise of the stilt create a line that joins the poem into a whole. Building through tension—the “dropping” of the bomb and the “lift” of the stilts, the “buried” dead and the homes “above the ground”—the poem relies on force and counterforce to generate life’s resilience. And crucial to the sense of resilience in the poem is the idea of repurposing, making use of that which was meant to destroy in order to further life, subverting the original intent to annihilate. The bombs are designed to kill, but in coming into contact with human life, their metal parts transform into something that can shelter. This example of human resourcefulness and ingenuity is a minor resistance against the impersonal rationality of antipersonnel air warfare.

As the collection progresses, a calendar from the scrapbook becomes the object of focus. Comprising the last third of *Found* is a series of poems with dates as titles.

Beginning with “January, 1978” and ending in “December, 1979,” the roughly two-year period marks the passage of time, of waiting that is not necessarily empty. “January, 1978” reads: “This month / has / X / This / the mark / of / a hurried hand.”³⁹ “February, 1978” begins with three parallel flat lines that “cross out / 7 days / then // placed / on / the number / of / each day.”⁴⁰ In “January, 1979,” “The first day / here / is / circled / then // / takes out / the month.”⁴¹ The next seven poems, from February to August 1979, contain a single hand-drawn slash, the same one that adorns the cover of the book. The reproduction of enigmatic slashes does not convey how time was spent. We know that time was experienced because it was marked by horizontal, angled, and crisscrossing lines, and this is all we know. The slashes tell nothing of what the father did in the camp or whether the days and months dragged on or sped by.

The date poems concentrate on the physicality of both the father and his markings. In “November, 1978,” the poet is attentive to the quality of the ink, and the force of the hand, that makes an impression on paper: “In / this month / the blue ink / runs out / The metal ball / digs / a pit / into paper.”⁴² The texture of the imprint, the look of the imperfect lines made over the numbered days of the calendar, declares something crucial, and Thammavongsa relays this immediacy in her poem by relying on drawn figures rather than language. Although the poet and the reader cannot access the father’s experience through the slashes, the certainty that he dug his pen into paper might suggest a number of possibilities: impatience, frustration, boredom, determination. The father’s act of applying pressure to extract the last of the pen’s blue ink, however, attests to a powerful, verifiable moment of living—he existed in this particular moment. In *Found*, the slash signifies that daily living endured in the refugee camp by asking readers to look at a slanted line, to witness living without demanding comprehension in the extractive ways we are conditioned to “read.”

In “September, 1979,” Thammavongsa writes, “This / is the first / month / left unmarked / The ones / after / are / the same.”⁴³ For the next three poems, from October to December 1979, the page is left blank, nothing but an expanse of white space. If the slashes and crossed lines represent the presence of life, then the lack of markings is a significant culmination to the date poem series. Like the discarding of the scrapbook, the cessation of counting time is an ambiguous act, one that does not necessarily reveal an end or a diminishing need to acknowledge time, but instead suspends the examiner’s desire for analysis. The blank page halts analytic and scopic progression. It forces an electrifying recognition of life’s vulnerability. The disappearance of the slash from one page to the next dramatizes the thin line between presence and absence, life and death. Indeed, the final poem of the collection is a brutal reminder of the violence that can be enacted on the body, of how easy it is to take a life. Entitled “Warning,” it reads: “My father took / a pigeon / broke / its hard neck / cut open / its chest / dug out / a handful / and threw back / its body / warning.”⁴⁴ This graphic concluding image of disembowelment

and death stands in sharp contrast to the quiet avowal of life in the rest of the collection.

The gradual movement from words to symbols to blank space in the collection traces Thammavongsa's awareness of the unrepresentability of her father's experience. She asks her readers to contemplate "emptiness" to arrive at a different "truth"—that living cannot be captured in words and that language inevitably fails us.⁴⁵ While the pages at the end of the collection might be interpreted as an abandonment of language, one that is risky for a poet who traffics in words, it is also a statement of fidelity to the father's experience. Leaving the page blank rather than filling it with speculation or imaginings stays close to the father's experience, and closer to him.

In contrast to other immigrant and minority second-generation artists who creatively fill in the gaps of history and identity, Thammavongsa chooses restraint as a form of engagement. To refrain from revealing a way into (his)story is a performance of meaning rather than a rejection of representation. The last third of *Found* moves more deeply into the realm of physical embodiment. At poetry readings, Thammavongsa "reads" the slashes by physically tracing slanted lines into the air with her finger, thereby performing poetry through her materiality—the body must communicate what words alone cannot.

My discussion of *Found* has followed Thammavongsa's lead in deliberately sidestepping a history lesson, or recounting personal and political history as an interpretive frame to better understand the poems. Yet my analysis works on the premise that the collection is so clearly steeped in a history of war and refugee migration that it has historical relevance beyond a personal meditation on an individual's time spent in a refugee camp. What, then, does the collection say about history?⁴⁶ As I have shown, *Found* does not provide an easy or accessible route into the complex historical conditions that affected millions of people in Laos and the rest of Southeast Asia. Thammavongsa does not function as a cultural guide or informant, narrating a misunderstood or elided history for uninformed readers. That is, one does not read the collection to learn about history, but in reading it, one recognizes that history happened, and that a man spent time in a refugee camp, that he wrote and collected, and tallied time, waited and felt something. He survived. The collection models a form of critical engagement without dictating how to engage a refugee life and history.

MONSTROUS RECOUNTINGS

The power of experience is that we can begin again, and then again. Experience offers us another try, a duration in which something else may take place. Ocean Vuong begins *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, an epistolary novel, with the sentence "Let me begin again," which doubles back in order to start once more.⁴⁷ About two-thirds of the way through the book, the narrator begins yet again,

abandoning the letter and the novel form to venture into the amorphous space between prose and verse, trusting the poetic line and free stanza to hold meanings that threaten to burst at the seams of coherence, gathering together the shards of experience—war, trauma, queerness, addiction, art, loss, and pleasure—that comprise what we would call a “narrative.”

Here is a writer (both author and character) experimenting, figuring out a way to write experience. The novel as letter is addressed to the narrator’s mother, who cannot read, and is thus already a negation of itself—an object that can never fulfill its purpose, to do the thing it is supposed to do. The act of writing experience, for refugee subjects, might be an unbridgeable contradiction, an oxymoronic action of reaching out and moving away, coming closer and breaking apart. Indeed, the narrator knows that “each word I put down is one word further from where you are.”⁴⁸

And yet he perseveres anyway, to tell the story again—crafting a queer refugee bildungsroman in which growth and transformation comes from retelling. The narrator, Little Dog, artfully recounts the stories he has lived through and ones passed on to him. In doing so, he reconstructs the presence of those he has lost to death and to distance—his mother, his grandmother, his lover, himself—in the life of epistolary fiction. As Marguerite Nguyen argues, the epistolary form plays a significant role in the formation of the Vietnamese diaspora. The letter is a “creative-critical” act for “establishing a familiar linguistic, emotional, and historical milieu,” which calls “refugee diasporics into being and conversation.”⁴⁹ The epistolary, as Vuong shows, is also a site of relational retelling. The retold story is where he and his people all survive. Recounting is a method that allows the narrator to preserve and regenerate shared experience, or the jagged shape of their lives.

To recount is to take stock of these lives, to give an account of experience that pulls writer, character, and reader together within what Ursula K. Le Guin calls the “carrier bag” of the novel.⁵⁰ In this bag, anything can happen. It is a place where more life can be lived and witnessed. And more life, for someone like Little Dog, is another telling of what has already transpired, a reinscribing of the past, in order to get “down so low the world offers a merciful new angle, a larger vision made of small things.”⁵¹ Recounting is a way for the teller to acquire new vision of the story and to provide a moment for ordinary, seemingly unremarkable lives to be held. *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* offers experience as a retelling, and in these retellings something like refuge comes into being. In the do-over of writing, another chance at life is possible for those who have received little mercy in the world.

As a stand-in for Vuong, Little Dog muses on his process as he describes the immense struggle to live and all the ways these refugee, queer, working-class individuals have died. That he decides to write to and about his mother in a form and language she will never access is, I suggest, a relation of resilience.⁵² The seeming futility of the endeavor is precisely what makes it possible. Like Thammavongsa, Little Dog takes the less conventional and more oblique path to “reach” his parent. Resilience is both a complicated chasm between and a bridge to one’s kin. A story

that can only be told, because it cannot be read by the intended reader, defies reason. A life—of the breathing and novelistic kind—unencumbered by its “purpose” is resilient, materializing where and when it should not, refusing the normative course of *bios*.⁵³ Reaching out to his mother by way of an impossibility allows Little Dog to bring the story into being, and for it to continue beyond the immediacy of their lives. Sharing the first time that his lover, Trevor, fucks him, Little Dog writes, “I only have the nerve to tell you what comes after because the chance this letter finds you is slim—the very impossibility of your reading this is all that makes my telling it possible.”⁵⁴

Why, then, structure the narrative in this particular way? Why tell all and also tell nothing to the intended receiver? In a “coming out” scene, when the narrator confesses to his mother that he does not like girls (which is to say that he likes boys without having to say so) and she, in turn, reveals that she had given birth to a stillborn, Little Dog comprehends their “exchanging truths” as “cutting one another.”⁵⁵ A story, he knows, can be a dangerous thing, a sharp object that makes those already battered bleed more. It is thus not necessarily the story that he wants to narrate or give to this mother, even if the epistolary address of the novel might indicate otherwise. Rather, it is *through the story* or its telling that she can exist, that he can preserve her and hold her safe from the passage of time, the assault of an unending war, and the daily grind of immigrant life.

He explains: “I never wanted to build a ‘body of work,’ but to preserve these, our bodies, breathing and unaccounted for, inside this work.”⁵⁶ It is thus not the content of the writing that is significant, but what that writing can keep alive, which are the bodies of those whose stories are unexamined, who easily slip away, without a ripple, from the surface of the world. His careful choice to substantiate *these* bodies and *this* work in the very sentence itself directs the reader’s consciousness to the materiality of holding a book, a story, a life. Little Dog knows that the reader is not his mother, but someone who possesses English, and the privilege of reading. And it is through their eyes that he can subsequently reach his mother—which is to say, she and everyone he writes about continue to live in the reader’s reading. As such, it is in being read, and not in reading, that the mother attains a kind of resilient form, a presence in the novel and in the world beyond it.

While the letter-novel is not actually meant for the mother to read, it is *for* her in that it recounts the undeniable presence of her being, and readers are recruited to participate in its recognition. In the letter-novel, they cannot ignore this refugee woman as they could in the life outside its pages, where she is just another salon worker bent over, painting their nails. She is too real—too flawed and tender, violent and yearning, damaged and defiant. Little Dog realizes: “It could be, in writing you here, I am writing to everyone—for how can there be a private space if there is no safe space.”⁵⁷

This crucial awareness of his linguistic endeavor comes after the description of a racist attack in which the narrator, as a young boy, is violently forced to “speak

English” on a school bus. His reaction—to petrify the self in silence—recalls classic scenes of Asian American psychic formation in the face of public shaming and racialization.⁵⁸ Little Dog’s mother chastises him for letting such violence happen, doing nothing to defend himself. She then implores him to “find a way . . . because I don’t have the English to help you. I can’t say nothing to stop them. You find a way.”⁵⁹ This moment dramatizes the ways that the English language has been wielded against these refugee subjects and how the work of survival is learning to use it, to find a way to say something back.⁶⁰

Writing is subsequently how Little Dog finds a way to survive. It is not the way his mother would have imagined responding to racist bullies at school. Rather, it is speaking publicly in a private manner, using English in the most unsafe of spaces, that of the letter-novel, to recount the most intimate of experiences. In the letter-novel, they all “speak.” This is how the narrator uses his “bellyful of English” to say something and mark his family’s resilient presence.⁶¹ Writing is one way out of the margins that the world has confined them to, and the novel is a refuge from, although not a solution to, the forces of racial, hetero, and capitalist violence that slowly wears them down.

And so, in writing, Little Dog preserves and gives form to their lives, even while doing so he exposes them. The novel is neither a private nor a safe space. This is the danger of the story, and to enact resilience is also to risk being shattered. Accordingly, the bodies that are preserved and regenerated through writing in *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* are not romanticized versions of people worthy of sympathy. Instead, they are flawed and vulnerable—the narrator insists on recognizing their unsanitized selves, whether it be the battered face of domestic abuse, the pride of selling one’s body to feed one’s child in wartime, or the shit that comes out from the pressure of anal sex. These bodies in the letter-novel, like the ones off the page, straddle the line between whole and unraveled, monstrosity and humanity.

Little Dog boldly declares that his mother is both a mother and a monster, which is to say that she is singularly human.⁶² This necessary vision comes from recounting, or the resilient work of artistic re-creation. In the letter-novel, she is the woman who leaves bruised welts on Little Dog’s forearm and also paints, with nail polish, the color pink back on his vandalized bike. She is the woman who twirls and moos in order to ask the butchers for “oxtail” to make pho, and who wakes in the middle of the night in absolute terror, dragging her son and mother to a stranger’s house to save her sister from being killed, forgetting that she had moved away years ago. To write his mother in this way, as broken and terrorized, as trying and struggling, never escaping the violence that has gripped her, is to render the proud imperfection of a woman who knows how to speak only “entirely in war.”⁶³

That is to say, he preserves her in all her complexity, revealing the difficult truths and contradictions of a refugee woman for all to see. In doing this, he leaves her open to misinterpretation and moral judgment, which is the danger of all stories

and acts of reading. He risks, in the writing, to make her prey, to expose her to the prying eyes of the public, or to readers who might never understand a complicated refugee subject like her. For Little Dog, writing is a monstrous act and the writer too is a monster, someone who has to navigate the treacherous zone between the private and public, the personal and social.

He thus contemplates the meaning of *monster* in order to theorize the work of writing: “From the Latin root *monstrum*, a divine messenger of catastrophe, then adapted by the Old French to mean an animal of myriad origins: centaur, griffin, satyr. To be a monster is to be a hybrid signal, a lighthouse: both shelter and warning at once.”⁶⁴ A monster protects while heralding danger, it gathers lives and directs them to a time when the threat of destruction looms. This is the work of the writer, the reteller of refugee stories. The narrator puts bodies into the eyes—what he calls God’s “loneliest creation”—of readers so that they may be seen, examined, and remembered. But this eye, as he explains, is “hungry” and “empty,” a shelter that is also a feeding cage.⁶⁵

To live inside the story is to be at peril, because while it provides a moment for bodies to exist, there are no guarantees as to how they exist or what will be done to them. Survival, he tells us, “exists only on the verge of its own disappearing.”⁶⁶ That is to say, the survived life is always one moment away from falling into oblivion, and resilience can quickly slip into literal and discursive death. Vuong presents us with an understanding of resilience in which life is lived perching on a cliff. Its proximity to loss is what defines a resilient life. Survival has meaning, then, because presence is always subjected to the imminent actuality of absence.

If a story is a practice of resilience, then it can simultaneously be a moment when bodies get devoured—“A story, after all, is a kind of swallowing.”⁶⁷ This is another way in which writing is a monstrous act. The story holds bodies by way of ingestion, consuming the very lives it preserves. The eyes and mouth, as mechanisms of sensory perception, recognize the existence of life through cannibalistic incorporation. Little Dog knows that “to open a mouth, in speech, is to leave only the bones, which remain untold.”⁶⁸ This act of telling—to spit out bones—offers not a “pure” or unadulterated body, but a digested version of life, a story that the writer has already dissected and pieced back together or left in incomplete fragments.

The experience contained in *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* is, then, not so much a reconstruction, but a deconstruction that seeks to keep the interval between absence and presence open. He writes, “I’m breaking us apart again so that I might carry us somewhere else—where, exactly, I’m not sure.”⁶⁹ By “breaking apart” he means, first, that writing is a distancer and, second, that it is a kind of disassembling. Writing is not meant to provide clarity or certainty, but rather to signal the existence of a life and the impeding destruction it faces. The first predator is the narrator-son himself.

Thus, Little Dog understands writing as marring the body—“I change, embellish, and preserve you all at once.”⁷⁰ The preserved refugee subject is also one who

is scarred and tarnished, but also adorned and dressed up—a mother and a monster. If Thammavongsa attempts to recover and reproduce her father's experience in a refugee camp by way of restraint, then Vuong, via Little Dog, tries to know his mother's war-ravaged but undefeated body by amassing words, recounting her over and over again. To continue to do so, to be aware that telling is a dangerous enterprise in which one must reveal and then mar the most treasured parts of one's self, and to go on telling the story, is resilience. Recounting experience at the cost of altering it—to possibly lose the “originality” of the experience—is to “insist that our being alive is beautiful enough to be worthy of replication.”⁷¹

Storytelling is therefore the replication of being. This replication is not a copy but a continuance. It allows life to have more life, even if that life is not an exact or faithful replica of what it seeks to replicate. The resilience of writing is that life transforms on another plane of existence, not completely confined to or constrained by the fate that war, race, capitalism, and physics have determined for it. This does not mean that Little Dog can imagine a different ending or happy resolution for them (Lan, his grandmother, dies of bone cancer; Trevor, his lover, dies of an overdose, and he and his mother, in the end, have more pain to endure). Rather, replication of life in the letter-novel allows the narrator to gain insight into, and then declare, the value of their lives: “All this time I told myself we were born from war—but I was wrong, Ma. We were born from beauty. Let no one mistake us for the fruit of violence—but that violence, having passed through the fruit, failed to spoil it.”⁷² Recounting these lives in the time-space of epistolary fiction unequivocally describes how they are unspoiled. Their liveliness, even as they perish, permeates the world of the letter-novel occurring in the eyes of the reader, over and over again as it is read. Little Dog knows this—it is his relational act of resilience in collaboration with readers. He rhetorically inquires: “So what if all I ever made of my life was more of it?”⁷³

This question is not an insignificant statement about the form and function of the letter-novel, for it is precisely what Little Dog does from beginning to end—create more and more life. He recounts how they are gorgeous, and that this gorgeousness is only brief because “to be gorgeous, you must first be seen, but to be seen allows you to be hunted.”⁷⁴ Such is the price of life and resilience, the cost of writing and being written. The condition of being “briefly gorgeous” that gives the letter-novel its title is the intimate and contiguous existence of life and death, love and loss, violence and beauty. Nowhere in the letter-novel is this condition more poignantly conveyed than in the juxtaposition of Lan's death with Little Dog's first anal penetration.

Recounting allows these two disparate events to be brought together in time, to dramatize the thin line between annihilation and pleasure, loss and tenderness. As Lan's body is deteriorating from stage 4 bone cancer, “shriveled and striated,” Little Dog's body is “deeply broken” and “inside out” from the force and pressure of penetration.⁷⁵ Both moments describe a vulnerable body escaping the limits

of its physical self. In one, a body is returning to a bare and singular state, and in the other a body is discovering its capacity for communion with another body. In both, bodies are tended to and cared for: Little Dog's family fanning, feeding, and cleaning the dying one, and Trevor cleaning, with his mouth, the other's anus that has just soiled itself.

Braiding together the narrative of a war survivor's death and a narrative of gay sex performs resilience as the possibility of pleasure and mercy in and with moments of loss. The letter-novel suggests that life is always thick and layered in this way, impure in how affective experiences commingle and imbricate. The story is a moment of experiential impurity in which people and events come together, collide, blend, and then something else becomes possible—life skirts death, the past is drawn into the present, and the present is ignited.⁷⁶ This is how a writer creates more life for everyone else to witness. Describing his grandmother's style of narration, one that Little Dog himself employs in the letter-novel, he writes: "Shifts in narrative would occur—the past never a fixed and dormant landscape but one that is re-seen. Whether we want to or not, we are traveling in a spiral, we are creating something new from what is gone."⁷⁷ Writing is to re-see the past and to travel in this spiral of time, bringing people and experiences along in the winding journey of the unending story. Without a retelling, we lose vision. To re-see and be re-seen is a relation of resilience, holding what is gone, not known or not knowable. In the end, Little Dog knows that to tell a story is to "feed yourself sugar on the cusp of danger."⁷⁸ In the mouth and on the longing tongue, the taste of a story can only ever be bittersweet.

RECORD OF REFUGE

Recovering and recounting experience in ways that extend presence and the possibility of meaning, as Thammavongsa and Vuong do, is about producing a *record* of life. Kao Kalia Yang's *The Latecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir* further evidences the social and historical importance of narrative record for refugee subjects, particularly for a stateless people who have, until recently, not anchored themselves in the written language.⁷⁹ The memoir, which is an expansive familial and cultural history, assumes the task of recording the lives of Hmong people who were recruited by the CIA to fight a "secret war" from 1955 to 1974 and then scattered as refugees in its wake.⁸⁰ Such a narrative record is crucial, given the instrumental way in which official files have documented them. Yang tells us that "for many of the Hmong, their lives on paper began on the day the UN registered them as refugees of war."⁸¹ Yang's observation shows how Hmongs of the wars in Southeast Asia entered written history and Western consciousness *as* refugees—how the written word has the power to call them forth as such. The bureaucratic process of juridical-political refuge interpellated them into a legal category of being, and refuge status conferred not just political subjectivity, but also a kind of discursive

life in the turbulent narrative of Western modernity. The official record of their lives coincided with the recognition of their statelessness and lack of protection. Their written story began, according to this record, in the moment of transnational refuge seeking.

This record belongs to the bureaucratic moment, the progressive time of dominant history, and it crucially frames the actual existence—the possibilities and limits—of refugee lives. If documentation of Hmong presence occurs through official registration, then the memoir offers a different way to participate in the making of history. That is to say, the memoir is an alternate record of experience, one that scrambles the rationality of institutional capture as seen in a legal document. While the official record inscribed “their names on paper” and “gave them numbers that would replace their names,” the memoir seeks to record the experiences that numbers cannot fill, bringing back names and the lives that fit on the page.⁸² To record and make a record of life, Yang’s memoir shows, is a resilient act that offers expanded time for the recognition of human experience.

My discussion of Thammavongsa and Vuong has focused on the writing process as a mediating relation, one in which refugee resilience could be *described* and also (*re*)*produced*. Yang’s book, the first nationally distributed Hmong memoir in the United States, highlights how writing can generate the historical presence of people who have hitherto not been part of written world history or were indexed in that history only as a legal byproduct of war. Registration numbers conferred the possibility of political protection, but writing is the duration when refuge is being sought and might eventually be found.

There is a long and rich tradition of Hmong cultural expression in artistic objects such as story cloths (*paj ntaub*), tools, instruments, and other everyday items. Yet, since history has intervened—though the introduction of modern written language into Hmong culture via colonial missionary work in the 1950s as well as migrations to the Global North in the late 1970s and ’80s—“without written texts, Hmong voices are over-looked or non-existent.”⁸³ For this reason, critics have identified writing, and life-writing in particular, as an important contemporary and diasporic means of Hmong cultural renewal, an opportunity for Hmong subjects to exercise agency in shaping their own history.⁸⁴

In this context, writing is not just a discursive or symbolic act removed from the material realities of how people live. For Yang, it is clearly tied to the existence and cultural survival of a people who have no state or physical nation to unite them. She thus understands memoir writing not just as a vehicle for self-reflection or discovery, but also and more crucially as a means of seeking refuge. Ma Vang suggests that Hmong writing is mobile, always “on the run” as it navigates the tensions of home, history, place, and language.⁸⁵ This mobility is its refuge-seeking function, and Yang concludes her memoir with a hopeful rallying call: “Our dreams are coming true, my Hmong brothers and sisters. . . . We, seekers of refuge, will find it: if not in the world, then in each other. If not in life, then surely in books.”⁸⁶

For her, this dream of refuge, so elusive for many Hmong for so long, is being realized within textuality, between the covers of a book, and *The Latehomecomer* is one realization of its promise.⁸⁷ Seeking refuge in a book does not merely refer to the escapist function of literature. Rather, the book is itself a *literal* time-space of refuge, a *moment of actual time* for lives to exist when other modes of existence may be more fleeting or inhospitable. As a material document to be read, circulated, and debated, a book houses experience in ways that give displaced lives social presence, acting as a container of living for those who know that no physical space is a foregone conclusion, a safe and permanent “home.”

Chia Youyee Vang writes: “Although they have never had a nation as we know nation-states today, Hmong nation-building efforts have been an integral part of their modern history.”⁸⁸ Because this history has been marked by multiple displacements as well as by the absence of autonomous sovereignty over a geographic area, they must turn to different sites, both material and discursive, to establish nationhood.⁸⁹ Yang suggests that a “family memoir,” through a relational approach that connects an individual story to a collective history, offers a means for the work of imagining diasporic national community.⁹⁰ Perhaps the act of writing offers a more radical and complete notion of refuge than the rights and citizenship provided by juridical-political refuge, and thus the memoir is a different route *into* refuge, a dwelling on and for experience.

Yang, accordingly, narrates Hmong history as personal and familial experience. Filtered through an individual lens, this history is inevitably peculiar but certainly not unique. Specificity of experience is not a limitation, but an opportunity or catalyst for relational dialogue, for the meeting of past and present, individual and history, self and other. Maurice Merleau-Ponty writes that in the experience of dialogue, individual thoughts are “inter-woven into a single fabric,” a story cloth if you will.⁹¹ The weaving together of multiple voices, perspectives, and experiences in *The Latehomecomer* might be understood as an introduction of “the impersonal into the heart of subjectivity,” whereby the “individuality of perspectives” is blurred and dissolved into something like collaboration.⁹² Beginning with the stories of her family in the mountains of Laos and ending with the tales of the Yang family matriarch, the memoir dislodges the individual writing subject as the central locus of a life.

The refuge found in words is a resilient continuance of life, one that allows subjects situated differently in time to encounter one another. The story, at its most powerful, is active and expanded time. The writing in *The Latehomecomer* offers a duration in which experience may be exchanged and shared across generations, between people who may not have had the means or opportunity to meet. This is signaled in the book’s dedication, which reads: “*For my grandmother, Youa Lee, who never learned how to write. To my baby brother, Maxwell Hwm Yang, who will read the things she never wrote.*”⁹³ The two subjects named represent the bookends of the extended Yang family: the late matriarch from the mountains of Laos and her young, American-born descendant.

Delineated here is a familial lineage, and somewhere in the vast distance between the generations is the emergence of writing. Even though writing was not a part of the grandmother's world, her grandchild will nonetheless read "the things she never wrote." The contradiction posed is a self-referential declaration of the archival function of Yang's memoir—the things that were never written exist in *The Latehomecomer*. Situated in and mediating the relationship between grandmother and grandchild, Yang's writing preserves the former's stories and transmits them to the latter. This work of writing is monumental in the context of ongoing historical erasure, transformative migrations, and unwitnessed deaths. The book's building of refuge links generations by creating family through memoir. In it, the story continues, transcending the strict spatiotemporal bounds of linear time to offer a long-lasting refuge—to offer experience itself.⁹⁴

The content of this experience is *how* they lived and *how* they were able to go on living. The memoir anchors itself in the potential of the written word to carry the willful materiality of life, the minor triumphs of staying alive. Yang writes that "by documenting our deaths, we were documenting our lives."⁹⁵ This realization occurs because "the Hmong had died too many times, and each time, their deaths had gone unwritten."⁹⁶ Like much of Southeast Asian diasporic cultural production, the memoir is a memorial for the dead and, as such, is simultaneously a record of life. Yet it shows that finding refuge in writing is not simply registering life and death; more crucially, it is documenting the joys and pleasures that flow in between and next to them. It is in these durations, in which loss is a structuring force of life, that resilience is most tenaciously potent. The meaning of life lived may flash through and be perceived in them.

For example, Yang provides us with one of the most eye-opening and unconventional accounts of life in a refugee camp, a portrait that emphasizes togetherness and comfort instead of suffering. Or it may be more precise to say that she gives us a more complex view of the camp, whereby an experience largely characterized as sovereign exception, and as precarious, traumatic, and empty time, is modulated with the simple affections that make life worth living.

After years of fleeing the Lao Pathet and hiding in mountainous jungles as fugitives, Yang's extended family reunited at the Ban Vinai refugee camp in Thailand. She tells us that this was the first, and only, time after the war that the family lived together in one place: "For us, in many ways, the life we had in the camp was ideal. We were surrounded by people who loved us."⁹⁷ Although their arrival at the camp was met with contempt—Yang recounts her parents' memory of "an expression on one man's face," as they walked toward a fenced compound, that said "we were not human, too poor to walk on the earth"—life for the family settled into a rhythm of ordinary contentment and everyday pleasures.⁹⁸ The camp confined them, but it also became a place where they survived and experienced time with kin. In the camp, "the war was in the past," and "that was enough to make the future a busy one, filled with living."⁹⁹

This experience of living in the camp was infused with storytelling. Yang recalls: “Like so many other children, in other parts of the world, in a time of nothing, we heard stories of what was before. There were always people to tell me stories in the camp.”¹⁰⁰ When the family had “nothing,” these stories filled the hours and days, giving quality to experience. In Ban Vinai, refuge was indexed to acts of storytelling, to stories that were exchanged and made available. Yang discovered “the shape of stories, how to remember them, and how to tell them.”¹⁰¹ She would later employ this knowledge to craft *The Latehomecomer* and thus produce another refuge, another way for stories to continue in another time and place.

The refugee camp is the backdrop for this telling of refuge, of how Yang’s grandmother ran a little shop selling yams and herbal medicine; how her aunts, uncles, and older cousins doted on and protected her; how they all “ate from the same white enamel-covered bowls, with little cracks where the metal peaked through, used the same steel spoons, wore the same brands of cockatoo flip-flops, dreamed the same dreams.”¹⁰² Even when she knows that “safety in the camp was an illusion,” the experiences created (and retold) there cannot be discounted as unreal or insignificant.¹⁰³ It is, undeniably, an affective experience of resilience, of survival without spectacularity—people trying to live together. For Yang, the refugee camp “is people I love living around me. The world of our lives then was contained in a way that life would never be again.”¹⁰⁴

Once the family resettled in the United States, life indeed was not the same. Yang poignantly reveals that “for me, the hardness in life began in America. We are so lucky to be in this country, the adults said. Watching them struggle belied this fact.”¹⁰⁵ Even as the Yang family found work, achieved education, and grew in size, the lack of material resources became “the nightmare that kept love apart in America.”¹⁰⁶ Initially scattered across the United States as a result of the government’s sponsorship and resettlement program, the biggest challenge the Yang clan faced was how to “survive in America and still love each other as we had in Laos.”¹⁰⁷

The separation that characterized much of the early years in the United States stands in sharp contrast to Yang’s description of life in the Ban Vinai refugee camp. Resettlement did not live up to its promise of a “dream,” for “we were refugees in this country, not citizens. It was not our home, only an asylum.”¹⁰⁸ This recognition is what makes memoir so necessary as a different means of finding home. The “hardness” of life, experienced by Yang as racialized isolation, disconnect, and silence, required the telling of stories to open up the world and to find a distinct voice in it. In the United States, stories once again become a refuge, not a turn away from the difficulties of life, but a counsel on how to forge one and live squarely within it.

The source of these stories is Yang’s late grandmother, and the entire final section of the memoir is reserved for her narratives of jealous witches; women who turn into tigers; struggles to raise orphan siblings; and marriages, births, and deaths. Told through her voice, these stories are kept alive for others to engage at another moment in time. If the grandmother is a figure of storytelling, a holder of

family and Hmong history, then the book picks up and carries on her work: “The witnesses [to life and death] grew old, and they died, and life continued, as if they had never lived. I didn’t want this [to] happen to my grandma, to this woman I adored, whom I could not imagine not loving forever.”¹⁰⁹ In the memoir, Yang’s grandmother leaves behind an inheritance of experiences. Her life itself—the upheavals, heartbreaks, and joys she endured—is a lesson in continuing the story.

A final image of the grandmother, Youa Lee, captured from a homemade video shown at her funeral, conveys with crystal clarity the purpose and method of storytelling that the memoir develops in its pages. Recorded by Yang’s uncle, the video shows her grandmother “alive on the screen,” seated on a swing with kin, not smiling but “looking at the camera directly.”¹¹⁰ Her grandchildren are pushing the swing, enjoying the day out at a park. This ordinary image, however, is spliced with images of “airplanes zooming across the sky, bombs being dropped,” from “a documentary of the Vietnam War in Laos.”¹¹¹ The remarkable juxtaposition of life and destruction, the ordinary and the spectacular, is a reminder of what refugee life has lived through, intertwining geopolitical events and intimate experience. It shows us how a refugee memoir or biography should be told. Aline Lo argues that this final section offers a more complex picture of the grandmother—and ultimately of Hmong refugees—as a subject defined by, but not confined to, a history of war.¹¹² The story does not, and cannot, erase the violence; in fact, it needs to bring that violence in so that the human life can be illuminated in its most quiet and meaningful moments.

What this seemingly jarring montage evokes for Yang is not the tragedy or trauma of her grandmother’s life, but its ordinary resilience: “The last thing I saw was my grandmother’s back moving away from my field of vision. I could tell it was her because the gait was uneven, lopsided. On her back, she carried a makeshift basket. Her flip-flops kicked up dust from the dirt path.”¹¹³ What emerges from the dropped bombs is a Hmong grandmother sitting on a swing with her descendant. The image of Yang’s grandmother with her arm around a smiling grandchild, squinting at the brightness of the sun, and the sight of her walking down a dirt path with a basket at her hip, are small everyday moments that neutralize the power of the bomb and the terror of war. There is annihilation, there is death, there is loss, but in their midst life also goes on, surely, quietly, resiliently. This is a record that no official designation or bureaucratic narrative can either capture or erase.

WITH LOSS

In these works by Thammavongsa, Vuong, and Yang, practices of narration, which are practices of relating, point to resilience as a creative reckoning with loss. The methods these individuals devise in order to continue the story—which is to access, create, and transform experience—engage loss without centering trauma. Instead, they critically describe the kinds of life that, as Vuong articulates, violence

has failed to spoil. These works story survival and persisting forms of life without leaving loss behind, revealing the generative and vexed potential of meaning. As David L. Eng and David Kazanjian remind us, loss is “inseparable from what remains, for what is lost is known only by what remains of it, by how these remains are produced, read, and sustained.”¹¹⁴ What remains is a relation of resilience in which remains are recovered, recounted, and recorded in highly particular but deeply resonant stories of continuance. Refugee resilience, as I have argued, is what refugee subjects *do* with loss in the duration of refuge. This doing is the making of refuge by refusing the end of the story, by insisting that the absence of documentation or the narrative gaps cannot be the only existence. At the same time, they stay with these absences and gaps, knowing that there has to be something else there. Recalling Vizenor’s notion of survivance, we might understand resilience not as “a mere reaction” to loss, but as an action of living with and holding loss in unfolding time.¹¹⁵

The readings I have provided focalize intergenerational relations between refugee subjects and their kin. As a “site” for thinking through resilience, the family indexes how reproduction—biological, social, discursive—is complicated by war, migration, and refuge seeking. That is, if the family is how normative structures are proliferated, then examining them is how we can understand the kinds of obstructions (and possibilities) that war and refuge pose for social survival. The family is often where loss is most profoundly felt, and where life gets passed on and continues. It is also where the breakdown of such processes compels renegotiations and innovations.

In her influential essay “Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity,” Lisa Lowe warns us against reading Asian American culture through the trope of intergenerational conflict.¹¹⁶ Such readings obscure difference and heterogeneity by localizing deeply social issues in the private drama of familial conflict. While this danger remains true in the decades since Lowe first articulated it, I return to intergenerational relations in this chapter to explore the difficult labor of refuge making for Southeast Asian refugee subjects. Instead of staging the tensions between “nativism” and “assimilation,” refugee intergenerationality is a crucible where profound historical and social disruptions imprint themselves on people’s lives. It is through the relationships between sons and daughters and their parents and grandparents that we can identify and comprehend, with deep, embodied detail, the impact of war and the experience of refuge.

Moreover, as I have demonstrated, these relations illuminate resilience and survival not as triumph over disaster or neoliberal progress, but as a difficult coming-to-terms with loss. They occur through acts of storying, which test different forms of intimate, social, and historical presence. Refugee storying—in particular recovering, recounting, and recording—take loss and what remains as what might become possible. The consequence of such processes is not some

kind of overcoming of loss or reconciliation. Instead, creative reengagements with experience are at the heart of the notion of lived refuge I have attempted to articulate in this book. These *re-* acts—denoting a repetition or a turning back—bring into view the nonlinear and ongoing time of refuge. It is at this foundational level that we can perceive refugee resilience as life and story persisting in expanded time.

Conclusion

Refugeetude: When Does a Refugee Stop Being a Refugee?

I wasn't rich in America. I was a coolie just like anybody else. . . . Perhaps I returned not only because I wanted to see my parents for the last time, but also because in Vietnam, people could make me feel like I was somebody. They treated me like a foreigner who had money. Didn't everybody want to be somebody? I didn't have an education or any skills, but I had the hope that my children would do better than me. I was a boat person, a refugee, and I was still on the boat. Sometimes I wondered where I would be anchored.¹

—NHAN T. LE

Nhan T. Le, a former “boat person” who now lives in Manchester, New Hampshire, and works as a board tester for an electronics company, conceives of her life in the United States as a continuation of her asylum-seeking boat journey. Le’s impulse to understand her post-refugee life in this way illuminates for us the structural workings of refuge as it lingers and continues well beyond a moment of arrival. In identifying how others might misinterpret her return to Vietnam as triumphant—indeed, the very fact that she left the country and can make a return trip is, for many who stayed behind, evidence that she has “made it”—Le is forced to reflect on the reality of her racialized, working-class situation in the United States, leading her to make the powerful confession that, despite having attained a seemingly comfortable life in the world’s richest and, presumably, most powerful democracy, she is unanchored, is on the rickety boat, is *still a refugee*.

In this moment, the refugee past punctures the resident present. The privileges of national belonging—such as an American passport, money, and transnational mobility—ostensibly preclude Le from the purview of “refugee,” but her existence within a capitalist wage labor system—which she compares to indentureship (“coolie”)—as a consequence of American “refuge” leads her to *feel* like a refugee

and to conceive of her life in the United States as an extension of the refugee experience. The shock of returning to Vietnam reminds Le that she is still a refugee because she has not yet “settled” into American capitalist success. Refuge in the United States, Le’s narrative shows, is deeply structured by capitalism, which functions, in conjunction with other forces like race and gender, to fasten refugee subjects to a neoliberal economy that prolongs their search for asylum and settlement. The work of seeking refuge does not end when refugees are granted political asylum; what begins instead is a life of low-wage labor, with few opportunities for upward mobility, despite the prevalent discourses of “refugee exceptionalism,” whereby the refugee’s struggle and suffering are cast as provisional, with deliverance into freedom always just ahead on the horizon.²

Through refuge, Le and other refugees like her come to share in the common but incommensurate situations of socioeconomic marginalization that many racialized, (im)migrant, and undocumented individuals face in the United States. While refugees may seem exceptional, the protagonists of spectacular stories of success, there is nothing singular or unique about the ways in which the state attempts to assimilate them into the nation’s capitalist “melting pot.” Le’s incredible reveal, in its metaphorical turn and literal implications, is fascinating not only because it zeros in on the enduring quality of refugee experience, but also because it points to the fragility of refuge’s capitalist promise of a “good” life.

By way of concluding this book, I extend its insights on refuge to a consideration of refugee subjectivity and the possibilities of relational politics. While my analyses of gratitude, resentment, and resilience have been concerned primarily with describing the experiential structure of refuge, they have also been about refugee subjects and their multiple ways of being, of feeling and acting, thinking and inventing. In this conclusion, I more explicitly, and with the same theoretical impulse, reflect on the question of subjectivity—how its politicized and relational forms come into being, and what they might look like or make possible.

What emerges from experiences of refuge? If, as the book’s central argument claims, refuge has a long duration and does not end, then refugee subjectivity is similarly not fixed in position or time, but endures and transforms as ongoing consciousness and relationality. *Lived Refuge* began with a simple question about how refuge is experienced and then proceeded to describe its long and unfinished duration. In showing that refuge might productively be conceptualized through lived experiences, which are experiments in meaning making—to live, be, and relate—I offer an alternative framing to the dominant juridical-political definition. Continuing this exploration, I “end” with a cognate question about time and experience: When does a refugee stop being a refugee?

I take Nhan T. Le’s narrative as a point of departure to address and engage a host of larger concerns surrounding refugee temporality and subjectivity. Exemplified in Le’s narrative is a continued state of being and a mode of relationality that I call *refugeetude*. Broadly, the term describes a coming into consciousness of

the forces that produce and structure “refuge” and “refugee.” It names the forms of recognition, articulation, and relation that emerge from experiences of refuge(e), as well as attempts to redefine and live those experiences differently from what the legal framework allows for.³

My conceptualization builds upon Khatharya Um’s foundational term *refugitude*, which provides a rubric for framing refugee agential presence through memory, cultural, and activist work. In the aftermath of revolutionary violence, or more specifically genocide, the often difficult and contradictory process of recounting can enable “every refugee” to “participate in the shaping and memorializing of a collective history, and in so doing find comfort in the assurance of a shared identity.”⁴ While memory reveals the “psychic flux” of refugee-survivors, it also provides a path toward recovering humanity, subjective coherence, and the possibility of justice.⁵ As counter-memories and counter-narratives to the state’s enactment of biopolitics—the practices and discourses of violence that fracture the individual and the social—refugitude underscores the richness and “heroism” of the refugee’s historical, social, and political life.⁶

My discussion of *refugeetude* takes a cue from and develops Um’s concern with refugee consciousness and agency, and then extends that subjective ontology toward the possibility of relationality and relational politics. While *refugitude* is a recovery of refugee subjectivity, one that does not follow state definitions and timelines, *refugeetude* furthers this formation of subjective consciousness to explore the possibilities of affective connections with marginalized others. Although both *refugitude* and *refugeetude* zero in on questions of subjectivity, consciousness, and temporality, they do so through different methods and have different aims. That is, *refugitude* primarily frames the refugee-survivor’s fortitude, the “ability to retain one’s dignity and humanity in the moral abyss” and the capacity for hope via cultural and political enactments, while *refugeetude* seeks to expand the category “refugee” into a wider social body and a political orientation that might open up participation in the ongoing goal of relational decolonization.⁷ *Refugeetude* does this through its elaboration of the notions of refugee memory and politics that *refugitude* makes possible. That is, *refugeetude* is a relational term firmly situated in the political, one that allows us to contemplate the possibilities of refugeeness as a living and being with others.

By affixing the suffix *-tude* to the word *refugee*, I invoke past projects of political recuperation—namely *Négritude*, *coolitude*, and *migritude*—that take social experiences of marginalization and oppression and recast them as states of being or agency.⁸ *Refugeetude* marks a critical reorientation, an epistemological shift, in how we think about and understand the category “refugee.” Redirecting dominant perception of this category away from a temporary legal designation and a condition of social abjection and toward an enduring creative force, *refugeetude* opens up new ways of conceptualizing refugee subjects and the relationalities that extend beyond the parameters of refugeeness, generating connections to past, present, and future forms of displacement.

In this way, *refugeetude* takes up *refugitude's* focus on expanding the time and space of *refugeeness*. Um, via the Critical Refugee Studies Collective website, writes that the “conditions and consciousness of being a refugee . . . often outlast the expiration of the politico-legal status; that very expiration itself is a denial of the persisting challenges facing the refugee individual, families, and communities. Whereas the term ‘refugee’ has been made synonymous with needs, *refugitude* rescues it from reductionist pejorative connotations with equal attention to hope and futurity.”⁹ A rethinking of the refugee category challenges conventional understandings that confine *refugee* to a legal definition, a short time frame, and a pitiful existence.

Such explorations of consciousness point to how *refugee* might signify differently for the contemporary moment, one that has thus far failed to seriously engage refugees as more than a “problem.” Following Um, *refugeetude* clarifies how *refugeeness*—the psychic quality or condition of embodiment that results from seeking refuge and/or coming into contact with the bureaucratic processes laid out by legal instruments such as the UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and other (inter)national refugee policies—is difficult to jettison from the self. We can thus comprehend *refugeetude* not as an irregularity or disruption of political subjecthood—a “crisis” to be resolved—but as an experiential resource for developing significant and durable ways of being in, and moving through, the world.

Reading Nhan T. Le’s story as a particular expression of *refugeetude*, as well as an experience common to many “boat people” refugees of the Vietnam War, I explore interlinked questions about the temporality of experience, psychic formation, and political possibility. While my elucidation of *refugeetude* is anchored primarily in the historical context of the global wars in Southeast Asia, it seeks to engage with issues that are immediate and urgent to contemporary politics. To understand, in the concept of *refugeetude*, that *refugeeness* is not a cloak that can easily be shed with the coming of refuge, but might instead be a catalyst for thinking, feeling, and doing with others—for imagining justice—is politically crucial to the present moment of intensified production and criminalization of refugees.

Refugeetude turns away from readily available discourses of victimhood and commonplace knowledge of refugees to highlight how refugee subjects gain awareness, create meaning, and imagine futures. It signifies critical impulses to see, know, and act—ways of being political, even when politics varies in degree and form. This is where *refugeetude* expands on Um’s concept of *refugitude*. In addition to framing the possibility of refugee presence or survival, *refugeetude* explores the connections and actions that constellate refugees in a wider social and political existence. The concept is thus not simply a new name for an old condition or a humanist move to redeem an abject position. *Refugeetude*, as shown below, begins with but significantly moves beyond *refugee*. It is to look at *refugeeness* anew and ask how it can give rise to being and politics.

Le's story is a spark for my thinking, and I employ its details as apertures through which to offer suppositions on what refugeetude is, could be, or makes possible. I first establish that lived experiences of refuge(e) constitute a form of subjectivity, and propose that we expand the boundaries of refugeeness beyond the legal definition to include a range of times, places, and subjects. I then explore how refugee and refugeeness shift toward refugeetude, a means by which refugee subjects—people who have been shaped by the processes of violent displacement and border control—come to understand, articulate, and resist their conditions. As such, and most importantly, refugeetude is a politics, a kind of anti-assimilationist truth telling that Hannah Arendt invests in the vanguard figure of the refugee.

Le's insightful description of her life under capitalist refuge, and its links to other histories of racialized labor, particularly in the coolie, animates my discussion, but as the narrative reaches its signifying limit, I turn briefly to the story of another refugee from another, more contemporary war—Fadia Jouny, a refugee of the Syrian conflict—in order to think through intergroup solidarities that refugeetude might enable. Jouny's relations with Indigenous peoples highlight the difficult position that the displaced settler occupies within the context of ongoing settler colonialism. Her recognition that safe arrival in Canada is predicated on the genocide and continued dispossession of Indigenous peoples represents an acknowledgment of violent entanglements, as well as an inchoate relationality that has the potential, without guarantees, to reach for justice.¹⁰ The coming into consciousness that refugeetude pinpoints is crucially tied to relational politics—ways of knowing and being with others—that might emerge within and against a global refugee regime that continually produces, manages, and purports to solve the “problem” of forced migration.

BEING IN THE WORLD

When does a refugee stop being a refugee? This is a question about the duration of the refugee category, one that is deemed an anomaly in a world system organized around the nation-state and citizenship. The temporality of the refugee is conventionally short and finite, an aberration in the otherwise consistent experience of nationality and political rights. Such a condition is not sustainable in the long term, for without protection from a sovereign state, refugees are reduced to what Giorgio Agamben calls “naked” or “bare” life, marked for social and literal death.¹¹ In this framework, the refugee is not a viable political subject. “Unable” or “unwilling,” due to fear of persecution, to “avail himself of protection” by the “country of his nationality” and seeking to acquire protection elsewhere, the refugee occupies the space of in-between, an ontology of interstitiality, where “he” has a breathing body, but that body is without the political markers of the “human.”¹² This ontological precarity explains why refugees continue to be persistently represented and

understood as figures of lack—homeless specters, abject outsiders, identity-less mass, or wastes of globalization. Whether through a politics of humanitarian pity, a theoretical gesture of reclamation, or a point of political critique, refugees are reified as not quite human, and the condition of refugeeness is not quite tenable as a life to be lived.

At the end of the Second World War, institutions established to address the millions of displaced Europeans in a shifting postwar milieu regarded refugees as a momentary problem, to which a solution would be achieved in a matter of years. These institutions—the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration and the International Refugee Organization, which culminated in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)—were themselves meant to be provisional, dissolved when the final refugees were resettled. The contemporary prominence of the UNHCR as a regime of refugee management, and the record-breaking number of refugees in the world each year, is incontrovertible evidence that refugee displacement is a permanent, constitutive element of late-capitalist modernity, even though, of course, there have always been people fleeing violence and seeking asylum throughout recorded history, before the refugee category was codified in international law. This should mark for us that the UN model, with its legal implications, is not the only framework for understanding the experience of people seeking refuge; historically, it is relatively nascent.¹³

At the same time, many refugees experience the condition not as an exception, but as a rule of existence. As the prolonged nature of refugee situations in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries has shown us, the condition of refugee has been and continues to be a way of life for millions of people. In *The State of the World's Refugees: In Search of Solidarity*, published by the office of the UNHCR in 2012, the authors point out that two-thirds of the world's refugees currently live in protracted situations of “long-term exile.”¹⁴ Some have been refugees for two or three decades, and many have given birth to and raised children who know no way of life other than that inside refugee camps. This telling statistic demonstrates the material reality of refugee experiences and the limits of internationally agreed-upon “solutions” (refoulement, local integration, and resettlement) to forced migration—solutions that rely upon state-protected rights as political teleology.

The majority of refugees in the world experience their condition as refugees indefinitely, sometimes for an entire lifetime. There is thus nothing temporary or short about either the legal designation or the subjective experience of the refugee. Moreover, as Eric Tang argues, refuge is a “fiction” for many refugees who are resettled in neoliberal, late-capitalist Western nations—particularly in the poorest areas, targeted for social death—as they continue to exist in a “cycle of uprooting, displacement, and captivity.”¹⁵ This recognition that refugeeness is not a transitory experience and that refuge might remain elusive compels me to inquire into how those who have seemingly acquired asylum continue to relate to the category, and

how the experience of refuge(e) continues to stay with an individual, shaping consciousness, cultural identity, and forms of politics.

Below, I more thoroughly develop a sense of refugee subjectivity, one that coalesces beyond the temporal and spatial confines of the juridical-political definition of refuge. Le's assertion that she still *feels like* a refugee—that her life in the United States is not a break from, but is contiguous with, refugeeness—cannot be accounted for in any bureaucratic definition. That the condition of refugee might be long term or long lasting brings into sharp relief the epistemological gap between a legal definition and how it is experienced. Le's repeated attempts to escape Vietnam—to become a refugee—and her continued search for settlement in the United States demonstrate how the category of refugee is an immediate shaping force for subjects living within its capacious reach.

Working with and expanding on the ground that Um's discussion of refugitude opens up, the concept of refugeitude allows us to see that refugeeness is an experience, consciousness, and knowledge that lingers even when the legal designation is lifted, or one that might be present before the designation comes into effect.¹⁶ This quality of refugeeness is not temporally constrained to singular events such as displacement, asylum seeking, and resettlement; is not spatially tied to specific locations like the boat, the border, or the camp; and is not bound to the letter of the law. Instead, it is psychic and affective, enduring in time and space, adhering itself in various ways to the bodies, hearts, and minds of refugees, former refugees, and subsequent generations. Where refugeeness will flare up (as a flash in a moment of danger, to return to Walter Benjamin's metaphor), how and when it will declare its presence, cannot be known in advance.¹⁷

REFUGEE SUBJECTS

Le was a “refugee” before she arrived at a camp, before the UN interviewed her, before the United States granted her entry—or rather she *experienced* refugeeness well before any form of institutional or legal processing. A motivating factor for Le's refuge seeking was her immersion in a postwar social field in which friends and family were becoming refugees every day, as a result of the untenability of life at home. She existed in a world where daily reality forced one to contemplate finding refuge, to “look for a way out.”¹⁸ Political repression, economic insecurity, and social instability drove many to seek asylum elsewhere. It took Le and her husband three failed escape attempts before they successfully arrived at Pulau Bidong, a refugee camp in Malaysia, on their fourth try in 1987. After Vietnamese authorities arrested them during their third attempt, Le and her husband were sent to labor camps that resembled military barracks, where they were indoctrinated in communist ideologies, made to confess their “crimes,” and forced to work. Le would not see her husband again for two years, and one of her relatives would die in

the camp. Chased by the police while at sea on another escape attempt, Le had to hide, disguise herself, and move stealthily to evade capture, effectively becoming a fugitive—a figure that shares a long historical and ontological genealogy with the refugee.¹⁹

Ironically, persecution arising from a failed quest for refuge further exacerbated the refugee's urgent need to flee; the struggle to acquire refuge is itself central to refugee experience, and contributes to the making of the refugee subject. Le's experience of failed escape, capture, and imprisonment before she gains the refugee designation already configures her as a refugee. That is to say, Le was a refugee before she became a legal refugee, and she remains, as she tells us, a refugee after gaining legal asylum. The porous temporality of Le's experience shows how difficult it is to determine when refugeeness begins and when it ends. It is perhaps useful to consider the "before" and "after" of legal status as inextricably part of our conceptualization of the refugee, and to expand the experiential purview of refugeeness.

We might thus orient our thinking around the idea of "refugee subjects" as opposed to the more commonly used term *refugees*. Taking a cue from Le's particular experience but moving beyond it to contemplate a more general problematic, I muse here on the meanings of *refugee* that are possible but as yet unacceptable, even unthinkable, within the existing juridical-political framework, and, by extension, on the dominant social and cultural understandings. The idea of refugee subjects is a new one, something not yet here, and it is difficult to concretize, but it may yet surface at a future point in time. As I see it, refugee subjects can be a more capacious concept, encompassing those who are legal refugees; those who were at one point in time refugees; those who sought, or are seeking, refuge; those who have been persecuted and forcibly displaced from their homes but did not (or could not) acquire official refugee status; those who are culturally understood as refugees even though they were never legally refugees; and those who are at the threshold of resident and refugee, living with the imminent threat of being "refugeed" by the forces of war, capitalism, and globalization.

To think through refugeness in this way is not to flatten the term *refugee* into a catchall phrase for migrants living in a transnational, globalized world, in which it loses all specificity of meaning; rather, it attempts to reflect the complex and contingent nature of migration, whereby the realities of how and why people move exceed the classifications available to comprehend and manage them. The institutionalized term and legal category *refugee*, with its emphasis on legally recognized persecution and operating under the rubric of human rights, fails to name the diversity of the actual experiences of those ushered (or targeted for ushering) into the refugee framework.

Turning to refugee subjects is a strategic obfuscation of the distinctiveness of *refugee*. The goal is not to offer a better or replacement definition, but rather to highlight that what makes refugees distinct from other migrants under the eyes of

the law might also be what constrains them ideologically, and what is used to deny many people the right of movement and asylum. I do not wish to do away with the legal definition; I recognize its value for many stakeholders working to address refugee situations, and for the people seeking asylum themselves. I wish, however, to consider what is distinctive about *refugee* without automatically referring back to the parameters of the legal definition or juridical-political form. In doing this, what we might find is that it is difficult to distinguish between refugee subjects and other transnational migrants, diasporic individuals, or forcibly displaced groups.

Rather than making legal refugees less unique or obsolete, this definitional imprecision points to a dimension of deep arbitrariness in the system: some individuals escaping political turmoil and forms of violence are deemed refugees and others are just migrants, even when there is much experiential overlap. Destabilizing the category of refugee allows us to think differently about the temporality of refugee experiences, and about the different subjectivities or psychic states that might fall under or relate to them. While this expansion of *refugee* may not be acceptable to policymakers or immigration boards, tasked with positivistic, juridical determinations, it could aid cultural critics, artists, and activists in comprehending refugees more broadly, and perhaps differently, in the social, cultural, and political realms.

Through the blurring of boundaries between refugees and other migrants, the notion of refugee subjects attempts to circumvent the primacy of the UN refugee category, as an instrument of the international refugee regime, to determine who is or is not a “genuine” refugee. Of course, such determinations are of utmost and critical importance—they are matters of life and death for so many—but they do not provide the definitive, complete, or most illuminating picture of what a refugee is or could be. What the UN definition gives us is a very historically specific concept that is rooted in the geopolitics of Europe after the Second World War. Moreover, as scholars have pointed out, the definition’s narrow conception, and its fractioning into labels such as *asylum seeker*, *bogus refugees*, and *illegal migrant*, functions to contain migration from the Global South and to advance the interests of Western hegemonic states.²⁰ It is also the ideological grounding, and legal instrument, for the criminalization of refugees. To insist on thinking about refugees primarily through this lens of legal and state-sanctioned definitions, even though they have very real effects and consequences for people, is to limit the epistemological, political, and imaginative breadth of the refugee concept.

Refugee subjects allows for a discussion of refugees that is not circumscribed by legal status; what we know of as *refugees* can be more ontologically fluid, referring not only to subjects who have been accorded official refugee status by either national or international law, but also to a range of subjects affected by refugee-making processes and forces. In this way, for example, a descendant of refugees, who has never been displaced, can come to inherit refugeeeness through immersion in a social field, through stories, memories, and exchange.²¹ An individual packing

her suitcase in anticipation of fleeing her home because of encroaching violence enters the structure of feeling—that which has not yet solidified, but can be felt—of refugeeness.²² Or a former refugee who has become a citizen of a nation-state can yet retain traces—consciousness, knowledge, and feeling—of refugeeness, traces that are foundational to a present and future conception of the self.

To be clear, in claiming that a kind of refugeeness sticks with certain refugee bodies or communities, I do not wish to reiterate dominant discourses that mark individuals and groups as perpetually foreign to a national body. Nor is refugeeness an essence or quality intrinsic to refugee subjects. Rather, I suggest that refugeeness is a substantial experience that can be the basis for the formation and development of subjectivity, or “a certain affective attitude towards the world.”²³ Such serious considerations of subjectivity have not traditionally been accorded to refugees. While other categories of displacement, such as “exile,” have been imagined as viable, even honorable, identities, the category of refugee has not yet gained such status. Edward Said, for example, writes: “The word ‘refugee’ has become a political one, suggesting large herds of innocent and bewildered people requiring urgent international assistance, whereas ‘exile’ carries with it, I think, a touch of solitude and spirituality.”²⁴ Revealed in Said’s distinction between *refugee* and *exile* is a deeply entrenched and pervasive assumption about refugee lack—here a lack of the romantic quality of deep interiority that is a cornerstone of Western, liberal subjecthood. In viewing *refugee* in this way, Said reproduces a depoliticization of refugees by characterizing them as an undifferentiated mass of passive and pitiful objects requiring rescue. This understanding underlies much of popular, and objectifying, conceptions of refugees.

THE POLITICS OF REFUGEEETUDE

Refugeetude shifts critical focus to the issue of refugee subjectivity, taking refugees not as “objects of investigation” but as historical beings living in the midst of geopolitical forces. Yet refugeetude is not a transhistorical identity that can be ascribed to all refugee subjects. Liisa H. Malkki warns against the intellectual compulsion to make abstract and essentialize the diverse historical and political contexts of refugee migrations in order to produce a universal “refugee condition.” She writes that the “quest for *the* refugee experience . . . reflects a tendency, in many disciplines, to seize upon political or historical processes and then to inscribe aspects of these processes in the bodies and psyches of the people who are undergoing them. In this way, very mobile, unstable social phenomena may be imagined as essential ‘traits’ and ‘characteristics’ attached to, or emanating from, individual persons.”²⁵ Instead of a stable internal identity, refugeetude is a politics—it is not *in* a subject, even if it might eventually become experienced as internalized.

That is, refugeetude is not a preexisting quality or ideology that refugee subjects acquire after experiencing some specific event or upon meeting some set criteria

(from outside to inside). It is not an interiority that is possessed and sedimented as subjectivity, an inner characteristic that motivates thought and external action. Thus, it is not simply that refugee subjects produce *refugeetude* (from inside to outside), but that both refugee subjects and *refugeetude* come into being through contacts, attachments, and investments within everyday social and political interactions; they take form in encounters with power that might prescribe and delimit, as well as in moments of clarity and communion that might inspire and broaden.

Refugeetude is a coming into consciousness of the social, political, and historical forces that situate refugee subjects, and the acts that attempt to know, impact, and transcend this situation. It can be grasped, for example, when refugee subjects participate in hunger strikes and practice “self-mutilation”—the stitching together of lips, eyes, and ears—in order to make state violence visible and protest inhumane detention and deportation policies.²⁶ It can be perceived in a public art installation—a blue billboard with the text “refugees run the seas / cause we own our own votes”—inviting “viewers to imagine an incalculable future where justice for migrants exists.”²⁷ It is narrated in a short story about smuggled refugees who perish in the back of a truck, a fiction that blurs truth and reality.²⁸ It is visualized in a hip-hop music video in which refugees move freely, unobstructed by walls, fences, and borders.²⁹ It is present when a new refugee recognizes that settler-colonial violence toward Indigenous peoples undergirds her safe arrival. I provide these little glimmers of *refugeetude* here, in addition to a more sustained analysis of how it manifests for Nhan T. Le, in order to capture the wide-ranging breadth of *refugeetude*, and the various forms that a coming into consciousness may take.

Khatharya Um’s work is again instructive here. She notes that discourses of trauma elide how refugee-survivors “have lived with, transmitted, and even transformed their history of victimization into that of resilience and fortitude.”³⁰ As such, “the different and multiple registers of agency that refugees and refugee communities exhibit, including their political and philanthropic lives, are unnoted.”³¹ This explains why examinations of agency, via *refugitude*, are socially and politically crucial. However, while *refugeetude* can be taken to mean agency, it resonates more like a way of being (an *ethos*) that does not acquiesce to the entrenched global order structured by forms of racial, capital, and mobile inequality. An agential subject may be one actualization of *refugeetude*, but it is not the only or primary one. Rather, *refugeetude* describes a consciousness that may lead to a range of expressions. Consciousness here is not an unequivocal, categorical, or fully formed understanding or position. Instead, consciousness can range from an inchoate thought or recognition to forms of purposeful, physical protest. It is, at the core, to see one’s situation, and identify sources of violence and injustice that have shaped one’s (as well as others’) coming into being.

For Le, *refugeetude* takes shape most strikingly in an anticapitalist critique of American society.³² It is consciousness of the material life that the refugee is delivered into, and how capitalist refuge has structured her ability to live. In the late

twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, refuge in the Global North is deeply tied to economic calculations; in particular, the possibility of a “new beginning” for refugees is determined, in large part, by opportunities for work and capital accumulation. When Le tells us that she is “still on a boat,” is still a refugee in the United States, she specifically means that she must move from one unstable, low-paying job to another in a process of unsettlement marked by economic precarity, labor exploitation, and alienation. It is not simply that Le cannot find a “good” permanent job, but more importantly it is how this lack of material stability prevents her from gaining a sense of belonging, agency, and settledness. Refuge as freedom from oppression and persecution in Vietnam does not mean freedom to attain opportunity, equity, or justice in the United States.

Describing her first few years in the states, Le says, “This period was the most unproductive, and I changed jobs more than in my whole life in Vietnam.”³³ Arriving in the late 1980s, she entered a struggling economy that saw her skills—she was trained as a medical lab technician—as inconsequential and her labor as dispensable. After a brief stint at a garment factory, Le quickly realized her place as a worker: “I learned the first lesson in America: no company wanted to care for their workers. It was just a job.”³⁴ Such clarity about how capitalism functions is also precise understanding of how refuge creates the situation in which the refugee must struggle and compete in order to eke out a living in the free market. Le further explains: “We made the minimum wage, \$4.25 an hour. . . . I worked for a few days, then they laid me off. Then they called me back when they had orders. It wasn’t stable, and I didn’t like it because I felt that I had been used. Since they needed me to work for only a few days, when they ran out of things to do they sent me home. I was a call girl. I felt cheap and cheated.”³⁵ The feeling of being “cheap and cheated” is far from the expected emotion of gratitude that refuge is supposed to inspire in refugees. A condition of disposability awaits the recipient of humanitarian care, and this is what refuge actually looks like for people like Le. Here, an analysis of refuge in the United States is performed through a critique of its neoliberal economy’s dehumanizing practices. If refuge cannot be directly criticized for fear that the refugee seems ungrateful—the most despicable response to a received benefit—then it is forcefully articulated in the working and living conditions that the refugee faces: “Life in America is too stressful and isolated, although material goods are always plentiful.”³⁶

Importantly, Le invokes the word *coolie* to characterize the refugee’s struggle with labor in the United States, and in doing so constellates disparate historical experiences of Asian racialization in the Americas.³⁷ The word refers to a specific form of migrant laborer—namely Chinese and Indian—during the expansion of colonialism and capitalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and coolies are often understood as lowly workers who were “cast adrift from place, skill and purpose.”³⁸ Entering into forms of indenture, bondage, and indebtedness with employers, coolies became an underclass of cheap and dispensable

human resource for driving colonial economies. Although coolie labor was crucial to colonial capitalism and various nation-building projects in the “New World,” coolies were also perceived as threats and targeted for exclusion.³⁹

While Le is obviously not a coolie, her invocation of this classed and racialized figure from the past yokes together the categories of coolie and refugee in the present, connecting similar but incommensurate experiences of marginalization brought about by difficult migrations. Such connections make clear that the refugee is first and foremost another wage-laborer in the free market, a cog in the capitalist machine, as opposed to a unique recipient of humanitarian aid. To see the continuity between coolie and refugee is to see the forces of colonialism, capitalism, and racialization at play in displacing migrant subjects across time and space. The Vietnamese refugee who is a human remainder of neo-imperialist wars that the United States waged in Southeast Asia during the second half of the twentieth century shares a common trajectory, an experience of forced movement and economic exploitation, with workers in an earlier context of colonial governmentality. In expressing that refuge does not unfold according to the script of American exceptionalism, Le is not dismissing refuge as a valuable mechanism for those fleeing violence. She does, however, explain what humanitarian benevolence offers to some refugees, what the material consequence of refuge entails, and what freedom looks like on a concrete, everyday level. Le’s *refugeetude*—a making sense of her own experience—points to the failure of the neoliberal nation-state to provide “refugeed” individuals like her a form of livable refuge.

FALSE OPTIMISM

The politics of *refugeetude* challenges prevalent objectifications of refugees as abject figures who are “invisible, speechless, and, above all, nonpolitical.”⁴⁰ It is the counterpart to what Mimi Thi Nguyen calls the “refugee condition,” a “discursive, medico-judicial disposition” of “arrested affect or potentiality.”⁴¹ Such a condition names the pathological incapacity and anachronistic temporality of refugees, marking their need for rehabilitation and biopolitical governmentality. If *refugeeness* is often understood as an aberrant condition, then *refugeetude* is a condition of possibility, a method of knowing and affecting the world that holds on to the critical potential of *refugeeness*. As such, there is no natural alignment between refugees and *refugeetude*. The experience of asylum seeking and refuge does not automatically transform into *refugeetude*; it is not a politics that can be ascribed to any and all refugees. Indeed, many refugee subjects desire assimilation, and they endeavor to fold themselves into the fabric of citizenship and civil society. Yet to covet the privileges and rights associated with national protection when one’s life has been upturned, when one faces danger and death, when one languishes in camps, is not a yearning to be dismissed as uncritical or politically naive. To want

to leave a refugee past behind is not always a betrayal. Such orientations, however, might be better described as a politics of citizenship.

Refugeetude, on the other hand, does not subscribe to what Hannah Arendt calls a “false” or “insane” optimism, in which refugees hold out hope for total assimilation into a national body politic. In a contemporary context, Lauren Berlant might describe this attachment to national belonging—especially amid the resurgence of fascism and nationalist populism—as cruelly optimistic.⁴² Writing about Jewish refugees of the Second World War, Arendt explains that to assimilate, through recourse to extreme forms of patriotism, is to “adjust in principle to everything and everybody,” and in the process to lose a sense of self.⁴³ She writes: “A man who wants to lose his self discovers, indeed, the possibilities of human existence, which are infinite, as infinite as is creation. But the recovering of a new personality is as difficult—and as hopeless—as a new creation of the world. . . . We don’t succeed and we can’t succeed; under the cover of our ‘optimism’ you can easily detect the hopeless sadness of assimilationists.”⁴⁴ For Arendt, the work of shedding history and identity—here refugeeness and Jewishness—in order to assume nationality is ultimately a futile aspiration, for the refugee comes up against a system that has the power to reverse the “recovering” of self, to repeat the search for belonging and repeal nationality. This does not mean that self-reinvention is not possible, but that such acts are subject to the inevitable capriciousness and contingencies of history and, importantly, the will of the state, as contemporary practices of denaturalization and deportation make clear.

This leads Arendt to make her often-quoted claim that “those few refugees who insist upon telling the truth, even to the point of ‘indecent,’ get in exchange for their unpopularity one priceless advantage: history is no longer a closed book to them and politics is no longer the privilege of the Gentiles. . . . Refugees driven from country to country represent the vanguard of their peoples—if they keep their identity.”⁴⁵ The conditional “if they keep their identity” is key to the possibilities of history and politics being available to refugees, to their potential to be at the forefront of forging new formations of political existence and community.⁴⁶ The “keeping of identity” she refers to is not so much a holding on to an immutable identity, but rather a refusal to exchange the past for acceptance into a “topsy-turvy world” that allows “its weakest member to be excluded and persecuted.” To keep an identity is to embrace the role of the pariah, whose presence throws into sharp relief the crises that mark our categories of political organization.⁴⁷

Le’s narrative details how difficult it is to “recover the self” (assimilate) or to “keep identity” (resist) in the wake of forced migration, when refuge is still yet to come—if it ever will. After a return trip to Vietnam, Le suffers a crisis of both conscience and identity, unable to reconcile who she has become with who her kin are, who she used to be, and who she could have been. It is as if her new “American” self—the self of refuge—crumbles when confronted with a past life, one that is

also someone else's present. Le poignantly reflects that "my heart was lost. My heart was not the only thing that was lost. I also lost myself somewhere between Vietnam and America."⁴⁸ This "somewhere between" is the passage, both physical and psychic, that the refugee is in the midst of navigating, that is not yet over and done with. A sense of being "lost" means that she cannot settle, but is somehow still caught in the search for a place to arrive and call home. Recounting the birth of her second child, Le ends her narrative with these lines: "I asked myself, where is my boy coming from and where is he going? Home, I guess. But is it really his or is it really mine? Where is home?"⁴⁹

This simple and powerful question—where is home?—unravels the force of false optimism, revealing that there is ultimately no home in the national community of the United States, which still views refugees as undesirable or relegates them to the working poor. Thus, there is little false optimism in Le's story, and no blind faith in the nation's interest or ability to uplift the refugee; it is clear that absorption into nationality has no guarantees. The absence of false optimism does not mean that the refugee is hopeless, however. Indeed, she wants more for herself, and particularly for her children to "do better than me."⁵⁰ What she gives us instead is "indecent," the hard truths that underlie the humanitarian virtue of refuge—the feeling and material condition of not being at home and of socioeconomic and affective precarity. A refugee story like Le's, which is not one of successful integration and gratefulness toward the nation-state, is indecent because it is incongruent with discourses of American rescue and benevolence, liberalism, and the American Dream. While it may be tempting to interpret Le's story as one of struggle and hardship, circling back to notions of refugee pity, it must be emphasized that Le's narration displays a woman profoundly aware of her everyday life and the social, political, and historical forces that shape it. In this way, history and politics, as Arendt claims, are truly open to this ordinary individual.

BEING WITH OTHERS

Building on Arendt's work, we can say that refugeetude is thinking, feeling, and acting that might be described as "indecent" within the prevailing social, cultural, and political milieu. Indecency is not necessarily oppositional, radical, or controversial; more often it is surprising, unexpected, and revealing—what Arendt calls "truth." An inappropriateness to or incongruence with an established epistemological and sociopolitical framework, organized around the naturalization of nation-state, border, and displacement, marks refugeetude's "unpopularity." As Arendt remarks, the keeping of refugeeness affords the refugee a more expansive vision of history and politics. Such a vision means that refugee subjects can begin to make crucial linkages between themselves and others who have undergone and are undergoing similar experiences within the "national order of things," including migrant, undocumented, racialized, and Indigenous groups.

This affective “mapping”—tracing the historicity or sociality of seemingly singular refugee experiences—with marginalized others is one of the advantages that Arendt gestures toward.⁵¹ In this way, the world opens up for refugee subjects, for they are no longer just individual pariahs or outsiders, but people who could come to share in the collective struggle of those deemed “problems” for the nation-state and the international community to contain and manage. Vijay Prashad writes of a kind of assimilation different from the nationalistic type, a “horizontal assimilation engineered by migrants as they smile at each other, knowing quite well what is carried on each other’s backs.”⁵² Horizontal assimilation stands in contrast to the false optimism of vertical assimilation, in that it looks to other modalities of connection, affiliation, and commitment. Refugeetude could become shared intimacies between refugee subjects, and cultivated affinities with others. In its most potent form, refugeetude is refugee subjects recognizing who they are, how they have come to be, and who they might become with others.

Le’s story is, of course, incomplete. What refuge will look like in the future for her and her family is yet to be determined. Her candid reflections, however, constellate her, a refugee of the Vietnam War, relationally to coolies of the past and racialized migrants and workers of the present. These relations are not fully formed or figured, but they hold incipient potential for horizontal assimilations as an alternative to false optimism. They demonstrate different ways of existing within, but not solely with and of, the nation-state. This form of cross-group, inter-historical relationality is also articulated by another refugee from another, more contemporary, war in which U.S. neo-imperial intervention played a hand in producing displacement—the war in Syria. Fadia Jouny, a Syrian refugee who recently arrived in Canada, declares solidarity with Indigenous peoples who have been displaced and dispossessed by the Canadian nation-state. Although Le and Jouny are separated in time and space by different wars, different migrations, and arrivals in different settler-colonial states, their voicing of refugeetude shares a consciousness of the state violence that attends refuge, as well as an attunement to connections with those “others” affected by such violence.

In a *National Observer* article published in March 2017, Fadia Jouny expresses her desire to learn more about the history of First Nations peoples.⁵³ She articulates the bind whereby refugees who find safe haven in settler-colonial states like Canada come to occupy stolen Indigenous territory: “I feel very bad. We are on their land.”⁵⁴ Eryn Lê Espiritu Gandhi calls this the “refugee settler condition,” the “vexed positionality of refugee subjects whose citizenship in a settler colonial state is predicated upon the unjust dispossession of an Indigenous population.”⁵⁵ Yet this condition might also be the site of incipient solidarities. Gandhi states, “Articulated together, refugee modalities of statelessness and Indigenous epistemologies . . . can unsettle settler colonial state violence, pointing us toward more pluralized forms of collective belonging.”⁵⁶

Jouny's statement is thus also the beginning of a different kind of recognition, one in which the Canadian state is not the only (willing or unwilling) "host" to refugees, or the primary point of reference. In refuge, refugees come into contact with many others, including Indigenous communities, who are the original inhabitants and protectors of the land upon which political asylum is based. Indeed, contact does not automatically produce solidarity; tensions, antagonism, and conflict can and do arise, as different groups are pitted against one another for a place in the Canadian multicultural mosaic.⁵⁷ But for those like Jouny, refuge means reckoning with the fact that political protection and safety in a settler state like Canada is predicated on more than a century of ongoing genocide and dispossession of Indigenous peoples. This initiates a more complicated understanding of how to be in refuge, and how to be with others who may seem quite disconnected and removed from one's own experience.

The violent histories of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, fought over territory, resources, religion, race, and ideology, tell us that the legal protection—and invitation into a life of rights—that juridical-political refuge offers has an insidious underbelly. Like all liberal democratic privileges or "rights" in an interconnected, globalized capitalist system, refuge is scaffolded by layers of violence toward others.⁵⁸ That is, the "house" of refuge is built on the stilts of violence. The refugee's physical presence in Canada (and her asylum claim, which reaffirms Canadian political sovereignty), renders her a complicit beneficiary in a system that operates on settler-colonial violence.

Yet how do we move forward from this indisputable fact? What other relations between refugees and Indigenous peoples are possible? Given that the refugee's arrival in settler states "transits" through (as Jodi A. Byrd would say) imperial genocide of Indigenous peoples, *how* she arrives matters in this calculus, in being positioned between the settler and the native.⁵⁹ The force of violence that has brought the refugee to Canada could be the very thing that prompts her to see the forces of violence—where such violence is historically and culturally erased and forgotten—that have been and continue to be enacted on others, and to reorient herself relationally to those whom the state has targeted for removal and extermination.

Jouny continues: "I feel I am the same as them, in some way. . . . The First Nations were removed from their land. I know what that is like."⁶⁰ While this comparison may seem simplistic at first, it gestures to the complex ways in which migrant and Indigenous populations are displaced and dispossessed by the logics of empire and capital, if not in the same way or to the same degree. According to Sunera Thobani, the nation-state requires Indigenous and migrant "others" in order to exalt itself, which should make clear that their fates are inextricably intertwined within settler formations.⁶¹ This triangulation of Indigenous and migrant subjects with white "nationals" is a form of racial management that seeks to separate and

divide their interests, obscuring the most powerful common interest of all—the dismantling of and freedom from the settler-colonial state.

Jouny’s statement begs the question: If refugees and Indigenous groups share a history of displacement, then what forces have played a role in these displacements, and how do these pasts of uprooting come to bind them in the present moment? Furthermore, how does what Harsha Walia describes as “border imperialism”—the uprooting of people through war, capitalism, and neo-imperialism in developing countries, and the simultaneous tightening of Western borders—relate to settler colonialism, the project of facilitating the “dispossession of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority”?⁶² How might knowing what it is like to be removed from one’s home, however different in context and magnitude, be the beginning of an inchoate solidarity between refugees and Indigenous peoples?⁶³

In his examination of the intersection between indigeneity and diaspora, Daniel Coleman writes that the two cultural formations share “in common the experiences of displacement from a homeland and marginalization in the metropolitan settler state.”⁶⁴ Yet they have tended to “set very different, even opposed, political and social objectives.”⁶⁵ If, as Audra Simpson argues, Indigenous enactments of sovereignty begin with refusals of settler citizenship and the gifts of the state, then refugees are at the opposite end, coveting the “gift” of political recognition in order to survive.⁶⁶ The desire for state recognition seemingly distances refugees from Indigenous groups and their political aims. While this problem seems irreconcilable, Jouny’s comments demonstrate to us that refuge in Canada also facilitates the refugee’s attunement to Indigenous histories, opening her eyes to the continuing struggles of Indigenous peoples for self-determination: “Since arriving in Canada in 2015, Jouny has been busy learning not just the English language, but also about Canadian culture, and Indigenous colonization, [and] missing and murdered Indigenous women.”⁶⁷ She has also begun the work of raising awareness among youth groups in her own community.

In this work of learning, the possibility of some other desire, some other attachment, and some other way of relating can be felt, if not formalized or instituted. What this does for the larger project of decolonization, how it effects social action and social change, is still to be determined, but the refugee gains a deeper sense of the violence that undergirds her precious refuge, a more complex understanding of what it means to find “safe haven” in a settler state, and the work that might be involved in meaningful reconciliation.

Another refugee subject, Ali Abukar, who works for a resettlement organization in Saskatoon, writes that “reconciliation will only work if we acknowledge the truth of the past, build meaningful relationships, and stand with one another against injustices and inequities.”⁶⁸ He notes that “being aware of my privileges” as a newcomer to Canada “makes me question the ongoing inequities and injustices perpetrated against our Indigenous sisters and brothers.”⁶⁹ Serving new immigrants and refugees, then, means that “bridges” are built between them and

Indigenous communities through engagement and collaboration, so that Canada's colonial history is not covered over as it "welcomes" refugees into its fold.

In the summer of 2018, for example, the Kurdish Initiative for Refugees (KIFR) summer program visited the Brokenhead Ojibway Nation in an effort for not only cultural exchange but education. Nour Ali, founder of KIFR, says, "We lost our land also, so it is very important to know, respect and feel their struggles and what happened with the indigenous people."⁷⁰ Indigenous leaders, too, have reached out and stood in solidarity with refugees. In a 2018 open letter to President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau regarding the "immigrant and refugee children being torn from their families and jailed south of the medicine line," the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs draws a connection between the current situation and their past: "For many of us, this is reminiscent of U.S. and Canadian policies of Indian Residential School and Indian Boarding Schools, where Indigenous children were kidnapped and forcibly separated from their families and communities."⁷¹

The making of these historical linkages—of loss of (home)land, family separation, and incarceration—identifies shared experiential commonalities that might be the basis for future coalitions. While their function and power remain largely discursive and symbolic at present, such work has the potential to plant the seeds for what Leanne Betasamosake Simpson calls "constellations of co-resistance," which is "working together toward a radical alternative present based on deep reciprocity and the gorgeous generative refusal of colonial recognition."⁷² The kind of decolonial movement building that Simpson imagines has its foundations in allyship, in people and communities on "Turtle Island and beyond that are struggling in their own localities against these same forces, building movements that contain the alternatives."⁷³ Kim TallBear has articulated these alliances as "caretaking relations" that resist the "American Dreaming" of the progressive, extractive, and developmental narratives of settler-colonial states.⁷⁴ Rejecting such dreams of a more inclusive or liberal state requires kin making, or "making people into familiars in order to relate."⁷⁵ Doing so might "inspire change, new ways of organizing and standing together in the face of state violence against both humans and the land."⁷⁶ Refugeetude can be the politics through which refugee subjects participate in these forms of relationalities in the settler state. To "be with" is to be entangled in plurality and coexistence, to hold on to the many tensions that bind refugee and indigeneity in likeness and incommensurability.⁷⁷ It is a continual and constant form of awareness, critique, and being that develops with an impetus to understand the threads that link past, present, and future forms of displacement.

. . .

Like Jouny's recognition of the colonial displacement of Indigenous peoples that makes possible her safe protection in Canada, Nhan T. Le's story exposes the capitalist exploitation behind the "good" of refuge in the United States. Understood as

a coveted gift of rights and political subjecthood for stateless individuals, refuge is also employed by the state to legitimize its nationalist projects of violence—of colonial and capitalist accumulation—at home and abroad. This is the insidious underbelly of refuge in the Global North. For a refugee subject like Le, refugeetude is an understanding that the exalted success stories of “good” refugees—almost always coded through upward mobility and economic success—are indeed exceptional. Refugee exceptionality, as scholars of the Vietnam War diaspora have pointed out, can be produced, circulated, and appropriated to inscribe revisionist histories and justify past and future foreign wars.⁷⁸ Refugeetude, then, manifests as an understanding of how refuge engenders ongoing, complicated entanglements with the state and its mechanism, as opposed to being a final destination or an end to rightlessness; it intertwines safety and violence, hope and limitation, past, present, and future.

But refuge also places refugee subjects in proximity to millions of racialized, migrant, and Indigenous groups, groups that have their own complicated histories and relationships to the nation-state. One way that a refugee does not cease being a refugee is through the consciousness of her relatedness (although, of course, there may be disavowals and rejections) with these other “others,” and the kinds of connections and coalitional politics that are possible. On World Refugee Day 2020, in the midst of the COVID-19 global pandemic and the worldwide protests in the wake of George Floyd’s brutal murder at the hands of the Minneapolis police, the Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC), a civil rights advocacy organization, used the hashtag #RefugeesForBlackLives as a declaration of commitment and solidarity, acknowledging that “our lives are interconnected.”⁷⁹ In an earlier statement, Quyen Dinh, the executive director of SEARAC, wrote: “As refugees and descendents [*sic*] of refugees, as survivors of war and genocide, our communities also know the devastating impacts of police force. It is incumbent on us as Southeast Asian Americans to show up for the Black community.”⁸⁰ Dinh mobilizes the experiences of being a refugee—of *knowing* the violence that the state enacts—to “show up” or stand with people whose lives are being threatened and assaulted by white supremacy. Such a move represents the beginning of subjective consciousness developing into coalition building—the politics of refugeetude. It shows how the the conventionally abject position of refugee might signify not just a desire for legal recognition, but also a political yearning for forms of forthcoming justice. Refugeetude is sensing, feeling, thinking, knowing, and doing that finds a way to be *human* within a world order that often fails to be humane to the millions of people moving through the world in search of refuge.

NOTES

PREFACE

1. Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1969), 84.
2. Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 83.
3. See Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings, *Walter Benjamin: A Critical Life* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014).
4. See Esther Leslie, "Walter Benjamin: The Refugee and Migrant," *Verso Books*, July 15, 2019, <https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/2283-walter-benjamin-the-refugee-and-migrant>.
5. Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1969), 257–58.
6. On our "social vulnerability," see Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004).
7. See Walter Benjamin, "Experience," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, vol. 1, 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 3–4; Walter Benjamin, "Experience and Poverty," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings, vol. 2, part 2: 1931–1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, trans. Rodney Livingston and others (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 731–36.
8. Benjamin, "Experience and Poverty," 732.
9. Raymond Williams, "Experience," in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 86.
10. Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 108, 83.
11. See Peter Showler, *Refugee Sandwich: Stories of Exile and Asylum* (Montreal: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2006); L. Berg and J. Millbank, "Constructing the Personal

Narrative of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Asylum Claimants,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 22, no. 2 (2009): 195–223.

12. See Vinh Nguyen, “Me-search, Hauntings, and Critical Distance,” *Life Writing* 12, no. 4 (2015): 467–77; Vinh Nguyen, “The Migrant Rain,” *Brick, A Literary Journal* 107 (2021): 11–18.

13. For an account of Benjamin’s border crossing and his final days, see Lisa Fittko, “The Story of Old Benjamin,” in *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 946–54.

INTRODUCTION: EXPERIENCE OF REFUGE

1. Liisa H. Malkki, “Refugees and Exile: From ‘Refuge Studies’ to the National Order of Things,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 495–523.

2. Ranjana Khanna, “On Asylum and Genealogy,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 104, no. 2 (2005): 371–80.

3. See Emma Haddad, *The Refugee in International Society: Between Sovereigns* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

4. See Foucault’s articulation of biopolitics as a form of modern governmentality, to “make live and let die.” See Michel Foucault, “Lecture 11, 17 March 1976,” in “*Society Must Be Defended*”: *Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1956* (New York: Picador Press, 2003), 239–64.

5. Nevzat Soguk, *States and Strangers: Refugees and Displacements of Statecraft* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999); Yến Lê Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014).

6. Alia Al-Saji argues that this “flow” of time is not progressive or linear, but one in which the past continues to affectively bear on the present. See Alia Al-Saji, “Durée,” in *Fifty Concepts for a Critical Phenomenology*, ed. Gail Weiss, Ann V. Murphy, and Gayle Salamon (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2019), 99–106. See also Henri Bergson, *Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2001); Watts Cunningham, “Bergson’s Conception of Duration,” *The Philosophical Review* 23, no. 5 (1914): 525–39.

7. Raymond Williams, “Empirical,” in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 75.

8. On the issue of the refugee’s creativity, see the Critical Refugee Studies Collective’s collaborative book, where they advocate for “*allowing the worlds of refugees to be evident, on their own terms, as much as possible*” (20). Yến Lê Espiritu, Lan Duong, Ma Vang, et al., *Departures: An Introduction to Critical Refugee Studies* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022).

9. lê thi diem thúy, *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), 8.

10. Discourses of state governance and securitization have long utilized the metaphor of the “household” and “home.” William Walters argues that “if modern political economy echoes the project of government in the image of the household, domopolitics refers to the government of state (but, crucially, other political spaces as well) as a *home*” (241). See William Walters, “Secure Borders, Safe Haven, Domopolitics,” *Citizenship Studies* 8, no. 3 (2004): 237–60.

11. Didier Fassin writes that refuge is “often represented, in reference to its founding text [the 1951 Geneva Convention], as an immutable reality” (40). See Didier Fassin, “The Precarious Truth of Asylum,” *Public Culture* 25, no. 1 (2013): 39–63.

12. *lê, Gangster*, 8.

13. *lê, Gangster*, 8.

14. *lê, Gangster*, 117.

15. Ma Vang, *History on the Run: Secrecy, Fugitivity, and Hmong Refugee Epistemologies*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 14.

16. Avery Gordon calls haunting “the living effects, seething and lingering, of what seems over and done with” (195). See *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

17. Of course, emphasis on other affective experiences—loss, happiness, trauma, boredom, or contentment, for example—on or different interpretations of the same experiences analyzed here may yield an entirely different view or structure of refuge. Likewise, another history of refugee movement or archive of texts might contradict every tenet of this framework. Such is the peril of thinking.

18. For a discussion of structure, see William H. Swell Jr., “A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation,” *American Journal of Sociology* 98, no. 1 (1992): 1–29.

19. For a good overview of Williams’s concept, see Sean Matthews, “Change and Theory in Raymond Williams’s Structure of Feeling,” *Pretexts: Literary and Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (2001): 179–94.

20. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 128.

21. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 131.

22. Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (Middlesex, UK: Penguin, 1965), 64.

23. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 132.

24. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 132.

25. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 132.

26. See Raymond Williams, “Experience,” in *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 83–86.

27. Williams, “Experience,” 84.

28. See Williams, “Experience”; Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

29. See Avital Ronell, *The Test Drive* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

30. Anthony Barnett, “Raymond Williams and Marxism: A Rejoinder to Terry Eagleton,” *New Left Review* 99 (1976): 62.

31. Terry Eagleton, in his trenchant critique of Williams, writes that it is “this insistence on experience, this passionate premium placed upon the ‘lived,’ which provides one of the centrally unifying themes of Williams’s *oeuvre*—which supplies at once the formidable power and drastic limitation of his work” (22). See Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: Verso, 1976).

32. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 133–34.

33. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 128.

34. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 132.

35. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962); Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

36. See M. Wheeler, "Martin Heidegger," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, October 12, 2011, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heidegger/>.

37. Marita Eastmond, "Stories as Lived Experience: Narratives in Forced Migration Research," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 20, no. 2 (2007): 249.

38. See Timothy O'Leary, *Foucault and Fiction: The Experience Book* (London: Continuum, 2009).

39. For an analysis of how "refugee writing" provides insight into sociohistorical contexts, see Hadji Bakara, "Time, Sovereignty, and Refugee Writing," *PMLA* 137, no. 3 (2022): 442–57.

40. Christopher Lee, *The Semblance of Identity: Aesthetic Mediation in Asian American Literature* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), 18.

41. Kandice Chuh, *The Difference Aesthetics Makes: On the Humanities "After Man"* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), 3.

42. Timothy K. August, *The Refugee Aesthetic: Reimagining Southeast Asian America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2021), 124.

43. On denationalization and banishment as the production of social and literal death, see Audrey Macklin, "Kick-Off Contribution," in *The Return of Banishment: Do the New Denationalization Policies Weaken Citizenship?*, ed. Audrey Macklin and Rainer Bauböck, 1–7 (Fiesole, Italy: European University Institute, 2015).

44. Here, inspired by Williams, I take, effectively, a critical "keyword" approach to tracing the concept of refuge.

45. For overviews of refuge/asylum, see Prakash S. Sinha, *Asylum and International Law* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971); Matthew J. Gibney, *The Ethics and Politics of Asylum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

46. This is still the case, even when individual nation-states contract out their sovereignty to international organizations, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees or the International Organization for Migration, to run their refugee determination process.

47. See United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Figures at a Glance," n.d., <https://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>.

48. See Giorgio Agamben, "We Refugees," trans. Michael Rocke, *Symposium* 49, no. 2 (1995): 114–19.

49. This is in the fundamental principle of non-*refoulement* in Article 33, one of the few binding articles that contracting states cannot make reservations for.

50. Matthew E. Price, *Rethinking Asylum: History, Purpose, and Limits* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 36.

51. Asylum is, of course, not just a principle in the "Western tradition." See, for example, Ghassan Maàrouf Arnaout, *Asylum in the Arab-Islamic Tradition* (Geneva: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, International Institute of Humanitarian Law, 1987).

52. The asylum seeker was required to stay within the city walls. Vengeance could be meted out, without repercussion, if he or she were found outside the walls. Moshe Greenberg argues that there is a punitive character to refuge, in that the slayer is detained or kept in captivity. See Moshe Greenberg, "The Biblical Conception of Asylum," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 78, no. 2 (1959): 125–32.

53. Price, *Rethinking Asylum*, 32.
54. For an overview discussion of sanctuary, see Philip Marfleet, "Understanding 'Sanctuary': Faith and Traditions of Asylum," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 24, no. 3 (2011): 440–55; Linda Rabben, *Sanctuary and Asylum: A Social and Political History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016).
55. See Karl Shoemaker, "Sanctuary for Crime in the Early Common Law," in *Sanctuary Practices in International Perspectives*, ed. Randy K. Lippert and Sean Rehaag (New York: Routledge, 2013), 15–27.
56. See Shannon McSheffrey, *Seeking Sanctuary: Crime, Mercy, and Politics in English Courts, 1400–1550* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
57. See Liza Schuster, "Asylum and the Lessons of History," *Race & Class* 44, no. 2 (2002): 40–56.
58. See Atle Grahl-Madsen, "The League of Nations and the Refugees," in *The League of Nations in Retrospect*, ed. Arnold Angenendt (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 358–68; Claudena Skran, *Refugees in Inter-War Europe: The Emergence of a Regime* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
59. This argument is formed in response to Ranjana Khanna's claim that asylum is "a right of the state, and not of an individual. It is the right of the sovereign to grant protection under the rule of law, or to deny it" ("On Asylum and Genealogy," 373). Pointing to the wording of Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Khanna continues: "There is no human right to asylum as such. There is only the right to seek asylum and to enjoy it if it is granted" (374).
60. Hannah Arendt, "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man," in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland, OH: Meridian Books, 1958), 297.
61. See, for example, David Moffette and Jennifer Ridgley, "Sanctuary City Organizing in Canada: From Hospitality to Solidarity," *Migration and Society* 1, no. 1 (2018): 147–55; Craig Fortier, "No One Is Illegal: Movements and Anti-colonial Struggles from within the Nation-State," in *Producing and Negotiating Non-citizenship: Precarious Legal Status in Canada*, ed. Luin Goldring and Patricia Landolt (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 274–90; A. Naomi Paik, "Abolitionist Futures and the US Sanctuary Movement," *Race & Class* 59, no. 2 (2017): 3–25; Anne McNevin, "Political Belonging in a Neoliberal Era: The Struggle of the Sans-Papiers," *Citizenship Studies* 10, no. 2 (2006): 135–51.
62. Shauna Labman argues that resettlement is a policy solution that is not legally binding. In its fraught and uneven application by individual states, it has also been "a tool of protection and the expression of international burden sharing" (2). See Shauna Labman, *Crossing Law's Border: Canada's Refugee Resettlement Program* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2019).
63. See Fassin, "The Precarious Truth of Asylum."
64. See Espiritu, *Body Counts*; Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); Eric Tang, *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the NYC Hyperghetto* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015); Eryn Lê Espiritu Gandhi, *Archipelago of Resettlement: Vietnamese Refugee Settlers and Decolonization across Guam and Israel-Palestine* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022).
65. See Khatharya Um, "The 'Vietnam War': What's in a Name?," *Amerasia Journal* 31, no. 2 (2005): 134–39.

66. W. Courtland Robinson, *Terms of Refuge: The Indochinese Exodus and the International Response* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 82.

67. For a firsthand account of these postwar events, see Ngoc Ngan Nguyễn, *The Will of Heaven: A Story of One Vietnamese and the End of His World* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1982).

68. Of course, human displacement was not confined to the end of the war but occurred also during its fighting, when many people were internally displaced. For example, the Geneva Convention that divided Vietnam created the strategic hamlet program, which also uprooted many villagers from their ancestral lands.

69. Gil Loescher and John A. Scanlan, *Calculated Kindness: Refugees and America's Half Open Door, 1945 to the Present* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), xvii.

70. Schulzinger writes: "The U.S. government pressed the United Nations to characterize the more than seventy thousand Vietnamese living in the United States as refugees. In 1975 the United States contributed \$8.6 million to the \$12.4 million the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) requested to assist Thailand in accommodating the fleeing Vietnamese. The United States promised to provide more, if others followed suit. In return the United States insisted that the Vietnamese be classified as refugees facing persecution at home rather than displaced persons who might be expected to return" (114). Robert D. Schulzinger, *A Time for Peace: The Legacy of the Vietnam War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

71. Loescher and Scanlan, *Calculated Kindness*, 109.

72. For historical accounts of the Vietnam War, see Marilyn Young, *The Vietnam Wars 1945–1990* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991); Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2013); James H. Willbanks, *Abandoning Vietnam: How America Left and South Vietnam Lost Its War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004).

73. I borrow the phrasing "endings that are not over" from Yến Lê Espiritu, "Thirty Years AfterWARD: The Endings That Are Not Over," *Amerasia Journal* 31, no. 2 (2005): xiii–xxiii.

74. Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 4.

75. Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, *War, Genocide, Justice: Cambodian American Memory Work* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 118.

76. Khatharya Um, *From the Land of Shadows: War, Revolution, and the Making of the Cambodian Diaspora* (New York: NYU Press, 2015), 199.

77. See Siobhan Kattago, "Introduction: Memory Studies and its Companions," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Memory Studies*, ed. Siobhan Kattago (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2015).

78. See Espiritu, *Body Counts*; Schlund-Vials, *War, Genocide, Justice*; Um, *From the Land of Shadows*; Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*; Long T. Bui, *Returns of War: South Vietnam and the Price of Refugee Memory* (New York: NYU Press, 2018).

79. See Kandice Chuh, *Imagine Otherwise: On Asian American Critique* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

80. I follow Ann Cvetkovich in understanding "affect" in a generic sense, "as a category that encompasses affect, emotion, and feeling, and that includes impulses, desires, and feelings that get historically constructed in a range of ways (whether as distinct specific emotions or as a generic category often contrasted with reason)" (4). Ann Cvetkovich, *Depression: A Public Feeling* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

81. Um, *From the Land of Shadows*, 16.

82. Um, *From the Land of Shadows*, 16.
83. The concept of refugitude was first developed in Um's *From the Land of Shadows*. On page 213, Um writes: "To her [author's mother], it marked the beginning of our exile, the candlesticks symbolizing the thoroughness of our dispossession and severance of all links to our past, the *tabula rasa* of our personal history. Like the candlesticks wiped clean by some unknown force, our past, our lives before *refugitude*, had been erased." The term was further defined on the Critical Refugee Studies Collective webpage in 2017.
84. I employ the spelling "refugeetude" as a gesture to preserve the category of "refugee," even as I attempt to push its boundaries. My stylistic decision seeks to signal that the legal and historical definitions of refugees are still materially and politically crucial to the social world in which we live, despite its deep limitations.
85. Walter Benjamin, *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019), 3.
86. David S. Ferris, "Introduction: Reading Benjamin," in *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, ed. David S. Ferris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1–17.
87. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 461.
88. Max Pensky, "Method and Time: Benjamin's Dialectical Images," in *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, ed. David S. Ferris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 177–98.
89. Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 461.
90. Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), xvii.
91. Freeman, *Time Binds*, xvi–xvii.

1. GRATITUDE

- Vinh Nguyen, "Commemorating Freedom: The Fortieth Anniversary of the 'Fall of Saigon' in Canada," *Canadian Review of American Studies* 48, no. 3 (2018): 464–86.
- See Yén Lê Espiritu, "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, no. 2 (2006): 329–52.
- For studies on gratitude, see Peter J. Leithart, *Gratitude: An Intellectual History* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014); Margaret Visser, *The Gift of Thanks: The Roots and Rituals of Gratitude* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009); Terrance McConnell, *Gratitude* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).
- Edward J. Harpham, "Gratitude in the History of Ideas," in *The Psychology of Gratitude*, ed. Robert A. Emmons and Michael E. McCullough (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 19–36.
- Robert C. Solomon, "Foreword," in *The Psychology of Gratitude*, ed. Robert A. Emmons and Michael E. McCullough (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), x; Harpham, "Gratitude in the History of Ideas," 24.
- Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 59.
- Robert C. Emmons, "The Psychology of Gratitude: An Introduction," in *The Psychology of Gratitude*, ed. Robert A. Emmons and Michael E. McCullough (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 5.

8. David Steindl-Rast, "Gratitude as Thankfulness and as Gratefulness," in *The Psychology of Gratitude*, ed. Robert A. Emmons and Michael E. McCullough (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 284.

9. See Liza Schuster, "Asylum and the Lessons of History," *Race & Class* 44, no. 2 (2002): 40–56; Matthew E. Price, *Rethinking Asylum: History, Purpose, and Limits* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

10. Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 61.

11. Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 158.

12. Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 24.

13. Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom*, 28.

14. Lisa Yoneyama, "Traveling Memories, Contagious Justice: Americanization of Japanese War Crimes at the End of the Post-Cold War," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 6, no. 1 (2003): 81.

15. Yén Lê Espiritu has convincingly analyzed how grateful, successful refugees from the Vietnam War are rhetorically expedient for America's contemporary and future foreign interventions, especially in places like Afghanistan and Iraq. Long T. Bui has similarly examined the discursive conscription of Vietnamese refugees into serving the military, pulling them into "a double movement that turns the antiwar mantra of 'never again' into 'once again'" (122). See Yén Lê Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refugees* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014); Long T. Bui, *Returns of War: South Vietnam and the Price of Refugee Memory* (New York: NYU Press, 2018).

16. See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, vol. 1* (New York: Vintage, 1990); Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

17. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

18. Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom*, 189.

19. For a discussion of the novel's anecdotal/vignette form, see Helen M. Buss, "Kim Thúy's *Ru* and the Art of the Anecdote," *A/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 33, no. 3 (2018): 605–12.

20. Kim Thúy, *Ru: A Novel*, trans. Sheila Fischman (Toronto: Random House Canada, 2012), 74.

21. Thúy, *Ru*, 140.

22. John Barber, "Kim Thuy's River of Life," *Globe and Mail*, February 5, 2012; Jim Bartley, "From Riches to Rags to Riches," *Globe and Mail*, February 10, 2012.

23. The novel has received a host of prestigious prizes, including Canada's Governor General's Literary Award for Fiction (French language), France's Grand prix littéraire RTL-Lire, and Italy's Mondello Prize for Multiculturalism.

24. Established in 2002 by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, Canada Reads sets out to find a book that will ignite a national conversation, one that all Canadians *should* read (and gather around). The competition is about creating what Benedict Anderson refers to as an "imagined community"—a sense of connectedness and collective identity through shared cultural, print-based media. The competition follows a format in which a celebrity or public figure defends one book from a list of five finalists. A winner is determined, after several rounds of debate, through votes cast by the participating panelists. In 2015, the theme of the competition was "one book to break barriers," one that "can change perspectives, challenge stereotypes and illuminate issues." See Laura Moss, "Canada Reads," *Canadian Literature* 183 (2004): 6–10.

25. “Canada Reads 2015,” *Canada Reads*, season 15, episodes 1–4, created by Talin Vartanian and Peter Kavanagh, featuring Kim Thúy, aired March 16–19, 2015, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2015, television.

26. Jason Ziedenberg, “Canada’s Vietnam Legacy,” *Canadian Dimension* 29, no. 5 (1995): 24–28. We should also be reminded that *Ru* was written in the French language, within a Québécois context, and that the text reveals competing forms of nationalism at play when we invoke “Canada” and “Canadian nationalism.” See Jenny Heijun Wills, “Competing Nationalisms in *Ru* and *La Trilogie Coréenne*: Francophone Asian Québécois Literatures,” *Canadian Literature* 227 (2015): 75–93.

27. For a discussion of *Ru*’s aesthetic strategies, particularly bricolage, see Jenny M. James, “Frayed Ends: Refugee Memory and Bricolage Practices of Repair in Dionne Brand’s *What We All Long For* and Kim Thúy’s *Ru*,” *MELUS* 41, no. 3 (2016): 42–67.

28. The narrative of social, economic, and psychic “success,” as seen in a text like *Ru*, is a hallmark of *mainstream* Asian North American literature—literature that is, according to Viet Thanh Nguyen, “most likely to be read by non-Asian [North] American readers and critics.” Viet Thanh Nguyen, *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in Asian America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 147–48. Read as public demonstrations of success performed by those who have been rescued by and/or allowed entry into Western democratic nation-states, these narratives help to confirm liberal ideals of freedom and equality. They function as proof of the inclusive, tolerant, and fundamentally nonracist constitution of the national space. Thus, the immigrant’s success can be construed as the nation’s own success at multicultural, collective-building projects. Because of their ideologically reaffirming function, stories of immigrant and refugee success are often more palatable and easily digested by mainstream readers and state structures alike.

29. Thúy, *Ru*, 21, 25, 22–23.

30. Thúy, *Ru*, 9.

31. Thúy, *Ru*, 57.

32. Daniel Coleman, *White Civility: The Literary Project of White Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

33. Thúy, *Ru*, 9, 10.

34. For more on Canadian humanitarian exceptionalism, see Vinh Nguyen and Thy Phu, *Refugee States: Critical Refugee Studies in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021).

35. Thúy, *Ru*, 3–5.

36. “Kim Thuy, author of *Ru*,” *Feature Interview*, Radio Canada International, 2012.

37. “Kim Thuy, author of *Ru*.”

38. Thúy, *Ru*, 8.

39. Thúy, *Ru*, 89.

40. Thúy, *Ru*, 76.

41. Thúy, *Ru*, 88.

42. Thúy, *Ru*, 88.

43. Thúy, *Ru*, 10.

44. Thúy, *Ru*, 11.

45. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006), 46.

46. Loung Ung, *Lucky Child: A Daughter of Cambodia Reunites with the Sister She Left Behind* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2005), 175.

47. Khatharya Um writes that the Khmer Rouge “regime perpetuates the devaluation of personhood, the denuding of life to its barest, by forcing survivors ultimately to question their own right to life: ‘why did I live?’” (186). See Khatharya Um, *From the Land of Shadows: War, Revolution, and the Making of the Cambodian Diaspora* (New York: NYU Press, 2015).

48. Thúy, *Ru*, 1.

49. Thúy, *Ru*, 1.

50. Loung Ung, “Author’s Note,” in *First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2000).

51. Nick Crossley, *Intersubjectivity; The Fabric of Social Becoming* (London: SAGE, 1996).

52. *First They Killed My Father* was severely criticized by members of the Cambodian diasporic community for its “historical inaccuracy.” Bunkong Tuon argues for its “emotional truth” as a testimony of the genocide. See Bunkong Tuon, “Inaccuracy and Testimonial Literature: The Case of Loung Ung’s *First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers*,” *MELUS: Multi-ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 38, no. 3 (2013): 107–25.

53. Ung, *Lucky Child*, 175.

54. Ung, *First They Killed My Father*, 216.

55. Ung, *First They Killed My Father*, 235.

56. Ung, *Lucky Child*, 30, 31.

57. Ung, *Lucky Child*, 25.

58. Ung, *Lucky Child*, 25.

59. Ung, *Lucky Child*, 48.

60. Ung, *Lucky Child*, 48.

61. Ung, *Lucky Child*, 191.

62. Ung, *Lucky Child*, 210.

63. Ung, *First They Killed My Father*, 235.

64. Ung, *First They Killed My Father*, 235.

65. Ung, *Lucky Child*, 247.

66. Ung, *First They Killed My Father*, 237.

67. Analyzing *First They Killed My Father*, Cathy Schlund-Vials writes that the memoir is a “literary memorial for both the living and the dead” (138). See Cathy Schlund-Vials, “Family, Citizenship, and Selfhood in Luong Ung’s *First They Killed My Father*,” in *Embodying Asian/American Sexualities*, ed. Gina Masequesmay and Sean Metzger (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009), 127–44.

68. “The Gift of Refuge,” *Everydayhero*, 2013, <https://give.everydayhero.com/au/the-gift-of-refuge>.

69. In his emphatic display of refugee gratitude, the expression of patriotism is, at the same time, one of religious devotion, an affirmation of God’s magnanimity.

70. Jane McAdam and Fiona Chong, *Why Asylum Seeking Is Legal and Australia’s Policies Are Not* (Sydney, Australia: UNSW Press, 2014); Richard Devetak, “In Fear of Refugees: The Politics of Border Protection in Australia,” *International Journal of Human Rights* 8, no. 1 (2004): 101–09.

71. “Spirit of Life Episode 438—Tri Nguyen,” *Spirit of Life*, host Geraldine Lee, February 14, 2014.

72. “Spirit of Life Episode 438—Tri Nguyen.”

73. Susan Metcalf, “Australia’s Asylum Seeker Policy Is Breaking People,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, December 23, 2013. On the policy of deterrence, see Sharon Pickering and

Caroline Lambert, "Deterrence: Australia's Refugee Policy," *Current Issues in Criminal Justice* 14, no. 1 (2002): 65–86.

74. Devetak, "In Fear of Refugees," 101.

75. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, ed. Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean (New York: Routledge, 1995), 214.

76. Tri Nguyen, *The Gift of Refuge*, official website.

77. Tri Nguyen, *The Gift of Refuge*, official website.

78. "The Walker," *The Feed: News, Culture, Technology*, April 25, 2014.

79. The official site states: "You can help bring this positive message to Australia by walking or running with the boat, or contributing to the fund of Baptcare Sanctuary. For those wanting to help in the pilgrimage itself, Tri is looking for support vehicles and drivers, walker/runners, accommodation along the way, and local media opportunities." See Tri Nguyen, *The Gift of Refuge*, official website.

80. Kim Beales, "The Gift of Refuge," Bandcamp, January 27, 2014, <https://kimbeales.bandcamp.com/track/gift-of-refuge>.

81. The project's Facebook page, which had close to 1,300 followers, and official website continue to remain active. To date, over \$12,000 (from more than seventy donors) has been raised for Baptcare, an organization that currently supports approximately seventy asylum seekers.

82. Tri Nguyen, *The Gift of Refuge*, official website.

83. Jill Dolan, *Geographies of Learning: Theory and Practice, Activism and Performance* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001), 16.

84. Michael Balfour and Nina Woodrow, "On Stitches," in *Refugee Performance: Practical Encounters*, ed. Michael Balfour (Bristol, UK: Intellect, 2013), 19.

85. Balfour and Woodrow, "On Stitches," 19, 28.

86. The Gift of Refuge, "I just found out that Parliament won't receive the boat as a gift of gratitude," Facebook, January 6, 2015, https://www.facebook.com/pg/giftofrefuge/posts/?ref=page_internal.

87. As of 2023, the "Gift of Refuge" campaign remains active, and the boat continues to float from one parliamentary office to another.

88. Jason D'Cruz, "Displacement and Gratitude: Accounting for the Political Obligation of Refugees," *Ethics & Global Politics* 7, no. 1 (2014): 14.

89. Dina Nayeri, "The Ungrateful Refugee," in *The Displaced: Refugee Writers on Refugee Lives*, ed. Viet Thanh Nguyen (New York: Abrams Press, 2018), 140.

90. Nayeri, "The Ungrateful Refugee," 141, 142.

91. Nayeri, "The Ungrateful Refugee," 148.

2. RESENTMENT

1. Alison M. Jaggar, "Love and Knowledge," *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*, ed. Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 160.

2. Arlie Russell Hochschild, "Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure," *American Journal of Sociology* 85, no. 3 (1979): 551–75.

3. According to Zygmunt Bauman, refugees need to either be absorbed into rights or kept at bay and outside of view, because they remind the "settled" of a foundational

existential anxiety, that their precarious “settledness” could at any moment become upturned. See Zygmunt Bauman, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and Its Outcasts* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003).

4. These lands and resources, for settler nation-states like the United States, Canada, and Australia, are stolen and violently possessed. See the conclusion of this book for an engagement with settler colonialism.

5. Sara Ahmed’s thinking on proximity, borders, and the production of fear in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* is instructive here for understanding the relationship between resentment and threat. She writes that “the language of fear involves the intensification of ‘threats,’ which works to create a distinction between those who are ‘under threat’ and those who threaten. Fear is an effect of this process, rather than its origin.” We might similarly think of fear as an effect of national resentment. Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 20.

6. This anticommunism, however, is also an important means of community building and identity formation, giving Vietnamese a sense of purpose and an explanation for their existence. See Thuy Vo Dang, “The Cultural Work of Anticommunism in the San Diego Vietnamese American Community,” *Amerasia Journal* 31, no. 2 (2005): 65–86; Lan Duong and Isabelle Thuy Pelaud, “Vietnamese American Art and Community Politics: An Engaged Feminist Perspective,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 15, no. 3 (2012): 241–69; Caroline Kieu Linh Valverde, *Transnationalizing Viet Nam: Community, Culture, and Politics in the Diaspora* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013).

7. Both *refugee* and *resentment* share the prefix *re-*, which marks their relationship to time and space, an attachment to the past.

8. For more on resentment as protest arising from injury, see Marc Ferro, *Resentment in History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010); Dolores Martin Moruno, “Introduction: On Resentment: Past and Present of an Emotion,” in *On Resentment: Past and Present*, ed. Fantini Bernardino, Dolores Martin Moruno, and Javier Moscoso (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2013), 1–22.

9. The phrasing “the past that is not yet or even past” is inspired by Faulkner. See William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun: A Play*, adapt. Ruth Ford (New York: Random House, 1959).

10. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson, trans. Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Max Scheler, *Ressentiment*, trans. Louis A. Coser (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1994); Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 1759 (São Paulo, Brazil: MetaLibri Press, 2006); Joseph Butler, *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel, 1726* (New York: Dodo Press, 2009).

11. See Marlia E. Banning, “The Politics of Resentment,” *JAC* 26, no. 1–2 (2006): 67–101.

12. See Michael Ure, “Resentment/*Ressentiment*,” *Constellations* 22, no. 4 (2015): 599–613.

13. Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, 21.

14. Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 29.

15. Manfred S. Frings, “Introduction,” in Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 7.

16. For a discussion of the story-cycle form and its narration of transnational tensions, see Long Le-Khac, “Narrating the Transnational: Refugee Routes, Communities of Shared Fate, and Transnarrative Form,” *MELUS* 43, no. 2 (2018): 106–28.

17. Aimee Phan, *We Should Never Meet: Stories* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2004), 108.

18. See Scheler, *Ressentiment*.
19. Jack Shadoian, *Dreams and Dead Ends: The American Gangster/Crime Film* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1979), 3.
20. Yến Lê Espiritu points out that two strategic narratives—the innocent Vietnam Veteran and the good Vietnamese refugee—converged twenty-five years after the war's end to “conjure triumph from defeat,” “enabling ‘patriotic’ Americans to push military intervention as key in America’s self-appointed role as liberators” in new neo-imperial endeavors in other parts of the world (330). This, what she calls “the ‘we-win-even-when-we-lose’ syndrome,” “has energized and emboldened the perpetuation of U.S. militarism” (330). See Yến Lê Espiritu, “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, no. 2 (2006): 329–52.
21. T. J. English, *Born to Kill: The Rise and Fall of America’s Bloodiest Asian Gang* (New York: Harper, 2009), 8.
22. See Sam Quinones, “The New Breed of Gangs,” *Sacramento Magazine* (1991): 22–29, 89.
23. Patrick Du Phuoc Long (with Laura Richard), *The Dream Shattered: Vietnamese Gangs in America* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1996).
24. James Diego Vigil, for example, writes, “To assess the rise of Vietnamese gangs, we need to look back to the Vietnam War and understand some of its ramifications” (99). T. J. English declares that “there was little doubt that the war’s legacy of violence, inhumanity, and abandonment had played a formative role in shaping the lives and actions of these young gangsters” (280). James Dubro describes gangsters as “tough and cynical young men who had come through the horrors of life in Vietnam, Communist re-education camps, then the bleak refugee camps” (224).
25. Tod W. Burke, Charles O’Rear, and Al Lotz, “A New Look at Asian Gangs: Home Invaders,” *CJ: The Americas* 4, no. 4 (1991): 16.
26. Jodi Kim provides an astute reading of Vinh. She argues that this gangster figure provides “a critical political diagnosis of the American War in Vietnam and the contradictions of the so-called American Dream” (220). See Jodi Kim, *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).
27. Phan, *We Should Never Meet*, 94.
28. This anger and frustration toward the United States was able to be expressed in Vietnamese language publications, but not in the American public sphere. See Qui-Phiet Tran, “Contemporary Vietnamese American Feminine Writing: Exile and Home,” *Amerasia Journal* 19, no. 3 (1993): 71–83.
29. Phan, *We Should Never Meet*, 96.
30. Kim, *Ends of Empire*, 222.
31. Echoed in his critique is the deceptively simple but powerfully resonant war-era refrain—“Why are we in Vietnam?”—that, according to Marilyn Young, continues to haunt American historical memory (ix). See Marilyn B. Young, *Vietnam Wars, 1945–1990* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).
32. Phan, *We Should Never Meet*, 97.
33. For a discussion of family and an “aesthetics of kinship” in Phan’s stories, see Crystal Parikh, “Conclusion: An Aesthetics of Kin and the Rights of the Child,” in *Writing Human Rights: The Political Imaginaries of Writers of Color* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 227–42.

34. For a discussion of gift giving in Phan's stories, see Jungha Kim, "The Affects and Ethics of the Gift in Aimee Phan's *We Should Never Meet*," *Contemporary Literature* 57, no. 1 (2016): 56–78.

35. See Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

36. See Jane Gross, "6 Are Killed as 8-Hour Siege by Gang Ends in California," *New York Times*, April 6, 1991; Richard C. Paddock and Lily Dizon, "3 Vietnamese Brothers in Shoot-Out Led Troubled Lives," *Los Angeles Times*, April 15, 1991; Jill Walker, "Hostage Takers Wanted to Leave Country," *Washington Post*, April 6, 1991.

37. Jill Walker, "Hostage Takers Wanted to Leave Country."

38. Y Thien Nguyen, "(Re)making the South Vietnamese Past in America," *Journal of Asian American Studies* 21, no. 1 (2018): 74.

39. Andrew Lam, *Perfume Dreams: Reflections on the Vietnamese Diaspora* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 2005), 62.

40. Lam, *Perfume Dreams*, 65–66.

41. Michael Peter Smith and Bernadette Tarallo, "Who Are the 'Good Guys'? The Social Construction of the Vietnamese 'Other,'" in *The Bubbling Cauldron: Race, Ethnicity, and the Urban Crisis*, ed. Michael Peter Smith and Joe R. Feagin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 62.

42. Jim Doyle, "Good Guys Siege Leader Guilty / Death Penalty Possible Though He Didn't Shoot," *SFGate*, February 9, 1995.

43. Paddock and Dizon, "3 Vietnamese Brothers in Shoot-Out."

44. Jorge Casuso, "Hostage Takers Were Fed Up with America," *Chicago Tribune*, April 6, 1991; Steve Geissinger, "Gunmen—Members of an Asian Gang—Were Unhappy in United States," Associated Press, April 6, 1991.

45. Phan, *We Should Never Meet*, 103.

46. Emily Cheng, "The Vietnamese American 'Model Orphan' in Aimee Phan's *We Should Never Meet*," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 49, no. 3 (2016): 109–24.

47. Kim, *Ends of Empire*, 222.

48. Phan, *We Should Never Meet*, 147.

49. Phan, *We Should Never Meet*, 147.

50. Phan, *We Should Never Meet*, 158.

51. Phan, *We Should Never Meet*, 166–67.

52. Phan, *We Should Never Meet*, 166.

53. Phan, *We Should Never Meet*, 165.

54. Phan, *We Should Never Meet*, 166.

55. Phan, *We Should Never Meet*, 169.

56. Peter Nyers, "Abject Cosmopolitanism: The Politics of Protection in the Anti-deportation Movement," *Third World Quarterly* 24, no. 6 (2003): 1070.

57. See Soo Ah Kwon, "Deporting Cambodian Refugees: Youth Activism, State Reform, and Imperial Statecraft," *Positions: East Asia Critique* 20, no. 3 (2012): 737–62; Rachel Ida Buff, "The Deportation Terror," *American Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2008): 523–51.

58. Thy Phu, *Picturing Model Citizens: Civility in Asian American Visual Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 152.

59. See A. Naomi Paik, *Rightlessness: Testimony and Redress in U.S. Prison Camps since World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

60. Scheler, *Ressentiment*, 51.
61. John Caruso Jr., "Studio Revolt Media Lab: A Collaborative Producing Motion Imagery and Performance Projects," *International Journal of Multicultural Education* 15, no. 2 (2013): 1–6.
62. Bill Ong Hing, "Deporting Cambodian Refugees: Justice Denied?," *Crime & Delinquency* 51, no. 2 (2005): 217.
63. Kwon, "Deporting Cambodian Refugees," 753.
64. Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, *War, Genocide, and Justice: Cambodian American Memory Work* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 13; on the ethics of American responsibility, see also Hing, "Deporting Cambodian Refugees: Justice Denied?"
65. Y-Dang Troeung, "Iterations of War and Its Literary Counterforces: Vaddey Ratner's *In the Shadow of the Banyan* and Kosal Khiev's *Why I Write*," *MELUS* 40: no. 2 (2015), 97.
66. Y-Dang Troeung, *Refugee Lifeworlds: The Afterlife of the Cold War in Cambodia* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2022), 103.
67. Nyers, "Abject Cosmopolitanism," 1078.
68. "My Asian Americana," dir. Anida Yoeu Ali and Masahiro Sugano, Studio Revolt, 2011.
69. These are the Violent Crime and Law Enforcement Act (1994), Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (1996), and Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (1996). See Thi Bui, "Refugee to Detainee: How the U.S. Is Deporting Those Seeking a Safe Haven," *The Nib*, June 13, 2018; Southeast Asian Resource Action Center, "The Devastating Impact of Deportation on Asian Americans," April 15, 2018.
70. These activist campaigns have also relied on arguments about rehabilitation, familial bonds, and good citizenship.
71. Wendy Brown, *States of Injury* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 66.
72. Brown, *States of Injury*, 70, 65.
73. Brown, *States of Injury*, 65.
74. Glenn Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 109.
75. Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 109.

3. RESILIENCE

1. Thu-Hương Nguyễn-Võ, "Forking Paths: How Shall We Mourn the Dead?," *Amerasia Journal* 31, no. 2 (2005): 168.
2. I am indebted, throughout this chapter, to Nguyễn-Võ Thu-Hương's generative discussion of Vietnamese American mourning and anamnesis in her foundational essay "Forking Paths."
3. On intimacy and the social, see the work of scholars such as Lauren Berlant, Ann Cvetkovich, and Lisa Lowe.
4. Andrew Zolli and Ann Marie Healy, *Resilience* (London: Headline, 2012).
5. Brad Evans and Julian Reid, *Resilient Life: The Art of Living Dangerously* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), 16.
6. David Chandler, *Resilience: The Governance of Complexity* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 3, 5.
7. Mark Neocleous, "Resisting Resilience," *Radical Philosophy* 178 (2013): 5.

8. On the phenomenon of refugee entrepreneurship, see Alexandra Embiricos, "From Refugee to Entrepreneur? Challenges to Refugee Self-Reliance in Berlin, Germany," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 33, no. 1 (2020): 245–67; Sameeksha Desai et al., "Refugee Entrepreneurship: Context and Directions for Future Research," *Small Business Economics* 56, no. 4 (2020).

9. Gerald Vizenor, *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), 85.

10. Vizenor, *Native Liberty*, 85.

11. Dian Million, "There Is a River in Me: Theory from Life," in *Theorizing Native Studies*, ed. Andrea Smith and Audra Simpson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 35.

12. See Daniel Heath Justice, *Why Indigenous Literature Matters* (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018); Thomas King, *The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

13. Angels Carabí, "Interview with Maxine Hong Kingston," *Atlantis* 10, no. 1–2 (1988): 142.

14. King-Kok Cheung, "Talk Story: Counter-Memory in Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men*," *Tamkang Review* 24, no. 1 (1993): 23.

15. Walter Benjamin, *The Storyteller: Tales out of Loneliness* (London: Verso, 2016), 83.

16. Didier Coste, "Narrative Theory," *Oxford Research Encyclopedias* (2017): 1.

17. See Audre Lorde, "Poetry Is Not a Luxury," in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press, 1984, 2007), 36–39; T. Minh Ha Trinh, *Elsewhere, within Here: Immigration, Refugeeism and the Boundary Event* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

18. Souvankham Thammavongsa, *Found* (Toronto: Pedlar Press, 2007), n.p.

19. Adele Barclay, "Interview with Souvankham Thammavongsa," *Queens Journal*, September 19, 2008.

20. I am indebted to Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory," which also takes up these concerns. See Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

21. Carrie Dawson, "On Thinking Life a State and Reading (about) Refugees: The Anti-confessional Impulse in Canadian Refugee Writing," *Canadian Literature*, no. 234 (2017): 71.

22. Carrie Dawson understands the poems as "forgeries" that do not reproduce experience but rather create new stories that do not conform to the (state and institutional) demands of veracity and truth. See Carrie Dawson, "'Treaty to Tell the Truth': The Anti-Confessional Impulse in Canadian Refugee Writing," *Canadian Literature*, no. 234 (2017): 14–31.

23. Christine Kim, *The Minor Intimacies of Race: Asian Publics in North America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 132, 153.

24. I am influenced here by Eugenie Brinkema's thinking on affect and form. For her, affect is not only "felt by moved bodies," but also "wildly composed in specific cinematic, literary, and critical texts" (xvi). See Eugenie Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

25. I borrow the notion of "shimmer" from Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, "Introduction: An Inventory of Shimmers," in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 1–28.

26. Thammavongsa, *Found*, 13.

27. Thammavongsa, *Found*, 16–17.
28. Kasim Husain, “A Poetics of Sparsity: Refusing Authoritative Interpretation in Souvankham Thammavongsa’s *Found*,” *The Poetic Front* 2, no. 1 (2009): 1–4.
29. Thammavongsa, *Found*, 18.
30. Thammavongsa, *Found*, 25.
31. Thammavongsa, *Found*, 26.
32. Souvankham Thammavongsa, “My Father’s Scrapbook,” *The New Quarterly* (Winter 2008): 51.
33. Thammavongsa, *Found*, 34.
34. Thammavongsa, *Found*, 33.
35. Alfred W. McCoy, “Foreword: Reflections on History’s Largest Air War,” in Fred Branfman, *Voices from the Plain of Jars: Life under an Air War* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), xii.
36. Channapha Khamvongsa and Elaine Russell, “Legacies of War: Cluster Bombs in Laos,” *Critical Asian Studies* 41, no. 2 (2009): 282.
37. Fred Branfman, *Voices from the Plain of Jars: Life under an Air War* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2013), 4–5.
38. Branfman, *Voices from the Plain of Jars*, 30.
39. Thammavongsa, *Found*, 43.
40. Thammavongsa, *Found*, 44.
41. Thammavongsa, *Found*, 48.
42. Thammavongsa, *Found*, 47.
43. Thammavongsa, *Found*, 56.
44. Thammavongsa, *Found*, 60.
45. For a discussion of the poetics and politics of space in *Found*, see Brittany Kraus, “Unmarked, Undocumented and Un-Canadian: Examining Space in Souvankham Thammavongsa’s *Found*,” *Postcolonial Text* 10, no. 2 (2015): 1–21.
46. For a consideration of student responses to *Found* and, in particular, how the text can be used productively in the classroom to initiate discussions of “Which material objects, bearing traces of which histories and stories, arrive in our hands, and under what circumstances? Which objects and which histories do not?” (570), see Guy Beauregard, “Transpacific Precarities: Responding to Souvankham Thammavongsa’s *Found* and Rita Wong’s *Forage* in East Asia,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 20, no. 4 (2019): 564–81.
47. Ocean Vuong, *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2019), 3.
48. Vuong, *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous*, 3.
49. Marguerite Nguyen, *America’s Vietnam: The Longue Durée of U.S. Literature and Empire* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018), 140.
50. Le Guin writes that fiction is “a way of trying to describe what is in fact going on, what people actually do and feel, how people relate to everything else in this vast sack, this belly of the universe, this womb of things to be and tomb of things that were, this unending story.” Ursula K. Le Guin, “The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction” [1986], in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 154.
51. Vuong, *On Earth We’re Briefly Gorgeous*, 189.

52. For a discussion of language in the novel, specifically the mother-tongue and acts of translation, see Birgit Neumann, "'Our Mother Tongue, Then, Us No Mother at All—But an Orphan': The Mother Tongue and Translation in Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*," *Anglia* 138, no. 2 (2020): 277–98.

53. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), in which he describes *bios* as life lived in the polis and under the rule of law (*nomos*).

54. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 113.

55. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 133.

56. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 175.

57. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 33–34.

58. The most famous scene occurs in Maxine Hong Kingston, *The Woman Warrior: Memoirs of a Girlhood among Ghosts* (New York: Vintage International, 1989).

59. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 26.

60. For a reading of this scene in particular and a discussion of how the novel recasts shame in relation to refugee and queerness, see Jennifer Cho, "'We Were Born from Beauty': Dis/Inheriting Genealogies of Refugee and Queer Shame in Ocean Vuong's *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*," *MELUS* 47, no. 1 (2022): 130–53.

61. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 26.

62. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 14.

63. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 32.

64. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 13.

65. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 12.

66. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 238.

67. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 43.

68. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 43.

69. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 62.

70. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 85.

71. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 139.

72. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 231.

73. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 139.

74. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 238.

75. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 195, 203.

76. For a discussion of the politics of impurity and queerness, see Gayatri Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Publics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

77. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 28.

78. Vuong, *On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous*, 5.

79. For a history of the Hmong people, see Sucheng Chan, *Hmong Means Free: Life in Laos and America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Kou Yang, "Commentary: Challenges and Complexity in the Re-construction of Hmong History," *Hmong Studies Journal* 10 (2010): 1–17; Jane Hamilton-Merritt, *Tragic Mountains: The Hmong, the Americans, and the Secret Wars for Laos, 1942–1992* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

80. Kou Yang states: "The end of the U.S. secret war in 1975 gradually pushed more than ten percent of the population of Laos to become refugees abroad. More than one-third of

these refugees are Hmong” (165). See Kou Yang, “Research Note: The Hmong in America: Twenty-Five Years after the U.S. Secret War in Laos,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 4, no. 2 (2001), 165–74.

81. Kao Kalia Yang, *The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir* (Minneapolis, MN: Coffee House Press, 2008), 46.

82. Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 45.

83. Mai Neng Moua, “Introduction,” in *Bamboo among the Oaks: Contemporary Writing by Hmong Americans* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 2002), 6.

84. See John M. Duffy, *Writing from These Roots: Literacy in a Hmong-American Community* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2007); Vincent K. Her and Mary Louise Buley-Meissner, “Hmong Voice and Memories: An Exploration of Identity, Culture, and History through *Bamboo among the Oaks: Contemporary Writing by Hmong Americans*,” *Journal of Asian American Studies* 13, no. 1 (2010): 35–58.

85. Ma Vang, “Writing on the Run: Hmong American Literary Formations and the Deterritorialized Subject,” *MELUS* 41, no. 3 (2016): 89–111.

86. Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 274.

87. For a discussion of how Yang’s text models a way of finding “home,” see Aline Lo, “Writing Citizenship: Flexible Forms of Belonging in Kao Kalia Yang’s *The Latehomecomer*,” *Hmong Studies Journal* 12 (2011): 1–15; Asha Sen, *Postcolonial Yearning: Reshaping Spiritual and Secular Discourses in Contemporary Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

88. Chia Youyee Vang, *Hmong America: Constructing Community in Diaspora* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 150.

89. One of these sites, “literary formations,” Ma Vang argues, is Hmong people “writing on the run,” a deterritorialized yearning for home. See Vang, “Writing on the Run.”

90. For a discussion of family memoir as historical narrative, see Rocío G. Davis, “Mediating Historical Memory in Asian/American Family Memoirs: K. Connie Kang’s *Home Was the Land of Morning Calm* and Duong Van Mai Elliot’s *The Sacred Willow*,” *Biography* 30, no. 4 (2007): 491–511.

91. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 2002), 413.

92. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 414.

93. Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, n.p.

94. In the vignette that follows the dedication, Yang recounts a Hmong belief that babies live happily in the clouds, observing the “course of human lives.” It was difficult to call them down to earth, but once they descended, the babies chose their own lives. She writes that “the people who we would become we had inside of us from the beginning, and the people whose worlds we share, whose memories we hold strong inside of us, we have always known.” The cyclical temporality of this understanding, which posits that one is born with knowledge of the past and its people, and will once again be a part of the future, provides another register of meaning to Maxwell’s “reading” of his grandmother’s stories—they have always been *in him* (n.p.).

95. Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 214.

96. Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 214.

97. Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 67.

98. Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 43.

99. Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 68–69.
100. Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 71.
101. Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 72.
102. Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 61.
103. Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 80.
104. Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 77.
105. Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 151.
106. Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 135.
107. Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 136.
108. Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 201.
109. Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 214–15.
110. Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 261.
111. Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 260–61.
112. Aline Lo, “Letting Karst Mountains Bloom: Decentering the Secret War in Hmong American Literature and Art,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Refugee Narratives*, ed. Evyn Lê Espiritu Gandhi and Vinh Nguyen, 407–17 (New York: Routledge, 2023).
113. Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 261.
114. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, eds., *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 2.
115. Vizenor, *Native Liberty*, 85.
116. Lisa Lowe, “Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity: Marking Asian American Difference,” *Diaspora* 1, no. 1 (1991): 24–44.

CONCLUSION: REFUGEE(T)UDE: WHEN DOES A REFUGEE STOP
BEING A REFUGEE?

1. Nhan T. Le, “Coolie in America,” in *Voices of the Boat People: Nineteen Narratives of Escape and Survival*, ed. Mary Terrell Cargill and Jade Quang (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2000), 146. Italics mine.
2. See Eric Tang, *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the NYC Hyperghetto* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015).
3. I borrow the wording “refuge(e)” to signal the co-constitution of refuge and refugee from Yĕn Lê Espiritu. See Yĕn Lê Espiritu, *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014).
4. Khatharya Um, *From the Land of Shadows: War, Revolution, and the Making of the Cambodian Diaspora* (New York: NYU Press, 2015), 200.
5. Um, *From the Land of Shadows*, 189.
6. Um, *From the Land of Shadows*, 259.
7. Um, *From the Land of Shadows*, 259.
8. See Amié Césaire, *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, trans. and ed. A. James Arnold and Clayton Eshleman (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2013); Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948); Marina Carter and Khal Torabully, *Coolitude: An Anthology of the Indian Labour Diaspora* (London: Anthem Press, 2002); Shailja Patel, *Migritude* (New York: Kaya Press, 2010). See also Peter Gatrell, “Refugees—What’s

Wrong with History?,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 30, no. 2 (2016): 170–89. Gatrell’s concept of “refugeedom”—“a matrix involving administrative practices, legal norms, social relations and refugees’ experiences, and how these have been represented in cultural terms” (170)—also raises the question of refugee subjectivity.

9. See “Critical Vocabularies,” in *The Critical Refugee Studies Collective*, <https://criticalrefugeestudies.com/resources/critical-vocabularies>.

10. I am indebted to Stuart Hall’s notion of “politics without guarantees.” See *Race, The Floating Signifier*, dir. Sut Jhally (Northampton, MA: Media Education Foundation, 1997).

11. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

12. This sentence plays with the UNHCR definition of *refugee* as a person who, “owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.” See United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1951, 1967), <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>. See also Hannah Arendt, “The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man,” in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland, OH: Meridian, 1958), 267–302.

13. See Matthew E. Price, *Rethinking Asylum: History, Purpose, and Limits* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

14. United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *The State of the World’s Refugees: In Search of Solidarity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 18.

15. Tang, *Unsettled*, 5.

16. In taking this line of argument, I am influenced by scholars in the field of diaspora studies like Steven Vertovec and Lily Cho, who have articulated the concept of diaspora as a “type of consciousness” and a “condition of subjectivity,” respectively. Their work demonstrates how concepts that refer to social or political formations, like diaspora and refugee, can be approached or re-signified through psychic, affective, or embodied lens. See Steven Vertovec, “Three Meanings of ‘Diaspora’ Exemplified by South Asian Religions,” *Diaspora* 6, no. 3 (1999): 277–300; Lily Cho, “The Turn to Diaspora,” *Topia* 17 (2007): 11–30.

17. See Walter Benjamin, “Theses of the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zhon (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1968), 255–66.

18. Le, “Coolie in America,” 132.

19. See Liza Schuster, “Asylum and the Lessons of History,” *Race and Class* 44, no. 2 (2002): 40–56; Ranjana Khanna, “On Asylum and Genealogy,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 104, no. 2 (2005): 371–80.

20. See Roger Zetter, “More Labels, Fewer Refugees: Remaking the Refugee Label in an Era of Globalization,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 20, no. 2 (2007): 172–92; B. S. Chimni, “The Birth of a ‘Discipline’: From Refugee to Forced Migration Studies,” *Journal of Refugee Studies* 22, no. 1 (2009): 11–29.

21. I am thinking here also of Marianne Hirsch’s concept of “postmemory.” See Marianne Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory,” *Poetics Today* 29, no. 1 (2008): 103–28.

22. See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

23. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Black Orpheus," *Massachusetts Review* 6, no. 1 (1964–65): 36.
24. Edward Said, "Reflections on Exile," in *Altogether Elsewhere*, ed. Marc Robinson (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994), 144.
25. Liisa H. Malkki, "Refugees and Exile: From 'Refugee Studies' to the National Order of Things," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 511.
26. For over three decades, refugee seekers and migrants have resorted to "self mutilation" as a last resort to beseech different liberal-democratic nation-states around the world to reverse decisions to close borders, detain refugees, and deport asylum seekers. See Alison Jeffers, *Refugees, Theater and Crisis: Performing Global Identities* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Nevzat Soguk, "Splinters of Hegemony: Ontopoetical Visions in International Relations," *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 31, no. 4 (2006): 377–404.
27. See Francisco-Fernando Granados, "Refugees Run the Seas . . .," *Francisco-Fernando Granados* (blog), 2014, <https://francisco-fernando-granados.blogspot.com/2014/09/refugees-run-seas.html>. Accessed October 17, 2018.
28. See Hassan Blasim, "A Truck to Berlin," in *The Madman of Freedom Square*, trans. Jonathan Wright (Croydon, UK: Comma Press, 2009), 67–73.
29. See M.I.A., "Borders," YouTube, February 17, 2016, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNw7HbaeWY>.
30. Um, *From the Land of Shadows*, 10.
31. Um, *From the Land of Shadows*, 10.
32. This critique, though, is not ideological, but reflects an embodied experience. Le is equally critical of communism in Vietnam: "Everyone was free now, free of having a job and free of thinking also because the government did the thinking for the people." Le, "Coolie in America," 142.
33. Le, "Coolie in America," 142.
34. Le, "Coolie in America," 142.
35. Le, "Coolie in America," 142.
36. Le, "Coolie in America," 142.
37. Coolie labor was also an element of French Indochina, providing another historical layer to Le's usage of the term. See Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémerly, *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858–1954*, trans. Ly Lan Dill-Klein with Eric Jennings, Nora Taylor, and Noémi Tousignant (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).
38. Jan Breman and E. Valentine Daniel, "Conclusion: The Making of a Coolie," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 19, no. 3–4 (1992): 283.
39. Lisa Yun writes that "coolie history and its attendant narratives become a conundrum of contradictions: hypermobile yet immobilized, owned by one and owned by many, fluid yet enslaved" (xx). See Lisa Yun, *The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African Slaves in Cuba* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008); Jane Junn, "From Coolie to Model Minority: U.S. Immigration Policy and the Construction of Racial Identity," *Du Bois Review* 4, no. 2 (2007): 355–73.
40. Peter Nyers, *Rethinking Refugees: Beyond States of Emergency* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.
41. Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 53.
42. See Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

43. Hannah Arendt, "We Refugees," in *Altogether Elsewhere: Writers on Exile*, ed. Marc Robinson (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1999), 117.
44. Arendt, "We Refugees," 117.
45. Arendt, "We Refugees," 119.
46. Agamben takes Arendt's claim further, arguing that "the refugee is the sole category in which it is possible today to perceive the forms and limits of a political community to come." See Giorgio Agamben, "We Refugees," trans. Michael Rocke, *Symposium* 49, no. 2 (1995): 114–19, 114.
47. Arendt, "We Refugees," 119.
48. Le, "Coolie in America," 150.
49. Le, "Coolie in America," 150.
50. Le, "Coolie in America," 146.
51. See Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping: Melancholia and the Politics of Modernism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).
52. Vijay Prashad, "Foreword: Speaking of Saris," in Patel, *Migritude*, iv.
53. Jenny Uechi, "This Syrian Refugee Wants to Learn More about Canada's First Nations," *National Observer*, March 22, 2017, <https://www.nationalobserver.com/2017/03/22/news/syrian-refugee-wants-learn-more-about-canadas-first-nations>.
54. Uechi, "This Syrian Refugee Wants to Learn."
55. Evyn Lê Espiritu Gandhi, *Archipelago of Resettlement: Vietnamese Refugee Settlers and Decolonization across Guam and Israel-Palestine* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022), 2.
56. Espiritu Gandhi, *Archipelago of Resettlement*, 5.
57. Gage Karahkwí:io Diabo argues that these social antagonisms and bad feelings must not be covered over with abstract good emotions (respect, responsibility, and gratitude) in attempts to build alliances between Indigenous people and settlers of color. See Gage Karahkwí:io Diabo, "Bad Feelings, Feeling Bad: The Affects of Asian-Indigenous Coalition," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 20, no. 2 (2019): 257–70.
58. Queer theorists of color have, in particular, examined this. See Chandan Reddy, *Freedom with Violence: Race Sexuality, and the US State* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).
59. See Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright, "Decolonizing Resistance, Challenging Colonial States," *Social Justice* 35, no. 3 (2009): 120–38.
60. Uechi, "This Syrian Refugee Wants to Learn."
61. See Sunera Thobani, *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007).
62. See Harsha Walia, *Undoing Border Imperialism* (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2013); Glenn Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 40–41.
63. In approaching such complicated questions, it would be useful to keep in mind that "Indigenous" and "refugee" are historical experiences that can and do overlap. James Clifford suggests that there are "diasporic *dimensions* or *conjectures* in contemporary native lives" (71) and that "something like an indigenous desire animates diasporic consciousness"

(76). Writing about Indigenous refugees in the U.S.-Mexico and U.S.-Canada borderlands during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Brenden W. Rensink argues that settler border making redefined Indigenous mobility. That is, when Indigenous people cross geopolitical borders, often fleeing state punishment, they can be rendered native “but foreign” (7). We might also look to Central American Indigenous peoples who were part of the “migrant caravans” that traveled through Mexico to reach the United States. The point here is that there can be experiential similarities and imbrications between the two categories. See James Clifford, *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013); Brenden W. Rensink, *Native but Foreign* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2018).

64. Daniel Coleman, “Indigenous Place and Diaspora Space: Of Literalism and Abstraction,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 6, no. 1 (2016): 73.

65. Coleman, “Indigenous Place and Diaspora Space,” 62.

66. See Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014).

67. Uechi, “This Syrian Refugee Wants to Learn.”

68. Ali Abukar, “Reconciliation and New Canadians,” in *Reconciliation in Practice: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*, ed. Ranjan Datta (Halifax, Canada: Fernwood, 2020), 114.

69. Abukar, “Reconciliation and New Canadians,” 113.

70. Mennonite Central Committee, “Bridging Gaps between Indigenous Peoples and Newcomers,” <https://mcccanada.ca/stories/bridging-gaps-between-indigenous-people-newcomers>.

71. Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, “Open Letter: UBCIC Condemns Child Detention and Family Separation,” June 25, 2018, https://www.ubcic.bc.ca/ubcic_condemns_child_detention.

72. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 9.

73. Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 228–29.

74. Kim TallBear, “Caretaking Relations, Not American Dreaming,” *Kalfou: A Journal of Comparative and Relational Ethnic Studies* 6, no. 1 (2019): 25.

75. TallBear, “Caretaking Relations,” 37.

76. TallBear, “Caretaking Relations,” 38.

77. Kandice Chuh et al., “Being with José: An Introduction,” *Social Text*, no. 121 (2014): 1–7.

78. See Espiritu, *Body Counts*; Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom*.

79. Southeast Asian Resource Action Center, “During this year’s #WorldRefugeeDay . . .,” Facebook post, June 20, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/page/34803500301/search/?q=%23RefugeesForBlackLives>.

80. Southeast Asian Resource Action Center, “Statement on the Death of George Floyd,” May 27, 2020, <https://www.searac.org/press-room/searac-statement-on-the-death-of-george-floyd/#:~:text=It%20is%20incumbant%20on%20us,to%20endure%2C%20to%20this%20day>.

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