The Routledge Handbook of Refugee Narratives

Edited by Evyn Lê Espiritu Gandhi and Vinh Nguyen

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF
REFUGEE NARRATIVES

This *Handbook* presents a transnational and interdisciplinary study of refugee narratives, broadly defined. Interrogating who can be considered a refugee and what constitutes a narrative, the thirty-eight chapters included in this collection encompass a range of forcibly displaced subjects, a mix of geographical and historical contexts, and a variety of storytelling modalities. Analyzing novels, poetry, memoirs, comics, films, photography, music, social media, data, graffiti, letters, reports, eco-design, video games, archival remnants, and ethnography, the individual chapters counter dominant representations of refugees as voiceless victims. Addressing key characteristics and thematics of refugee narratives, this *Handbook* examines how refugee cultural productions are shaped by and in turn shape socio-political landscapes. It will be of interest to researchers, teachers, students, and practitioners committed to engaging refugee narratives in the contemporary moment.

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Dedicated to the loving memory of our friend and colleague Y-Dang Troeung

refugee, survivor, storyteller

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

INTRODUCTION

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Suitcases and Snapshots

An opened suitcase holds the miniature model of a crumbling room. The room's remaining walls are cracked and pocked-marked, evoking violence, abandonment, and decay. Covered by a layer of dust, the fuchsia armchair and Persian carpet suggest a scene of bygone domesticity, a place where people once lived. Positioned inside the suitcase, however, this home is no longer just a memory left behind but something carried along in the ongoing process of displacement. This mixed-media art piece, entitled "Baggage #2," from Syrian American artist and architect Mohamad Hafez's *Baggage Series*, provides a visual model of the "life narratives experienced by refugees of war."[1] A life can, indeed must, be packed inside a suitcase when one is forcibly uprooted. A suitcase becomes a vessel through which the materials that make up a life narrative are gathered and transported to different places and times. As such, the suitcase and its physical contents—clothes, jewelry, money, and documents—can tell an expansive (hi)story of refugeeism, and not just the celebrated story of the cosmopolitan jet-setter, with which it is more commonly linked. Furthermore, "baggage" signifies the emotional and psychic things that linger and refuse to be forgotten. The refugee baggage evoked in Hafez's artwork includes the memories and histories that also migrate, that are formed in migrating, and that last well beyond migration's seeming conclusion.[2]

A bag or baggage might thus be a fitting carrier for refugee narratives, as stories of and formed in displaced movement, that cross borders and bring material and immaterial things around the world and back. *The Routledge Handbook of Refugee Narratives* explores these narratives and their significance to understanding the social conditions, cultural politics, and personal experiences of refugee migration. This collection is guided by the dual question: who can be considered a refugee and what constitutes a narrative? To address this question, we offer an interdisciplinary study, drawing from the humanities and social sciences, that radically expands its two key terms of engagement—*refugees* and *narratives*—to encompass a range of forcibly displaced subjects and a variety of storytelling modalities. The chapters in this volume explore the different ways refugees are imbricated with narrative or how they are understood and produced *through* narrative, whether it be legal, journalistic, artistic, literary, or personal.

In response to dominant media and state narratives about refugees that depict them as passive victims of decontextualized violence or demand first-person testimonials of their trauma, we turn to a larger range of narrative productions to elucidate the complexities of refugee flight and resettlement. The chapters in this volume analyze novels, poetry, memoirs, comics, films, photography, music, social media, data, graffiti, letters, reports, eco-design, video games, archival remnants, and ethnography written by, alongside, or in conversation with refugee cultural producers. Narrative, as this collection demonstrates,

can be found in a plethora of texts and contexts: in books, on big and small screens, on the internet, in galleries, and throughout ordinary life. Because refugee narratives take so many different forms and are so much a part of the social and cultural landscape, we contend that a focus on refugee aesthetics and narrative strategies is crucial to both understanding the processes of narrative production and to responding to oversimplified narratives about refugees.[3]

In our attempts to examine what counts as a narrative and who is recognized as a refugee, this volume provides snapshots that define and also revise the broad category of *refugee narratives*. That is, each chapter captures a particular moment in time, a specific view of what refugee narrative is and what it does. These snapshots, when placed together in the carrier that is this Handbook, sketch a larger picture of the different kinds of refugee narratives being produced and the questions that preoccupy research on these narratives in the early part of the twenty-first century. As a snapshot, it is not the first or final say on the topic but one configuration in a still growing constellation of scholarship on refugee narratives.[4]

In examining and expanding "refugee" and "narrative," we point to the historical and contemporary richness of refugee cultural productions that range in content, tone, form, and modality. In the current moment, specifically, there is a proliferation of narratives on and about refugees. No doubt, this is partly a response to the massive number of refugees and displaced persons around the world, the highest since World War II.[5] The chapters in this collection attend to the many unfolding refugee migrations in the present, as well as past displacements and those yet to come. They also point to the porousness of legal and generic categories—how strict boundaries, borders, and definitions do not hold up under analysis. Refugee narratives is, in essence, a formation that resists definitive categorization, engaging categories in order to complicate and push their parameters. The chapters included in this volume ask readers to (re)consider the inherited conventions and assumptions regarding how refugees are narrated and the master narratives that exist about them. Doing so is a matter of aesthetic education, ethical contemplation, and political commitment.

This collection highlights the need for what writer and critic Viet Thanh Nguyen calls "narrative plenitude," a diverse, differing, and often-conflicting wellspring of narratives on and about refugees.[6] An "economy of narrative plenitude" allows for narratives that move beyond refugee victimhood or innocence, that comprehend refugees as diverse and complex, eluding attempts to reduce them to stereotypes and well-worn conventions.[7] It facilitates an understanding of refugee narratives as a series of interconnected snapshots as opposed to a singular discourse.

The mixed and varied contents of this Handbook-as-refugee-suitcase demonstrate the various journeys that refugees have traveled, bearing witness to the fact that they too are undeniably part of the global community, are human beings affected by and affecting the world, rather than rightless, pitiful victims, abstracted from place and time.[8] This insight resonates in Hafez's "Baggage #2." The absence of human subjects in the piece is not an elision of subjectivity but rather a pregnant haunting suggesting people beyond the frame. Two clues—a small plant in the corner and a black telephone by the chair— echo the possibility of life and survivance, of resilience and flight elsewhere.[9] The physical suitcase itself is proof of a subject—the one who carries—who is gone, in waiting, or still to come. Hafez's art invites us to think about refugee narratives beyond the text and outside of the visible. It encourages us to look for refugee narratives in unlikely times and places, to seek out these snapshots of forcibly displaced subjects on the move.

Dominant Narratives about Refugees

A Handbook on refugee narratives firstly warrants a discussion of the perennial question: Who is a refugee? According to Jewish political theorist Hannah Arendt, the figure of the modern refugee emerged during the interwar years in Europe, when the consolidation of the nation-state structure led to the mass increase in stateless peoples who were excluded from narrow definitions of the nation and thus denied state-granted citizenship rights.[10] This mass refugee crisis—in which inalienable human

rights ceased to exist as such—culminated in the Holocaust, one consequence of which was the violent expulsion of Jewish, Romani, and communist subjects, among others, from the body politic.

In the wake of the devastation of World War II, the newly established United Nations, founded in 1945, ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, which sought to legally delineate who constitutes a refugee and codify internationally recognized refugee rights. In particular, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) defined a refugee as "someone who has been forced to flee his or her country" due to "a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group."[11] The 1951 Convention and the subsequent 1967 Protocol, which crucially expanded the geographical and temporal limits of the Convention, outline how refugees should be treated, stressing the core principle of non-refoulement, which protects a refugee from being returned to "a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom."[12] Moreover, attempts have been made in subsequent decades to become more inclusive of the grounds for persecution. In recent years, for example, the UNHCR has moved to recognize the asylum claims of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI) individuals who face fear of persecution due to sexual orientation or gender identity, though the application has been uneven across national lines.

What this oft-cited legal genealogy of the emergence of the modern refugee elides, however, are other stories and experiences of forced displacement. For one, the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol overshadowed the earlier 1949 United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), established in the wake of the State of Israel's 1948 declaration of sovereignty in Palestine and designed to address the mass expulsion of native Palestinians from their ancestral homes and villages. Palestinian refugees and exiles, therefore, are legally excluded from the purview of the 1951 Refugee Convention; their violent displacement due to Zionist settler colonialism is not recognized as a "well-founded fear of persecution," and their aspiration for the Right of Return to their contested homeland rather than resettlement elsewhere complicates the UNHCR emphasis on non-refoulment. As Eman Ghanayem argues in her chapter in this volume, a more expansive understanding of refugee narratives should therefore account for the imbrication of refugeehood and Indigeneity, war and settler colonialism, forced displacement and the desire to return.

The 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol's narrow recognition of what constitutes a "well-founded fear of persecution," moreover, does not account for the many causes that force people to flee their homelands, which include not only war and ethnic conflict but also ongoing legacies of colonial dispossession, Western intervention, economic underdevelopment, global capitalism, labor exploitation, and climate change. This collection, therefore, examines the narratives of UNHCR-recognized refugees alongside asylum seekers, so-called "economic migrants," internally displaced peoples, Black fugitives, Indigenous subjects, and climate refugees, attending to the right of resettlement alongside the desire to remain. We do not limit our study to those displaced during and after World War II but also look to earlier instances in which people were made to move prior to the establishment of the UNHCR. Via this expansive definition of who constitutes a refugee, we are interested in mapping resonances across a rich diversity of experiences of forced displacement, even as the chapters included in this volume are careful to attend to the specificities of different socio-historical contexts.[13]

The *Routledge Handbook of Refugee Narratives* explores the multitude of narratives that cohere around refugees. In many ways, it serves as a resistant rejoinder to dominant narratives about refugees that circulate in the media and are codified in government responses: narratives that depict refugees as a threatening horde, wave, or virus that will overpower and infect the fragile body politic; narratives that conceive of refugees as passive objects of pity and humanitarian intervention and that paint Western resettlement nations as saviors; and narratives that focus on refugee gratitude or success, overlooking the ongoing effects of unsettlement and exile. We also push back against master narratives that depict some refugees as more deserving of aid than others: as we write this introduction in spring 2022, for example, we witness how white refugees from Ukraine are embraced by Western countries eager to condemn Russia's atrocities, even as racialized refugees from Afghanistan, Syria, Eritrea, Sudan, Haiti, Myanmar-Burma, and Central America—to name but a few—are disregarded or denied asylum.

In response to these dominant narratives, this volume adopts a broad critical refugee studies framework—one that centers the refugee as a "critical idea but also as a social actor whose life, when traced, illuminates the interconnections of colonization, war, and global social change," to quote Yến Lê Espiritu.[14] The chapters highlight refugee agency and complexity, centering refugee voices, stories, and epistemologies. They recognize the elongated temporalities of unsettlement, attending to what Khatharya Um calls "refugitude" and Vinh Nguyen expands on as "refugeetude."[15] They forge alternative and often novel ways of both narrating refugees and understanding how refugees narrate themselves; in doing so, they open up the category of refugee narratives to include multiplicitous forms of social and cultural production, from literature to letters to the editor, photography to music, social media to video games.

Theorizing Refugee Narratives

The *Routledge Handbook of Refugee Narratives* engages with and builds on a growing body of humanities-inflected research that examines the unique role that narratives, broadly defined, play in representing and addressing the social conditions of refugee displacement. This scholarship zeros in on the specificities of "refugee" as an investigative category, even as it explores its porousness or pushes back against its limitations. In contrast to sociological studies, which often take the refugee as a mere object of analysis, these works collectively argue that a focus on refugee narratives—whether literary or visual, fictive or factual, conventional or experimental—enables a view of refugees as ontological and epistemological *subjects* shaped by and shaping history. Instead of an undifferentiated mass, abstract concept, or bureaucratic identification, refugees are embodied individuals with personal experiences that are situated in specific contexts. In this matter, narrative is specially positioned to demonstrate and insist that refugees are *human beings*, a fact that national security discourse, populist rhetoric, and bureaucratic processes often willfully ignore.

Conceiving refugee narratives as "stories of flight" that move between mobility and stasis, Eleni Coundouriotis reminds us that narratives crucially validate and justify human rights claims. They function as powerful evidentiary material in juridical determinations as well as proof of persecution and historical atrocity. Yet, beyond administrative usefulness, narratives also "hold at bay the dehumanizing aspects of the refugee experience of dependence by characterizing the refugee as heroic and agentic."[16] This humanizing capacity of narratives is particularly crucial for people who are often characterized as lacking, voiceless, or victims of crises. Against spectacularized media discourses of refugees, for example, Yogita Goyal sees the refugee novel as one particular kind of refugee narrative that can provide psychological depth to refugees and cultivate empathy in readers. Writing, Goyal suggests, "imagines futurity, inscribes memory, arranges time and place, or refuses the spectacular immediacy of traumatic images of refugees in favor of giving them voice and subjectivity."[17] The desire for voice and subjectivity is a desire to represent refugees as "experiencing subjects" who "make sense of violence and turbulent change."[18] Marita Eastmond reiterates the idea that refugee narratives are not just documentations of reality but mediated representations that "make room for a more dynamic view of the individual as subject, acting in the world and reflecting on that action. As such they also provide an opportunity or entry point to grasping the interplay between self and society."[19]

Eastmond points us to one of the most important functions of narrative: that it maps the linkages and connections between the personal and the political, biography and history, the self and others. While narratives are never completely detached from the social world from which they emerge, refugee narratives are a consciously and explicitly social enterprise. That is, they address the social issues and conditions of their time of production (and beyond). Refugee narratives are often politically oriented, highlighting the limitations of the current nation-state order and the need for alternative formations of collective belonging.

This brings us to another epistemological possibility that the scholarship opens up: refugee narratives as a critique of political categories of social organization such as nationalism, citizenship, and sovereignty.

According to Arendt, Liisa Malkki, and other scholars, displaced refugees make apparent that a "national order of things" cannot guarantee human rights for stateless peoples.[20] Refugee narratives thus call forth "a no-longer-delayable renewal of categories," a push to re-imagine "a different set of connections across time and space that point somewhere else besides assimilation into the nation."[21] This somewhere else is a transnational formation that extends beyond the confines of geopolitical borders as well as the bounds of national literary traditions and languages.

The nation-state is a complicated space for refugees, at once a site of belonging, protection, and desire as well as a place of danger, exclusion, and contestation. The history of the refugee is, in some ways, also the history of the nation-state—of its constructions, transformations, and operations. As Hadji Bakara explains, "refugee writers have always been special witnesses to the shifting grounds of political life."[22] Refugee narratives might thus be understood as both personal and collective narratives of witness. They observe and testify to wars, genocides, colonialisms, global power struggles, the drawing and redrawing of borders, the collapse of nation-states and the creation of new ones, the spaces in between zones of sovereignty, the law's exclusionary and inclusionary logics, and the forging of new communities.

It is important to note that not all refugee narratives are critical of the nation-state and its political categories. Indeed, many refugee narratives, wittingly or not, reproduce hegemonic discourses of home, belonging, and rights. The scholarship, however, has, for the most part, been interested in probing the aspects of refugee narratives that contain the potential for political resistance. That is, they view refugee narratives not just as testimonies of witness but also interventions in public life and political discourse, challenging the power of the nation-state to determine the parameters of social life and define the political. Bakara further suggests that "the ideas and affects found in writing by and about refugees have become sources of intellectual and aesthetic resistance to both xenophobic nationalism and neoliberal globalization."[23] Similarly, Claire Gallien, understanding refugee poetics via postcolonial theory, sees narratives as "oppositional responses of writers and artists to the discourse of the state and mainstream media."[24] Such "writing back" is also a "writing beyond" the status quo that has normalized various forms of violence and inequity. In other words, narratives are imaginative acts that envision alternatives to the present that has failed to meaningfully reckon with refugee migrations.

For Lyndsey Stonebridge, refugee writing is centered on the experience of "rightlessness." As such, it poses one of the most pressing questions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries: "What kind of political, legal, moral, and psychic life might we imagine existing *between* national citizenship and statelessness?"[25] Such a question seeks a different social horizon at the intersection between ethics and politics. For Stonebridge, it is "literary or aesthetic form" that can perform this crucial imaginative work of formulating "alternatives to nationalist conceptions of political sovereignty."[26] Agnes Woolley further contends that narrative representation can "intersect with, critique, and even transform the public debate over asylum."[27] In other words, there is a direct relationship between aesthetic representation and political and popular discourses on refugees. Navigating the tension between refugee invisibility and overexposure, narrative "offers alternative, non-coercive, narrative forums in which to explore the condition of statelessness."[28] Relatedly, Marguerite Nguyen and Catherine Fung argue that bringing ethics and aesthetics together "can reveal how the complex histories, geopolitics, and memories of refugee migrations are variously obscured and brought into view."[29] Attention to representational modes and formal elements of narrative can yield insights into the ethical concerns regarding refugees as objects of humanitarian care, redirecting focus onto cultural expressions and the lifeworlds of refugees.

While much of the existing scholarship on refugee narratives has focused on either legal testimonies or literary texts, this collection moves to open the category of refugee narratives to include the sonic and the visual, the embodied and the virtual, and the affective and the social. In this way, the chapters included in this volume understand cultural production as both self-conscious and quotidian. Refugee narratives are embedded across multiple scales and forms of everyday life. In the sense that they aim to illuminate and also affect the material world, refugee narratives *do* important cultural, social, and political work. Cathy Schlund-Vials argues that the memory-work of those who survive violence and migration can reimagine "alternative sites for justice, healing, and reclamation" to shape more just futures.[30]

It is important, thus, to understand refugee narratives not as discursive or abstracted stories removed from the exigencies of the world but rather as intimately and deeply engaged works committed to understanding and transforming social life.

Themes and Problematics

The chapters within this Handbook explore the multiple dimensions of narrative, taking up the issues of refugee subjectivity and political critique in various ways. They delve into the themes and problematics that arise from careful examinations of refugee narratives. While the next section provides a navigational map of the individual chapters, this section outlines some of the overarching threads that run through the entire collection: truth and representation, voice and visibility, audience and positionality, praxis and aesthetics, space and time.

Because refugee narratives are dominated by the testimonial form, the question of truth and representation is a major concern for many of our contributors. The demand for truth, authenticity, and credibility is persistent for refugees who must prove the legitimacy of their asylum claims. Narratives can facilitate this truth-telling—via testimony, autobiography, oral history, interviews, and so on—but it can also question truth's absolute imperative and move beyond direct confessions of experience toward imagination and fabulation. In one sense or another, these chapters explore what narratives, true or not, can make possible, especially when it is by and about people who are persecuted and have been uprooted from home.

To think about narrative is to also think about personal, artistic, and political voice. How does voice develop? Who gets to have a voice? How is it "given" or thwarted? Voice in refugee narratives is both an aesthetic and political issue and gets us to the thorny problematic of agency—the ability to tell one's story, to affect the world, to determine the trajectory of one's life even in seemingly powerless circumstances. The authors in this volume show that voice is a complex mediation between refugees and others, including the nation-state, citizens, Indigenous peoples, and other migrants.

But what does it mean to be heard or to become visible? While recognition affords legal status, provides public platform, or enables the building of relations and communities, it can also reduce and simplify refugee subjects, the power dynamics at play in migration, and the structural forces that shape displacement. Visibility is a bind, and sometimes it is crucial to evade being seen and known. Accordingly, the quandaries of visibility, or producing narratives for public consumption, are explored by many of the contributors.

The tension between the value and the pitfalls of being heard, seen, and read puts a spotlight on the audience(s) for refugee narratives. Who are refugee narratives being produced for and to what ends? The audience is at one level amorphous, as anyone anywhere could potentially encounter refugee narratives, especially in our age of globalization and mass media. But audiences are also specific, like government officials, academics, confidants, family members, publics, and other refugees. Many of the chapters ask how audiences are supposed to feel or how they should respond to refugee narratives. The notion that refugee narratives elicit empathy and compassion is both emphasized and problematized, while questions about the audience's implication in histories of violence and ethical responsibility are raised. In this way, how narratives reach audiences or the platforms and medium of dissemination, whether they be print or digital, textual or visual, public or private, is a matter worthy of note.

Related to this is the method through which refugee narratives are brought into being, collected, or initiated. What prompts a "telling" of a story or a production of representation? The impetus for narrative influences the form it takes and the kinds of stories that can be told. In this way, the positionality of researchers, activists, advocates, writers, and refugees themselves is a matter of great importance. Because narratives about refugees that purport to know them and define their fate have always been vexed, our contributors take pains to contemplate refugees as knowledge producers and collaborators. They show us that refugees' active participation in the production of narrative is a major concern for those engaged in academic, artistic, and activist work.

Perhaps then it might be productive to think of refugee narratives as a praxis that is reflexive about the place of refugees in the global political imaginary and that attempts to engage with and effect change in the social sphere. As a broad category, refugee narratives attempt to challenge and revise the master narratives about refugees, particularly ones that traffic in tropes of victimhood and damage. They work to break borders and hermetic categories and offer more expansive views of refugee migration. In doing so, refugee narratives also question and blur the separation between refugee and resident, migrant and Indigenous subject.

We might view this border-breaking as the political and ethical content of refugee narratives. The Handbook's contributors, however, are also attuned to the aesthetic forms that dramatize and express this content. In other words, *how* refugee narratives are narrated matters. Meaning is to be found in the stylistic decisions and generic conventions (and breaches) that writers, artists, and cultural producers employ to craft refugee narratives. What an attention to form enables in terms of narrative and political intervention is a valuable contribution of these chapters.

Refugee narratives are inherently narratives of movement, even as they must often contend with the restriction of mobility. The theme of space and spatiality is thus central to many of the chapters. Movements across space, both physical and metaphorical, can convey experience and emotion and reveal itineraries of escape, resettlement, and solidarity. To speak of space is also, of course, to speak of time. As refugees move across space they also move across time, problematizing linear conceptions of chronology and pointing toward alternative futures.

Together, these themes and problematics that cut across the different chapters in the collection form a complex snapshot of refugee narratives and the concerns they engender. The specific focuses of the individual chapters, outlined in the next section, weave together these threads, grounding them in socio-political contexts and giving them shape and texture.

Navigational Map

While not comprehensive—an impossible task—the chapters in this volume address a wide range of geographical and historical contexts, spanning Asia, Africa, Europe, the Américas, and Australia and reaching across multiple centuries of forced displacement. Our authors as well are situated around the world, writing from both refugee and non-refugee perspectives, located both inside and outside of academia. What follows is a navigational map to help guide readers through the different sections of the collection. The table of contents should be read not as a conclusive doctrine but as an impermanent snapshot of just *one* way that the chapters gathered in this volume can speak to one another. We have organized the chapters in a way that facilitates different kinds of thematic, methodological, and conceptual conversations. We hope that these groupings spark connections and debate and ultimately offer deeper understandings of refugee narratives. The act of organizing and dividing the chapters into sections is somewhat artificial; it draws arbitrary borders where none should exist. Yet, we have undertaken this task for the purpose of readerly ease and navigation, with the caveat that other groupings are possible. The reader could, and should, choose to read promiscuously across the volume and ignore our organizational scheme altogether. Moreover, like the refugee narratives discussed in each chapter, the chapters themselves are elusive and mobile, reaching across the borders of each section to resonate with the themes, arguments, and provocations of chapters organized into other sections of the volume.

We begin with a cluster of chapters that consider narrative as a form of storytelling. Setting the terms of analysis for the rest of the volume, Carrie Dawson argues that refugee stories should be recognized as such; they are imaginative, creative, and audacious, shaped by literary devices such as allegory, myth, and surrealism. B. Venkat Mani offers "unsettlement" as a productive analytic for catalyzing conversations between comparative literature, world literature, and refugee studies. Bishupal Limbu highlights the limitations of refugee scripts that cohere to a narrow humanitarian template, pointing us instead toward complex stories of implication, beneficiary status, and ingratitude. Asha Varadharajan

explores the variegated intersections of trauma, narration, and self-realization, focusing on Holocaust and Bosnian refugee stories that eschew linear narratives of redemption or healing.

The next cluster of chapters examines how refugee narratives unsettle genre conventions in surprising ways. Sydney Van To theorizes refugee noir, arguing that literary noir—defined by motifs of homelessness, border-crossing, vigilante justice, and corrupt institutions—has too long disavowed its own refugee unconscious. Agnes Woolley discusses how recent films by and about refugees play with different genres, including horror, and tracks the emergence of a "new visual grammar of refugeehood." Centering a feminist refugee epistemology, Lan Duong explores how Vietnamese films that center the overlooked 1954 north-south migration of internally displaced refugees repurpose one of the most popular theatrical genres in Vietnam: the *cải lương* opera. Rounding out the section, Asis De traces how the figure of the refugee has evolved across the different novels included in Amitav Ghosh's prolific oeuvre.

Extending the discussion of visual narratives begun in the previous section in regards to film, the next section more deeply theorizes visibility and visuality in relation to photography and the digital. Tracking the shift from the hypervisibility of refugee migration in Lesvos, Greece, during the 2010s to the "crisis of disappearance" of refugee subjects during the COVID-19 pandemic, Anna Carastathis and Myrto Tsilimpounidi probe how different hegemonic visual narratives necessitate distinct political responses via what they call "(non)citizen/refugee photography." Analyzing digital autographics—which include performance art on social media, online comics, and digital music videos—that emerge from migrant communities who seek refugee status in Malaysia and Australia, M. Eliatamby-O'Brien theorizes "unarrival": a threshold state between migration and official arrival for those deemed ineligible for the legal category of refugee. Extending the focus on social media, Zuzanna Olszewska details how diasporic, Persian-language Afghan poets turn to Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook to share poetry after the Fall of Kabul in August 2021. Roopika Risam, in turn, probes how refugee narratives based on data can either reinforce or disrupt hegemonic tropes.

The next section prompts self-reflection on mediation and positionality, with the goal toward theorizing a refugee narrative pedagogy. Nina Mickwitz unpacks how writer positionality, production models, institutional contexts, and projected readerships mediate the narratives of three different comics. Elif Sarı meditates on the "auto-ethno-fiction" narrative of Aram, a self-identified queer lesbian refugee in Turkey, to discuss how research, collaboration, and friendship shape the telling, listening, and writing of refugee narratives. Analyzing recent middle grade/young adult literary texts that address Rohingya and Syrian refugee migration, Julia Hope outlines a "RefugeeCrit" framework that readers and teachers can use to unpack a text's depiction of the refugee experience, profile of the protagonist, role of the reader, and positionality of the author. Similarly, Erin Goheen Glanville details a cultural refugee studies pedagogy (CRSP) approach to refugee narratives, offering a postcolonial-inflected film project, *Borderstory*, as an illustrative example.

The rest of the volume is organized around key thematics. *Borderstory* offers a point of transition to the next section on border-crossing. Regina Marie Mills focuses on the southern U.S.-Mexico border, highlighting the diverse narratives of Central American border-crossers and attending to questions of gender, Blackness, and Indigeneity. Charmaine A. Nelson draws our attention to the U.S.-Canada border, interrogating how the category of refugee was routinely denied to enslaved fugitives who, flipping the script of the oft-cited Underground Railroad, fled southward from Canada to the United States. Moving to the South Asian context, Aalene Mahum Aneeq analyzes letters to the editor to discuss how the 1947 Partition of Pakistan from India and the mass border-crossings that ensued shaped religious discourses around the construction of the ideal Pakistani Muslim citizen in Punjab. In a more conceptual register, Angela Naimou engages with Iraqi cultural production to theorize the border itself as a kind of frame, subverted and shaped by frame narratives and narrative frames.

Health and (dis)ability constitute another key nexus of refugee narratives. Via an analysis of Caribbean refugee narratives, April Shemak proposes a biopoetics of health to counter states' and institutions'

biopolitical control of refugee bodily integrity. Turning to the histories and afterlives of the Cold War in Cambodia, Y-Dang Troeung puts critical refugee studies in conversation with critical disability studies to theorize "refugee race-ability," an analytic that grapples with how race and ableism shape refugee lifeworlds and modalities of resistance. Christiane Assefa's chapter, meanwhile, details how the San Diego Refugee Communities Coalition utilizes grassroots activism and a praxis of solidarity to respond to and empower forcibly displaced communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, in the process of contesting dominant, white-inflected narratives around health and wellness.

As the previous section makes clear, health and (dis)ability are collective concerns, necessitating communal networks of care and kinship: the focus of the next cluster of chapters. Turning to the Armenian genocide during World War I that preceded the establishment of the UNHCR, Veronika Zablotsky demonstrates the limitations of early American humanitarian discourse that articulated adoptive care and kinship of Armenian refugees such as Arshaluys Mardigian, only to overwrite their stories and demands for juridical redress. Eun Ah Cho unpacks how Jero Yun's films about North Korean border crossers both reinforce and subvert patriarchal representations of ideal motherhood. Centering the oral histories and photovoice projects of recent gay and lesbian refugees resettled in Canada, Katherine Fobear highlights how queer narratives of intimacy challenge conflations of home with both the "nation-state" and "heteronormative domicile." Sunčica Klaas hones in on the figure of the child, engaging contemporary narratives of child refugees from Mexico and Central America to explore the intersections of childhood, care, and technology.

Refugee narratives are embedded even as they traverse across different geographies, necessitating an engagement of land/water ecologies. In the next section, Marguerite Nguyen theorizes "refugee ecologies" as the interactive relationship between refugee characters and their literary environments or settings. Himadri Chatterjee explores the importance of ecology, nature, memory, and forgetting in Dalit refugee writings in Bangla, posing the provocation, "How does a person without a homeland remember the loss of home?" Eman Ghanayem theorizes the intersections of refugeehood and Indigeneity, examining Palestinian and American Indian depictions of displacement as stories of place and epiphanies of Indigenous hope.

The previous section's focus on ecologies primes readers for the next section's engagement with refugee spatialities and cartographies. In conversation with Afghan and Sudanese refugees that he met while conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Patras, Greece, Marco Mogiani theorizes what he calls "refugees' counter-narratives of settlement and mobility." Aline Lo offers the "karst mountains" as a spatial analytic for examining how Hmong American literature and art decenter the looming place of the Secret War in Hmong refugee narratives. Directing attention to Indigenous and forced migrant routes that connect Australia and Indonesia, Kieren Kresevic Salazar proposes the "archipelago" as another cartography for tracing refugee cultural production. Nathan Allen Jung, meanwhile, turns to the digital, engaging a framework of affective geography to theorize how refugee video games can cultivate what he calls "spatial empathy."

The volume concludes with a meditation on temporality and futurity. Alenka Bartulović and Miha Kozorog examine how Bosnian refugees and Slovenian residents in the wake of the War on the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia formed musical bands in Slovenia out of the "dull time" of boredom. Both Emily Hue and Olivia Arlene Quintanilla contemplate the future-oriented temporalities underlining climate refugee narratives; while Hue contrasts corporate eco-design proposals with more environmental justice-oriented visions of sustainability, Quintanilla unpacks how climate change narratives mark some Pacific Islands for drowning (climate refugees) and others for militarized resettlement (climate refuge), necessitating Indigenous visions of climate justice. Hadji Baraka concludes our collection by interrogating associations of refugees with the "bad future," turning to early refugee writers such as Arendt, Anna Seghers, and Bertolt Brecht to address the seeming epistemological impossibility of refugee futurity. His argument that refugee futures are catachrestic opens up space for imagining new visions of refugee justice that do not reproduce teleological or neoliberal narratives of what the future may hold.

A Snapshot in Time

A snapshot seeks to capture stories and trajectories in flight—of homes packed into baggage and violence narrowly escaped. As a snapshot in time, this collection presents just one constellation of the themes, problematics, and interventions that concern refugee narratives as they have emerged and been articulated in this particular moment. But this snapshot also offers a picture of our embodied conditions of production and how this collection came into being. The rising global death toll due to ongoing wars and the pandemic has made the collective writing of this volume at times painful and difficult, even as it has underscored the sense of political urgency with which we write.

We began this project in January 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic started to spread across the globe. The pandemic curtailed mobility, as governments imposed quarantines that restricted movement and travel in an attempt to curb the virus's spread. But the pandemic did not stop war, imperialism, settler colonialism, and economic underdevelopment—that is, the very conditions that forcibly displace refugees. Indeed, many governments weaponized the pandemic as a pretense to close borders and deny refuge to those whose need to flee was only exacerbated by conditions of global illness and precarity.

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted people's lifeworlds—those of refugee cultural producers but also of this volume's many authors. Collectively we struggled with new childcare responsibilities, shifts to online teaching and labor, institutional changes, protracted separation from loved ones, illness in our bodies and homes, and the grief of mourning the dead. To write about and alongside refugee narratives these past few years, then, was no easy endeavor. As editors, we did our best to engage with our authors with compassion and care, knowing that our own struggles were reflected in those whose work we wanted to feature. We thank our authors for their commitment to this project and for their belief in the necessity to sit with refugee narratives under conditions of global and personal duress.

The chapters in this volume were also produced under conditions of protracted warfare and ongoing forced displacement. Several authors changed the focus of their chapters to respond to unfolding conditions of refugee flight: the COVID-19 pandemic, of course, but also the Black Lives Matters protests that started in the United States but spread globally in the wake of George Floyd's murder in May 2020; the coup d'état in Myanmar-Burma in February 2021; the sharp uptick in Zionist violence against Palestinians in May 2021; the Fall of Kabul and so-called end to the War on Terror in August 2021. Many refugee migrations discussed in this collection are ongoing: forcibly displaced peoples from Palestine, Syria, Haiti, Central America, Sudan, and Eritrea, to name but a few, continue to seek refuge and a better life. Climate refugee migrations are increasing as global temperatures continue to rise. As we write this introduction in spring 2022, Russian aggression has displaced millions of Ukrainian refugees with no end to warfare in sight.

Global conditions are ever changing; as such, this collection can only offer a snapshot of refugee narratives as captured in this particular moment of the early twenty-first century. Future volumes will be needed to take stock of political and cultural shifts. We hope that this collection can serve as an inflection point—to speak back against dominant narratives that depict refugees as victims of warfare or objects of humanitarian aid and to highlight how refugee narratives envision different forms of social organization in the present and those still to come. We hope that this volume can intervene in the trajectory of refugee futurities; that it may be packed securely in a suitcase and carried in the flight toward alternative horizons.

Notes

1 Hafez, *Baggage Series*.
2 See also Ma Vang's discussion of the "lost bag" and the stories of loss that it carries in *History on the Run*.
3 August, *The Refugee Aesthetic*.
4 See for example: Nguyen, *The Displaced*; Cox et al., *Refugee Imaginaries*; Espiritu and Sharif, "Critical Refugee Studies"; Espiritu et al., *Departures*.
5 UNHCR, "Figures at a Glance," June 18, 2021, https://www.unhcr.org/en-us/figures-at-a-glance.html.

6 Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*, 203.
7 Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*, 203.
8 Nyers, "Abject Cosmopolitanism."
9 Vizenor, *Native Liberty.*
10 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism.*
11 UNHCR, "Who Is a refugee?"
12 UNHCR, "1951 Refugee Convention."
13 We are influenced by The Critical Refugee Studies Collective's definition of "refugee": "Refugees are human beings forcibly displaced within or outside of their land of origin as a result of persecution, conflict, war, conquest, settler/colonialism, militarism, occupation, empire, and environmental and climate-related disasters, regardless of their legal status. Refugees can be self-identified and are often unrecognized within the limited definitions proffered by international and state laws, hence may be subsumed, in those instances, under other labels such as 'undocumented.'"
14 Espiritu, *Body Counts*, 11.
15 Um, *From the Land of Shadows*, 213; Nguyen, "Refugeetude."
16 Coundouriotis, *Narrating Human Rights in Africa*, 120.
17 Goyal, "'We Are All Migrants,'" 248.
18 Eastmond, "Stories as Lived Experience," 249.
19 Eastmond, "Stories as Lived Experience," 250.
20 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 267–302; Malkki, "Refugees and Exile."
21 Agamben, "We Refugees," 117; Nguyen, "Refugee Memories and Asian American Critique," 934.
22 Bakara, "Introduction: Refugee Literatures," 289.
23 Bakara, "Introduction: Refugee Literatures," 291.
24 Gallien, "Forcing Displacement," 724.
25 Stonebridge, *Placeless People*, 19.
26 Stonebridge, *Placeless People*, 14.
27 Woolley, *Contemporary Asylum Narratives*, 6.
28 Woolley, *Contemporary Asylum Narratives*, 20.
29 Nguyen and Fung, "Refugee Cultures," 2.
30 Schlund-Vials, *War, Genocide, and Justice*, 17.

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PART I

Storytelling

1

FLIGHTS OF FANCY

Imagination, Audacity, and Refugee Storytelling

Carrie Dawson

Individuals seeking to make a refugee claim from within Canada fill out a Basis of Claim (BOC) Form and submit it to the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRB), the independent administrative tribunal that decides refugee claims. The BOC Form includes the following directions: "The information you give in your BOC Form must be *complete, true, and correct*. Your BOC Form will be used as evidence in your claim for refugee protection, and you will be asked questions about the information you give in the form."[1] Beyond that, the form directs claimants to "explain everything in order, starting with the oldest information and ending with the newest."[2] Where winning favor can be a matter of life and death, claimants, many of whom have suffered lasting trauma and most of whom are operating in a language that is not their own, use that narrative to demonstrate credibility while establishing persecution. The narrative forms the crux of the subsequent oral hearing, after which a member of the IRB decides their claim.

Canada has granted refugee claimants an opportunity to introduce and supplement written claims at oral hearings since 1985, but the processes governing hearings have changed over time: now, there is one decision-maker presiding rather than two; the reliance of video technologies means that more hearings are carried out at a distance; and, perhaps most importantly, the 2003 introduction of reverse-order questioning means that hearings are led by the decision-maker's questions rather than the claimant's testimony. With this last change in mind, legal scholar John Galloway argues that oral hearings have become increasingly adversarial, with claimants being challenged to explain perceived "defects" in their written submissions and oral testimony.[3] Inasmuch as the IRB has "lost sight of the ideal that the proper way to determine refugee claims is to enable claimants to tell their story," it has, he suggests, also "lost the institutional will to listen."[4]

Since Galloway's essay was published in 2011, the narrative dimension of the refugee claim has been further constrained by the adoption of the updated BOC Form, which directs claimants to answer multiple short-answer questions rather than providing room for a more open narrative. A different kind of constraint was introduced by the 2012 decision to restrict the amount of time claimants have to prepare their BOC form to 15 days. Most recently, the federal government—which has been experimenting with automated decision-making software in immigration decisions since 2014—announced its plans to expand the use of "predictive analytics" in some areas of the refugee determination process.[5] For all these reasons, Galloway's concerns about fostering a "will to listen" to refugee stories are increasingly urgent.

This chapter attempts to extend the "call for narrative," but rather than focusing on things that constrain the telling of refugee stories during the claim process, I contend that the appraisal of refugee stories needs to begin by understanding them as such. Though I begin with a brief survey of work by

legal studies scholars who explore the importance of storytelling in the refugee determination process, the bulk of the chapter considers how creative writing by and about refugees extends the stories that refugees are expected to tell, whether in the hearing room, in the press, or in print. Recognizing that all those venues tend to reward refugees who tell factual stories of their flight to safety, I focus instead on the valency and audacity of ostentatiously imaginative literary representations of the refugee as story-teller. Foregrounding the extent to which telling and hearing stories is a necessarily imaginative enter-prise, I draw on Phillipe Falardeau's film *Monsieur Lazhar*, Rawi Hage's novel *Cockroach*, and Ahmad Danny Ramadan's novel *The Clothesline Swing* to consider how literature and film can hone the will and ability to listen to refugee stories, while communicating difficult, complicated truths.

In considering the valency of creative texts that represent the refugee certification process, many scholars have emphasized their ability to give voice to stories that are told behind closed doors and constrained by a myriad of factors, including trauma. Such arguments are sensible and they inform important grassroots projects fostering storytelling among refugee populations, but I argue something different. I contend that "what literary forms have to offer in the analysis of refugee testimony"[6] also has to do with their inventiveness, their exploitation of the gap between representation and the real. Paying particular attention to allegory, myth, and surrealism, I suggest that such analysis can be improved by careful attention to literary forms, not because of their realistic representation of the refugee's reason for flight but because of their imaginative flights of fancy.

Though I contrast the instrumentalism of statist readings of refugees with creative work that fosters more open-ended and imaginative reading practices, I understand law and literature to be "mutually implicated."[7] In this, I am guided by Joseph Slaughter, whose argument for the "socio-cultural work" of the *bildungsroman* begins with two key observations. Firstly, "articulating the narrative subtexts and implications of legal form(s) enables us to recognize some of the ways that law … projects and depends on cultural narratives for its effective operation, legitimation, and social compulsion."[8] Secondly, "rec-ognizing some of the human rights implications of literary form(s) means also becoming attentive to the often-unpredictable ways in which our reading practices are themselves implicated in the possibility and project of realizing a world based on human rights."[9] Obviously, any attempt to move between the lit-erary and legal realms when talking about the "reading practices" that serve refugees needs to acknow-ledge that poems and stories by and about refugees do not save lives, but that the stories claimants tell can do so. As such, recognizing that the stakes are altogether different inside and outside of the deter-mination process, I want to underscore the simple observation that those who get refugee status and go on to become writers or cultural practitioners tend to be acclaimed as witnesses but struggle to be recognized as storytellers,[10] while those who are in the process of seeking refugee status have no interest in being seen as such. Indeed, the perception of the claimant as a storyteller—one who departs from or embellishes upon the facts and is seen to use imagination and craft to beguile an audience—is almost certain to diminish credibility and get in the way of success.

The Inventiveness of Truth Claims

And yet, the claimant's success is nevertheless dependent on the mastery of storytelling conventions. As Anthea Vogl argues, "the law's requirement for 'plausible' evidence involves an expectation that refugee applicants tell a good story—that is, one that predominantly conforms to the conventions of model narrative forms."[11] But, as has been suggested, the obstacles to such speech are enormous. Other problems impair decision-makers' ability to attend to the stories that claimants struggle to tell; for example, Audrey Macklin, a legal scholar and former member of the IRB, argues that "profound differences of culture, class, personal history, and political context manifest through unarticulated assumptions and [mis]readings."[12] As a literary scholar interested in the idea that the refugee's testimony—however faithful or factual—is storied and shaped by the limits of language and memory, I want to suggest that the potential for "[mis]readings" is exacerbated if we fail to attend to the role that imaginative language plays in making and deciding claims. As Benjamin Berger notes, "Anglo-Canadian jurisprudence is

replete with metaphorical constructions of the law" and key legal concepts are routinely expressed through metaphors that operate analogically to condense abstract ideas.[13] As such, any attempt to understand the "role that narrative form plays in governing both the presentation and the assessment of refugee applicants' testimony during the oral hearing" must take seriously both the idea of the refugee claimant as a storyteller and that of the decision-maker as equally engaged in an imaginative enterprise.[14]

In an article entitled "Failures of Imagination," Laurence J. Kirmayer argues that "the IRB assess[es] the narrative of asylum seekers against the notion of a truthful story as fixed and isomorphic to a single historical sequence of events" and "any deviation from this fixed account is evidence of dissimulation designed to claim the valued status of refugee."[15] To the extent that the credibility of IRB decision-maker's findings rests on the perception that they have accurately assessed the significance and truth value of the facts encoded in refugees' narratives, they may have little inclination to contend with the extent to which—far from being "fixed"—claim stories are imaginative constructs shaped by the words that are available (or not) to the teller, and by the context in which they are told, heard, and read. As Kirmayer argues, "The stories [decision-makers] find credible depend on a backdrop of narratives in constant circulation controlled by interests that are not neutral and would have us imagine our world in a certain way."[16] Kirmayer's concern with "interests that are not neutral" is bolstered by recent reports indicating bias or other problems with decision-maker credibility at the IRB,[17] but his argument is particularly pertinent here insofar as it presents the cultural and structural issues resulting in the "breaches of etiquette, procedure, understanding and even compassion" at IRB hearings as "failures of imagination."[18] "And imagination," he concludes, "is the only faculty we have that lets us see beyond the horizon of convention."[19]

Anthea Vogl echoes aspects of Kirmayer's argument in her consideration of the storytelling conventions at play in the determination process; for example, she emphasizes that the claimant must present evidence of persecution and flight in the form of a more-or-less "stock" story while demonstrating self-reflexivity and a kind of limited-omniscience when accounting for her own actions and those of others, and in speculating on what would happen if she were forced to return home. What sets Vogl apart from other legal scholars who consider the narrative dimension of the refugee determination process is her contention that literature and film—with their openness to interpretation, accommodation of multiple points of view, and cultivation of affect—may shed some light on the constraints that govern the assessment of narrative in the refugee determination process.

Not surprisingly, her claim that "certain works of literature can be productively read to challenge law's demand for particular types of narrative" references a literary text that represents that process, *Monsieur Lazhar*, Philipe Falardeau's Oscar-nominated film adaptation of Évelyne de la Chenelière's 2002 play *Bashir Lazhar*.[20] The film tells the story of an Algerian refugee claimant in Montreal who takes a job as a teacher while waiting for his claim to be decided. The teacher Lazhar replaces had recently hung herself in her classroom, and the film parallels the students' struggle to reckon with her death with Lazhar's grief following the politically motivated murder of his wife and daughters in Algeria. Pointing out that the viewer knows—early on—that Lazhar has lied about his citizenship status, Vogl argues that the film has the viewer occupy the "deeply discomforting role" of judging Lazhar's claim to refugee protection. Indeed, although the film generates little sympathy for the impassive IRB official who interrupts Lazhar's heartfelt testimony with a demand that he stick to the facts,[21] the viewer is nevertheless prompted to identify with that official insofar as they share his struggle to gather the facts of Lazhar's experience because he repeatedly shows himself to be unable or unwilling to provide interlocutors with a fulsome, coherent trauma story.

Monsieur Lazhar contains a number of intersecting narratives. One of them—the fable included in the film's final moments—is crucial for an appreciation of the ways the film scrutinizes the "strictures that deny the status of author to claimants."[22] Upon learning that he has been fired from his teaching job for lying about his immigration status, Lazhar writes a fable for his students. Although it begins with the maxim "there is nothing to say after an unjust death," the fable contradicts itself by telling a story about just such a death, and that story is about the social function of storytelling, including its ability to strengthen communal bonds. Specifically, Lazhar tells the story of a tree that harbors

a much-loved chrysalis. As the chrysalis prepares to leave its cocoon and the tree, a fire sweeps the forest and the chrysalis burns. Subsequently, when birds alight on its branches, the tree, "scarred by grief," tells them the story of the "chrysalis that never woke up," but which he nevertheless imagines as a butterfly in flight, a "discreet witness to our love stories."[23]

As a fable, Lazhar's story invites an allegorical reading, but its allegory is imprecise and unstable. Because Lazhar has recently learned that his daughter died jumping from a burning building, it makes sense to see the dead child as the chrysalis and Lazhar as the tree who could not keep her safe. But chrysalis imagery abounds in the film and is often associated with Lazhar's pubescent Canadian students, especially Alice, a favorite, who approaches him with arms outstretched like wings in the film's final frames and is thus redolent of the birds temporarily sheltered by the tree and the butterfly who is an empathetic "witness" to its love story. And finally, the tree, though easily aligned with Lazhar, can be seen as a synecdoche of the school, which prizes student safety but fails to offer meaningful guidance following the suicide of a beloved teacher, and of Canada, which ultimately offers him sanctuary following his family's "unjust death." Narrative details support all these readings, and the film allows them to exist alongside each other. Thus, in the final moments of the film, the viewer, who has struggled to ascertain the facts underlying Lazhar's claim, is presented with a flight of fancy and asked to contend with the panoply of competing readings it invites.

When defending the value of literary studies in contexts that encourage the instrumentalization of knowledge, literary scholars often make a virtue of literature's openness to multiple interpretations—its undecidability.[24] But I am hesitant to do that here because such arguments feel fatuous in a chapter that begins by asking how literature might extend the will and ability to listen to refugee stories inside the refugee determination process, which is necessarily goal-oriented and is, given the massive back-log of claims, reasonably concerned with expeditiousness. That said, in trying to understand "what literary forms may have to offer in the analysis of refugee testimony,"[25] I am attracted to Arne De Boever's argument that allegory is an "aesthetic decision" that foregrounds an "undecidability" useful for scrutinizing the political decisions with which a narrative is concerned.[26] Certainly, that happens in *Monsieur Lazhar*: allegory is a decision taken by Lazhar, who is ultimately presented as the author of a story criticizing the social forces and legal processes compelling him to tell straightforwardly confessional and verifiable stories of refugee flight that can be easily processed by their audiences; but rather than undermining decisions taken in the text, Lazhar's allegorical story underscores the place of imagination in the decision-oriented juridical realm. By sustaining the discomfort of having the reader judge Lazhar's claim story and by having him meet the demand for a "convincing" claim with an allegory that approaches those facts indirectly and supports multiple interpretations, *Monsieur Lazhar* attunes us to the imaginative work of fashioning credible narratives and, equally, fashioning credible readings.

Unlike the trauma story Lazhar is compelled to tell in the hearing—where he is urged to stick to the facts and is admonished for being "unconvincing"[27]—the ostentatiously imaginative but "unconvincing" fable Lazhar finally chooses to tell communicates the truth of his experiences indirectly. This makes sense, as most trauma theorists agree that trauma resists language and confounds memory. So, whether or not refugees aim to "tell us the facts," narratives that seek to communicate trauma often work within distortion to gesture obliquely toward experience. Because the film celebrates Lazhar's ability as a storyteller while also drawing attention to those structures that—to borrow Galloway's phrasing—deny the "the status of author to claimants," it reminds viewers that, whether or not a claim story "reproduce[s] the facts,"[28] there is significant imaginative work involved in the claimant's attempt to find the language with which to render traumatic experience as a compelling and reasonably "complete" story while navigating linguistic, cultural, psychological, and situational barriers. In sum, if this film can be said to foster a "will to listen" to refugee stories, it does so by encouraging a reading practice or audience ethic that begins by recognizing the claimant as the author of their own story and proceeds by recognizing the imagination as integral rather than antithetical to the creation of compelling and credible narratives. This is what film and literature ask of us: even, or especially, when a narrative is far-fetched, we approach it on its own terms so as to inhabit its reality before contending with its claims.

The Audacity of Inventiveness

Thus far, while trying to be sensitive to the very different stakes of telling and assessing refugee stories in the aesthetic and juridical realms, I have tried to suggest how "aesthetic decisions" taken in a literary text about the refugee determination process might extend "the will to listen" and the ability to assess claim stories. In the second half of this chapter, I take a different tack and consider the valency of ostentatiously imaginative claims made in creative writing by refugees. In doing so, I invoke Vietnamese American refugee poet and novelist Ocean Vuong's evocative phase, the "audacity to invent,"[29] which he has used to describe his admiration for Homer. "In inventing, he preserved history," argues Vuong, who is also recognized for his creative use of classical myth to explore personal history. "Personally, I'm always asking who's my father," he continues. "Like Homer, I felt I'd better make it up. The Japanese have a word for it: *yugen*, when you have so little you have to imagine it."[30] So, absence, Vuong argues, makes invention necessary, and myth—like allegory—provides a framework for that invention. Put differently, the framework of myth—the most elemental of family stories—provides a familiar arc in which the displaced writer can reinvent and render personal stories of loss: because the epic elements of myth simultaneously capture and defamiliarize the personal story, they introduce a discord useful for exploring the value and the instability of the "little" memories from which the revised myth is forged. Keeping these ideas in play, I want to turn now to a consideration of the audacious re-inventing of existing stories as another aesthetic decision that has particular resonance in refugee writing.

Like Vuong, Vietnamese-Canadian scholar and creative writer Anh Hua was forced to leave Vietnam as a child. "The Blue Tank," a short, fictionalized account of that journey, was published as a preface to an article she wrote about the uses and pitfalls of storytelling for refugees. The plot of "The Blue Tank" corresponds with Hua's personal history, but the author warns against collapsing the two by accompanying it with an extended meditation on "the telling of a retelling of a story that is told again and again in repetitive trauma and pleasure until the story becomes myth, legend, unbelievable."[31] Likening the process of reconstructing her fictionalized escape story to that of "arranging bones" so as to create the "pretense of coherence" for her audience, Hua asks, "Should I tell the story? I fear the trap of the Confessional: Treaty to tell the Truth." After all, she argues, "there was no original story. The story has changed each time I tell it to myself, to others."[32] While the "Treaty to tell the Truth" seems to have more to do with the experience of being called upon to provide confessional stories of refugee trauma and salvation in her daily life than it does with the demand for a "complete, true, and correct" narrative in the refugee determination process, Hua's point about the mutability and growing mythic-ness of her reiterated story has implications for a process that tends to operate under the assumption that true stories are as immutable as the facts upon which they are based.

In the story, Hua ends up recasting "a haunting memory of forced migration, displacement, piracy, trauma and death" as "a childlike fantasy." Calling her story a "tale-tell," which brings to mind the tall tale with its connotations of excess and incredulity, she foregrounds the significance of fantasy for child survivors of trauma. At the same time, she argues that emphasizing the imaginative reach of her story is also a means of resisting dominant narratives of refugees as abject victims.

Because it connotes boldness, audacity reminds us that inventiveness is risky for those who need to be seen as truth-tellers. But audacity also suggests immodesty, so foregrounding audacity in refugee writing is a means of challenging the discourse of the pitiable, passive refugee with a framework that emphasizes agency, self-invention, and imagination. With that in mind, I want to turn to a consideration of how "the audacity to invent," a "tell-tale," is represented in another refugee story about storytelling, *The Clothesline Swing*, by Ahmad Danny Ramadan, who came to Canada from Syria in 2014. Ramadan's novel is about the love affair between two men, one of whom is dying, and both of whom are Syrian refugees. In hopes of extending their time together, the narrator, known only as Hakawati, spins stories, many of which are fantastical, and most of which are based loosely on their escape from Syria to Lebanon and eventually to Canada. *Hakawatis* are the professional orators who have performed across the Middle East for millennia. The word means storyteller, from the Arabic "*haka*," to tell or

relate, but as Wail Hassan notes, "in the Lebanese dialect, 'haki' is also 'speech,' so that 'to speak' is synonymous with telling a story."[33] Given this, it is not surprising that Ramadan's Hakawati favors the direct, conversational quality of the second-person "you," or that he begins by declaring, "Have I got a story for you,"[34] before proceeding to tell a chain of interlocking stories that figure "storytelling [as] the condition of language and of all human knowledge."[35]

Like so many *hakawatis*, Ramadan's narrator borrows from *1001 Nights*. Calling himself a "fabulist,"[36] he mythologizes his own autobiography, recasting it as a series of more-or-less realistic stories into which he interweaves references to and characters from those tales. He also styles himself after its frame-narrator, the master storyteller Scheherazade, who famously kept herself alive by telling far-fetched stories that captivated the sultan who planned to kill her: "I'm your Scheherazade" and "you become my Shahryar," says Hakawati to his unnamed lover.[37] The comparison is both audacious and imprecise: whereas "the blade of the executioner's sword lies on the storyteller's neck" in *1001 Nights*,[38] the life that Ramadan's storyteller tries to save is not his own, but his lover's. However, drawing on Marina Warner, who calls Scheherazade's stories "ransom tale[s],"[39] we might say that he, too, understands his far-fetched tales as "ransom," that which is used to secure an individual's freedom or, if one prefers the Biblical meaning, redemption. Either way, it is easy to see why Scheherazade's story might have a particular resonance for Ramadan, a refugee writer interested in high-stakes storytelling.

In *The Clothesline Swing*, Hakawati and his lover are privately sponsored refugees: because they do not make inland claims, they do not present their claims at oral hearings. And yet, *The Clothesline Swing* is interested in the idea that refugees get called upon to perform victimhood and gratitude and that that performance functions as a form of ransom. So, for example, Hakawati gets called upon to repeat his salvation story in various public venues and in ways that satisfy his sponsor's desire to be recognized as a savior. "I saved their lives" the sponsor, Jake, tells a crowd of people and then elbows Hakawati, saying, "'Tell them'."[40] Hakawati obliges and publically performs the story of his suffering as the story of Jake's generosity. Privately, though, he struggles to talk to his lover about the violent homophobia that led him to flee Damascus: "I told you this story, once, years ago," he says, "but I've never repeated it."[41] He goes on to explain that stories of personal trauma "don't feel like stories of mine; these are the stories of the other men who lived them instead of me … [Men] I don't understand anymore."[42] Given that the attack exacerbated feelings of shame and extreme vulnerability in Hakawati, it is not surprising that he renders it in the third person, as the story of "the stranger": describing a particularly vicious beating, Hakawati explains, "The stranger's hands were weakened. He couldn't protect his face any-more. Slowly, they slipped to his sides. His chest took a kick from the sole of a shoe. He heard the crack echoing in his head, as his fractured rib gave up and broke completely. I heard it too."[43] While this shift in narrative perspective aptly captures the sense of self-estrangement that is a recognized response to trauma, its awkwardness is also significant in that it draws attention to the story's constructedness and artifice without impugning its veracity. Something similar happens when Hawakati—like Monsieur Lazhar—discusses his tendency to disguise or dress up his most traumatic memories in the form of an "unrecognizable fable": "My memories wear my stories like the skins of dead animals, but you undress them and place them in my view."[44] The point is not to liken storytelling to a striptease culminating in the exposure of naked truth but rather to suggest that the tender "skins" of memory sometimes need the protective and diverting vestment of story before they can be made recognizable and bearable—or wearable—to their subjects.

Like the narrator of Anh Hua's semi-autobiographical story, Hakawati mixes reality with fantasy and "epic elements of heroism." And like Hua's narrator, he declares, "I can't untangle them. I can't tell the reality from the dream."[45] But neither Hua nor Ramadan presents their narrators as unreliable: despite the stories' flights of fancy, readers are not encouraged to doubt the storytellers, who are no less credible for their use of incredible metaphors and allusions to explore otherwise inexpressible truths analogically. In attempting to tease out the relationship between fantasy and fidelity in these histori-cally grounded but ostentatiously imaginative trauma stories, it is useful to draw on Tim O'Brien, who has frequently employed the conventions of magic realism in books that are largely realistic depictions

of war and its aftermath. Noting that "war is a surrealistic experience," O'Brien argues, "I see myself as a realist in the strictest sense."[46] At the same time, he emphasizes that his idea of realism extends to fantasies and daydreams, which often have a particular vividness and value for those who have endured sustained violence or trauma:

> In any war story, but especially a true one, it's difficult to separate what happened from what seemed to happen. What seems to happen becomes its own happening and has to be told that way … And then afterward, when you go to tell about it, there is always that surreal seemingness, which makes the story seem untrue, but which in fact represents the hard and exact truth as it seemed.[47]

Like Hua and Ramadan, who also tell war stories, he shows us that—rather than detracting from its reliability—a story's flights of fancy create a "surreal seemingness" that underscores its status as a literary and thus imaginative object while also serving "the exact truth as it seemed." With reference to one final text, I want to elaborate upon the potential of "surreal seemingness" as another audacious aesthetic decision that insists upon the inventiveness of the refugee storyteller who serves the "truth as it seemed" while insisting they are much more than a witness to their own pain.

   "Surreal seemingness" is the predominant mode of Rawi Hage's 2008 novel *Cockroach*. It is also a strategy employed by its irascible unnamed narrator, who is, among other things, a highly sophisticated storyteller and a refugee.[48] In the aftermath of a suicide attempt brought on by the poverty and social alienation he suffers after migrating to Montreal, the narrator—who frequently represents himself as a cockroach—undergoes court-mandated therapy. The novel opens with a session with his therapist, Genevieve:

> Tell me about your childhood, the shrink asked me.
> In my youth I was an insect.
> What kind of insect? she asked.
> A cockroach, I said.
> Why?[49]

The answer to that question is difficult to discern because Cockroach is more inclined to talk about the present than the past, but he clarifies that the bugginess that began in his childhood and persists throughout his adult life is a function of both "cunning and need."[50] Numerous critics have picked up on this and have argued that the narrator's identification as a cockroach is an expression of self-loathing in a city whose inhabitants fail to recognize the humanity of dark-skinned migrants,[51] but that it is also affirmative inasmuch as it emphasizes resilience and mobility. Notably, critics are less certain about the ontological status of those scenes in which the narrator imagines himself *as* a cockroach and depicts himself scuttling under floorboards and disappearing down drains. For the most part, they understand the novel's moments of "surreal seemingness" as allusions to Kafka's *Metamorphosis* or as drug-induced hallucinations. While the text supports both these readings, they overlook the fact that the novel is a first-person, retrospective account of a skilled but manifestly unreliable storyteller; thus, it is presented as a memoir of sorts. So, the question it raises is not "Does the narrator actually become a cockroach?" or "Does he believe himself to be one?" but "*Why does he represent himself as such?*"

   There are at least two answers to that question. To begin with, we might look back to O'Brien and say that the narrator uses cockroachness, however seemingly "surreal," to "represent the hard and exact truth" of the life lived by an impoverished Arab migrant who laments that he is treated like vermin: desperate to escape his "shithole" apartment, he wanders the streets in a "constantly shivering carcass" and tries to avoid the police, who treat him with suspicion, warning him, for example, that he is not permitted "to stare at people inside commercial places."[52] Thus, as Gillian Bright argues, his cockroachness "enacts an incarnation of shame," but one that "mirror[s] the violence of the oppressive

gaze itself." So, in representing himself as a cockroach, the narrator "absorbs and reflects the settler's shameful and shaming gaze" that perceives him as pestilent and fails to recognize his humanity.[53]

Secondly, the narrator's representation of himself as a cockroach gives him a degree of agency because it changes the power dynamics in his "interrogations" with Genevieve, who threatens to institutionalize him if he does not comply with her demands for a factually oriented narrative about his past. "The doctor, like sultans, is fond of stories," notes Cockroach.[54] With this comparison, he implicitly likens himself to Scheherazade, as Hakawati had done, thus constituting his stories as a form of ransom necessary to sustain his liberty while also emphasizing his own imaginative prowess. Like Scheherazade, he uses that prowess to seduce his listener: when the narrator embarks on a story about a violent episode from his childhood, Genevieve leans in and Cockroach notes that her pen "ma[kes] its way inside her lips."[55] Whether or not his stories are titillating, they clearly gratify his interlocutor and, by implication, his reader, who finds herself addressed by the second-person "you" with which Cockroach often refers to Genevieve. As Mark Libin argues, Cockroach's stories are particularly gratifying when they relegate violence and suffering to another time and place, thus confirming an "all-too seductive liberal ideology" of Canada as a sanctuary and the analyst-cum-reader as an empathetic helpmeet.[56]

But Cockroach has no interest in acceding to the desired narratives about a pitiable "marginalized other" who needs saving: "If only she knew what I am capable of," he thinks.[57] By insisting on his own agency and refusing to offer the expected stories of distant suffering and Canadian salvation, the narrator makes it all but impossible for his audience to empathize with him. Thus, Libin argues, "the voice of compassion, the voice of cross-cultural understanding, is not only refused but deliberately sabotaged" by the narrator, who simultaneously sabotages the reader's ability "to feel that s/he has made authentic experiential and ethical contact with the marginalized other who constructs the text."[58] And because the narrator is presented as the intradiegetic author who "constructs the text," the book can be understood to parody the conventions of traumatic life narratives wherein "empathetic identification" is a "means to the reader's own self-affirmation" as "an agent of social change and humanitarian betterment."[59]

Recognizing that "stories of suffering and survival" are received and interpreted in unpredictable ways, Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith suggest that their considerable mass-market appeal owes much to their cultivation of "empathetic identification" that "recuperates … radical differences into [readers'] more familiar frameworks of meaning," and so ultimately "dispel[s] the fear of otherness by containing it."[60] But Hage's narrator does not dispel those fears: unlike Monsieur Lazhar, who employs insect imagery in his fable to suggest a potential for positive change and civic participation, Hage's narrator insists on his cockroachness so as to stoke his interlocutors' "fear of otherness" and unsettle self-congratulatory ideas of Canada as a sanctuary. This is made plain in the last pages of the story, where he depicts himself committing murder and then descending—in cockroach form—into the underground, where he remains, alienated, unfathomable, and fearsome.

In *Alibis*, a collection of essays about diasporic memory and displacement, André Aciman explains:

> For me to write, I need to work my way back out of one home, consider another, and find the no-man's land in between. I need to go to one André, unwrite that André, choose the other André across the way … Writing is not a home-coming. Writing is an alibi. Writing is a perpetual stammer of alibis.[61]

In Hage's novel, the narrator's representation of himself as a cockroach introduces the surreal "stammer" of mutation into his narrative while also serving as a peculiarly inventive "alibi": because the court-mandated therapy sessions resemble legal proceedings wherein the narrator refuses to provide a straight-forward account of his innocence, his cockroachness is an audacious defensive gesture that responds to the scopophilia of the state by demonstrating his ability to evade capture of any kind. Further, in a city "infested with newcomers,"[62] it is an "aesthetic decision" that asserts the impossibility of homecoming, and underscores his refusal to use his personal "stories of suffering and survival" to shore up pleasing national myths.

Unlike the other stories discussed in this chapter, *Cockroach* does not "extend the will to listen" to refugee stories by encouraging its readers to be "empathetic to the perspective that is offered,"[63] but it nevertheless asks readers to become "attentive to the often-unpredictable ways in which our reading practices are themselves implicated in the possibility and project of realizing a world based on human rights."[64] By questioning "the Treaty to tell the Truth" and responding to it with self-consciously imaginative fictions that foreground abstraction, metaphor, and other flights of fancy, *Cockroach*, like all the texts discussed in this chapter, suggests how different modes of reading and writing variously buttress and challenge the structures of citizenship within the Canadian nation-state.

Noting that decision-makers in the refugee determination process are necessarily on guard against the "audacity to invent," I started off by suggesting that that guardedness can lead to a failure to recognize the inventiveness that necessarily structures all narratives, including claim stories. So, recognizing that the language of story speaks differently than the language of statecraft, I have tried to suggest how stories can help us better understand "failures of imagination" that inhibit the practice of statecraft. At a time when refugee stories are populating the newspapers and preoccupying the public imagination, this chapter has sought to demonstrate that any attempt to extend "the will" and ability to appraise those stories must begin by attending to the flights of fancy and other manifestly imaginative claims made by refugee storytellers.

Notes

1 Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, "Appendix."
2 Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, "Basis of Claim Form."
3 Galloway, "Proof and Narrative," 309.
4 Galloway, "Proof and Narrative," 327.
5 Molnar and Gill, "Bots at the Gate," 1.
6 Vogl, "Refugee Status Determination," 257.
7 Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.,* 44.
8 Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.,* 44.
9 Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.,* 44.
10 For example, Laotian-Canadian writer Souvankham Thammavongsa has lamented that interviews about her writing often begin with the question, "What was it like in the refugee camp? … Tell us the conditions." Thammavongsa, "12 or 20 Questions."
11 Vogl, "Telling Stories from Start to Finish," 64.
12 Macklin, "Asylum and the Rule of Law in Canada," 85.
13 Berger, "Trial by Metaphor," 30–8.
14 Vogl, "Refugee Status," 3. Peter Showler, a former IRB official, develops this point in *Refugee Sandwich*, a collection of stories about the determination process. Showler, *Refugee Sandwich*.
15 Kirmayer, "Failures of Imagination," 167.
16 Kirmayer, "Failures of Imagination," 183.
17 For example, see the following media advisory: Rehaag, "2017 Refugee Claim Data."
18 Kirmayer, "Failures of Imagination," 177.
19 Kirmayer, "Failures of Imagination," 183.
20 Vogl, "Refugee Status," 287.
21 *Monsieur Lazhar*, 1:35:01.
22 Galloway, "Proof and Narrative," 327.
23 *Monsieur Lazhar*, 1:29:36 to 1:30:14.
24 As Joseph Slaughter argues, "The virtue that literature is traditionally understood to hold over law is its capacity to represent contradiction and paradox without a disciplinary obligation to offer a logical resolution" (43).
25 Vogl, "Refugee Status," 257.
26 De Boever, *States of Exception in the Contemporary Novel,* 1; De Boever, "*States of Exception*," 4, 5. Note that De Boever defines an aesthetic decision as "a decision taken with respect to an aesthetic situation or state, a regime of representation," and he asks, as I do, "Which aesthetics do the characters and narrators in the novels that I look at adopt in a situation of crisis?" (4).
27 *Monsieur Lazhar*, 1:35:01 to 1:35:05.
28 Galloway, "Proof and Narrative," 327.
29 Armitstead, "War Baby."

30 Armitstead, "War Baby."
31 Hua, "Travel and Displacement," 110.
32 Hua, "Travel and Displacement," 110.
33 Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives,* 212.
34 Ramadan, *The Clothesline Swing*, 13.
35 Hassan, *Immigrant Narratives*, 212.
36 Ramadan, *The Clothesline Swing,* 14.
37 Ramadan, *The Clothesline Swing,* 21.
38 Warner, *Stranger Magic,* 5.
39 Warner, *Stranger Magic*, 195.
40 Ramadan, *The Clothesline Swing,* 200.
41 Ramadan, *The Clothesline Swing,* 27.
42 Ramadan, *The Clothesline Swing,* 27.
43 Ramadan, *The Clothesline Swing,* 30.
44 Ramadan, *The Clothesline Swing,* 205.
45 Ramadan, *The Clothesline Swing,* 207.
46 O'Brien quoted in Herzog, *Tim O'Brien*, 22.
47 O'Brien, *The Things They Carried,* 69–70.
48 The reader knows little about how the narrator came to Canada, other than that he arrived from an unnamed Middle Eastern country in the grip of civil war, and is able to provide identity documents to police officers who harass him. But, whether or not he has refugee status, he disdains the refugees with whom he associates, calling them "lost mutts" who "howl about the past." Rawi Hage, *Cockroach* (Toronto: Anansi Press, 2008), 144. This is worth noting because Hage rarely identifies as a refugee writer. Though he does not share his narrator's hostility, he, too, is disinclined to discuss his past and the ways it might intersect with that of his characters, arguing, "I'm a writer, not just a witness." Quoted in Renzetti, "The Search for Rawi Hage."
49 Hage, *Cockroach*, 5.
50 Hage, *Cockroach*, 3.
51 Hage, *Cockroach*, 122.
52 Hage, *Cockroach,* 17, 9, 87.
53 Bright, "On Being the 'Same Type'," 83.
54 Hage, *Cockroach*, 102.
55 Hage, *Cockroach*, 102.
56 Libin, "Marking Territory," 77.
57 Hage, *Cockroach*, 50.
58 Libin, "Marking Territory," 73.
59 Schaffer and Smith, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives,* 12.
60 Schaffer and Smith, *Human Rights and Narrated Lives,* 25.
61 Aciman, *Alibis,* 198 (emphasis in original).
62 Hage, *Cockroach*, 30.
63 Galloway, "Proof and Narrative," 327, 309.
64 Slaughter, *Human Rights Inc.,* 44.

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2

THEORIZING UNSETTLEMENT

Refugee Narratives as Literary Ration Cards

B. Venkat Mani

The following morning, my father drove us to a compound on the outskirts of Kabul where we boarded a secret compartment of an eighteen-wheeler truck and set off for Pakistan. […] Miraculously, after an hour or two, we were able to cross the disputed border at Khyber Pass and continue to Peshawar. After a journey of more than twelve hours, we arrived in Peshawar where our guide was waiting.

> Asadulla Abubakr, "The Irony of Life and the Survival of the American Dream" (2010)

On that day, my mother, siblings, and I got into a truck, and that truck took us to the water, and in the water was a boat, and that boat took us to Cambodia, and in Cambodia we went into the jungle, and on the other side was Thailand, and in Thailand was a processing centre, and after the processing centre was a refugee camp.

> Vinh Nguyen, "To Mourn with No Grave" (2021)

If wars cause displacements, acts of seeking refuge trigger lifelong unsettlements. The epigraphs of this chapter serve well to illustrate this claim. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, as the shiny packaging of the American dream comes undone for Muslims in the US to reveal the harsh realities of Islamophobia, Asadulla Abubakr, an Afghan American author and doctor (of medicine) revisits the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, recreating painful childhood memories. A similar recollection is offered by Vinh Nguyen, a Vietnamese Canadian theorist, author, and professor of English literature. Amid the global coronavirus pandemic, as the world goes into shelter-in-place and completely forgets about those for whom seeking shelter became the only way to survive, Nguyen shares moments of US withdrawal from Saigon in 1975. Writing as adults with temporal and geographical distance from the moments of displacement in two different geo-political contexts, Abubakr and Nguyen reconstruct personal, familial pasts of ordinary human beings whose lives were swept by currents of world history, marking the beginning of unsettlements. It hardly matters if as citizens of the US and Canada, respectively, the completion of their "resettlement" and, therefore, their political status in public eye is no longer defined by the word "refugee."

Abubakr and Nguyen's writings are part of a growing body of narratives of those who were forcibly displaced from their homelands, housed in refugee camps, or forcibly contained in detention centers. Works in many world languages—such as the Iranian German Sherko Fatah's *Im Grenzland* ("In the Borderland," 2003) or the Sri Lankan Anuk Arudapragasam's *Story of a Brief Marriage* (2017), short story collections such as the Vietnamese American author Viet Thanh Nguyen's *The Refugees* (2017) or the Iraqi Finnish author and filmmaker Hassan Blasim's *The Madman of Freedom Square* (2016), graphic

novels such as the Syrian painter and artist Hamid Sulaiman's *Freedom Hospital* (2017) or the German British illustrator Olivier Kugler's graphic reportage *Escaping Wars and Waves* (2018)—are just a few examples of a new body of multi-locational, multi-lingual, and multi-perspectival refugee literature of the twenty-first century.

Afghanistan, Vietnam, Iraq, Syria, Korea, Myanmar, Chile, and Venezuela. Names, places, and years might change, but moments of unsettlement caused by sudden displacements find intersecting, if not similar iterations. Beyond displacement and resettlement, lives of refugees or those who were once refugees are tales of *unsettlement*.

How does one read unsettlement? How can aesthetic documentations of unsettlement enrich our understanding of literatures of forced migration? These two questions lead my curiosity. However, instead of asking how refugees are depicted in literature, or what can literary representations of refugees teach us about them, I spell the need for a perspectival shift. What can refugees, and writings by and about them, teach us about our literatures and interconnected histories? How can a focus on refugee-figures and experiences as registered in literary works assist us in re-conceptualizing legal, political, and aesthetic discourses on refugees and other forced migrants? How may refugee narratives shape our reading of literature in a globally comparative framework?

Underlying these questions are three central arguments. First, that literary studies have historically privileged the figure of the exile over the figure of the refugee. While the former has been constructed as an artistic, expressive, inspired visionary, the latter has often been reduced to a statistic, one among uncountable masses with no stories to tell. In the contemporary moment, we as scholars of literature need to dispel this erroneous construction. Second, tracing contours of unsettlement and its efficacy in the larger context of forced displacements assists in unraveling the constructed difference between an artistic and a statistic subject. Physical displacements of human beings are caused today due to many factors: from cataclysmic political events, to long-term economic disparities in the Global South, to even climate change. Engagement with causes and modes of unsettlement helps us in recognizing and acknowledging the emotive consequences, the affective dimensions of such displacements on the lives of who are displaced. Unsettlement assists in thinking of human beings beyond labels such as "economic refugees," "illegals," or "asylum seekers," as perpetually dependent entities whose entire identity is reducible to governmental identification papers. Third, I make a case for unsettlement as a critical tool to comprehend and articulate refugee subjectivities. It is in this vein that I offer the phrase "literary ration cards" for refugee narratives. As readers will see, instead of deploying the traditional meaning of the term "ration card" as a document issued by a governmental agency that promises a minimum quota of nourishment for those who live below the poverty line, I empower the term and use it as a source of intellectual nourishment, enrichment, and solace, as the wellspring of creativity and source of story-telling of human beings unsettled by world historical events.

What follows are four sections. I start with briefly outlining differences between the meanings of terms exiles and refugees. Next, engaging with the terms "refugeedom" and "refugeetude," I underscore the relevance of the term "unsettlement" and unfold its multiple meanings.[1] Third, I explore ways in which refugee narratives of unsettlement can be productive in unsettling disciplinary inertia in the so-called "national" literary studies and catalyze new conversations among Comparative Literature, World Literature, and Refugee Studies. Finally, I return to the epigraphs that opened this chapter to illustrate how "unsettlement" as a key term can be productive in critical appreciations and evaluations of narratives of refuge.

Exiles vs. Refugees: The Literary Text vs. the Ration Card?

In the Oxford English Dictionary, the first category of meanings relating to exile denotes "prolonged absence from one's native country or a place regarded as home, endured by force of circumstances or voluntarily undergone for some purpose."[2] Exile invokes "senses connected with removal from a place." The entry for the term refugee, on the other hand, begins with reference to Protestants who fled France

following the Edict of Nantes (1685), listed as archaic, immediately followed by the modern meaning, which resembles the UNHCR definition from 1951: "A person who has been forced to leave his or her home and seek refuge elsewhere, esp. in a foreign country, from war, religious persecution, political troubles, the effects of a natural disaster, etc.; a displaced person."[3]

Prolonged absence vs. (presumably permanent) displacement; voluntary migration due to (undefined) circumstances vs. forced migration to seek refuge from war, religious persecution, etc. While the reasons for exile overlap with those for seeking refuge, it is astounding how these entries give agency to the exile while presenting the refugee as bereft of any initiative. Furthermore, the senses connected with removal available to an exile do not seem to exist for the displaced person seeking refuge.

The differences in the lexical meanings of these terms have seeped into widespread perceptions. An exile insinuates displacement of an extraordinary human being. A refugee seems to adumbrate displacement of ordinary masses. Even a cursory glance at media usage will clarify that the word exile comes with hefty power: of a prince, a royal family, an overthrown political leader, head of the state, a government, an intellectual, a novelist, an artist, or a poet. Refugee, on the other hand, stands for the permanently disempowered, ordinary subjects of an empire or citizens of a nation-state who apparently cannot afford "prolonged absences," and, therefore, may never return to the original nation of birth and citizenship.

This hierarchy is palpable in literary studies, in which the term exile has garnered much critical attention.[4] The state of refugees, on the other hand, can be summed up in three words: invisibility, paucity, and apathy. Especially in Europe and North America, scholarship evidences a definite, even if unintentional, privileging of exile over refugee: through the conflation of the two terms,[5] their interchangeable usage,[6] or through subsumption under the larger term "migrant."[7] It would be hard to find studies that present literature of exiles in terms of crisis, a problem, or from a human rights' framework. But such terms are frameworks reserved in abundance for refugee literature.[8] Recent monographs offer correctives, though either only in the present European context, discussing refugee literature as narratives of asylum seekers,[9] or "placeless people,"[10] or as figures in historical postcolonial "Partition" literatures from South Asia.[11]

The term "refugee" as a qualifier for literature is yet to acquire the critical purchase and traction it deserves. Even in the very large body of scholarship that engages with experiences of migration (willful and forced) in Migration and Diaspora Studies, a field that burgeoned and flourished in the Anglo-American academy parallel to the growth of Postcolonial Studies in the last two decades of the twentieth century, the intellectual curiosity about the term remains largely eclipsed by a focus on willful migrants, or as we shall see below, the term "exile."

In the years leading up to and during the Second World War, German intellectuals, both Jewish and non-Jewish, emigrating to North America during the Nazi regime—Hannah Arendt, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Thomas Mann, Bertolt Brecht, Lion Feuchtwanger and others who came to the US, or Anna Seghers who went to Mexico—were designated as exiles, even though today they would be called refugees. The opening passages of Hannah Arendt's important essay, "We Refugees" (1943), stages the tension behind the terminology in important ways by simultaneously blurring and sharpening the boundaries between exiles and refugees. On the one hand, Arendt does away with the class distinction between privileged nobility, an intellectual, or any other salaried Jewish person who was forced to leave Hitler's totalitarian regime. On the other hand, she sharpens the definition of a refugee, defining refugees as those with a strong political opinion, someone to be welcomed by committees:

> In the first place, we don't like to be called "refugees." We ourselves call each other "newcomers" or "immigrants." … A refugee used to be the one driven to seek refuge because of some act committed or some political opinion held. Well, it is true that we have had to seek refuge, but we committed no acts and most of us never dreamt of having any radical political opinion. With us the meaning of the term "refugee" has changed. Now refugees are those of us who have been so unfortunate as to arrive in a new country without means and have to be helped by refugee committees.[12]

In the third and fourth decades of the twentieth century, when international bodies such as the League of Nations and the International Refugee Protection Organization try to shift the discourse of refugees from charity to rights, the gap even in social usage starts to widen. During the years following Hitler's ascension to power, as the terms "stateless" and "refugees" make their presence in abundance, this trend grows. In the post Second World War period, with the establishment of the United Nations, the establishment of the Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (1950), and then with the signing of the 1951 Convention on the Rights of Refugees, the distinction between the exile and the refugee, the nobleman or political exile and the working-class person, becomes deeper.

In literary studies, this translates into proliferation of research on "Exile Literature," whereas "Refugee Literature" stands for handouts, pamphlets, and information booklets translated from English and French into many world languages, to be given to refugees to make them aware of their political rights and processes, but also health care, hygiene and so on. As politics progresses, literary studies become more regressive in their distinctions between the terms. Even in Postcolonial theory, the difference between an articulate exile and an inarticulate or silent subaltern refugee is forever sealed.

"Exile… is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home"—states Edward Said in his seminal essay, "Reflections on Exile."[13] Referencing *The Romantic Exiles*, the historian E. H. Carr's study of Russian intellectuals in the nineteenth century, Said emphasizes an important distinction: "The difference between earlier exiles and those of our time is, it bears stressing, scale: our age—with its modern warfare, imperialism, and the quasi-theological ambitions of totalitarian rulers—is indeed the age of refugees, the displaced person, mass immigration."[14] Juxtaposing exile, "a fundamentally discontinuous state of being,"[15] with nationalism, "an assertion of belonging in and to a place, a heritage,"[16] Said declares that "exiles feel a need to reconstitute their broken lives, usually by choosing to see themselves as part of a triumphant ideology or restored people."[17]

Earlier in his essay Said categorically states, "You must first set aside Joyce and Nabokov and think instead of the uncountable masses for whom UN agencies have been created. You must think of refugee-peasants with no prospect of ever returning home, armed only with a ration-card and an agency number … the hopelessly large numbers, the compounded misery of the 'undocumented,' … without a tellable history."[18] Yet the focus of the essay remains on poets and exilic subjecthood and creativity. Said's impressive list of interlocutors of exilic sensitivity begins with the Pakistani poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz[19] followed by the Armenian poet Noubar Aslanyan[20] and the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish.[21] Joseph Conrad, "who thought of himself as an exile from Poland,"[22] provides a bridge to "expatriates" such as Hemingway and Fitzgerald,[23] after which Said returns to German scholars and thinkers such as George Lukács—citing Lukács' formulation of the novel as a genre of "transcendental homelessness"[24]—to end with Theodor Adorno[25] and Erich Auerbach,[26] who moved to the US during the National Socialist regime in Germany.

Herein lies the key to understanding the difference between the hierarchy of terminology and treatment of terms in literary studies. Said, who identified himself as an exile, privileges exilic experience, contrasting exiled authors against the voluntary migrations of Hemingway and Fitzgerald that makes them "expatriates."[27] Said's otherwise egalitarian plea to set aside Joyce and Nabokov ends up pitting refugees against them. Akin to Arendt, for Said too refugees are those for whom UN agencies are created, hopelessly large number—the undocumented, without a committed act or a radical political opinion, or without a tellable history. Exiles are of the like of Joyce and Nabokov with literary name recognition, with no need for a ration card, and no necessity or desire to be welcomed on their arrival by committees or UN agencies, with tellable histories that they themselves can create and present to posterity. Refugees are ones with a ration card and agency numbers, whose tellable histories are yet to be told, or extending Said's logic, to be found in the files of the agencies.

It is hardly a surprise then, that the focus of scrutiny in literary studies—whether qualified by national, comparative, or world—has favored "exiles." Those with the ration card and agency numbers

somehow became the prerogative of the social sciences, explaining why there are far more advances made in Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology, and History on refugees.[28] But in these disciplines, too, literary works stay outside the analytical apparatus, and ethnographic accounts or archived personal stories suffice as "refugee narratives."

Refugeedom, Refugeetude: Making Space for Ration Card Holders

A necessary shift in the discourse of refugees is underway in the twenty-first century, as the older romanticization of the term "exile" based on class and educational privilege is fading. A path to think about refugee "subjecthood" is laid by the historian Peter Gatrell and the literary theorist Vinh Nguyen through their terms "Refugeedom" and "Refugeetude," respectively. In an essay tellingly entitled, "Refugees—What is Wrong with History?,"[29] Gatrell makes a case for inclusion of refugee histories in the larger corpus of history, calling on historians to think about "how refugees themselves interact with history."[30] In this context, Gatrell introduces refugeedom as a "matrix involving administrative practices, legal norms, social relations and refugees' experience,"[31] a "capacious and an insistent term … to argue for an approach that incorporates a social and cultural history of refugees within shifting systems of power. … Refugeedom can be conceived as a system that governs but does not necessarily bind refugees in an inescapable vice."[32]

While Gatrell calls for a history of refugeedom, Nguyen, answering the provocative question in the title of his essay, "when does a refugee stop being a refugee?," offers the term refugeetude as a way of capacitating our understanding of lived realities of refugee experiences.[33] Past the conferral of the political status "refugee" to a human being, Nguyen compellingly articulates that the "refugee past punctures the resident present."[34] Nguyen recasts the term refugee as a "form of subjectivity—an experience, consciousness, and knowledge … that is psychic, affective, and embodied, enduring in time and space."[35] He further elaborates:

> 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, then, 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.[36]

Both scholars capacitate new conceptualizations of refugees' epistemologies. Gatrell argues for the incorporation of social and cultural histories without necessarily identifying fiction or creative non-fiction as possible sources of such histories; the term "literature" in his essay refers largely to scholarship in refugee studies. Nguyen does identify "sources for constructing integral subjectivities and modes of aesthetic and social production," especially as he references the history of the suffix "-tude," that encapsulates possibilities of "political recuperation" in terms such as "negritude, coolitude, and migritude."[37] This, in turn, frames his reading of two contemporary subjects, the Vietnamese American Nhan T. Le and Fadia Jouny, a Syrian (refugee) in Canada. The expression of refugeetude in the writings of these two authors intersects for Nguyen in "a consciousness of the state violence that attends refuge, as well as an attunement to connections with those others affected by such violence."[38]

Gatrell's call for a "history of refugeedom" can be extended to other disciplinary knowledges, in order to identify and address matrices and systems wherein power imbalances find categorically different social and cultural expressions. The critical consciousness about refugee subjecthood that Nguyen offers through the term "refugeetude" allows possibilities of identifying commonalities that move beyond "state violence" and yet attend refuge and connections with others.

Not merely the proliferation of refugees or the significance of the legal definition of refugees in todays' world, but the rise of a new kind of writing that centralizes the refugee experience must serve

as a turning point for literary criticism, especially in regards to comparison on a global scale. Akin to the discipline of history, literary studies too have largely emulated the nationalist categorizations of the nineteenth century, reflective in disciplinary structures and departmental organizations of universities. Even as English moves from its heavy British leanings to incorporate American, Canadian, Australian, and for the past four decades, Postcolonial Studies, now giving way to the Global Anglophone, the reliance on territorial *settlements* in national-political bodies, or a move from them in scholarship on transnational or now world literatures, has been imminent to classification of works of literature. Developments in Comparative or other so-called "national" literary disciplines have yet to throw the yolk of regional or geo-linguistic catagorizations of literature. At this instance in our history, in which a record number of migrants populate the world and one percent of the world's population is forcibly displaced, the nation-state-based organization of literary knowledge seems hardly tenable or productive. However, instead of re-creating the center-periphery model that marked scholarship in the first decade of the twenty-first century—once again place-bound and place-based—it is time to accept inhabitance through migration, rather than inheritance of languages and literatures along ethnonationalist lines as the norm. Past vocabularies of distinctions between exiles and refugees, extraordinary artists vs. ordinary ration card holders won't suffice.

What if *un*settlement became the keyword for framing our study of literature? Which longer, connected, or connectible histories of border politics and territorial demarcations, ideological polarization, as well as current racial-religious hierarchies and tensions can be unearthed through a focus on unsettlement?

Theorizing Unsettlement

I offer unsettlement neither as a methodological starting point nor a catchall term under which all refugee literature can be listed. Extending some of the ideas offered by Vinh Nguyen through his term "Refugeetude," or Gatrell through his term "Refugeedom," I think of unsettlement as mode of critical thinking that frames migration not just as a journey from point A to point B for some individuals looking for better opportunities or trying to get out of a war zone.

I locate the term unsettlement first and foremost at the confluence of territorial/geographical/physical *and* emotional, intellectual, cultural, and, in our times, virtual uprooting caused by sudden mass-displacement of human beings due to cataclysmic world-historical events. The *immediacy* of rapidly unfolding events, the *urgency* to assure survival, and the *agency* that is exercised by ordinary humans to take steps to assure the safety of self and family through any means available are key to understanding the physical and emotional distress that comes with unsettlement. In English, the word "unsettlement" is characterized "as a state of mind, affairs, questions, received ideas, matters, spirit, and feeling." Its German equivalents signify the same mental distress: *Unruhe* (disquiet), *Unzufriedenheit* (dissatisfaction), *Unbehagen* (discontent), and more. The Hindi words *asthirta* (instability) or *ashanti* (without peace), the Urdu *pareshan* (disturbed) or *betarteeb* (disorderly) refer to the mental state, no different that the Farsi *bekarar* (restless), Turkish *huzursuzluk* (state of being without a master/owner to order) or Pashto *bezabta* (unstable) refer to the mental state. Territorial de-settlements or evacuations, *Unsiedlung* (the opposite of Siedlung), or *gair abad* (without population), are other meanings ascribed to unsettlement.

Admittedly, these are examples from very few languages. But I start with this cross-linguistic description because, especially in the refugee context, it is helpful to think of unsettlement at the intersection of languages through the matrix of translatability. The arduous task of seeking refuge itself involves multiple acts of translation, literal and figurative. Sudden displacements and departures plus the urgency of survival initiate crossing over of physical (geographical), but also linguistic boundaries. The process of seeking asylum necessitates a translation of the trauma faced by refugees, its reconstruction in the refugees' first language, and/or its translation, through an interpreter or translator, in the language of the host nation. By considering unsettlement as mental/emotional displacement alongside physical/

geographical dislocation, accompanied by translation, the term unsettlement becomes a conduit for both the rift and its unhealable nature, to evoke Said.

By inserting "world-historical" as a qualifier of events that cause unsettlement, I am not reconstituting a hierarchy of events based on their significance for local, national, or regional contexts. Crises that cause sudden dispersal of human beings in today's world are caused either through direct or indirect involvement of, and/or covert or overt cognizance of the international community. In addition, in our age of mass labor migrations and constructions of worldwide diasporas, an event that happens in one part of the world does not stay contained within the political boundaries of a nation-state. Through one's own displacement that would take one to unknown trajectories—on a truck to a boat from Saigon to Cambodia to Thailand for Nguyen or on a truck to the Afghanistan-Pakistan border to Peshawar for Abubakr—or through family connections abroad, one cannot think of any event as significant only to national or regional history. Unsettlement through world-historical events helps us understand the conundrum Arendt articulates: "we committed no acts and most of us never dreamt of having any radical political opinion,"[39] as ordinary human beings without having committed political acts or punished for radical opinions—think of Afghans evacuating Kabul en masse on August 15, 2021—are suddenly forced to seek refuge.

Now that the immediacy of circumstances, urgency to assure survival, and the agency exercised to seek refuge have been established, the term unsettlement can be imagined as a heuristic device to understand both *overlaps* and *distinctions* between willful/voluntary and forced migrations. Simply stated, voluntary migrations assure one's chances to thrive, whereas forced migrations, whether within national borders or outside, must be undertaken in order to survive. The boundary line between thriving and survival is obviously not always so clear, which is perhaps why there is no internationally settled and agreed upon legal definition of "migrant." A migrant simply denotes a person living away from a place where they were born; people staying outside their country of origin who are not asylum-seekers or refugees. These include students, workers, and family members of other migrants who may or may not be citizens of their nations of residence. Whereas seeking opportunities of education and gainful employment, resulting in voluntary resettlements might be done if choice is indeed available, these stories often also reveal years of state disinvestment in education or in employment opportunities for its own citizens, reserving the control and accumulation of educational and financial advantages in the hands of a small group of individuals. However, migration for better chances in life cannot be conflated with migration for the sake of survival. The urgency of displacement due to exploding bombs, drones, and open fire, or sudden destruction of land and property due to a tsunami, famine, pandemic, or starvation is no match to movement in peaceful times. Unsettlement offers a parameter to distinguish between migration that comes with the privilege of education, class, and caste, conducted under peaceful circumstances in order to thrive, from migration that must be undertaken as a last resort in order to survive, whether due to longstanding economic insecurities and lack of opportunities in the nation of birth, or due to wars, political upheavals, fear of persecution or death, or natural or human-made calamities that leave one with no choice. A fight between betterment of existence and mere existence. One privileged, the other not so much. Thinking about unsettlement as integral to processes of migrations assists in developing an awareness of the differences, and the overlaps, particularly in regard to so-called "economic refugees."

Migration Studies have long focused on the idea of "mobility" in contexts of willful migration, even when displacement, dislocation, or deterritorialization are often interchangeably used to describe experiences and writings of exiles. Mobility, now also associated with economic progression or retrogression, as in "upward" and "downward" mobility, can barely capture the pain, suffering, and pressure, as well as fortitude, resilience, and hope of those who have been suddenly rendered homeless as consequence of, say a war between two political factions within a nation or two world superpowers fighting for control over a third nation. Unsettlement gives a window into different kinds of mobilities: a privileged or semi-privileged "higher-end" mobility and an equally important, albeit subaltern mobility that must be undertaken to save lives that have been rendered either discounted or less worthy of respect due to social hierarchies or political forces.

Extending the dual trope of territorial and mental distress, unsettlement forwards a way to imagine the connections between legal definitions and distinctions that mark the differences between refugees, stateless, and internally displaced individuals around the world. According to the Geneva Convention on the Status of the Refugees (1951), a refugee is "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion."[40] An asylum seeker is the prima facie of refugees: someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed.[41] A stateless person is one "who is not considered as a national by any State under the operation of its law."[42] Internally displaced people (IDPs) have not crossed a border to find safety.

Erasing distinctions underlying these definitions might not be productive, as they are instruments of human rights. But to consider them as watertight categories under which human beings can be classified would be equally unproductive. Working through unsettlement aids us in finding commonalities between the state of human beings who are forcibly displaced regardless of the political status accorded to them. Unsettlement inaugurates a way to find a common thread of humanity in the reasons that might have forced human beings to leave their home and hearth on dangerous journeys.

Unsettlement also offers a window into a social institutionality of the "refugee camp." The UNHCR definition here is useful again: "Refugee camps are temporary facilities built to provide immediate protection and assistance to people who have been forced to flee their homes due to war, persecution or violence."[43] As we all know, from Pakistan to Bangladesh to Thailand, all the way to the US-Mexico border, and even in Germany now, there are camps intended as temporary facilities which have lasted for over three decades, or in the case of Palestinian refugees, over fifty years. In fact, much of UNHCR's efforts, as well as corrective solution-based scholarship in the social sciences, are directed toward "refugee settlement" and "refugee resettlement." Unsettlement assists in uncovering and questioning the longevity of these spaces for our times, which turn from an immediate to a semi-permanent and sometimes permanent address, the domicile of those without a forwarding address.

The discursive advantages of thinking through unsettlement in the larger social context can be measured with the writing of Vietnamese American novelist Viet Thanh Nguyen. In his essay "Being a Refugee, an American, and a Human being,"[44] Nguyen writes at the outset that "for many these identities cannot be reconciled. … In March 1975, as Saigon was about to fall, or on the brink of liberation, depending on your point of view, my humanity was temporarily put into question as I became a refugee."[45] Thinking through unsettlement capacitates modes of taking sincerely the other point of view, one that focuses less on the brink of liberation through war but more on someone finding themselves at the brink of their humanity being temporarily put into question. Nguyen further states: "To become a refugee means that one's country has imploded, taking with it all the things that protect our humanity: a functional government, a mostly non-murderous police force, a reliable drinking water and food supply and efficient sewage system."[46] Unsettlement serves as a way of also holding the state accountable, one that was charged with the protection of its subjects' humanity but could not, a state and ruling regime that was so interested in its settlement of power through perpetuity and in settling revenge with its own citizens. Unsettlement mobilizes the political right to hold superpowers accountable for their failure by simply declaring another state a "failed state" while hiding their own failures. Unsettlement assists in addressing the difficult reconciliation of intersectional identities: of a refugee, a human being, and a member of a nation-state.

In "We Refugees," Arendt describes three kinds of losses in German–Jewish refugees: "homes, which means the familiarity of daily life … occupation which means the confidence that we are of some use in this world … [and] … language which means the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings."[47] Unsettlement narratives account for these losses in written language by identifying the impact or affected expressions of feelings, albeit, drawing on Gatrell, in the larger matrix of socio-politics which includes readers who may not have had first-hand experience of being a refugee. Unsettlement can be used to measure the engagement of the forcibly displaced with the settled, looking deeper into the political and cultural histories of territorially demarcated, place-based,

and place-bound histories of dispersals of human beings. Formally what this also means is to not think of refugee narratives as a monolith, as a large body of literature merely organized under one thematic rubric. Given the long histories of elements of narration in different linguistic cultural traditions—say Pashto prose forms of storytelling such as *Kissa*, or Arabic *Hikaye*, or the Tamil *Kadai*—to think of literature of refugees simply in terms of Western (familiar) forms and non-Western (unfamiliar) content would not suffice. This would require further unsettlement of our own comprehensions of formal distinctions and our expectations of that form.

Reading Unsettlement

Unsettlement should *unsettle*, as it were, one's own presumptions about permanent settlements or inheritances of a national cultural terrain, a language, and prompt thinking, in concrete terms, of one's own history of willful migration or forced displacement. What this means, in turn, is to think of nations too as products of several waves of forced and willful migrations of human beings, of ongoing slow or rapid settlements, with many future ones in store, rather than thinking of "citizens" as those with a longer history of migration spanning generations, and "migrants" as those with shorter histories. In addition, unsettlement also helps us to understand the parallel processes of forced migrations: unsettlements that go into the creation of national political boundaries, such as mass displacements of Native American and First Nation people in North America, forced migration of Africans through slave trade in the Americas and in Europe, or in more recent histories the "population exchange" of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs during the partition of India. Unsettlement serves as a flashlight that assists in illuminating the fine cracks, the hairline fractures that are often glossed over by identitarian status markers that create political hierarchies.

I want to offer unsettlement as way of reading literature and understanding the connections between *Darstellen* and *Vertreten*—the artistic and political representation—of cataclysmic world-historical events and their impact on human beings and narratives. A general perception of reading refugee narratives is that they help us develop "empathy and understanding," a term that is widely used from listicles (list articles) published in news outlets to library guides and catalogs. Surely empathy and understanding are admirable points of arrival, but not the only ones. Refugee narratives offer us ways of unsettling our readerly assumptions by calling upon us to sharpen our critical sensitivities so we are not just following the trajectory of plight and flight coupled with a crash course in national history. The need is to consider both the qualifier "refugee" and the noun "literature"—whether in original language of creation or in translation—through critical tools that help us engage with language and form and frame our experience and purpose of reading. Unsettlement initiates and facilitates a de-sedimentation of received ideas, matters, spirit, and feeling. With the word, I want to call for an urgent perspectival shift for new articulations of affairs and questions pertaining to refugees and aesthetic expressions of refuge, as catalyst for aesthetic production *as* social production of meanings by those who are unsettled by history and therefore unsettled in their stories. Unsettlement serves as a way of accounting for forced departures, disappearances of human beings as well as material and identitarian dispossession of human dignity.

To what end? How can works of literature hold national superpowers accountable for their failure? What are the ways in which the idea of unsettlement as territorial and emotional displacement, as physical and virtual disruption of life, could be mobilized as a practice of reading? To answer these questions, let me turn now to the two works of creative non-fiction with which I started this essay.

Asadulla Abubakr's "The Irony of Life and the Survival of the American Dream" and Vinh Nguyen's "To Mourn with No Grave" fall somewhere between the genre of the short story and a memoir and therefore are too independent to be tamed by the generic label "autobiographical narratives" or simply "creative nonfiction." Written by two authors who were forcibly displaced as children with their families, these pieces contain affective manifestations of sudden territorial and emotional displacements, ways of being and becoming in the world after another world is gone, destroyed, and wiped-away overnight. As the displacements happen because of two brutally violent episodes of world history in the

1970s—Afghanistan and Vietnam, respectively—these are stories that at the very outset lay bare human vulnerability that became a central feature of the ideological battleground between communism and capitalism that the world was turned into in the latter half of the twentieth century. Neither pretending to speak for all migrants or refugees nor offering an easy redemption between the two ideologies in the name of liberalism or conservatism, the narrative "I's" in both pieces uncover and unsettle decades of accumulated, caked-up layers of history while performing an archeology of their Selves and inserting their own selves—in multi-lingual, multi-locational, and multi-medial registers.

The passages quoted as the epigraphs of this essay, which describe the moments of actual physical displacements, the urgency and immediacy of journeys undertaken to secure safety and seek refuge, are not the starting points of the stories. They appear two-thirds of the way into the narratives as important but not the only stations in the lives of the narrators. Abubakr moves chronologically, starting with the date of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan: "December 4, 1979 was another ordinary day for an eight-year-old child, except the day itself wasn't ordinary."[48] He describes the unusually large number of flights taking off and landing at the Kabul airport, an "intriguing and exciting" moment for a child.[49] The narrative moves to the loss of hope among his parents, the censorship and control regime of the puppet government led by Babrak Karmal, and the growing insecurity within the family, which then leads to their departure to Pakistan, and then to the United States. The physical displacement serves as the turning point, leading then to details about being in the US and turning into "proud Americans."[50] As a teenager in the US, the narrator initially plans to join the US army "to defend the country from communism,"[51] deciding later for a tertiary education in Biochemistry, leading to medicine, which nonetheless was accompanied with having read "completely or partially every book with the word Afghan or Afghanistan" in the title.[52] Dari disappears from the family and is replaced by English. The family and his own strong sense of indebtedness to the US and the belief in the US as a free society are shaken after 9/11 as every Muslim is suspected to be a terrorist or linked with them: "[US] had transformed into a police state almost similar to the former Soviet Union."[53] The once-refugee subject, whose integration into the US society is made possible through acquisition of language and education, is suddenly declared an outsider. The business of being and becoming must carve out new paths.

To dismiss Abubakr's intense and sudden disappointment and need for examining the "irony of the American dream" as naïve feelings of a refugee would be an exercise in elitism that would expect a more "nuanced" writing from an author without the need for a ration card. The nuance lies precisely in reading the modes in which brick-by-brick, a life built comes apart, unsettling everything one had known, twice: once in Afghanistan, the second time in the US. As one world comes to an end, another world takes over, and a new world must be recreated yet again.

A similar sense of double unsettlement, not just dual displacement, is movingly captured by Vinh Nguyen. Like Abubakr, Nguyen, too, does not begin with the tale of displacement cited at the beginning of this chapter. Here, in fact, a chance encounter, sounds of Vietnamese from the apartment above "raining" slowly through cracks in stucco of the ceiling starts an associative chain of memory for the narrator. The suspicion of presence of an elderly Vietnamese neighbor in his apartment building in Toronto intrigues the first-person narrator, who lives with his partner in the "part of the city … in a condo on a street that has been described as one of the 'coolest' neighborhoods in the world, populated by mostly white hipsters and young professionals."[54] The realization that the narrator rarely gets a chance to speak Vietnamese triggers memories of popular television shows—produced in Hong Kong, dubbed in Vietnamese, brought by aunts in video cassettes—and like much of the rest of the middle-class world in pandemic lockdown, the narrator starts watching those shows. These shows, he confesses, were forbidden to him as a child, so he could free up his head for learning English, the majority language of Canada. Reflections on the *mother*tongue revive memories of his *father* and the many stories and speculations over the years for his not being able to join the family. From a note in Vietnamese written on a photograph, which the narrator first translates with the help of google translate, to family dynamics, a visit to Ho Chi Minh City—his Saigon that is no more—all appear in rapid succession in the narration. The loss that is mourned is not just of a dear family member, but the losses incurred

over many years caused by, once again, a war fought under the auspices of ideological bifurcation of the world, between Communism and Capitalism, for control of power as ordinary human beings suffered.

As Abubakr and Nguyen register, this is how human beings are turned into refugees: first *up*rooted and then *re*routed, with their everyday lives disrupted, destructed, or thoroughly transformed. To the rest of the world, the bureaucratic trajectory and political process—from evacuation from a war zone to transfer to a refugee camp, from recognition of status as asylum seekers to the acquisition of citizenship—might appear as the happy telos of resettlement of refugees. But behind asylum papers or passports are other stories that form and inform lives of millions of refugees around the world. They tell their own tales of multiple unsettlements in stark, laconic language that goes beyond the linguistic trapeze acts of Joyce or Nabokov. Abubakr and Nguyen recall both trajectories and consequences of their unsettlements.

Refugee narratives, akin to the causes, consequences, and then trajectories of refugee creations, cannot be limited to one or the other national or linguistic-cultural origin. They pose new sets of challenges but also opportunities for Comparative Literature and World Literature studies, whereby not merely texts translated into other languages become part of the world literary space, but also human beings, forcibly displaced, are translated from one locale to another. Without the clout or the literary ambition of self-proclaimed "exiles," these and many other authors tell tales of those with ration cards, those with some, or in many cases, no documents, no identity papers. And yet, as Viet Thanh Nguyen, Vinh Nguyen, Asadulla Abubak, and many other authors writing with refugee figures bring forth, tales of unsettlement become the unauthorized autobiographies for those without forwarding addresses. Beyond empathy and understanding, refugee narratives ask us to investigate the immediacy, urgency, and the agency of human narratives, especially the capacity to survive in multiple locales and languages, as unsettlements come back and ask for re-considerations and re-articulations—sometimes through the violent invasions of foreign powers, or the loud bangs of terrorist attacks, or merely through "migrant rains" of words through cracks in the ceiling.

Notes

 1 Gatrell, "Refugees"; Nguyen, "Refugeetude."
 2 "Exile, n.1."
 3 "Refugee, n.1."
 4 Alvarez Borland, *Cuban-American Literature of Exile*; Brandt, *Exil-Literatur, 1933–1945*; Vietor-Engländer, *The Legacy of Exile*.
 5 Moeller, *Latin America and the Literature of Exile*.
 6 Langer, *Crossing the Border*.
 7 Ladbrook, "Writing the Refugee Experience."
 8 McClennen and Moore, *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Human Rights*.
 9 Woolley, *Contemporary Asylum Narratives*.
10 Stonebridge, *Placeless People*.
11 Chakraborty, *The Refugee Woman*. Ansari, *Choosing to Stay*.
12 Arendt, "We Refugees," 264.
13 Said, "Reflections on Exile," 137.
14 Said, "Reflections on Exile," 138.
15 Said, "Reflections on Exile," 140.
16 Said, "Reflections on Exile," 139.
17 Said, "Reflections on Exile," 141.
18 Said, "Reflections on Exile," 139.
19 Said, "Reflections on Exile," 138.
20 Said, "Reflections on Exile," 141.
21 Said, "Reflections on Exile," 142.
22 Said, "Reflections on Exile," 142.
23 Said, "Reflections on Exile," 144.
24 Said, "Reflections on Exile," 144.
25 Said, "Reflections on Exile," 147.

26 Said, "Reflections on Exile," 148.
27 I cannot help noting here that "expatriates" is a word used by white Americans, Australians, Canadians, British, and South Africans to identify themselves and their communities in Asia and the Middle East, as opposed to persons of color from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, who are always described in these countries as migrants.
28 Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., *The Oxford Handbook of Refugee and Forced Migration Studies*.
29 Gatrell, "Refugees."
30 Gatrell, "Refugees," 170.
31 Gatrell, "Refugees," 170.
32 Gatrell, "Refugees," 179.
33 Nguyen, "Refugeetude."
34 Nguyen, "Refugeetude," 109.
35 Nguyen, "Refugeetude," 114.
36 Nguyen, "Refugeetude," 111.
37 Nguyen, "Refugeetude," 110.
38 Nguyen, "Refugeetude," 124.
39 Arendt, "We Refugees," 264.
40 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees."
41 Amnesty International, "Refugees, Asylum-Seekers and Migrants."
42 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, "Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness."
43 "What Is a Refugee Camp?"
44 Nguyen, *The Refugees*.
45 Nguyen, *The Refugees,* 211.
46 Nguyen, *The Refugees,* 212.
47 Arendt, "We Refugees," 264.
48 Abubakr, "The Irony of Life and the Survival of the American Dream," 106.
49 Abubakr, "The Irony of Life and the Survival of the American Dream," 106.
50 Abubakr, "The Irony of Life and the Survival of the American Dream," 110.
51 Abubakr, "The Irony of Life and the Survival of the American Dream," 110.
52 Abubakr, "The Irony of Life and the Survival of the American Dream," 110.
53 Abubakr, "The Irony of Life and the Survival of the American Dream," 111–12.
54 Vinh Nguyen, "To Mourn with No Grave."

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3

REFUGEE NARRATIVES AND HUMANITARIAN FORM

Bishupal Limbu

What are the forms and conventions of the refugee narrative? Asking such a question seems to imply that we already know who or what a refugee is and that there is such a thing as a refugee narrative with clearly identifiable characteristics. However, as ongoing debates over the distinction between refugee and (economic) migrant demonstrate, we cannot take the self-evidence of the refugee category for granted. Indeed, it is often the site of definitional conflicts and moral and political policing.[1] The legal definition of a refugee enshrined in the 1951 UN Convention provides a useful starting point but gives little indication of the ways in which this category is shaped by prevailing moral values, political exigencies, and representational practices. I want to start, therefore, with the obvious but important point that our understanding of who or what refugees are cannot be separated from the narratives we assemble about them. In other words, refugee narratives are not simply *about* refugees; they also participate in constructing and producing refugees both discursively (through representational norms and practices) and materially (through the bestowal or withholding of rights and protections). In this chapter, I analyze how certain persistent narrative scripts associated with humanitarian storytelling construct and produce refugees. I argue that insofar as these scripts make refugees legible as objects of humanitarian concern, they perform politically useful work. At the same time, however, they also constrict our political imagination by linking refugees to a discourse of suffering and empathy. For this reason, it is necessary to find alternatives to the humanitarian template. I suggest that such alternatives involve situating refugee narratives in relation to stories of implication, beneficiary status, and ungratefulness, which go beyond inspiring compassion and highlight larger structures that lead to inequality and injustice as well as broader scales of interconnectedness and responsibility.

Humanitarian Templates: Suffering, Flight, and Humanization

The clearest example of the discursive and material production of refugees occurs in the interview for asylum, a crucial moment in the story of the refugee and one that often appears in both fictional and non-fictional accounts of refugee experience. This interview has certain codes and conventions: it requires a story of persecution and injury that the refugee presents as proof that they have fled for the right reasons and are worthy of asylum. A successful story is one that contains the appropriate details of suffering and trauma, and a refugee who wishes to gain asylum must shape their story according to these conventions.[2] The interview, in other words, involves a performance of the "authenticity" and "worthiness" of the refugee in the structure of an address or supplication. The word "performance" should not be taken to mean that refugees are merely playacting when they tell their stories or fabricating stories for the purposes of the interview. The point is, rather, that stories by and about refugees

do not exist in a vacuum but are always already situated in a codified set of circumstances, such as that of the asylum interview. What the interview makes evident is that refugee narratives have to contend with the question of form and that this question is intimately bound up with other questions about what kinds of stories get told and what effect they have on how we perceive and understand refugees. Although the interview is just one site for the discursive and material production of refugees, it reveals the existence of a general template or frame that influences the construction of refugee narratives, even when these narratives are fictional rather than bureaucratic or journalistic.

Take, for instance, *What Is the What* by Dave Eggers, a novel in the form of a fictionalized autobiography of one of the so-called Lost Boys of Sudan. When Valentino, the protagonist, prepares his application for asylum in the U.S., he is aware that his narrative has to meet certain expectations:

> The first step in leaving Kakuma [a refugee camp in Kenya] was the writing of our autobiographies. … We were asked to write about the civil war, about losing our families, about our lives in the camps. … We knew that those who felt persecuted in Kakuma or Sudan would be given special consideration. Maybe your family in the Sudan had done something to another family and you feared retribution? Perhaps you had deserted the SPLA and feared punishment? It could be many things. Whichever strategy we applied, we knew that our stories had to be well told, that we needed to remember all that we had seen and done; no deprivation was insignificant.[3]

These expectations—of persecution, suffering, deprivation, and fear—shape Valentino's story. He documents his experiences, "every last thing [he] had seen, every path and tree and pair of yellowed eyes, every body [he] buried," in nine pages of an examination booklet.[4] Although this document does not appear in the novel, it is present in an amplified form *as the novel itself*, which follows the same template by telling a detailed story of persecution, suffering, deprivation, and fear in the structure of a first-person address to a nebulous First World reader, who is then presumably moved by horror and compassion into helping or responding in some way. In *What Is the What*, this empathetic addressee is represented by several people, most notably Valentino's sponsor, a white lawyer from Atlanta, who wants to "hear it all" during their weekly "ritual" of storytelling.[5] But the novel also explicitly positions the reader in a structure of address as a witness to Valentino's suffering and resilience: "It gives me strength, almost unbelievable strength, to know that you are there. … I will tell stories to people who will listen and to people who don't want to listen, to people who seek me out and to those who run. All the while I will know that you are there. How can I pretend that you do not exist? It would be almost as impossible as you pretending that I do not exist."[6] These sentences, from the final paragraph of the novel, function as an emotional appeal to the reader's empathy, highlighting the sentimental humanitarian template that undergirds the novel in general.[7]

That this template is present to varying degrees in many narratives by and about refugees suggests that it fulfills a need or purpose. I have already alluded to the necessity of performing the part of the authentic refugee—a script that involves precisely the mobilization of the sentimental frame and a demonstration of the refugee's humanity. This demonstration, however, is not a neutral act that merely documents or delivers the truth of the refugee in unmediated fashion; it is also a production of the refugee as a figure who becomes worthy of our ethical consideration by virtue of their suffering and abjection. The refugee, in other words, becomes recognizable as human through a process that defines their humanity in terms of injury and diminishment.[8] This recognition follows a humanitarian logic, setting up a relationship of lives at risk in need of rescue while furthering a vision of humanity in which suffering and vulnerability provide the principle of equivalence and connection with otherness.

Refugee narratives, often engaged in an attempt to "humanize" refugees as a way to counter negative stereotypes or argue for their inclusion in an imagined community of rights-bearing humans, function as discursive practices that generate and mobilize representations within a humanitarian logic. The appeal to humanity provides an ethical solution to the problem of marginalization and otherness faced by refugees, but it also, albeit inadvertently, creates new problems of exclusion and regulation.

These interlocking effects are evident, for example, in the Somali–British poet Warsan Shire's widely shared poem called "Home," which depicts in poignant detail the conditions that force people to flee their homes. The poem compresses the experience of departure and flight into a few highly evocative images: the endless hours inside "the stomach of a truck," the deadly space at "the bottom of the boat," the desperate scramble to "crawl under fences."[9] To these images are added the danger and violence encountered on the journey, including the gendered violence of rape. The poem also conveys other aspects of the refugee experience that connect with the experiences of a broader public, such as the discomfort of hunger, the humiliation of being helpless, and the grief of losing one's family. Most significantly, the poem addresses the question of duress in stories about refugees. Home is not a place one *wants* to flee and one only leaves when *forced* to do so, when the circumstances at home have become so threatening to existence that there is no other option but to take flight. Home has become "the mouth of a shark" and "the barrel of [a] gun"; it tells you to run, "chase[s] you to the shore," and sends you off on a perilous journey.[10] The poem demonstrates in this way the necessity for flight, describing the dangers that make escape the only option even when the journey itself may bring more risks and safe arrival is far from guaranteed. Moreover, instead of presenting the refugee's situation as exceptional and beyond comprehension, the poem encourages its readers or listeners to recognize that when faced with the circumstances described, they, too, would be compelled to flee and find safety elsewhere, in a distant land that they do not choose and that is, specifically, not home. No one, the poem repeats, wants to leave home: "no one" willingly puts children on rickety boats sailing treacherous seas and "no one" voluntarily endures the hardships and hazards of a journey without guarantees. This powerfully repeated "no one" includes not only the refugee but everyone. Significantly, however, the poem does not plead for empathy or identification with the plight of refugees. It asks instead for understanding ("you have to understand"), which is a more complex response.[11]

In an incisive analysis of "the banality of empathy," Namwali Serpell observes that the "empathy model of art … has imposed upon readers and viewers the idea that they can and ought to use art to inhabit others, especially the marginalized. Perhaps worse, it has imposed on makers of art, especially the marginalized, the idea that they can and ought to construct creative vehicles for empathy."[12] "Home" avoids this dynamic by activating the reader's capacity for judgment by presenting various scenarios and suggesting that "no one," whoever one is, would behave differently in such circumstances. This is not the task of feeling oneself into or as the suffering other; it is rather the activity of training oneself to accommodate the standpoints of others in an impartial way. Serpell cites a famous passage from Hannah Arendt's essay on "Truth and Politics" to explain this approach:

> I form an opinion by considering a given issue from different viewpoints, by making present to my mind the standpoints of those who are absent; that is, I represent them. This process of representation does not blindly adopt the actual views of those who stand somewhere else, and hence look upon the world from a different perspective; this is a question neither of empathy, as though I tried to be or to feel like somebody else, nor of counting noses and joining a majority but of being and thinking in my own identity where actually I am not.[13]

Although the distinction between empathy and what Arendt calls "representative thinking" may seem small, it is nonetheless important. Representative thinking involves not a practice of identification but a process of critically considering and evaluating other viewpoints in order to form judgments. Rather than simply yielding to the sentimental force of empathy, Arendt recommends engaging with other perspectives but from a position of disinterestedness, or what I identify above as understanding.[14]

Despite the emphasis on understanding and judgment that is evident in "Home," so seductive is the empathy model of art (to borrow Serpell's phrase) that the poem, like many other literary representations of refugees, has been read and received as precisely an invitation to empathize with refugees and offer them assistance. In 2015, "Home" was used, for example, in a short video made to support the work of

the charity Save the Children that featured a song titled "Help Is Coming" by the rock band Crowded House accompanied by predictable footage of suffering refugees on overfull boats and on desperate journeys across inhospitable lands. The video includes an introduction by the celebrity actor Benedict Cumberbatch, who recites a few lines from "Home" and ends by declaring that "Help is coming." Although it would be easy to criticize and dismiss the appropriation of the poem in this video, it is more productive to investigate how the poem could lend itself to such appropriations. Part of the answer seems to lie in the way it movingly describes the unbearable conditions that cause people to flee their homes and the difficulties they face during their journey: pain, suffering, brutality, trauma, and possibly death. The presence of these elements indicates how difficult it is to entirely escape the sentimental humanitarian frame even when the purpose may be to emphasize agency rather than victimhood.

Recent literary representations of refugees generally attempt to challenge the dehumanization of refugees in public discourse and make them recognizable as part of a human community. These concerns influence and shape the representational practices and formal patterns of refugee stories, which often recount incidents involving atrocity, vulnerability, and suffering. As I have suggested, a humanitarian logic of abjection and rescue goes hand in hand with the adoption of a sentimental script and its focus on suffering. Although the humanitarian framework may be unavoidable and perhaps even necessary to a certain extent, it is politically important to ask what other representational modes and configurations are available to supplement this framework.

At first glance, the story of flight, depicting the movement of refugees from one place to another, thereby foregrounding action and persistence, seems to provide such an alternative paradigm. This is the argument that Eleni Coundouriotis advances in her useful exploration of how the refugee experience takes shape in narrative. According to Coundouriotis, the story of flight is central in refugee narratives because it offers a sense of agency and (forward) direction. She notes "a tension between mobility and stasis" in refugee narratives but argues that they "invariably emphasize the original story of flight rather than the story of immobility" because flight indicates agency and autonomy, a sense that one is heading somewhere.[15] Moreover, the story of flight, Coundouriotis claims, demonstrates purpose when refugees find themselves trapped in a messy or desperate situation and signals their hope that something better lies ahead.

It is worth asking, however, if this positive view of stories of flight is entirely warranted. To be sure, such stories furnish a key narrative framework in representations of refugees, whether fictional or journalistic. The most common depiction of refugees involves bodies in motion traversing or, more frequently, failing to traverse dangerous seas, difficult terrain, and fortified borders. Documentaries and journalistic writing routinely highlight the journey at sea in flimsy boats and the passage through unfamiliar and inhospitable lands. For instance, *4.1 Miles*, a documentary short film made for *The New York Times* in 2016 at the height of the so-called European refugee crisis, focuses on the coast guard of the Greek island of Lesbos as they rescue men, women, and children from almost certain death during their perilous crossing of the Mediterranean. *The New Odyssey*, Patrick Kingsley's detailed and sympathetic book published the same year, follows the paths on land and sea of Syrians, Eritreans, Afghanis, and others as they attempt to find safety in Europe. Both of these examples rely on stories of flight for narrative shape and impact. Another recent high-profile example is Ai Weiwei's documentary *Human Flow* and the accompanying book of interviews published under the same title. Some of the most significant fictional or quasi-fictional representations of refugee experience, such as Ghassan Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*, Michael Winterbottom's *In This World*, Abbas Khider's *Der falsche Inder*, Philippe Lioret's *Welcome*, and many of the stories collected in the four volumes of *Refugee Tales* edited by David Herd and Anna Pincus are also structured around stories of flight.

Often, however, these stories are not merely about the journey but also about the difficulties encountered during the journey. Refugees flee when faced with violence and death, and the experience of flight itself is routinely depicted as beset by hardship, fear, and the risk of dying (or actual death, as in *Men in the Sun*). Stories of flight, therefore, are also frequently stories of suffering and trauma within the familiar frame of sentimental humanitarianism.

If the narratives that rely on this framework are the most widespread and "effective" way of representing refugees, what is the effect on our perceptions of the people—real or imagined—whose stories are conveyed in such fashion? If the vocabulary of humanity and human rights is used to guide our understanding of refugee narratives, how do stories of flight construct the humanity of the refugee as human rights subject and what idea of human rights is involved? Coundouriotis claims that stories of flight "dramatize" the refugee experience and "illustrate the reality of human rights abuses," thereby making refugees legible as bearers of those rights.[16] But this legibility and the notion of human rights that undergirds it owe rather too much to the humanitarian logic that produces refugees as objects of pity and empathy in a theater of suffering.[17]

Complicities, Implications, and Beneficiaries

It is difficult to avoid the humanitarian template in narrating refugee experience, and, despite its limitations, humanitarian storytelling performs a useful function. However, because those limitations do exist, it is worth asking what alternative narrative patterns are available for telling refugee stories. Jenny Erpenbeck's novel *Go, Went, Gone* provides one intriguing answer by shifting the focus from empathy for suffering to historical and political connections of complicity and implication. First published in German in 2015, the novel follows a retired professor of Classics as he becomes involved with a group of refugees, asking them questions, helping them in small ways, and eventually forming a kind of friendship with them. On one level, the novel is a liberal humanist account of the refugee "crisis" in Europe: it recounts the events of 2012–14 when refugees set up tents at Oranienplatz in the Kreuzberg neighborhood of Berlin and staged a protest for the right to work and study. Richard, the protagonist, starts as an observer from the sidelines, unsure of his own curiosity about the refugees, and gradually becomes a regular visitor at the former senior residence where a group of refugees is housed after the dismantling of the Oranienplatz encampment. Over weeks and months, he builds relationships with several of them and learns about their individual histories, backgrounds, and personalities. The reader of the novel, too, learns with him. In this way, *Go, Went, Gone* seems to reproduce the sentimental humanitarian frame, offering a lesson on the humanity of others, whom we may initially see as a nameless mass, and emphasizing the value of empathy as a means of moral engagement. But I would argue that the more important lessons of the novel lie in a few scattered observations that historicize the present, thus allowing us to see it in a continuum with the actions and events of an earlier period whose effects we may still have to reckon with in unexpected ways. The first of these occurs near the beginning of the novel while Richard idly watches refugees and "sympathizers" at Oranienplatz.

> Back when there was a canal here, Germany still had colonies. The word *Kolonialwaren* was still visible in weathered script on some East Berlin facades as recently as twenty years ago, until the West started renovating everything, including the last vestiges of these grocer's shops with their imported wares. … You can still find "German East Africa" on the globe in his study. … Richard has no idea what German East Africa is called today. He wonders whether, back when there was still a canal right where he's sitting now, slaves were sold at that department store.[18]

This passage offers an acknowledgment of Germany's colonial past—a past that persists even when the visible signs of its presence have been erased. Richard does not explicitly connect his reflections on German East Africa and the commerce of slaves to the situation of the refugees that he sees in Oranienplatz. But the fact that these reflections appear in this particular context suggests that there is a connection between Germany's colonial past and the refugees' presence in Germany.

How should this connection be conceptualized? After all, there is no obvious link between a group of refugees from various parts of the world gathered in Berlin in the twenty-first century and the colony of German East Africa, which occupied an area in the African Great Lakes region and was ceded to other European powers (Britain, Belgium, and Portugal) at the end of World War I. Nor is it clear how

German colonialism and its economic activities (indicated by the term *Kolonialwaren* or colonial goods) are connected to the contemporary German state and its citizens. And yet the novel seems to insist, in this passage and others, that there is some sort of connection, oblique though it may be. Indeed, its very obliqueness seems to be the point since it suggests that deciphering the present involves work—specifically, the work of historicizing, contextualizing, and interpreting—rather than readymade reactions of bafflement, contempt, or empathy.

In *The Implicated Subject*, Michael Rothberg proposes a relationship of implication as a way of thinking about how we are complexly situated in configurations of inequality and advantage. According to Rothberg, "Implicated subjects occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes."[19] This notion of implication broadens our sense of ourselves as actors and participants in the creation and sustenance of structural injustices. It links the conditions of the present to the actions and events of the past by stressing indirect lines of cause and effect. It also opens up the question of responsibility, suggesting that there are forms of responsibility that extend beyond immediate contexts of causality.

When applied to refugee narratives, the idea of implication offers a framework that reorients us away from the humanitarian template. Stories about refugees that emphasize implication focus not so much on the production of compassion for refugees as they do on the excavation of historical knowledge and the construction of political awareness. To be sure, these two activities are not incompatible with each other and may even work more effectively together; however, they involve different narrative patterns and representational choices. In the case of *Go, Went, Gone*, the protagonist's evocation of German colonialism tells a story of the refugees in Oranienplatz in a much longer time frame than, for instance, any single story of flight. This extended storyline loses the "drama" of humanitarian storytelling but adds important new actors to the tale: the German state and its citizens as complexly entangled participants. The narrative shifts attention from suffering and rescue to implication and responsibility.

In *Go, Went, Gone*, this shift is thematized in a casual moment when Richard mentions to his friends that one of the refugees he has come to know is a Tuareg from Niger, a country that has some of the world's largest deposits of uranium.

> Richard tells Detlef and Sylvia, who probably don't even know exactly where Niger is, about the French-government-owned corporation Areva that holds a monopoly on the mines and dumps its waste in an area where the Tuareg used to pasture their camels. … In Niger, Richard says, the drinking water has been contaminated, the camels are done for, people keep getting cancer without knowing why—but in France and here in Germany we have plenty of energy.[20]

Richard's comment links the cancer consuming the bodies of people in Niger with the electricity produced in European nuclear power plants and used, for example, to operate everyday household appliances. This connection makes the suffering of distant others not an object of compassion but the source of an uncomfortable awareness of one's own implication and responsibility—even culpability—for that suffering. The story here is not so much about discovering the humanity shared by Tuaregs and Germans and thus extending human rights as it is about understanding the structural inequalities that link the miserable conditions of life at one end to the ordinary comfort and convenience of life at the other. What links the Tuareg refugee to the German citizen is not (or not only) their common human exposure to injury but a relationship of complex causality and indefinable answerability.

Bruce Robbins provides another way of conceptualizing this relationship with the figure of the beneficiary. As indicated by the term, the beneficiary profits from past and present structures of inequality that they may not be directly responsible for creating. Noticing this figure means telling stories of suffering that are angled or inflected differently to highlight material inequalities distributed and connected on a global scale. It means, as Robbins explains, relying less on a humanitarian "appeal to empathy and abstract fairness" and more on a recognition that "your fate is *causally linked*, however

obscurely, with the fates of distant and sometimes suffering others."[21] This emphasis on causality differentiates Robbins's approach from Rothberg's more diffuse notion of implication; both, however, draw attention to linkages and relations of responsibility that get occluded in prevailing humanitarian frameworks of storytelling. The alternative narrative template provided by the beneficiary departs from the conventions of humanitarian storytelling without escaping them entirely. Robbins describes "the discourse of the beneficiary" as "something between a recognition of global economic injustice and a denunciation of it."[22] It occurs "in a range of tonalities, not all of them political, some perhaps more rueful than indignant."[23] Richard's observation linking the situation in Niger to daily life in Germany fits this description remarkably well and its tone is closer to ruefulness than indignation.

Given the apparent inadequacy of this response, one may ask what, concretely, his recognition of his and his friends' beneficiary status entails. There seems to be an incommensurability in the recognition of implication, especially when its dimensions are historically and geographically extensive, and the response or range of responses that may be possible or available. Richard is motivated to a large extent by something resembling shame, both collective and individual. Sara Ahmed suggests that "the expression of shame is a political action, which is not yet finished, as it depends on how it gets 'taken up.'"[24] Shame, in other words, is associated with unfinished and ongoing actions, which, individually, will only ever be inadequate but which are not, therefore, unnecessary or unimportant. Richard's response to his beneficiary status mostly involves personal acts of kindness and generosity. The limited scope of his actions may indicate a shortcoming in the political imagination of the novel. On the other hand, it may also point to the aporia that attends any attempt to imagine and perform politically meaningful action, including the action of writing a novel or analyzing one. There is something like a relationship between this situation and what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has described as "justice as the experience of the impossible."[25]

Ungrateful and Compromised Refugees

In addition to the figures of the implicated subject and the beneficiary, *Go, Went, Gone* also depicts another morally complicated figure: that of the ungrateful refugee, a term that Dina Nayeri has used to describe and denounce the "gratitude politics" that expects refugees and immigrants to constantly prove their worth and perform their humble appreciation at being admitted to the host country.[26] The ungrateful refugee is the embarrassing and undeserving counterpart of the sincere and innocent yet victimized refugee whose story gets codified in the asylum interview. In *Go, Went, Gone*, the ungrateful refugee is an 18-year-old named Osarobo, whom Richard invites to his home to play the piano and who, readers are led to believe, is behind the burglary that takes place while Richard is away at a colloquium. It is worth noting that Osarobo is just one among several refugees portrayed in the novel and his actions are not presented as general or normative for the group. However, in a story that is clearly sympathetic to refugees, his example appears as a striking counterpoint to the morally pure and grateful refugee who functions as the paradigmatic subject of humanitarian benevolence.

The ungrateful refugee forsakes the script of innocence and moral worthiness that regulates the portrayal of refugee characters and, in doing so, reveals the existence of such a script as well as its limitations.[27] Although "humanizing" refugees by constructing them as blameless objects of humanitarian concern can be politically useful, these modes of representation also restrict our sense of the political while simultaneously redrawing the boundary of humanity to exclude new others, defined as non-innocent, malicious, or undeserving. The forms of storytelling attached to the notions of innocence and blamelessness require the production of a sanitized universal humanity evacuated of the messy details of history and politics that would otherwise trouble the making of easy moral distinctions.

The challenge, therefore, is to open up our understanding of refugees and refugee narratives to fresh meanings and articulations, which also entails expanding our political horizons and ethical intuitions. Refugee stories that propose alternative narrative patterns and emphasize figures that depart from the tropes of suffering, innocence, and victimhood perform this work. What the example of the ungrateful

refugee demonstrates is that refugees, too, are morally complex beings who, like the implicated subject and the beneficiary, are eclectically positioned participants in various histories and social formations. Such an understanding can be found, for instance, in *Dheepan*, Jacques Audiard's award-winning 2015 film about Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka settling into a new life in France, which makes no effort to stage innocence or to present figures that are morally untainted. The three central characters are a family—husband, wife, and daughter—only because they have taken the identities and papers of others who have presumably become casualties of the civil war in Sri Lanka. The paradigmatic scene of the asylum interview is compressed into barely two minutes of screen time and presented as a perfunctory recitation of obvious untruths. Instead of an affect-laden recounting of past suffering that would prove the refugees' authenticity and worthiness and justify the bestowal of asylum, the film shows a former soldier of a separatist movement telling bogus stories, thus seeming to confirm the worst fears about phony and undeserving refugees entering the host country by deceit. By treating this subterfuge as a non-issue—and indeed, by featuring it casually as a premise for the exploration of other issues—*Dheepan* avoids the restrictive script of innocence and suffering humanity. It also expands the boundaries of the refugee narrative by locating the Sri Lankan refugees in a *banlieue* setting, thus linking their story to that of other working class immigrant communities in France but in a way that draws attention to structural inequalities and the failure of assimilation rather than the "sugary success stories" dictated by gratitude politics.[28]

This strategy of disrupting the humanitarian production of refugees by situating them in unexpected contexts is evident, as well, in a short story titled "Bombshell Diana" by Shobasakthi, which is the nom de plume of Antonythasan Jesuthasan, the actor who portrays the title character in *Dheepan*. Originally written in Tamil, "Bombshell Diana" begins with a death certificate—that of Diana Mahendiraja—and an asylum petition in a French tribunal. The scene then shifts abruptly to Sri Lanka and Diana's brief life story: her birth just before an aerial raid destroys part of the maternity hospital; the strange affliction that leaves her frozen like a statue when confronted with danger and that is identified as the cause of her obesity; the regular aerial bombings by government planes that, in one instance, kills 64 female students; her short-lived relationship with a married man with bulging eyes who builds the dugout shelter where she hides during air raids. Although these details provide the ingredients of a humanizing story of suffering, they are recounted in a straightforward and distinctly non-sentimental fashion. Moreover, given that Diana's story is framed in an extended flashback and not actually presented as evidence before the French court of asylum, she remains unavailable as an object of humanitarian rescue. At the end of "Bombshell Diana," we learn that the petitioner who has provided Diana's death certificate as part of his dossier, claiming her as a cousin, in fact, bought the certificate for thirty euros to strengthen his case. The inclusion of this detail draws attention to the particular types of stories required by the asylum process and the "agency" demonstrated by refugees in the face of such constraints. It also invites reflection on the political and ethical limitations of the stories we expect to hear from and about refugees. By juxtaposing the two characters—the innocent dead woman and the wily petitioner— "Bombshell Diana" reveals how our ready compassion for one may depend on a generally accepted condemnation of the other. In other words, it demonstrates how the politics of extending humanity to the innocent suffering victim involves a simultaneous endeavor to police the boundaries of this humanity and exclude the non-innocent and morally compromised other.

Conclusion

Although refugee narratives that rely on the scripts of humanitarian storytelling perform important work, they also constrict our political imagination. The appeal to a universal humanity appears as a morally commendable gesture of inclusion but also entails regulating the meaning of the human and who or what gets admitted into this category. Resisting humanitarian logic in refugee narratives means questioning and modifying the definition and representation of refugees in public discourse, law, and literature. It involves excavating histories and networks of implication in structural injustices, tracing

relationships of causality that link beneficiaries to the conditions that force people to flee, shifting the focus from sentimental elements to structural ones, and forsaking the politics of innocence and rescue. Insofar as refugees and refugee narratives become legible through their participation in humanitarian scripts of abjection and the logic of inclusion through exclusion, these alternative templates may end up making them less recognizable as distinct figures and as stories with unique moral claims. That is a risk that seems worth taking. Transforming the political signification of the refugee category enables a rethinking of related notions such as economic migrant and citizen as well as the systems—capitalism and the nation-state—on which they depend. It also allows new stories and narrative patterns to emerge, including ones that cannot be anticipated in this chapter. Being open to this possibility implies a willingness to consider refugees not as especially worthy or exceptionally political—a framing that indicates another form of benevolence—but as complexly entangled in the historical and political processes that situate them in relation to others who are equally caught up in these processes. It means being persistently attentive to the ways in which even the most seemingly radical stories may congeal into a prescriptive script and foreclose the imagining of emancipatory futures. In the endeavor to create a more just world, these tasks could not be more necessary.

Notes

1. For this reason, I use the word "refugee" throughout this essay even when other terms may sometimes be more accurate. In English, the semantic field occupied by the term "refugee" borders and blurs into those claimed by related terms such as asylum seeker, asylee, displaced person, migrant, immigrant, and exile. Further complications arise when one goes beyond English. William Maley points out that "there is no reason to assume that all languages have a word that coincides precisely with the ordinary language usage of the word 'refugee' in English" (*What Is a Refugee?,* 38). He notes that whereas the English term "refugee" suggests "the protection that is made available to someone in need," the equivalent Russian term, for instance, emphasizes "the process of movement rather than what happens at the destination" (*What Is a Refugee?,* 38).

2. Suketu Mehta, in an article for *The New Yorker*, provides an informative account of how asylum stories get "shaped" to conform to the expectations of the asylum process. Focusing on the case of a woman from a central African country seeking asylum in the U.S., Mehta writes, "The system demanded a certain kind of narrative if she was to be allowed to stay here, and she furnished it. She had read the expected symptoms of persecution, and repeated them upon command" ("The Asylum Seeker"). Others have also documented, in different national contexts, how stories get constructed in response to the constraints and conventions of the asylum process. See, for example, Maryns, *The Asylum Speaker*; Laacher, *Croire à l'incroyable*; Monnier, "The Hidden Part of Asylum Seekers' Interviews in Geneva, Switzerland," 305–25; and d'Halluin-Mabillot, *Les épreuves de l'asile*.

3. Eggers, *What Is the What,* 485.

4. Eggers, *What Is the What,* 485–6.

5. Eggers, *What Is the What,* 177.

6. Eggers, *What Is the What,* 535.

7. Yogita Goyal characterizes *What Is the What* as a refashioned slave narrative that uses the sentimental form, noting that "what links the novel to the slave narrative is the sentimental frame, the focus on producing feeling, empathy, horror, compassion, even pity to rouse the audience to some non-specified action" (*Runaway Genres,* 57).

8. The question of the humanitarian construction of the abject and powerless victim is relevant in other contexts too. For example, examining the rhetorical strategies of eighteenth-century British abolitionism, Lynn Festa argues that "The sentimental method of humanization usually generates a subject in the thrall of victimhood, restricted to a state of innocence, passivity, and political impotence" ("Humanity without Feathers," *Humanity,* 14).

9. Shire, "Home." Shire uses some of the same lines and images in "Conversations about Home (at the Deportation Centre)," a prose poem published in her collection *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth*.

10. Shire, "Home."

11. Shire, "Home."

12. Serpell, "The Banality of Empathy." The question of how empathy is implicated in literary representation has been widely debated, most recently in discussions of human rights and literature. For a concise overview, see Dawes, "Human Rights, Literature, and Empathy," 427–32.

13. Arendt, "Truth and Politics," 556.

14. Arendt borrows this term (disinterestedness) from Kant, who uses it in his account of the subjective universality of the judgment of taste in *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. For a stimulating examination of Arendt's essay in relation to a wide set of questions, see Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgment,* 117–42.

15 Coundouriotis, "In Flight," 78–79.
16 Coundouriotis, "In Flight," 78.
17 Whether it is possible to separate human rights and humanitarianism is a question that has attracted extensive critical attention. Samuel Moyn provides a historical perspective on this debate and argues that in the late twentieth century, "Humanitarianism came close to annexing and redefining human rights as they were incorporated in the familiar script of empathy in the face of the spectacle of the body in pain as viewed across gradients of wealth and power—a script that still defines humanitarianism today" ("Human Rights and Humanitarianization," 41).
18 Erpenbeck, *Go, Went, Gone*, 36–37.
19 Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject,* 1.
20 Erpenbeck, *Go, Went, Gone*, 146.
21 Robbins, *The Beneficiary,* 3.
22 Robbins, *The Beneficiary,* 6.
23 Robbins, *The Beneficiary,* 7.
24 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion,* 120.
25 Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason,* 246.
26 Nayeri, "The Ungrateful Refugee," 146.
27 For illuminating discussions of how innocence is involved in the construction of simplified stories of vulnerability and compassion, see Ticktin, "Thinking Beyond Humanitarian Borders," 255–71 and Ticktin, "A World without Innocence," 577–90.
28 Nayeri, "The Ungrateful Refugee," 148. In France, *banlieues* refer to the low-income housing estates located in the peripheries of major cities that often house ethnically diverse communities from immigrant backgrounds. Given its setting and action, *Dheepan* can be linked to the genre of the *banlieue* film, of which the most well-known example is Mathieu Kassovitz's *La Haine*.

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4

COMING UNDONE

Displacement, Trauma, and the Crisis of (Narrative) Agency[1]

Asha Varadharajan

Peter Gatrell's *The Making of the Modern Refugee* offers a bold challenge to "the fashioning [of] the modern refugee as a passive and 'traumatized' object of intervention."[2] In an argument that has since become standard in studies of forced migration and displacement, Gatrell traces "the discursive registers" in which the category and person of the refugee are constituted and in which their "speechlessness and passivity have become the norm."[3] The portrayal of refugees as "bewildered and bereft" complements their anonymous and decontextualized appearance in images that claim to confer both distinction and humanity upon them.[4] Gatrell's elegant and persuasive writings investigate the possibility of imagining displacement *simultaneously* as danger and deliverance, adventure and opportunity, and constraint and risk.[5] Refugees, after all, "negotiated the turbulent currents of displacement" before they were permitted to narrate them.[6] While the extremity of the condition of the displaced is not in question, Gatrell insists on the significance of enforcing "*their* understanding of what befell them" as well as their agency in surviving their fate.[7]

Gatrell's argument might seem unexceptional in the current scholarly climate where survivors rather than victims, defiance rather than despair, and testimony rather than observation are all the rage. What intrigues me, however, is the role of narrative (one of Gatrell's discursive registers) in allowing refugees to reclaim their experience from the distortions of policy machinations and public opinion and *as the means* by which they restore order and significance to their lives. Gatrell recognizes the pressure on refugees to tell stories that meet the expectations of legal and bureaucratic credibility as well as the ways in which both guarded and defiant silences and torrential speech can be simultaneously appropriated and misunderstood.[8] The condition of displacement, as the very word suggests, might beggar belief and defy comprehension, making it impossible for "story" to redeem or even elucidate such unimaginable and inexpressible loss. Gatrell remains convinced, however, that the exercise of narrative authority is essential to reconstruct dismantled lives so that refugees might be perceived as capable of aspiration and action and deserving of political recognition.[9]

The introduction to *The Making of the Modern Refugee* offers a provocation and plea: "In what ways did [refugees] seek to transcend or, conversely, to embrace their displacement: might this be not only a condition of being in the world but also a means of self-realization?"[10] In this chapter, I explore the consequences of recasting forced migration and involuntary displacement as *both* states of being in the world *and* forms of self-realization—since the numbers of displaced persons in the world are the highest they have ever been, is Gatrell merely making a virtue of necessity? The understandable desire to invest the voices of the displaced with narrative authority and historical agency poses its own set of problems. Self-realization, at least for literary scholars, immediately conjures up the *Bildungsroman*, the mode that Joseph Slaughter has shown also underpins the discourse of human rights, even "the right to have

rights," as Hannah Arendt might say.[11] Thus, the refugee "story" becomes inextricable from their mode of being in the world, the only means at their disposal to comprehend, describe, and inhabit it. The privileging of testimony and eye-witness in communicating what Susan Sontag would call "the shock of the real" does not account for how refugees become the corollary rather than antidote to images that render them passive and mute or to spreads featuring fashion model and wife of David Bowie, Iman, who declares, no doubt with scrupulous good intention, "I am the face of a refugee. I am what is possible."[12] The transition from victim to survivor or from trauma to healing is hardly ever the progressive evolution implied by both Iman and the *Bildungsroman* and leaves refugees with no choice but to embrace one or the other as constitutive of their identity.

Gatrell is careful to suggest that the drama of loss and restoration in which the refugee condition plays itself out should nevertheless avoid "narratives of abrupt, traumatic catastrophe" even while such a drama remains cognizant of the sudden and violent fashion in which displacement can occur.[13] This balance between process and rupture, to my mind, is an inviting way to address refugee trauma since memory and forgetting play both subtle and obvious roles in the manifestation of trauma and because the compound of loss, grief, and suffering can make trauma simultaneously protracted and violent, continuous and disruptive, condensed and elaborate.[14] The following questions guide my discussion: how does narrative suture the wounds of displacement? Is refugee self-realization more and other than therapeutic and redemptive? Does it refuse or embrace healing and mastery? To what end? Has the "empire of trauma" failed to colonize refugees?[15] What would it mean to abide trauma rather than overcome it? In order to address these questions, I analyze Elie Wiesel's *Night*, a memoir based on Wiesel's experience as a prisoner in the Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps during WWII, and Adnan Mahmutović's *How to Fare Well and Stay Fair*, a collection of short stories which follows the lives of refugees fleeing Bosnia in the 1990s. Rather than aspire to a grand theory of the relations among trauma, narrative, and self-realization, I argue that these literary texts pose challenges to the received wisdom on these matters; that is, my readings open up these thorny questions rather than answer them, in deference to the perplexities of trauma, the ambiguity of narrative, and the palimpsest that is the refugee condition. These texts wield trauma as a resource in unexpected ways and recalibrate its import with flair and attitude.

Echoes and Resonances

The "historical echoes" between the Holocaust and the Balkan War inspire my decision to juxtapose Elie Wiesel's *Night* with Adnan Mahmutović's *How to Fare Well and Stay Fair*.[16] These texts not only attest to the power of memoir and fiction in rendering the sensibility of displacement but are also exemplary of the limits of consciousness and language, of the failure of narrative to capture and articulate trauma, loss, sanity, and survival. Both works surprise and unsettle: contrary to the virtue and heroism usually attributed to the inmates of concentration camps, Wiesel's harrowing tale depicts the relentless denuding of every trace of the human and humane in them. Mahmutović's mordant and hilariously cynical short fiction forces a re-evaluation of the nature and effect of trauma, evolving a mode of storytelling that escapes victimology even as its scenes of violence cut and disturb. The lives of the displaced are inconceivable without a story, not only because of its sense-making and re-membering capacities but because aid and asylum depend on "the logic and linearity" of story, turning the lives of the displaced into an object lesson in how (not) to tell a story.[17]

Dan Stone notes that contemporary refugee camps once housed the inmates of Dachau, suggesting, therefore, that history itself may be a form of traumatic repetition. As Arendt knew, "contemporary history has created a new kind of human beings—the kind that are put in concentration camps by their foes and in internment camps by their friends."[18] Robert Fisk's essay, "Bosnia War Crimes," describes the gymnasiums that became prisons or camps, the transportation in the rain on open trucks, the systematic extortion of money and jewelry by holding knives to babies' throats, the siege by starvation, mass evacuations and executions of blindfolded and bound men, and the "cruel and systematic" "selection"

of rape victims—"The Chetniks just pointed and said 'You, you and you.'"[19] Because Bosnian survivors of "ethnic cleansing" are perceived as "white Muslims," their predicament replicates that of Jews who were expelled from their own polity and betrayed by friends and neighbors.[20] Both events recall the cruelty of the perpetrators of genocide, the "self-pity" of bystanders who sought "a way of absolving [their] own powerlessness," and the indifference of many others.[21] In "Bosnia on My Mind," Salman Rushdie is struck by the truth that Sarajevo is "where, as Susan Sontag has said, the twentieth century began, and where, with terrible symmetry, it is ending."[22] For Rushdie, Sarajevo represents the dream of Europe in which "pluralism, tolerance, and coexistence created a unique and resilient culture" against the encroachment of nationalism, religion, or ethnicity.[23] Fighting for Sarajevo, in his mind, is "a fight for what matters most to us about our own."[24] While Rushdie is all too aware that the labeling of the victims of Serbian aggression as Muslims is "the reason for Europe's indifference to Sarajevo's fate,"[25] he clings to what Jean Baudrillard describes as an "ecumenical pathos" which "replenish[es]" European frames of reference and values.[26] Like Frantz Fanon before him, Baudrillard's vision of European humanism is bleak and unforgiving. In the furious essays he wrote for the French magazine, *Libération*, Baudrillard asserts that "the Serbs could almost be hailed the demystifying tool and the savage analyzer of this phantom Europe."[27] Rather than betraying or desecrating the dream of Europe, they are its "cutting edge. The 'real' Europe in the making is a white Europe, a bleached Europe that is morally, economically, and ethnically integrated and cleansed."[28] For Baudrillard, the Serbs are merely the "agents of the West's dirty jobs"—the "extermination, exile, or exclusion" of "all heterogeneous and rebellious elements," be they Jewish or Muslim.[29] Because Baudrillard sees this "New European Order" as "the twilight of values," he would not object to the straight line I am drawing here between the Holocaust and Bosnia.[30] Perhaps nothing reinforces my intuition more than the title of Wiesel's memoir, *Night*, redolent as it is of qualitative and continuous duration, of the interpenetration of past and present rather than of a discrete and progressive temporality implied by the concept of time.

Baudrillard's resistance to a bleached Europe does not quite capture the anomalous predicament of Bosnia's "white Muslims." Rushdie's characterization of Sarajevo as a city in which miscegenation was the norm is accurate as is his paean to the values of pluralism, tolerance, and coexistence—it certainly explains why its citizens were surprised by ethnicity and religion becoming the new constituents of their identity and by the media's description of an internecine, even tribal, conflict in which the brutes would eventually exterminate each other. Rushdie's idealization of a populace that once characterized itself simply as "Bosnian" rather than "Muslim" accords with Mahmutović's recollection of growing up "never talking about race politics or skin color" and then discovering that "Muslim" was actually an operative category.[31] As Mahmutović elaborated, the problem is that these Muslims are citizens, "natives" of Europe who have lived there for centuries, inhabiting Europe's center rather than its margins, and white, as bleached as the populace Baudrillard imagines and precisely *not* heterogeneous, as Baudrillard asserts. Rushdie's Bosnia is equally flawed because he puts Muslims in the invidious position of defending themselves as liberal, secular, and therefore no threat to Europe while simultaneously turning religious Muslims into tribes rather than citizens of nations. In a place as historically multiethnic and multireligious as Bosnia, the real threat or disturbance is to the category "white," which, as Mahmutović trenchantly suggests, has yet to be digested by both victims and aggressors in its name. Wiesel's memory of "the vanishing of a beautiful, well-behaved little Jewish girl [his sister] with golden hair and a sad smile, murdered with her mother the very night of their arrival [in the camp]" equally challenges Baudrillard's imputation of heterogeneity (the epithets beautiful, well-behaved, and golden are no accident).[32] Most chillingly, perhaps, Mahmutović remarks, "no one asked you, but they knew, for sure, just as they did with Jews."[33] For him, the machinery of genocide bespeaks that certainty.

In her interview with Wiesel, and despite the manner in which his answers contradict her assumptions, Oprah Winfrey insists that she hears "hope that the human spirit can survive anything. *Anything*."[34] And yet, for Wiesel, his survival is abnormal and his sanity a mystery, and he insists, further, that to "compare one atrocity to another" "would be demeaning to both."[35] However, my juxtaposition of Wiesel's Holocaust memoir with Mahmutović's fictions of the Bosnian War is designed to elicit how

each builds upon the other to offer a prismatic interplay of trauma and narrative, memory and forgetting, violence and grace. While the relationship between these two texts is subtle and intangible rather than explicit, I contend that they constitute a force-field in which structural and historical, every day and catastrophic, individual and cross-generational, and masculine and feminine trauma cohabit. Their delineation of the predicaments of trauma and/as narrative differentiates among the connotations of pain, suffering, grief, and trauma while expanding the terrain of vulnerability. As I have begun to suggest and hope to demonstrate, these interpretive claims may nuance the project of self-realization and agency, routinely conceived as a neat progression from victim to survivor or silence to speech, such that living *in* displacement or suspension rather than *transcending* both conditions exudes its own peculiar imaginative fortitude.

"The Abstract Nakedness of Being Human"

In his preface to the 2006 translation of *Night*, Wiesel refers to the opening of the Yiddish version in which the narrator, fashioning a mock Book of Genesis, recalls the belief "that every one of us has been entrusted with a sacred spark from the Shekhinah's flame; that every one of us carries in his eyes and in his soul a reflection of God's image" and then asserts, "*That* was the source if not the cause of all our ordeals."[36] Wiesel's words bear an uncanny resemblance to Arendt's inimitable discussion in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* of the failure of the conception of human rights precisely when those who professed it encountered beings who had lost everything "except that they were still human."[37] Arendt, like Wiesel, describes this moment as a desacralization—"the world found nothing sacred in the abstract nakedness of being human."[38] The narrator of *Night* traces the process of exchange, substitution, dispossession, and divestiture that expels him from humanity and depletes the figure of "unaccommodated man" of its customary romance and poignancy: the cattle car and the camp signify his claim to home; his muddied and eventually stolen boots and the gold crown of his tooth, extracted by a rusty spoon, signify his claim to property; his murdered and missing mother and sisters signify his claim to family; and the ragged clothing foisted upon him signify his claim to dignity.[39]

The conventional invocation of trauma as a somatic and psychic wound pales beside the existential trauma Wiesel suffers, just as it fails to encompass the ontological ambition of totalitarianism that Arendt compellingly excoriates. The transformation of the world or of society was but a paltry ambition in the face of the "transformation of human nature itself."[40] The "corpse" who contemplates the narrator from "the depths of the mirror" on his liberation from Buchenwald attests to the fulfillment of the totalitarian dream of annihilation—it/he is the culmination of the excruciating murder of the juridical and moral person in Wiesel that *Night* traces.[41] But this totalitarian dream would be incomplete without Wiesel's unsparing depiction of the elimination of his individuality: first, his transformation into nothing but "a famished stomach" and, ultimately, his abandonment of filial love and duty.[42] *Night* concludes with the narrator's freedom but what lingers with the reader is its haunting, yet brilliantly unsentimental, depiction of the narrator/Wiesel as the son who fails to heed his father's plea for succor and cannot find the tears with which to mourn his death. One is forced to conclude that the son who remains unmoved by the bloody, broken face of his ailing father has also ceased to be a man. It is for this reason that the "look in [the corpse's] eyes as he gazed at [Wiesel in the mirror] has never left [him]."[43]

Trauma, in Wiesel's and Arendt's tormenting non-fiction, manifests itself not as the terror of annihilation but, paradoxically, as "a dangerous readiness for death" because the refugees from concentration camps "became witnesses and victims of worse terrors than death—without having been able to discover a higher ideal than life."[44] Arendt's searing irony here explains why Wiesel's memoir does not end on a rousing note about the survival of the human spirit or why his "terrifying moment of lucidity" about the inmates as "damned souls … seeking redemption, seeking oblivion, without any hope of finding either" remains far more convincing as a portrait of the perils and possibilities that narrative both promises and forecloses in the encounter with the traumatic event.[45] Winfrey's paean to

hope as well as the language of working through, healing, and growth, simply seem beside the point for witnesses to and survivors of the Holocaust. Wiesel's melancholic acknowledgment that he "could not keep silent no matter how difficult, if not impossible, it was to speak" simultaneously invokes trauma—the compulsion to speak—while failing to alleviate it.[46] The traumatic narrative, unlike the *Bildungsroman*, obscures rather than illuminates life and the human. Its role as testimony is equally fraught—even if survivor-narrators know what Auschwitz was because they experienced it, Wiesel doubts their readers can understand. The unspeakable may well remain incomprehensible, but Wiesel bears witness because he must.

The affirmative dimension of testimony so prevalent in public discourse is markedly absent in the anaphoric repetition of "never shall I forget" when the narrator's litany of unforgettable events pierces the reader's heart and conscience while leaving the narrator inconsolable.[47] It may be more accurate to describe the events as evaporations because each one confirms absence, dissolution, deprivation, murder, and condemnation—the smoke that consumes the children's bodies also consumes the narrator's faith, robs him of his desire to live, turns his dreams into ashes, and the immortality of the divine into condemnation and punishment. The moment is one of resounding negation, a premature rather than belated epiphany more characteristic of traumatic narratives and traumatized subjects than subjects on the road to self-realization in the *Bildungsroman*. Even disillusion and despair in the standard *Bildungsroman* become the means to acceptance of or resignation to one's destiny or place in the world. To my mind, Wiesel momentarily departs from the world of the dead to enter the community of the living as witness, not victim, to testify rather than remember and narrate.

The word "Never" echoes long after Wiesel has intoned it because it widens the gap that remains between knowledge and understanding and deepens the "silence that envelops and transcends words."[48] The blasphemy it invokes prevents reconciliation with or even resignation to the horrors of the past, ringing out in defiance of divine justice. Crucially, however, it exists so that the traumatic event, the Holocaust, might be neither "usurped" nor "profaned" by the light of reason or the consolations of conscience.[49] The act of witnessing turns memory into Wiesel's familiar, so to speak, inhabiting his present as powerfully as the events it recalls dominated his past. Claudia Welz writes of the therapeutic benefits for Holocaust survivors of *not* integrating "the traumatic past into an overarching life script," creating, instead, distance from it.[50] For Wiesel, however, his struggle to know and remember is inseparable from bearing witness, even as *Night* casts a baleful and unforgiving light on the perceived nobility of suffering and endurance.

The Wound and the Voice

In the afterword to the 2016 edition of her influential work, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth advocates a movement away from individual pathology toward "the larger demands of collective political and historical dynamics."[51] This shift in emphasis is already evident in Wiesel's declaration that the witness "does not want his past to become their [the children who will be born tomorrow's] future" and his sustained commitment "to shed light on the pain of others."[52] Moreover, Caruth's contention that traumatic experience inhabits "a temporality that cannot be limited to, or fully understood from within, the perspective of the individual"[53] is amply demonstrated in Wiesel's artful manipulation of temporality in his memoir. The oscillation between an interminable "night" and dates that punctuate the narrative, the fragile border between narrative and historical present, and the preponderance of analepsis and prolepsis couched in the language of prophecy and revelation constitute the "double telling" that Caruth discerns as fundamental to the traumatic encounter.[54] The reduction of more than 700 pages in Yiddish to a slim volume of 112 pages in Marion Wiesel's 2006 translation via the French original in 1959, Wiesel's deliberate refusal to offer a beginning, middle, and end, the succession of vignettes that make no concession to progress and continuity, and the collapse of boundaries between dream, memory, and hallucination all transform narrative itself into the simultaneous negotiation of death and survival.

Unclaimed Experience opens with "the peculiar and sometimes uncanny way in which catastrophic events seem to repeat themselves."[55] As I have argued above, the Balkan War reveals astonishing similarities with Wiesel's "discovery of a demented and glacial universe" divided into those who "came to kill" and those who "came to die."[56] Mahmutović's short story collection piqued my curiosity in part because, in contrast to Wiesel's world, which is an almost exclusively patriarchal one of rabbis, fathers, and sons, *How to Fare Well and Stay Fair* resounds with the voices, presences, and memories of women.[57] The collection traces the migration and settlement of refugees from the Balkan Wars in Sweden. Almasa, Fatima, and Emina dominate the collection, but their stories weave in and out of the fugitive presences of other voices such as those of a fictionalized Mahmutović who recounts his own experiences as a caregiver in Sweden or appears as the metafictional target of Almasa's contempt for the "author" who exploits her story for narrative/aesthetic gain. The combination of horror and humor, rage and tenderness, and despair and hope that define the characters simultaneously distinguishes their plight as refugees and aligns them with that of migrants who survive and comprehend their fates while remaining bound to the past and unsettled in the present.

Mahmutović speaks in what might be deemed his own voice only twice; I was intrigued by a heterosexual male author who chose to mediate and deploy the voice and focalization of women and queer boys and manipulate the second person, free indirect discourse, and metafiction in the ethical desire to tell his and their story. Moreover, memory in this text may be the characters' own recollection or refraction of the past but is equally the effect of what they have been told, particularly in the stories that depict shared reminiscences, tactical forgetting, nostalgic remembrance, or active reconstruction. As Merima Šehagić contends in her study of the influence of collective trauma in present-day Sarajevo, memories do not necessarily "coincide with truths," and it is far more instructive to imagine both remembering and forgetting as belonging to memory, and, therefore, to history.[58] What do these techniques mean for the imagination of community among Bosnian refugees, especially in light of Wiesel's stark depiction of his alienation from God and community? How could these multiple displacements and mediations contribute to self-realization? One must not forget that Wiesel could not bring himself to "speak" until more than a decade after the events he describes and, by his own admission, that he rewrites his work as many as 40 times before he is satisfied.[59] If *Night* qualifies as a narrative of trauma because of "the delayed appearance and belated address" of the truth to which it bears witness, it must also be said that "the human voice that cries out from the wound" is urgent and imperative, but not immediate, a *crafted*, and no less powerful for being so, rather than *spontaneous* cry of suffering.[60] Both Wiesel and Mahmutović are compelled by the "sources," "magnitude," and "consequences" of memory rather than its vaunted authenticity.[61]

Without resorting to a facile typology of refugee trauma, but with the desire to situate "trauma in larger contexts of history and violence," I want to argue that both Wiesel and Mahmutović make what "remains unintegrated and inassimilable" *instrumental* to taking back control of story; by the same token, the trauma they encounter and represent is never "utterly unspeakable" or "blankly unreadable."[62] After all, Wiesel's narrative voice is that of a survivor of the Holocaust, even if he speaks in the name of its victims, and Mahmutović's tales are composed of the memories and quotidian lives of Bosnian refugees "settled" in Sweden, of the *aftermath* of war and displacement. Because both the event and its survival were and are "unbearable,"[63] neither of these authors would lapse into "spiritually uplifting" narratives that would "take the trauma out of trauma"[64]; however, what they write is shot through with the pragmatism and cynicism of survivors and the mystery and miracle of survival. I like to think of this as wicked moral fiber because Wiesel cannot forgive either himself or the world for turning him into the depraved son who failed to respond to his father's summons, and Mahmutović, if his characters contain pieces of himself, has little to celebrate *or* regret.[65]

Both works model for us the "empathic unsettlement" that the writing of historical trauma requires.[66] If Wiesel works through the aftershocks of his own trauma, he also speaks for "those who cannot or will not tell their own stories," for the "ten thousandth man"[67] behind whom the gate shut and who, but for that accident of fate, might be sitting in Wiesel's place.[68] Mahmutović, on the other hand,

arguably wades into the "ethical minefield" of "secondary witnessing and vicarious trauma" because he chooses to write fiction rather than memoir, despite, or perhaps because of, having been a refugee from Bosnia himself.[69] As I demonstrate below, he chooses multiplicity rather than singularity, dispersal rather than cohesion, and fragmentation rather than wholeness to temper the concentrated agony in Wiesel's tale or dispel its unrelieved darkness. Crucially, Mahmutović believes in the advantages of the sidekick's rather than the hero's or protagonist's perspective and of refusing the authority that necessarily accrues to Wiesel's combined role of narrator, protagonist, and witness.[70] Despite the "dark night of the soul" into which Wiesel descends, his stark memoir still commands empathy because of the grandeur of his suffering and the intensity of his existential despair—it thrives on the paradigmatic awe that the Holocaust commands. The empathy Mahmutović's tales demand, however, thrives on intimacy rather than identification or awe, on mess and contradiction, rage and ambivalence, and on the humor and profanity that operate like screen memories shielding trauma from view.[71] His clever manipulation of proximity and distance, voice and focalization, rather than striving for affect, prevent him from "encroaching on traumas" that may not be his own.[72] Besides, the characters in *How to Fare Well and Stay Fair* are simultaneously banal and fascinating, fearless and vulnerable, and realists and romantics, a tribute to the variety of responses that the collective inheritance of trauma generates rather than, as in *Night*, allegories or doubles or repetitions of the unique trauma at its heart. Wiesel's unsparing memoir is inseparable from the moral judgment he inflicts upon himself and his tormentors and from the conscience, he hopes to awaken in his readers. Mahmutović, on the contrary, *refrains* from judgment, his very neutrality in this regard the source of the empathic unsettlement he coaxes from his readers. Mahmutović's story fragments acquire "objective significance and moral force" because, rather than treat the trauma as a discrete event that rules their lives with disruptive and uncontrollable power, conflating past and present, they "mitigate and counteract" its effects, paradoxically binding the community together with memories of the very loss that tore their lives apart.[73]

In an eerie and hallucinatory scene that foreshadows Wiesel's ultimate betrayal and abandonment of his father, Wiesel describes the effects of prolonged starvation that turn his fellow inmates into "[b]easts of prey" "trampling, tearing at and mauling each other."[74] Wiesel observes "an old man dragging himself on all fours" who emerges from this mob, clutching a crust of bread that he has saved for himself and his son.[75] Not only is he set upon by his son who proceeds to eat the crust after his father dies, but the son is killed too by others who "[jump] him."[76] And Wiesel does not participate in the frenzy only because he does not think he will survive it. This is a scene of suffering, the pervasiveness of an elemental hunger that has penetrated so deep that a spiritual death has ensued, making the bodies that harbor it unrecognizable to themselves and each other as men with souls worthy of both damnation and salvation. The reduction to nothingness in Wiesel's world engenders a profound existential and spiritual yearning, throwing the desacralization of naked humanity into sharp relief.

Mahmutović, on the contrary, fashions an unapologetically profane universe in which violence, violation, and suffering are so routine and banal that they can only aspire to be labeled painful or humiliating or poignant—and even that might be stretching it a bit. Sex is "war currency," as the title of one of his jolting stories declares.[77] Its 19-year-old male protagonist sketches a habitual spreading of legs[78] across generations to escape whatever prison or misery life brings in its wake: his mother, to "escape her mountain village,"[79] Lara, who was lucky enough "to hook up" (and get knocked up) by "that French UN officer,"[80] and the narrator himself, who would "fuck anybody or anything" to get out of "[his] beloved motherland"[81] after ten months of war. The narrator gets his wish, "moan[ing] in pain but drag[ging] hard"[82] into his "rusty and tight"[83] butt, Sadiq, who deceives him into believing that he can send the narrator on a "lifelong vacation"[84] to any destination he chooses. We leave the narrator, clad in his father's bloodied shirt that his mother refuses to wash, practicing smiles in front of a broken mirror, riddled with hemorrhoids, and moaning in pain as he grabs his "wet and sticky" behind.[85] The story opens with his mother cutting his hair to protect him from being recruited by soldiers (and killed by them as his father was) by making him look younger and concludes with him caressing her hand—she is all he has left, and his customary insouciance and queer sarcasm have deserted him.

This harsh profanation finds its apotheosis in the story "[Refuge]e" which features Almasa, who introduces herself laconically elsewhere in the collection as "Almasa. A rape victim" or comments matter-of-factly, "So much was taken from me by the war already, my virginity for instance."[86] Her name means gem, or diamond in the rough, and is the closest Mahmutović comes to a protagonist in his collection.[87] In "[Refuge]e," Almasa overhears a "hefty" woman regale her fellow-passengers on the bus with jokes such as "the one about a 60-year-old maid who was living alone in some Godforsaken village the Serbs pillaged."[88] The woman continues,

> 'Well, the old maid heard about torches, guns, glistening blades, daylight thefts and above all, the raping of women. She was so overcome she wouldn't even cringe in a corner. She spent her time at the window, waiting for her fate. So when a Četnik plunged into her house, rifled through the place, took what little chattels she had and suddenly was on his way out, she cried out after him, "What about the rape?"'[89]

The men in the hefty woman's audience laugh, one of them exclaiming, "'You're killing us.'"[90] Almasa's reaction, however, is explosive:

> I could not quite see the woman. I saw a girl, as real as her, familiar, pale-faced and curly-haired, and my arms became big and hairy, and they pushed away the merry men and grabbed the woman's ears and threw her on the floor and I heard myself hiss, 'How about rape?' I tore open her blouse, exposing her breasts. She screamed. I hit her over the mouth with the back of my hand, yelling, 'Shut up bitch, I don't like noisy whores!' I pushed myself from her, sticking my hand between her legs as if I was trying to grab something and pull it from out of there …. Someone pulled me away while I yelled, 'I told you to shut your mouth up, not your cunt! Open it! It's dry! I don't fucking like it dry!'[91]

This moment recalls viscerally Caruth's comment that "the experience of a trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will."[92] The twist here is that the voice "paradoxically released *through the wound*" is that of Almasa's *tormentor*, and her speech and actions are *his*.[93] This uncanny moment permits Almasa to do what she wanted to all along, embrace the hefty woman's rebellion, but, ironically, at the *woman's* expense. Almasa "awakes" to find "[old] milk-smelling fingers comb[ing] her hair" and soothing her pain in an exacting parallel to the boy who caresses his mother's hand.[94] The possibility exists that the same woman who tells the joke is the one who comforts Almasa, revealing that a culture's humor evolves from its pain. In a fascinating reversal of, perhaps even complement to, Wiesel's and Arendt's take on the world finding nothing sacred about the nakedness of the human, the joke's profanation does not so much ridicule Almasa's pain as help her emerge from it armed with both the tormentor's power and the victim's dignity.[95] Mahmutović follows this story in the collection with "Midsummer. It's Raining," in which Almasa reveals that she "quite like[s] fucking."[96] Her sex with the stranger who is the first to talk to her and therefore gets to be the first to "have" her is played out through the niceties of polite conversation, addressing each other as "beautiful" and "handsome," and wrapping up the encounter with "Don't mention it. Pleasure is all mine."[97] The juxtaposition of this story with "[Refuge]e" reveals that Almasa's violation has taught her to distinguish between what her one-night stand refers to, with some irony, as "the pleasures of love" from "fucking;" by the same token, she is neither repelled by sex nor does it always trigger her trauma.[98] She has lost her virginity but not her desire. While her casual promiscuity and routine drunkenness might suggest that she craves oblivion, they do not destroy her volition or her self-respect. If the memory of violation no longer has the power to shock the community Almasa inhabits, they are by no means inured to it, and it is this distinction that engenders the bond that unites them. Unlike Wiesel's characters, each enclosed in their private hell, those in *How to Fare Well and Stay Fair* understand what they cannot know and

love those they do not understand. Trauma cannot be healed, but it can be transcended, if only for brief, merciful moments.

While the stories I have discussed dwell on violated and butchered bodies, "Gusul" introduces Emina, who undertakes the ritual washing of her mother's body before the latter's burial. The trauma is off-stage, so to speak, because Emina's bedridden mother has been speechless since her husband was burned in the mosque in Bosnia and speaks only once in the story when she expresses a desire to eat plum pie but dies before she can eat it. Mahmutović shifts the terrain to grief and loss, both of which are as unspeakable as trauma, and expressed, in this story, in gesture and action when Emina holds her mother's cold feet against her warm stomach and when she chokes on the plum pie she cannot stop eating in the wake of her mother's death. The ritual of washing her mother's body (the meaning of the story's title) bathes the mother's young breasts, slender legs, Caesarean scar, and vagina in her daughter's tenderness and blesses it with the prayer Emina chants. Emina's touch honors the orifices of the female body rather than invades them. Mahmutović maps the variegated terrain of trauma as if to suggest that it occupies a minor rather than privileged place in the realm of human vulnerability.

Conclusion

In "We Refugees," Giorgio Agamben writes that Arendt proposes the "condition of refugee and person without a country" as "the paradigm of a new historical consciousness."[99] Arendt's—and by extension, Agamben's—proposition becomes plausible in light of the shift from the *extremity* of statelessness in Arendt's time to its *ubiquity* in ours. Gatrell's call to imagine displacement as a mode of being and form of self-realization is remarkably in accord with Agamben's investment in the new historical consciousness that refugees augur and in my attention to memoir and fiction that probe traumatic repetition as the crucible in which identities are made, not born.

Wiesel and Mahmutović can be productively read within the framework of trauma, as I have shown, but they also nuance and texture its affective force and exceed its limits by rejecting critical consensus on trauma as simultaneously unclaimed and unclaimable. Both texts resurrect the healing power of memory rather than seek to redeem trauma. *Night'*s relentless bleakness is transfigured for one brief moment when Wiesel recalls his father's spontaneous and radiant smile and that scene inexplicably lingers in my mind too. In *How To Fare Well and Stay Fair*, Almasa prays "to dream of [her] family awash in blood, butchered and heaped on one another."[100] But her memory simultaneously betrays and consoles her so that "she can only see … her brothers … sit[ting] tight together watching [her], smiling laughing guffawing."[101] Almasa traces her father's face in her breath that covers the bus window, declaring, "'I love you more than anybody alive,'" while Wiesel continues to hear his father's voice pleading with his son not to abandon him to his agony even though both then and now his father had already lost consciousness and could no longer cry out.[102] This, too, is love, as perverse and haunted as it is.

Living *in* displacement, particularly in the context of a growing acknowledgment of refugee agency and a demand for refugees not only to tell their story but to control it, avoids installing pain as the foundation of both the identity of the displaced and of their demand for recognition.[103] If memoir and testimony foster the grand epiphany, however wrenching and abject, in the manner of Gatrell's investment in self-realization, fiction skewers those ambitions in its modest victories, corrosive irony, and failed optimism. Both memoir and fiction crave complexity which is why trauma finds itself at home in and displaced by them.

Notes

1 This chapter could not have been written without Keely Gervais's timely help, Hailey Scott's meticulous research assistance, and Tim Wyman-McCarthy's sympathetic rigor. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Adnan Mahmutović for his friendship and generosity.
2 Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, 8.
3 Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, 9, 184.

4 Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, 10.
5 Gatrell, "Refugees," 174.
6 Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, 13.
7 Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, 295. Emphasis added.
8 Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, 295.
9 Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, 13; Gatrell & Nowak, "Reckoning with Refugeedom," 2.
10 Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, 13.
11 Slaughter, *Human Rights, Inc.*; Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 296.
12 Sontag & Oe, "An Exchange of Letters," 16; Pulia, "Supermodel Iman."
13 Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, 288.
14 Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, 288.
15 Fassin, Didier, & Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma.*
16 Stone, "On Neighbours," 241.
17 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well and Stay Fair,* 53.
18 Arendt, "We Refugees," 265.
19 Fisk, "Bosnia War Crimes."
20 Fisk, "Bosnia War Crimes."
21 Baudrillard, "No Pity for Sarajevo," 80.
22 Rushdie, "Bosnia on My Mind," 17.
23 Rushdie, "Bosnia on My Mind," 18.
24 Rushdie, "Bosnia on My Mind," 20.
25 Rushdie, "Bosnia on My Mind," 18.
26 Baudrillard, "No Pity for Sarajevo," 81, 82.
27 Baudrillard, "No Pity for Sarajevo," 82.
28 Baudrillard, "No Pity for Sarajevo," 82.
29 Baudrillard, "No Pity for Sarajevo," 83.
30 Baudrillard, "No Pity for Sarajevo," 81, 83.
31 Mahmutović, "Guest Lecture."
32 Wiesel, *Night*, ix.
33 Mahmutović, "Guest Lecture."
34 Winfrey, "Oprah Talks to Elie Wiesel."
35 Winfrey, "Oprah Talks to Elie Wiesel."
36 Wiesel, *Night*, xi, 5.
37 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 299.
38 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 299.
39 Shakespeare et al., *The Tragedy of King Lear*, 141.
40 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 458.
41 Wiesel, *Night*, 115.
42 Wiesel, *Night*, 52.
43 Wiesel, *Night*, 115.
44 Arendt, "We Refugees," 266.
45 Wiesel, *Night*, 36.
46 Wiesel, *Night*, x.
47 Wiesel, *Night*, 34.
48 Wiesel, *Night*, x.
49 Wiesel, *Night*, ix.
50 Welz, "A Voice Crying Out," 421.
51 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 121.
52 Wiesel, *Night*, xv; Cargas, "An Interview with Elie Wiesel."
53 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 122.
54 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 7.
55 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 1.
56 Wiesel, *Night*, 3, ix.
57 This contrast is qualified, first, by the manner in which Wiesel's memoir is harrowed by the murder of his mother and sisters and by the bloodcurdling screams of Mrs. Schächter who can see flames which her companions cannot until the children whose bodies go up in smoke confirm her terror and premonition. Second, *How to Fare Well and Stay Fair* opens with a photograph of the author's father whose fugitive presence in some of the stories transfigure them with joy and, unlike *Night*, with memories of love and laughter rather than betrayal and tearless emptiness.
58 Šehagić, "How a Collective Trauma," 138.

59 Cargas, "An Interview with Elie Wiesel."
60 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 3, 4.
61 Wiesel, *Night*, xv.
62 LaCapra, "Trauma, History, Memory, Identity," 378; Schwab, as quoted by LaCapra, "Trauma, History, Memory, Identity," 379.
63 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 7.
64 LaCapra, "Trauma, History, Memory, Identity," 84, 377.
65 Wiesel, *Night*, xii.
66 LaCapra, "Trauma, History, Memory, Identity," 82.
67 Davis, *Traces of War*, 11.
68 Cargas, "An Interview with Elie Wiesel."
69 Davis, *Traces of War*, 12.
70 Mahmutović, "Guest Lecture."
71 Mahmutović, "Guest Lecture."
72 Davis, *Traces of War,* 12.
73 LaCapra, "Trauma, History, Memory, Identity," 377, 378.
74 Wiesel, *Night*, 101.
75 Wiesel, *Night*, 101.
76 Wiesel, *Night*, 102.
77 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 88.
78 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 89.
79 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 89.
80 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 88.
81 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 92.
82 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 96.
83 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 95.
84 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 94.
85 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 98.
86 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 53, 60.
87 Mahmutović, "Guest Lecture."
88 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 16, 18.
89 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 18.
90 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 18.
91 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 18–19.
92 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 2.
93 Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 2.
94 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 19.
95 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 19.
96 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 60.
97 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 61.
98 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 60.
99 Agamben, "We Refugees," 114.
100 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 46.
101 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 46.
102 Mahmutović, *How to Fare Well*, 19.
103 Brown, *States of Injury*, 74.

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PART II

Genres and Conventions

5

REFUGEE NOIR

Sydney Van To

Critical refugee scholars have long urged that we move beyond imagining refugees as helpless victims or dangerous swarms, but refugees must still reckon with these dominant images to be seen or heard at all. While the legal definition of refugees posited by border regimes is dictated by empiricist and securitarian fixations, popular representations of the refugee in mainstream news and media often mobilize xenophobic and dehumanizing discourses. The refugee's critically vexed relation to the spheres of law and popular culture is articulated through the ambiguous politics of noir's pulp style.

In noir, the resolution of a case does not reinscribe the authority of law and state as it does in the classic crime and detective story. Rather, noir lingers upon the socio-economic conditions which had given rise to criminality rather than the crime itself. On the other hand, noir's attraction to this criminal milieu might be rooted less in leftist critique and more in the delights of voyeurism and sadomasochism; if so, noir is at best apolitical and at worst proto-fascist.[1] Paula Rabinowitz mediates between these two interpretations by viewing noir as "a kind of political theory of America's problematic democracy disguised as cheap melodrama."[2] Refugee noir, this chapter argues, both records how the commercial sensationalism of noir has unwittingly depoliticized the refugee and presents reading strategies for reactivating the submerged radicalism of noir. To read for noir's radicalism is to focus on what Christopher Breu calls noir's negative affect: "that there is always a remainder, always unworked through forms of affect and social antagonism."[3] Or, as Donald Pease puts it, "'noir' names what cannot be integrated within a film's narrative."[4] Refugee noir reveals that this subversive remainder has always been embodied by refugees, relegated beyond the pale of the "national order of things."[5]

This chapter's theorization of refugee noir revolves around the motifs of conspiracy, disappearance, and eruption as sites at which the presence of this subversive remainder is registered: as a subject or subjects whose worldview is delegitimized, who must navigate the world under erasure, and who is eventually no longer content to be mere remainder. Drawing upon Breu's claim that "noir is one of the privileged forms of fictional discourse for the narration of affect," refugee noir rejects the reduction of the refugee to brutely corporeal terms but rather foregrounds the affective dimensions of refugee interiority.[6] Scholars such as Liisa Malkki and Richard Black have expressed skepticism as to whether "refugee" can be redeemed from its legal and bureaucratic bagginess in becoming a coherent sociological, let alone aesthetic, category.[7] But Khatharya Um and Vinh Nguyen have attempted to recuperate this category by positing a "refugitude" or "refugeetude" which "challenges conventional understandings that confine refugee to a legal definition, short time frame, and pitiful existence."[8] Meanwhile, scholars such as Viet Thanh Nguyen, Cathy J. Schlund-Vials, and Timothy August have observed the gradual formation of a "refugee aesthetics" or "refugee literature" bound together by a

cross-refugee experience.[9] Refugee noir probes these forms of refugee subjectivity which react against the lived conditions of fugitivity, exclusion, surveillance, and precarity.

This refugee subject emerging out of noir resists national and patriarchal schemes of governance, legal and humanitarian procedures of objectification, and the mainstream press's appetite for images of refugee abjection. This re-negotiation of refugee visibility and invisibility constitutes the drama of refugee noir. Yet, as the following section argues, noir is not simply a resonant medium for expressing refugee thoughts and feelings. Noir, in fact, has been guided from its very beginning by a *refugee unconsciousness* which invokes and represses the refugee figure for its own aesthetic expression.

The Refugees of Noir

Noir originally refers to *film noir*, as coined by French cinephiles, to characterize a period of American interwar and postwar cinema. Since then, the difficulties of clarifying the generic features of noir have driven many critics to argue that noir must be something other than a genre. Given its amorphousness, noir has managed to appear in various media such as radio, visual art, comics, and video games, proliferating across what James Naremore terms the "noir mediascape."[10] *Film noir*'s iconic devices of voice-over, flashback, and visual fragmentation seek to portray a haunted psyche which is also narratable in literary noir.[11] This chapter assumes that noir, once understood in terms of noir affect and noir subjectivity, is as identifiable in literature as in film.

But instead of repeating the inexhaustible question of "what is noir?" we might instead ask, "what does noir try to show us?" Through critical reconsiderations of noir as a "leitmotif running through mid-twentieth-century American culture," as "primarily *discursive*—a way of talking about films more than any kind of film," as "an antigenre that reveals the savage side of capitalism," as a "'meta-genre'—a threshold concept," and finally, as a "regime of visibility," noir is shown to be an aesthetics which aspires to an epistemological function.[12] Refugee noir offers an epistemology which illuminates the nation-state's strategies of detecting and concealing the refugee, as well as the refugee's own strategies for counter-detection and self-concealment. Unlike the classic detective, the noir hero knows the world not rationally but passionately, not neutrally but through fluctuating positions of power. Refugee noir, protesting these constructions of rationality, re-politicizes epistemology as a field for refugee critique.

Scholars have generally historicized film noir as a reflection of the white American male's sense of alienation from postwar society—with women entering the workforce, racial minorities populating the cities, veterans unable to re-adjust themselves to civilian life, and the consumerist culture of the Golden '50s running amok.[13] More recently, Jonathan Auerbach reads noir in the context of Cold War paranoia: "Cinema scholars frequently link noir to existential alienation, abstractly or philosophically considered, but such alienation needs to be more precisely grounded in specific historical and cultural fears about enemy aliens lurking within."[14] Noir inherits the "social detection" function of classic detective fiction, but performs this role with not the latter's satisfaction of the colonial overseer, but the panic of the border guard.[15] If the classic detective chased after adventure in exotic lands, this genre gives way to noir in the postwar period, when the detective learns that these subjects of the global South will be following him home as migrants and refugees.[16]

Noir, as Jennifer Fay and Justus Nieland argue, has "repeatedly been connected to anxieties about the boundaries of national culture."[17] In the wake of globalization, this feeling of liminality and displacement is expressed through noir's obsession with the setting of the border as the culmination of lawlessness, savagery, and irrationalism. For the border, as the exhaustion of place itself, apparently figures as the logical conclusion of crime and detective fiction's constant drive toward new territories—leading Dominique Bregent-Heald to identify a subgenre she terms "border noirs."[18] Yet when Eric Lott writes, "Film noir is a cinematic mode defined by its border crossings," it is worth noting that most critics have read such border crossings in terms of racial mixing, pursuing a femme fatale, or self-reflexive concerns with the ambiguous boundaries of noir's own genre identity, rather than in the intensely literal terms experienced by the asylum seeker.[19] Even Auerbach's excellent study of "noir citizenship," as conveying

this threatened sense of citizenship and national belonging, fails to fully consider its relevance for those who are actually migrant, stateless, and homeless.[20] Although the noir hero perishing in the borderlands has been interpreted as having "no patriotic or nationalist commitments" and resisting enlistment into a "national frame of mind," refugee noir reminds us that even these self-declared outcasts have nation-states to return to.[21]

Refugee noir properly historicizes, politicizes, and reclaims homelessness as more than sheer posture on behalf of the figure who has been exiled even from this "exile cinema."[22] *Film noir* was in no small part born from contributions of Jewish émigré directors who had to seek work in Hollywood after fleeing Nazi persecution, such as Fritz Lang, Robert Siodmak, and Billy Wilder.[23] "The experience of exile," Anton Kaes writes, "is the historical unconscious of many of their films."[24] Both the pre-auteur classical studio system and the émigré's assimilatory desires also factor into noir's apparent refugee unconsciousness; but non-refugee critics and filmmakers have played a large part in aestheticizing the refugee dimensions of *film noir* to the point that its depoliticized form could be interpreted in terms of a universal, if not plainly straight white male, existentialism. The few critics who have noticed noir's relation to the refugee and exile mention it only in passing. By confronting the refugee unconsciousness at the heart of noir, refugee noir provides an alternative epistemology which is grounded in the refugee rather than the citizen, and in the racialized, gendered, and queered subject rather than the universalized white male. Recent scholarship which attempts to situate noir within a transnational context have habitually adopted the security framework of the nation-state. Refugee noir inverts this critical tendency in order to understand not the nation-state's insecurity but the refugee's precarity, and what it means to be not the agent but the target of these bordering technologies.

This chapter conceptualizes refugee noir through contemporary noir, which has circled back to the interwar and postwar refugee crisis from which *film noir* originated. As an analytic rather than a genre, refugee noir demonstrates that the noir motifs of borders, homelessness, fear, violence, and institutional corruption index the experiences of not an imperiled white masculinity nor the romanticized figure of the exile or émigré, but the refugee. This chapter will examine three contemporary Anglophone works of literary noir which render explicit this latent presence of the refugee through the motifs of conspiracy, disappearance, and eruption: Mūkoma wa Ngũgĩ's *Nairobi Heat* (2009) which depicts a paranoiac relationship to a degraded world; Vu Tran's *Dragonfish* (2015) which thematizes a self-destructively obsessive relationship to a lost love object; and China Miéville's *The City & the City* (2009) which portrays the convergence of these two noir affects—paranoia and obsession—through xenophobic nationalisms, for which the border becomes a fetish object to be preserved at all costs.

Nairobi Heat and the Humanitarian Conspiracy

In Mūkoma wa Ngũgĩ's *Nairobi Heat*, the investigation of a murder in Madison, Wisconsin, leads to the exposé of an international humanitarian organization which exploits the image of Rwandan refugees while concealing its own involvement in the genocide. The global conspiracy, as a typical feature of the noir thriller, may risk undermining noir's political potential through its seeming detachment from reality. But the conspiracist's "detachment" may also compel Western readers to notice their own attachment to an epistemological code by which their own realities are taken for granted. Noir allows us, writes Mūkoma, to "look at very, very extreme situations, extreme violence, a society just about to explode" in a way that can't be done with realist fiction.[25] Sam Naidu reads *Nairobi Heat* as an instance of African noir which maintains a gritty realism while "[resorting] to both hyperbole and melodrama" in expressing its Afro-pessimist vision.[26] Refugee noir, simultaneously realist and hyperbolic, likewise acknowledges that the refugee's reality is constituted by these extreme conditions. Humanitarian organizations, in pursuing solutions which are acceptable to nation-states and their citizens but rarely to refugees themselves, regularly disparage the latter's concerns as irrational, hysterical, or superstitious.[27] Furthermore, conspiracy discloses that these so-called "refugee crises" are not disparate scenes but belong within a global network of war, imperialism, and neoliberalism. The revelation of conspiracy

legitimates refugee paranoia and refugee (in)humanities: the refugee and non-refugee inhabit such different worlds that the dominant epistemological and moral categories no longer necessarily hold water for the refugee.[28]

Nairobi Heat opens with the mockery of noir's racial cliches: "A beautiful young blonde was dead, and the suspect, my suspect, was an African male."[29] The novel's hero is a Black detective named Ishmael, and the suspect is a Rwandan refugee named Joshua Hakizimana, famous for supposedly saving thousands of lives during the Rwandan genocide. Now a professor at the University of Wisconsin, Joshua also works with the Never Again Foundation and Nairobi's Refugee Centre in providing aid to African refugees. A mysterious phone call sends Detective Ishmael to Kenya to investigate the girl's murder, but even he realizes, "Had it been a black victim I certainly wouldn't have been racking up overtime in Nairobi."[30] After digging into some records, Ishmael realizes that the Refugee Centre/Never Again Foundation is a money laundering scheme which employs images of the pitiful refugee for fundraising and that its key member Joshua had colluded with the genocidaires by using his "safe haven" as bait for luring the Tutsi people to their deaths.[31] Since Detective Ishmael is ultimately unable to prove Joshua's link with the girl's death or bring him to trial for his role in the Rwandan genocide, Joshua is legally exonerated. Even worse, the fickleness of public opinion permits Joshua to smoothly rehabilitate his public image and regain his professorship. The racist justice system, which was initially overbearing against Joshua as a Black man, now shrinks away from the incomprehensible dimensions of genocide. Ishmael, who was pressured to take extreme measures in investigating a Black suspect over the death of a white woman, must now appeal to white supremacists to avenge the death of not only her but also these Rwandan victims. A local KKK leader agrees to kill Joshua to avenge the murdered white woman, and after doing so, is shot by Ishmael as well. As a police officer with compromised moral codes, Ishmael—like the anti-heroes of *Dragonfish* and *The City & the City*—turns to extra-legal means of justice, colluding with white supremacy in a fraught attempt to avenge the victims of genocide and protracted refugee situations. In the world of noir, there can be no innocence but only ambiguous justice. Through this triangulation of African, African American, and white supremacist relations, Joshua becomes yet another sacrificed refugee—on the one hand, as an act of racial terror by the KKK, and on the other, as Ishmael's attempt to re-contain the history of the Rwandan genocide.

The Refugee Centre and Never Again Foundation function as guises for *Nairobi Heat*'s critique of refugee relief agencies such as the UNHCR, whose post-Cold War legitimation and expansion were facilitated by their appropriation of refugee voices.[32] When Ishmael asks the Refugee Centre to put him in touch with Rwandan refugees, his request is dismissed on the grounds of being a "privacy breach."[33] Privacy, however, is but an alibi for their enforced silence. Ishmael finds his own way to Mathare, the urban slums on the outskirts of Nairobi with "open sewers and the thousands of barely clothed sweating bodies milling around."[34] The liberal emphasis on privacy is ironically contrasted with the refugees' material privation, incapable of even properly covering their bodies. As Ishmael later realizes, the donations to the Foundation were not going to any of these refugees but to private bank accounts. The refugees' prolonged degradation not only precludes the possibility of their self-representation but also increases donations toward the Centre: "the Centre controls the suffering, and whoever controls the suffering controls the guilt … How much can a guilty conscience be worth? Millions, it would seem."[35] When Ishmael asks the refugees about Joshua, they refuse to say anything. There are many possible reasons for their silence: fear of the consequences of speaking out; unwillingness to share their stories with strangers; resignation to the powerlessness of their own voices; or simply, a wish not to speak.

Through its conspiratorial optics, refugee noir is keen to the numerous ways in which the refugee figure has been exploited, even by other refugees. Yet, Mūkoma underscores the falsity as well as perils of framing the refugee as merely a victim. Not only does humanitarianism repeat the genocide's erasure and detain its victims in a protracted refugee state, but the genocide was itself modeled upon a humanitarian logic, considering that Joshua's safe haven was only a way of using "honey to catch ants."[36] Still presenting himself as a humanitarian, Joshua continues his role as genocidaire by murdering those who threaten to expose his organization, such as the nameless white woman at the beginning of the novel.

Further, as a genocidaire-turned-professor, Joshua alludes to the numerous scholars who participated in the Rwandan genocide, forcing us to question our trust in those tasked with knowledge production.[37] This indictment of Joshua issues an interrogation of the ulterior motives of these institutions, which make claims upon authoritative knowledge and humanitarian benevolence.

Through what Foucault terms "the insurrection of subjugated knowledges," *Nairobi Heat* operates as refugee noir in critiquing a Western epistemology which has construed refugee fears as paranoiac and instead recuperates paranoia as a discerning suspiciousness toward the deeper networks of power.[38] The consequence is a disruption of the parochial moral categories which have long constructed the classic detective figure as, according to Ishmael's ex-wife, "a simple man after simple truths."[39] The novel reveals Detective Ishmael fully emerging as a noir anti-hero only once he takes on the epistemological and moral frameworks of the refugee. When Ishmael murders Joshua, he recalls the angry words of a refugee: "The worst killers are the survivors. They know life is cheap, no matter what the rest of the world says. So yes, Joshua can kill, but so can I or anyone else who has been through such a hell as we have."[40] Yet, Ishmael's deliverance of noir justice does revert to a simplistic morality, as he seeks to pin the responsibility of the Rwandan genocide on a single villain rather than confront the complex structural drivers which conspiracy originally detects. Whereas this conclusion hazards portraying the Rwandan genocide as a closed case that can finally be put to rest, Vu Tran's *Dragonfish* presents characters who are granted no sense of closure to the horrors of history.

Dragonfish and the Refugee Femme Fatale

In classic noir, the sexual allure of the femme fatale constitutes an epistemological problem for the male hero. As feminist critics have argued, the femme fatale is "the puzzle … [which] displaces solution of the crime as the object of the plot," "the figure of a certain discursive unease, a potential epistemological trauma," and is "presented not merely as to-be-looked-at, but as to-be-solved."[41] Her sexual and epistemological menace becomes a problem of power—the femme fatale must be killed by the end of the story so that the male noir hero can restore mastery over himself. Paula Rabinowitz views the femme fatale's frequent representation as a transnational fugitive as a continuation of this punitive violence: "There is no place for such a destabilizing woman to reside within the legitimacy of the family and implicitly the nation: a petit treason—a crime against the family—was a crime against the state."[42] As feminist refugee noir, *Dragonfish* represents a refugee femme fatale who refuses to accept these patriarchal forms of punishment. Paralleling *Nairobi Heat*'s critique of the reduction of refugees to passive objects of humanitarian care, *Dragonfish* critiques the reduction of the female refugee to an object of capture. But whereas the invisibility of the Rwandan refugees in *Nairobi Heat* had been exploited by humanitarian organizations, this invisibility of *Dragonfish*'s heroine works as a strategy of elusion.

In *Dragonfish*, a police officer named Robert Ruen is searching for his ex-wife Hong or, as he had nicknamed her after an ex-girlfriend, Suzy. It is Sonny—a violent Vietnamese casino owner, drug smuggler, and Hong's husband from a Malaysian refugee camp—who blackmails Robert into this assignment after she had left him. So, too, had Hong disappeared from Robert's life after he physically lashed out at her years earlier. Hong is a femme fatale only before the male gaze: as the desired object of their possession, her elusiveness drives these men toward irrational acts of violence. The novel contrasts this focus on the femme fatale's beauty with explorations of her psychic interiority. Interwoven into the novel's narrative are Hong's letters to her daughter Mai. As a young girl, Mai was not only separated from her father when fleeing Vietnam but also subsequently abandoned by Hong in the US. When Robert meets Mai during his search, he finally learns the reason behind Hong's disappearance: she had stolen a hundred grand in cash from Sonny and left it in a suitcase for Mai. Although Mai had also been trying to locate her mother, Robert and Mai decided to give up the search and focus on helping Mai escape with Sonny's money. By the novel's climax, a violent struggle between Robert and Sonny ends in a housefire. When Robert wakes up, Sonny is dead, and his son Jonathan tells Robert to never return to Las Vegas. Like the other non-refugee noir heroes in *Nairobi Heat* and *The City & the City*, Robert

evinces an aspect of noir's refugee unconsciousness: having once endeavored to slip into new territories, he finally comes up against borders which are unpassable.

The femme fatale can be traced back to the class of working women who refused to give up the economic emancipation they had gained after WWII and whose newly found power "serves as an antidote to a lifetime of suppression."[43] But Hong's role as the femme fatale is additionally inflected by refugeetude, the endurance of a refugee consciousness from her time in camp. Tran rehabilitates the misogynist trope of the femme fatale gold-digger through the refugee's memories of material insecurity. Although Robert first regards Hong's stolen money as "a poisoned gift," he remembers that "money had always been about freedom for [Hong]," a freedom which she sought to pass on to Mai.[44] When he attempts to persuade Mai to return the money, Robert—like Ishmael in *Nairobi Heat*—runs up against an epistemological gulf between himself and the refugee: "For once, I had no response. It was like being full and arguing the ethics of stealing food with someone dying of hunger."[45] The performance of feminine vulnerability, which had enabled her theft, plays upon popular images of the refugee as well: "Those in the immigration bureaucracy… expect [refugee] women to position themselves as victims of violent cultural practices that allow men to abuse them."[46] Even when no longer legally a refugee, Hong had appealed to Robert's white savior delusions to gain protection from the law and later to Sonny as the patriarch of a dangerous Vietnamese American community in Las Vegas. But through these abusive relationships, Hong learns that she had only traded one form of vulnerability for another. Her continued performance as a refugee femme fatale distracts these men from noticing her escape plans.

Hong never actually appears in the novel. Robert and Mai resign themselves to the permanence of Hong's disappearance when they realize that their desire to find her is also their desire to possess her. Mai admits, "Why should I go chasing after her like she's someone I lost? She was never mine to lose anyway."[47] Sonny, in contrast, clings to Hong, the loss of whom is metonymic of the deeper loss of his motherland. The noir anti-hero or anti-heroine, as Tran explains, is reminiscent of the refugee, "weighed down—fundamentally affected and therefore shaped—by the stories in his past that he is unwilling to tell others, perhaps is unable to tell."[48] But in contrast to classic noir's nostalgia for a white male order, refugee noir can be seen as an elaboration of Jinah Kim's concept of "transpacific noir," in which melancholy operates as a politicized affect which symptomizes a refusal to move on from the military violence which had ravaged the Asia-Pacific and produced the refugee.[49]

The novel's epistolary sections speak back against noir's tendency to privilege a white male perspective which reduces the woman and the refugee to a (sexual) object. On the one hand, Hong's letters occupy a private feminine sphere which eludes what feminist scholars have identified as the masculine control over the noir narrative structure, typified by Robert's roles as narrator and investigator.[50] A feminist refugee epistemology, as conceptualized by Yến Lê Espiritu and Lan Duong, can look beyond the gendered spectacles of refugee suffering by turning to the letter as a form which resides at "the intersection between private grief and public trauma."[51] Hong embodies what Ma Vang, drawing upon this concept of feminist refugee epistemology, terms "history on the run," which "makes room for refugee secrecy that is not the same kind of secrecy as state governance."[52] On the other hand, her letters no longer seem elusive when they become utterly confessional before the reader's eyes or when they are disrespectfully circulated among the male characters.

While Sonny and Robert seem to regard Hong's letters as a proxy of herself and continue to struggle over its symbolic possession, Hong resides outside of the writings she leaves behind. Sonny tells Robert that her letters contain only saccharine "lie[s]," while Jonathan later presents Hong's diary only to burn it before Robert: "I'm saving you from futility. It's like my father always said about poker. Even if all the cards are shown, the story is still incomplete."[53] Meanwhile, her letters to Mai are not only rendered opaque through their English translation for the reader but also fall short of the aim of serving as a confession: "I've tried to explain myself and lay bare whatever truth I can find. Yet it seems the more I explain, the more I muddy the truth."[54] Her letters and journals, even as they divulge her deepest secrets, still do not divulge enough—not even to the writer herself. Feminist refugee noir foregrounds the secrecy of the refugee femme fatale in relation to neither the male nor national gaze, but through

this private writing process by which she also struggles to comprehend herself as a subject. Patriarchal and nation-state solutions to the "problem" of the refugee femme fatale are thus rebuffed as misdirected toward an image rather than a person.

The City & the City and Border Epistemologies

Unlike Vu Tran, who was a refugee of the Vietnam War, and unlike Mūkoma wa Ngũgĩ, who had grown up in Kenya and who is the son of writer and political exile Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, China Miéville is a white British writer without a refugee family background. And unlike the previous two novels, *The City & the City* refers to refugees only infrequently, even as it obsesses over the trope of the border. By illustrating the relevance of refugee noir for a noir text which does not explicitly take the refugee as its primary concern, we can see how the aesthetics of noir is unconsciously saturated with the absent figure of the refugee.

In *The City & the City*, foreigners and urban refugees are a disavowed population which is none-theless subjected to the government's constant surveillance and management. Miéville literalizes this epistemological double standard through the conceit of "unseeing": citizens must consciously monitor their own perception, deliberately ignoring those whom their government does not permit them to see. Besźel and Ul Qoma are separate city-states occupying the same geographical space. The national border, even once detached from physical territory, is thus maintained through the policing of percep-tion: one is forbidden from noticing the sights, smells, objects, and people of the opposite city, even as this is conceded to be an impossible task. While some regions are "total" (belonging entirely to one city), most are "crosshatched" (shared by both cities) or at least "grosstopically close" (disavowed as proximate to one another).[55] The perceptual or physical transgression of these national borders is called "breach."[56] "Breach" is also the name of the mysterious extra-national entity which captures those who have committed breach, never to be seen or heard from again.

Miéville's novel implicitly comments upon the fact that the majority of the world's refugee popula-tion are urban refugees who have opted out of carceral containment in an official camp setting.[57] The nation-state, unable to territorially exclude the refugee, still exerts a disciplinary power over urban refugees. Reading *The City & the City*, international legal scholar Douglas Guilfoyle writes, "In a sense, we all already live in Besźel and Ul Qoma. We constitute through our collective legal practices a state that—while no longer territorially exclusive—manages to exclude the transnational subalterns."[58] The looming threat of deportation produces an enforced invisibility which cuts off refugees' access to public institutions, state welfare, media attention, and academic researchers.[59] Not until its 2009 Urban Refugee Policy did the UNHCR acknowledge the existence of urban refugees, formerly classified as "irregular movers."[60] Nevertheless, contrary to international law, many national governments continue forcing refugees into camps. In one of the novel's few scenes alluding to refugees, Borlú's partner quips, "Oh, we [Ul Qoma] have our camps, same as you [Besźel], here and there, round the outskirts. The UN's not happy. Neither's Amnesty. Giving you shit about conditions too? Want smokes?"[61]

When the novel's protagonist, Inspector Tyador Borlú, is tasked with investigating the death of an anonymous woman, he learns that she had been killed in Ul Qoma and dumped in Besźel. Lacking a name and an identifiable nationality, the victim becomes comparable to the refugee whose death reveals how law is limited to those properly belonging to a nation. Just as *Nairobi Heat* had demonstrated, justice is pitifully reduced to a matter of jurisdiction.[62] When Borlú requests to hand over the case to Breach, which has typically managed transnational conflicts such as these, he finds that the politicians of both city-states have become wary of Breach's increasing authority: "we hand over our sovereignty to [Breach] at our peril … Simply to make our lives easier."[63] This wariness echoes Hannah Arendt's account of how the totalitarian police state originated from the interwar refugee crisis: "The nation-state, incapable of providing a law for those who had lost the protection of a national government, trans-ferred the whole matter to the police … [whose] emancipation from law and government grew in direct proportion to the influx of refugees."[64] The political paradox, as Borlú realizes, is that the enforcement

of national boundaries necessitates the creation of an extra-legal and extra-national entity, but the latter's authority increasingly encroaches upon the nation-state's own: "The powers of the Breach are almost limitless … The two cities need the Breach. And without the cities' integrities, what is Breach?"[65] Video footage later reveals that the victim's murderer had been careful to avoid committing breach by transporting the victim's corpse across city-state lines in a legal fashion. Evidently, the crime of breach is taken more seriously than the crime of murder: whereas one invalidates a life, the other invalidates the national structure upon which a life is judged to be significant.

Borlú is transferred from Besźel's investigative team to Ul Qoma as a police consultant and eventually teams up with Breach as well. As Borlú investigates, he finds himself entangled in the political factions contesting the meaning of the national border, such as the Besź and Ul Qoman nationalists who aspire to reclaim the other's territory, as well as the unificationists who seek to eliminate the border between the two cities. The unificationists, who had been "furtively propagandising among refugees and new immigrants … [as to] weaponise such urban uncertainty," manufacture an epistemological crisis by crashing a busload of refugees who cannot help themselves from breaching as they fill the streets.[66] The refugees' breach draws bystanding citizens into breach as well, who find themselves reluctant witnesses to the scene of the accident, "faced then with scores of afraid, injured intruders, without intent to transgress but without choice, without language to ask for help, stumbling out of the ruined buses, weeping children in their arms and bleeding across borders."[67] The refugees disturb the organizing structure of the nation-state by forcing their way into the perceptual field from which they had been excluded. By enacting what Rancière terms a "redistribution of the sensible," the unificationists attempt to wrest perception away from its disciplinary structure and redraw a national border which incorporates both cities.[68]

Borlú quickly realizes that the unificationists, as "eager utopians," had been manipulated as a diversionary tactic, allowing the real criminals to escape.[69] The victim, discovered to be an archeology student named Mahlia Geary, had been murdered to cover up a multinational corporation's theft of Besź and Ul Qoman ancient artifacts. As in *Nairobi Heat*, the refugee crisis was only an alibi for capitalist exploitation. By suggesting that capital manufactures these refugee crises, conspiratorial noir dramatizes how refugee representation has been controlled in order to channel a xenophobic rhetoric which distracts the white working class from their own economic and political subordination. Intended as a humanitarian crisis, the event is instead treated as a security crisis which leads to the intensification of surveillance and disciplinary measures. The unificationists had underestimated the degree to which the citizenry's perception remains invested with nationalism, even without the nation-state's mandates. Besź and Ul Qoman nationals carefully manage their appearance and behavior to mark their national identities for others to "see" or "unsee" while also racializing the Asian, Middle Eastern, and African immigrants as "pickaninnies."[70] But refugees are not even given the benefit of this racialization, rendered so utterly other that even when bystanders are forced to breach, they still perceive nothing of the refugee but a mass of grasping and needy bodies.

By the novel's conclusion, the border is restored and there is no mention of what happens to the refugee who becomes, once again, a matter of concern only for the police, immigration bureaucracy, and humanitarian organizations. But this eruption of the refugee into the field of perception had nonetheless produced a moment of national agitation. Although *The City & the City* does not give a proper voice to its refugee characters, we can still perceive the text operating as refugee noir by exposing the power of policing institutions to displace and dehumanize the refugee, whose merely physical presence threatens to undermine the sacred construct of the nation-state.

Conclusion

Refugee noir revolts against the nation-state technologies which seek to represent, solve, and ultimately contain the refugee. This revolt, as this chapter has shown, may consist of a conspiratorial knowledge materializing from beneath official narratives about the refugee, a disappearance and a theft unfolding

behind the dazzling spectacle of the refugee femme fatale, and a radical visibility of urban refugees erupting from within a nation-state and compelling acknowledgment. If both noir and the nation-state have traditionally cohered through the repression of the refugee, the refugee characters of these noir texts strategically inhabit these dominant images of themselves to destabilize their positions within the structures of noir and the nation-state. The analytic of refugee noir offers a mode of representing the refugee that refuses to conform to national practices of detection.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1 Siegfried Kracauer perceives an "emotional preparedness for fascism" (110) in noir, while Dean MacCannell perceives "a tenderness toward fascism" (283) even in noir's leftist renditions. See Kracauer, "Hollywood's Terror Films" and MacCannell, "Democracy's Turn."
2 Rabinowitz, *Black & White*, 18.
3 Breu, "Work and Death," 42.
4 Pease, "Borderline," 87.
5 Malkki, "Refugees and Exile," 512.
6 Breu, "Work and Death," 42.
7 Malkki, "Refugees and Exile"; Black, "Fifty Years."
8 Um, *From the Land*, 213; Nguyen, "Refugeetude," 111.
9 Nguyen, "Refugee Memories"; Schlund-Vials, "Refugee Aesthetics"; August, *The Refugee Aesthetic.*
10 Naremore, *More Than Night*, 255.
11 Horsley, *The Noir Thriller*, 9.
12 Rabinowitz, *Black & White*, 14; Fay and Nieland, *Film Noir*, 125; Naremore, *More Than Night,* 22; Auerbach, *Dark Borders,* 22; Auerbach, "Noir Citizenship," 116; Jacques Rancière, quoted in Auerbach, *Dark Borders*, 12.
13 Sobchack, "Lounge Time."
14 Auerbach, *Dark Borders*, 6.
15 Siddiqi, "Police and Postcolonial," 176.
16 On postcolonial critiques of the detective story, see Reitz, *Detecting the Nation*; Mukherjee, *Crime and Empire*; and Pearson and Singer, *Detective Fiction*.
17 Fay and Nieland, *Film Noir*, 3.
18 Bregent-Heald, "Dark Limbo," 125.
19 On the racial unconscious of film noir, see Diawara, "*Noir* by *Noirs*"; and Lott, "The Whiteness of Film Noir." On pursuing the femme fatale across national borders, see Dresser, "Global Noir"; and Rabinowitz, "Stateless Mothers / Motherless States." On noir's self-reflexive concerns about its own genre identity, see Oliver and Trigo, *Noir Anxiety*; and Bregent-Heald, "Dark Limbo."
20 Auerbach, "Noir Citizenship" and *Dark Borders*.
21 Abbott, *The Street*, 19; Hirsch, *The Dark Side*, 19.
22 Koepnick, *The Dark Mirror*, 262.
23 Brook, *Driven to Darkness*.
24 Kaes, "A Stranger," 57.
25 Mūkoma, "Searching for Clues."
26 Naidu, "That Ever-Blurry Line," 344.
27 Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries," 390.
28 Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*.
29 Mūkoma, *Nairobi Heat*, 1.
30 Mūkoma, *Nairobi Heat*, 6.
31 Mūkoma, *Nairobi Heat*, 17.
32 Betts and Collier, *Refuge*.
33 Mūkoma, *Nairobi Heat*, 36.
34 Mūkoma, *Nairobi Heat*, 36–37.
35 Mūkoma, *Nairobi Heat*, 111–12.

36 Mūkoma, *Nairobi Heat*, 124.
37 Chege, "Africa's Murderous Professors"; Cornwell, "Rwandan Scholars 'Conspired.'"
38 Foucault, "*Society Must Be Defended*," 7.
39 Mūkoma, *Nairobi Heat*, 49.
40 Mūkoma, *Nairobi Heat*, 99.
41 Gledhill, "Klute 1," 15; Doane, *Femmes Fatales*, 1; Farrimond, *The Contemporary Femme Fatale*, 15.
42 Rabinowitz, "Stateless Mothers," 199.
43 Ha and Greenfield, "'It's oil and water,'" 39.
44 Tran, *Dragonfish*, 130, 162.
45 Tran, *Dragonfish*, 186.
46 Menjívar and Walsh, "Gender, Violence and Migration," 53.
47 Tran, *Dragonfish*, 248.
48 Tran, "Interview."
49 Kim, "Transpacific Noir," 66.
50 Gledhill, "Klute 1."
51 Espiritu and Duong, "Feminist Refugee Epistemology," 588.
52 Vang, *History on the Run*, 8.
53 Tran, *Dragonfish*, 280, 290.
54 Tran, *Dragonfish*, 214.
55 Miéville, *The City*, 14, 24, 66.
56 Miéville, *The City*, 14.
57 UN General Assembly, *New York Declaration*.
58 Guilfoyle, "Reading *The City & the City*," 207.
59 Borren, "Towards an Arendtian Politics"; Correa-Velez and Gifford, "When the Right"; and Harrell-Bond and Voutira, "In Search."
60 UNHCR, *UNHCR Policy*.
61 Miéville, *The City & the City*, 157.
62 Martin, "Unacknowledged Cities."
63 Miéville, *The City*, 64.
64 Arendt, *The Origins*, 286–87.
65 Miéville, *The City*, 68.
66 Miéville, *The City*, 43.
67 Miéville, *The City*, 275.
68 Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*.
69 Miéville, *The City*, 276.
70 Miéville, *The City,* 157.

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6

RE-ORIENTING THE GAZE

Visualizing Refugees in Recent Film

Agnes Woolley

Richard Mosse's 2017 video installation *Incoming* uses a military-grade thermal imaging camera to document the journeys of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, Mali, and Senegal. Presented on three multi-channel screens, scenes of boat arrivals, crowded camps, and border sites are rendered through striking infrared imagery that defamiliarizes what has recently become commonplace on news media covering the so-called refugee crisis. Despite his stated goal to use this military technology "against its intended purpose," Mosse's long-range camera nonetheless documents refugees without their awareness or consent. The unwitting participation of the subjects rendered through this technology of surveillance underscores the uneven power dynamics between viewers and those depicted on screen.[1] In its deployment of cutting-edge digital cameras, which can detect humans from a distance of 33.3 kilometers, *Incoming* lays bare both the dehumanizing and humanizing aspects of such weaponized technologies. In the context of an art gallery, the viewing subject is confronted with bodies that, while remaining anonymized, depersonalized, and alien, are made visible through their warm bodily tissue—a reminder that these are living, breathing human beings.

Mosse's project encapsulates the complex issue of visibility as it relates to refugees. Subject to the authoritarian gaze of state control which aims to inhibit movement, refugees at times need to disappear to evade capture and cross borders. Yet they also need to make public their claims to asylum, to testify to abuse and persecution as a means of securing their rights. As Debarati Sanyal points out, "The rhetoric of human rights and humanitarianism operate according to the representational mandates of visibility and recognition."[2] Refugees need to be seen in order to be recognized as rights bearing individuals. This chapter centralizes questions of visibility regarding contemporary refugee movement by focusing on recent filmmaking by and about refugees. In particular, it negotiates between regimes of visual representation within state and humanitarian management of refugees and filmic responses to it. When brought together, the films discussed below suggest the emergence of a new visual grammar of refugeehood, one that attempts to resist the camera's potential role as a "technology of capture" while also harnessing its representational promise.[3]

Concerns about documentary authenticity and moral empathy are especially pressing for those working with visual representations of refugees, who must contend with an archive of imagery that has ossified over time into a set of familiar visual tropes. For example, in what Benjamin Thomas White describes as the "overland trudge" trope, groups of people burdened by luggage are captured trudging through a non-descript landscape.[4] Drawing on the metanarrative of the Biblical exodus, these images tend to be decontextualized such that both the refugees and the landscapes they traverse become interchangeable. In her much-cited study of Hutu refugees in Tanzania, Liisa Malkki shows

how refugee women and children are similarly universalized. Usually depicted in domestic settings, in camps or preparing food, the refugee woman is "madonnalike," while infants come to signify a kind of "elementary humanity."[5] In more recent living memory, scenes of crowded trains, refugee faces pressed up against windows unmistakably evoke the Holocaust. While such images have the potential to act as productive scenes of "multidirectional memory," more often than not they work to both overdetermine and depoliticize refugee narratives in the public sphere.[6] Increasingly exposed to the eye of the camera for the purposes of both humanitarian advocacy and state control, refugees are vulnerable to surveillance, stereotype, and fetishization, all of which occlude the diversity and complexity of individuals captured on screen while coding refugees along a binary axis of either extreme vulnerability or severe threat.

As the numbers of people on the move have increased over the last two decades, so too has the amount of moving image work depicting the experience of forced migration. Not only has the relative ubiquity of digital technology increased the availability of first-hand footage of forced migration but there has also been a growing appetite among filmmakers and moving image artists to explore this ever-growing phenomenon. The visual works explored in this chapter suggest a shifting refugee imaginary which tackles head-on the complex representational politics of the human rights regime and positions refugees as active agents rather than passive objects of pity. I chart the ways in which recent fiction and non-fiction film re-frame the often-objectifying humanitarian gaze of news media and subvert the politics of affect that works on feelings of both fear and compassion among settled or citizen audiences. My analysis of this visual landscape considers how effective these varied strategies are for moving beyond a representational politics perpetually caught between visibility and occlusion, between the demand for rights framed by humanitarian regimes and the right to evade interpolation as figures of either vulnerability or threat.

Taking a selective approach to the wealth of material emerging on the topic, I have grouped the films into three distinct modes. The first and perhaps the most common form for refugee narrative is documentary, which tends toward the testimonial and can unwittingly collude with an unforgiving legal framework that demands an authentic and verifiable account of persecution.[7] The danger is the emergence of a narrative context that holds refugees to the same standard of truth as a court of law. While some of the documentary material I look at below are clearly intended to expose abuse and ill-treatment, its visual grammar insists on a metaphoricity which installs a critical distance between audiences and the experiences unfolding on screen. My main focus, Gianfranco Rosi's *Fire at Sea* (2016), rejects the empathetic affect in its depiction of refugees arriving on Lampedusa and instead uses visual forms to draw out metaphorical and aesthetic connections that highlight the structural systems implicating us all in the phenomenon of precarious migration. Further nuancing the documentary mode, the second part of the chapter looks at the rise of refugee-led filmmaking and considers how the subjective "first-person" camera used in these films intersects with and challenges the established visual grammar of refugeehood. Through a close reading of *Midnight Traveler* (2019), which was filmed by a refugee family on route from Afghanistan to Hungary, I explore how refugee-led films re-orient the hierarchical dynamics of pity implicit in the conventional humanitarian gaze. Finally, I explore how genre film—in particular, horror—opens up an unexpected and productive visual language for exploring refugee narratives beyond the social-realist style within which such stories tend to be told. Remi Weekes' asylum horror *His House* (2020) uses the generic conventions of the haunted house subgenre to defamiliarize the refugee experience for audiences accustomed to the kinds of visual tropes outlined above. All of the films I look at here engage in more or less oblique ways with the politics of humanitarian spectatorship and the visual surveillance of border crossers by states. In doing so, they deploy their visual forms to create subversive refugee narratives through strategies of implication, juxtaposition, and metaphor. Importantly, these films share an interest in mapping connections between refugees and sedentary audiences not through empathy or identification but through structural, historical, and political entanglements.

Documentary and the Implicated Subject

The experimental filmmaker Hito Steyerl diagnoses the present as a condition of "documentary uncertainty," writing that "[t]he closer to reality we get, the less intelligible it becomes."[8] Steyerl urges us to consider this uncertainty not so much as a "shameful lack" but rather as "the core quality of documentary modes."[9] We should, according to Steyerl, "accept the intensity of the problem of truth, especially in an era in which doubts have become persuasive."[10] In fact, as Stella Bruzzi notes, "The pact between documentary, reality and the documentary spectator is far more straightforward than many theorists have made out: that a documentary will never be reality nor will it erase or invalidate that reality by being representational."[11] Existing in a liminal space between reality and representation, documentary foregrounds "the problem of truth" in its very constitution. This is important for refugees, whose claims for asylum are measured against a narrowly interpreted burden of proof. A number of recent documentaries about refugees adopt a self-reflexive and aestheticized approach, storytelling as much through mood, sound, and visual imagery as through testimonial and truth-telling modes.[12] As we shall see, Gianfranco Rosi's *Fire at Sea* (2016) shifts focus away from refugee testimony to the structural complicity of individuals, states, and humanitarian regimes in the reproduction of punitive conditions for border crossers.

Hito Steyerl's films are one object of analysis in Michael Rothberg's recent intervention into the discourse of the beneficiary in his book *The Implicated Subject*.[13] Rothberg's "implicated subject" is a shifting subject position which figures the intangible connections between actors across time and space in contexts of injustice. So, in relation to forced migration, the question might be how (predominantly white) citizen subjects are implicated in producing the conditions of possibility for ruthless asylum systems and border regimes in the Global North while also being historically implicated in the conditions that create refugees in the first place: histories of colonization, neo-imperialist intervention, and withholding the spoils of empire.[14] The conceptual category of "the implicated subject," Rothberg argues, allows us both to work through legacies of violence and to address "suffering and inequality in the present."[15] Moving beyond the perpetrator/victim binary, Rothberg's concept "shifts questions of accountability from a discourse of guilt to a less legally and emotionally charged terrain of historical and political responsibility."[16] Rothberg's aim is a "long-distance solidarity"—that is, "solidarity premised on difference rather than logics of sameness and identification."[17] "Implication," then, suggests a way of understanding the kinds of structural relationships that are notoriously hard to grasp, especially in dramatic narrative in which, more often than not, we are invested in the story arc of individuals and so come to understand the notion of refugeeism, say, as a singular as opposed to a structural condition. Rothberg's shift to a politics—and a poetics—of difference that at times eschews emotional investment altogether offers an alternative to empathetic identification as a tactic for refugee advocacy.[18]

Gianfranco Rosi's *Fire at Sea* attempts to visualize Rothberg's structures of implication by figuring the connections between sedentary citizen populations and arriving refugees through abstraction and metaphor. His oblique depiction of life on the Italian island of Lampedusa (a key arrival point for refugees getting to Europe) offers, to quote Rothberg, "allegories of social relations rather than essential or fixed individual identities."[19] Rosi creates figures of implication and a web of symbolic connections between the islanders and the new arrivals in a directorial approach that refuses to distill a social relationship but instead presents viewers with a spectrum of affiliations and responsibilities. The film has two ostensibly unconnected but, in reality, entangled narratives: the first focuses on a young boy, Samuele, who lives with his grandmother and father on Lampedusa and roams the island attacking unsuspecting birds with his catapult. The second narrative, interspersed with the first, is that of a rescue mission that takes place off the coast of the island and provides glimpses into the lives of arriving refugees as they are processed at a holding center prior to relocation to the mainland. Though dominated by Samuele and the domestic life of the island, the film establishes a series of figurative associations that link the Lampedusans with the arriving refugees. Through themes of vision and visuality, order and chaos, Rosi

engages in a process described by Yến Lê Espiritu as "critical juxtaposing": "the bringing together of seemingly different and disconnected events, communities, histories and spaces in order to illuminate what would otherwise not be visible about the contours, contents, and afterlives of war and empire."[20] Rosi's juxtaposition of the island's two constituencies allows audiences to read one through the other, revealing the constitutive and fluid terms of their relationship. Coexisting, but not coinciding, in the space of the film, the viewer holds these two forms of life together and is left to reflect critically on what connections may exist between them.[21]

Consider the constellation of ideas at work in the film's Italian title *Fuocoamare*. In an early scene, Samuele's grandmother is cooking in her kitchen while listening to the radio. As a report comes on describing yet another shipwreck on the island's coast, she mutters, "Poor souls." In this scene, the voice of the DJ intrudes into the domestic space of the kitchen, but later we will see the DJ himself at work as the grandmother calls in to request the World War II song "Fuocoamare." The song refers to a long-shared memory of the bombing of an Italian boat off the island in which many people died. In yet another scene, this war story is recounted to Samuele by his grandmother as she sits sewing by the window: "The ships fired rockets and it was like there was fire at sea. […] The sea turned red." This link to World War II and its mass displacements presents a pertinent parallel to the refugee migration depicted in the film, but the specificity of fire at sea also has a contemporary resonance. There are many instances of fires on refugee boats, saturated as they are in gasoline. A particularly bad boat fire took place just off the coast of Lampedusa on October 3, 2013, resulting in the deaths of more than 360 people. Days later, on October 11, around 35 people were killed in another shipwreck in the same location. Together they are referred to as the "Lampedusa Disaster" and are memorialized through several artworks. Yet in Rosi's film, the temporal and spatial connections between these two historical circumstances are only obliquely referenced, as if just out of reach. This work of stitching together discrete historical events—figured in the grandmother's sewing—elicits a critical rather than emotional engagement from viewers. The grandmother exemplifies Rothberg's mutable and shifting "implicated subject." She has her own memories of wartime, her own privations and challenges, but she is also implicated in the reception of those who come to the shores of the island seeking sanctuary; she hears of the drowned refugees on the radio and offers them her thoughts from within her clean and ordered domestic space.

The film's key metaphor is that of sight. The partially sighted Samuele—who prowls the island wearing an eye patch to correct a lazy eye—suggests that the humanitarian tactic of making visible rights violations is not always as straightforward as it seems. Samuele does not see what goes on elsewhere on the island. His path never crosses that of the refugees despite their geographical proximity, suggesting the challenge of making connections even in circumstances of temporal and spatial simultaneity. What Samuele does not see is captured by Rosi's camera, which documents the arrival of refugees and the ways they are managed on the island. However, the two constituencies of people on Lampedusa are visualized on screen in highly distinct ways. The scenes following Samuele deploy a lingering and often locked-off camera: long, meditative shots of the landscape are replicated inside the domestic spaces where uneventful scenes slowly unfold with Samuele, his grandmother, and his father. Whereas these shots suggest the contemplative luxury of space and time, the scenes involving refugees are tightly packed with people, and a mobile camera moves up and down with the ebb and flow of the sea. Most strikingly, the refugees themselves are aestheticized in a manner reminiscent of science fiction and this technological, other-worldly aesthetic creates a marked contrast to the pastoral landscape traversed by Samuele. For example, we view the arriving boats through grainy surveillance camera footage and see an eerie twilight coastline populated with vast radar trackers. The refugees are wrapped in shiny, metallic blankets rendering them an alien presence, while rescue workers move anonymously across the screen in hazmat suits. The militarized nature of the operation suggests a blurred boundary between humanitarian aid and state control and pre-figures Richard Mosse's surveillance aesthetic in *Incoming*, discussed in the introduction. Unlike Samuele, audiences see both sets of islanders, which, though rendered as visually distinct, are linked by a series of figurative connections

that reveal the challenge of mapping the complex social relations that produce such deathly scenarios as those in and around Lampedusa.

First-Person Filmmaking and Networks of Solidarity

Where Rosi seeks a critical distance between his camera and the refugee subjects it depicts, recent refugee-made documentaries have tended to take a radically first-person approach. *Les Sauteurs* (2016), directed by Abou Bakar Sidibé, Moritz Siebert, and Estephan Wagner; *Revenir* (2018), directed by Kumut Imesh and David Fedele; *Chauka, Please Tell Us the Time* (2017), directed by Behrouz Boochani and Arash Kamali Sarvestani; and Hassan Fazili's *Midnight Traveler* (2019), which I discuss in detail below, are all instances in which refugees take up a camera to tell their own stories. This authorial control is striking in the context of refugee narratives, which are so often instrumentalized for political purposes. As Laura Rascaroli notes in her discussion of "the personal camera," "to speak 'I' is, after all, firstly a political act of self-awareness and self-affirmation."[22] Yet, the films listed above are all collaborative projects. The footage is shot by refugees and then edited into feature films by filmmakers and production outfits working in more stable environments, suggesting a cross-border solidarity between citizens and non-citizens. Indeed, all these films relied on the collaboration of European or American producers, even as the refugees themselves assert directorial control (all are co-credited as directors). While this shows that the authorial 'I' is as much a matter of material circumstance as it is a creative compulsion, the first-person approach in these films provides not only an unprecedented insight into contemporary border crossing but also a highly subjective and intimate portrayal of the individuals who undertake it.

Midnight Traveler stands out among the selection above because Fazili was already a filmmaker when he became a refugee. Indeed, it was his documentaries that brought him to the notice of the Taliban, who put a bounty on his head. After his application for asylum in Australia was denied, Fazili was forced to travel overland to Europe with his wife and two young daughters. *Midnight Traveler* is part video diary and part home movie, documenting his family's journey from Afghanistan to Hungary. Fazili's attention to the minutiae of family life provides a visual counterpoint to the dominant imagery of abject refugees depicted in the news media. He introduces himself in the film by talking over archival footage of his home life and previous documentaries he has made, one of which is about a Taliban leader. In a thoughtful and reflective voice-over, Fazili describes how he was told to flee by a member of the Taliban who was once a family friend, a man bonded to Fazili through an incident in their shared past. That he is both friendly with and an enemy of the Taliban points to the ambivalence that is a hallmark of Fazili's film and which he gives voice to in his extensive narration. Indeed, the film oscillates in formal intention between a desire to document the brutality of Europe's border regime and moments of reflection about the filmmaker's own creative instincts as he documents his family's difficult and often dangerous journey.

The anxieties Fazili expresses in the film about his own acts of representation echo those articulated by Susan Sontag in her 2003 book, *Regarding the Pain of Others,* where she brings in for critique Sebastião Salgado's durational photography project, *Migrations*. It is no coincidence that Sontag's critique of documentary photography is focused on the issue of migration. The bias toward sedentary life in the Global North and the persistence of the nation-state as a unit of political power and ethno-cultural identification frame migration and statelessness as both crisis and threat. Salgado's itinerant, homeless figures, Sontag suggests, are "reduced to their powerlessness."[23] Fixed by a decontextualizing gaze, refugees exist only as indices of their own statelessness, with the specifics of their history, politics and conditions of displacement remaining unknown even as they are transfigured onto a global canvas. Critiqued as "cinematic," Salgado's images are presented on a large scale and, for Sontag, induce a kind of paralysis in the viewer, whose own sense of powerlessness, when confronted with the sheer magnitude of the phenomenon, becomes the dominant affect.[24] By contrast, in *Midnight Traveler*, Fazili deploys his sharp aesthetic sensibility to hone in on intimate family relationships as a way of giving emotional and historical context to the film's characters.

Sontag is also interested in the ways that the camera provokes compassion, pity, and even action on behalf of those depicted. If Salgado's pictures are too beautiful, then photographs of things at their worst, or "uglifying," for Sontag, invite an active response: "For photographs to accuse, and possibly to alter conduct, they must shock."[25] Images of suffering are forever caught in this paradox since the camera cannot help but make a spectacle of the suffering it depicts: "The photograph gives mixed signals. Stop this, it urges. But it also exclaims, What a spectacle!"[26] While a number of refugee films are caught up in such a dynamic, *Midnight Traveler* is most explicit in its articulation of this paradox. For example, in a scene toward the end of the film, as the family waits in Serbia to have their case heard, the pace slows and music plays over a sequence of shots: Fazili's young daughters looking through a window, their reflections in a puddle as they walk, birds flying. Fazili remarks in voice-over: "I love cinema. But sometimes cinema is so dirty." He appears to change the subject, describing how they were packing up their belongings ready to change rooms in the camp when they realized they had not seen their youngest daughter Zahra for over an hour. He describes their frantic search as the image on the screen switches from birds flying across a grey sky to a fuzzy moon glimpsed through twisted tree branches striating the screen. As though a tear has ripped through the reel, the image indicates a break in the film's spell in which Fazili contemplates the ethics of his own act of filmmaking: "For one moment, I thought to myself, 'What a scene you're in!' […] I thought, 'This will be the best scene in the film.' I said, 'Maybe, maybe you should turn on your camera.'" At this point, Fazili's voice begins to crack, his emotion overwhelming him. By this time, the moon has disappeared and the screen is blank, a square of black as he describes imagining seeing Zahra's body, his wife running and "I have my camera in my hand, and I'm filming that moment." The film is effectively paused as Fazili contemplates the extent to which he is as much a product of the film as its creator. Even where the filmmaker is himself in charge of his own narrative as a refugee on the run, the impulse to create a strong story via the spectacularization of refugee precarity is keenly felt.

Fazili's questioning narration and editorial decisions about what to show parallel the anxieties about visual representations of suffering raised by Sontag, and this moment in the film speaks powerfully to a rejection of the norms of humanitarian storytelling. While it appears to conform to the conventions of subjective human rights testimonial, *Midnight Traveler* resists interpellation as such by actively questioning the representation of trauma on screen. It is a documentary technique in which, as Michael Renov describes, "the representation of the historical real is consciously filtered through the flux of subjectivity."[27] Moreover, Fazili narrates his tussle between his identities as documentarian and father, which pull him in different directions as this moment of drama unfolds. Fazili's "self-searching authorial presence" involves the spectator in a more active, critical relationship with what they are seeing on the screen.[28] As refugee solidarity groups search for ways to engage audiences with the catastrophic situation unfolding at border sites, here is a way for refugees to appear as self-reflective agents of their own experience. Moreover, the film's interest in those moments familiar in any family life—children playing, tears of frustration and boredom, relationship tensions—suggests a desire to shift focus from the conventional frames through which we view life as a refugee. Indeed, the film's reflection on refugee experience rests on a visual expression of what it *feels* like to live in circumstances of danger and uncertainty rather than what it *looks* like as represented on screen. The opening sequence of the film shows Fazili's daughters on a fairground ride wheeling around as they are filmed from inside an adjacent seat. The temporality and spatiality of the scene are ambiguous. Is this the projection of some as-yet-unrealized future where the family has secured safe asylum in Europe? Is it a stop along the way, a snatched moment of frivolity? Or is it back in Afghanistan, the home they have now irrevocably lost? The final scenes of the film return to this moment in the fairground and to others from along the journey, stitched together in a montage that, rather than suggesting a chronological journey, evokes circularity and repetition, suggesting the relentlessness of their search for asylum. This kind of first-person filmmaking generates an intimacy that humanizes at the same time as it documents. But it also insistently contemplates the mechanics of the narrative's construction, re-working the testimonial form such that confession becomes a mode of critical reflection.

Hostile Environments: Refugee Horror and the Politics of Hospitality

Outside the social realism of testimonial representation, in the realm of genres such as thriller, horror, road movies, and even comedy, lies an alternative refugee imaginary that finds refugee characters able to inhabit a diverse range of roles. As protagonists of thrillers like Stephen Frears' *Dirty, Pretty, Things* (2002) and Alfonso Cuarón's 2012 dystopian *Children of Men*, refugees take charge of the narrative within identifiably generic terms. Kornél Mundruczó's *Jupiter's Moon* (2017) features a Syrian refugee who develops the ability to fly after being shot by border police, and Neill Blomkamp has twice explored the dramatic conflicts thrown up by migration through a heavily allegorical science fiction mode: the eerily affecting *District 9* (2009), which finds alien refugees confined to an internment camp, and the bigger budget follow up, *Elysium* (2013), which takes place on a space colony. In Aki Kaurismäki's deadpan comedies *Le Havre* (2011) and *The Other Side of Hope* (2017), refugees belong to a cast of stylized characters echoed in Ben Sharrock's 2021 film *Limbo*, a dark comedy about asylum seekers set on a Hebridean island.

Though arguably jumping from one set of representational constraints to another, as character archetypes in mainstream genre films, refugees are, paradoxically, free to become unlikable anti-heroes, superhuman action heroes, and, perhaps most importantly, agents of change within the narrative. This "narrative plenitude" within genre representations of forced migration has the potential to free refugees from the "enclave" of abjection, passivity, and dependency to which they are often confined and allow them to emerge as nuanced characters.[29] Most recently, horror, with its moral ambiguities and oblique social commentary, has proven to be a particularly fertile genre for exploring the often traumatic experience of seeking asylum. Romola Garai's *Amulet* (2020) and Remi Weekes's *His House* (2020), which I discuss in depth below, both deploy the horror sub-genre of the haunted house, which comes with a readymade set of themes linked to refuge regarding ideas of hospitality, hostility, and visitation. Crossing literal and figurative thresholds into an uncertain future, the protagonists of haunted house films are invariably met by a hostile reception in the form of a malign presence lingering within the walls, the memory of a horrific event, or a human host with murderous intent.

His House contains multiple permutations of the idea of host and guest, which neatly satirize the politics of asylum by allegorizing the idea of hospitality in the figure of the haunted house. An asylum-seeking couple from South Sudan are both guests in the UK and hosts to a series of malign entities they unwittingly bring with them after they kidnap a young girl to help secure their escape. Transferred from a detention center to an all but derelict housing estate on the outskirts of London, Rial and Bol are allocated a run-down house in which they must remain until the outcome of their asylum claim is determined. Traumatized by their perilous journey to the UK, the couple find that the ghosts of those they have lost along the way live inside the walls of the ramshackle house, and the haunting drives both characters to destructive extremes. As morally complex horror protagonists, Bol and Rial do not conform to the prevailing image of the forced migrant in human rights discourses, which often colludes with the idea of the "good" or "deserving" refugee.[30] Their haunting is, in part, retribution for their kidnap of the young girl they had passed off as their daughter.

In addition to experiencing a supernatural haunting, Bol and Rial are subjected to the routine horrors of the UK asylum system. These are hinted at in an early scene in which the couple glimpse a blood-soaked man being restrained by security guards in one of the detention cells. The discriminations, petty abuses, and racism of the asylum system suggest that the UK is at best unwelcoming and at worst actively hostile, an environment successfully living up to the policy ambitions of former Home Secretary Teresa May, who in 2012 described her intention to "create, here in Britain, a really hostile environment for illegal immigrants."[31] As Jacques Derrida theorizes, hostility and hospitality are close etymological companions and derive from the same root: "hostis," which means both host and guest and gives us both *hos*pitality and *hos*tile.[32] That the two are so closely linked suggests the always already present nature of otherness. The word gives us the idea of the stranger or the foreigner and highlights the ease with which nation-states oscillate between positions of hospitality and hostility in public discourse or,

sometimes, occupy both positions simultaneously. Many nations, the UK included, are signatories to the internationally agreed standard on hospitality to refugees: the 1951 UN Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol. Yet this same legal hospitality gives rise to a bureaucratic and ideological hostility which sees states attempting to evade international responsibilities.

Moreover, the concept of hospitality anchors the public world of war, exile, and nations to the domestic, private boundaries of the home, and in *His House,* the house itself becomes the boundary line between these spheres. As asylum seekers with temporary leave to remain, Bol and Rial are subject to what Derrida describes as "conditional hospitality."[33] The conditions of their hospitality are that they must not work, and they must stay in the accommodation that has been provided. That the couple are compelled to stay in the haunted house by immigration law rather than by some supernatural force not only resolves a common plotting problem in horrors—"Why don't they just get out of there?!"—but also gives the narrative a real-world twist that brings the everyday horror of asylum seeking into focus. The couple can neither live in nor vacate the house, an aporetic situation that characterizes the position of many refugees caught in camps along national borders: unable to cross, unable to return.

The thin border between hospitality and hostility creates a narrative tension in *His House* that works both as effective horror and as critique of a punitive asylum system. This operates most successfully at the level of the production design, which draws on both a localized British tradition of social realism and the symbolic schema of the classic haunted house genre. The council estate, as depicted by canonical British realist filmmakers like Andrea Arnold, Ken Loach, and Mike Leigh in *His House* becomes imbued with a sinister and supernatural force. The house itself appears to sigh, creak, and even scream, electrical glitches conjure images of decomposed bodies, and the streets around the house seem populated with dead-eyed automatons who embody May's "hostile environment." These distinct generic approaches exist in productive tension with one another in Weekes's film such that the refugee figure is neither subsumed into fantasy by the horror elements nor is their victimhood fetishized as it might be in a social realist depiction.

The film was shot in Tilbury, Essex, just outside London. An iconic location of departures and arrivals, Tilbury Docks was where the *SS Windrush* arrived in 1948, and its liminal status between town and country is an ambiguity played on by Weekes in the film. In one memorable scene, Rial sets out from the house to find the GP Surgery, a journey that finds her continually thwarted by the maze-like streets of the housing estate. Turning corners repeatedly in an evident nod to Stanley Kubrick's 1980 iconic horror film *The Shining*, Rial is confronted with the same blind alleys, brick walls, and, at one point, the same child kicking a ball. The circuitous dead ends of the bureaucratic asylum system are here spatialized in the tortuous housing estate, which keeps replicating itself, blocking Rial's escape. The scene builds a sense of danger and foreboding that culminates in an encounter between Rial and a group of Black British schoolkids who mock her accent and tell her to "Get back to Africa." As the echo of *The Shining* attests, the scene draws on classic genre techniques to build tension, but both the setting and the scene's final encounter temporarily transport audiences from the supernatural realm to the complex racial and xenophobic politics that underlie Rial's confrontation with the school boys. Refracted through a horror lens, the routine "othering" of refugees depicted in the scene is amplified, endowed with the shock value inherent in the structure of suspenseful narrative plotting.

In fusing horror and social realist aesthetics, Weekes grants viewers all the anticipated pleasures of the horror genre while at the same time keeping them alert to the material realities of seeking asylum. The sequence of shots that ends the film captures this duality and suggests an ambivalence common to horror endings by invoking the ongoing uncertainty faced by refugees: as Bol states, your ghosts "live with you." Posed in front of the camera as if for a family portrait, Bol and Rial appear inside their freshly painted sitting room cleansed of the presence of the "night witch" that has been haunting them. They affirm their readiness to move on and build a new life, yet in the next shot, the couple appears surrounded by other refugees: the ghosts of those who have drowned now restored to full bodily humanity. Far from the gruesome figures we have glimpsed through the plasterwork, here are human beings looking straight back at us, the audience. Bol and Rial will remain both guests and hosts,

treading the boundary between life and death and marking the ruptures caused by forced migration. As Heidrun Friese observes, negotiations over hospitality "question social, cultural or national boundaries, and undermine the general congruence of citizenship, territory and nation."[34] The profoundly unsettling experience of watching *His House* arises not just from its horror elements but from the very real unsettlements of seeking refuge.

Conclusion

Released in 2020, *His House* is the logical product of two decades in which filmmakers have experimented with new ways of representing refugees on screen. Not only have genre films responded to the growing phenomenon of forced migration, but widespread access to basic digital filmmaking technology has opened up multiple narrative avenues for refugees to tell their stories through film. Both these developments in moving image work have influenced documentary filmmaking to the extent that bearing witness to refugee testimony is beginning to take innovative and hybrid forms, as seen in the examples explored above. It is, in part, a negotiation with the power of images in relation to constituencies for whom *being seen* is a complex proposition. As we have seen, this negotiation takes various forms: strategies of constellation, metaphor, implication, and genre counteract both the arresting gaze of nation-state surveillance and the pitying eye of the humanitarian imaginary. Above all, these films suggest the emergence of a new set of optics for the visualization of refugee experiences, one that resists the commodification of suffering and seeks to harness the power of the visual in liberatory rather than restrictive ways.

Notes

1 Quote taken from Mosse's website: www.richardmosse.com/projects/incoming.
2 Sanyal, "Humanitarian Detention and Figures of Persistence at the Border," 457.
3 Sanyal, "Calais's 'Jungle,'" 9.
4 Benjamin Thomas White coins the phrase "overland trudge" in his series of blog articles on images of refugees: https://singularthings.wordpress.com/2015/10/07/images-of-refugees-part-2-refugees-on-land.
5 Malkki, *Purity and Exile,* 11.
6 Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory.*
7 The Refugee Convention requires that asylum seekers demonstrate a "well-founded" fear of persecution in order to be granted refugee status. See United Nations High Commission for Refugees (1951, 1967) "Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees."
8 Steyerl, "Documentary Uncertainty."
9 Steyerl, "Documentary Uncertainty."
10 Steyerl, "Documentary Uncertainty."
11 Bruzzi, *New Documentary,* 6.
12 A good example of this is Ai Weiwei's 2017 documentary *Human Flow,* which deploys an almost hyperbolically epic aesthetic achieved through the use of high-definition drone cameras, capturing a vast canvas of moving bodies abstracted to the point of total obscurity. This tactic offers a set of unconscious and metaphorical connections, which contrast to the intimate one-to-one interviews the filmmaker conducts with refugees at other moments in the film. In this vein, see *Blue Sky from Pain* (2016) directed by Stephanos Mangriotis and Hyacinthe Pavlides. Documentary animation has also proved to be a form elastic enough to accommodate the hardships faced by refugees without fetishizing their victimhood. See, for example, *Flee* (2021, Dir. Jonas Poher Rasmussen).
13 See also Robbins, *The Beneficiary.*
14 See El-Enany, *(B)ordering Britain* on this last point.
15 Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject,* 11.
16 Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject,* 20.
17 Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject,* 12.
18 This tactic has been used extensively in humanitarian campaigning on refugee issues. For example, the UNHCR Virtual Reality film *Clouds Over Sidra* was taken to Davos World Economic Forum in 2015. VR producer Chris Milk describes VR as "ultimate empathy machine" in his 2015 Ted Talk: https://www.ted.com/talks/chris_milk_how_virtual_reality_can_create_the_ultimate_empathy_machine?language=en.

19 Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject,* 200.
20 Espiritu, *Body Counts,* 34.
21 The only point of human connection in the film is provided by a doctor who treats both Samuele and a number of refugee patients.
22 Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera,* 2.
23 Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others,* 78.
24 Consciously "cinematic" imagery has been used to differing effect in recent refugee documentaries such as Ai Weiwei's *Human Flow* (2017) and Gianfranco Rosi's *Fire at Sea* (2016), discussed above.
25 Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others,* 81.
26 Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others,* 77.
27 Renov, *The Subject of Documentary,* 70.
28 Paul Arthur quoted in Rascaroli, *The Personal Camera.*
29 Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies,* 203.
30 See Sales, "The Deserving and the Undeserving?"; and Shukla, *The Good Immigrant.*
31 Kirkup and Winnett, "Theresa May Interview."
32 Derrida and Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality.*
33 Derrida and Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality,* 25.
34 Freise, "The Limits of Hospitality," 53.

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7

SONG, SOUND, AND REFUGEE AFFECT IN *LIFE OF A FLOWER* AND *SONG LANG*

Lan Duong

This chapter seeks to upend the global media's vast visual archive of Vietnamese refugees, an archive that has mostly captured images of refugees fleeing in fear and cowering en masse. Turning away from this archive and the savior narrative underlying it, I look to a different archive altogether—Vietnamese fictional films that narrate the refugee movement within a highly melodramatic register, one marked by an exaltation of sound, color, and emotion. *Kiếp Hoa* [*Life of a Flower*] (1953) and *Song Lang* (2018), I argue, offer a baroque window onto which the landscape of migration is studded with deeply felt sentiments of exile and loss. While *Life of a Flower* previews the story of the North-South migration in 1954 and *Song Lang* of the post-1975 migration, I bring these films together, as both reverberate with a southern Vietnamese affect, born of a historically situated sense of displacement and grounded in one of the most popular theatrical genres in Việt Nam—the *cải lương* opera.

Analyzed in tandem, *Life of a Flower* and *Song Lang* usefully highlight the generation of Vietnamese internal refugees who migrated in 1954 and the profound impact that this move had on their identities and political histories, a subject that few scholars have explored in relation to post-1975 migrations. It also puts pressure on grappling with the various resettlements that the Vietnamese have undergone throughout the twentieth century and underscores the transnational crossings between homeland and diaspora that have occurred with ever-greater constancy in the twenty-first century. In this crucial way, the two films build on a Vietnamese cinematic archive that actively binds the act of *fleeing* with the sense of *feeling* for a culturally vibrant South Việt Nam.

My readings of these films activate the figure of the refugee and performance of *cải lương*, "deemed the soul of Việt Nam," as Luu Trong Tuan argues.[1] From the 1920s on, *cải lương* "grew out of southern singing traditions,"[2] and as its transliteration suggests, *cải lương*, or "renovated theater," has been adapted many times over, drawing from its influences of Chinese theatre and "Western light opera or musical drama."[3] Precisely because of its enduring evolutions, *cải lương* remains controversial and yet is *the* "traditional art of the nation as it was created by the Vietnamese, with its dynamism and openness [that] still survives,"[4] an openness that has exposed it to state criticism throughout the years.

Building on the emotionalism of *cải lương* and refugee (hi)stories, I use Sara Ahmed's "model of the sociality of emotions"[5] to map how "emotions move through movement or the circulation of objects," which then become sticky and "saturated with affect."[6] Specifically, I read the ways that the grand nature of *cải lương* powerfully binds to the epic narrative of Vietnamese migration. The films *Life of a Flower* and *Song Lang*, in turn, fasten to other sticky objects, like the literary classic *The Tale of Kieu* and the legend of "Mỹ Châu-Trọng Thủy," two narratives that circulate, to this day, with a film of emotionalism underlying them. Consequently, the films and their themes of valor and loyalty, love for one's country, and death in wartime resonate even more strongly with Vietnamese audiences.

I also trace the refugee lines of flight outside of the frames of the films, advancing a Critical Refugee Studies (CRS) method of analysis that centralizes refugees in popular culture and ascertains the filaments of joy and loss, of memories and critiques, threaded within *Life of a Flower* and *Song Lang*. This mode of looking, as my co-writers and I arrive to in *Departures: An Introduction to Critical Refugee Studies*, allows for "the worlds of refugees to be evident, on their own terms."[7] The task of the CRS scholar, then, is to map the fault lines of creativity and criticality in refugee works and explore the epistemological and worldmaking practices that inhere in them. As I contend in the following pages, refugee movements are bound to a queer, feminist, and critical sensibility, one closely twined with *cải lương* itself. Reading through refugee affects and itineraries lets us probe the relations between objects and the feelings they engender while opening up vital inquiries into other critical archives and models of critique that focus on refugees.

Life of a Flower, Cải Lương, and the Excesses of the Melodrama and the Musical

Dubbed the first "sound" film made in Việt Nam, *Life of a Flower* featured for the first time post-synchronous dialogue by Vietnamese actors. Captured within a studio, sound is crucial to the film's narrative and emotive impact. Taking place in Hà Nội during the First Indochina War, the film's story is set in 1953 (the year the film was made) and begins with the peregrinations of a Catholic family who seek shelter from the chaos of war. To communicate such dramatic events, the film emotes through song the women's sorrows and joys and uses Foley sounds to cue the sonic memories of wartime Việt Nam.

The film is further marked by its transnational modes of production and serves as one of the early examples of a transnational collaboration between a French director (Claude Bernard) as well as Chinese and Vietnamese industry players. Some scenes were shot in a Hong Kong studio, in which Chinese actors appeared and where Vietnamese performers were flown to, while others were filmed on location in the country's capital. More locally, the Vietnamese collaboration involves *cải lương* singers and songwriters, an ensemble that brings together the film's production studio (Kim Chung Film Studio) with the Hà Nội-based Kim Chung Opera House. Its cast of players includes Trần Viết Long, the film's main investor, promoter, and screenwriter (his pen name was Trần Lang). He was also the real-life husband and stage manager of the main actor in the film, Kim Chung, a beloved opera singer who often headlined the popular theater venue.[8] As the manager of the opera house and film studio, he named both after his wife and wrote into the screenplay that the characters would go to a theater called Kim Chung for a night out on the town.

In yet another collapsing of text and context, the real-life family dynamics on set paralleled the real-life drama that structured the film's production. As his wife's manager, Trần Viết Long worked with her brother, Tiểu Lang, and his wife, Kim Xuân, to make the film. In real life, the two women were sisters-in-law and performed as sisters onscreen. The family's popularity as a renowned family of singers and artists lends the film an additional layer of celebrity and authenticity that the film (and Trần) harnessed to make what was then a "blockbuster" movie for its time. It was also the first movie to have been promoted through an extensive marketing plan. Flying a plane, Trần littered parts of Hà Nội with movie posters to advertise the film. Newspapers reported that spectators flocked to the movie theaters in the three regions of the country—Hà Nội, Huế, and Sài Gòn—when it debuted in 1954. The film was so popular that when it was doubled-billed at two different theatres, its canisters were transported by motorbike to accommodate viewer demand.[9]

Mirroring the story of a displaced family onscreen, the family of singers behind the film was forced to break up and leave for the South in 1954. Trần and Kim were among those who participated in the North–South migration after having shot the film in 1953, the year that internally displaced refugees began moving to the South to flee communist persecution. Once *Life of a Flower* was released, writer/producer Trần acquired some wealth and wanted to make another film, but he was never able to do so because of the First and Second Indochinese Wars; he and his actress-wife migrated southward and

then abroad during these wars and their aftermath. In 1954, the family decided to divide the film reels among themselves: Trần's brother-in-law and sister-in-law stayed in Hà Nội and kept one copy, while Trần and Kim kept the other, moving first to Sài Gòn in 1954 and then to France in the 1970s after the war ended. Trần tried to finance another film in 1985 but could not, as the Vietnamese state did not recognize *Việt Kiều* (overseas Vietnamese) capital and disallowed any Vietnamese diasporic film from being made in the country.[10] Having never produced a film again, Trần died in 2003 in Sài Gòn. His wife donated the film to the state, which has since restored and archived it at the Film Archives (Viện Phim) in Hà Nội. Kim died in Sài Gòn in 2008.[11]

In articles on *Life of a Flower* and its recent screenings in Việt Nam, none of them discuss the other reason why Trần and Kim's family may have had to flee to the South: it was because *cải lương* singers were persecuted in the North. As Barley Norton notes, after the August Revolution, the Party began to aggressively manage and censor certain cultural expressions, deeming, for example, that "*Tuồng* was too feudal; *Cải lương* was too sentimental and romantic; but *Chèo* was favored because of its credential as popular folk art and potential as vehicle for mass propaganda."[12] Thus, *cải lương*'s demise in this region of the country strongly figures into the story. With its colonial roots and melodramatic expressiveness, *cải lương* was intensely critiqued by the Vietnamese Communist Party in the latter half of the twentieth century.

By virtue of its openness to change, as Philip Taylor details, *cải lương* has always courted controversy from the early twentieth century on, specifically in its borrowings from Chinese opera and French colonial culture. For some colonial-era singers it was a means, for example, to collaborate with the French and critique communism as a political way of life. Taylor further argues that *cải lương* was suspect for other reasons: "its moral value in the form of popular entertainment, unacceptable mixing of disparate influences, degree of foreign-ness, class status and political tendency, and finally, dubious sponsorship by a succession of states, both colonial and post-colonial."[13] The gendered nature of the genre was problematic as well: its feminized, melodramatic overtones ran counter to the masculinist images of socialist realism that the Party wanted to espouse for the nation following the First Indochina War. Despite its provocations, or because of them, *cải lương*, Taylor writes, "became one of the major cultural and artistic movements in the urban areas of southern Vietnam in the twentieth century and its following and influence [has] spread elsewhere in the nation and overseas."[14]

Life of a Flower's narrative culminates in the tumult of the 1940s and 1950s. In 1945, the First Indochinese War began when Vietnamese communists led a mass movement that toppled the Japanese-installed government in Hà Nội. The following year, France went to war with its former colony but later lost a major battle at Điện Biên Phủ against the Việt Minh in 1954, resulting in a withdrawal of all French troops from the country soon after. The Geneva Accords decreed that Việt Nam would be divided at the seventeenth parallel, with the communists receiving control only of the North and pending nation-wide elections that were never held in the country. Against this chaotic backdrop, "nearly a million refugees sought refuge in the territory of what would become the Republic of Vietnam (RVN), a US-supported regime headed by Catholic leader Ngô Đình Diệm."[15] During the 304-day grace period that the UN allowed for people to transfer across regions, "the mass movement from the North to the South became known as *Cuộc Di cư Vĩ đại* [Great Transmigration] and the refugees became known as the *Bắc di cư năm mươi tư* [Northern Refugees from Fifty-Four], or *Bắc di cư*."[16] The mode of travel for this group (who are still colloquially known as *Bắc di cư*) or Bắc 54 was aided by the U.S., the French, and other private voluntary agencies like the U.S. National Catholic Welfare Conference.[17] Most of the displaced were Catholic Kinh but also included economic migrants in search of a new life.[18]

While the U.S. campaign was touted as successful by the U.S. in relocating one million refugees transregionally, for the refugees themselves, there remained a sorrowful feeling of grief and a great deal of ambivalence in leaving. As Lien Hang Nguyen writes, these migrants formed the "double diaspora of Việt Nam's Catholics," to reuse the title of her essay. She describes the excruciating decision to move and the sense of betrayal they felt when exiled from their ancestral homes at the hands of the Vietnamese government.[19] As Nguyen argues, these refugees became ensconced in a swirl of events and emotions

before and after resettlement, observing that "eight hundred thousand Catholics who fled the North, left primarily out of fear," all the while being encouraged by Washington who "enticed people to rally to the South" with the promise of money and stability.[20] Phi Nguyen further notes that "what began as a temporary sojourn for northerners traveling South became permanent, one that was rife with the psychical pain of separation and expulsion."[21] Refugee-sojourners eventually invested their political energies into the region to support the Catholic leadership of Ngô Đình Diệm, the synergies of which would help shape the Republic of South Việt Nam and its ideological formations from thereon.

The dual themes of political exile and forced migration reverberate in the storyline and sound design of *Life of a Flower.* The film's opening scene uses acoustic and mnemonic reminders of a shared traumatic past to tell a story of refugee loss. Announcing the historical frame of the film (the migration from Hà Nội to Thái Bình), the intertitle is underlined by the percussive sounds of warfare and scenes of refugees fleeing on foot by land. While the camera lingers on the migrants, the film's focalization eventually settles on a family of women (of two sisters and their mother) and their migration southward.

In the film, Ngọc Lan (played by Kim Chung), her sister Ngọc Thủy (played by Xuân Kim), and their mother escape the war and communist persecution, as they are part of an educated class of Catholics displaced by the Franco-Indochinese conflict. When the matriarch can no longer walk, they stop at a large manor and ask the owner if they can stay to rest. A love story quickly unfolds between the property owner's son, Thiện, and Ngọc Lan, but theirs is a chaste romance that will be thwarted throughout by men who try to exploit her naïveté and tarnish her reputation. Viewers soon apprehend that the "flower" of the title refers to the tragic life and death of the eldest sister. In her prettified temperament and prodigious talent, she bears resemblance to the (in)famous character of Kiều in Nguyễn Du's *Truyện Kiều*, or *Tale of Kieu,* a literary allusion in the film that appends another sheen of emotionalism surrounding Ngọc Lan.

Originally published in 1820, *The Tale of Kieu* still stands as the epitome of classic Vietnamese literature. In the epic poem, Kiều and her travels and travails begin immediately: a highly educated woman who marries for money (so that she can pay her father's debts and have him released from prison), she is soon kidnapped and sex-trafficked, forced to become a prostitute several times in the story. When she and her lover Kim Trọng finally reunite, he is married to her younger sister, but he and Kiều agree to live together as husband and second wife. Even as the narrative portrays a prostitute and her misfortunes, for the Vietnamese, as George Boudarel argues, "Kiều has remained for [them], the image of their own misfortunes, the mirror that reflects their own suffering transfigured."[22] Similarly, in Nathalie Nguyen's reading of Kiều, the bourgeois Vietnamese woman's "fate, beauty and talent lead to misery,"[23] but she is treasured as such by the Vietnamese, who see not only themselves in the literary character but also their country and the hardships it has undergone.

Indeed, *Life of a Flower's* narrative is contoured by the waywardness of the beautiful and talented Ngọc Lan who follows the same path of errantry as Kiều, though her trajectory is marked with some distinctions. While she does not become a prostitute, she is always in danger of becoming one or being seen as one. When she walks the street, she recognizes that her presence in the urbanscape marks her as sexually available. Alone in the city, she and her sister become prey to men and their malintents. Hungry and destitute, they are invited to work and stay with their childhood friend, Tam. When told that her lover Thiện has died from a gunshot wound, Ngọc Lan drinks to excess with Tam, only to discover the next morning that he raped her. When he makes sexual overtures toward the younger sister, the two women leave his apartment and become displaced again.

A film about wandering women, it tells a moral story about the tragedies that befall them, anchoring itself in the notion of female refugeehood and the dangers of women's sexuality. Such melodramatic themes are orchestrated through the genre of the musical so that the film's many excesses—its tragic sentimentality, song and dance numbers, and intertextual allusions—offer a non-normative reading of what is excessive to the narrative and cannot be resolved: the women's errant desires, even as the narrative prioritizes the idea of women's propriety. Featuring expressive songs and dances by the two sisters, which disrupt the film's linear narrative, *Life of a Flower* sets up a precedent for the viewing of

Figure 7.1   Screenshot by author. Singing sisters Ngọc Lan and Ngọc Thủy, played by sisters–in–law Kim Chung and Kim Xuân, director Claude Bernard, *Life of a Flower,* 1954.

Vietnamese film in terms of aural and visual excesses, an extravagance related to the musical film genre (*loại phim ca nhạc*) and which has rarely been replicated since.[24]

I mobilize a study of the melodrama and the musical to argue that *Life of a Flower* displays "the hallmarks of melodrama (heightened emotional display, spectacle and excess) [and] give[s] way to a stylization that provides an aesthetic distance, an irony, that cannot be ignored."[25] Operating in a similar vein is the musical genre in film, which showcases the eruptions of self-expression within the narrative's propulsive movement to the end. Such displays of emotionalism evince a "'queer' libidinal heterogeneity—something that far exceeds the parameters of the domestic, oedipalized heterosexuality promoted by the narrative."[26] Here, the excess of that "something," which "cannot be ignored," is the positioning of the women in the film.

Certainly, the two sisters and their wholesome goodness, performed in service to a heteropatriarchal narrative, are integral to the film's tale about the virtues of settling down, even though the women's forced nomadism—and the problem attendant to this condition—remains the movie's emotive pulse. But the women's star presence on and offscreen as singers and actors also direct the film's energy, as they sign into being a wholly different way of seeing Vietnamese women perform as songstresses who dominate the frames of the film. As such, the women serve as markers of tragic femininity, while their performances offer up the high emotionalism that the film affectionately traffics in, producing an extratextual frame for the reading of its ironic aestheticism and theatricality.

Related to these registers, *Life of a Flower* exhibits a love shared between the two sisters (again, sisters-in-law in real life) that becomes a more compelling spectacle to watch for viewers than the tragedy of heterosexual love that drives the narrative. As with *The Tale of Kieu*, in *Life of a Flower,* the younger

sister replaces the love object for the male subject—in grieving over the body of the dead woman, they become a newly configured couple, one that suggests a queer triangulation that, again, exceeds the narrative's genteel, heteronormative planes. Ultimately, the film comes alive most when its text and context collide, as the factual details of the film's main players and their extradiegetic migration are critical for locating the film's emotional force and potential sites for spectatorial pleasure. Its intertextual qualities may have produced an extra frisson of pleasure for viewers in hearing for the first time a musical featuring popular *cải lương* actors and witnessing the film's self-reflexive moments play out.

This homage to excess is embedded in the seams of the film *Song Long* as well. In the following section, I advance a reading of the state's domination of the South, which aimed to "erase the loss of southern society and facilitate an imaginary of a united nation."[27] In post-war Sài Gòn, the setting for *Song Lang*, the state also censored and censured the beloved art form that was once flourishing and privatized in the 1960s and 1970s, another moment of *cải lương*'s golden era. Leon Lê's queer staging of 1980s Sài Gòn hinges on the state's cannibalization of the genre in nationalizing and masculinizing the theme of communist uplift. Intertwined with this recent history of *cải lương* is my analysis of the refugee figure—the director himself. As a returning refugee, Lê's presence limns the film and foregrounds how the refugee narrative may be full of errant narrative possibilities.

Sài Gòn in the 1980s: *Song Lang* and the Look of Nostalgia

When *Life of a Flower* was screened to audiences in Việt Nam in 2012, newspaper articles discussed its affecting portrayal of womanhood and quaint archive of imagery, waxing nostalgic about its scenes of a vintage Hà Nội and women in white *áo dài*s.[28] Here, I examine this retroactive, introspective mode of looking at Vietnamese film, as more and more contemporary films appear to take a honeyed perspective on the country's recent past.[29] My point is that for a young generation of Vietnamese—many of whom have not experienced the war in the ways that their parents and grandparents had—the past functions as a site to be mined for pastiche and nostalgia. According to Rey Chow, however, nostalgia is not simply a regressive mode of looking back; it can be both critical and complex, at times "constituting a cultural politics of self-nativizing" of local cultures and customs while proffering rebukes of a hypercapitalist present by providing "an alternative temporality" and the "fantasy of communal formations."[30]

This complexity surrounding the past, I contend, shapes a different way of looking in Vietnamese cinema, a signpost that marks a shift in how the Vietnamese view their past and grapple with the country's contemporaneity. The nostalgia in these films shows the modes by which a prewar Sài Gòn, "reformed" by Communists after the Vietnam War ended, is remembered by its inhabitants and by the diaspora as (and continues to be) a vital site of urbane cosmopolitanism. As an example, *Song Lang* serves as a love letter to Sài Gòn's past in its retro look and story about love and loss. Unlike other recent Vietnamese films that dwell on the past, however, director Leon Lê puts into a play a darker postwar story about a gangster (Dũng) and an artist (Linh) and their unlikely queer romance.

Against the backdrop of this romance is 1980s Sài Gòn (renamed Hồ Chí Minh City in 1975), revisualized in oversaturated colors and with onscreen displays of queer masculinity. *Song Lang*'s bleakness alludes to the darkness of this time period in relation to the city's postwar poverty and its privations in terms of culture. As Khai Thu Nguyen argues, when *cải lương* was eventually banished to the South after the Vietnam War, the art form became "superimposed on the body of the southerner," so that its excesses came to "represent the excesses and aberrations of an ideology that was in need of purification."[31] In purifying the South, the state meted out punishment of "the southerner's excessively feminized body" through the processes of reeducation and economic displacement.[32] Mapping the body of the southerner onto the body politic of South Việt Nam, the Communist North accused the region of sheltering, through *cải lương*, the embrace of romance and sentimentality.

From its opening frames, we see Dũng ("Thunderbolt") terrorizing people who owe money to his boss, a female loan shark. His aggressive streak is attributed to his mother's abandonment of him and his father after the Vietnam War ended. A *cải lương* performer, she leaves for the U.S. to escape the

communist regime's encroachment of the southern city and appropriation of the cultural form. Dũng's father was also part of the troupe, in which he played the *đàn nguyệt*, an ancient instrument that features stirringly in the opera's orchestral sounds and serves a role in deepening Dũng and Linh's attraction for one another. Dũng has become a cold and ruthless criminal in the present day, spurning his love for *cải lương* because of its association with his mother's leave-taking and father's death. When the film begins, then, Dũng's sense of betrayal fuels both his attachment and antipathy to *cải lương*.

The betrayal that Dũng feels for having been forsaken by his mother and, to some extent, the motherland is understandable within the historical context and political climate that the film points to. After the country's "reunification" in 1975, and amid wars with China and Cambodia in the late 1970s, the newly unified government put into place a centrally planned economy throughout the country, based on an economic structure that had already been impacted by French colonialism's extractive nature and the absolute ecological devastation that resulted from the many wars fought on Vietnamese soil. The postwar economy thus "staggered from one economic crisis to another."[33] In the wake of the state's massive reconstructive efforts after 1975, increased poverty and widespread hunger were made worse since foreign aid to Việt Nam had ceased. The U.S. also instituted a trade embargo on the country, which would not be lifted until 1994. During such desperate times, the state established a policy to distribute food and goods via coupons in what is known as the subsidy period (*thời bao cấp*), which took place from 1975 to 1986. This period ended when the Fifth Party Congress officially implemented the economic reforms called *Đổi Mới*, or Renovation, in 1987.

In the South, the government inaugurated other disastrous policies that profoundly changed the constitution of the region's economics and demographics, for example, establishing reeducation camps that detained and tortured those who had worked for or collaborated with the U.S. government during the war. Those incarcerated included a range of high- and low-level military officers as well as translators, police officers, and sex workers. Also punished were middle-class urbanites, many of whom were ethnic Chinese, as they were sent to New Economic Zones (NEZs) in the rural areas to live and work the land. In the process of being "socialized" by Hà Nội, as Ngo Vinh Long argues, southern Việt Nam found itself "in an even worse social and economic situation. In addition to the unemployed and hungry mentioned above, one must add the several million Saigon soldiers and police, as well as the more than 300,000 prostitutes, who suddenly found themselves out of work. There were also several hundred thousand war invalids and 800,000 orphans."[34]

Because of these collateral effects of the war, the North's retributive "national reprogramming" of the South, to use Long Bui's exacting term, factored heavily into the exodus of southern Vietnamese refugees from Việt Nam to countries like the U.S., France, Australia, and others, from the 1970s to the late 1980s.[35] The successive waves of out-migration during this period would later form the expansive geographical and cultural borders that makeup today's Vietnamese diaspora. As part of this diaspora, Leon Lê's refugee history is woven into the making of the film and outlines *Song Lang's* critique of the postwar communist state and its amorality.

Song Lang and the Sounds of Propaganda

In articles detailing *Song Lang's* mode of production and reception in Việt Nam and the U.S., director Lê traces his trajectory out of Việt Nam as a young child and back to the country to make a film about *cải lương* as an adult.[36] In 1992, he was 13 years old when he left Sài Gòn and arrived in Orange County, California. Lê recalls how he came without his parents (who were to come later) but arrived with distinct memories of his love for *cải lương*, which formed the impetus for *Song Lang's* script. In 2016, he returned to Việt Nam to shoot the film. It was there that the film was well received, and consequently, Lê truly felt Vietnamese in his identity and roots, stating: "Hearing the responses after the film came out, and having people understanding and sharing my point of view and emotions that I put into the film, I feel like I'm not alone anymore. In the end, I'm still Vietnamese at heart. It's in my blood."[37]

Aligning himself as "Vietnamese" in his passion for *cải lương*, Lê's claimed that the film is "just a drama," even while it was momentously released during the one-hundredth year anniversary of *cải lương* in the country.[38] Lê's assertion is pragmatic, given that the subjects of postwar Sài Gòn and *cải lương* have been provocative topics for the Vietnamese state. Nevertheless, this genre's popularity in the postwar South and overseas communities informs the political subtext underlying Lê's sumptuous drama (co-written with veteran woman writer and theater performer Nguyễn Thị Minh Ngọc) about opera and queer love during a time of extreme hardship for the city's inhabitants. As much as the politics of the film are tamped down in its surrounding discourses, *Song Lang*'s criticism of the postwar Vietnamese government and its "feminization" of the South is clear due to the folk opera's Indigenous southern roots and its solicitation of sympathy for a queer gangster, based on real-life mobster and devoted supporter of *cải lương*, Năm Cam. Absent from these extratextual details is the way that *Song Lang* faults the state for the mother's leaving, the impoverished conditions and criminal elements of the city, and finally, the privations of a once-vibrant cultural form. In no uncertain terms, the film shows that the state created the conditions for the precaritization of its own people, namely southerners, in the postwar era.

The state's presence-as-a-problem in Sài Gòn's postwar society is positioned at several moments in the film, made manifest through the sound design and musical score. In the film's beginning, we hear militarist propaganda broadcast through a loudspeaker, its tangled cables snaking throughout the city. But reaction shots of the people who wake up to these sounds show they are unfazed by the pronouncements of national unity and military strength. Rather, people's everyday rhythms are syncopated to the beats of a familial sociality. Thus, while the radio host drones on about the "People's Army of Vietnam" that is "always ready to fight for the country's independence and for freedom," we also see in the following sequence a series of shots empty of people, pillow shots of communist flags festooned across apartment buildings, and canted (and thus derealized) images of the famous sights of Sài Gòn, namely, the Notre Dame Cathedral and Turtle Lake. As the movie emphasizes, in an era during which the state has imprisoned and displaced so many southerners, what provides the people with a moral compass by which to live their lives is made internally.

That moral compass is symbolized by the "song lang" of the film's title, a percussive instrument used in *cải lương* to regulate a song's tempo. In the film's opening, Dũng holds in his hands the musical instrument bequeathed to him by his dead father, and intones his father's words about how its regulating function in music also provides a "moral framework for the artist." These lessons about morality are imparted through two important figurations in the film—that of the suffering father and the performance of *cải lương* itself—both of which come together most resoundingly in a scene that uses seamless editing to convey the strains of an artistic and erotic communion. Having disliked each other from the start—Dũng threatens to shut down Linh's mother's opera house because it is in debt to his boss—Dũng and Linh later discover their shared passion for *cải lương* by way of their performing together. Precipitating this is the moment when Dũng reveals that his father had once penned songs for the family's opera troupe. Urging Linh to sing his father's dirge, Dũng picks up his lute to play alongside Linh, in what is emotively staged as a visual and aural commemoration of his late father, orchestrated to link the ties between past and present.

This scene explains two facets of Dũng's past. It melds father and son across time and space through their love for music. As it also features a flashback, viewers see the mother preparing to leave while her only child (Dũng) watches her go. Overlaid onto this moment of erotic intensity between Dũng and Linh is the primordial loss of the maternal figure. The lyrics address this loss while alluding as well to the metacinematic framing of the film: "Only through this song can I express the pain/I'm missing you throughout these sleepless nights … Only the sounds of my lute echoing in the night/as if it's crying for the end of a love story." Again, the sequence is notable for its high emotionalism in triangulating the three men and strengthening the bonds between them in response to the mother, the loss of whom was motivated by the postwar state's misappropriation of the opera form.

By the film's penultimate conclusion, in which Dũng goes to meet Linh at the opera theater only to be slain by a man whose wife had killed herself and two young daughters when she wasn't able to pay

Figure 7.2 Screenshot by author. Dũng and Linh meet for the first time in *Song Lang*, director Leon Lê,
Song Lang, 2018.

her debts, viewers connect the opening with the final scenes of Dũng's death and redemption. In a con-
tinuation of the beginning frames, in which he cradles the song lang in his hands and pays his respects
to his dead father, Dũng visits his loan shark boss to pay back the debt that the suicide victim/mother
had once owed her. Coming full circle—that is, in returning to a love for *cải lương* that once nourished
him—he then opens a trunk full of his family's mementos of the opera and explores his family's illus-
trious past as performers by the film's end. A "reformed" man in the next scenes, he wears a clean white
shirt, dons his lute, and approaches the opera house to meet with Linh with renewed vigor but is ulti-
mately knifed in the back by an avenging patriarch.

The high drama accompanying these scenes is piped into the opera songs as well, songs Lê recomposed
specifically for the film. At the same time, Dũng meets his unfortunate fate, the opera of "Mỹ Chau-
Trọng Thủy," which relays the story of two ill-fated lovers of times past, unfolds contrapuntally on the
stage, signaling that the songs and their lyrics play an important allegorical role in the film. The legend
of "Mỹ Chau-Trọng Thủy" is set in ancient wartime Việt Nam, an epic story that spans decades of war
and strife and involves familial treachery and filicide. The opera's lyrics evoke the Romeo and Juliet-
like themes of the story—of the lovers' enforced separation because of familial ties, a daughter's betrayal
to her father, and finally, the father's beheading of his daughter when he finds out she has provided her
lover with wartime secrets. As Trọng Thủy holds the body of his dead lover on the proscenium and
mourns the loss of Mỹ Chau, we see Dũng's murder and his lifeless body being hauled away by the
police, his blood washed away by the rain. Later, Linh comes out to meet Dũng outside the opera house
and finds no one there.

The film's nesting of stories about star-crossed love across time and space is most forcefully under-
stood through the frames of refugee history. The legend and opera of Mỹ Chau and Trọng Thủy replay
the drama of a separation between two families, between North and South, during both the First and
Second Indochinese Wars, and most energetically, retells the story of an amoral patriarch that breaks
up and destroys both families in war's aftermath. The ruthless king kills his daughter when he finds out
that she has betrayed him. While *Song Lang* (melo)dramatizes and heightens the loving relationships
between men, the haunting essence of trauma remains the vengeful politics of a communist regime,

the politics of which made way for a paternalistic, violent domination of the South in the post-1975 era, which sought to remasculinize this region via reeducation and ideological indoctrination. The film's extravagance, its storyline, style, music, costume, and color, becomes a celebration of *cải lương*'s excessive form and a criticism of the state's appropriation of it. Lê's refugee memory informs the film's critique of the punishing conditions that the state created in the South following Viet Nam's history of war and imperial conquest.

Nostalgia and Sentimentality in Vietnamese Cinema

The films analyzed in this chapter operate within a maximalist key, abounding with dramatic energy, nostalgia, and sentimentality. According to Rey Chow, the "sentimental is an affective orientation and tendency, one that is often characterized by apparent emotional excess, in the form of exaggerated grief or dejection or a propensity towards the shedding of tears."[39] Looking at "feminized" film genres in East Asian cinemas that are often derided as such, Chow defines the word "sentimental" in Chinese is marked by a "disposition toward making compromises and toward making-do with even–and especially—that which is oppressive and unbearable."[40]

The sentiment embroidering the films *Life of a Flower* and *Song Lang* is influenced by their scaffolding but also crystallizes around acts of "making do" with the material remains of the South and cultural vestiges of Sài Gòn. This sentimentality also helps to deflect the films' critique of the North Vietnamese regime's forced displacement of Vietnamese refugees: those who fled to the South in 1954 and then, in many cases, fled again in the years after 1975. These critiques knit their way into the modes by which they were made, whereby the actors' and directors' stories of refugee migration structure the politics and aesthetics of their work. Highlighting the refugee at the fulcrum of these films, I underscore the volatility of this gendered figuration, as it is queerly wedded to the genres of the musical and melodrama and the themes of exile and errantry. My reading highlights how Vietnamese refugee creatives work through their refugee memories, musical passions, and queer desires to realize them in film; accordingly, these filmic representations undo the dominant imagery of refugees as those defined by trauma and tragedy. In their visual and aural excesses, refugee narratives brim with sticky affect, one that affords refugees in the diaspora to feel ever more affectionately toward the cultural products of pre- and postwar South Việt Nam.

Through the lens of CRS and its methodology of centering refugees as social actors and potent critics of the state, an illuminating study of the two films becomes visible. An emergent field, CRS reformulates the ways in which refugees might be viewed from their own perspectives. Most useful to me, CRS asks what this reorientation would look like if a hegemonic visual archive was supplanted by a refugee's own archive of imagery, sound, and affect. Based on this method, I have advanced a reading of the popular generic forms of the musical and melodrama—upon which *Life of a Flower* and *Song Lang* are based and lovingly delineated—and provided a deep contextual analysis of the films' texts and paratexts to show the ways that refugee histories and memories are sewn into the works' ontological form and critique, while also revealing how other archives are possible.

Notes

1 Luu, "Cai Luong (Renovated Theatre)," 92.
2 Brandon, *Theatre in Southeast Asia*, 75.
3 Marr, *Vietnamese Tradition on Trial*, 167.
4 Luu, "Cai Luong (Renovated Theatre)," 93.
5 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 10.
6 Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 111.
7 Espiritu et al., *Departures,* 18.
8 "*Kiếp Hoa*: Một thời Hà Nội."
9 Seeshelloc, "*Kiếp Hoa*: Nét Son của Hà Nội Ngày Tháng Cũ."

10 "Chiêm ngưỡng tài tử, giai nhân điện ảnh một thời trong *Kiếp Hoa*."
11 Trần, "*Kiếp Hoa* Ngầy Ấy."
12 Norton, *Songs for the Spirits*, 33.
13 Taylor, "Digesting Reform," 138–9.
14 Taylor, "Digesting Reform," 139.
15 Hansen, "*Bắc Di Cư*," 174.
16 Hansen, "*Bắc Di Cư*," 174–5.
17 Weisner, *Victims and Survivors*, 9.
18 Weisner, *Victims and Survivors*, 9.
19 Nguyen, "The Double Diaspora of Vietnam's Catholics," 494.
20 Nguyen, "The Double Diaspora of Vietnam's Catholics," 494.
21 Nguyen, "Fighting the First Indochina War Again?," 209–10.
22 Boudarel, "Kiều or the Misfortunes of Virtue in Vietnamese," 47.
23 Nguyen, "A Classical Heroine and Her Modern Manifestation," 456.
24 There are very few musicals in the Vietnamese film canon. However, recent films like *Brilliant Kisses* (2010) and *Long-Legged Girls* (2006) use popular music as part of their MTV-style aesthetic.
25 Marchetti, "Excess and Understatement," 52.
26 Farmer, *Spectacular Passions*, 86.
27 Nguyen, "A Personal Sorrow," 268.
28 Nguyễn, "*Kiếp Hoa*."
29 Such recent films have been *Cô Ba Sài Gòn* [*The Tailor*] (2017) and *Tháng Năm Rực Rỡ* [*The Go-Go Sisters*] (2018).
30 Chow, "A Souvenir of Love," 210.
31 Nguyen, "A Personal Sorrow," 264.
32 Nguyen, "A Personal Sorrow," 264.
33 White and Marr, "Introduction: Postwar Vietnam," 2.
34 Long, "The Socialization of South Vietnam," 133.
35 Bui, *Returns of War*, 178.
36 See articles by Kaye, "*Song Lang*"; Tseng, "How a Broadway Dancer"; and Chu, "LAAPFF Interview."
37 Chu, "LAAPFF Interview."
38 Kaye, "*Song Lang*."
39 Chow, *Sentimental Fabulations*, 15.
40 Chow, *Sentimental Fabulations*, 18.

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8

REFUGEES TO WORKER-MIGRANTS

Transformations of Cross-Border Migration in Amitav Ghosh's Novels

Asis De

In *The Great Derangement*, Amitav Ghosh writes, "My ancestors were ecological refugees long before the term was invented."[1] This is one of the reasons Ghosh is particularly sensitive to the unwillingly displaced populations and refugees in almost all his fictional narratives. Ghosh's use of the term "ecological refugees" for his ancestors migrating away from the British Indian province of Bengal to Bihar in the nineteenth century due to a massive flood emphasizes that human migration due to environmental disaster is no less significant than the dislocation of millions after the turbulent politico-historical events in the post-Partition Indian subcontinent. Historically, it is a truism that the word "refugee" started permeating the Indian literary imagination mainly after the Partition of British India in 1947, and the Indian conception of "refugee" is essentially validated by a sense of the border between the two nascent nations of India and Pakistan. However, the refugee in Ghosh's creative imagination is, more broadly, a destitute figure who witnesses the loss of almost every materiality of their past in the whirlwind of situational disasters, like Ghosh's "ancestors sitting huddled on an outcrop, looking on as their dwellings were washed away."[2] Ghosh's refugee, fundamentally, lacks a home: either they lose it or they leave it behind. This chapter, organized into five sections, explores the evolving trajectory of Amitav Ghosh's representation of refugees over his five major novels set in the South Asian context and beyond: *The Circle of Reason* (1986), *The Shadow Lines* (1988), *The Glass Palace* (2000), *The Hungry Tide* (2004), and *Gun Island* (2019). The first section overviews the historical and other situational contexts of cross-border migration and multiplicity of the refugee condition across Ghosh's literary canvas. The three following sections track the transformation of Ghosh's ethical engagement with a variety of refugees as storyteller, pinpointing the shift in his depictions of destitute twentieth-century refugees to twenty-first-century cyber-educated undocumented worker-migrants to Europe. The concluding fifth section sums up the evolution of Ghosh's representation of refugees and their shared identity. For Ghosh, the identity of a refugee or cross-border migrant is hardly a permanent condition of exile in distress. Rather, it retains a hopeful, resilient spirit that transforms the refugee into a resident.

At its simplest, the refugee is a figure who is forced to migrate to a safer place after losing home in a conflict—be it political, ethno-religious, societal, economic, or even environmental. The statutory definition of the "refugee" in *Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1951), finally agreed upon by the United Nations in 1967, is a fair product of well-thought-out jurisprudence which justifies the logic behind the refugee's cross-border migration and stateless condition.[3] However, the ground realities of refugees' plight across the globe are very different from one instance to the other. The scenario of refugee rehabilitation and support systems for asylum seekers and illegal worker-migrants in developed countries is substantially different from that of India, Pakistan, or Bangladesh. Therefore, the narratives accommodating refugees' experiences in these South Asian countries focus primarily on

issues like pre-migration community conflicts, the plight, and dehumanization of refugees in camps as well as in places such as railway stations and terminuses, individual memories of exploitation and injustice, the negligence of the state in rehabilitation, the use of the refugee population as vote banks by the political parties, and state-sponsored atrocities inflicted upon groups of refugees. Issues like the rights of refugees, civilian movements to broaden resource supports, and legal aids for both refugees and economic migrants—which often find place in Euro-American refugee narratives—are rarely visible in South Asian Anglophone refugee narratives. Unlike his earlier novels, Ghosh's latest novel *Gun Island* addresses these latter issues to some degree, as some of the characters enter European countries as refugees. However, Amitav Ghosh does not depict refugees as never-ending crises but as something fundamental to the human condition of the Indian subcontinent in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The vast tapestry of stories over time and space delineated in Ghosh's novels accommodates refugees and economic migrants as they "'dwell in travel' in cultural spaces that flow across borders" and contribute to the novelist's invocation of the "syncretic elements in culture(s) as a possible solution to intercultural conflict."[4] Most interesting is the variety of refugee figures in his narratives. From political (the Indian Partition) refugees in *The Circle of Reason* and *The Shadow Lines*, to war refugees and ethno-religious refugees in *The Glass Palace* and *The Hungry Tide*, to ecological refugees and worker-migrants entering Europe through illegal trafficking in *Gun Island*, Ghosh's representation of border crossers evidences a wide range of ideas and ethical values.

In his book *Amitav Ghosh* (2007), Anshuman Mondal observes that "the figure of the 'refugee' is one that has continued to inform [Ghosh's] fiction throughout his career."[5] Mondal's scholarly statement, which was made fifteen years ago, understands the "refugee" only as post-Partition destitute peasants crossing the border to seek refuge in India. To Mondal, Ghosh positions the refugee primarily as the subaltern, unwelcomed "other" to the urban "*bhadralok*, the upper and middle sections of Bengali society," in novels like *The Circle of Reason*, *The Shadow Lines*, and *The Hungry Tide*.[6] Ghosh showcases the post-Partition refugees in his first two novels, *The Circle of Reason* and *The Shadow Lines*, primarily *en masse*—as a wave of faceless, destitute subjects with whom the novelist finds an ethical engagement as a storyteller. Ghosh recognizes the group identity of refugees in these novels as a reality of the time and records their destitution from the point of view of a detached empathetic observer. It is in *The Glass Palace* that Ghosh first shows a deep interest in individual stories of migration and destitution, as he tells Aldama in an interview after its publication: "And in the end my real interest is in the predicament of individuals."[7] In both *The Glass Palace* and *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh's representation of refugees becomes more intimate as he delineates a comprehensive matrix straddling both the past and the present of refugees, as the "refugee's self-identity is anchored more to who she or he was than what she or he has become."[8] For example, the intimate conversation of one of the Bangladeshi refugees with Kusum, a character in *The Hungry Tide*, accommodates both the past and present of the peasant refugees:

> "*Once we lived in Bangladesh, in Khulna jila* (district)*: we're tide country people, from the Sundarbans' edge. When the war broke out, our village was burned to ash; we crossed the border … We were met by the police and taken away; in buses they drove us to a settlement camp.*"[9]

The speaker is one of the low-caste Hindu peasants who had left their homes in Bangladesh as war victims and ethno-religious refugees and who identify themselves as the "Bastuhara" or destitute people without any home. From these "Bastuhara" (homeless) refugees rowing their boat in *The Hungry Tide* to the economic migrants on the Blue Boat stranded in the Mediterranean on its way to Italy in *Gun Island*, Ghosh's treatment of the refugee has accommodated multiplicity of vision over time.

Ghosh's representation of refugees and worker-migrants appearing as "refugees" has altered courses interestingly throughout his oeuvre: from the post-Partition ethno-religious refugees pouring in India from East Pakistan/Bangladesh in *The Circle of Reason* and *The Shadow Lines* to the state-sponsored genocide of the similar type of low-caste Hindu refugees in 1979 in *The Hungry Tide*; from the 1941 exodus of the Indian refugees from Burmese cities and towns in *The Glass Palace* to the young worker-migrants

from the twenty-first-century Indian subcontinent reaching Italy as "refugees" with the support of organized human trafficking in *Gun Island*. Amitav Ghosh's evolving migration vocabulary clarifies why many of his major fictional characters are textually identified as migrants and not refugees, as the term "refugee" has its exclusive politico-historical dimensions in the postcolonial cultural context of the Indian subcontinent. Claire Gallien's assessment of the term "refugee" as "an historical construction that privileged political and ideological considerations over economic and ecological ones" is, therefore, reasonably applicable to Ghosh's ethno-religious refugees in the spatio-temporal context of twentieth-century India.[10] Interestingly, in *The Calcutta Chromosome* (1995) and the three novels commonly known as the *Ibis* trilogy—*Sea of Poppies* (2008), *River of Smoke* (2011), and *Flood of Fire* (2015)—Ghosh does not use the word "refugee" even once but the word "migrants" with ease. Gallien reads "migrant" as an inclusive "double-edged term" which is broadly used "to avoid discriminating between people because of their reasons for migration."[11] In Ghosh's literary imagination, the "refugee" identity stands for people migrating with surviving members of the family, whereas the economic migrants usually do not move with family but with a few close friends. However, what is common between these two categories is their ability to stand firm against situational hostilities and their resilient spirit for survival.

"Refugees from the East": *The Circle of Reason* and *The Shadow Lines*

While looking at post-Partition Indian Anglophone literatures, one may notice a huge concentration of authors and media pundits on the western border between India and West Pakistan and the corridor of population exchange between Delhi and Lahore, in comparison with the less visible literary attention across the border between India and East Pakistan/Bangladesh. Indian novelists like Khushwant Singh, Anita Desai, Manohar Malgonkar, and Vikram Seth have all composed narratives on the violently turbulent post-Partition days, cross-border migration, and the destitute refugees, mostly set in north-western India and Delhi. Amitav Ghosh remains the only eminent Anglophone Indian writer to focus exclusively on the refugee scenario across the borderline between India and East Pakistan. It is remarkable to note that the exact phrase "refugees from the east" appears in Ghosh's first two novels—*The Circle of Reason* and *The Shadow Lines*, when he first mentions the refugees in those narratives.

Amitav Ghosh's debut narrative, *The Circle of Reason*, "suggests that its author feels very deeply indeed, about history's victims … who are forced into exile by events beyond their control."[12] The Indian locale in the first part of the narrative is "a village called Lalpukur, about a hundred miles north of Calcutta, *near the border*," where "most of the villagers were *refugees from the east*."[13] Ghosh's treatment of the refugee issue is both spatial and temporal, as he specifies the positionality of the Indian village "near the border" between India and East Pakistan, where post-Partition political refugees find shelter as "history's victims."[14] The majority of refugees who pay the price of Partition have been "*vomited out of their native soil* years ago … and dumped hundreds of miles away" in Lalpukur, which serves as nothing but "a dumping-ground for the refuse from tyrants' frenzies."[15] In this narrative, the refugees have been delineated as human waste expelled from their homes as part of the ethnic cleansing of the poor Hindus from East Pakistan. The specific use of the word "vomit" in Ghosh's narrative recalls Zygmunt Bauman's idea of the stranger, the political and ideological "other," as does his conception of exclusion as the process of "*vomiting* the strangers, banishing them from the limits of the orderly world": "'cleansing'—expelling the strangers beyond the frontiers of the managed and manageable territory."[16]

Ghosh insists further on the historicity of exclusion as a process of expulsion of the ethno-religious "other" from the territoriality of East Pakistan, which continues for decades and reaches its zenith during the civil war and "genocide in Bangladesh": "borders dissolved under the weight of millions of people in panic-stricken flight from an army of animals."[17] The "panic-stricken flight" of millions of refugees from Bangladesh in fear of violence and persecution ends in Lalpukur, the place that offers the much sought-for "consolation of a sort—refuge."[18] Ghosh uses the word "refuge" thrice and the word "refugee" twice in *The Circle of Reason* but remarkably uses the plural form "refugees" five times to emphasize his preference for the representation of their group condition—a portrayal of the refugees

as a faceless collectivity. The representation of the refugee habitus cropping up like make-shift ghettos at Lalpukur in *The Circle of Reason* implies camaraderie among the destitute migrants, and a sense of refugee solidarity while settling down in a new country.

In *The Circle of Reason*, Ghosh implies that the refugees should be considered more than a regional issue with limited impact on the social life of the host nation. Poverty and destitution make the refugees so vulnerable that people with evil intentions often take advantage of them, as Jyoti Das, the police officer in the narrative, apprehends: "there were so many refugees in those border areas and they were *good clay for anyone's hands*."[19] The probability of the misrecognition of the refugees as criminals, prostitutes, and half-paid laborers, is evoked in the phrase "good clay for anyone's hands." Ghosh addresses this issue prominently in *The Hungry Tide,* discussed in the next section. In the second part of *The Circle of Reason,* it appears that Ghosh shifts his attention from the ethno-religious refugees as he does not use the word "refugee" even once and concentrates on the story of Alu's migration to al-Ghazira. However, Robbie B. H. Goh reads Alu's immigrant positionality "as a refugee in al-Ghazira,"[20] although Alu is neither a post-Partition refugee nor an ethno-religious victim fitting into Ghosh's usual pattern of political refugee-hood in the novel. Moreover, Alu is not an economic migrant who reaches al-Ghazira chasing the dream of an affluent future but a suspect of crime being chased by the police. In sum, in his literary debut, Ghosh responds to the refugee issue from an immediate sense of ethical responsibility, as it was an unavoidable reality during the 1970–80s.

The Shadow Lines, Ghosh's second novel, is a more concentrated literary meditation on the ideas of nation, freedom and borders, communal violence and migration, and the moral and ethical responsibilities of a writer whose "life had been affected by civil violence," alongside "the effects of fear on memory and one's engagement with the world."[21] The portrayal of refugees as group identity is more vivid than the previous novel, and it becomes evident from Ghosh's preference for the plural: the word "refugee" appears once, but "refugees" ten times. However, the first sentence on the refugees in *The Shadow Lines* appears identical with *The Circle of Reason*: "There were only a few scattered shacks on Gariahat Road then, put up by the earliest *refugees from the east*."[22] The location of the "few scattered shacks" on a particular road in south Calcutta makes it clear that the refugees are no longer confined to "some far-flung refugee camp on the border."[23] The landscape in the southern fringe of Calcutta appears "filthy" to Tha'mma, a major character in *The Shadow Lines*, "all because of the refugees, flooding in like that": "Rows of shacks appeared on both sides of the road [now], small ramshackle structures, some of them built on low stilts, with walls of plaited bamboo, and roofs that had been patched together somehow out of sheets of corrugated iron."[24] The considerable refugee influx, consequent transformation of landscape and the attitude of the residents of Calcutta to refugees in part two of the novel could be seen as "evidence of how refugees were deeply unwelcome in capital cities in the immediate aftermath of partition."[25] Ghosh's distinction between the pre-Partition migrants settled in Calcutta and the post-Partition East Pakistani refugees pouring into the city finds fictional expression in the snapping remark of Tha'mma: "We're not refugees. … We came long before Partition."[26] Tha'mma and her family came from Dhaka and settled in Calcutta "long before Partition," so how could she be a refugee? The temporal distinction between the "pre-" and the "post-" Partition appears more significant in constructing refugee identity in the Indian mindset than the spatial difference between Dhaka and Calcutta.

Ghosh's depiction of both post-Partition Hindu and Muslim refugees in *The Shadow Lines* appears impartial, as to him, it is destitution and *not* religion that shapes the identity of a refugee. As he mentions the illegal squatting of the Hindu refugees in Calcutta, so he describes the forced occupation of Tha'mma's ancestral house in Dhaka by Muslim refugees "who had gone across from Bihar."[27] Some readers may find the forced occupation of minority households an act of violence, but it is historically a truism that both "India and Pakistan responded with a series of legislation around 'evacuee' property that effectively legalised this de facto transfer of property from minorities to refugees as part of the solution to the crisis of accommodation."[28] While referring to the Khulna riots of 1964, the narratorial voice resonates with empathy: "Hindu refugees began to pour over the border into India … towns and cities of East Pakistan were now in the grip of a 'frenzy' of looting, killing and burning."[29] An identical

feeling overpowers the narrator as he witnesses a similar "frenzy" in Calcutta: "Mobs went rampaging through the city, killing Muslims and burning and looting their shops and houses."[30] Ghosh's sardonic humor comes ablaze as the narrator talks about the "printed pictures of weeping, stranded Hindu refugees" on the pages of a few Calcutta dailies alongside the apathetic indifference of elite visitors of Moulin Rouge, the luxurious bar on Park Street in Calcutta: "it was business as usual, with a tea dance from 5 to 7 p.m. and a Dinner Dance with Delilah accompanied by the 'popular Moulin Rouge quintette.'"[31] *The Shadow Lines* also critiques the forgetting of the historical contribution of ordinary people in alleviating the frenzies across shadowy borders between the nations: "there were innumerable cases of Muslims in East Pakistan giving shelter to Hindus … and equally, in India, of Hindus sheltering Muslims. But they were ordinary people, soon forgotten."[32] The reference to "ordinary people" emphasizes Ghosh's ethical responsibility to humanity in general and his moral acknowledgment of common people who saved the lives of refugees.

Refugees and Forgotten History: *The Glass Palace* and *The Hungry Tide*

As *The Circle of Reason* and *The Shadow Lines* contextualize refugee movements in the political historicity of Indian Partition and the Liberation War of Bangladesh, *The Glass Palace* depicts the marginalized history of forced displacement during the anti-Indian riots in Burma, which resulted in an exodus of Indians from colonial Burma in 1941. Due to this shift in spatio-temporal context, Ghosh does not apparently consider the Indian immigrants as refugees since most of the narrative covers the historical time of British colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent, making the ideas of a stable Indian nation and its international border invalid. To Ghosh, as the resident Indians are not the ethno-nationals of Burma but successful economic migrants there, the Burmese people wanted to free their economic space in the name of ethnic cleansing. The anti-Indian riots may be seen as a totalitarian act of violent repatriation of the Indian economic migrants, who finally leave the country like refugees. However, in this grand narrative consisting of 48 chapters, Ghosh uses the word "refugee" only twice and "refugees" just 5 times within the final 15 chapters. The readers come across the word "refugee" first in chapter 33, when the Indian lawyer Mr. Khan visits Rajkumar's house in Rangoon and informs him about the decision taken in "a meeting of some of the city's most prominent Indians" to form "a Refugee Evacuation Committee" in "fears of a coming catastrophe," as "the committee's intentions were to get as many Indians out of Burma as possible."[33] Rajkumar refutes any possibility of migration initially, but as the situation grows hostile fast and his eldest son Neel dies during the chaos of a Japanese air raid, he agrees to move to India. As the air was heavy with mutual distrust and escalating ethnic conflict between the Indians and the Burmese, thousands of Indians started heading toward a safer destination: "towards the northern, landward passage to India—a distance of more than a thousand miles … their possessions bundled on their heads; they were carrying children on their backs; wheeling elderly people in carts and barrows."[34] The spectacle that Rajkumar and his family witness on their way to Calcutta is unnerving: "some thirty thousand refugees were squatting along the river-bank, waiting to move on. … Great numbers of refugees were still arriving, every day."[35] The city of Rangoon certainly did not have such a huge Indian population, but as Hugh Tinker finds it, "spectacle of the Rangoon Indians fleeing in terror inevitably produced a reaction among the Indian population in all the up-country towns," who also joined in the exodus.[36]

Ghosh's narrator describes the details of the migratory flight of refugees in poignant language that finally reaches its climax with Manju's death by drowning while ferrying across a river. Rajkumar and his wife Dolly reach Calcutta with their infant granddaughter Jaya like "starving migrants from the countryside" and approach Uma for shelter. The narrator sums up the situation of Rajkumar: once a business tycoon of Rangoon, now a dependent, "Uma was a benevolent benefactress; he a near-destitute refugee."[37] In Ghosh's fictional representation of refugees, destitution is the crucial feature. However, what makes Rajkumar stand out is his resilient spirit, and his resourcefulness which holds him strong even in the face of acute distress. In *The Glass Palace*, Ghosh represents a unique refugee-responsive

imaginary in a different historical and humane matrix than the other novels. Was Rajkumar a war refugee or a victim of ethnic conflict? How could Rajkumar be a refugee in Calcutta, as his ancestral origin was in British-occupied India? The issues of rootedness and territoriality are so complex in the case of Rajkumar that the reader feels no surprise when he recollects the glory of Burma in his refugee condition in Calcutta: "Ah, Burma—now, Burma was a golden land," or his fascination for Burmese cuisine, the "mohingya" noodles in particular. In the remaining twenty years of his "new life" as a dependent refugee at Uma's house in Calcutta, Rajkumar remembers neither the distress he and his family members endured during the exodus nor does he recount the loss of his son and daughter-in-law, as if it was a chapter forgotten forever.[38] These simultaneous processes of selective remembering and forgetting improve his access to rights in the context of the host society and may be seen as a constitutive part of the refugee experience.

Ghosh's next novel, *The Hungry Tide*, also grapples with refugees' forgotten history. It returns to the settlement of refugees from Bangladesh in the Indian part of Sundarbans and their forced evacuation from the island of Morichjhãpi by the state, resulting in a genocide which lapses soon into collective forgetting. Here Ghosh treats refugees as a collective entity of poor and low-caste people who flee the communal violence of Bangladesh and enter the Indian part of Sundarbans for survival "in successive waves, some after the partition of the subcontinent in 1947 and some after the Bangladesh war of 1971."[39] The novelist uses the word "refugees" 16 times, though his center of attention is the Morichjhãpi massacre of 1979, which Mondal describes as "a marginalized episode in the coercive history of the modern postcolonial Indian state."[40] Ghosh uses the word "refugees" first in relation to the Morichjhãpi incident in chapter four3 amid a conversation between Nilima and Kanai:

"It was around the time of *the Morichjhãpi incident*, so I was beside myself with worry."
"Oh?" said Kanai. "What was that? *I don't recall it exactly*."
"*Some refugees had occupied one of the islands in the forest*," Nilima said. "The *government wanted to force the refugees to return to their resettlement camp in central India*."[41]

Kanai's reaction after listening to the reference of "the Morichjhãpi incident" and his failure to "recall it exactly" emphasize the public amnesia of this marginalized history. The literary reconstruction of the Morichjhãpi incident finds exposure through Nilima's memory and the diary Nirmal had written before his death in 1979. Nilima retrieves from her memory all the relevant information in a journalistic manner, whereas Nirmal's diary is an intimate documentation spirited with revolutionary idealism. The novelist "has enlivened the *fabula* of Morichjhãpi eviction into a beautiful *syuzhet*" that perfectly describes "the essential conflict arising between the human struggle for survival and the interdependency with nature."[42] As *The Hungry Tide* displays cross-border migration of refugees on political and ethno-religious grounds, so it accommodates intra-national counter-migration of the refugees from the resettlement camp in central India to Sundarbans for familiar environment, as they "*have always lived— by fishing, by clearing land, and by planting the soil*."[43]

Chapter 19 of *The Hungry Tide*, with its historically significant title "Morichjhãpi," contextualizes the refugees as "the poorest of rural people, oppressed and exploited both by Muslim communalists and by Hindus of the upper castes."[44] Nilima identifies these peasants as low-caste "Dalits" who came to Morichjhãpi not from Bangladesh directly but "from a government resettlement camp in central India" situated at "a place called Dandakaranya … hundreds of miles from Bengal."[45] After enduring the hostile people and environment of Dandakaranya for a decade, as Nilima tells Kanai, many refugees "*organized themselves* and broke out of the camp" and "moved eastward in the hope of settling in the Sundarbans."[46] The reader may notice refugee solidarity in their "organized" resistance and counter-migration to the familiar riverine environment of Sundarbans. One of the refugees confesses before Kusum—"*we* love *our* tide country mud … rivers ran in *our* heads, the tides were in *our* blood."[47] The use of first person collectives, "we" and "our," emphasizes the warmth of the bond between the refugees and their familiar riverine environment. The idea of refugee solidarity finds an intimate involvement in

this narrative, as Kusum reflects: "*these were my people, how could I stand apart? We shared the same tongue, we were joined in our bones; the dreams they had dreamt were no different from my own.*"[48]

Nirmal's diary in *The Hungry Tide* could be seen as an "apology" of a left-wing idealist who laments the "anti-human" stand of the then Left Front government of West Bengal that prioritized the project of wildlife conservation over refugee rehabilitation. Nirmal's concern for refugees appears identical to Kusum's anxiety, as Nirmal's diary chronicles Kusum's words on the face of eviction—"Who are these people, I wondered, who love animals so much that *they* are willing to kill *us* for them?"[49] An amazing reversal of the binary between "they/us" takes place as Nirmal, despite being an Indian citizen, stands in solidarity with the dispossessed refugees. The description of the refugee-boat in Nirmal's diary, defiantly moving against a speedboat of the police deployed for eviction, upholds the spectacle of refugee solidarity: "*the people in the boat joined together their voices and began to shout, in unison, 'Amra kara? Bastuhara. Who are we? We are the dispossessed*.'"[50] Nirmal's leftist ideology of privileging the rights of the dispossessed leads him to a philosophical reflection, which could be considered as Ghosh's statement on belonging and identity: "*Where else could you belong, except in the place you refused to leave.*"[51] Shameem Black convincingly demonstrates how Ghosh's narrative "uncovers a past in which refugees compete for legitimacy on tideland islands with endangered tigers."[52] Black's idea of the refugees' competition "for legitimacy" on the rights of the tideland with "endangered tigers" points out the fountainhead of existential conflict between the humankind in destitution and the *other* non-human species on the face of extinction. Ghosh's treatment of the refugees finds a significant transformation in *The Hungry Tide*, as he introduces the conflict between social and environmental justice: the already rehabilitated refugees' yearning for the riverine ecology and settling down in the island of Morichjhãpi and the eventual state-sponsored eviction and genocide of refugees on the ecological grounds of tiger conservation.

Ecological Refugees and Worker-Migrants across the Mediterranean: *Gun Island*

Gun Island, Ghosh's latest novel as of the time of writing, may appear like a sequel to *The Hungry Tide* as some of its characters and themes reappear. The idea of environmental migration introduced in *The Hungry Tide* 15 years earlier and the notion of "ecological refugees" showcased in *The Great Derangement* in 2016 find more space in this narrative, as Ghosh accommodates an ecological dimension alongside the politico-cultural context of ethno-religious refugees from East Pakistan/Bangladesh. The "steady flow of refugees from East Pakistan" and the fresh arrival of "many more hungry mouths" after an environmental disaster "known as the Bhola cyclone" in mid-November 1970 sets the spatio-temporal context of both the political refugees and the ecological migrants in *Gun Island*.[53] Whereas the narrator-protagonist Dinanath is a descendant of Partition-refugees—"my parents and grandparents had crossed over to India when the subcontinent was partitioned," Ghosh's shocking metaphor of "hungry mouths" emphasizes the severe destitution of ecological refugees.[54] The character of Lubna Alam recounts to Dinanath how a climate catastrophe destroyed their ancestral house in Bangladesh before they arrived in Europe: "Everything's gone now; the house, the people—the water's taken it all."[55] The narrator also refers to the evacuations before "Cyclone Aila, which hit the Sundarbans in 2009," and its "long-term consequences" as "communities had been destroyed and families dispersed": "the young had drifted to cities, swelling already-swollen slums," and the elderly "had taken to begging on the streets."[56] Devastating climate events like storms and floods often compel the people of Sundarbans to migrate to far-off places as refugees.

In *Gun Island*, Ghosh uses a transcontinental spatiality as his characters move between Asia, the United States, Europe, and Northern Africa. The novelist's treatment of the refugees and cross-border migrants takes a giant leap as he includes the twenty-first-century European "refugee crisis" (2015–16) alongside the economic migration of young South Asians with the support of international trafficking networks. In *Gun Island*, Ghosh uses the word "refugees" 35 times and its Italian equivalent "rifugiati" 8 times, alongside the word "migrants" 18 times and its Italian form "immigrati" twice—a pervasive coverage never found in any of his earlier narratives. As most of the characters move across the borders

of multiple cultural spaces, Ghosh takes the freedom of using an expansive multilingual vocabulary, even accommodating words from the register of cyber technology and social media. Moreover, some of the women characters appear remarkably active in ameliorating the plight of refugees: Gisella and Imma adopting "two orphaned refugees—a six-year-old girl from Syria and a boy of seven from Eritrea"; the Bangladeshi lady Lubna, an environmental refugee and now a travel agent in Venice, supporting young worker-migrants as a benefactress by making them aware of "rights under the law and things like that"; and Piya, reappearing after *The Hungry Tide*, participating in an expedition to rescue the stranded refugees "on the Blue Boat."[57]

Bilal and Palash, the two Bangladeshi migrants, working as Lubna's assistants in Venice, are literary representations of South Asian economic migrants who populate the working class in the service industry of several European cities. In *Gun Island*, Ghosh puts forward the tricky difference between the politico-legal status of "refugees" and that of the "worker-migrants," which constitutes the core of global debates over the "European Refugee Crisis" (2015–16). As per the European Agenda on Migration[58] and the norms on the status and rights of refugees set by the UN in the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol, illegal economic migrants entering Europe through trafficking are not eligible for legal protection and the status of "refugees." However, in reality, some pro-refugee political organizations and liberal activists advocate for equal rights and legal status for every migrant and asylum seeker on par with refugees on humanitarian grounds. Unlike Ghosh's earlier narratives which showcase the political and ethno-religious refugees in India in the last century, *Gun Island* focuses on the increasing complications of undocumented cross-border migrations in this age of economic globalization.

The young worker-migrants from South Asia, particularly from Bangladesh, constitute a large population of "the *rifugiati* and *immigrati*"[59] in Italy. Gisella, alias Gisa, who has been "commissioned by a consortium of television channels" to make a documentary on refugees, informs Dinanath: "last month Bangladeshis were the second largest group coming into Italy."[60] Gisa also informs Deen about the news of "a boatload of refugees" which has been "spotted in the eastern Mediterranean."[61] She further illustrates how worker-migrants from Bangladesh take advantage of entering Europe with a motley group of refugees dispatched by traffickers from Egypt: "a *gruppo misto* with Eritreans, Egyptians, Ethiopians, Sudanese, and maybe some Bengalese as well. That's been the pattern with boats from Egypt."[62] The description of Rafi's overland cross-border migration from Turkey to Bulgaria with a group of refugees of mixed ethno-nationalities appears identical to Gisa's statement: "there were a few Bengalis among them, but the others were from Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, Pakistan and some other countries, too."[63] The young Bangladeshi worker-migrants who reach the European coastline as "refugees" are not destitute war refugees or asylum seekers but belong to middle-class families. They can afford the cost of illegal cross-border migration through an organized human trafficking system "with tentacles that reach into all regions and most countries in the world."[64] Cheap smartphones and easily available Internet facilitate undocumented transnational movements of worker-migrants, as Ghosh points out in an authorial meet: "Every migrant, basically their movements are made possible through cell phones: the payments to the traffickers, the destinations where they are going—all of it is completely tied to this technology."[65] In this age of advanced cyber technology and social media, cell phones act as agents to dismantle ties with the familiar local and provoke the young minds of the Global South for the distant Global North, where life appears glamorous. Moreover, the desire for social prestige in the homeland and the dream of sending home hefty remittances entice the young Bangladeshi worker-migrants so thoroughly that they risk the Mediterranean in leaky boats or rubber rafts and land ultimately upon a system of disguised slavery in the hands of labor recruiters. From his conversation with a Bangladeshi youth selling bottled water near Rialto Bridge in Venice, Dinanath learns that even during the fearsome cross-Mediterranean journey "in a *gommone*," the migrant witnessed a kind of community solidarity, as he "was in a group and they crossed over together, giving hope and courage to each other."[66] The worker-migrants' travel experiences, camaraderie with people of other ethno-nationalities, and the patient "listening to the trauma of another [can] contribute to cross-cultural solidarity and to the creation of new forms of community."[67]

However, apart from the fear of being capsized in the Mediterranean, Ghosh depicts in *Gun Island* the other troubles worker-migrants face during their journey: the inhumanity of the traffickers,[68] the risks of being victim to "the trade in human organs"[69] in Egypt, the anxiety of being stopped by the coastguards upon reaching the European shoreline and even the threats of "planned attacks on migrants"[70] in Europe. In the final chapter, Ghosh describes "the clamorous confrontation" between the "right-wing, anti-immigrant groups" and the pro-refugee activists including some major fictional characters.[71] In the face of the right-wing opposition to accommodating refugees and economic immigrants in Europe, activists take a significant role in organizing solidarity movements for the refugees, as Palash tells Deen how "human rights activists across Italy had decided to take up the cause of the boatload of refugees."[72] Lorenzo Zamponi observes how Italy, particularly in "the last few decades, has seen a significant presence of migrants' and migration-related political activism, both in the institutional realm and in street politics."[73] However, upon locating the "refugees on the deck of the Blue Boat," as the activists greet them with a "cheer of welcome," the slogans from the vessels of the anti-immigrant groups—"*Go back where you came from … Europe for Europeans*," expound their desperate attempt "to preserve the whiteness of their own metropolitan territories in Europe."[74] In the name of overseas trade and economy, the colonial guilt of "repopulating other continents" with "slaves and coolies" is historically countervailed by the migratory flow of people from the erstwhile Empires.[75]

Conclusion

The transformation of refugees and cross-border migrants is visible on many levels across Ghosh's narratives—throughout the literary representation, in the author's thinking over time, and also in the characters' subjectivity. From the post-Partition destitute ethno-religious refugee families flocking to India as "history's victims" in the early novels to the ecological refugees in *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*, from forced displacement to seemingly voluntary cross-border migration, Ghosh's treatment of "refugees," understood broadly, evidences a steady transformation.[76] While the narrators of the first two novels witness the refugee influx and eventual transformation of respective socio-cultural spaces like detached observers, the narrators in *The Glass Palace* and *The Hungry Tide* emphasize the transformation of destitute refugees into resilient individuals struggling to remake the new country as their home. Though ontologically distinct from refugees, young worker-migrants flocking to Europe from the Indian subcontinent as "refugees" through organized global "trafficking in human beings" in *Gun Island* is the latest phase in the evolution of the refugee figure in Ghosh's narratives.[77] Whereas the twentieth-century ethno-religious and ecological refugees in Ghosh's novels seek socio-cultural assimilation in the host nations as they have no ancestral homes to return to at their places of origin, the worker-migrants in *Gun Island* prefer dual citizenship as their politico-national identity.

The sea-change in Amitav Ghosh's representation of refugees finds expression also in the use of language: unlike the victim groups of refugees in the earlier novels, the young worker-migrants in *Gun Island* appear skilled in multilingual conversation, another form of cross-border extraterritoriality which interrogates the supposedly default monolingual imaginary along national borders and simultaneously attempts to establish new literary geographies more cosmopolitan in nature. Worker-migrants in Ghosh's latest novel hardly lament the loss of roots like the destitute, anxious refugees of the earlier narratives but instead accommodate the realities of transcontinental routes to live their dreams. The element that puts the twentieth-century transnational refugees in a common frame of solidarity with the twenty-first-century cyber-literate, transcontinental worker-migrants is, as Tipu tells Dinanath in *Gun Island*, "their stories": "story of persecution if you want them to listen to you."[78] In sum, the figure of the refugee in Ghosh's narratives has transformed over time, even as he consistently attends to the socio-economic and cultural specificity of South Asian migrants via the strong ethical engagement of a storyteller.

Notes

1 Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*, 4.
2 Ghosh, *The Great Derangement*, 5.
3 UN General Assembly, "Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees," 153.
4 Dixon, "'Travelling in the West,'" 10; Hoydis, "*Tackling the Morality of History*," 25.
5 Mondal, *Amitav Ghosh*, 2.
6 Mondal, *Amitav Ghosh*, 3 (original emphasis).
7 Ghosh, "An Interview with Amitav Ghosh," interview by Aldama, 86–87.
8 Daniel and Knudsen, "Introduction," in *Mistrusting Refugees*, 5.
9 Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, 164–5 (original emphasis).
10 Gallien, "'Refugee Literature,'" 723.
11 Gallien, "Forcing Displacement," 738.
12 Hawley, *Amitav Ghosh*, 53.
13 Ghosh, *The Circle of Reason*, 20 (emphasis added).
14 Ghosh, *The Circle of Reason*, 20; Hawley, *Amitav Ghosh*, 53.
15 Ghosh, *The Circle of Reason*, 64 (emphasis added).
16 Bauman, *Postmodernity and Its Discontents*, 18 (original emphasis).
17 Ghosh, *The Circle of Reason*, 64.
18 Ghosh, *The Circle of Reason*, 64.
19 Ghosh, *The Circle of Reason*, 137 (emphasis added).
20 Goh, "Inner Circles and the Voice of the Shuttle," 208.
21 Ghosh, *Incendiary Circumstances*, 46; Hawley, *Amitav Ghosh*, 64.
22 Amitav Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, 8 (emphasis added).
23 Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, 8.
24 Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, 144–5.
25 Sen, *Citizen Refugee*, 162.
26 Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, 145.
27 Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, 149.
28 Sen, *Citizen Refugee*, 163.
29 Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, 252.
30 Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, 252.
31 Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, 252–3.
32 Ghosh, *The Shadow Lines*, 253.
33 Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*, 392–3.
34 Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*, 467.
35 Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*, 468.
36 Tinker, "A Forgotten Long March," 6.
37 Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*, 477; Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*, 545.
38 Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*, 494; Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*, 495.
39 Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, 59.
40 Mondal, *Amitav Ghosh*, 133.
41 Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, 26 (emphasis added).
42 Asis De, "Remapping the 'Bhatir Desh,'" 16; Hoydis, "*Tackling the Morality of History*," 293.
43 Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, 262 (original emphasis).
44 Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, 118.
45 Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, 118.
46 Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, 118 (emphasis added).
47 Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, 118 (emphasis added).
48 Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, 165 (original emphasis).
49 Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, 261–2 (emphasis added).
50 Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, 254 (original emphasis).
51 Ghosh, *The Hungry Tide*, 254 (original emphasis).
52 Black, "Post–Humanitarianism and the Indian Novel in English," 302.
53 Ghosh, *Gun Island,* 14; Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 13.
54 Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 22.
55 Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 160.
56 Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 48–49.
57 Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 128; Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 157; Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 244.

58 The "European Agenda on Migration," launched by the European Commission in May 2015, prioritizes its fight against human trafficking and is structured along "four pillars: reducing the incentives for irregular migration; border management—saving lives and securing external borders; emphasizing Europe's duty to protect implemented through a strong common asylum policy; and introducing a new policy on legal migration." Agustín and Jørgensen, *Solidarity and the "Refugee Crisis" in Europe*, 10–11.
59 Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 145.
60 Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 146.
61 Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 172.
62 Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 173.
63 Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 241.
64 Farr, "Human Trafficking," 124.
65 In a post-publication discussion of *Gun Island* on October 27, 2019 (Chicago Humanities Festival), Ghosh admits that many ideas in *Gun Island* have roots in his personal experiences of interviewing refugees in 2015–2016.
66 Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 219.
67 Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing,* 2.
68 Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 236–40.
69 Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 262.
70 Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 189.
71 Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 274; Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 272.
72 Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 198.
73 Zamponi, "From Border to Border," 104.
74 Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 276; Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 279.
75 Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 279.
76 Hawley, *Amitav Ghosh*, 53.
77 Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 278.
78 Ghosh, *Gun Island*, 62.

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PART III

Visuality and Visibility

"THROUGH THE LENS OF A REFUGEE"

Disrupting Visual Narratives of Displacement

Anna Carastathis and Myrto Tsilimpounidi

The "refugee crisis" declared in the summer of 2015 by European politicians has been characterized as "possibly the most photographed crisis in human history."[1] In particular, scenes of arrival became emblematic of the crisis: photojournalists descended on Lesvos, Greece—at that time the main point of entry of people seeking refuge in Europe—to capture these arrivals. Myriad photographs depicting people arriving in dinghies were reproduced in mass media. Some press photographers on the scene sought to counter the "visual dehumanisation of refugees"[2] through various strategies, such as close-up shots depicting peoples' faces, and representing them as members of nuclear families. Yet, such strategies do not resolve the risk of objectification inherent in photographic representations of "refugees" that circulate in visual, affective, moral, and commodity economies through the work of reproduction.[3] On the other hand, attempts at self-representation, particularly when these are elicited through participatory photography projects, wherein "refugees"[4] are the ones holding the camera, also raise ethical and political issues. These issues do not disappear with the physical presence of refugees, the visibility of the face, the overdetermination of gender identities and kinship relations, or the authorship of photographs by people forcibly placed in that category. Rather, we question whether participatory photography interrupts the visual economy through which "refugees" are reproduced as objects of a series of gazes.[5] Photographic exhibitions in galleries and museums purported to offer a view "through the lens of a refugee,"[6] or—later on, as the crisis became chronic, and perilous arrival gave way to forced encampment—"a look inside Lesbos [sic] refugee camp."[7] What does the viewer of such images desire to see, and what are they shown? What possibilities exist for making visible, audible, and palpable other, non-hegemonic visual narratives, excluded by state and supranational attempts to censor and control the field of vision? What possibilities are opened up by photography from "below," particularly by photographers who are relegated by border regimes to the category of the "refugee," as well as those displaced from that category and denied international protection?

In this chapter, we focus on (non-)citizen/refugee journalism in conditions of perpetual displacement in Lesvos, which are increasingly operating under conditions not of spectacle and hypervisibility, but state-enforced media blackouts and carceral encampment. By "(non-)citizen/refugee journalism" (including photography) we are troubling the reliance of the more common term, "citizen journalism," on the notion of citizenship to convey the amateur status of "ordinary people" who, using digital cameras and social media, take and publicize photographs of events they witness in public space. Citizen photojournalism has been analyzed as having the capacity to shift perceptions and "write" new narratives, from "below."[8] We propose that (non-)citizen/refugee photography does not rely on the reified privileges of citizenship to articulate a "right to the image for all."[9]

If the declaration of the "refugee crisis" was a period of hypervisibility, the dominant visual narrative was "crisis as appearance." This, in itself, is an inverted image: the crisis was engineered through the necropolitical regime of migration management, which would rather have people dying in war, or drowning in the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas, than arriving in Europe. Six years in, the conditions have altered dramatically: we are now witnessing the re-engineering of the hegemonic visual narrative as "crisis as disappearance." States waging a war of images have always sought to regulate a visual economy of highly constrained significations, but now the intervention of the state in and through photography is primarily operating through censorship to prevent images—and those who produce and watch them—to function as witnesses of atrocities carried out in the name of national sovereignty and security.

(Non-)citizen/refugee photography attempts to counter the so-called "compassion fatigue" that has set in six years on from when that "crisis" was declared. The news cycle has moved on, but the war on migration has intensified. How do photographs address us, who view photographs from a diversity of epistemic and social locations, not as mere spectators, but as viewers actively assuming their responsibility to "watch" photographs, at a moment when mass media have largely averted their gaze from the "refugee crisis" to other crises that have since come on to the scene?[10] What are the utopian possibilities of photography to articulate abolitionist demands in a bordered and fortressed world? In this chapter, we trace our search for possible answers to these questions throughout our collaboration (section one); we then trace the role of visual narratives in the shift from conditions of hypervisibility of Lesvos and other bordered spaces, as well as of people on the move (section two) to state-enforced invisibility through increased militarization of borders, media bans, and walling projects (section three), and how these developments correspond to mobilization and demobilization of solidarity movements, but also to the photographic agency of people who, at various times, were obliged into, or denied visibility (section four).

One: Lesvos, 2016

We met in Lesvos in July 2016, while we were both participants in a conference, Crossing Borders, about the unfolding "refugee crisis" on the island. The Crossing Borders conference was framed in contrast to both ad-hoc humanitarianism, on the one hand, and the militarization of the Aegean Sea, on the other. Inspired by the solidarity movement to "Welcome Refugees," the conference promised an opportunity to explore ways to think and act together at a moment when solidarity efforts—social clinics, no borders kitchens, housing squats, and demonstrations demanding that European authorities "open the borders"—were increasing every day. Crossing Borders offered an antidote to talking about Lesvos—a highly mediatized space that came to stand almost as a synonym for what became known as "Europe's refugee crisis"—from elsewhere, thereby countering the impression that the island is always already a faraway place, a synecdoche of the crisis. Instead, the conference promised to treat the island as a radical space of activism, solidarity, and everyday struggles against borders, with a program that incorporated contributions from academic superstars, international volunteers, solidarity activists, sympathetic locals, politicians, researchers, and refugees themselves. We became uneasy when we learned that there was a programmed visit to the detention center of Moria, announced cryptically in the conference program as the last "special event."[11] As participants in the conference, we had not been informed in advance of a code of practice, agenda, or even the practicalities (translation issues, for example) of the visit—not to mention given a justification by the organizers for its very occurrence in the program. Things really came to a head when the conference organizers invited us to "bring our cameras to Moria!"

It was only after this instruction was given that some participants of the conference vocalized our frustrations and we organized to collectively write a statement about our positionality and our refusal to reproduce hegemonic categories and become the observers, or the bearers of an objectifying photographic gaze eliding questions of consent, captivity, and complicity inside Moria, which we read aloud at the final plenary of the conference.[12] After our intervention, the notion that we would visit Moria

on a "field trip" as spectators, ethnographers, or citizens with cameras, was justified by the organizers in terms of giving "visibility" to what, we countered, was already a hyper-saturated visual field. The intervention was the outcome of frustration as we saw a division being reproduced between "us" and "them," while silencing people on the move. But we wondered, why was the invitation to "bring your cameras" so powerful in mobilizing a group of critical academics to question the epistemological relations that, in reality, undergirded the conference as a whole?

Perhaps because, for decades, representation has been revealed as structured by power, and has been reclaimed as a terrain of resistance. Critiques of the image, the gaze, the phenomenal and representational acts involved in photography, in particular, from feminist, antiracist, and decolonial perspectives, have made us aware of visual politics, the risks of objectification, and the uneven distribution of representational power. Hence, the invitation to us, as academics and citizens with relative privileges of mobility and stasis, to "bring our cameras" to Moria seemed to entail the displacement of people on the move encamped in Moria from those who have "the right to look." "There is power in looking," as bell hooks writes in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*.[13] hooks poses the questions: who has "the right to look? The right to gaze? At whom? And under what conditions?" Black women's resistance to white supremacist, patriarchal "looking relations" embody what hooks calls the "oppositional gaze," one that "looks" to document.[14] Nicholas Mirzoeff, in *The Right to Look*, explains the main difference between what, on the one hand, he calls visuality, which, as practiced on the bodies of enslaved and incarcerated people, "sutures authority to power and renders this association 'natural'," and, on the other, countervisuality, which asserts "the right to look," is the practice of resistant ways of seeing from the subject-position of the oppressed.[15] "The right to look" becomes the basis of a form of visual activism, an act of setting our vision free from the violent frames of colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and racial capitalism, as these are represented as the given political and visual formations in the nation-state system, and in the asylum–migration nexus. Freeing our vision entails practicing ways of seeing which exceed the normative frames that the state insinuates as structures of perception. With respect to the proposed field-trip visit to a detention center with our cameras, we wanted to question how our vision has been trained to consent to the violence of the border. This led us to question how photography reproduces institutions and power relations that more insidiously reproduce the border.

Two: Athens, 2017

By 2017, images of people in boats arriving on the shores of Lesvos had become visual shortcuts of what now was routinely referred to as Europe's refugee crisis. We refer to this visual narrative as "crisis as appearance": first the appearance of people who had survived the crossing, then the appearance of their images on mainstream and alternative media, with local, national, and international coverage. The frenzied reproduction of refugees' seemingly sudden appearance on the shores of Europe gave the impression of an explosion of narratives, a plethora of images, which bolstered nationalist, nativist, and fascist claims of "uncontrollable waves" or even "avalanches" of people arriving to seek asylum. But despite the proliferation of images, the visual narrative became increasingly austere, in the sense that the photographs being reproduced used visual shortcuts to represent what was being constructed as the phenomenon of the "refugee crisis." What was striking is that the same visual shortcuts used to represent people on the move in hostile narratives were often reproduced in sympathetic, humanitarian, and solidarity narratives.

We illustrate this with two examples: first, with the iconic image of the "Refugees Welcome" movement in which we see a man leading a woman who holds a female child by the hand, all of them running.[16] Underneath the image sometimes the caption appears: "Bring your families!" This image was reproduced on stickers and posters that indicated refugee-friendly places, on banners and placards on demonstrations against the border regime, and worn on t-shirts by solidarity activists. Although this is not a photograph, because of its ubiquity and symbolic power, it has figured in myriad photographs: the image shapes a photographic imaginary which is thoroughly structured by the heteronormalization

of "refugees," their overdetermination as participating in patriarchal kinship relations. The order in the image matters: the man, the woman, and then the child, which reflects the omnipresent patriarchal order of "who comes first" in heteronormative family structures. The image originally appeared on a highway sign, commissioned by the California transportation authority in the late 1980s to warn drivers of people crossing the U.S.-Mexico border, after hundreds of people crossing from Mexico into the U.S. were killed by cars. John Hood, a Navajo artist who designed the *Immigration Sign*, has said that his intent in representing border-crossers as a family—crucial to this was the gender identities, ages, and kinship relations of the figures—was to elicit U.S. citizens' empathy, so that in the place of a fleeing family (depicted on the sign) any American could substitute their own.[17] Hood also wanted to connect the contemporary journeys of people crossing the U.S.-Mexico border to the Long Walk of the Navajo.[18] The sign, in U.S. politics, was repurposed both by advocates of freedom of movement and, equally, by those for whom the sign represents "an unruly … out-of-control border" and who seek to criminalize people on the move.[19] Since 2018, the physical signs no longer appear along the border. Destroyed or stolen, they have "become obsolete": "the transportation department stopped replacing the signs years ago because it constructed fences along medians to deter people from running across highways."[20] As the image circulated in the post-2015 "Refugees Welcome" movement in Europe, it shed its material connection to the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

Second, visual shortcuts were affected through the use of proxy objects to represent "refugees" in ways that objectify them in the visual narrative of "crisis as appearance": paradigmatically, the bright orange life jacket worn by people making dangerous sea crossings to arrive in Europe. The life jacket as a proxy for "refugees" is such a visual shortcut, which comes to signify, and indeed reify, this category.[21] The visual economy in which refugees are reproduced relies on the frugal use of the proxy object to perform a restrained signification of an absent, yet immediately intelligible, referent. The life jacket, like the "Refugees Welcome" image, was circulated in hostile and sympathetic discourses. We argue that its reproduction, as a visual shortcut for refugees, performs a metonymic relation between the proxy object and its referent (people making the sea crossing).[22] The fetishization of the life jacket—its homogenization, substitution, and erasure of the subjects it is meant to signify—mirrors the reification of social relations of dispossession embodied in the border regime, doing violence to people forced to cross borders clandestinely.[23]

We invoke the term "visual economy" to make an explicit link between the economy of representations and the economy of war. War is a factory of images; images of war wage war, as the Abounaddara Collective aptly reminds us.[24] A second sense of "visual economy" refers to the regulated, sparing use of visuals—the use of visual shortcuts—to make certain meanings seem almost autonomically intelligible, and their interpretations seemingly immediate. The temporality of crisis—happening now, breaking with the past, rendering the future uncertain—and the exigency of responding to it relies on images that circulate instantly in a visual economy, through which categories of meaning structuring our perception are normalized and become habitual at a pre-reflective level. Thinking of crisis as a "frame" through which the political is made visible enables us not only to ask about what becomes known and apprehensible as "crisis" but also what is rendered unknowable and is misapprehended through this frame. Following the logic of crisis as a "frame," when the mainstream narrative of the beginning of the refugee crisis is the appearance of people on the move on the shores of Europe, what remains invisible are decades of war, conflict, economic stagnation, patriarchal oppression, extractivism, and exploitation.

In July 2017, in Athens, we facilitated a photography workshop with LGBTQI+ refugees and local activists, which we called "Facing Crisis." We focused on LGBTQI+ refugees because they were the ones facing doubled invisibility through the construction of the figure of the refugee as a father, mother, or a child. The aim of the workshop was to deconstruct how people on the move are objectified in the visual economy of the "refugee crisis" and to engage in self-representation through portraiture photography. We sought to draw out the meaning of "facing" as a verb, which implies the subject's potential not only to be visible, but to look, to act—to embody an "oppositional gaze"[25] and collectively engage

in acts of "countervisuality."[26] Through the experience of the workshop we reflected on the pitfalls of participatory photography projects, which were proliferating at this time, and which, in that sense, began to constitute a visual economic sector. By this we mean, first, that images produced through participatory photography—in their sheer number and representational power—shaped looking relations; and, second, that a significant amount of money was expended in cultural programs (including photography), funded by UNHCR, private foundations, and charities, targeting "refugees" (particularly "women and children") in the early years of the "refugee crisis" and in various sites of refuge around the world.[27]

Our reflections concerning the pitfalls of participatory photography based on *Facing Crisis*, and our viewing of exhibitions and publications of similar projects are the following. First, does participatory photography disrupt or reproduce habituated ways of seeing? For instance, many of the photographs taken by the workshop participants reproduced a culturally available counter-discourse of camp gayness, as well as hegemonic standards of beauty. In this way, gay men appeared at the visual epicenter. In our attempt to counter the heteronormative "bring your families" narrative, we were reproducing an alternative normativity, this one reifying the "(L)G(BTQI+) refugee." The pitfall was replacing the "bring your families" visual shortcut with other easily available visual stereotypes of "gayness." We had wanted to collectively imagine an oppositional gaze, not a gaze from the opposite side, in this case homonormative vs. heteronormative notions of gender and beauty. We questioned the motivations and effects of projects that give cameras to "refugees" and exhibit photographs they take of themselves, and of other refugees. Who is imagined as having the right to look at these photographs? And what does this imagined viewer see, or expect to see? We wondered, what anxieties motivate efforts to "give a face" to "refugees" (LGBTQI+ or otherwise)? With our participants, many of whom refused to identify as "refugees" because they found this label objectifying, we wondered: to the extent that the "refugee" is an overdetermined state category, not a unique subject, does the "refugee" have, and can it show, its face? Do our attempts to make "refugees" visible end up reproducing our habit of seeing with the eyes of the state? The workshop occasioned reflections on the strategy of photographic refusal. The participants expressed their discomfort with exhibiting photographs of themselves embodying their queer and trans identities to a community—both of "locals" and of non-LGBTQI+ people on the move—that was hostile and, increasingly, violent. Thus, collectively, we refused to exhibit the photographs that were taken during the workshop. Instead, we printed the photographs in small formats and the photographers chose their favorites to keep or give to friends; we celebrated the end of the process—and, for some participants, the beginning of their love for photography—with a karaoke party.

We do not wish to overgeneralize from this experience or perform an academic critique of participatory photography, which is a broad, umbrella category comprising various approaches to popular art education, community empowerment, and collaborative research. Caroline Lenette argues that "by framing and depicting their own lived experiences rather than being the 'object' of others' gaze and framing, [people with direct experience of displacement] can use photography as a means to challenge detrimental visual narratives of forced migration."[28] For Lenette, "participatory visual methods like photo-voice are impactful in refugee studies because they can counter the damage caused by the often-exploitative and voyeuristic photographic representations" in media and NGOs, which are meant to trigger western audiences' sympathy by reproducing "tropes" such as "complete vulnerability."[29] We are skeptical as to what extent the participatory photography we saw in this period entirely escapes these tropes iconographically—in terms of what, by and large, it depicts—though we agree with Lenette that in point of view and agency, its iconological conditions of possibility are quite different than, say, a photojournalist's shot of a "refugee," often taken without explicit consent, and often in conditions of duress or outright coercion.[30] Still, participatory photography does not entirely evade the ethical and political problems inherent in more obviously objectifying photographic practices. This is why, we feel, the participants in *Facing Crisis* ultimately decided to refuse the public exhibition of their photographs. We wonder whether such an option, to refuse, really exists in workshops funded by institutions focused on "outcomes," and we see photographic refusal as an act of refusing commodification, consumability,

and violence.[31] In that sense, photographic refusal is not just the refusal of photography or of being photographed (a negative stance); it is also an intervention in, a contestation of, and a creative response to the looking relations that constitute photography (a productive stance). In particular, we were interested in the possibilities of visualizing photographic refusal—through visually representing "presence" and "absence," leading to a series of images we titled "Facing Crisis."[32] In what follows, we contrast participatory photography—in the context of proliferating images of "refugees"—with (non-)citizen/refugee photography. We argue the latter emerges to directly contest the ethical and political problems wrought by the visual economy of "migration management," in which, often unwittingly, and quite against their intentions, participatory photography projects can be seen to participate.

Three: Lockdown, 2020

By March 2020, the atmosphere of struggle, hope, possibility, and solidarity that ignited our lives in Athens in the early years of the "refugee crisis" had given way to cynicism, resignation, and demobilization. Before European states closed their borders, and Greece signed on to a EU policy of confinement or "warehousing" that entrapped tens of thousands of people in a place they didn't want to stay; before the right-wing New Democracy government was elected again in July 2019 (having shifted even further to the extreme right); before the new government violently evicted all but one of the housing squatters, re-encamping their residents and destroying communities; before intensified pushbacks, deportations, and militarization became the order of the border; before all that, we glimpsed the prefiguration of a border abolitionist culture emerging in the center of our city. This too, was stolen, together with all that was stolen from people on the move—their time, their autonomy, their right to asylum, their futures, their hopes and dreams.

After the appearance of coronavirus in Greece (officially: February 26, 2020), the government declared a "double crisis": the emergent global crisis of the pandemic became intertwined in state discourse with the so-called "border crisis" declared when, in protest over the EU's failure to uphold the terms of the EU-Turkey deal, and the EU's lack of support for Turkey's imperialist military campaign in Syria, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan threatened to "open the border" to refugees, encouraging them to enter Greece through the Evros/Meriç land crossing. Exploiting this "threat"—which, of course, is only a threat if both sides view people on the move as "undesirables," a view consolidated through the racist equation of criminalized border-crossers with the virus[33]—the Greek government imposed a "state of emergency" in March, suspending asylum processes. Moreover, the new government sought international support for its previously devised and already partially implemented designs to detain criminalized people on the move in "closed centers" that exacerbated the spread of COVID-19 among imprisoned refugees, to accelerate deportations, and to further criminalize solidarity activists. Exploiting the coronavirus outbreak, the Greek government has "justified the containment of refugees by conflating quarantine with detention."[34] Indeed, the lockdown which started on March 23, 2020, was never lifted for asylum seekers under conditions of encampment on the hotspot islands and on many mainland camps as well.

It was in this climate of intensified border violence in which the Greek military is alleged to have killed people who attempted to cross the Evros/Meriç river,[35] that in late February–early March 2020, dozens of fascists, Neo-Nazis, and white supremacists from elsewhere in Europe joined their local counterparts and descended on Lesvos, attacking refugees, journalists, NGO workers, and solidarity activists (or anyone whom they perceived as such).[36]

A gradual attack on freedom of press by the Greek government began while we were in a strict lockdown, during which, even to leave the house, we had to send text messages informing the police about our whereabouts. In social isolation, we had little way of knowing directly what was taking place in detention centers or hotspots and what kind of reality people were facing there. Not being able to go from Athens to Lesvos, as we have been doing regularly since 2014, we relied on the circulation of images taken mainly by (non-)citizen/refugee journalists, through solidarity and anarchist networks;

so, our way of knowing was mediated by images, but ones created by people with direct experience of displacement. The Greek government used the pretext of the pandemic and the "double crisis" to enact a war on images. If the news cycle had moved on and most photojournalists reassigned to other sites than Lesvos, the government now decisively interrupted the possibilities of photography to raise consciousness among those not directly affected by its fascist migration policy and border control practices, even outrightly lying about what it was doing—for example, violent pushbacks of refugee boats—on international media broadcasts and press briefings.

After the fire in September 2020 which destroyed Moria, the government constructed a new, closed, and highly policed hotspot on the former shooting range at Mavrovouni/Kara Tepe. The government furthermore evicted the self-organized solidarity camp The Village of All Together (PIKPA), and also closed the municipally run Kara Tepe camp for asylum seekers deemed "vulnerable." The media ban has produced a deafening visual silence. People subject to encampment inside camps on Lesvos and elsewhere were documenting through their camera phones the harsh conditions—for example, snow, heavy rain, deaths from cold, and open sewage—but faced obstacles to circulating these visual testimonies. Electricity was often cut for several hours, Wi-Fi access was deliberately blocked by the authorities, and Twitter and Facebook accounts reporting from within the camps were suspended and their users faced criminal charges, which meant that their asylum cases would be rejected.[37] On Lesvos refugees were discouraged from talking to journalists and activists, and leaking photographs from inside the camp was treated as an "act of resistance" with repercussions for their asylum process, feeding into a climate of fear. The government, police, and military sought to restrict the access of journalists to the camp and to asylum seekers, leading to Reporters Without Borders' (RSF) condemnation of "a strategic restriction of press freedom and right to information."[38]

In September 2020, journalists were offered a guided tour by the Greek government, monitored by the Greek military, of the new "Moria 2.0" detention facility at Mavrovouni/Kara Tepe. Since then, journalists have not been allowed inside the camp and there have been incidents of police harassment and intimidation to journalists who try to gain access. In November 2020, a Canadian filmmaker documenting scenes of arrival in Lesvos was detained by the police and found guilty of "facilitating the entrance of illegal migrants."[39] In October 2020, a German documentary crew was "detained for seven hours, strip-searched and held in jail without charges and repeatedly denied access to a lawyer."[40]

The conditions of visibility have dramatically shifted since the onset of the so-called "refugee crisis" six years ago, when Lesvos became the epicenter of the photographic gaze turned on people arriving in Europe. The media ban and non-disclosure agreements imposed on volunteers and staff at camps and hotspots, as well as the harassment and criminalization of people forced to live in detention camps when they attempt to document the conditions they experience, has rendered the need to pay witness and amplify the visions and voices of people trapped in carceral border spaces ever more urgent. The state has sought to implement its fascistic migration policy under cover of darkness, in spaces that, by geography and by political design, are kept out of view. As Alison Mountz argues about offshore detention more generally, the Aegean hotspot islands are part of wider "enforcement archipelagos of detention," as people on the move get trapped there and remain invisible from the shores of sovereign territory.[41] Moreover, the state has sought to undermine—by asserting its monopoly on truth—the thorough documentation by civil society organizations of human rights violations, systematic violence, and the *de facto* suspension of the rule of law. When confronted by international press, and in the European Parliament, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Migration and other officials have repeatedly denied conducting pushbacks, calling these claims "fake news," while attacking search and rescue NGOs with charges of criminal organization, espionage, violation of state secrets, and facilitation of entry in order to render their witnessing epistemologically suspect and to secure the impossibility of photography (among other practices of documentation).[42]

If the declaration of the "refugee crisis" was a period of hypervisibility, the dominant visual narrative was "crisis as appearance." Six years on, the conditions have altered dramatically: we are now witnessing the re-engineering of the hegemonic visual narrative as "crisis as disappearance." The real crisis of

displacement was, of course, never about appearance, but disappearance. States waging a war of images sought to regulate a visual economy of highly constrained significations, but now the intervention of the state in and through photography is primarily operating through censorship.

Four: Lesvos, 2021

In this political climate of censorship, the efforts of people on the move, now stuck in stasis in Moria Hell, to document the conditions to which they are subjected in order to transform them, persist despite posing significant risks to their lives, safety, and chances of being granted asylum. As Nazanin Froghi writes in "The Marble Life: A Year of Limbo on Lesvos," describing how she became a photographer with ReFOCUS Media Labs while encamped in Moria, the urgency to photograph, to write, and to "raise our voices" became greater during the lockdown:

> It felt like the final blow came with Moria's complete lockdown. We had to stand in crowded lines for hours and get permission for everything necessary. We were officially stuck inside Moria for the sake of public health and safety … Despite all the challenges, our ReFOCUS media classes continued, and I was led to report on conditions and current events inside Moria during lockdown. I had never thought about being a journalist before, but now I found it essential to raise our voices, especially since other journalists were not allowed on Lesvos or in Moria.[43]

ReFOCUS Media Labs began as a participatory photography project, founded by two non-refugees, Douglas Herman and Sonia Nandzik, who sought to teach photography skills to people stuck in Moria. But as Herman and Nandzik explain, the project was transformed into (non-)citizen/refugee photojournalism:

> We never intended to have them use these skills to document their daily misery. But the fascism, the pandemic, and now the indifference following the fires have left us all with no choice but to report no matter what. As mainstream media slowly shifts away from Lesbos, our collective hope is that they are not forgotten all over again.[44]

Thus, in ReFOCUS, (non-)citizen/refugee photography directly resists the efforts of the state to silence, and indeed, smother visual narratives of displacement in a moment of "crisis as disappearance." Photography as an act of witnessing which seeks other witnesses, on the other side of walls, military barriers, and lines of censorship, also resists the violent segregation of embodied vision, insisting on the existence of a community of viewers—including those who create photographs and those who appear in them. As Ariella Azoulay has argued in her book *The Civil Contract of Photography*, photographers, the subjects of photographs, and those who view or "watch" them constitute a "virtual political community."[45] Through photography "the governed possess a certain power to suspend the gesture of the sovereign power seeking to totally dominate the relations between us, dividing us as governed into citizens and noncitizens."[46] The civil contract of photography, unlike other "social contracts" that legitimate state authority, constitutes a citizenry without sovereignty, a community without borders.[47] Photographs that cross borders while seeking to abolish borders have a power that states attempt to extinguish by seeking to control the visual field, to wage wars of images, to throw dust in the eyes of the world.

In August 2020, at a time when media coverage of camps was difficult and often criminalized by the Greek police, Noemi based in the Netherlands was following Amir's Facebook account in order to understand what was happening in Moria. Noemi is a Spanish photographer and photo editor based in the Netherlands and Amir is a 21-year-old man from Afghanistan living in Moria camp for one year already. Amir teaches English to children in Moria and his dream is to become a photographer or

Figure 9.1   Anonymous photographer and anonymous designer, "Do you even see me?" Used with permission, Creative Commons License CC BY NC ND 4.0.
Source: Poster, Now You See Me Moria, 2021, https://nowyouseememoria.eu/gallery.

a pilot. Noemi's and Amir's last names are not given for security reasons. Noemi reached out to him and they began a joint Instagram account, Now You See Me Moria, sharing images and stories from Moria.[48] They were joined by Ali and Qutaeba, two other people forced to live in Moria, and their images soon gained a lot of attention on social media. As Noemi says, explaining the name of their photography initiative,

> You see me, but you don't see me because you don't do anything to change our situation. Now, you're going to see me and it's your decision if you want to do something or not. But you can't say that you don't see me.[49]

The four photographers issued an open call for designers to use their images and design posters. "Do you even see me?" reads one of them, depicting a group of people under the hot summer sun holding their belongings while walking (see Figure 9.1).[50] "Memento Mori(a)" is the title of another poster, which shows a field full of white UNHCR tents and reminds us that images can act as a warning or reminder of death: in Latin, "remember that you have to die."[51] "Mori" instead/inside of "Moria" stands as a reminder of the white supremacist, necropolitical project of detention (and of "migration management" more generally): "mori" means death in Latin, may derive from the Latin "maurus," from the ancient Greek "mauros" which refers to the Moors, or to North Africans, and has come to connote "dark skinned."

In her "Letter to the World from Moria (No. 8)," written in November 2019, Parwana Amiri, a poet, educator, former student of ReFOCUS media labs, and co-founder of Waves of Hope self-organized school and Youth Refugee Movement, speaks to the transformative power of narratives of displacement to "break the borders you built":

> My pen won't break, but borders will
> I didn't know that in Europe people get divided into the ones with passports and the ones without. I didn't know that I would be treated as 'a refugee,' a person without papers, without rights. I thought we escaped from emergencies, but here our arrival is considered an emergency for the locals. I thought our situation in the camp is an emergency, but in Europe the meaning of emergency for people like 'us' is to be dead. …
> My pen won't break until we end this story of inequality and discrimination among humankind. My words will always break the borders you built.
> *Parwana*[52]

The photographs that illustrate the chapbook, taken by Parwana and others, are images of resistance in everyday life in Moria and Lesvos. They directly challenge—as do her words in the quoted text—both the hegemonic visual narrative of crisis as appearance and the attempt of the state to disappear the crisis it itself has generated, while making it impossible for us to avert our gaze and look away.

Conclusion: Watching Photographs

Azoulay argues that "one needs to stop looking at the photograph and instead start watching it. The verb 'to watch' is usually used for viewing phenomena or moving pictures. It entails dimensions of time and movement that need to be reinscribed in the interpretation of the still photographic image."[53] In order to watch photographs, we need to act as though what is happening in the image is still happening. As the editors of this handbook, Vinh Nguyen and Evyn Lê Espiritu Gandhi, quite astutely pointed out to us during the revisions of this paper, watching photographs is a narrative technique, which is active in keeping a story alive. Even though we generally assume that a photograph depicts an event in the past, photographs–as–narratives function through the agency of those who watch them in the present. The activity of watching photographs takes the still photograph out of the realm of the past, further away

from the prevailing notion that what is depicted has already happened, instead bringing it to the realm of what is currently unfolding. When we view photographs in the past tense, we as viewers—occupying a diverse range of epistemic and social locations, across borders and boundaries of citizenship—cannot take any responsibility for what has already happened and therefore we cannot take any action to change it. However, when we watch a photograph, particularly a photograph that documents violence, we are confronted with our responsibility in the present to transform what is depicted. When we watch photographs we assume a stance, we engage with representations in a way that can alter them and us: we face crisis. Facing crisis has a twofold meaning: giving crisis a face, and critically bearing witness to it. The question, "Who has the right to look?" becomes transformed into the question: "Who has the responsibility to watch?" The answer: the one who through the act of watching is capable of transforming the way in which the world looks—which is to say: each and all of us.

Notes

1 Phelps, "Why Is So Much Art about the 'Refugee Crisis' So Bad?"
2 Bleiker et al., "The Visual Dehumanization of Refugees," 399.
3 Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi, *Reproducing Refugees*.
4 We place "refugee" in quotation marks to take critical distance from the term, understood (a) as a legal category defined through exclusion (of economic migrants and rejected asylum seekers); (b) as a representation congealed through socio-legal and visual discourses and narratives of deservingness. We do not dispute the reality of forced displacement; rather, we argue it is broader than the category "refugee" allows. Where we refer to displaced people seeking asylum we do not put the term in quotation marks. Many people categorized as "refugees" in our context distance themselves from this label, which they find objectifying or dehumanizing.
5 See Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi, *Reproducing Refugees*, 131–56.
6 Apergi, "Through the Lens of a Refugee."
7 McElvaney, "Rare Look at Life Inside Lesbos' Moria Refugee Camp."
8 Grayson, "Citizen Photojournalism," 568–79.
9 Abounaddara Collective, "A Right to the Image for All."
10 Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*.
11 Following the "hotspot approach" inaugurated in 2015 by the European Union to manage what it declared was a "crisis of mixed migration flows" (European Commission, "Explanatory Note," 1), five "registration and identification centres" (or "hotspots") started operating in Greece in 2015–2016, on the islands of Lesvos, Chios, Samos, Leros, and Kos (as well as various sites in Italy), of which Moria was the largest.
12 It formed, for us, a point of entry into an analysis of the growing academic industry in relation to what has been constructed as the "refugee crisis" in/of Europe. The statement has also been republished as Sixteen Participants of the "Crossing Borders" Conference in Lesbos, Greece, July 2016, "Intervention," 1–3.
13 hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze," 115.
14 hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze," 116.
15 Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, 6.
16 See https://black-mosquito.org/en/refugee-welcome-plakat.html.html.
17 Morales, "Iconic Sign Evokes Connection to Long Walk."
18 The Long Walk of the Navajo refers to their deportation and ethnic cleansing in 1864 by the U.S. federal government, in the midst of colonial war, whereby they were forcibly displaced from their territory in what is now "Arizona" to what is now "New Mexico," 482 km away. Morales, "Iconic Sign Evokes Connection"; see Morrissey, Kate, "Last of iconic illegal immigration crossing signs has vanished in California." *Los Angeles Times,* 10 February 2018, https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-immigration-sign-20180210-story.html.
19 Morales, "Iconic Sign Evokes Connection."
20 Morales, "Iconic Sign Evokes Connection."
21 Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi, *Reproducing Refugees*, 73–92.
22 Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi, *Reproducing Refugees*, 74.
23 Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi, *Reproducing Refugees*, 74.
24 Abounaddara Collective and Fox, "Representational Regimes," 1–7.
25 hooks, "The Oppositional Gaze," 115–31.
26 Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*.
27 See Lenette, *Arts-Based Methods in Refugee Research,* 158–59.
28 Lenette, *Arts-Based Methods in Refugee Research*, 143.

29 Lenette, *Arts-Based Methods in Refugee Research,* 158, 157.
30 The distinction between iconography and iconology as complementary analytic methods in the critical study of photography is explained by Lenette in another article in terms of the former's *focus on content* vs. the latter's *focus on perspective.* Lenette, "Writing with Light."
31 *Facing Crisis* was an unfunded, and in that sense grassroots, collaboration between LGBTQI+ refugees organized in a collective (that eventually became a non-profit organization) and ourselves. None of the participants (including ourselves) derived any economic benefit from the workshop (we paid for equipment and materials out of pocket).
32 See Tsilimpounidi and Carastathis, "Facing Crisis"; Carastathis and Tsilimpounidi, *Reproducing Refugees*, 138–55.
33 See Tsalapatis, "Refugees, Mitsotakis, and Black Death."
34 Spathopoulou et al., "Crisis Goes Viral," 9–10.
35 Forensic Architecture has confirmed that two people, Muhammad Al-Arab and Muhammad Gulzar, were killed and several people injured when the Greek military fired live ammunition at people crossing the border. The Greek government denies this (Forensic Architecture, "The Killing of Muhammad Al-Arab"; "The Killing of Muhammad Gulzar").
36 Fallon, "How the Greek Island Lesbos Became a Stage for Europe's Far Right."
37 Liberum, "Moria 2."
38 Reporters Without Borders (RSF), "Greek Police Uses Brutal Violence and Arbitrary Bans to Obstruct Reporting on the Refugee Crisis."
39 Souliotis, "Canadian Held on Lesvos Over Alleged Migration Law Violations."
40 European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), "Concern Over German Documentary Crew Detained in Greece."
41 Mountz, "The Enforcement Archipelago," 118–28.
42 See Amanpour, "The New York Times Reports …"
43 Froghi, "The Marble Life."
44 Herman quoted in Fallon and Froghi, "Refugee Journalists in Lesbos Tell Their Own Stories."
45 Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 14, 21.
46 Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 21.
47 Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 132.
48 See: https://www.instagram.com/now_you_see_me_moria/?hl=en.
49 Quoted in Attah, "Now You See Me Moria Poster Campaign."
50 You can find the poster here: https://nowyouseememoria.eu/WP/wp-content/uploads/ninja-forms/3/DOYOUEVENSEEME1.pdf.
51 Oxford English Dictionary (OED), "Memento"; You can find the poster here: https://nowyouseememoria.eu/WP/wp-content/uploads/ninja-forms/3/Tea_Marta_Memento_Moria_Poster_EN_RO.pdf.
52 Amiri, *My Pen Won't Break, But Borders Will.*
53 Azoulay, *The Civil Contract,* 14.

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10

NARRATIVIZING UNARRIVAL

Digital Autographics by Asylum Seekers in the Pacific

M. Eliatamby-O'Brien

Seeking asylum in Australia, Farhad Bandesh, a Kurd from Iran, was detained from 2013–19 on Manus Island. He was subsequently detained in Melbourne's Immigration Transfer Accommodation, and finally released in 2020. While detained, Bandesh used new media and digital art to express his feelings of instability and isolation. In WhatsApp interviews, he describes the importance of creating online collaborative art and music to connect him to Australia even when physically isolated, and later to disseminate his work broadly: "I use music and art to reach people and make sure they know, we [asylum seekers] are still here indefinitely imprisoned and tortured … When I create something, it means I am alive, I am not a forgotten person."[1]

The 2020 music video "The Smiling Boy," whose lyrics and music Bandesh wrote while detained, is based on a 1989 photograph of Kurdish refugees depicting a young boy smiling for the camera moments before he and everyone in the photo were killed by Iraqi soldiers. Nine Australian animators collaborated with Bandesh on the video, which features a collection of animated loops related to forced migration and detention, such as images of parents and children holding suitcases and birds flying over walls, while the central animation is a striking black-and-white capture of Bandesh's singing face. The Director of Animation for "The Smiling Boy," Neil Sanders, worked with a video Bandesh filmed of himself in detention, which was then rotoscoped—digitally traced over—to provide a realistic animation. As the animation plays, the lyrics connect Bandesh's experiences in Australian detention to the "Kurdish kids queued for death" in Iraq. He sings, "Seven years in your jails/Seven years in your hell/You can't break me/I resist, I create, I paint, I sing … You can't bury me alive."[2]

The music video associates the mistreatment of refugees in Iran and Iraq with those in Australia to create a widely circulated artistic object in refutation of the silencing and exclusionary measures of detention systems. Bandesh's face as the primary image ensures his narrative remains central to the video and invites a direct response to his presence, even if solely through the animated form. Unlike Bandesh's self-shot video, the shaky, stark rotoscoped animation exaggerates his expression and forces engagement with his expressions of pain, and recasts his image outside of the confines of detention as it reiterates the video's assertion that detention will not "bury" him. "The Smiling Boy," and Bandesh's other collaborative music videos on YouTube, have been widely discussed and shared on social media, facilitating his engagement with Australia's art scene. In this way, collaborative digital media projects can help detainees like Bandesh develop a type of active presence in Australia despite their physical isolation and unpredictable statuses. In doing so, detained refugees resist being "forgotten" and connect to global audiences through their narratives.

Bandesh's intervention is reflective of the way asylum seekers can harness the medium of autographics—what Gillian Whitlock and Anna Poletti refer to as "life narratives fabricated in and

through drawing and design using various technologies, and materials" including comics, digital scrapbooks, zines, and performance media that yoke narrative autobiographies to visual documentary forms.[3] Comics have shaped the terrain of modern autographics, but recent forms include digital visual media, performance media, and social networks. Poletti and Whitlock write that "embodiment and subjectivity emerge in strikingly different terms in visual and performance media than in written narratives" and autographics involve a "showing and telling" that necessitate "attentive and reflexive reading strategies … alive and responsive to the challenges and pleasures arising from the convergence of the visual, the textual, and the material."[4] Such reflexive reading practices can foster new avenues for readers' engagement with individual self-expression that productively extend the already-present tension in autobiographies between prevailing historical facts and individual memories. Instead, the use of these hybrid forms like self-portraiture, internal dialogue, and physical performance circumvents expectations of event-driven and fact-based life writing, and instead emphasizes non-linear and emotion-based accounts.[5]

Digital autographics—autobiographical narratives relayed through visual cultures in new media—are an especially vital form through which migrants can digitally record and disseminate narratives about their fraught relationship to the immigration regime and national space(s). Digital autographics are uniquely accessible to asylum seekers in their creation and dissemination, as they can be developed with any medium, including found items and physical performances, and can be shared online relatively easily via mobile phones. Furthermore, the use of imagery along with oral or written narratives lends itself to readability across numerous linguistic and literary registers, which encourages further sharing of these autographics. Emergent forms of autographics, including performance art on social media, online comics, and digital animated videos, invite viewers to make associations between thematics of isolation, exclusion, the contradictions of migrations, and the silencing of experiences, while still narrativizing individual's everyday experiences. For those asylum seekers with access to internet-enabled devices, digital autographics can also help them share artistic self-witnessing of their mistreatment by connecting them to the media, activists, and the public.[6] Such dissemination of self-representing witnessing can establish, as Maria Rae et al. assert, a "complex and interconnected relationship" between the "agent" who produces the work, the media they produce, and a widespread audience who interacts with the work visually and physically through commentary.[7] While, as Daniel Joyce describes, the emergence of "digital media witnesses" may not immediately shift human rights issues or policies, it nevertheless connects individuals globally based on mutual investments in changing social conditions and sharing methods of resistance.[8] For migrants who seek out creative forms of connection and access to conversations about their experiences, but who face multiple forms of invisibility as they are cast in the media and by the state as victims who are spoken for or as unwanted individuals, digital media enables them to develop and share counternarratives that respond to their silencing and exclusion. As migrants intervene in these conversations, digital autographics not only put them in dialogue with the public, but also connect them to other asylum seekers with shared histories, developing a larger corpus of creative counternarratives of migratory histories.

This chapter examines digital autographics that address the experiences of asylum seekers who are deemed ineligible for the legal category of refugee and are detained or otherwise have their rights limited by the state but are not officially registered or recognized as having arrived within the nation. I conceive of this condition as one of "unarrival"—as existing in-between migration and official arrival, of lacking formalized status and access to public spaces, and of experiencing tremendous ambiguity as to their relationship to national space. The dispossession of these "unarrived" migrants is further shaped by their indeterminate relationship to national borders, uncertain prospects for resettlement or forcible removal, and the concealment of their presence within the uncertain socio-legal space they inhabit. The presence of the unarrived is thus unfixed and their access to legal processes that might allow them to officialize their place within the nation is tenuous at best. Unarrival cannot be decoupled from the global discourse on refugees, as it is connected to attempts to further restrict and manage refugee status and the benefits therein, while underscoring the uncertainty and exclusion experienced by those who

lack rights afforded to those with "officialized" status. At the same time, as it emerges from the same global associations of refugees with displacement, unbelonging, and the desire for stability, narrativizing unarrival can generatively trace commonalities between the many individuals who have existed in this undefined space—after migration(s), after physical arrival in a new state, yet prior to any personal or officialized sense of arrival. Theorizing unarrival can thus help connect the less-visible experience of forced migrants to the experiences of refugees globally who have lived through similar events, and for whom unarrival remains part of their migratory experiences. Digital autographics that narrate unarrival can capture the complexities of this condition that is simultaneously marked by an end to physical migration in the moment, yet structured by barriers to entering public space fully—ongoing physical and psychic exclusion alongside the desire for a stable and knowable future.

This chapter specifically explores digital autographics depicting the unarrival of migrants who attempt to seek refugee status in either Malaysia or Australia—nations whose treatment of forced migrants is connected by the historical circulation of migrants through the Pacific, and more recently, by collaborative approaches to limiting refugees like the failed 2011 "refugee swap agreement" where Australia intended to transfer 800 detainees to Malaysia for processing to deter future migrants, and accept 4,000 UNHCR-designated refugees over four years from Malaysia to reduce Malaysia's immigrant population. These nations deploy distinct but interrelated methods to protract the formal arrival of asylum seekers within national space, and expose how unarrival can emerge in both so-called "resettlement" nations like Australia with resources to conditionally admit refugees, and in formerly colonized, rapidly industrializing "transit" nations like Malaysia that have been unable or have refused to admit refugees without the assistance of resettlement nations or the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Unarrival is produced distinctly in each nation. In Malaysia, the state does not process or provide privileges to asylum seekers, and even those with refugee status conferred by the UNHRC are viewed as "illegal" migrants. Unarrival is produced through the exclusion of asylum seekers from Malaysia's public services and spaces and their lack of official state-recognized designation, which subjects them to detention and arrest.[9] Each nation draws on forms of governmentality particular to their nation-building initiatives to develop policies on asylum seekers, yet their strategies used to simultaneously register and manage the presence of forced migrants similarly obscures migrants' experiences while figuring them as unassimilable and unwanted non-citizens incompatible with national security. Comparatively considering these nations' approach to unarrival conveys how this problematic can take the form of both spatial exclusion via detention upon entering the nation's borders, or social exclusion by carefully restricting access to public space and everyday life. Rendering asylum seekers as not having fully arrived—both rhetorically, through the language of illegality and irregularity, and physically, by forcing them into detention facilities or denying access to basic services—exemplifies how said processes subtend the control maintained by these nations over asylum seekers' lives while evading acknowledgement of or accountability for their presence.

For asylum seekers living in such precarity, documentation of their experiences is vital to resisting the invisibility of their realities. In addition to working with alternative media organizations, digital artistic interventions are one significant method for asylum seekers to capture what of their lives remains unseen and unrecorded, and to produce a tenuous but vital form of autonomy as they make their presence known even while excluded from rights, national space, and elements of everyday life. After elaborating on Australia and Malaysia's asylum seeker policies, this chapter examines examples like the Refugee Art Project, a non-profit arts organization which helps those detained by the Australian government create online art, and Parastoo Theatre, a Malaysian theater company run by forced migrants that uploads performances online and invites audience interaction. As these digital autographics allow individuals to capture and share their own narratives, they enable asylum seekers who are otherwise barred from full access to national space to self-represent and make visible their obscured experiences. When shared online, these works create crucial connections both between migrants with similar relationships to unarrival, and between asylum seekers and members of the national and global communities who interact with these interventions.

Producing Unarrival in Australia and Malaysia through Asylum Seeker Policies

Australia's practices of offshore processing and mandatory detention are crucial to the deferral of asylum seekers' official arrival. Emerging from its settler colonial identity and the legacy of the White Australia Policy (1901–73), which further refuted Indigenous sovereignty and barred non-Anglo-Europeans from immigration, Australia has deployed a strategy of indefinite, mandatory, non-reviewable, and extra-territorial detention following transport to offshore processing centers since the early 2000s, where all "unlawful arrivals" who travel by boat are held in detention until they are granted a valid visa or forced to leave the country. Alongside the 2013 institution of "Operation Sovereign Borders," which prohibits "Suspected Illegal Entry Vessels" (SIEVs) from entering Australian waters, the government instituted a policy stating that all "illegal arrivals" would be transported offshore for claims processing and resettlement outside Australia.[10] Australia pays Papua New Guinea (PNG) and Nauru to process and hold in detention sites all asylum seekers who attempt to enter Australia without visas, though some individuals are eventually transferred to onshore detention facilities in Australia. Andonea Dickson identifies that these processing and detention centers are thus "zones that are neither of PNG or Nauru, nor detached from them; neither of Australia, nor free of Australia's authoritative jurisdiction," which "transforms these islands into technologies of Australia's border, holding asylum seekers in geographies juridically removed from the Australian state … allow[ing] the transferring state to evade jurisdictional responsibility and political accountability" even if such actions violate international refugee law that prohibits arbitrary and juridically-unsupervised detention.[11]

Australia's management of asylum seekers coupled with the denial of their rights to appeal their status exacerbates their unarrival, which renders invisible their experiences, enabling careful management over both the asylum process and public knowledge of its effects on forced migrants. The Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs—the predecessor to the current Department of Home Affairs which oversees refugees, immigration, and border control—claims in a published fact sheet that "mandatory detention is the result of unlawful entry, not the seeking of asylum. People being held in immigration detention have broken Australian law … by seeking to enter Australia without authority."[12] Such sentiments are applied not only to those in offshore detention, but also "unlawful" non-citizens held in onshore detention centers, either because they were transferred from offshore centers or lack a valid visa and are considered "illegal" immigrants. The rhetorical strategy of identifying detention as a result of attempted unlawful entry puts the onus of being detained on the individual, and justifies their subjection to state power. Their detention renders them as unarrived by spatially indicating they are not permitted within Australia proper and can be denied the same opportunities afforded other migrants. As Dickson argues, the rhetoric surrounding the detention system coupled with the unpredictable movement of asylum seekers from site to site "suspends" them in a "condition of exteriority" which produces "disarticulated geographies of sovereign authority," as the state exercises power over those who arrive through so-called irregular means yet bars them from the access to rights or "systems of protection" afforded to citizens, visa holders, and "legal" refugees.[13] Rather than suspending law in the Agambenian sense, the logic of detention is maintained through "recursive legal manipulations … to domestic law, influenced by successive governments and the institutionalisation of 'indifference' to the rights of asylum seekers."[14] For asylum seekers in detention, whether offshore or mainland, these processes intensify the experience of being impossibly distanced from arrival. They are caught between the state's control that is suggestive of some connection to national space, but are consistently told that they have no claim to, and are unwanted within, the nation proper. Further exacerbating this unarrival are the numerous shifting securitization methods that govern their lives, complicating their ability to make visible the reality of detention and garner the public or legal support necessary to alter these conditions.

Unlike Australia, the category of "refugee" does not exist in Malaysian law, and all "irregular" migrants lack state-administered protections as "illegal immigrants," the only category that Malaysia recognizes for those who do not immigrate through official means. Malaysia is not a signatory to the UN

1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol—which include provisions such as non-refoulement, providing refugees with legal status, and not penalizing "irregular" boat arrivals—and the UNHCR manages all refugee processing. The state has argued that the requirements of the Convention and Protocol place an undue burden on its development as a formerly colonized nation. Indeed, Malaysia's dominant securitization efforts emerge from its history of colonization wherein non-state agencies and NGOs intervened to assist with human rights governance.[15] This relationship results in the tension between the state allowing an outside body like the UNHCR to administer certain protections while its immigration and policing forces disregard UNHCR-conferred refugee status.

While the Malaysian government abdicates responsibility for processing asylum seekers, it extends its numerous mechanisms of securitization to ensure they remain unsettled within its borders. Asylum seekers and UNHCR-designated refugees are restricted from legally working, renting accommodations, accessing most public services, attending state schools, and seeking medical attention at government facilities; they are rarely offered the opportunity of resettlement or integration, and are frequently subjected to intervention by law enforcement without legal proceedings.[16] These restrictions bar individuals from accessing basic living standards and essential services that would signal their presence and belonging, and as Alice Nah asserts, reiterate a "condition of illegality … an uncertain and unresolved socio-legal location," in relation to the nation's border, which forecloses any sense of having fully and legitimately entered Malaysia.[17] Further separating these migrants from a sense of belonging and integration is internalization of the processes that figure them as unwanted and excluded, which results in practices of self-invisibility even as refugees largely express desires for their experiences to be known through their own words.[18] Leonie Ansems de Vries identifies that the "practices of (in)visibility are in play" as migrants are compelled to avoid highways associated with foreigners, change their routes to remain invisible to migration officers and the police, and practice "voluntary detention" at home to avoid possible arrest.[19] The twin forces of their own attempts to remain unseen alongside their indeterminate status extend to a broader form of invisibility; the ensuing self-silencing and general ignorance of their experiences means there is limited documentation of their lives, which leads to a sense of being disconnected not only from their communities, but from a larger history and community of asylum seekers in Malaysia.[20]

While these migrants may not be physically detained outside Malaysia, the state's deterrence methods ensure their status is in flux, which manifests the conditions of unarrival as individuals are barred physically, psychically, and legally from access to normative components of everyday life.[21] Asylum seekers' positions remain unfixed long after entering Malaysia's borders, and, crucially, both before *and* after their status is assessed by the UNHCR. As the state still considers them unlawful migrants, refugees risk violence, arrest, prosecution, and detention by local law enforcement to control their presence and deter future arrivals, and any UNHCR status changes are "exceptions" to the nation's internal securitization and border politics.[22] While the UNHCR makes individuals "appear" on official records and in public discourse, the state "disappears" their presence by failing to address landed asylum seekers in governmental reports or speeches, and with expectations that the media will follow suit. This disappearing is extended by the state's anti-refugee and anti-migrant rhetoric alongside its securitization aims that detain, arrest, and deport "illegal" migrants.[23] This sense of impermanence and not having arrived creates a condition of "incommensurable temporality," as Gerhard Hoffstaedter proposes, where forced migrants remain "perpetually in crisis, indefinite indeterminacy, unable to project themselves into a certain or stable future."[24] The perpetual precariousness of their status and their undefined legal determination intensifies their inability to feel as though they are present—emotionally and physically—within Malaysia.[25]

As these state processes conceal asylum seekers' existences and refuse officializing their arrival through mechanisms like indefinite detention and exclusion from public space, the details and nuances of their everyday lives and struggles are obscured in public discourse. The remainder of this chapter examines how autographics provide counternarratives to these socio-legal and rhetorical strategies that render asylum seekers invisible and exclude them from access to public conversations.

The Refugee Art Project and Documenting Detention Autographically

Since 2010, the Refugee Art Project in Australia has organized weekly art classes for both asylum seekers in Villawood, a detention center in a Sydney suburb, and for those released from other detention centers. Artist and academic Safdar Ahmed, a lead organizer of the Project, describes its intent to "facilitate the agency and self-expression of people of an asylum seeker or refugee background, to deepen public understanding about the asylum seeker issue and the realities of Australia's detention regime."[26] Art produced through the Project is exhibited publicly and digitized and shared on social media, particularly through their Facebook page and its 8,000 followers. The art produced is therapeutically vital for participants who seek ways to document and make sense of their experiences, but its online dissemination, as Olivia Khoo proposes, mediates "encounters between refugee artists in detention with the broader public" while "exceed[ing] linguistic barriers and impediments."[27] The art has also been widely shared through Ahmed's award-winning digital autographic comic *Villawood: Notes from an Immigration Detention Centre* which self-reflexively explores Ahmed's experiences running art workshops in Villawood while emphasizing stories of and artwork by asylum seekers.[28] Ahmed juxtaposes his own personal observations about navigating Villawood with the words of and images created by those detained, and includes context about the lives of detainees who died or were deported and cannot speak to their own art. He also worked with participants to include their own autographic narratives, when possible, even if their stories may have numerous gaps and end in uncertainty. Verónica Tello argues that the aesthetic "counter-memorialization of refugeedom" will often "appear as the convergence of heterogeneous things, which do not combine neatly, and in fragment and rupture."[29] Project participants' work often reflects this convergence as a form of working through the numerous incongruities of their unarrival, such as drawings that express the indeterminacy of detention, images of resistance alongside ones suggestive of detention's totalizing effects, and art that grapples with their uncertain relationship to Australia.

The work of Ahmad Ali Jafari, an Afghan asylum seeker who is the focus of "Chapter 2: Ahmed" of *Villawood,* exemplifies these tensions. In *Villawood*, above two cells of Jafari's art, a text caption notes: "Like so many refugees in detention, his artwork depicts the frustration of being indefinitely detained with no certainty of release."[30] Ahmed explains that Jafari died in detention following chest pains ignored by guards. The inclusion of his art in *Villawood* becomes a way of preserving his experiences online posthumously, while also drawing attention to his other art produced with the Project that may have been otherwise lost after his death. For instance, one of the images from Jafari's art included in *Villawood* is a self-portrait of his face behind bars, with a speech bubble that reads "Suddenly they put me in Villawood detention centre," without any details as to who the "they" in question might encompass.[31] This single image is part of a longer ten-panel comic originally published on Facebook alongside other participants' art entitled "Frustration," which details Jafari's detention after the Department of Immigration erroneously accused him of having a criminal record. Crucially, in "Frustration," Jafari publishes under the pseudonym "Batur," which provides him anonymity—an important act of resistance given the government's failure to correctly identify his background, though he later allowed his art to be used under his own name as part of the Refugee Art Project's work. For those invested in the rest of Jafari's story, the accessibility of his online work allows viewers from a variety of backgrounds and literacies to confront the incoherence of detention processes, but alongside the particular lived experiences of migrants whose lives are rarely documented in media or state reporting. As the hybrid "verbal-visual nature" of autographic comics already assumes the impossibility of capturing easily digestible, fact-based, and linear events in non-fiction narratives, works like Jafari's harness the form to collapse the numerous disjunctures and uncertainties of detention into a compact series of panels, without the expectation that the totality of his trauma and experiences will be explicitly detailed.[32] Yet Jafari's autographic depiction of his own face in his work, as with the other art in the project, provides what Khoo refers to as an ethical and humanizing "face-to-face" encounter with asylum seekers through their own self-representation and self-perception of themselves

in art, rather than through an externally produced image of them such as a photograph or documentary.[33] Their autographics instead emphasize their autonomy in sharing particular elements of their experiences in their comics and art—a vital approach as they are "otherwise kept outside of public view, thought, imagination."[34]

The final frame of "Frustration" is especially striking: it is an identical self-portrait to the image of Jafari's face in *Villawood* that also appears at the start of "Frustration," but he no longer appears behind bars, even though the caption reads "I have waited for 11 long months."[35] Ahmed proposes that art of this nature can "provide the opportunity to review, revise, and reconstitute the often scattered shards of memory, culture and identity that refugees carry with them," where the "artistic act may then become one of discovery" rather than art that solely revisits trauma or incites pity for asylum seekers.[36] Jafari's short comic allows him to work through the contradictions of unarrival and the impossible distance between him and Australia proper even as he is technically within its borders. This working through is emphasized in the last frame, where he projects himself outside the bars to appear not as a detainee victimized by the whims of the immigration system, but as an individual self-representing his frustration and awareness of the system's injustices. In sum, the autographic form frees him to manage the details of his narrative. At the same time, his work persists beyond his untimely death through its digitization, and contributes to the Project's larger goal of creating a body of work for other asylum seekers and the Australian public that "bear[s] witness to what would otherwise go unseen" while ensuring participants self-represent their narratives artistically.[37]

While Jafari's comic traces a particular series of events, most of the participants' art that is posted on social media are decontextualized drawings or self-portraits that also narrativize life in offshore detention. An especially striking series of paintings posted on Facebook by the Refugee Art Project is attributed to "Saeed, who spent 2+ years incarcerated in Australian detention centres."[38] The background of the first painting is the Australian flag, and in the center, two eyes peek out from behind cell bars. The next painting is of a shoe painted with the Australian flag crushing a hunched figure who cries out in capital letters, "I AM THE FUTURE!" The background of the final painting is again the flag, and above a caption reading "WHATEVER HAPPENS I HOPE IT'S GOOD," a silhouetted figure keels over a couch.[39] Ahmed identifies that many participants "project themselves into the future, as soon-to-be contributors to the Australian national identity" which often involves "a surprising (re) appropriation of the symbols and icons of Australian nationalism."[40] Saeed's work exemplifies this reappropriation by critiquing Australian nationalism and its relationship to the trauma of indefinite detention by depicting the flag consistently looming over images of violence toward detainees. While Saeed also engages with the nation's future through the caption, his claim that "I AM THE FUTURE" takes on additional meaning, extending beyond a symbolic nationalist assertion to stake a claim to this future through its digitization and use in ongoing anti-detention artistic projects. For instance, along with other participants' work, Saeed's series was included on the Refugee Art Project's social media to promote "Imaginary Borders: A New Refugee Art Project Exhibition," which showcased participants' work in a gallery venue in Sydney—one of the twenty-five exhibitions facilitated by the project with participants' input and permission. The digitization of participants' autographics, coupled with their role in organizing the exhibition, can thus facilitate powerful affiliations beyond the confines of detention: between participants who can view the workshop art on their phones and engage with a digital repository of their shared narratives, between participants and viewers who interact with the art in both physical and digital spaces, and, critically, between participants and the physical site of the gallery, where their work enables them to actively engage in discussions about Australia's exclusionary tactics that they would otherwise be excluded from in detention. The Refugee Art Project's work fosters this vital dialogue via the digital, mediating conversations between asylum seekers and audience members who may be interested in the experiences of forced migrants, but who lack firsthand knowledge of their realities. In doing so, the Project enables current detainees, and even those subjected to death in detention like Jafari, to contribute to conversations about the actual effects of Australia's exclusionary tactics rather than being spoken for or having their experiences erased.

Creating Community through Interactivity: Parastoo Theatre

Parastoo Theatre, named after the Persian word for migratory swallows, is based in Kuala Lumpur and led by Afghan writer and director Saleh Sepas, a UNHCR–designated refugee. Sepas has faced Malaysia's strict restrictions for "unlawful" migrants. After fleeing to Malaysia in 2016, he was effectively excluded from public space as he was unable to work or otherwise engage with the community at large for fear of violence or censure. The members of Parastoo are also asylum seekers from Afghanistan, and in an interview, Sepas and producer Amin Kamrani describe how they were isolated, depressed, and lacked any access to social activities due to their tenuous and illegal status. Parastoo participants thus experience a significant gap between host and migrant communities; they are unable to return to their nation of origin, yet are disconnected from everyday Malaysian society, and lack a sense of stability or home given their fraught status. As the government works with media outlets to actively suppress news and stories about refugees and asylum seekers, Parastoo also plays a crucial role in allowing individuals to tell their stories while connecting with other migrants who participate in the theater either as actors or as members of the participatory audience. This helps them expand their interpersonal relationships in a space where their experiences are legible rather than silenced. The plays that the writing cohort of Parastoo performers develop alongside the directing and acting cohorts are based on asylum seekers' lives in Afghanistan and their complex feelings of hope, loss, alienation, and uncertainty after migration. For example, *The Bitter Taste of History* is a one-act play performed in Persian with Malay and English subtitles projected behind the performers based on the "experiences of [migrants'] friends and family"; it focuses on families separated by the Taliban with an emphasis on the patriarchal violence therein, and includes "snippets of news reports" about ongoing fighting in Afghanistan.[41] Parastoo's inclusion of references to actual events mirrors how asylum seekers' migratory struggles complicate their ability to keep abreast of what is occurring in Afghanistan, as they appear as brief and inconsistent insertions, yet nevertheless these inclusions help make their histories present for audiences and participants in Malaysia. At the end of the performances, the participants encourage refugees in the audience to discuss their own experiences, and the Malaysian audience to ask questions. As one of the participants, Ismail, describes, "Theatre freed me from psychological pressures because we can connect with different people."[42] Though revisiting such violence through developing and acting in these plays may risk retraumatization, the participants emphasize that the connection to the Malaysian public and other refugees, as well as the validation of their experiences, is profoundly healing.

In addition to live shows, Parastoo also posts videos of their workshops and performances on Facebook, which, aligning with Whitlock and Poletti's theorization of performance media as autographical, produces a digital autographic effect as the relationship between the larger theater productions and actors' individual narratives is drawn out online. These videos are also reshared by larger arts-based events in Malaysia with international reach like Refugee Fest, which connects the Parastoo participants to other migrants who use artistic forms like poetry, painting, music, and film to make their narratives visible, and invite further audience interactivity with their stories as online viewers are asked to help participants imagine new possible responses to scenes from their lives.

Participants specifically use methods from Augusto Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, which involves techniques like "image theatre," wherein a participant asks a group of fellow actors to act out an event where they were oppressed and then alters the scene to express the outcome they desire, and "forum theatre," where the audience proposes solutions to various enacted social problems.[43] The online videos allow viewers to understand how refugees make sense of their past traumas, and also how these stories are rendered invisible in Malaysia. Migrant participants explain how they are doubly silenced when they retain these memories but know their experiences are unwanted and denied in everyday discussions in both nations. In one of the workshop videos from 2020, a Parastoo member, Farzana, directly identifies migrants' invisibility in Malaysia, asserting that "the audiences must connect to us by seeing our body and that we don't have a voice to speak," which precisely reflects the need to develop creative ways to make their presence legible amid the struggle of making their experiences widely known.[44]

Many of the workshop videos reference abuses by police in Afghanistan, but also invite the audience to become active participants as writer and director Sepas asks the rest of the actors, and thus the online viewers, to try and interpret the scenes before the details of the atrocities are revealed, which invites them to personally connect to the scene. The actors then explain how retelling these stories gives them a sense of belonging.[45] In one activity, the participants are asked to act out their feelings through repetitive motion and a sound of their choice. Together, they create a larger emotive cacophony of their experiences that audiences are invited to interpret, parsing out what emotions the participants might be expressing individually and collectively. Even though this activity lacks a specific narrative focus, a participant, Masouma, notes that it creates a bridge between audience and actors as "they connect through eyes and body."[46] Following another forum theater workshop, "Overcoming Hardship in Times of Crisis," where participants act out brief examples of domestic violence against asylum seekers, an actor then asks the audience "who were oppressed?" The online audience members provide varied responses: "Mother and daughter were oppressed," "male violence against women!" and "The mother and daughter had also rude behavior." The actors then invite a physically present audience member onstage to re-act a scene and find a way to change the outcome of the violence.[47] As this initial connection occurs prior to participants discussing their traumas, it is grounded in shared emotional understanding as audiences must use their own experiences to make sense of the actors' behaviors in the video, which ideally works to diminish pre-existing assumptions about the unknowability of refugees in Malaysia.

In a 2020 workshop, another participant, Reza, has the others freeze in a scene that mimics a time he was taken into police custody a decade prior for playing with fireworks. He was told that if he cleaned the police station he would be released, but was instead detained with others for an unspecified amount of time. Reza then has participants alter the scene, as he reimagines a scenario where he was able to go home and watch football with his family and friends, which allowed him a sense of control over his experiences and how they are relayed. The focus on police and detainment connects participants' experiences in Afghanistan to Malaysia, where even those with UNHCR identity documents are arbitrarily and indefinitely taken into custody. Tello argues that memorial art can involve "a process of prefiguring the thickness of history and brutality, and of counting disagreement as part of the process of remembrance."[48] Parastoo's plays and workshops at once evoke the violence of the past and tether it to the ongoing conditions of unarrival in Malaysia by suggesting the past is never settled, and can be revisited and renarrated through participants' interventions. After Reza's scene, he describes that sharing Parastoo's work is important as it "helps reduce our fear of judgement … for those who have a bitter experience and can't forget it, so others here see that experience."[49] By recording and sharing these autographic performances with a wide online audience who are asked to participate in envisioning alternatives to refugees' current conditions in Malaysia, the digital dissemination of Parastoo's work counters the active concealment of refugees' narratives and histories, and helps them cultivate a sense of community otherwise foreclosed by state policies and practices.

Conclusion

Digital autographics exemplify different approaches migrant creatives can take to harness the interactivity and circulation of the digital form, and to intervene in the conversations and processes that obscure their histories, refute their presence, and deny state accountability for their marginality. At a time when the conditions of unarrival persist globally for forced migrants living in exteriority to everyday life and marked as unwanted in prevailing state discourses, digital autographies enable migrant creatives to record and disseminate their narratives across and beyond the nation, inviting dialogue with communities they are otherwise excluded from. The Refugee Art Project evinces the significance of creating a repository of visual works by asylum seekers that can be shared widely over social media, which renders visible resonances in their responses to discussions about rights and experiences of detained asylum seekers. The medium also fosters interaction between audiences and participants

through online conversations, which connects individuals beyond the physical barriers of detention centers. Parastoo Theatre records the embodied narratives of asylum seekers to creatively document their lives and distinctly creates community in online spaces by encouraging viewers to actively engage with their presence and performance. Through this active engagement, these narrative approaches demand more of audiences than passive viewing. They instead implicate audiences in the artists' and participants' experiences, positioning them as witnesses compelled to interpret and respond to migrant lives, and produce a type of artistic presence that exceeds the state's careful rhetorical and structural management of their realities via conditions of unarrival.

Notes

1 Ryan, "I WhatsApped Refugees."
2 Bandesh, "The Smiling Boy by Farhad Bandesh."
3 Whitlock and Poletti, "Self-Regarding Art," v.
4 Whitlock and Poletti, "Self-Regarding Art," viii, xiv.
5 Whitlock and Poletti, "Self-Regarding Art," viii.
6 Rae, Holman, and Nethery, "Self-Represented Witnessing," 480.
7 Rae, Holman, and Nethery, "Self-Represented Witnessing," 480, 491.
8 Joyce, "Media Witnesses," 242.
9 "Asylum seeker" is used throughout to refer to those who seek refugee status and associated rights. While those with UNHCR-designated refugee status are classified as "illegal" by the Malaysian state, I use "asylum seeker" when referring to the state's perspective. In Australia, certain organizations refer to all forced migrants as "refugees," but for clarity I use "asylum seeker" for those without status.
10 Dickson, "Distancing Asylum Seekers from the State," 440.
11 Dickson, "Distancing Asylum Seekers from the State," 444.
12 Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, *Fact Sheet 82: Immigration Detention*.
13 Dickson, "Distancing Asylum Seekers," 437, 439.
14 Dickson, "Distancing Asylum Seekers," 440–41.
15 Mohd Don and Lee, "Representing Immigrants as Illegals, Threats and Victims in Malaysia," 688.
16 Mohd Don and Lee, "Representing Immigrants as Illegals, Threats and Victims in Malaysia," 688.
17 Nah, "Struggling with (Il)Legality," 36.
18 Mohd Don and Lee, "Representing Immigrants as Illegals, Threats and Victims in Malaysia," 702.
19 Ansems de Vries, "Politics of (In)visibility," 890.
20 Nah, "Struggling with (Il)Legality," 37.
21 Ansems de Vries, "Politics of (In)visibility," 894.
22 Nah, "Struggling with (Il)Legality," 38.
23 Lego, "Making Refugees (Dis)Appear," 196.
24 Hoffstaedter, "Arrested Refugee Mobilities," 532.
25 Hoffstaedter, "Arrested Refugee Mobilities," 540.
26 Ahmed, "Bearing Witness," 24.
27 Khoo, "A Post-Apology," 99.
28 Ahmed is not a refugee but identifies that the discrimination against his Indian Muslim paternal family informs his work with minoritized peoples in Australia and his desire to both work with fellow artists from migrant backgrounds—including former detainees—and provide artistic outlets for detainees and refugees while ensuring they have agency over the dissemination of their work (Ahmed, "The Art of Exile," 11–12).
29 Tello, *Counter-Memorial Aesthetics,* 2, 21.
30 Ahmed, *Villawood.*
31 Ahmed, *Villawood.*
32 Hatfield, *Alternative Comics,* 112.
33 Khoo, "A Post-Apology," 104.
34 Khoo, "A Post-Apology," 104.
35 Ahmed, *Villawood.*
36 Ahmed, "The Art of Exile," 11.
37 Ahmed, "Bearing Witness," 24.
38 The Refugee Art Project, "Come and see Imaginary Borders."
39 The Refugee Art Project, "Our New Exhibition."
40 Ahmed, "The Art of Exile," 16.

41 Mayberry, "Afghan Refugees in Malaysia Find Hope in Theatre of the Oppressed."
42 The Refugee Fest, "Parastoo Theatre Workshop by Saleh Sepas."
43 Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed,* 112, 117.
44 The Refugee Fest, "Parastoo Theatre Workshop by Saleh Sepas."
45 The Refugee Fest, "Parastoo Theatre Workshop by Saleh Sepas."
46 The Refugee Fest, "Parastoo Theatre Workshop by Saleh Sepas."
47 Parastoo, "Forum Theatre."
48 Tello, *Counter-Memorial*, 22.
49 The Refugee Fest, "Parastoo Theatre Workshop by Saleh Sepas."

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11

IF WE DO NOT WRITE POETRY, WE WILL DIE

Afghan Diasporic Social Media Poetry for the Fall of Kabul

Zuzanna Olszewska

Take your bombs, your guns
and your trash
clear out and go home,
comfortable people of the world!
Stop eyeing up our water and land,
heartless neighbors!
Mournful, enraged,
these days
poetry
can't work its poetry.
Which woman
has the heart
to tend to her looks
when she's anxious and distraught?

A woman
abandoned by all
is not a woman.
She is gunpowder stuffed down the throat of a gun,
a sorrow petrified
in the mountain's heart.
How can I speak poetry
with all this molten rock
in my throat?

We did not deserve war,
homeland dear.
Wild, beautiful woman!
Your fate could have been
caravans bearing silk and light
The rubab's echoes in the mountains

Salang's snow
The Helmand's flow
and strong, kind men
who gifted you children
made of love and wisdom.

Regret
exile
aloneness
I did not deserve these.
My poems should have borne
the scent of redbud and oleaster
the tinkle of anklets and attans
the tang of sheep's milk in green thickets.

They will grow green, one day,
all these dreams
that we have buried in the breast of the earth.[1]
[782 followers//61 likes/7 comments][2]

On July 11, 2021, this poem was posted on Instagram by Mahbouba Ibrahimi, an Afghan poet and filmmaker who now lives in a village north of Uppsala in Sweden. It reflects the anxiety with which many diasporic Afghans watched as international troops accelerated their withdrawal from Afghanistan that month—a concern that quickly turned to horror as the Taliban began to make increasingly rapid territorial gains across the country. Most Afghan people wanted foreign military occupation to end, certainly, but this was too fast, too uncontrolled, and the outcome not at all what many had hoped for.

Ibrahimi is twice a refugee. Born in Kandahar in 1975 as a member of that city's Shi'a, Hazara minority, she grew up and was educated in Iran. I first met her in 2005 when she was one of the key poets and activists of an Afghan literary association in Tehran. She returned to Afghanistan in 2007, but soon migrated again to Sweden to seek a better future for her young children. Although geographically isolated from most of her compatriots, she is active on Facebook and Instagram and regularly shares her new work there; she was very prolific during the tense summer of 2021, posting many new poems and reposting old ones. It was she who posted the line "These days, if we do not write poetry we will die" that I have used as the title of this piece. Ibrahimi often takes an anti-war stance and personifies her homeland in her poetry—in the past, she has identified it with a loving but exhausted father or mother. Here she personifies it as a "wild, beautiful woman" who deserved a different, happier fate. She defiantly excoriates both Westerners and Afghanistan's immediate neighbors for their hand in its decades of misery, all the while mourning its beauty and deferred dreams.

I had intended to write something different for this volume. This was supposed to be a survey of forty years of Afghan refugee poetry in Persian, highlighting its themes, genres, modes of circulation, and publics. But as I worked on my chapter, poems like Ibrahimi's increasingly captured my attention and the final section on social media poetry began to throb with a new pain and urgency. As cities and provinces across Afghanistan fell one by one to the Taliban in the summer of 2021—gradually, then rapidly—the Afghan refugee and diasporic poets I followed published their responses in verse online. This material eventually swallowed up the whole chapter.

I present here, then, a selection of the Persian-language social media poetry of the fall of Kabul, or the unexpected capture of power by a Taliban government whose shape is still unfolding. These are poems which are appearing not only in English translation but also in print for the first time, with the permission of their authors. All translations are my own. Despite their freshness, they still allow me to reflect on many of the recurring themes and genres of the past forty years of refugee poetry, and many

of their authors are people I would have included in the longer survey I originally planned. I focus especially on those whose craft was forged in refugee communities in Iran beginning in the 1980s, but later spread around the globe with many waves of remigration. This work originated in ethnographic research with Afghan refugee literary organizations in Iran between 2005 and 2010, and ongoing digital ethnography with Afghan poets and intellectuals from the global diaspora in subsequent years.

When writing about a country as complex, diverse, and riven by violence as Afghanistan, it is important to acknowledge that the poetry I have selected—and the notion of a "fall" in the title, rather than a rise or a return—represents a partial view. Seen as a major vehicle of ethical intervention, social critique, and even an alternative form of knowledge in this part of the world, poetry is necessarily political; it both reflects and analyzes the fragmentation of Afghanistan.[3] As Persian-speakers and often members of minorities persecuted in the past by the Taliban, these poets saw the latter's return as a catastrophe and a cause for mourning rather than celebration, but many people who suffered most from the NATO forces' counterinsurgency tactics, particularly in largely Pashtu-speaking areas whose communities had fed Taliban recruitment, felt differently about their return. The Taliban themselves, indeed, are known to write poetry, as are many ordinary people in the regions from which they derive most of their support.[4] I will leave it to others to collect and translate poetry from other regions and languages in Afghanistan, representing other viewpoints.

Taken together, these poems certainly represent refugee narratives about exile and its longings and indignities, and about the political volatility and fragmentation of Afghanistan. But although the state of "refugeeness" often implies a state of exception, in this region, on the contrary, mobility—whether due to pastoral nomadism, trade, pilgrimage, scholarship, or indeed political exile—has been a fact of life for centuries. The (incomplete) rise of a centralized state of Afghanistan, with irredentist populations straddling its imperially-imposed borders, should in many ways be seen instead as the exception, requiring greater cultural and political negotiation that is far from settled today. Indeed, diasporic individuals and communities themselves have played an important role in the imagination of the Afghan state and its national culture and literature, whether in the nineteenth century or the twenty-first.[5] Recently, scholars of Afghan literature in Persian and Pashto have been finding it fruitful to write instead of *border* or *borderland* literatures, drawing inspiration from poets and theorists of the Mexican American borderlands such as Heriberto Yépez and Gloria Anzaldúa. Here, as James Caron writes, "migrant subjects and plural local ones—both in the literary formation and in everyday life—are not separable, in a transregional society that has been configured as a 'global borderland.' … Theirs is a combined social and aesthetic practice that negotiates bordering, and that reconstitutes new formations out of the fragments that result from it."[6] Indeed, with their poetic subjectivities shaped by their formative years and literary training in Iran, yet never belonging to that country, the poets whose works I present here are similarly borderland subjects. Here I ask: how have their negotiations manifested in the wake of the most recent cataclysmic events? What new cultural formations do social media allow to arise, given the easy circulation of cultural material across vast global networks?

Afghan Refugee Poets and Social Media Poetry

Afghan refugees have long been drily described in international humanitarian jargon as one of the largest refugee "caseloads" or as one of the world's largest and most prolonged "refugee emergencies." Some four million Afghans fled to neighboring countries and an additional three million were internally displaced following the Soviet invasion in 1979. Subsequent political events—resistance, civil war, repressive theocratic government, and ongoing armed conflict following the U.S.-led invasion in 2001—led to further population movements on an unprecedented scale. Twenty years later, in 2021, we witnessed the chaotic scenes at Kabul Airport—already as indelible as images of the fall of Saigon—as tens of thousands of people were evacuated or fled across land borders to neighboring countries. For anyone familiar with the rich literary heritage of this region, it should come as no surprise that refugees themselves have extensively narrated these experiences of exile in rather different terms to the

humanitarian jargon. Their experiences have been intertwined with poetry, both oral and written, as their longest-standing, most portable, and most durable artistic tradition—and, as suggested above, as a means of continuous critique, reflection, world-building, and intervention in social life.

Poetry has long held extraordinary significance throughout the West-Central Asian region and its many languages, among which Persian (also known in Afghanistan, not uncontroversially, as Dari) has often acted as a lingua franca and prestige language. Poets traditionally possessed an aura of wisdom and authority and with heavily restricted literacy, oral literature in local vernaculars was until quite recently a medium of mass communication, a popular pastime and social activity, and a portable repository of cultural, historical, and philosophical knowledge. Written literature in the Persian language, meanwhile, was for centuries an integral part of elite culture, scholarship, and administration in the courts of kings and, together with Islam, a unifying force in multiethnic kingdoms and empires from Iran to Central Asia and India. Poetry has also been a vehicle for social and political messages, whether praise or criticism. As such, it offers a useful lens for understanding socio-economic transformations and mass migrations alike.[7]

Early on in the past four decades of conflict, in the 1980s and 1990s, many of the established writers and poets of the intellectual circles of large cities like Kabul and Herat went into exile—either in the neighboring countries of Pakistan and Iran or further afield, in Europe and the U.S. Some wrote their masterpieces there, like Seyyed Baha'uddin Majrouh's poetry-prose treatise *Azhdahā-ye Khodi* ("Ego Monster"), published in Peshawar, Pakistan, where he was assassinated in 1988.[8] Given the rural origins and non-literacy of the vast majority of Afghan refugees, however, one of the primary forms of literature that flourished right from the start in refugee communities was oral poetry and storytelling in folk genres, which circulated on cassette tapes and in chapbooks in the bazaars of Pakistan and Iran—typically, religious and martial poetry calling for resistance against the Soviet invasion, and nostalgic poetry of exile.[9]

As the conflict passed through successive stages and years of exile turned into decades, new literary genres, themes, and protagonists emerged in relation to political and cultural developments in diverse diasporic communities. Most notably, widespread access to education for both boys and girls in many refugee communities brought about a revolution of literacy and the broadening of writing, readership, and publication—first in print, and later online. In Iran, for example, there were three distinct moments in refugee poetic production: the resistance poetry of the 1980s; the post–ideological poetry of the 1990s onward; and the social media poetry of the 2010s onwards.[10] These moments reflected wider socio-political transformations, in whose forges new genres were shaped. The Afghan resistance poetry written in Iran in the 1980s, for instance, mirrored the elevated emotions, intensely political and religious themes, and neoclassical genres of Iranian post-Islamic Revolution poetry and the poetry of the Iran-Iraq War, while the post-ideological poetry of the 1990s turned to more personal and particularistic themes and genres, including a major shift (back) to the lyrical and confessional modernist blank verse developed largely in Iran earlier in the twentieth century. Social media poetry can be either highly political or intensely personal and draws on both earlier strands in a literary moment that continues to be experimental and eclectic. It is to this last category, and its most recent expressions in particular, that I now turn.

In the mid-late 2000s many Afghan poets and writers, especially those based in Iran, turned their hands to blogging. At the time, writers of Persian-language blogs—known as "veblogs"—formed one of the biggest blogging communities in the world.[11] Blogs were tightly interconnected, since users could publicly "follow" each other's work and often requested reciprocity when doing so. Users actively commented on each other's latest posts within hours of them appearing. The younger Afghan poets were also avid users of instant messaging platforms in the early 2000s and regularly chatted with large personal networks of friends across Iran, Afghanistan, and the diaspora, many of whom they had never met in person. Eventually, in the 2010s, Facebook quickly rose in popularity as a single platform that enabled all these features—publishing, commenting, networking, and messaging—while in the late 2010s many users also created Instagram accounts and some became more active on that platform. New activity on most blogs died down at around the same time, though many old ones are still available to read online. Access to Facebook and Instagram is restricted in Iran but most users have ways to get around these blocks—called *filter-shekan* or filter-breakers. Elsewhere in the world, of course, access is

far easier. Although the move to social media was spearheaded by younger poets, eventually the older, more established poets who initially scorned it realized that they would be left behind and seen as out of touch if they did not also establish a presence there.

As the core group of Afghan poets in Iran that I worked with gradually dispersed to numerous countries around the world, through repatriation to Afghanistan, onward migration or resettlement to third countries via the United Nations, many found that social media became their primary way of staying in touch both with other poets and with Persian-speaking audiences. This allowed their poems to be published and read quickly and for readers to give them comments and feedback (even if poets often despair at the perfunctory nature of such feedback). Many of the poets I first met in Iran now have large followings on social media, numbering in the thousands. One of the most popular is Zahra Hosseinzadeh (b. 1980), a master of the *ghazal* form who still lives in Iran and has a following among both Afghans and Iranians, with over 24,000 followers on Instagram as of August 2021. The connections they make are not just about staying in touch with existing acquaintances: they also become powerful tools for finding and interacting with likeminded people, some of whom go on to become firm friends, and result in sprawling transnational networks of poets, intellectuals, and other cultural producers.

Poetry as Reaction and Witnessing

The internet has facilitated the continued relevance of political poetry, granting it an almost unprecedented immediacy. Afghanistan has remained embroiled in conflict during the past twenty years, with periodic atrocities taking place on its soil, such as bombings and armed assaults against civilians by insurgent groups. Many of Afghanistan's Persian-speaking poets are Hazaras, Shi'as, or otherwise in sympathy with these minority groups that have often been specifically targeted in insurgent attacks. News of this bloodshed, complete with graphic images, often makes its way onto the social media feeds of diasporic Afghans within minutes of such events, soon followed by anguished responses in verse that crystallize the feelings of many observers and receive dozens or hundreds of "likes" and "shares" on Facebook. Poetry helps to galvanize this affective community quickly because it is so quick to produce (compared, say, to music or video), with many poets I know growing increasingly skilled at impromptu composition, and because of the deep reserves of cultural and historical resonance on which it draws.

The events of the summer of 2021 were no exception, and indeed resulted in an intensification of poetic activity. People responded to events—such as the fall of particular cities—or to images or particular news stories, with new compositions, reposts of their older poetry on themes of war or nostalgia for the homeland, or quotes from famous works by other poets. Many, both women and men, expressed their solidarity for the women of Afghanistan and fear of what a return to Taliban rule would mean for them. In early September, when the province of Panjshir was the final region of Afghanistan mounting armed resistance against the Taliban, many Persian-language poets returned to the tones and themes of the war and resistance poetry of the 1980s, praising the leaders of the resistance and lamenting those who were killed with a return to the language of martyrdom.

The ancient city of Herat in the west of Afghanistan, once famously described as a place where you could not stretch your legs without kicking a poet, fell to the Taliban on August 12, 2021. On that day Maral Taheri, who was born (in 1981) in Mashhad, Iran to a Herati family, and now lives in Tehran, posted the following short poem in blank verse on Instagram:

> In the alley a wind starts to blow
> This is the beginning of ruination
> That day when your hands were ruined, a wind was blowing.
> Dear stars,
> dear cardboard stars!
> When in the heavens, the blowing of lies takes hold,
> how are we to find solace in the verses of defeated prophets?

We will find each other like the dead of thousands of thousands of years, and then
the sun will judge us by the decay of our corpses.
#Herat

<div align="right">[617 followers//123 likes/6 comments]</div>

Taheri's post was an example of literary quotation: this is an excerpt from a poem by Iranian modernist poet Forugh Farrokhzad (1934–67),[12] so well-known that Taheri evidently felt it did not require attribution. Taheri, who has been deeply influenced by Farrokhzad in her own work and life, clearly felt that the poem's surrealism and disillusionment lent itself perfectly to the moment. The theme of decay and ruination was amplified in the accompanying photograph, showing four of the remaining minarets of Herat's fourteenth-century Musalla complex—there were originally twenty, but all but nine were dynamited by the British in 1885, and several more fell in subsequent earthquakes. They tower over Herat's old city, leaning slightly, recalling both the city's former glory and its ruination. Read in 2021, the poem reflects the air of deceit and corruption that characterizes *our* time, where lies are told even in the heavens, and even the stars are fake—uncannily resonating with the rumors that the governor of Herat had surrendered without a shot being fired in an apparent deal with the Taliban. In such times, how can one trust the "defeated prophets"? Rather than a Judgement Day with the promise of eternal life, one can have only the judgement of the merciless sun on one's bones to look forward to. In quoting a modernist Iranian poet in this way, Taheri is also effectively translating Afghanistan's pain for her many followers of Iranian origin.

As more cities fell, next came the news of the desperate and chaotic evacuations of Afghan citizens allied with the foreign forces, the government, or otherwise perceiving themselves at risk from the Taliban. The chaos and haste were epitomized by several reports of women giving birth on board evacuation flights. In response to such stories, Mahbouba Ibrahimi posted the following poem on Facebook on August 31, 2021, reflecting, as she often does, the plight of refugees and exiles everywhere:

Tonight's poem

We don't have much space on this earth of ours
The extent of a room
The extent of a rug
We don't even have enough time
for our final death throes.
So we have to
give birth to our babies on airplanes
breastfeed them in camps
and hear them speak their first words
in the lands of others.

And one day they'll suddenly ask us—
Where are we from?

We have to be very careful
not to burn
their delicate fingertips
on a map
when we
place them over the homeland's name.

<div align="right">[2,372 followers/95 reactions (like/sad/love)/7 comments]</div>

Those who were evacuated themselves began posting poems of homesickness and nostalgia. Mostafa Hazara is a well-known journalist, poet, and director of a cultural foundation in Kabul who was born to refugees in Tehran in 1989 and grew up there before his family returned to Afghanistan when he was seventeen. He was evacuated to France in late August and subsequently posted many poems of longing on both his Facebook and his Twitter accounts. On Twitter they were inevitably shorter and in his characteristically laconic style, often including an ironic or humorous element and mixing elevated emotions with the mundane trivia of everyday life—a hallmark of the style of poetry described as "postmodern" by Persian-language poets—such as in this poem from September 6:

How awful I feel for my homeland.
What should I tell my doctor?
Prescribe Kabul for me,
Pol-e Sorkh three times a day,
bread from home
and good mountain air?

How awful I feel for my homeland.
The insurance company says,
The cost of your illness due to your homeland is up to you.
Homeland–sickness
as with your teeth or eyes is a cosmetic condition.
You need to pay for it yourself.[13]
        [9,191 followers//7 comments/53 retweets/621 likes]

As concern over the Taliban's treatment of women intensified, poets responded with their reflections on the plight of Afghan women. Indeed, it should be noted that a strong stance in favor of women's rights is a sine qua non for progressive Afghan intellectuals today, both male and female, even if some of the precise details of what that means might vary. On August 28, one of the best-known and revered (male) master poets and cultural activists in the refugee community in Iran, Seyyed AbuTaleb Mozaffari (b. 1966), posted a poem titled "Woman and War":

When a woman sits weeping in a corner of a house
first
the flowers in the vases wither one by one
pestilence strikes the orchard
the wind blows sorrow through the streets
quarrels erupt in the shops
cars collide.
Women's sorrow
causes commerce to decline.

To have a beautiful city
a flourishing homeland
you don't need to fight for years
have endless philosophical debates
and keep changing your systems of governance.
Keep women joyful
go to the market with them
buy them poems and perfume and flowers.

> A country whose women weep in the corners of houses
> is condemned to famine and strife.
>> [7,844 followers/478 reactions (like/love)/22 comments/30 shares]

At first glance, it might appear that this poem presents an overly romanticized view of women or sees them only through a typically patriarchal prism of hyperemotionality, as well as placing all the agency for "keep[ing] women joyful" in the hands of men. But Mozaffari, who is proud of his work mentoring and championing several generations of female poets and writers, is well aware that more work is necessary to safeguard women's rights than simply "buy[ing] them poems and perfume and flowers." So what is he trying to do in this poem? Interesting here is the poem's playful inversion of the usual assumptions of causality: that women weep due to famine, strife, pestilence, and war. Here, it is the other way around, as women are endowed with a powerful, magic-realist kind of agency that spreads chaos around them when they weep. It may not seem like a radically feminist poem, but perhaps the assertion that respect for women is the true source of peace and prosperity is radical in its simplicity. It is also a clear anti-Taliban message. The cynicism for "endless philosophical debates" and ever-changing systems of governance, perhaps unusual for someone with training in Iran's religious seminaries, also reflects a wider disillusionment with ideology experienced by many Afghan refugees in Iran—and indeed, many Iranians—from the mid-1990s onwards.

Poems of Martyrdom

In early September, the news that the primarily Tajik forces of the National Resistance Front (NRF) were under attack but still fighting in the Panjshir Valley sent a ripple of hope across Persian-speaking Afghan social media. An example of the repurposing of an older poem underscored how uncannily history appeared to be repeating itself in Afghanistan. Another of the master poets and literary activists of the Afghan community in Iran, Mohammad Kazem Kazemi (born in Herat in 1967 but residing in Mashhad for over 40 years), recalled a poem he had written 30 years previously in honor of the leader of the Northern Alliance that opposed the Taliban conquest of Afghanistan in the 1990s, Ahmad Shah Massoud, who went on to be assassinated shortly before 9/11. He reposted a fragment of it with a black-and-white image of Massoud in profile in the background wearing his trademark Panjshiri *pākol* hat. The profile of his son Ahmad Massoud, the current leader of the NRF, appeared in color in the foreground. The poem was a neoclassical *masnavi*, a very old form of long poem consisting of rhyming couplets in a fixed meter in which many of the great Persian epic and mystical poems were composed, and which enjoyed a renaissance in a modified form as the vehicle for the Afghan and Iranian war poetry of the 1980s. Kazemi's poem draws on images and figures from the epic *Shāhnāmeh* ("*Book of Kings*"), including the tragic heroes Rostam and Esfandiar [Facebook: 12,171 followers//544 like/love/28 comments/59 shares].

But the brief celebration of the resistance quickly turned to mourning again with the news of the killing of several important NRF leaders. Among them was Fahim Dashti, a Panjshiri with ties to the military leadership—he had survived the bombing that killed Massoud Sr. in 2001—who became their spokesman, but whose own background was in journalism. Due to his decades of work in this field and as an advocate for freedom of speech in Afghanistan, he was well-known and highly respected among journalists, writers, and civil society workers. Poems lamenting his death soon appeared, and at least one of them turned into a viral meme.

Elyas Alavi (b. 1982, Daikundi), a poet and artist who grew up in Iran but now lives in Australia, posted one such poem on September 5, with the following introduction:

> [In English] Today, our country has lost one of its greatest journalists Fahim Dashti, assassinated by the terrorist Taliban. He was the Afghan resistance spokesman and fought till the end defending his hometown of #panjshir.

[In Persian] To Fahim Dashti and all those killed in the name of freedom. Your path will be continued.

Death can
extinguish your eyes
but not your gaze,
crush your lips
but not your smile.
It can make your hands fall still
but not the wild spirit of your fingers.
What wondrous scenes you painted:
For the birds, a sky
For Mohammad, a mother
For Esmail, a homeland
For Zahera, a heart that ticks like a clock.
You're still here
worrying about the leaves and the fishes
you're hidden in the night
and the wild spirit of your fingers courses through our veins.
Death can extinguish your eyes
but not your gaze.
   [Facebook: 2,611 followers//220 reactions (like/sad/love)/6 comments/14 shares]

Another such poem appeared from Mostafa Hazara on his Twitter feed, and this one circulated even more widely:

Dear Fahim Dashti, my good and thoughtful friend, man of the arena of the pen and the bullet
Rest in peace
 …

And death was ashamed before you
so ashamed
that the bullets wept blood
the moment they reached your body.

Oh, if freedom
had an identity card
it would bear your photograph
your name would be freedom's nom de plume
and your voice, freedom's tongue.
   [9,191 followers//4 comments/30 retweets/374 likes]

This poem was subsequently transformed into a meme with the addition of some artwork by the poet's friend Mahdi Mohebbi: a digitally altered portrait of Dashti based on a photograph, but rendered with a more painterly quality, staring directly at the camera with his furrowed brow and impish half-smile, the *pākol* hat framing his head like a halo and the poem beside him. As is to be expected on Twitter, when overlaid over a striking image, the poem attracted more attention than the original tweet when Hazara posted it later that same day, this time receiving 22 comments/177 retweets/1.5k likes.

   Although Kazemi nominally belongs to the same Tajik ethnic group as the Panjshiris, Alavi and Hazara do not, though as Persian speakers they share a language. These poems reveal how in 2021, as

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during the civil war of the 1990s, poetry was one of the linguistic and cultural resources used to rally the resistance and build inter-ethnic alliances and solidarities.

Audience Responses: The Recollection of Trauma

How have Persian-speaking social media users responded to these poems? The figures I have given above for the scale of responses, shares, retweets and so on give only a partial picture. A successful Persian poem must move its audience, whether arousing strong emotions or, in the case of political poetry, even action. In interviews with me, social media poets said that although they felt social media was an excellent way to extend their networks, especially after the loss of their previous Persian-speaking audiences following their migration away from the region, they were not sure how deeply people engaged with their poetry. Many people responded simply by pressing the "like" button on Twitter or Instagram, or selecting a reaction on Facebook (typically a thumbs-up for "like," a heart for "love" or a sad face for "sad"). Others commented simply with strings of emojis, especially hearts, flowers, or weeping faces. If a reader is particularly struck by a particular line in a poem, they might simply repost that one line in a comment to show their appreciation. The political poetry of the summer of 2021 was no different, although the scale of the responses seemed to be much greater than normal, suggesting that Afghans around the world were engaging with social media more intensely to obtain news. When they came across poetry, it seemed to affect them deeply, as the incident below reveals.

Being multi-modal forms of media, of course, social networking platforms also allow for other forms of engagement than reading. In September, someone in my network posted a video on Facebook of a poetry reading in Iran from 2013 that they clearly felt had become resonant once again. It was a reading of a long poem written by Seyyed AbuTaleb Mozaffari, titled "*Tambākuhā-ye talkh-e vatani*" ("The Homeland's Bitter Tobacco") in a large, packed auditorium.[14] The poem references numerous contemporary and historical writers and scholars central to the recording of Hazara history. It also recounts painful episodes from that history, as well as Mozaffari's nostalgia for his birthplace and family history. Below is a fragment:

> …
> Little by little, I recall my mother's lullaby,
> little by little, all the names of my dead brothers,
> the names of my lost sisters.
> Little by little, I recall the color of my grandfather's lost horse
> the color of night
>
> and his five-shot rifle
> that he hid on a dark mountainside one winter night
> and the following spring had forgotten where it was.
> Allow me to lament the tale of the years after Katib.
> I am the grandchild of a woman,
> a survivor of the plundering caravan of the Taji Khoo gang,
> brigands of the time of Amir Abdur Rahman.
> For years my father farmed the land
> that was his and not his.
> My father, beside his grandfather's grave
> worked for the conquering lords
> and the inscriptions in my ancestral cemetery
> were written in Dari-Persian,
> a language the immigrants from Peshawar could neither read nor write.
> Twice a year my mother collected pots

    of the clarified butter of Baghchar,
    baskets of finest *qorut*,
    and sacks of spring wheat
    and the lords would come with frowns and mutters and take them away to one of their houses.
    Tiredness lingered in my mother's body
    just as hunger did in our eyes.
    …[15]

As Mozaffari read, the camera scanned the faces of the audience members insistently, as if expecting a strong reaction. Indeed, at particularly poignant moments of the recitation, members of the audience—most of them Hazaras themselves—wept openly, dabbing their eyes and noses with handkerchiefs. The master of ceremonies, too, commented at the end that he had not been able to hold back tears. When this video was posted on Facebook, many readers revealed that they already knew the poem well and that the emotional reaction was a common one: "I've wept with this poem so many times," wrote one.

When composed or recirculated during momentous events, then, poetry has the power to catalyze affective responses linked to memories of a painful past: a concatenated memory of traumas that bind the present to the past and make it impossible to interpret current events except through its prism. Thus, the ongoing targeting of Shi'as and Hazaras in Afghanistan, whether through reprisals by the Taliban, or the brutal suicide bombings of mosques and schools by the militant Islamic State in Khorasan Province group (IS-K), is linked to past atrocities against them, including the massacres perpetrated by Amir Abdur Rahman in the 1880–90s that Mozaffari mentions. Cumulatively, such discursive linkage reveals the deadly pattern in these atrocities, reinforcing the view that they add up to no less than an ongoing genocide against the Hazaras of Afghanistan, a term that became prevalent on social media in 2021.

Often, a single quoted line or the briefest poem is enough to perform this act of strategic recollection, and quotation is another way in which audiences respond, as we saw with Taheri's post above. This was the case when IS-K bombed a Shi'a mosque in Kandahar on October 16, 2021, during Friday prayers, killing over forty people—one of many such attacks since the return of the Taliban, who seem unable or unwilling to prevent them. Numerous people I knew on social media responded to this event by posting the same two-line poem by Mohammad Sharif Sa'idi (b. 1969), another long-time refugee in Iran who now lives in Sweden: "*Dar Qandehār anār mikhordam/Dahānam por az khun-e ābā'i shod.*" ("In Kandahar I was eating pomegranates/My mouth filled with the blood of my forefathers.") This is a play not only on the red juice of the pomegranate, but also on the famous pomegranates of Kandahar, which are renowned for their quality—Kandahar and pomegranate (*anār*) are further linked by an internal rhyme. But Kandahar is a majority Pashtun city and was known as their traditional seat of power for centuries, and most recently as the spiritual home of the Taliban. It is said that when the final Hazara rebellion against the heavy-handed reign of Abdur Rahman was crushed in 1893, Hazaras were enslaved and sold in the markets of Kandahar. A simple act like eating a pomegranate from Kandahar, then, risks unleashing such traumatic recollections for Hazaras.

Conclusion

What can poetry tell us about the perspectives of Afghan refugees in the wake of the fall of Kabul? In its simplest form, it is a way of reading the news and documenting one's reactions to it, in the manner that social media platforms invite all their users to. For those poets, writers, and cultural activists who fled, and those looking on from outside the country, the return of the Taliban represented the overnight extinguishing of their lives and achievements, as well as the dreams of a peaceful, democratic, rights-respecting, and ethnically harmonious Afghanistan to whose realization many had dedicated their lives. Some of the anguish and rage they felt is captured by the poems I have collected here. As I have written

elsewhere, writing poetry can be an act of release or personal catharsis for the refugee poet, a purging of one's *dard-e daruni* or inner pain.[16] It is simultaneously an act of self-making as an engaged and empathetic intellectual, and an act of witnessing a collective pain and claiming the right to voice it.

But beyond this immediate witnessing of events and affects, these poems also contain, in a highly condensed kernel form, many-layered histories and memories of past events, whether atrocities or moments of glory, and in some cases intertextual allusions to classical poetry and other literary or historical works. These bear some similarity to the proverbs, aphorisms, quotations from classical literature, and catch phrases described by Margaret Mills as "gnomics," which are frequently used in Afghan discourse "for purposes of identity-claiming in solidarity or distinction, of critique, admonition, or sometimes rueful commentary on the inevitable or tragic in human nature or historical events"—and given greater weight by their long tradition of use.[17]

Like these gnomics, social media poetry is often characterized by brevity and spontaneity: in reaction poetry, blank verse predominates over metric and rhyming forms, no doubt because the latter often take longer to compose, and poems often bear simple "time-stamp" titles, like Ibrahimi's "Tonight's Poem." This leads to an interesting dual temporality: they are simultaneously "of the moment" and, in the wider context of poetic circulation and intertextuality on social media, pregnant with the past.

These allusions are legible to particular publics familiar with both the genres and the discursive fields at hand, and they tend to circulate within them. Perhaps unfortunately for a country too often divided along ethno-linguistic lines, such discursive communities tend to be replicated on social media, and while they allow the affects and politics they proclaim to circulate widely across their global networks, they may not do enough to bridge ethno-linguistic gulfs in their own country. The new "borderland" formations they give rise to, then, make vivid the dislocations involved in fleeing across international borders. They memorialize, but for the time being seem powerless to confront, the deep scars left behind in the homeland.

Notes

1 Rubab: a traditional Afghan musical instrument (a three-stringed plucked lute). Salang: a mountain pass serving as an important route to the north of the country. Helmand: Afghanistan's longest river, flowing through the south. Attan: a festive folk dance originating in Pashtun areas of Afghanistan, now considered by some as the national dance.

2 To give a sense of the scale of poetic interaction on social media, as well as of the resonance of particular poems or poets, I follow each poem with the number of followers the poet has on that particular platform, the number of likes, shares, etc. that the particular poem received (as of October 1, 2021).

3 See the extensive writings of James Caron on this subject in the context of Pashtu literature, especially "Ambiguities of Orality and Literacy, Territory and Border Crossings," 113–39; and "Pashto Border Literature as Geopolitical Knowledge," 444–61.

4 See Strick van Linschoten and Kuehn, *Poetry of the Taliban*; Kłagisz, "Temporal, Mystic and Religious Love," 9–27; Griswold and Murphy, *I Am the Beggar of the World*; and Caron, "Ambiguities of Orality."

5 Green and Arbabzadah, *Afghanistan in Ink.*

6 Caron, "Pashto Border Literature," 457–8. See also Shams, "The Sensorium of Exile," 195–214.

7 See Green and Arbabzadah, *Afghanistan in Ink;* Ghani, "The Persian Literature of Afghanistan."

8 Ahmadi, "Mastering the Ego Monster," 163–84; see also Caron, "Ambiguities of Orality," 130–1.

9 For more on Pashtu refugee poetry of the 1980s, see Edwards, "Pretexts of Rebellion"; Heston, "Footpath Poets of Peshawar," 305–43; and Majrouh, *Songs of Love and War.*

10 For a fuller treatment of these periods in terms of their sociology, aesthetics, and politics, see Olszewska, *The Pearl of Dari.*

11 Akhavan, *Electronic Iran.*

12 My translation. From "*Imān biāvarim be āghāz-e fasl-e sard*" ("Let us Believe in the Coming of the Cold Season"), in Farrokhzad, *Majmu'eh-ye Kāmel-e She'rhā.*

13 Pol-e Sorkh: a district of Kabul, sometimes called "Little Europe," beloved by the intellectuals and artists of Kabul for its cafes and bookshops. It is the title of Hazara's first book of poetry, and he is known as "the Poet of Pol-e Sorkh." I have transcribed the name with vowel sounds reflecting the Iranian pronunciation that Hazara has retained from his birthplace.

14 The full original text may be found on Mozaffari's blog "*Baghchar,*" http://baghchar.blogfa.com.

15 The poem is addressed to Dr. Mohammad Sarvar Moulai, professor emeritus of Persian Literature at al-Zahra University, Tehran, and former Chancellor of Bamyan University in Afghanistan. Katib: a reference to Faiz Muhammad Katib (1860–1931), a Hazara historian, court chronicler, and intellectual, author of one of the most famous histories of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Afghanistan, *Sirāj al-Tawārikh* (*The Torch of Histories*, 1912). Amir Abdur Rahman (1844–1901): ruler of Afghanistan, called the "Iron Amir," known for his despotic rule and particularly brutal massacres of Hazaras in the 1890s. "Immigrants from Peshawar": a reference to Pashtun groups resettled in Hazara lands to alter the ethnic balance of the country, a policy of successive governments since Abdur Rahman. Baghchar: a village in Khas Uruzgan district, Afghanistan, Mozaffari's birthplace. *Qorut*: a dairy product made of fermented sheep's whey, dried and shaped into balls.

16 See Olszewska, *The Pearl of Dari,* 109–10.

17 Mills, "Gnomics," 251.

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CONNECTING THE DOTS

Refugee Data Narratives

Roopika Risam

Between late 2015 and early 2016, "The Flow towards Europe," a data narrative of forced migration created by Finnish data visualization startup Lucify, began circulating widely, capturing the imagination of social media users. "Data visualization at it's [sic] best!" wrote one Twitter user.[1] "A+ Must see," wrote another.[2] "Deceptively beautiful," said an additional user.[3] Winning an Open Finland Challenge, written up in media sources, and included in the *New York Times* curriculum on refugees, "The Flow towards Europe" gained attention with its visually appealing tale of forced migrants—depicted as pixelated dots—traveling to Europe from countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.[4] Beautiful and, indeed, deceptive, "The Flow towards Europe" illustrates how the design decisions and rhetorical choices of those who create data narratives of forced migration play a crucial role in representing refugees.

From data journalism to digital humanities scholarship, data narratives have become a crucial component of media ecologies. Faten El Outa et al. define data narration as "the activity of producing stories supported by facts extracted from data analysis, possibly using interactive visualizations."[5] Giorgia Lupi describes the crucial goals of data narratives: they "tell multiple interplaying stories and achieve a viable result in abstract visual composition."[6] Reporting and analysis of current events would now be incomplete without a *New York Times* or *Washington Post* data visualization or an infographic that combines text, image, and visualization to tell a story, and many major newspapers now boast data teams.[7] Data visualizations increasingly receive attention in news media and are widely circulated online through social media. They have become powerful, interactive narratives that reshape interactions between content and audience and tell powerful stories about the most pressing issues of the day.[8]

In recent years, remarkable advances in technology have yielded accessible and portable data formats, while intrepid developers have created an array of out-of-the-box data visualization tools that allow even the most novice users to create visually impressive data narratives in just a few clicks.[9] This access to tools, coupled with open data sets made available by governments and NGOs, has led to increased interest in data visualization in academic research, journalism, and technology and design firms.[10] This seeming accessibility of data and data visualization tools is both a blessing and a curse; there is so much that data visualization can communicate and, at the same time, so much that can go wrong. While data visualizations present complex data sets about refugees in visual formats that users can easily understand, as I have previously argued, rhetorical and design choices made in these visualizations have positioned forced migrants to Europe as instigators of a "refugee crisis" and rendered them as the abstracted, pixelated dots of "The Flow towards Europe."[11]

With the prodigious amount of data about contemporary refugees currently available through sources like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Organization for

Migration, refugees have been subject of numerous data visualizations proposing to illuminate the scale and scope of migration. In doing so, these forms of data storytelling displace the geo-political, colonial, and neo-colonial causes of migration onto refugees themselves, positioning them as "problems."[12] Building on my prior work, this chapter explores the narrative dimensions of refugee data, or how the medium of data visualization conveys narratives of refugees through the use of maps. Refugee narratives appear in many genres: journalism, novels, poetry, non-fiction, and memoir. In some cases, these narratives are articulated in refugees' own voices. In others, the narratives are ones told about refugees. Data narratives of refugees occur in both forms: some use quantitative data collected by non-governmental organizations or nation-states and thus offer data narratives of refugees told through the lens of the state, while others use qualitative data collected directly from refugees along with quantitative data to foreground refugees' voices. Because data narratives are an emerging genre with little consensus over their uses and ethics, those who create them have yet to contend with the ethics of narratives: whose story is being told, who is telling the story, and whose experiences are included or excluded?[13]

This chapter examines the challenges and triumphs of stories told with data and articulates a methodological approach for ethical, humanities-driven data narratives that resists reproducing state-centered narratives of forced migration. It tackles unanswered questions for data narratives: what does it mean to tell refugee narratives through data? What kinds of refugee narratives do data-driven approaches facilitate and what narratives are obscured? What kinds of data storytelling approaches foster the agency of refugees? I begin by articulating the problems of visualizing forced migration through the gaze of the state by examining Lucify's "The Flow towards Europe," identify mixed methods that address these challenges through the projects "Exodi/Esodi" and "Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat," and then articulate a series of precepts through my work on the project "Torn Apart/Separados," which uses quantitative data to turn the gaze of our data narratives back onto the state.

The Problems of Visualizing Forced Migration

The so-called "European Refugee Crisis" is one context in which data narratives of refugees can go wrong. Starting in 2014, the European Union began seeing a marked influx in refugees and migrants arriving from across the Mediterranean Sea and overland from the Middle East and Asia. The European Commission was quick to call this a "refugee crisis," which encompassed all manner of forced migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees. This large-scale migration continued over the next few years, only to be declared "over" in 2019 by the European Commission—though displaced people continued to migrate, despite geographical restrictions posed by COVID-19. The peak of migration in 2015 saw more than a million migrants, primarily Syrian, Afghan, and Iraqi refugees, typically arriving in Italy or Greece, forced to migrate because of war.[14] The scale of forcibly displaced people is absolutely stunning, and because of the sheer amount of data that it has generated, the influx of European migrants has held many possibilities for data visualization.

Data visualization are often (mis)understood as "neutral" depictions of data or objective pieces of information. Rather, they are representations of data that are indelibly shaped by the circumstances of their production. Data sets typically used to visualize European migration come from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, or the UN Refugee Agency) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). As Jill Walker Rettberg notes, all data is "situated"—not objective or neutral but the product of the series of circumstances surrounding its production and distribution.[15] The circumstances surrounding the creation of migration data remain largely uninterrogated in data visualizations, which fail to foreground key questions such as: who collected the data? What terms did they use? What were their motivations for data collection?[16] UNHCR and IOM data are collected to administer, surveil, manage, and control migrant populations. These organizations' officials are the ones determining what is included in and excluded from the data set and the terms by which forced migrants' experiences are transformed into data through the gaze of the state and international bodies

such as the UNHCR and IOM. This, in turn, means that data visualizations based on this data are rehearsing the trends of management, surveillance, and control. Identifying the "narrative" dimension of data visualizations emphasizes how they, as data narratives, are a way of telling a story, subject to the same questions of agency, voice, and representation as other narrative genres. Thus, a humanities-driven approach to data visualization—which, I suggest, is an important but overlooked form of data literacy—brings with it a responsibility for creators to attend to the ethics of their design decisions and rhetorical choices to avoid misrepresenting data, telling misleading stories, or distorting information.

With alarming frequency, the design of these state-centric visualizations plays into the notion of a "crisis," conveys a message that refugees are "problems," and diverts attention from the geo-political policies and practices that created the conditions that produced refugees in the first place. This is very much a factor of design choices—and lack of attention to the ways that these choices encode particular messages about refugees that audiences then decode. In this respect, data visualizations as forms of media can be understood through Stuart Hall's model of "encoding/decoding": the composer of data visualizations uses modes of communication (textual, visual, aural, kinesthetic) as symbols to communicate with audiences, and these audiences in turn interpret these symbols to comprehend the message as a whole.[17] Data visualizations of migration tend to encode the idea that refugees are problems through the interplay of written-linguistic, visual, and spatial modes of communication that they deploy. Their reception, which includes circulation on social media and publication in news outlets, suggests that audiences are in fact decoding that very message of refugees as invaders that threaten so-called "Fortress Europe."[18]

An example of this is Lucify's widely circulated data visualization, "The Flow towards Europe," which opened this chapter (see Figure 12.1). The project uses a data set from the UNHCR for a visualization that depicts waves of migrants, represented by dots, traveling from countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia toward Central Europe. "The Flow towards Europe" deploys written-linguistic cues that suggest migration—and thus migrants—are, in fact, a problem. As the note accompanying the project states, "Europe is experiencing the biggest refugee crisis since World War II. Based on the data from the United Nations, we clarify the scale of the crisis."[19] The choice of "crisis" as a term essentially instantiates a "crisis" by its use of the word—much in the way that Stuart Hall and colleagues identified

Figure 12.1   Screenshot of Lucify's *The Flow towards Europe* data visualization depicting migrants as dots moving toward Europe.

that Britain's mugging "crisis" in the 1970s was produced by the media's articulation and inflammation of a crisis that, in turn, justified the policing of the crisis.[20] Likewise, this so-called refugee "crisis" then begs the question of how to stop it.

Moreover, the word choice of "refugee" obfuscates the complexities of migration, particularly around categorization of migrants, misrepresenting the data used for the visualization. Based on definitions set forth by the UNHCR, an "asylum seeker" is "an individual who is seeking international protection."[21] A "refugee" denotes "a person who meets the eligibility criteria under the applicable refugee definitions, as provided for by international or regional instruments under UNHCR's mandate, and/or in national legislation."[22] Therefore, designation as a "refugee" requires legal and administrative processes to determine whether eligibility criteria are met. As the UN Refugee Agency notes, "Not every asylum-seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee, but every refugee was initially an asylum seeker."[23] Based on the data set in use, the visualization depicts flows of *asylum seekers* to European countries over time. Foregrounding the visualization with language about Europe's "*refugee* crisis" gives the false impression that the number of forced migrants have been designated as "refugees" and thus qualify for services and protections granted to refugees, such as the opportunity to work legally and to apply for residence. Given that forced migrants have become pawns in politics, as in the 2016 Brexit vote in the UK and the 2016 election of Donald Trump in the U.S., it is especially important that visualizations such as these do not misrepresent the number of state-accepted refugees and thus add ammunition to anti-immigrant sentiments.

Hovering over individual countries shows details, including the number of people who have left a country of origin or arrived in a destination country in Europe since 2012. The visualization omits other categories of forced migrants that are not in the data set—so the scale of migration is actually *higher* than what is represented. For example, the 5.6 million Syrian refugees registered by the UNHCR are not represented. In a visualization purporting to be depicting a "refugee crisis," it is unclear why the category of Syrian refugees would be omitted. Also completely absent is any written-linguistic context for migration that would humanize those represented in the data set and reframe the "problem" as not one of migrants themselves but of the geo-political circumstances, produced by colonialism, neo-colonialism, and intervention by the Global North, that are *actually* the problem. For example, U.S. wars launched in response to the September 11, 2001 attacks have displaced at least 38 million people from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and other countries.[24] Moreover, the U.S. war in Iraq is widely held to have destabilized the Middle East, creating the conditions for the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Levant (ISIL/ISIS) and civil war in Syria, which has led to forced migration to Europe.[25]

The visual rhetoric of "The Flow towards Europe" further contributes to the idea that the forced migrant is a problem. The primary visual choice is a map, but what a map looks like—which continents and countries are centered and which are displaced, color scheme, size choices, and types of maps (political, physical, topographical, etc.) selected—contributes to how messages about migration are decoded by viewers. "The Flow towards Europe" features European countries and thus the Global North front and center, with the countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, which are the primary sources of migrants, offset. Notably, countries like Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, which are not the focus of this map, are the ones that have received the largest number of refugees.[26] In this regard, the Eurocentric nature of the project—and thus the rendering of Europe as victim of a refugee crisis—is reinforced by its visual mode. The color scheme, in dark hues of grey, black, and green, reinforces the sense of foreboding. The political map without topographical features emphasizes national borders and depicts the cohesion and insularity of the nation-state.

Along with these visual cues, the spatial mode suggests that forced migrants violate borders and nation-states as dots that disrupt the map. For "The Flow towards Europe," white dots representing 25 migrants move across the map, traversing borders. The choice to group migrants by 25 was determined by the limitations of the visualization platform and the creators' sense that if each migrant were represented by a dot, the visualization would be aesthetically unappealing and glitchy. In unimpeded waves, these dots emphasize the magnitude of migration. However, this is a poor representation of

migration, which rarely takes place as the crow files, uniformly over time in the flows depicted in the visualization. Furthermore, the conversion of migrants into dots is dehumanizing, stripping away contexts that would shed light on the complexities of migration and replacing them with a single data point. Transgression of national boundaries by seamless flows of dots reinforces the anti-migrant rhetoric of public discourse that positions migrants as threats to national identity, economy, and security.

The Potential of Visualizing Forced Migration

In contrast to approaches to forced migration data visualization demonstrated by "The Flow towards Europe"—which is essentially "find some data and put it on a map"—humanities-driven data visualization, particularly when related to vulnerable populations, requires us to think through the ethics of different methodological approaches to visualizing forced migration. What is an ethics of care for data visualization of forced migration, grounded in humanities-driven data literacy and data visualization ethics? That is, what kinds of methods can be deployed in data narratives to center refugees and decenter the state in such narratives? An ethics of care for data visualization cannot be a blanket set of rules, a checklist, or some hegemonic notion of how to do this kind of work, but rather an articulation of the kinds of questions we must generate and ask, that are particular to the vulnerable populations whose experiences are being visualized: how can data narratives foreground refugee voices and agency? How can they tell stories through data that are told on refugees' own terms? How can data narratives resist the dehumanization of refugees by reducing them to mere pixels and instead emphasize their humanity? How can quantitative and qualitative data be meaningfully integrated to achieve these goals? Projects that take a mixed-methods approach more successfully visualize migration while resisting statist narratives and attending to the humanity of migrants.

A mixed-methods approach is valuable because it puts quantitative data in conversation with qualitative data generated by migrants. "Exodi/Esodi," for example, is a project that demonstrates this approach to visualizing migration. This project was created using testimonies of more than 2600 migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa who arrived in Italy between 2014 and 2017. These testimonies were collected by Doctors for Human Rights and offered migrants the opportunity to articulate their experiences on their own terms, emphasizing their voices and agency. Data from migrants—rather than data collected with the gaze of the state—foregrounds the humanity of migrants, their stories, their challenges, and the pain and violence that made the arduous and often traumatic process of migration the only optimal choice for them.

Like "The Flow towards Europe," "Esodi/Exodi" uses maps to visualize migration, showing land and sea routes. In contextual material provided to introduce the routes, the project integrates charts of quantitative data to offer a broad picture of mobile populations, such as the countries of origin for migrants from West Africa and the Horn of Africa, along with testimonies of migrants' journeys. In the overviews of individual routes, the project pairs maps with graphs of quantitative data to offer context such as lengths of routes. On these pages, users can click on cities and towns on the map for images, view historical context on the roles these locations have played for migrating people, and read testimonies from migrants about their experiences there.

The use of topographical maps also alerts viewers to the environmental impact of geography and climate, such as the harsh desert regions that migrants must traverse to reach Europe. This is emphasized by "Esodi/Exodi"'s inclusion of travel routes that are absent in the other visualizations created based on UNHCR or IOM data. Critically, the visualizations depict these routes in a sensitive way that does not compromise the safety of others along migratory routes. The project thus offers context for the influx of European refugees in a way that refutes the state-centered narrative that migrants are, themselves, the problem.

"Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat," a project based on 250 qualitative interviews with migrants, takes a similar approach to displaying information about routes of migration in a thoughtful way that avoids exposing details that would endanger migrants in transit. The maps in the project

depict not only migrants' origins and destinations but also key locations where they stopped along the way. Providing this city- and town-level data without precise details of travel between them effectively balances the need to demonstrate the complexity of the journey without providing a roadmap that would facilitate surveillance or policing of routes.

The project is also notable in the way it illuminates the social and political factors that subtend migration, placing the responsibility on the Global North where it belongs. For each destination where migrants were interviewed (Rome, Athens, Istanbul, and Berlin), the project offers users the opportunity to follow the journeys of multiple migrants along their routes. Users can select a point on the map or a story from a list and click through the migrant's story. Each story integrates narrative text as well as direct quotes from testimonies, while the map view moves to successive points along the way. Each stop on the journey includes a prompt to engage the users and promote empathy, asking them to consider how they might act if they were in the migrant's situation. For example, the story "Brother escaping civil war" begins in Mauritania, highlighting the pressure that the brother feels as he must support his three brothers during civil war. A quote from the brother describes his rationale for leaving and asks the users to consider whether they might make a similar choice under the circumstances. These stories all describe the migrants interviewed in relational terms (e.g., "Husband and father escaping war and statelessness," "Husband, brother and son fleeing execution by ISIS," and "Three female friends escaping sexual violence"), emphasizing both the humanity of migrants and the geopolitical conditions that force migration, rather than the perspective of arrival nation-states.

Projects like "Exodi/Esodi" and "Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat" suggest that quantitative data is not inherently sufficient for promoting refugee agency and voice. As we see in "The Flow towards Europe," the factors subtending the data, such as the goal of its collection, the organizations or entities doing the collecting, and the terminology and controlled vocabulary through which refugees are described in the data, shape the narratives it can tell. In the case of data collected by the UNHCR or the IOM, which are convenient data sets for visualizing forced migration, the purpose of collecting the data is to administer and surveil refugee populations. Therefore, data collection is not on refugees' own terms and in their own voices but is designed explicitly to manage them.

Instead, "Exodi/Esodi" and "Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat" demonstrate the value of creating data narratives based on individual testimonies that integrate both qualitative and quantitative data. This mixed-methods approach helps viewers understand migratory contexts like distance traveled, countries of origin, and countries of destination at a broader scale than individual stories can convey, while emphasizing migrant voice and agency. This careful interplay between qualitative and quantitative, between individual and collective, is at the heart of an ethics of care for data visualization of forced migration, specifically its de-centering of state-produced narratives in favor of narratives that foreground refugees' voices.

The Ethics of Visualizing Migration in Practice

Considering alternate ways of creating data narratives about migration that refuse to center the state was the focus of the project "Torn Apart/Separados," which I undertook with colleagues in 2018. "Torn Apart/Separados" is a rapid response research project on the family separation policy implemented by the Trump administration in the spring of 2018 at the Mexico-U.S. border. When we began the first volume of the project—a series of data narratives on immigrant detention that we researched, developed, and launched in the span of one busy, sleepless week—it was driven by an altruistic question: what can a team of librarians, faculty, and graduate students with digital humanities skills do to respond to the family separation policy? We were never under any illusions that we were going to "solve" this problem, but as we watched so many of our colleagues wringing their hands and, rightfully, feeling helpless, we thought we could at least try something—anything—to see if we could be useful. The data narratives that we produced address migration with quantitative data, but "Torn Apart/Separados" takes a markedly different approach than projects like "The Flow towards Europe" by refusing to produce

data narratives of forced migration through the gaze of the state and instead using data visualization to put our gaze *onto the state* and its inhumane treatment of asylum seekers and refugees. The process of developing the project reflected five precepts for humanities-driven approaches to visualizing migration data and an ethics of care for data visualization: (1) acknowledging that creating a data narrative may not always be an appropriate choice; (2) recognizing what kinds of knowledge and expertise are needed to effectively create a data narrative about forced migration; (3) refusing to simply focus on data and data sets that can be found but considering the data one might need to curate; (4) understanding how specific kinds of data can help a creator construct a particular kind of data narrative; and (5) attending to the ethical implications of the data in one's care.

The first precept is not about *how* to undertake visualization but *whether* it is an appropriate choice. In late May of 2018, when the news came out about the U.S. government "losing" 5000 immigrant children, Alex Gil, who would become a fellow team member on "Torn Apart/Separados," and I began researching the situation, trying to understand what was going on and thinking about whether we could mobilize our skills with digital humanities and data visualization to do something. What we quickly realized, ahead of the news cycle, was that these were not children separated from families but were unaccompanied minors who arrived at the border, were put into a system created by the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Refugee Resettlement, and then were placed with family or sponsors. If the Office of Refugee Resettlement was unable to contact the children, family, or sponsors 30 days after placement, they were considered "lost." Through our research, we were also able to ascertain that 90 percent of the children were placed with family members, many of whom were undocumented, and that there were sponsors connected to networks reuniting children with undocumented family members. For undocumented people trying to avoid deportation, being "lost"—that is, not being found—may be the best thing. So we abandoned the idea that there was anything to do, other than help correct misinformation about these so-called "lost" children by sharing what we had found on social media and actively responding to misinformation being shared. A few weeks later, the news cycle turned to the family separation policy, with heart-wrenching stories about children ripped from their parents' arms, and the question came up again: is there anything we can do—and more critically, is there anything we *should* do?

These questions led to the next precept, which is recognizing what kinds of knowledges and expertise are crucial to doing data visualization well or responsibly. We set up a team of researchers: Alex Gil, Manan Ahmed, Moacir de Sá Pereira, Sylvia Fernández, Maira Álvarez, Merisa Martinez, and Linda Rodriguez (later Rachel Hendry joined us for our second volume of the project). We knew we needed a lot of expertise—scholars with deep knowledge of the borderlands (Fernández, Álvarez, Martinez, Rodriguez) and migration and media (Risam), and skills in data visualization and programming (de Sá Pereira, Henry, Gil, Risam), project management (Gil), data modeling (Gil, Ahmed, de Sá Pereira), data management (Gil, de Sá Pereira), and internet research (Risam, Gil, Rodriguez). At the outset of our week, we did not know what kind of project might emerge but decided to devote three days to researching immigrant detention and related data to see what we could find. We knew we were not intending to create visualizations that would rehearse a narrative of immigrant invasion but instead wanted to put a focus on the problem—on the U.S. government—and perhaps make some kind of small contribution. We had a vague sense that if we could map detention centers, we could raise awareness of the pervasiveness of immigrant detention, and if we could identify the shelters where children were being held, we might be able to get the information into the hands of social workers and lawyers working on the ground at the border and be of some assistance—and it seemed like the media might help us do it. So, we needed the expertise of collaborators outside of academia, without putting a larger burden on them while they were already doing critical work.

And the insights that emerged from dedicating time to research lead to the next precept: we cannot just focus on data we can easily find but also on data sets that we can create and curate. If we had solely relied on trying to tell data stories of migration based on what was available to us, we would be telling stories through the gaze of the state. Instead, what we were able to do was put the gaze *on* the state.

Within two days of research, we had found and verified a list of immigrant detention centers and hand-compiled a list of the 113 children's shelters where the children were being housed, through research in various government documents, non-profit tax documents, social media, and Google listings. Five days later, we released Volume 1 of the project, with a series of data visualizations slicing the data in a number of different ways and blending maps, charts, and text—from the more concrete map of detention centers to more experimental data stories, available in English, Spanish, and French. We released Volume 2 in August 2018, after we followed the money trail to design a series of data visualizations based on 20,000 government contracts given out by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to fund immigrant detention.

What this reflects is another key issue of what *kinds* of data tell what kinds of stories. What the "Torn Apart/Separados" data visualizations do differently than projects like "The Flow towards Europe" is put our gaze on the state to call into question the state itself and its infrastructures of immigrant detention. Volume 1 includes six data narratives: "Clinks" (a map of detention centers), "The Trap" (a map of the border), "The Eye" (a series of inset maps that locate detention centers in relation to landmarks), "Charts" (bar and pie charts quantifying immigrant detention), "ORR" (a map of children's shelters), and "Banned" (a map demonstrating the portion of the U.S. population correlating to numbers of Muslims banned by the Trump administration's travel bans). Volume 2 includes five data narratives: "Districts" (a map of money distributed by ICE by congressional district), "Rain" (a bubble chart depicting the growth of ICE funding between 2014 and 2018), "Gain" (a series of bar graphs of businesses owned by people of color and Indigenous people that received money from ICE), "Freezer" (a network graph and tree map examining connections between goods and companies supporting ICE), and "Lines" (a visualization mapping numbers of deported people). The data narratives are accompanied by paratexts aimed to assist our viewers in understanding the goal of our project to turn the gaze of forced migrant data narratives back on the state. In the essay, "Textures," Gil and I share insights and findings from our research process, such as the heart-rending Facebook reviews and Google business directory entries where parents posted inquiries looking for their children. The project site also includes "Reflections," essays written by team members and colleagues in response to the project, and a directory of "Allies" with contact information for organizations supporting migrants.

The carceral state becomes the problem in the first of our data narratives, "Clinks," which maps locations of immigrant detention centers in orange and children's shelters in purple on a topographical map of the U.S. The name "Clinks" refers to the vast number of jails and prisons that also serve as detention centers and points to the integration of the prison-industrial complex and the immigrant detention-industrial complex. In "Clinks," we demonstrate that ICE is everywhere, not just at the border, permeating the landscape of all our lives (see Figure 12.2).

The visualizations get increasingly more experimental as we try to address other challenges around data storytelling about forced migration, while playing with genres of data visualization to produce compelling data narratives. The experimental approach to data narratives allowed us to subvert user expectations of data visualization and challenge users to recognize that they are, in fact, representations, rather than neutral presentations of information. Unlike the conventional data visualization technique of placing dots on a map deployed in "Clinks," the other visualizations in Volume 1 use data experimentally to represent different facets of forced migration to the U.S. through the Mexico-U.S. border.

"The Trap," for example, explores the 100-mile border zone, where migrants are exposed to the harsh geographical conditions of the borderlands desert, which we propose is a trap for migrants. Through a topographical map, data identifying location of the ports of entry, overlaid geometry in orange identifying the border zone, and a legend with text explaining the visualization, "The Trap" tells the story of how, during the family separation crisis, Customs and Border Patrol blocked asylum seekers from the ports of entry where they are rightfully able to make asylum claims. Semi-circular indentations along the border identify points of entry, while the spaces in between them show where migrants cross the border, which is considered a criminal act. The overlay on the map depicts the
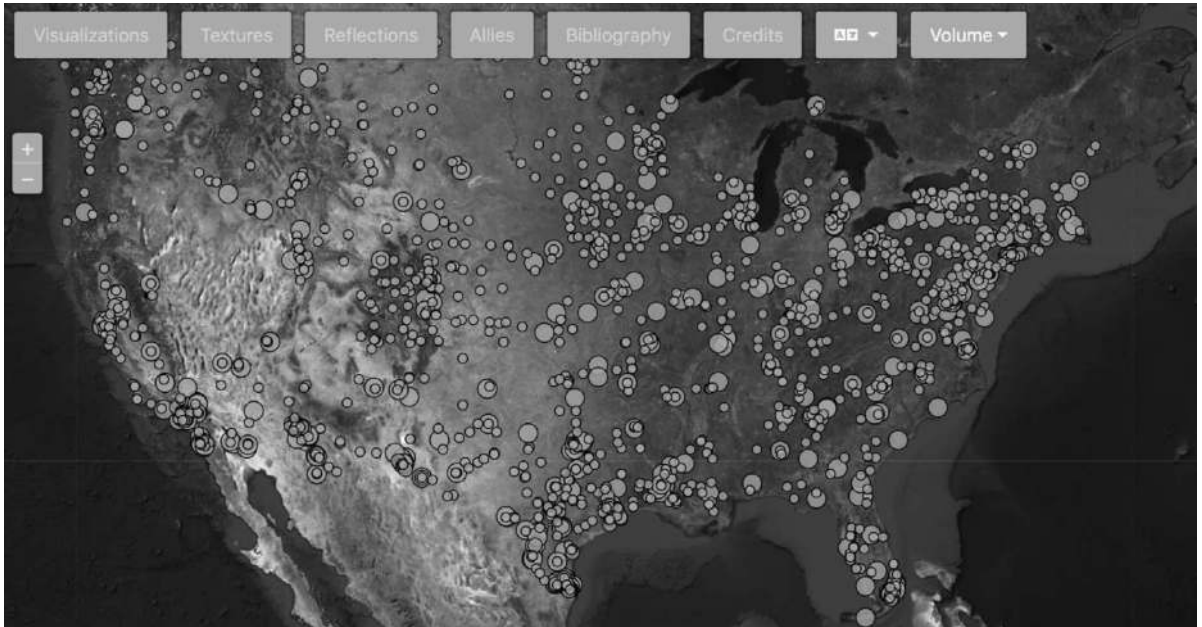
Figure 12.2   Screenshot of "Clinks" in "Torn Apart/Separados," depicting the significant number of immigrant detention centers and children's shelters in the U.S.

100-mile zone north of the border and the harsh desert region through which migrants must travel when crossing the border in between the points of entry.

A final precept that emerged from our work is that we must attend to is the ethical implications of the data. Our data narrative "ORR" (Office of Refugee Resettlement) in Volume 1 tells the story of the ethical issues we were contending with after compiling the data on the children's shelters. The name of the visualization refers to the division of the Department of Health and Human Services that facilitates refugee resettlement in the U.S. and, crucially, is the unit that manages children arriving at the border (as unaccompanied minors or, in 2018, children separated from their families). While we worked, we repeatedly debated whether or not we should make the addresses of the children's shelters easily available to anyone. The main issue was that we had the most complete, aggregated list of locations and were concerned, particularly at the height of media attention, that well-meaning people without experience organizing or working with migrant children would show up at these places to protest and potentially invite state violence in places housing an already vulnerable population of children. We ultimately decided against it. The "ORR" visualization tells that story, evoking both the need to protect that data as well as the slipperiness of ICE itself—its removal tactics that preclude migrants' rights to fair hearings and due process, middle-of-the-night raids, use of detainer documents to circumvent immigration laws, and its lack of oversight of detention facilities. Typically, when a user clicks on a dot on a data visualization, a tooltip or pop-up box with more information about that data point appears. When a user clicks on a dot on the "ORR" visualization, the dot simply evades them and moves around the screen. The data narrative further evokes strategies used by refugees in flight—savvy strategies of evasion, taking cover in the shadows, and the expertise migrants deploy in the process.

Because the project was the subject of a *WIRED* article—part of our efforts to court the media to get the word out that we had the data and to share the website containing our data narratives through social media—we then were challenged with the question of how to share the data and how to develop protocols governing its distribution. We were approached by a range of organizations and individuals requesting access to our data. We declined to work with *ProPublica*, individual data visualization designers, and design firms because they wanted to map the data and distribute addresses to the general public. Our team could not trust that they would manage and use the data with an ethics of care

consonant with our own. Conversely, we shared our data with *The Washington Post*, after discussions with their data team about how they would handle the data once it was in their care demonstrated that they would respect our protocols. They used the data to offer a geographic perspective on where migrant children were being housed while protecting the finer details of the data, such as names and addresses of the shelters. Additionally, we shared the data with social workers and lawyers who were working to facilitate family unification. While they did not publicly share the addresses of children's locations, they did share them with their clients, realizing the goal of our project to help mitigate the catastrophe created by the Trump administration's family separation policy.

Conclusion

As the range of refugee data narratives discussed in this chapter suggests, data visualization offers a powerful medium for telling stories about forced migration. It is particularly important that those who create these narratives do so in ways that promote refugee agency and voices and offer critiques of the state and its oppressive immigration policies. The example of Lucify's "The Flow towards Europe" presents a case study of pitfalls to avoid: relying on extant data sets, such as those available from the UNHCR and IOM; deploying written-linguistic text that promotes a crisis narrative and uses inaccurate terminology that misrepresents asylum seekers and refugees; and visual choices, such as centering countries of the Global North or displaying waves of moving dots, which reinforce a narrative in which forced migrants are problems and the Global North is a victim.

By taking a different approach to visualizing migration—one that does not dehumanize forced migrants but rather demonstrates an ethics of care for data visualization—creating data narratives that promote refugee voice and agency is possible. We see this in "Exodi/Esodi" and "Crossing the Mediterranean Sea by Boat," in their use of forced migrant testimonials. They offer examples of how to create data visualizations based on refugees' own experiences. Furthermore, they suggest how mixed-method approaches can effectively blend qualitative and quantitative data to produce data narratives that center forced migrants' voices and, in turn, decenter the gaze of arrival nation-states.

Finally, data narratives have the potential of emphasizing the dehumanization wrought by the state for asylum seekers and refugees. "Torn Apart/Separados" demonstrates this different approach to mapping migration. It further exemplifies what methodologies informed by a humanities-driven data literacy and data visualization ethics can look like by resisting reproducing data narratives through the gaze of the state and, instead, using the genre to cast an eye back on the oppressions perpetuated by the state. This approach requires: (1) examining whether data visualization is the right methodology to use, (2) recognizing what kinds of knowledges and expertise are crucial to undertaking data visualization in ethical and scholarly ways, (3) focusing not only on data that can be easily found but also data sets to create, (4) understanding what kinds of data tell what kinds of stories—and what kinds of narratives we can and cannot tell with data, and (5) attending to the ethical implications and uses of data in our care. Such new approaches hold possibilities for disrupting the ways that users envision mobile populations, reimagine the spatial relations of forced migration, and, in turn, challenge public discourse around refugee movement. By looking for new approaches, grounded in humanities-driven data literacy and data visualization ethics, we can more fully realize the possibilities of narratives that we can tell about forced migration with data.

Notes

1 Westerlund (@robinwesterlund), "Data Visualization at it's best!"
2 Tremblay (@LRT07), "A+ Must see the flow towards Europe."
3 Sloth (@gnarly420), "https://t.co/2v63mM81kr deceptively beautiful data visualization."
4 Lucify, "Visualizing Asylum Seekers in Europe"; Tavares, "Text to Text."
5 El Outa et al., "Towards a Conceptual Model for Data Narratives," 262.
6 Lupi, "The New Aesthetic of Data Narrative," 58.

7 Royal, "The Journalist as Programmer"; Weber and Rall, "Data Visualization in Online Journalism," 351; Rodríguez, Nunes, and Devezas, "Telling Stories with Data Visualization."

8 Segel and Heer, "Narrative Visualization," 1142.

9 Diakopoulos, *Automating the News*, 5–7; de-Lima-Santos, Schapals, and Bruns, "Out-of-the-Box versus In-house Tools."

10 Gray, Bounegru, and Chambers, *The Data Journalism Handbook*.

11 Risam, "Beyond the Migrant 'Problem,'" 567.

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13 El Outa et al., "Towards a Conceptual Model for Data Narratives," 263–4.

14 Spindler, "2015: The Year of Europe's Refugee Crisis."

15 Rettberg, "Situated Data Analysis."

16 Risam, "'It's Data, Not Reality.'"

17 Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," 130–2.

18 Misra, "Mapping the Frenzy of Europe's Migrant Crisis"; Dwyer, "This Map Shows How Large Europe's Refugee Crisis Really is"; Smith, "Stunning Digital Map Visualises Europe's Refugee Crisis"; Tavares, "Text to Text."

19 Lucify, "Visualizing Asylum Seekers in Europe."

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21 UNHCR Master Glossary of Terms, 441.

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PART IV

Mediation and Positionality

13

UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

Mediated Testimony and Narrative Tropes in Refugee Comics

Nina Mickwitz

The personal story has become a privileged form in cultural productions, including (but not limited to) graphic narratives, that advocate on behalf of refugee subjects. An individual protagonist renders complex issues intelligible at the level of lived experience; through vicarious sharing of this experience readers/audiences are invited to feel with and for others. This mechanism has come to assume a degree of common-sense acceptance. Analyzing the refugee narratives offered by three different comics, this chapter highlights how collaborative practices, uneven power relations, and institutional factors complicate the production of such stories. I probe the values and limitations of the personal story as narrative formula and device, to ponder the relationship between personification of large-scale and systemic issues such as forced migration and bordering and individualized notions of empathy and solidarity.[1]

The selected comics allow for comparisons of significant factors that exceed and, vitally, impact the textual: production models, institutional contexts, and projected readerships. Two of the texts are comic books by professional creators in the Global North: *Illegal: One Boy's Epic Journey of Hope and Survival* (2017), featuring a young boy from Niger as its protagonist, is aimed at a school age demographic, while *Näkymättömät Kädet/Invisible Hands*[2] (2011), which presents a young Moroccan man as its lead character, is oriented toward adult readerships. *Invisible Hands* is characterized by a markedly more somber outlook and complex exposition. Foregrounding assertions that their refugee narratives are grounded in primary research, both *Illegal* and *Invisible Hands* employ composite characters. Such fictionalized protagonists assume a metonymic function[3] and, bringing alive marginalized experiences and perspectives of historical events, assert their place in cultural archives.[4] Personification is neverthe-less fraught; positing one individual as the symbolic representative of any larger and heterogenous social group is an inherently reductive move. Moreover, as products of collaboration between professional storytellers and multiple refugee subjects, *Illegal* and *Invisible Hands* represent experiences not shared by their creators. Such "ventriloquism," astutely termed by Caterina Scarabicchi, undermines the agency associated with "voice."[5] The third example, *Así es la Vida/This Is Life*[6] (2013), is a testimonial in comics form, written and drawn by Congolese asylum seeker Tresór Londja. Compared to the previous two texts, *This Is Life* ostensibly offers a more direct first-person account and was published by the Spanish not-for-profit organization Spanish Catholic Commission for Migration Association (ACCEM) as Londja awaited the outcome on his asylum application. It quickly becomes evident, however, that this graphic testimony is no less mediated by institutional context, conventions, and power dynamics.

These three examples all extend "the undocumented migrant experience" through a male protagonist. This needs to be acknowledged, in view of significant intersections between mobilities, migration, and gender.[7] The implications are thus heightened in accounts featuring composite protagonists (*Illegal* and *Invisible Hands*), as such characters give rise to (implicit and direct) claims to universality.

This further accentuates the indeterminable wavering between specificity and signifying function (representing larger and heterogenous groups) and tensions that mark the fictionalized composite. But rather than setting up a binary opposition between testimony and ventriloquism, I aim to show how the personal story takes center stage in both, while interrogating its presumed virtues as a tool of expression and advocacy.

This chapter will examine *Illegal*'s and *Invisible Hands*, two works by creators from the Global North. Here, attention will be given to their ambition to engender emotional engagement, engagement of tropes such as victims/saviors and deserving/undeserving refugees, and to projected readerships and reception. This analysis is then complemented (and contrasted) by consideration of Londja's testimony in *This Is Life,* a work that is created from a position of direct experience of forced displacement and fundamentally shaped by these circumstances. The concluding part aligns the personal story with human interest journalism, to further probe the ideological dimensions of this narrative model. To set this up, I will first offer a brief introduction to what comics bring to the project of advocacy and the geo-political contexts of bordering depicted in all three comics.

Context Matters

Comics employ a synthesis of the visual and verbal to construct narratives peculiar to the form. While reading comics requires familiarity with specific conventions, they are broadly perceived as accessible and immediate, capable of engaging readers in intimate and affective reading experiences. For fans and aficionados, the capacity for complex narrative exposition has long been part of comics' appeal. With their transmigration from mass-culture ephemera to authorial expression, comics are increasingly recognized for slice-of-life realism, autobiography, and socially engaged non-fiction (biography, historical non-fiction, journalism, and documentary), often featuring marginalized subjectivities.[8] The appeal of comics as purveyors of personal narratives, aimed to foster solidarity with migrant and refugee subjectivities among (potentially distant) readers, can be understood against this background. It is also worth considering that, where subjects may be vulnerable to bureaucratic uses of photography (as documentation, identification, and evidence), drawn images sidestep the exposure of lens-based forms.

Graphically constructed narratives produce meaning through reiteration and layering techniques but also employ absences and elisions, and they can visually intimate dynamics and relationships through variations of proximity and scale. Their capacity to expand a narrative treatment seems a promising antidote to media images of migrants and a means to "explore and reflect on better ways of conceptualising and challenging dominant, deficit-based tropes."[9] Comics about forced migration do not necessarily avoid familiar motifs such as, for instance, overloaded boats. But the distancing effect of bodies as "living matter"[10] becomes disrupted when such imagery is integrated in sustained narrative engagement with, and investment in, characters and personality. The extent to which individual comics reinforce tropes of helplessness and victimhood (more or less deserving of sympathy), or challenge such imaginaries, is thus a question of visuality *and* narrative.

The three comics examined here operate, broadly speaking, in accordance with advocacy. The benevolent agenda of advocacy seems clear-cut compared to the ambivalence of mainstream media representations of migrants and refugees. Yet, critics have highlighted a similar tendency to erase individuality and political context, configuring relations based on distance and difference.[11] Predicated on readerships that occupy positions of relative privilege and agency, advocacy also raises questions about the empathy engendered, as well as its efficacy and limitations.[12] Unlike NGO campaigns to rally (financial and political) support, comic books tend not to involve explicit calls to action. However, these "softer" appeals render questions of "emotion-oriented"[13] representation, affect, and intent more, not less, pertinent. In short, do such appeals have the capacity to shift attitudes? To what extent are they self-serving, merely reminding those already privileged of their own capacity to care?[14] Crucially, such undertakings are themselves implicated in power dynamics circumscribing human mobilities, migration policy, and bordering.

Published in 2011, 2013, and 2017, the comics I discuss share in common the geo-political configuration of the European Union's external, more specifically Southern, border. The introduction of the Schengen agreement in 1990 eased movement within the European Union. Policing was instead asserted at Europe's external borders, affecting in particular migration from African countries and the Middle East, but also East Asia. The reasons compelling people to embark on risk-filled journeys to Europe, as represented in the comics at hand, are manifold and range from the acute threats of persecution and political instability to food shortages and economic drivers (inseparable from global financial structures and policy). And it should be noted that "Europe's own deeply racialised colonial history … ha[s] played a significant role in generating the war and conflict that led to refugees fleeing to Europe."[15]

Hostile policies known as "Fortress Europe" brought a "hardening of Europe's external borders against undocumented and unwanted migration."[16] The persistence of the so-called "humanitarian crisis" or "migrant crisis" can be traced back to the EU visa policy of 1993, that requires almost everyone traveling to an EU destination to provide valid documentation at the point of departure. "[M]igration policies have not stopped migrants from trying to reach Europe; on the contrary, they have made their journey even more dangerous."[17] Policy and tightened border controls have produced fertile conditions for people smuggling and heightened the visibility of migration, particularly in the emotive shape of overcrowded boats. The very terms "migrant crisis" and "refugee crisis" implicitly connect the idea of catastrophe with refugees themselves, while obscuring the long-term structural dynamics and "complex political, cultural and socio-economic" drivers of forced mobility and displacement.[18] As such, "there is nothing 'natural' or 'fixed' about the legal and policy categories associated with international migration: rather these categories are in a constant state of change, renegotiation and redefinition."[19] Legal definitions or distinctions between refugee and migrant will therefore not be adhered to in this chapter.

The assertion that "the existence of the border itself produces the violence that surrounds it"[20] refers not only to fences, detection technologies, and daily illegal pushbacks and forcible repatriation,[21] but also the violence, extortion, and exploitation that accompanies human trafficking. Crucially, the violence of bordering is not limited to physical and geographical border locations, their camps (administrative and official but also informal and make-shift), and highly visible rituals of controlled mobility. Biopolitical aspects (civic rights and access to support services, housing, healthcare, and education) are contingent on legal status, and vulnerabilities of certain groups connect to "migration-related deportation and detention."[22] That said, the persuasive powers of "the border spectacle"[23] show no signs of abating. The performative exclusions and othering enacted at borders mobilize notions of security and protection (for which the construction of a threat is essential) and shore up national and regional identity. This makes the border spectacle politically expedient. Like various other cultural productions, the comics in this chapter draw attention to the systemic violence of the European border regime. The extent to which these comics reinforce (rather than challenge) bordering as spectacle will be returned to in due course.

Speaking for Others

Border regimes distribute and restrict recourse to political processes, legal rights, and the right to be heard associated with citizenship. *Illegal* and *Invisible Hands* ostensibly render visible experiences in order to speak on behalf of refugee subjects with limited access to "a voice" of their own. *Illegal* (first published by Hodder) is written by Andrew Donkin and Eoin Colfer and illustrated by Giovanni Rigano. *Invisible Hands* is a weighty graphic novel by the Finnish cartoonist Ville Tietäväinen. While *Illegal* signposts its intention to engage young readers, *Invisible Hands*' narrative complexity and stark themes (violence and exploitative labor practices, destitution, mental and emotional disintegration and suicide) are suggestive of an adult readership.

Evidently speaking for and on behalf of others, *Illegal* and *Invisible Hands* raise questions about agency and representation, and both comic books directly address their processes of production. Each extends

assurances that their fictionalized narratives are informed by field research and first-hand witness accounts. To support this claim, *Illegal*'s main narrative is followed by a five-page comic adaptation of an Eritrean girl's testimony, as told to the not-for-profit organization Women for Refugee Women. This is included as part of source materials informing the fictional story devised by the creators. Along with acknowledgements of persons and organizations that contributed to the research process, readers can also find character development sketches by Rigano. In other words, the mediation of "voice" as a complex process of construction is overtly acknowledged. These peritextual components function to signpost conscientious inquiry and transparency of process in vital ways. Tietäväinen's preface similarly names individuals he encountered during fieldwork in Morocco and Spain. Additional and scholarly validation is extended by a foreword written by his social–anthropologist guide on this journey.

Both comic books invite readers to vicariously experience what the journeys of undocumented migrants might entail through the device of a personal story, seemingly intended to encourage an imaginative substitution, or imagined proximity. Readers are invited to form an affective connection with a central composite character through narratives that combine unfamiliar experiences with familiar narrative arcs.

Pedagogic Aims: *Illegal*

Illegal tells how 12-year-old Ebo from a village in Niger comes to find himself on an overcrowded inflatable dinghy adrift on the Mediterranean Sea. Ebo has been living with his destitute uncle, but his older brother Kwame has already left home, intent on joining their sister who they know is somewhere in Europe. The chapters cut between Ebo's initial search for Kwame, and the later part of his journey and the 300-mile maritime crossing from Libya to Sicily. This retrospective telling structured through flashbacks effectively maintains dramatic tension and the sense of precarity and unpredictability associated with being a hostage to fortune. The overland leg of Ebo's voyage sees him surviving the streets of Agadez before a chance encounter reunites him with Kwame. They eventually make it across the desert, part of the way on a smuggler's truck and the rest on foot. Once in Tripoli, the brothers work and hide from the authorities, sleeping in a storm drain, until they can pay for places on a crossing to Europe.

As the overcrowded vessel capsizes, Kwame disappears in the waves, but Ebo is hauled to safety by a circling rescue helicopter. Following some time recovering on a hospital ward, Ebo spends his days staring out to sea in the harbor of Lampedusa. The story concludes on this quayside, as Ebo is reunited with his sister in a redemptive resolution that speaks to the intended readership, from nine years up through to teens. The softly rounded drawing style and warm, vibrant colors also align with children's book illustration and animation. The linework seems effortlessly to bring life and movement to the characters, while dynamic shifts in perspective work with varied page layouts and panel arrangements to imbue the storytelling with drama. The warmth and energy refuse aesthetic registers of social realism (as a set of conventions historically associated with social justice agendas) for a style reminiscent of adventure stories, a move that appears designed to draw in young readers with lives far removed from the realities depicted.

Illegal is guided by a humanitarian and pedagogic imperative. The publisher offers a set of resources to accompany the book, at a variety of educational stages, to explore not only "the refugee crisis" but also geography, creative writing, and empathy.[24] The accompanying resources offer potential to undercut xenophobic prejudice and to support sharing of refugee experiences. *Illegal* has achieved considerable critical attention and acclaim, and a prior collaboration between Colfer and Donkin (the graphic novel adaptations of Colfer's fantasy-adventure *Artemis Fowl* series) is frequently mentioned in reviews. One reviewer describes *Illegal* as "deeply affective and thought-provoking" and notes the importance of such stories "to be heard." That the obligation to listen lies with remote and privileged readerships (of the review *and* book) is inferred: "One of [Ebo's] fellow voyagers, a Chelsea FC obsessive, jokes about becoming a World Service commentator (see how these boys are just like our own?)."[25] *Illegal*

thus shares power dynamics associated with a humanitarian move to tell a story on behalf of powerless others, inviting more privileged readers/audiences to respond based on an appeal to emotions. A politics or "discourse of pity"[26] is to some extent offset by presenting Ebo as a resourceful (as well as vulnerable) hero. At the same time, he is perfectly pitched as the innocent child, deserving of protection. As Carly McLaughlin notes, "The universality of childhood has been central to the mobilisation of public sympathy for child asylum-seekers."[27] This premise belies and obscures "a racist politics of asylum that determines who is seen as a worthy refugee, deserving of protection, and who is criminalised as an undocumented non-citizen."[28] The politics of this binary is sharply illustrated by the contrasting tone of exposition (visual and narrative) in *Illegal* and *Invisible Hands*, and inscribed in the respective fates of the protagonists. For young Ebo, an unexpected reunion with his sister on an Italian quayside fulfills the expectation of a happy ending. If this triumph inadvertently positions the Global North as a space of salvation and resolution, *Invisible Hands* instead depicts it as a site of continued struggle.

Artistic Ambitions: *Invisible Hands*

Tietäväinen's *Invisible Hands* (2014) tells the story of a doomed quest to fulfill familial (and gendered) responsibilities that sees the protagonist leave his North African home for the promise of better opportunities in Europe. Published by one of the largest publishing houses in Finland, *Invisible Hands* is a large hardback book that boasts strong production values and more than 200 pages of full-color artwork. The composite protagonist here is Rashid, a devout young husband and father of one, who works in a tailor's shop in Medina. Opportunities are scarce and when losing this job, Rashid's only remaining option is to accompany a friend eager to reach Europe in search of a better life. Like Ebo's brother Kwame, this friend perishes in the sea during their ill-fated crossing. But this is where similarities between *Illegal* and *Invisible Hands* end. Rashid initially finds employment in the Spanish region of Almería's vast expanse of greenhouses, colloquially known as "Mar de Plástico," an area known for providing vegetables to supermarkets across Europe, its migrant labor population, and squalid, lawless conditions.

As conceived by Tietäväinen, the protagonist Rashid is a modest young man guided by two fundamental aspirations: to be a good Muslim and to provide for his family. As an undocumented migrant, the odds are stacked against Rashid fulfilling these expectations and his duty as son, husband, and father. He is portrayed as a simple and gentle man, and at the same time a powerless pawn of circumstance. Eventually destitute, Rashid's hopes recede along with his self-worth and mental health. The bleakness of the tale is visually reinforced by a palette of murky greens and umber, while closely cropped views and rapidly alternating angles underline the sense of entrapment. Most pages and spreads are constructed of numerous panels and their irregular organization underscores the absence of stability that dominates the narrative overall. The story closes with an abject Rashid, dressed in an ad hoc and tattered Superman costume, atop Barcelona's Columbus monument. The pathos of this juxtaposition, the broken man in garb emulating a figure of heroic masculinity, is brought to conclusion as Rashid yet again fails—instead of soaring he falls to his death. The narrative thus follows an established narrative pattern, according to which characters incompatible with societal values and norms inevitably meet tragic ends. Seemingly doomed to failure and stripped of agency by circumstances and narrative treatment alike, Rashid is rendered pitiful. Eliciting pity is a recognized strategy of advocacy, and the positioning of Tietäväinen's story in such a topical, politically charged setting is moreover suggestive (albeit in a loose sense) of social justice concerns. However, pity is also associated with the literary genre of tragedy, more concerned with providing cathartic effects for audiences/readers. *Invisible Hands* teeters ambivalently between these two categories, thus raising discomforting questions about exploiting the suffering of others for the sake of personal ambition and privileged citizenry's catharsis.

The work generated notable media attention in Finland already during the production stage, as articles in the magazine *Suomen Kuvalehti* (the title translates as *Finland's Picture Post*) followed Tietäväinen's progress. This project, involving fieldwork and interviews in Morocco as early as 2005, also elicited interest from organizations concerned with migration ahead of publication.[29] In February 2011, the

Finnish Cultural Foundation awarded Tietäväinen for his "remarkable contribution, artistic courage and defense of humanitarian values."[30] One reviewer specifically comments on the work's affective capacity, how the story of an individual can make accessible to readers human dimensions that quantitative data and legal and policy discourse all render mute. At the same time, this review frames the work and its themes as "timeless."[31] This claim to universality is reiterated by Tietäväinen himself, when proclaiming that, rather than political, his interests concern how self-worth and identity are forged and lost.[32] Such universalist humanitarianism seems predicated on distance and difference, showing limited self-awareness about its appropriation and remolding of refugee testimonies. The configuration of Rashid (as a pitiable Other) thus aligns with a highly individualized conception of empathy, as "a capacity that is individually possessed and enacted, but that the Other is not actually required to stick around for the experience."[33] By the time the story ends, the subjects encountered during the initial research process indeed appear remote and receded from view.

Critical recognition might be considered useful, potentially even beneficial, for the dissemination of a counter discourse on migration. When produced by well-known creators and/or awarded accolades, the reach of the work is presumably enhanced, generating attention and visibility to "the refugee issue" and the human cost of the current "crisis." But it is also the case that work that evidently engages with a prominent and topical issue increases the likelihood of media attention with a focus on creators. Linda Alcoff has observed how "the practice of speaking for others is often born of a desire for mastery, to privilege oneself as the one who more correctly understands the truth about another's situation or as one who can champion a just cause and thus achieve glory and praise."[34] Alcoff here captures the uneven power relations that constitute speaking for others, and the inequities that such undertakings have capacity to reproduce and bolster. It also points to the wider reception discourse in which these texts are embedded and celebrated.

Critical reception of Tietäväinen's project extols the capacity and novelty of a popular culture form, historically considered derivative, to represent a complex and topical subject. Attention focuses on authorial and creative agency, and the recognition of comics as an accessible and affective form of storytelling. But the European border regimes that fundamentally underpin Rashid's story are largely sidelined. Ethical questions concerning representation and voice are also markedly absent in the reception discourse. The fading from view of the people and experiences purported to inform the work (noted in the work itself) is thus consolidated in the reviews and interviews surrounding this comic.

Graphic Testimony: Tresór Londja's *This Is Life*

The personal testimony of *This Is Life* might reasonably be expected to avoid various problems related to the composite characters and non-migrant authorship in *Illegal* and *Invisible Hands*. Yet, its institutional context and process of production is crucial to the text and its genesis, disrupting any straightforward sense of "pure" testimony. This comic tells the story of Londja's abrupt flight from the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2011, a journey that eventually brings him to the Spanish territory of Ceuta in North Africa, where he applies for asylum. The 27-page comic is bookended by pages that extend contextual and publication information and acknowledgments, including support from the Spanish Ministry of Employment and Social Security, the General Secretary of Immigration and Migration, and the Director General of Migration.

The comic opens in Kinshasa on December 30, 2010, and introduces Tresór Londja as a young family man, father of two children, and active member of the Progressive Lumumbista Movement. Londja explains how the DRC was preparing for elections, and that six months previously the prominent Congolese human rights defender Floribert Chebeya and his driver had been found dead following a meeting at the headquarters of the Congolese Police Force.[35] Later, when in early January the beaten bodies of two students were discovered, demonstrations and clashes between students and police quickly ensued. Although already in custody when these confrontations played out, these events form the backdrop for Tresór Londja's account of his arrest, the beatings he was subjected to in custody,

and his subsequent flight. The narrative briefly ventures beyond the parameters of first-hand witnessing as Londja includes scenes he would not have witnessed, to show how bribery involving politicians and high-ranking officials ensures his release. Once Londja then goes into hiding, his escape from the DRC is arranged by family and friends, and the comic shows a journey encompassing several different legs and means of transportation. Like countless others, this route eventually leads to the Spanish city of Melilla on the north-west coast of Africa. At this point, according to his description, Londja is dazed and disoriented, unsure of what country, let alone continent, he finds himself in.

These events may be cataclysmic, yet the telling of the story eschews dramatic tension in favor of a measured tone. In the comic this is realized through evenhanded exposition, restraint in both character depictions and compositional angles, and a certain uniformity of page layouts. In notable contrast to the comics discussed earlier, Londja's narrative is diligently chronological and avoids emotional registers. Instead, accuracy and credibility seem to be the guiding principles. This alignment with official and legal discourse hints at intent (and onus) to demonstrate the merits of Londja's asylum application. His authorial "voice" and ostensible ownership are amplified by the visual qualities, from the hand-printed words to heavy outlines, line work, and colors suggestive of pencil crayons and felt tip pens. Such mundane tools are not uncommon in autobiographical comics, and often valued for underscoring "authenticity." It seems a fair assumption that here this aesthetic is an outcome of necessity rather than choice. That does not, however, diminish its function as a marker of authenticity, nor does it detract from Londja's evident drawing skill and adept use of panels and page layouts.

The book's foreword further underscores its sense of authenticity and credibility. Londja writes:

> My name is Tresór Londja, I am a Congolese from the DRC, I am married and I have two children, a girl and a boy. I am writing this book, first of all to thank the Lord for saving my life and also to CETI for all the good it has done for me and continues to do me since I am still here.
>
> I do not know, if in the future I will get my asylum in Spain or if I will return to my family or if, on the contrary, I will be deported to my country where perhaps I will end up dead, although I hope this book remains here in the CETI so that it is known how I got with this help to save my life and that of my family.
>
> I would ask all the CETI members to keep this book as a memory, since it has not been easy for me to write it, thank you for your help.
>
> *S.9.522 Tresór-Londja, my translation*

Centro de Estancia Temporal de Inmigrantes (CETI) is a temporary and voluntary reception camp for migrants seeking asylum or legal access to Spain, "set up in 2000 by the Spanish government as a response to the rising number of tents in the forest of Ceuta built by irregular immigrants in the 1990s."[36] The camps are semi-open and classified as "reception camps designed to give basic services and social benefits" authorized by the Spanish Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (Regulation 2493/2004). Within them, NGOs including ACCEM are tasked with administrative and social care support for migrants and asylum-seekers. Londja's story is thus prefaced by the aims and intentions of ACCEM and their *Refugiados en el Cómic/Refugees in Comics* project.

Distinguished from the typographic fonts used in other peritextual components by its hand-printed capital letters, this hand-written foreword visually connects with the comic's text insets and speech bubbles. The signature and process number nevertheless highlight the authoritarian and institutional frame that enables and incontrovertibly shapes this testimony. The contributions of CETI support workers feature prominently in both the paratextual components and in the comic itself. More troubling aspects of the CETI facilities documented by outside observers, such as "violations of the rights of detainees and acts of violence"[37] and chronic overcrowding,[38] are carefully elided. Londja's expressions of gratitude underline the asymmetrical power relations, indebtedness, and inherent violence that, as Mimi Nguyen has argued, constitutes "the gift of freedom," as calculated, metered out, and withheld by apparatuses of liberal government.[39]

Londja writes his story held in the "legal 'limbos' [that] hold migrants in a perpetual temporary state, awaiting transfer to the mainland or deportation without access to the rights to which they are entitled."[40] The backstory of political engagement plays a prominent part in this narrative, setting it apart from refugee narratives in which journeys and arrivals are given center stage. Contexts of departure are routinely overshadowed by the focus on acute distress in advocacy's appeals for compassion. The specificity offered here is not merely due to authorial agency, nor their personal significance for Londja. His comic constitutes testimony in graphic form.[41] Writing the comic extends a vital opportunity to set out and support the case for political asylum, which in turn renders legible how "forced migrants depend on having their stories heard and believed."[42] The carefully maintained matter-of-fact tone, also reflected in the narrative treatment and visual exposition, presents a marked contrast to the privileging of affect in the previous two comics. *This Is Life* ends with expressions of hope but no resolution; Londja's legal status remains uncertain and neither the process outcome nor its time frames can be projected.

This comic is accessible from the online archives of ACCEM; according to the webpage the asylum application was eventually refused. Neither published by a mainstream publishing house, nor the kind of commercial property that reviewing and promotion commonly tends to be reserved for, this is a work with relatively limited circulation and reach. Its credentials and qualities might feel more convincing than the fictionalized "voicing" on behalf of undocumented migrants offered by *Illegal* and *Invisible Hands*. Yet, this testimony is no less a product of context and address, a perfect example of how "[w]hat is remembered and told is also situational, shaped not least through the contingencies of the encounter between narrator and listener and the power relationship between them."[43]

The Individual's Story and Beyond

This Is Life is a graphic testimony engendered by the necessity to offer support for Londja's asylum claim, and as such is inherently a narrative based on an individual's experiences. Yet Londja's account is non-conventional by neither elaborating for dramatic effect nor appealing to pity. This register of rational reasoning can be attributed to the juridical backdrop and context that places it apart from story-telling conventions for wider audiences. But *Illegal* and *Invisible Hands* originate from a commercial publishing landscape. Due to their fictionalized protagonists and "media placement,"[44] these works remain at a remove from comics journalism. Their subject matter, however, still locates them within ongoing spaces of public debate, and (deflections notwithstanding) a notion of the public, as "a discursive space in which collective concern becomes enacted."[45] This alignment with journalism may be oblique, yet these comics share some defining traits with the journalistic format known as the human-interest story: "the characteristics of the main actors and their impact on readers (identification potential), the dramatic structure of the story (narrative arc), and the responses of the audience to the story (discursive space)."[46] The identification in question is not predicated of actual shared experience, but rather the ability to imaginatively occupy a space. Despite the distinct emotional landscapes of *Illegal* and *Invisible Hands*, each invites reader engagement predicated on affect and emotional responses, and the question of either overcoming a relationship of "generalised pity"[47] remains. The comparison with human interest journalism also directs attention to narrative arcs, conventions, and tropes.

What are the implications of staging accounts of undocumented migration by mobilizing archetypal motifs familiar from existing story-telling traditions, be they triumphant or tragic? How might this impact readerly responses and potentially constrain the discursive space? From this perspective, Ebo's brother in *Illegal* and Rashid's friend in *Invisible Hands* illustrate the high-risk stakes of maritime crossings while also providing a well-known narrative function, that of expendable companion characters. The journey itself is a seductively familiar motif (and structure) that activates expectations, such as heroic prevailing in the face of obstacles. It feeds into tropes such as personal growth and successful arrival. As Vassiliki Vassiloudi notes about children's and young adult books addressing the topic of migration: "The journey has become such a popular image and such a central motif to refugee narratives that it seems to deflect attention from any other implication of the refugee condition."[48] Accounts that take as

their focus the same journeys and border-crossing moments privileged by news media risk maintaining, even bolstering, those very terms of engagement with migration. "Dominant narratives not only shape the stories people tell, they also situate public opinion, sanctioning, constraining or enabling certain stories to be told and heard."[49]

The vulnerabilities of *Illegal*'s heroic young protagonist Ebo and the tragic figure of Rashid in *Invisible Hands* do little to disrupt what has been described as the "'victim-pariah' representational status couplet."[50] If anything, the comparison between *Illegal*'s warm aesthetic and happy ending and *Invisible Hands*' darker tone and Rashid's tragic undoing perfectly illustrates this interdependent pairing. Ebo exemplifies the ideal victim and "deserving refugee," whereas *Invisible Hands* does little to challenge the habitual representation of (especially male) undocumented migrants as undesirable/threats to the social order of the Global North. Posing no immediate threat, but unable to fulfill the expectations placed upon him and apparently fated to failure, Tietäväinen's protagonist is not assigned much agency or positive value. It is ultimately neither trope alone, but rather the interchangeability between "threat" and "victim,"[51] and continued oscillation from "good refugee" to "bad 'refugee,"[52] that function to obscure the view of the structural issues at hand. Whether eliciting fear, pity, or more positively imbued portrayals of refugees as "dignified agents," the activation of emotion-led responses mobilizes and operates within a discourse of morality,[53] also resonant in traditional story-structures and constitutive tropes, such as heroes, quests, and individual self-realization, tragic and happy endings.

Of course, not all comics telling refugee stories follow conventional narrative structures. Londja's *This Is Life* poignantly refutes resolution, ending with the author still awaiting a decision on his asylum application. But alternatives to the individual focus of human-interest journalism and strategies to undercut the emotive currency of acute crisis are also evident elsewhere in comics publishing. For instance, anthologies presenting multiple narratives can implicitly support recognition that refugee experiences are plural and diverse. Other approaches engage with expanded and longer-term implications of displacement, aligning with Vinh Nguyen's notion of "Refugeetude."[54] Here, sightlines reach beyond the journey narrative, border spectacle, and crisis conceptualizations. Some comics storytellers adopt a self-conscious and overtly self-reflexive approach to address the privileged positions and power dynamics of their practice when representing refugee subjects. As Megan Boler writes, "At stake is not only the ability to empathize with the very distant other, but to recognize oneself as implicated in the social forces that create the climate of obstacles the other must confront."[55] Taking a different approach to similar ends, others have minimized rather than centered their attention on human subjects, instead privileging spaces and structures.[56] So evidently, alternatives to placing the individual as the privileged unit and go-to strategy for refugee narratives are possible and do exist.

Yet, in line with life narrative trends in late twentieth and twenty-first-century comics, the personal story commands a prominent position in comics telling refugee narratives. From factual modes of address to fiction, the presumed inherent virtue and value offered by the personal story seems augmented by this also being a convention privileged in advocacy-led story-telling more broadly. As a logical counter strategy to media and political discourse that suppresses human experience, up close and personal representations with their focus on the experiences of an individual are appealing. When reproducing common scripts and limitations associated with human interest formats, however, the emotion-based appeals and normative aspects of such narratives do not yield insight into systemic and geo-political factors that determine and curtail the mobilities of people. These kinds of accounts instead seem more likely to engender an individualized and, following Boler, passive form of empathy.[57] Promoting connection between reader and subject as recognition and fellow feeling, the personal story mirrors the conception of empathy as an individual act of imagining. Understanding solidarity as an outcome of empathy thus offers limited leverage for collective action, and follows neoliberalism's positioning of the individual as its most valued social unit.

To conclude, to forge transformative imaginaries is undoubtedly a sizeable ambition for any storyteller, and fraught with risk. It therefore requires an attentive and critical approach, not only to representational strategies, but also to the dynamics brought into play by underlying narrative conventions

and structures. These considerations fundamentally belie the perceived directness of the personal story. When it comes to refugee narratives, so too, do the complex processes of remediation and uneven power dynamics shaping production and reception alike.

Notes

1 Lynch and Kalaitzake, "Affective and Calculative Solidarity."
2 I will use the direct translation of Tietäväinen's title, *Invisible Hands*. This references the migrant labor providing fresh produce to supermarkets across Europe.
3 Nayar, "The Human Rights Graphic Novel," 92.
4 Polak, "Ethics in the Gutter," 31.
5 Scarabicchi, "Borrowed Voices."
6 Londja's Spanish title *Así es la Vida* roughly translates to the English *This Is Life,* and will henceforth be referred to by this translation.
7 Yeoh and Ramdas, "Gender, Migration," 1198–205.
8 The development of comics as an authorial form of self-expression draws on traditions such as North American underground comics but also feminist, queer, and other small press cultures.
9 Blomfield and Lenette, "Artistic Representations," 336.
10 Chouliaraki and Stolic, "Rethinking Media Responsibility," 1167.
11 Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries"; Pupavac, "Refugee Advocacy."
12 Nelems, "This Thing Called Empathy"; Boler, "Risks of Empathy."
13 Chouliaraki, "Posthumanitarianism," 108.
14 Rosler, *Decoys and Disruptions*, 177–9.
15 Lynch and Kalaitzake, "Affective and Calculative Solidarity," 243.
16 Marino and Dawes, "Introduction to Fortress Europe," 1.
17 Marino and Dawes, "Introduction to Fortress Europe," 2.
18 Lucassen, "Peeling an Onion," 406.
19 Crawley and Skleparis, "Refugees, Migrants, Neither, Both," 52.
20 Jones, *Violent Borders*, 5.
21 Human Rights Watch, *Abused and Expelled*.
22 Van Baar, "Evictability," 214.
23 De Genova, "Migrant 'Illegality' and Deportability," 436.
24 Donkin, "Impact in Classrooms."
25 Donaldson, "Moving Story," 35.
26 Chouliaraki, "Posthumanitarianism," 109.
27 McLaughlin, "They Don't Look Like Children," 1758.
28 McLaughlin, "They Don't Look Like Children," 1758.
29 Koikkalainen, "May I Introduce—Rashid," n.p.
30 Jantunen, "Forbidden Paradise," 50.
31 Rantanen, "Broken Dreams," n.p.
32 Paavola, "Forgotten Reality," n.p.
33 Nelems, "This Thing Called Empathy," 24.
34 Alcoff, "Speaking for Others," 29.
35 Human Rights Watch, *Prominent Activist's Murder.*
36 CETI, *The Land In Between.*
37 Arbogast, "A Thriving Business," 40.
38 Barbero, "The Struggle Against Deportation," 9.
39 Nguyen, "The Gift," 25.
40 Barbero, "The Struggle Against Deportation," 9.
41 Miné Okubo's *Citizen 13660,* first published in 1946, offers an earlier example of drawn testimony. This proto-comic documents the story of Okubo, one of over 110,000 citizens of Japanese descent who were detained under Executive Order 9066, issued in 1942. In the 1980s, Okubo's book was submitted along with her oral testimony to the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians.
42 Eastmond, "Stories as Lived Experience," 259.
43 Eastmond, "Stories as Lived Experience," 249.
44 Fine and White, "Human Interest Narratives," 61.
45 Fine and White, "Human Interest Narratives," 60.
46 Fine and White, "Human Interest Narratives," 61.
47 Boltanski, *Distant Suffering,* 3.

48 Vassiloudi, "Children's and Young Adult Refugee Narratives," 38.
49 Smith and Waite, "New and Enduring Narratives," 2290.
50 Kyriakides, Taha, Charles and Torres, "Introduction," 5.
51 Chouliraki and Stolic, "Rethinking Media Responsibility," 1163.
52 Szscepanik, "Imagined Refugeehood(s)."
53 Chouliaraki, "Posthumanitarianism," 120.
54 Nguyen, "Refugeetude."
55 Boler, "Risks of Empathy," 257.
56 Useful examples include Tings Chak's *Undocumented* and Sabba Khan's *In the Gaps*. See also Candida Rifkind's close analysis of *Undocumented*.
57 Boler, "Risks of Empathy," 256–9.

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14

"I AM MYSELF"

Queer Refugee Narratives

Elif Sarı[1]

The moment I heard about the coming together of this exciting anthology, I knew in my heart that Aram's stories should be *in the Handbook* among the refugee narratives this *Handbook* presents. Aram is a self-identified queer lesbian refugee whom I met through my ethnographic research with Iranian LGBTQ refugees in Turkey. What makes me want to write about Aram, more than anything else, is that they *queer* all the structures, sites, and systems they encounter and navigate, ranging from asylum bureaucracies to hospital corridors, from textile factories to community meetings. Here, I use "queer" as an embodied subject position that transgresses binary gender norms and a disorienting act (an unsettling method and a disruptive orientation) that challenges hegemonic narratives, disrupts binary thinking, and resists normalizing regimes. Aram is/does both, and by taking inspiration from their relentless queerness, this chapter presents two narrative experimentations to tell Aram's stories of queerness and refugeeness. In doing so, I hope to offer a queer(ing) perspective on writing with and about refugees.

The first narrative uses auto-ethno-fiction to bring together many stories told by Aram in one compositive narrative, which tells Aram's journey of what they call "arriving at self-knowledge" regarding their identification as queer. The second narrative offers an ethnographic account that follows Aram's struggle to make queerness recognized by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as a legitimate identity category and lifeworld.[2] Queerness in these narratives is not merely an "add-on" to Aram's refugee story. Rather, queerness—and the desire/struggle to be recognized, treated equally, and not punished for who they are—constitute the very fabric of their refugeeness. It is this desire to freely and safely *be themselves* that prompted Aram and most other queer, trans, and gender non-conforming refugees to leave their homes, families, and friends behind and seek asylum elsewhere. However, as the narratives in this chapter illustrate, the asylum system introduces various barriers to refugees' mobility, freedom, and safety and, in doing so, prevents them from realizing their desire to *be themselves*, which is, ironically, the main reason they become refugees in the first place. Aram's persistent navigation of, and resistance against, these structural constraints to live their life in a way that feels true to their sense of self is what is at the heart of their queerness and refugeeness and, thus, my writing.

One significant barrier to refugees' desire to *be themselves* is the carceral politics of asylum. Western states exclude racialized refugees from their territories and instead make them linger in liminal sites of waiting and incarceration in the Global South.[3] Aram, for instance, applied for asylum in 2014 and, although they completed all necessary processes and became eligible for refugee resettlement many years ago, they still wait in Turkey for resettlement to Canada as I write this chapter in 2022. In the context of this ongoing waiting and stuckness, engaging with Aram's narratives offers us a chance to bear political witness to global border closures that immobilize refugees and defer their needs, plans,

and aspirations—ranging from access to safe queer spaces to gender affirming health care, job security, and equality—to the not-yet temporalities of resettlement.

Furthermore, Aram's narratives demonstrate that as they face an uncertain future due to closed borders, LGBTQ refugees also live difficult and precarious lives in Turkey and face various constraints on their rights, freedoms, and access to resources. Some of these structural barriers that severely impact refugees' physical and mental wellbeing and deny their right to freely *be themselves* include asylum- and aid-seeking bureaucracies that require refugees to fit their complex identifications into rigid and essentialist gender/sexuality categories; a cisheteronormative and xenophobic healthcare system that maltreats and discriminates against queer and trans refugees; an exploitative informal labor market that profits from refugees' precarious status while forcing them to conform to binary gender norms; and carceral refugee settlement policies that isolate refugees in small Turkish towns where their desire to *be themselves* singles them out as different and makes them vulnerable to homo/transphobic violence.

In exposing this oppressive system, Aram's everyday experiences and stories *queer* dominant representations of asylum as a journey from repression to liberation. Rather, they point us to the carceral, capitalist, and cisheteropatriarchal logics embedded in the transnational asylum system and expose the multiple forms of physical, economic, and emotional violence that this system generates in refugees' lives. However, this critique of violence might run the risk of turning refugees into victim figures who do not have any control over their bodies, lives, identities, and narratives in the face of structural forces.[4] This is where approaching "queer" not merely as a subject position but also as a disorienting act and an unsettling method becomes of utmost importance. For instance, in both narratives, readers will see how Aram's gender non-conformity disorients all asylum officers, social workers, medical authorities, and employers who want to know whether Aram is a man or a woman. However, Aram's body, gender performances, and speech acts constantly and actively resist answering this question within binary sex/gender norms. Aram refuses to surrender to strict identity categories and tell their complex life in prescribed refugee narratives. They struggle to live their life and tell their truth in a way that is most authentic to them, even if that means losing their job, fighting with asylum authorities, or being denied humanitarian aid. Their acts of refusal and resistance challenge the dominant portrayal of refugees as weak and vulnerable figures and thus *queer* hegemonic victimhood narratives.

Narrating this stubborn queerness also comes with an ethical and political responsibility to *queer* the writing itself. While the second narrative in this chapter reads like conventional ethnographic writing and, thus, does not need much explanation, I want to say a few things about the first one, which is an "auto-ethno-fiction" narrative. *Auto*, because it is Aram's story told by Aram themself. *Ethno-fiction,* because although the narrative reads as if Aram told it at once, it is indeed a composite of many stories and narrative genres that Aram and I produced during my ethnographic research. In constructing this composite narrative, I followed the flow of Aram's storytelling in a four-hour film footage (recorded by their roommate for a collaborative audiovisual project idea) as the main narrative structure. I reconstructed parts of this narrative by bringing in different but interlinked stories or different versions of the same stories from our other conversations, recordings, and writings, including semi-structured interviews (recorded for my dissertation), petitions and letters (written by Aram and translated by me for submission to asylum authorities), re-scripted dialogues (enacted by Aram and written by me), and an audiovisual experimentation with Aram's "refugee folder" (containing photos, asylum documents, travel permits, bank statements, hospital appointments, and email exchanges) and the stories behind that personal archive.

The reason I blended these different stories, genres, and temporalities into one composite narrative is grounded in feminist and queer epistemologies, which engage with refugee narratives not merely to learn about refugees' lives per se but as social and political critiques of militarism, racism, capitalism, colonialism, and cisheteropatriarchy as well as sites where identities, norms, and power structures are constructed and contested.[5] Such engagement also extends into the act of writing. The questions of voice, form, and temporality in writing are not merely analytical matters or stylistic choices but deeply political issues that can reproduce or transform the "relations of power and knowledge" that situate queer/refugee experiences "within silence, erasure, and violence."[6]

When I began working on this chapter, I knew which stories I wanted to tell but struggled to find a format that felt right. In presenting different narrative genres, I resisted following the standard citation instructions for incorporating block quotes and dialogues into the text. I did not want to use different formatting (e.g., 12pt. font and double spacing for my writing and smaller font, single spacing, and extra indenting for Aram's narratives) because I wanted to disrupt, albeit textually, the established hierarchies between the ethnographer as an expert and her narrative as analysis, on the one hand, and refugees as interlocutors and their narratives as empirical data, on the other. I also did not want to divide Aram's stories into sub-sections, such as gender and sexuality, carcerality, healthcare, labor, and waiting, because they are inseparably intermingled in Aram's everyday experiences and narratives. Furthermore, I refrained from prioritizing one version of a given story over others, as Aram and I shared those stories many times and each re-telling was a site of connectivity, transformation, and healing. For weeks, I wrote and re-wrote, experimented with formatting and styling, only to realize that choosing one version among others confines the story to a single temporality, a stagnant moment in life, dismissing how both the story and its subject/narrator/listener continually evolve through the acts of telling and listening.

Auto-ethno-fiction allowed Aram and I to be in the same text, like we are sitting in the same room, talking together, learning from each other's words and silences, completing one another's sentences as we often do, and collectively building a narrative that draws on many stories and memories accumulated during our years of connectedness and collaboration. Moving between different spaces, contexts, and temporalities in the same narrative also enabled me to respect each version of Aram's stories and appreciate new insights in each re-telling. Together, these thought processes and writing experimentations showed me, once again, how rich, difficult, and messy queer refugee lives are, and how, in addition to the interventions and interruptions they make to hegemonic narratives, they also resist being told within the confines of a singular narrative form and a linear homogenous temporality.

Narrative I: Arriving at Self-Knowledge

When I was in Iran, I knew myself as a lesbian (*khodemo lesbian mishenakhtam*). My knowledge of these issues was minimal at the time, and my circumstances didn't allow me to improve my knowledge to better know what is what. When I came to Turkey, I went to the UNHCR and told them that I am a lesbian. My sexual orientation (*gerayesh-e jensi*) has always been toward girls. I mean, I've never felt attracted to guys. That's why I thought I was a lesbian.

Things changed for me when I began to live in Turkey. First, my clothes. In Iran, I had to wear *manto* [a jacket falling down the knees] and *roosari* [veil]. Here, I was freed from *manto* and *roosari*. Second, I could freely say that I am LGBT. Well, I couldn't tell everyone because, here too, there is homophobia. But I could tell at least some people, which gave me a new sense of freedom. I didn't have to lie anymore. I could now say I am LGBT.

But soon, the word "LGBT" began to make me less happy than the first time I came here [*laughs*]. I thought I'd be content when I free myself from the restrictions I faced in Iran. However, when I entered the community and introduced myself as LGBT, and when people called me "miss" (*khanoom*) and used my female name (*esm-e dokhtarane*), it didn't feel right. It surprised me. "Why am I not happy? I have everything I dreamed of." My biggest dream was to freely say that I am LGBT, that it is my sexual orientation. I never dared to say it in Iran. I acquired this freedom here, but I still wasn't happy when they called me *khanoom*.

I then changed my name and introduced myself as butch, but it didn't prevent people from calling me *khanoom*. At the time, my knowledge was still limited. For instance, I saw the first trans person in my life here in Turkey. What is trans, what is FtM, what is MtF, I learned them all here. Then I began to think I might be trans because I don't like to be a woman. I talked with trans folks, explained how I feel, and asked for their opinion. One of them told me, "Until you are sure, don't use hormones." But I said, "No, I am sure. I don't like to be a woman; therefore, I have to be a man" (*man dust nadaram zan*

basham, pas bayad mard basham). This idea was planted in my mind by society—that one must be either a man or a woman.

For hormone treatment, I had to go to Izmir, a two-hour drive away from where I live, to see a psychologist. After the psychologist gives me a letter that recognizes me as transgender, I can have a pre-scription for free hormones. Psychologists in my town do not know about trans issues. Everyone in the State Hospital maltreats us because we are foreigners. We don't have proper health insurance. We can't speak the language and thus can't explain ourselves adequately. And doctors never try to communicate with us. They don't even show the slightest effort to understand our problem when they realize we're refugees. Once I went to the State Hospital with a severe toothache. I tried to speak with the doctor by using Google Translate. When I tried to say, "I need to fix my teeth," I used the verb *tamir etmek* in Turkish, which is apparently used for repairing cars. The doctor, nurses, everyone laughed at me when I used it for my teeth. Then sitting on the doctor's chair under anesthesia, I didn't dare to speak again. I assumed she would do a filling or a root canal. But she pulled two of my teeth out without even telling me. Can you believe it? If I were a Turkish citizen, I would still have those teeth. But because I was a refugee, she didn't even bother to fix them. She pulled them out.

Hospital staff maltreat people like me also because of our physical appearance. Each time I show my refugee ID at the registry desk, the person looks at me, then looks at my ID, then looks at me. They're confused because they can't tell my gender. Sometimes they think that I am a man who stole a woman's ID [*laughs*]. I must explain that I am a woman and the person in the photo is me. Long story short, the healthcare system here is not made for queer people. I had heard about that psychologist in Izmir. The local LGBTQ group had suggested him for being knowledgeable about trans issues and supporting trans people. But I couldn't go to Izmir because I didn't have a travel permit. Oh, let me open a parathesis here.

When I had registered with the UNHCR in 2014, they had sent me to Denizli. It is where I've been living for eight years now. But I've been living in this small city that's not my choice and without my consent. I don't have the right to go to a neighboring town, even for one day, unless I go to the Migration Management,[7] wait in line for hours, explain my travel reasons, provide documentation, convince the officers, and finally, get a travel permit. I sometimes need to go to other cities for admin-istrative or medical purposes. Sometimes, I just need a vacation. But it's hard to get a permit. And because of my look, the officers at Migration Management make it even harder for me. They delib-erately humiliate me because of my physical appearance. Once I needed a permit to go to Istanbul to attend a queer NGO's workshop. The officer kept me inside for 40 minutes and interrogated me about my gender and sexuality:

OFFICER: So, you are lesbian?

I didn't think he would know what queer is and didn't want to explain, so I said yes.

OFFICER: Do you want to become a man?
ME: No, no. I am not transgender. I am lesbian.
OFFICER: Why do you wear men's clothes then?
ME: This is how I feel comfortable.
OFFICER: Are these men's pants?

[Points to my lower body. ME]

ME: I think they're unisex.
OFFICER: Do all lesbians wear men's clothes?
ME: No, everyone has a unique style. This is how I like to dress. Other people wear different things.

[The officer types on his computer for a few seconds, then stares at me from head to toe.]

OFFICER: Do you grow a beard?
ME: No. As I said, I am a woman.

[The officer types a few more words, then looks up at me again.]

OFFICER: You don't grow a mustache either?

[While touching his mustache.]

ME: No.
OFFICER: I bet you'd like to have a mustache.

[He laughs. I don't answer.]

OFFICER: So, do you have a girlfriend?
ME: I do.

[I didn't tell him that we broke up to prevent further questions.]

OFFICER: Is she also lesbian?
ME: Yes.
OFFICER: Does she also look like a man?
ME: No.

[My travel permit is printed and signed at this point, but the officer keeps asking questions.]

OFFICER: Does your family know you are like this?
ME: They do.
OFFICER: Are they okay with it?
ME: No, we had problems. That's why I came to Turkey.

[He hands me the permit while giving me another long look.]

OFFICER: So, what are you going to do in Istanbul?
ME: I'll attend this organization's workshop.
OFFICER: The letter says you're a guest speaker.
ME: Yes.
OFFICER: Good. Don't forget to mention how much the Turkish state does for you.

When I left the office, I was on the verge of tears. My hands were shaking out of anger. I wanted to scream all the swears I knew. I had to go through this to travel to Istanbul for a two-day workshop. It's such a simple thing, isn't it? But as you see, it is not simple for us refugees at all. That's why I couldn't go to the psychologist in Izmir either because I didn't want to ask for a travel permit. I would do anything not to go to the Migration Management. But the permit wasn't the only reason. I didn't have the financial means to commute to Izmir once or twice a month to see a psychologist. Besides, I was working in a textile factory and couldn't take a day off to go to Izmir. Look, I don't want to open another parenthesis here [*laughs*]. But I must [*laughs*].

You know, we refugees have become sick here. Our body is sick; our mind is sick. I love Turkey because it has given me some things that I didn't have in Iran. I am myself here (*inja khodamam*). But Turkey has also taken some things from me, and I don't know if I'd be ever able to take them back. Those eight years I've spent here with the hope that one country would give me refuge. I am not expecting any country to support me until the end of my life. I just need one country to let me go there, so I earn my living and care for myself. These past eight years have taken so much from me. When I entered Turkey, I was 31. Now I'm 39. I have the physical ability to work in a factory now, but I don't know if I'd still have it five years later. When I came to Turkey, I didn't have waist pain. I didn't have neck pain. Now, even a short walk or climbing a few stairs leaves me in unbearable pain. Why? Because I've been standing on my feet doing textile work for ten hours.

If you haven't worked in a factory before, it might be hard to imagine the pain and exhaustion, even for a day. Textile work is difficult, but your body becomes numb after a while. Our bodies get used to that kind of work as if they know we don't have any other option. We didn't choose to work in textile; we had to. No one asks if you have one loaf of bread at home to survive the day. Everyone thinks that refugees get money. That we are given at least one room. No. No states, no NGOs support us. We are forced to work. And when I said work for ten hours, that is just regular working hours. In many factories, they force us to work extra. I remember once I worked until 3 a.m. As we were leaving, the foreman said, "Everyone come to work at 8 a.m. as usual." When we reacted, he said, "If you don't come on time, you'll be fired." Imagine we worked until 3 a.m. By the time we go home, it would be 4 a.m. And we must leave home in three hours to make it to the factory at 8 in the morning. We all said, "There is no point in going home. Let's all sleep here."

I worked in another textile factory that paid us monthly. In the month I worked there, the employer forced us to stay for extra work (*ezafe kar*) every night. We couldn't say no because he threatened us with not paying our wages. To whom could we report this? How could we complain? We had two options: either stay for extra work or let the entire month's wage go. I didn't have the luxury to let that money go because my entire life depended on it. Rent, food, medicine, everything. And even when they torture us at work, we can't make a complaint because we don't have work permits here. We work illegally. Let's summarize the situation: "We, the state, don't give you work permits, but we don't give you financial aid, either. Find a way to live on your own. You should have known that refugee life is difficult." Yes, we knew it, and we didn't choose that life for fun. We had to become refugees so we could be ourselves. If we could stay in our own country [*pauses*] … I didn't become a refugee because of a desire to live in Turkey or for the love of going to America or Canada. No. I wouldn't change my own country to anywhere in the world. But my own country didn't accept me. There, I was threatened. I was treated like garbage. I was rejected by my own family, by society, by the state.

> [*We take a smoke break with freshly brewed black tea. I do the same many times as I bring together this narrative. Refugee life is difficult, as Aram says. Engaging with queer refugee narratives as writers, readers, and allies is also difficult, and at times, we all need pauses and collective silences. —ELIF*]

In my first textile job, I told them I was a woman. Once, when I came out of the restroom, the foreman was waiting for me in front of the door. "How could you use the women's restroom?" he said angrily. "I am a woman," I said. "Don't joke with me. I'm serious. You cannot use the women's restroom," he retorted. "I'm serious, too. I am a woman," I responded. "Look, I'm warning you the last time. You cannot use the women's restroom. If you use it one more time, you'll be fired." And he fired me.

In another textile factory, I was working in the storage unit. The foreman came to me one day and said, "I don't understand you. Are you a man or a woman?" I said, "What difference does it make to you? I came here to work, and my work here has nothing to do with my gender, with my body." He kept saying, "No, no, I don't understand you." I finally said, "Imagine I am fifty-fifty. Fifty percent of me is woman; the other fifty is man." He said, "There is no such thing. Pull down your pants. I want to see what you are." I was told this in Turkey [*chuckles, pauses*].

You know, I first laughed at those things. But when the things you used to laugh at repeat themselves every day, they are not funny anymore. They become a reason for suffering, a reason for pain and hurt. No matter how much you try to laugh, you feel the pain in your bones. As if someone is constantly hurting you in the head. My life in Turkey has been like that for eight years. Turkey has made us refugees sick. Textile work has made me insane. Uncertainty has made me insane. I don't say this lightly. We suffered so much in our countries and now live here under so much stress that we all need therapy. When I go to a third country and have health insurance, going to therapy will be the first thing I do [*laughs*].

Anyways, I was telling my story of arriving at self-knowledge (*be khod-shenasi residan*). I couldn't go to the doctor in Izmir and thus couldn't get hormones covered by my insurance. I vividly remember: one day, I asked one of my trans friends where he buys hormones. "For whom are you asking?" he said. "For myself," I answered. He said, "Don't do it. It's early for you." But I insisted. I eventually gave him 50 Liras, and he found me ten hormone shots. He helped me inject hormones the first two times because he knew how to do it. The third time, I watched YouTube tutorials on how to inject hormones. Imagine, I held my phone with one hand and injected myself with the other hand. The first time I did it myself, I injected it into my arm and didn't feel anything. The next time, I decided to inject it into my upper thigh [*shows*]. The first day was alright, but my leg got paralyzed the next day. I couldn't move it for two days [*laughs*]. I learned how to use hormones on my own and continued like that for one year without a doctor or any medical tests. Now that I think about it, I can tell it was perilous.

That year, I met several trans refugees. They always asked me, "You've been using hormones for six months; why have you not grown any mustache or beard?" I didn't tell them, but I was pleased deep inside of me. But I began to question, "Why am I so happy that I don't grow facial hair?" All my trans friends shaved every day, took pills, and used dozens of lotions so that they could grow facial hair. For instance, a friend of mine took a selfie and sent it to all of us when he first noticed a little bit of hair under his lip. But I never felt like that. On the contrary, I was thinking to myself that if I grow facial hair, I'd remove it with laser when I go to Canada.

Then my voice began to change; it became coarser. My chest became smaller. I enjoyed these changes because I always had problems with my breasts; I never liked them. My face began to change too. Before, 50 percent of people could understand I was a girl, and 50 percent couldn't identify my gender. Now, 80 percent would call me *agha* (mister) or *pesar* (boy), and 20 percent would be ambivalent about whether I was a man or a woman. I arrived at this point, where people wouldn't perceive me as a woman, but I still wasn't happy. First, I thought that hearing *agha* felt weird because I wasn't used to that word. But then I've realized that I don't like to be called a man.

I was unhappy when people called me *khanoom*. Now that they called me *agha*, I still wasn't happy. What was my problem?

One of my friends had gone to Canada, and we would talk on Skype almost every night. Well, his resettlement is a whole other story [*laughs*]. We had met in Denizli and became close friends. When we said goodbyes before his departure in 2016, I got a bit emotional. My friend laughed and said, "Don't be ridiculous. We will see each other in a few months." He had come to Turkey only three months before me. By that logic, I should have gone to Canada three months or, at most, a year after him. But after he left, the resettlement countries closed their borders and stopped accepting us. My friend's cohort was the last one that could leave Turkey. After them, all of us got stuck here. My friend has been living in Toronto for five years now. He is finishing a degree in college. He adopted a dog, furnished his apartment the way he likes, bought a car. He has made friends. He is going on vacations, saving money, making plans. Not just him; all refugees who came to Turkey only a few months before us have been living in America or Canada for five years now. Don't get me wrong; I am happy for them. But anyone in my shoes would ask the same question, "Why not me?" My friend told me we'd see each other in a few months. Those few months have become years now, and I am still in Turkey.

Now we don't talk that often, but when he first went to Canada, we used to talk almost every night. On one of those nights, we were chatting about hormones and stuff. I told him, "So-and-so, I don't

know if I should continue using hormones." "Why do you hesitate?" he asked. I said, "You are trans, and each change in your body makes you happy and excited. But I'm not like that at all. Now that people don't understand my gender, that my body is a female body, I'm still not happy." I even made a joke, "I don't understand what I am. Each time I think I am something, I forget about the other thing I previously was. Like, I'm not that anymore; now, I'm this." [*laughs*] He said, "Aram, have you heard about queer?" I said no. "These things you're telling me reminded me of queer. Go do a little bit of research about queer on the Internet, and then we will talk again."

When we hung up, I typed "queer" into Google. I read the first page that came up. Then the second, the third. The closer I came to the bottom of the screen page, the bigger and bigger the smile on my face became [*smiles*]. Those days, I had arrived at a point where I was afraid of myself because I couldn't understand why I was like that. I thought I couldn't figure out what I was, maybe because I had a mental problem, as the doctors in Iran told me. After reading about queer [*pauses*] … I found myself in those writings. I realized that people like me exist. That I am not abnormal. That the doctors were not right [*chuckles*]. My family had forced me to see many doctors in Iran, and they all had told me that I was sick, that my mind was sick. I think I internalized it to a certain extent that when I couldn't figure out what I was, I began to recall those doctors' words and worried that I might be sick. But after I read about queer, I was like, okay, I am queer. There are people like me who don't see themselves as either man or woman. It's not weird that my sexual orientation is like that of a lesbian, that I am attracted to women. But as for my personality, for my identity, I don't like to be an *agha* or a *khanoom*.

I am myself. I am Aram.

Narrative II: "Refugees Cannot Be Queer"

In August 2018, Aram was fired from their job in a small textile factory for insisting on using the women's restroom despite the foreman's several warnings that Aram, whom the foreman perceived as a man, was not allowed to do so. Aram has worked in different textile factories since they arrived in Turkey in 2014. They were questioned about their sex/gender in violent and humiliating ways at each job they worked and fired from those jobs due to their non-conforming gender expression. Having spent time with Aram, I have also witnessed how they are constantly asked whether they are a man or a woman in NGO offices, hospitals, banks, and stores. On many occasions we were together, they were denied access to women's restrooms in cafes, parks, and shopping malls, and subjected to harassment on the streets by locals, other refugees, and sometimes by the police.

As most textile factories in Turkey hire workers according to a strict gender division of labor, Aram could not find another job for months. They eventually decided to apply for the monthly financial aid (750 Turkish Liras; the equivalent of 125 U.S. Dollars in 2018) that the UNHCR had recently begun to provide for trans refugees. Aram believed that they should be eligible for "trans money" (*pul-e trans*) because they couldn't find employment due to their gender expression—one of the reasons why the UNHCR gives this financial aid to trans refugees and not to gay, lesbian, and bisexual applicants. Besides, Aram thought, they faced discrimination and harassment due to not only their sexual orientation (lesbian) but also their gender identity (queer). Thus, they wanted the UNHCR to recognize their queerness as a legitimate identity category, like transgender, worthy of support and protection.

I helped Aram get in touch with the UNHCR's main domestic implementing partner organization and called a social worker from that NGO's Ankara headquarters. The social worker could not comprehend for a while *what* Aram *was*. After my brief explanation of "queer," she interrupted me to ask, "So, is the applicant bisexual?" I said no and explained further how Aram perceives queerness as their gender identity. She then asked me if Aram was trans. I said no again. "It is hard to apply for this aid if the applicant is not transgender," she responded.

Aram and I were sitting on a bench in the hospital as we waited for Aram's dentist appointment. I began to explain to the social worker how Aram had been fired from jobs and harassed on the streets due to their physical appearance. "Restrooms!" Aram whispered to me, and I told the social worker that

Aram can't use public restrooms. "My name," Aram whispered to me again, and I told her that Aram does not use the female name assigned to them at birth. The social worker paused for a few seconds and said, "These sound very similar to our transgender clients' problems." "Yes!" I agreed excitedly, "This is why Aram wants to apply for this aid given to trans refugees." "I understand," she sighed, "but I doubt the UNHCR would recognize queerness. It does not even recognize bisexuality easily." She nevertheless suggested that Aram go to the NGO's local branch in Denizli and submit a petition explaining their problems.

In the following days, Aram wrote a three-page petition. While I cannot cite the entire letter here due to confidentiality, I would like to present its conclusion:

> "In these past four years, I did not feel safe even for one day. Employees, landlords, police officers, doctors, strangers on the street, and even other LGBT refugees have constantly questioned my presence, my physical appearance, and my gender. 'Are you a man or a woman?' I have heard this question almost every day …. Due to these reasons, I, as a queer lesbian person, would like to apply for the financial aid that the UNHCR gives to transgender refugees. I need this financial aid to afford my basic needs, as explained above. However, I do not want to change my asylum case to 'transgender' because I have no desire to change into a man, as I emphasized elsewhere in this petition. I am *queer* and *lesbian*. As you know, *sexual orientation* and *gender identity* are two different things. My sexual orientation is the same as I registered with the UNHCR—lesbian—and it has not changed. I am biologically a woman and attracted only to women, and thus, I am a lesbian. However, my gender identity is queer. That is, I do not see myself either as a man or a woman. As I explained in detail, due to my queerness, my life experiences are very similar to that of trans refugees. I suffer from similar forms of discrimination. The most challenging among them is that I cannot find employment due to my gender and therefore, need financial support."

Aram wrote the petition in Farsi, and I translated it into Turkish and English. I could not help but laugh when I read the sentence, "As you know, *sexual orientation* and *gender identity* are two different things." Aram looked at me with angst, "What happened?" "Nothing," I said, still giggling, "You gave the UNHCR an introduction to gender and sexuality." "Well, I had to. You saw that they don't know what queer is or gender identity and sexual orientation are. They don't even entertain the idea that one can be discriminated against on both grounds at the same time." "It is a great petition," I said affirmingly. "It is clear and informative. I would assign it in an *Introduction to Gender and Sexuality* class." This time we both laughed.

In the following days, Aram submitted the petition to the NGO, which then sent it to the UNHCR's Protection Department. As usual, the UNHCR did not get back to Aram for months. One day, Aram and I were having lunch in my apartment when the UNHCR called to inquire about the petition. Aram began to describe their physical appearance in graphic details, such as wearing men's clothes, binding their chest, and having short hair. They also mentioned that they have more masculine facial features and a coarser voice due to the testosterone hormone they used for a year. Then, they explained the difficulties they face due to their non-conforming gender expression by giving specific examples from their work and everyday life experiences.

Aram was looking at me from time to time as they talked, and I was giving them thumbs up after each answer they gave. When they hung up, we were almost sure that the UNHCR would find Aram eligible for financial aid. However, two months later, the NGO informed Aram that the UNHCR denied their request without any explanation. Aram and I—and all refugees who knew about this petition—got frustrated and disappointed. Sympathetic to Aram's case, the social workers at the NGO suggested that Aram consider changing their case to transgender to receive this financial aid. Aram's friends made the same suggestion. Janyar, for instance, said, "You used hormones for one year. You bind your chest. You wear men's clothes. Why don't you just tell them you are trans?" Like Aram, Janyar also

self-identified as queer and used they/them pronouns. Unlike Aram, however, Janyar registered with the UNHCR as transgender and was found eligible for the same financial aid that Aram was denied. "It is not your responsibility to educate the UNHCR," said Janyar. "Just play the game by their rules and get your money." Aram, however, refused to change their asylum case: "I am not trans. I am queer and lesbian. My entire life, I have had to lie about myself. The only reason why I left Iran was to be able to be myself. If I must lie again about who I am, then what's the point of going through all this suffering in Turkey?"

Aram continued to follow up on their petition even after the UNHCR rejected their request. They brought it up in almost all community meetings organized by national NGOs. They demanded that the NGOs put more pressure on the UNHCR to recognize queer refugees. They also called out those NGOs' own stances toward queerness. "Why do you call these meetings 'LGBT refugee meetings'? I am here, and I am queer," they said in almost every meeting, and the NGO staff seemed to agree. Indeed, most of those NGOs began to add "queer," "non-binary," and "gender non-conforming" to their activities and publications after callouts from Aram and other refugees who self-identified as such. The story of Aram's petition also initiated unexpected and otherwise unlikely conversations among refugees, ranging from what queer is to the differences between gender expression and gender identity, from the limitations of the term LGBT to the experiences of gender non-conforming refugees.

Although Aram managed to carve up some space for their self-identification and lived experiences and make "queer" recognized among national NGOs and within the larger refugee community, their efforts to do so vis-à-vis the UNHCR failed. After an emotionally exhausting process of phone calls, meetings, interviews, and petitions for two years, Aram visibly lost faith in the UNHCR's claim to be inclusive of non-normative genders and sexualities. Eventually, they decided to take social workers' advice and applied for changing their asylum case from "lesbian" to "transgender." In April 2020, two years after their initial petition was rejected, the UNHCR found Aram eligible for financial aid. Aram called me to give the news: "Write this in your dissertation," they said, "tell it to your students. I want everyone to learn how 'open-minded' the UNHCR is. Please write: the UNHCR does not recognize queer (*UNHCR queer ro ghabul nemikone*). Refugees cannot be queer; they have to be LGBT."

Conclusion

Hegemonic LGBTQ asylum narratives are "literally and figuratively straight" in their spatial and temporal orientations because they portray asylum as a straightforward journey from an oppressive past to an emancipated future.[8] They are also "straight" in their sexual orientations because they imagine gender and sexuality as innate, immutable, and unchanging features of one's identity formed through a linear trajectory of sexual development. Aram's experiences and stories unsettle these normative understandings of queerness and refugeeness and *queer* such "straight narratives" in numerous ways.

First, nowhere in their story does Aram describes their queerness as a "born this way" feature that is innate and unchangeable. Quite the contrary, as their living circumstances change—as they migrate, meet new people, enter new communities, gather new information, and acquire new experiences— their perception of self also changes and transforms. In narrating this queer journey of "arriving at self-knowledge," Aram challenges the asylum system's normative gender and sexuality regulations that oblige refugees to fit themselves into fixed identity categories and binary genders and express their identities in a causal progressive developmental model.

Second, Aram's narratives of precarious and uncertain waiting also disrupt hegemonic representations of asylum as a symbolic and physical escape from violence. Rather, they demonstrate how queer, trans, and gender non-conforming refugees are made vulnerable by the very states that claim to save and protect them, how their lives are made difficult by the same institutions that purport to help them, and how their identities and experiences are silenced and marginalized by the same regimes that claim to advocate for their rights. In exposing this oppressive system, Aram's queer refugee narratives reveal that the transnational asylum system—including Western states' border closures, international humanitarian

organizations' disciplinary gender and sexuality norms, and Turkey's sexuality, labor, and refugee politics—prevent queer, trans, and gender non-conforming refugees from realizing their desire to *be themselves*, which is, ironically, one of the main reasons of their displacement.

Third, the narration of this systemic violence also disrupts hegemonic victimhood narratives that portray refugees as passive and weak subjects. Instead, the narratives presented in this chapter illustrate how Aram keeps struggling to *be themself* as they navigate this oppressive and violent system and, in doing so, transform their surrounding environment and communities, disorient the legal and medical authorities' rigid and essentialist understandings of gender and sexuality, and ultimately unsettle our normative assumptions about queerness and refugeeness.

Finally, Aram's relentless queerness has unsettled my writing, too. One unforgettable moment was when I was working on the conclusion of this chapter. Sitting in front of a long list of notes that were supposed to help me categorize, reiterate, and summarize all the things Aram's queer refugee narratives reveal, unsettle, and transform, I suddenly began to write a long poem to Aram. In addition to reminding me how much love and admiration I have for Aram and their struggle, this unsettling poem-writing experience also made me realize, in the most literal way, how queer refugee lives push the boundaries of prescribed narratives and genres, resist categorization and simplification, and disrupt the comfort of coherent conclusions.

> your whole existence
> is a big middle finger to this system
>
> your every laughter, every haircut, each piece of skin and body you show or hide,
> and every step you take in those parks, on those streets, at all those places you quickly and
> beautifully make yours,
> is a middle finger to this system.

Notes

1 For those who embody Womxn, Life, Freedom
2 The UNHCR has been operating in Turkey since the 1960s. Its mandate includes various legal and humanitarian issues, including distributing humanitarian aid to refugees and facilitating their resettlement to host countries.
3 Hyndman and Giles, *Refugees in Extended Exile*; Sarı, "Unsafe Present, Uncertain Future"; Walia, *Border and Rule*.
4 Jenicek et al., "Dangerous Shortcuts," 643; Malkki, "Speechless Emissaries," 388.
5 Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*; Espiritu and Duong, "Feminist Refugee Epistemology," 558; Luibhéid, "Migrant and Refugee Lesbians."
6 Luibhéid, "Migrant and Refugee Lesbians," 58; also see Murray, "The (Not So) Straight Story," 452; Phu and Nguyen, "Something Personal," 5.
7 Directorate General of Migration Management, with its full name, is Turkey's main asylum and migration authority.
8 Murray, "The (Not So) Straight Story," 453.

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15

APPLYING REFUGEECRIT TO RECENT MIDDLE GRADE/YOUNG ADULT CHILDREN'S LITERATURE ABOUT REFUGEES

Julia Hope

For the past 15 years I have been researching children's literature about the refugee experience, identifying early on the exponential growth of books in this "emergent genre."[1] By the time of the publication of my book *Children's Literature about Refugees: A Catalyst in the Classroom* in 2017, I could include an appendix of 250 titles on the subject published in English in the UK, the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, and since then more titles are continually appearing, with several books achieving considerable attention in recent years.[2] Until the 1990s, the few refugee narratives written for children looked back to World War II and its aftermath, but the publication of Elizabeth Laird's *Kiss the Dust* in 1991, which depicted the story of an Iraqi Kurdish family's flight to Iran and thence to the UK, heralded a turning point in focusing on contemporary conflicts. From then on, children's and young adults' books mapped forced migration around the world. For example, the breakup of the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s generated a few texts, including the compelling 1994 *Zlata's Diary,* recording first-hand the experience of living through the siege of Sarajevo.

Since the millennium, however, there has been an ever-increasing outpouring of such narratives following the vicissitudes of child refugees traveling mainly from across Africa and the Middle East— and especially Afghanistan since 2001. Particularly since 2015 there has been a focus on Syrian children, with the escalation of conflict there contributing to the world's largest refugee crisis in decades.[3] Recent middle grade/young adult children's books (targeted at 8- to 18-year-olds) published in the UK include *The Bone Sparrow* (2016) by Zana Fraillon and *Boy, Everywhere* by A.M. Dassu (2020), which I will discuss in detail below, as well as *Welcome to Nowhere* by Elizabeth Laird (2017), *The Boy at the Back of the Class* by Onjali Q Rauf (2018), *Boy 87* by Ele Fountain (2018), and *A House Without Walls* by Elizabeth Laird (2019). However, none of these particular middle grade/young adult texts have been the subject of academic discussion and critique, as the focus has been more on the rapid growth of picture books about the refugee experience authored and illustrated in recent years.

Over the years, I have looked at how these books are authored, studied in the classroom, mediated by teachers, read by refugee and non-refugee children alike, and received by academic writers. Mainly, the response has been rapturous, with unquestioning claims that these books stimulate empathy for the refugee situation. However, Christine Wilkie-Stibbs notes that, although not a homogeneous category, much middle grade/young adult literature of this kind could well be described as "docu–novels … whose priority is to narrate a social circumstance, or which have a message to tell."[4] As such, I suggest they follow a formulaic representation of the refugee experience. The story often begins in a stable, peaceful setting in the protagonist's country of origin, while disruption, violence, and often warfare

begin to encroach, and the family moves slowly and reluctantly toward a decision to leave their home. Sometimes the story starts at the point of displacement, and sometimes the first move is internal, perhaps to relatives elsewhere, before making a long and horrific journey, full of drama and tension, to a "safe haven" in the West. Often the book finishes with a rescue by Western "helping hands" or some semi-miraculous intervention by a powerful "white saviour" who sorts out the situation, thereby moving toward the expected "happy ending."

However, as authors search for new angles on the usual story, I have recently noticed a trend toward increasingly grim and explicit depictions of the suffering of refugee children, especially those trapped in refugee or detainment camps. Middle grade and particularly young adult texts are generally moving in this direction, with increasing interest in tackling difficult and challenging issues, in the form of highly explicit social realism, generating much debate. Christopher "Chris" Myers, illustrator and son of Walter Dean Myers, several times winner of the Coretta Scott King Award for books representing the African American experience in children's literature, talked at the 2019 Bologna Children's Book Fair of some authors engaging with the humanity of migration, but others competing to produce what he termed as "tragedy porn," which seemingly strives to ask "how sad can we make this story?"[5] There is a sense in which we are in danger, when depicting the refugee experience, of sliding down a very dark tunnel into an ever more vivid and shocking depiction of human suffering, at the expense of provoking real engagement and empathy.

As already mentioned, refugee narratives for children focus, with a certain amount of time-lag, on waves of forced migration and the conflicts that produce them, moving through various geographical locations as they become relevant. Originally, many authors had had personal experience within the area generating refugees, usually through travel or living in the location, sometimes working with local people and establishing relationships. However, very few were refugees themselves or had direct experience of displacement, and this is still the case, despite a few writers with closer links to refugee populations or coming from a refugee background tackling the topic. As interest in the subject matter increased, more mainstream and famous authors started to take up the mantle, and in so doing broadened out the readership of such books to increase understanding and engagement. However, I have started to question their perspective as outsiders, often with limited understanding of refugee experiences, which creates a romanticized portrayal of the refugee narrative.

At the same time the genre of refugee narratives for children has been widening to include other forms—graphic novels, poetry, free verse, short story collections, some by refugee children themselves, and examples of paired writing between a refugee and a Western author. But the "docu-novel" still reigns supreme as the preferred medium and is distinct in its almost formulaic treatment of refugee narratives, as outlined above. Furthermore, middle grade/young adult texts have largely not been the subject of recent academic study, as attention is mostly focused on the burgeoning genre of picture books about the refugee experience. By focusing on books for an older age group, this chapter aims to fill an important gap in the scholarship.

Drawing on critical content analysis, in this chapter I examine in depth two middle grade (8- to 12-year-olds)/young adult (12- to 18-year-olds) texts, *The Bone Sparrow* and *Boy, Everywhere*, both of which have been published in the last five years and received public acclaim.[6] The massive flow of Rohingya Muslims from Myanmar is the background to *The Bone Sparrow*, while the ongoing conflict in Syria is the context for *Boy, Everywhere*. Both texts address contemporary refugee displacements and are mainly or partly set in refugee and detention camps, which is a new development in the genre. Furthermore, both are highly recommended by the UK charity Booktrust for readers aged between 9 and 11, although this targeted age-group specification could be questioned, due to the incredibly grim circumstances portrayed in the texts.[7] I argue that examining these two books using a RefugeeCrit framework, which I elaborate in the next section, provides a more nuanced approach for critically analyzing these books' depiction of the refugee experience, the profile of the protagonist, the positionality of the author, and the role of the reader.

Theoretical Approaches to Middle Grade/Young Adult Refugee Narratives

It was not until the turn of the millennium, and the attendant growth in refugee narratives, that an academic analysis of children's literature, and by extension middle grade/young adult texts, about refugees began to emerge. Initially, writers did not recognize the sub-genre and tended to focus on war-time narratives of flight more broadly.[8] Gradually, however, the emerging genre began to attract attention in its own right, with Beverley Naidoo's award-winning *The Other Side of Truth* (2000) having merited the most discussion.[9]

Academics and literary critics have struggled to theorize this emergent genre within an encompassing framework. Did it come under postcolonial studies, with its emphasis on "othering"? While "othering" of refugee children is indeed a problem, this seems to miss other crucial aspects with which to critique the genre, such as a sensitive representation of the refugee experience, often seen as a three-stage process.[10] However, when Wilkie-Stibbs applied "outsider theory" to several middle grade/young adult refugee narratives, she seemed to build on critiques of "othering," pointing out that none of the books were written by refugees or asylum seekers, but instead speaking for them and intended to help their privileged Western or Westernized young readers to believe in, sympathize with, and even be angry about such children's unnecessary misfortunes.[11] Furthermore, Grzegorczyk discussed three key middle grade/young adult refugee narratives within the context of a postcolonial discourse, depicting how "marginal subjects" have been dismissed, ignored, and threatened by an unaccommodating Britain, alluding to them somewhat enigmatically as "The Empire Within."[12]

The interdisciplinary field of critical refugee studies (CRS) also offers many relevant concepts that can be applied to the study of children's refugee literature. Aihwa Ong emphasizes the importance of acknowledging refugees' multiple displacements under both war and outside a linear story of resettlement, especially with reference to the current Rohingya Muslim refugee crisis.[13] Yến Lê Espiritu considers the myth of "the nation of refuge," particularly relating to Vietnamese refugees, who are encouraged to see the U.S. as giving what Mimi Thi Nguyen calls "the gift of freedom" to the grateful refugee.[14] Gratitude is a familiar theme in children's books, but CRS sees the refugee instead as resilient, productive, and having agency: "a social actor whose life, when traced, illuminates the interconnections of colonization, war and global social change."[15] Furthermore, Thy Phu and Vinh Nguyen outline how CRS works with memories and narratives to construct a personal point of entry to the lived experiences of those who have had to seek or are seeking refuge, and how they are linked with various social, political, and cultural forces.[16] Refugee narratives for the young are clearly located in CRS but in texts for children the wider contexts compelling forced migration are not usually fully explored.

A newly emergent framework, "RefugeeCrit," pioneered by Ekaterina Strekalova-Hughes, combines elements of CRS and Critical Race Theory (CRT), to be applied specifically to children's literature.[17] RefugeeCrit stipulates that "imperialism, colonialism, and racism are endemic to society, contribute to refugee flight, and reveal themselves in legal and economic mechanisms that influence life experiences of children and families from refugee backgrounds."[18] In the same vein, Vassiliki Vassiloudi looked at a number of refugee narratives, mainly picture books promoted by Amnesty International, the UK Red Cross, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and found that generally they depict refugee children as victims of politically sanitized global disasters, without background explanation of the causes.[19] Similarly, Strekalova-Hughes analyzed 45 picture books featuring first-generation children from refugee backgrounds as main characters, to interrogate how refugee flight is represented and to question its purpose.[20] She also found that the deeper reasons behind refugee flight are mostly veiled, denying refugees agency as they reactively leave their homes, and she advocates for empowering counter-narratives, presenting refugee characters with complex identities. Both writers find contrasts with "safe" places, like Europe and the United States, built into the story, which "pathologizes some countries and privileges others."[21] Moreover, by ignoring the socio-historical and cultural complexities that form part of the background to conflict "only their aftermath can be a target for the readers' actionable empathy."[22]

Echoing the previous points made by Wilkie-Stibbs, Vassiloudi found many stories follow an almost formulaic structure, "fixing the reader in the position of the Western benefactor … in order to foreground an implicitly comforting faith in Western charity and happy narrative closure."[23] Moreover, most narratives are dominated by a focus on the refugees' long journeys with a warm reception at the end, but do not address the hostility, homelessness, loss of family, identity and safety, and exposure to exploitation that is common. A further feature of RefugeeCrit is the idea that writing, publishing, and reading the "right books" has the power to influence empathetic attitudes toward refugees, heal trauma, and mitigate against injustice. Vassiloudi notes that some books have accompanying notes that detail the author's involvement in workshops with refugee children or of their participation in refugee relief work, with the aim of adding authenticity and providing evidence of robust research.[24] Readers are often urged in postscripts to explore ways of helping to "make a difference" through various refugee organizations or are informed that the proceeds from buying the book will do this for them. Encouraging readers to engage in acts of humanity while failing to address the root of the problem positions refugees as having no agency, and results in "their objectification as the weak other."[25] Furthermore, Western child readers are problematically exhorted to realize and be grateful for their good fortunes, while urging them to become the "friendly, caring hands" reaching out to refugees from the construct of the West as the "Promised Land." In this way, refugee narratives actually construct a clear binary between the displaced and the non-displaced child as well as promote the idea that awareness is the solution—functions that RefugeeCrit seeks to interrogate.

In this chapter, I will draw on and further develop the RefugeeCrit framework to consider the following in regards to middle grade/young adult refugee narratives:

Depiction of the refugee experience:
- Origins—Is the location prior to flight disclosed? Does the book suggest the cause of the conflict? Is it seen as self-created? Is the wider political and possibly imperial/colonial past touched on?
- Journey—Is the journey the main focus of the book? Is it long and perilous? Is it depicted as an exciting adventure at any point? Is the West seen as the desired destination throughout—the "promised land"?
- Rescue—Is the protagonist rescued from their situation? If so, by whom? Is there a "white saviour" involved? Are refugees the recipient of charity from a Western benefactor?
- Arrival—Is this part of the experience depicted? If so, where is the protagonist received? Do they receive a warm welcome? Are they helped by good people, perpetuating the myth of Western philanthropy?
- Ending—Is there narrative closure and a happy ending? Does this encompass a binary of safe/unsafe countries?

Profile of protagonist:
- Does the book "other" the refugee characters? Is the protagonist portrayed as a victim? Are they defined by their suffering or flight? Do they have an agential voice? Could they be admired? Do they have skills, abilities, and cultural resources? Do they have a complex identity?

The role of the reader:
- Who is the "implied reader" of the book? Could a refugee child derive pride from the story? Does the book encourage the reader to feel empathy? Does the book tend the reader towards "pity"? Does it provide ideas on ways to "make a difference"? Does it suggest the reader should feel grateful for what they have?

The positionality of the author:
- What is the author's background? In what ways are they qualified to write about this subject matter? What research have they conducted? Do they include cultural references surrounding the refugee? Do they implicitly reinforce myths of Western supremacy?

In the following sections I discuss two books, *The Bone Sparrow* and *Boy, Everywhere*, through the prism of RefugeeCrit, analyzing the depiction of the refugee experience, the profile of the protagonist, the positionality of the author, and the role of the reader.

The Bone Sparrow

Subhi, the Rohingya protagonist of *The Bone Sparrow*, was born in a refugee camp which provides the setting for the whole story, probably on Nauru or Manus Island, where refugees to Australia are off-loaded.[26] He lives in the section called "Family," where forty or more people share each tent, with his ailing mother, who appears to be dying of depression, and his sister Queeny, who becomes increasingly angry about their situation. They wait interminably for their poet father who was arrested by the Burmese authorities but has actually been killed. Subhi, and the reader, is briefly told of the background to Rohingya persecution by the mother. Moreover, at the end of the book is a three-page Afterword, which gives information about the treatment of asylum seekers and refugees, particularly by the Australian government, as well as the genocide of the Rohingya people by the Buddhist majority in Myanmar. However, the tone and language imply that the Afterword is written for a much older reader than the book itself, possibly an adult. Furthermore, no reference is made to the British Imperial involvement in the region, and subsequent wars of independence, as well as the treatment of the Rohingya as a political football between the British and Japanese forces during World War II. This challenging political context has been left mostly unacknowledged, while weaving this much depth into the text would be difficult, leaving it unsaid "whitewashes" the narrative.

In this text there is also no journey as such, but the conditions in the refugee camp are exposed in chilling clarity. The camp guards, called "Jackets," agents of Australian state control, routinely persecute the inmates. Meanwhile, the refugees are living in terrible unsanitary conditions, although when Human Rights Watch observers visit, the cuisine suddenly changes dramatically, and all guards are on their best behavior. Mental illness abounds, with accounts of adults self-harming, attempting suicide, or just giving up on life, as Subhi's mother appears to be doing. When a group of men sew their lips together and decide to go on a hunger strike, it could be argued that a line is crossed into territory which is conventionally too bleak and violent for a middle grade/young adult reader to empathize with, as the novel traffics in graphic representations of refugee pain and suffering.

A riot begins in the camp that grows to epic proportions, with all interior and exterior fences collapsing and the inmates escaping. In the confusion Subhi witnesses his friend Eli being battered to death by a Jacket, a scene described with a searing and drawn-out clarity that is intensely challenging. In the terrible aftermath of the riot and subsequent fire, "Outside people" arrive to ask questions and Subhi is approached by someone supposedly named Sarah, and who gives Subhi's mother a letter which is hinted at being a way for them to finally leave the camp. In such a final, mysterious twist of fate, it seems that a "white saviour" has been helicoptered in as a "deus ex machina." With Subhi's mother singing again, a "happy narrative closure" is hinted at, but there is no realistic depiction of the next stage of their lives—how they are received and how they adapt to life beyond the confines of Nauru or Manus Island, often racialized as "outside" the West. In sum, a strong binary of safe/unsafe countries is upheld.

In *The Bone Sparrow*, the 12-year-old Subhi's resilience can be admired, and due to the use of first-person perspective, the reader has access to his thoughts and feelings, albeit written in "broken English," which is arguably "othering." While Subhi is clearly a victim of circumstance, defined by his suffering, and lacking in a complex identity, he does display agency and has skills and abilities. However, he is also "othered" by the curious revelation that he does not speak Rohingya, as his mother has told him it is better to learn English, which is an unlikely scenario. There are a few mentions of life in Burma/Myanmar told in stories or by his sister, and the use of "maá," "ba," and a reference to "tarana" songs, but there is no sense of any language, customs, and traditions in common with other refugees in the camp, and this leaves Subhi and the reader lacking any associated linguistic and cultural heritage.

The author Fraillon's connection with the refugee experience is unclear, and it seems she has no direct experience of life in refugee camps, although she has worked as "an integration aide and teacher in schools."[27] Her website shows that she has undertaken extensive research and she details specific events, articles, and videos that inspired her to write *The Bone Sparrow*. However, this personal disconnect both from the country of origin of her featured family, and the location where the entirety of the book is set, is problematic, and the lack of background cultural fabric, noted above, is regrettable. The dedication at the beginning of *The Bone Sparrow* finishes with, "You will make a difference. And to the rest of us, so that we may learn how."[28] In the book's "Acknowledgements," Fraillon writes poetically: "Thank you also to everyone who has ever had to walk their journey to peace. With you, we are a stronger, more beautiful, wiser and more just society."[29] If this is aimed at the refugee reader, then an "us vs. them" binary is there from the outset, raising the question of who is included in the "we"?

Elsewhere Fraillon has outlined what inspired her to write *The Bone Sparrow*, asserting: "We can walk in the darkest places imaginable in a book and experience a taste of someone else's reality."[30] Again the "implied reader" is clearly a non-refugee "outsider" who is expected to feel empathy with, and maybe pity for, Subhi's situation. Since the tone of the text is unquestionably grim, it is difficult to imagine a refugee reader deriving pride from the story. Furthermore, the disconnect between style and suitability is problematic and its designation by Booktrust to be of interest to readers age ten, given the brutal and harrowing content, is also questionable.[31] As such it is perhaps more suitable for a young adult readership (12- to 18-year-olds), preferably beyond thirteen, although the tone and content might not be pitched to this cohort. The National Literacy Trust acknowledge on their website that the book "can present young people with challenging perspectives and uncomfortable realities."[32] Nevertheless, they provide a long and detailed resource sheet for teachers to support learning for 11- to 14-year-olds, with the following warning: "Please note: this document contains images that some people might find upsetting."[33] Amnesty International UK endorses the book and provides information about human rights, some questions to apply to the text, some actions to take "if you want to stand up for human rights," and links to the Amnesty website. In so doing, RefugeeCrit would argue that responsibility is passed to the child reader, and the need for those in a position of power to be accountable to refugee subjects is bypassed.

Boy, Everywhere

Damascus, the capital city of Syria, is the opening setting for *Boy, Everywhere*, begun in 2015 in response to the humanitarian crisis caused by prolonged civil war since 2011, but not published until 2020, and winner of the "Little Rebels Children's Book Award" in 2021.[34] In an "Author's Note" at the end of the text, Dassu is at pains to explain her motivation for writing the book: she wanted to show that Syrian refugees had not just come for "a better life," but most had enjoyed comfortable to wealthy lifestyles in Syria and would never have left until forced by violence and unrest to take extreme measures.[35] This background is abundantly clear in the first 50 pages of description of 13-year-old protagonist Sami and his family, home, and world prior to flight. Proactive, high-achieving, full of confidence, and described as a "compelling character" by the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education, Sami may be more relatable to young readers than Subhi, as his life prior to flight might be one that they could recognize.[36] He also demonstrates pride in his own resilience and is not presented as an object of pity, important criteria in the depiction of refugees in terms of RefugeeCrit. The narrative is full of Sami's interior emotion that the reader is privy to as he faces the situation his family is in and reluctantly accepts that they have to leave their home, country, and life behind them.

Boy, Everywhere begins with Sami sitting in his English class when a bomb goes off in Damascus. The location is overtly identified on the second page of the story, clarifying that this is in Syria. In *Boy, Everywhere*, the choice of "To Kill a Mockingbird" as the class text deliberately highlights the presence of English-speaking culture and, arguably, of cultural imperialism. The school, with children all collected by car, is part of the wider context of Sami's life of elitism and privilege, which is gradually

exposed as the story moves forward, detailing the high level of access to technology, Western consumer durables, and Western food and drink that this wealthy family enjoys in Syria. They also live in a gated community with a chauffeur and a maid, the house they live in being described in lavish terms, with a marble dining table, a grandfather clock, a water fountain, and a pool, as well as an orchard with olives and apricot trees, with a picture of Western/Middle Eastern fusion emerging. At the same time, the portrayal of Syria is deliberately multi-denominational, with Sami being a Muslim and the Islamic Mosque as dominant, but also Christian churches and Christian characters, such as Sami's best friend Joseph, being prominent in the story. Nevertheless, the text is scattered with Arabic words: "habiti" (my love), "maqluba" (food), "yalla" (let's go), which add context, richness, and depth.

Early in the book there is a short explanation of the political background to the protests that sparked civil war in Syria, but in very crude and supposedly child-friendly terms, with no real exploration of the cause of the protests. As Sami says: "I didn't understand it all properly—I knew that everyone was fighting and the whole country was in a mess" with the president, his people, and rebel groups in conflict without reason, and lacking any historical roots—a clear problem for RefugeeCrit.[37] Later, Mama gives a fuller explanation of the background to the civil war, but this is still confined to a contemporary timeframe and internal responsibility. It is only the grandmother Tete who hints at a wider panorama: "If it wasn't our government attacking us, it was the rebel groups, and if it wasn't them, it was a foreign government that had nothing to do with us."[38] In placing the blame almost exclusively on the shoulders of the Syrian regime, the text ignores other power interests at play. For example, there is no direct acknowledgment of the part played by European colonialism, in the form of French occupation, which created the Syrian state from a diverse mixture of peoples with inherent tensions, the importance of Syria as a Russian ally during the Cold War, and Turkey's anti-Kurdish interest in the region. It is difficult to imagine how such a tangled web could be explored in a children's book, but in ignoring the imperial/colonial past and the present geopolitical power plays, RefugeeCrit would suggest that *Boy, Everywhere* presents a misleading and dangerous narrative.

The journey taken by the family takes up about a quarter of the book, with a long and fragmented trip out of Syria via Beirut, Istanbul, and Athens. Locked in a basement with thirty other people while waiting for a boat to take them to Greece, this is indeed a steep descent from luxury to deprivation, experienced by many refugees. But rather than being rescued by a "white saviour," as with the previous book, Sami's family are in the hands of people smugglers—"criminals trying to make money out of desperate people"—and they must sell their jewelry to pay for their journey.[39] Throughout the book other stories of flight are integrated into the text via different characters, with details of families being split up, boats overturned, and many drowning at sea. This provides depth of understanding of the various forms that forced migration can take. For Sami's family, England is always the desired destination throughout, with the "promised land" of the West featuring strongly as a trope.

Finally reaching Manchester by plane, Sami's father claims asylum on entry to the UK and the police are called. The family is arrested and taken directly to a detention center. Rather than arrival in the UK providing an ending to the book and an implied resolution to all problems—as in *The Bone Sparrow*—*Boy Everywhere* is greatly concerned with depicting the reception that asylum seekers encounter as far from welcoming. Here the detention center is run by the prison service in the airport, with men and women separated into different sections, refugees' body searched, and locked in their cells. Sami is horrified and asks, "Wasn't this how police treated criminals?" while the contrast to his previous life in Syria could not be stronger.[40] After a prolonged stay of several weeks in this frightening environment, where the family members are separated and Sami and his father are attacked by another inmate, their lawyer, Miss Patel, sorts out their paperwork, and David, a guard from a Jewish refugee background, tell them they are free to go. Again, there are no "white saviours," the diverse cast of characters portraying a much more complex picture than other books. The only white characters at this point are the police and detention center guards. Similarly, when the family is taken in by other Syrians, they encounter a mixed reception—kindness from Uncle Muhammad, but hostility from his wife and his son Hassan, who persecutes Sami in every way he can, again providing a more complex picture.

It is when attending school in the UK that Sami encounters the first friendly and supportive white people—as is so often the case for refugees—Mrs Greenwood, the headteacher, Mr Williams, the form teacher, and Mrs Palrey, the class teacher who challenges bullying and open racism. He is also defended by his new friend, Ali, a Pakistani boy who takes him under his wing and back to his house to eat samosas—again, not a "white saviour." Ali briefly explains the group "Britain First" to Sami—"you know the kind that don't like brown people or just anyone from abroad"—which serves to set the school racism within a wider national context.[41] It is here that Sami delivers a key explanation of his former life in Syria to Ali, and one that underpins the whole book: "It's not all like what you see on the news, you know …. We're not dangerous or evil. We're educated, we go to schools, universities. We've got libraries and bookshops … coffee shops, restaurants, cinemas. We had lives, just the same as everyone in Manchester. Proper lives. These people who don't want us here …. They should know that we don't want to be here either."[42] RefugeeCrit applauds such depictions of refugee critiques of white saviorism.

In the UK, Sami is reunited with fellow traveler Aadam, another Syrian, and here we are offered a counternarrative that serves to widen understanding of the refugee experience, as not one "single story."[43] Aadam had arrived at the Calais "Jungle" and, after several unsuccessful attempts, had managed to board a moving truck that got him to the UK. The contrast with Sami's family's journey is startling, and Aadam found himself homeless on arrival and reduced to sleeping on the streets. However, when Sami brings him back to Uncle Muhammad's house, they are all thrown out by the family, having to find a place in a hostel, where "helping (presumably white) hands" meet their basic needs, but in order to stay together they sleep on the floor of the cafeteria.

Sami longs to return to Syria, and plots to jump into the hold of an airplane to Turkey: "I'm never going to settle here …. Damascus is where I belong."[44] He is prevented from doing so by his friends, Aadam and Ali, maintaining the strong message throughout the book, that it is (non-white) friends that help you through these difficult times. The story ends with a successful narrative closure, as the family are given "leave to remain in the UK," a technical and bureaucratic passport to stability and permanence.[45] This new status as officially accepted refugees is the key to their lives changing dramatically. Baba is able to resume working as a doctor, but at a lower level, and the family is able to rent their own house, which they spend much time and effort making habitable, showing determination and agency. Finally, Sami is able to make contact with Joseph, his best friend in Syria who has now moved to Qatar (a contrasting non-Western haven), and his new optimism, laced with ongoing challenges, is relayed to the reader via this communication. Sami's ongoing closeness with Joseph, even though separated by great distances geographically and sustained over time, is a realistic depiction of the importance of long-term and supportive friendships across the diaspora, especially for refugee children.

Credited in "The New Arab" as "the British Muslim children's author leading the charge for representation in books," Dassu is descended from a mixed heritage originally from Iraq, India, Burma, and Pakistan, with her father born in Tanzania.[46] In the previously discussed "Author's note," Dassu refers to her "own family's story of cross-cultural relocation and immigration,"[47] and during an online "Meet the Author" event, it emerged that both her Middle Eastern and South Asian families settled in Africa, Uganda, and Tanzania, respectively, and were forced to leave as refugees when local and national feeling turned against these communities. However, Dassu commented that although her families fled with nothing, they were able to start again in the UK and established businesses with funds they had transferred. In her own admission, this experience in her background clearly informed Dassu's perspective when depicting the character Sami.

At the beginning of *Boy, Everywhere* there is a dedication: "For everyone who had to leave everything behind and start again."[48] While this highlights the refugee situation from the outset, it is notably not "to" but "for" refugees, not as an "implied reader" who may possibly be "othered" by this sentence, but instead depicting aims to be inclusive. Meanwhile, although the "Author's note" briefly addresses the origins of the civil war in Syria, it does not seem to be aimed at middle grade/young adult readers in its tone and language. Sentences such as "Our constantly informed world shared their plight, but people soon became desensitized to their story" are beautifully expressed and emotive, but not directed

at young readers.[49] As with the "Afterward" to *The Bone Sparrow*, the choice of words could be viewed as "othering" to refugees, with its use of "we/us/our" and "they/them/theirs" throughout. However, the "Author's note" concludes with a stirring exhortation that complicates stable binaries: "In a world where we are told to see refugees as the 'other', I hope you will agree that 'they' are also 'us.'"[50]

Conclusion

This chapter seeks to question the motivations of authors of middle grade/young adult children's literature about refugees, the messages of such stories, and the images of refugees proffered by these books. By applying RefugeeCrit to two books, *The Bone Sparrow* and *Boy, Everywhere*, I hope to provide a useful framework to shed light on these questions. If we are "to promote international understanding through children's books," we need to be wary of certain tropes that are repeated time after time in the narratives discussed above—"the Western gaze," and the refugee as "othered" and as a "victim" in need of a "white saviour" with "helping hands."[51] With so many children's refugee texts being published in recent years, we are somehow moving to a body of work that could be described as "tragedy porn," with the intention to shock and horrify, ostensibly to foster empathy and spur readers into some sort of action. The difference between these books and those in other genres, such as horror, fantasy, or futurism, is that these situations are being endured by children now, in our world, in our time, often with no hope of "happy narrative closure" or even an ending of any kind. How we manage this knowledge and mediate it for children and young people is a concern of writers, publishers, reviewers, teachers, and parents. Looking into root causes and calling for political change is a challenge for children's books, often avoided and resulting in "half-truths and watered-down stories."[52] This is a global problem, and there are few individual life lessons that children can draw from them, other than to be encouraged to welcome new arrivals into the classroom and question dominant discourses about refugees arriving on our shores.

RefugeeCrit provides us with an opportunity to re-evaluate such texts, moving away from blanket approval to a more nuanced critique that can inform how they are used in the classroom and discussed in more informal settings. This relatively new framework can be applied as a critical perspective both to the production and consumption of such texts. However, in contrast to recent protest movements such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter, there is still a sense that refugees are being spoken for, rather than speaking for themselves, in part because of their precarious status and continuing persecution, and particularly in regard to children's literature. While #OwnVoices, a movement to promote authors from marginalized groups writing about their own experiences from their own perspective, is beginning to include the voices of refugees in adult literature, my hope is that this can extend to books for youth. If so, refugee narratives for middle grade/young adults, and younger children too, can move toward becoming a mouthpiece of the refugee experience, rather than a mere reflection of it.

Notes

1. Hope, "One Day We Had to Run," 296.
2. Hope, *Children's Literature about Refugees*.
3. "Syria Emergency."
4. Wilkie-Stibbs, *The Outside Child*, 12.
5. Myers, "Black Books Matter."
6. Johnson, Mathis, and Short, *Critical Content Analysis*.
7. "Books about Refugees and Asylum Seekers."
8. Agnew and Fox, *Children at War*; Lathey, "Autobiography and History."
9. Pinsent, "Language, Genres and Issues"; Wilkie-Stibbs, *The Outside Child*, 12; Giles, "What Is the Other Side of Truth?"; Grzegorczyk, *Discourses of Postcolonialism*.
10. Fazel and Stein, "Mental Health of Refugee Children."
11. Wilkie-Stibbs, *The Outside Child*, 37.
12. Grzegorczyk *Discourses of Postcolonialism,* 50, 37.

13 Ong, *Buddha Is Hiding.*
14 Espiritu, *Body Counts*, 2; Nguyen, *Gift of Freedom.*
15 Espiritu, *Body Counts*, 11.
16 Phu and Nguyen, "Introduction: Something Personal."
17 Strekalova-Hughes, "Unpacking Refugee Flight."
18 Strekalova-Hughes, Peterman, and Lewman, "Legally Scripted Fictions," 15.
19 Vassiloudi, "International and Local Relief Organizations."
20 Strekalova-Hughes, "Unpacking Refugee Flight."
21 Strekalova-Hughes, "Unpacking Refugee Flight," 35.
22 Strekalova-Hughes, "Unpacking Refugee Flight," 36.
23 Wilkie-Stibbs, *The Outside Child*; Vassiloudi, "International and Local Relief Organizations," 36.
24 Vassiloudi, "International and Local Relief Organizations."
25 Vassiloudi, "International and Local Relief Organizations," 40.
26 Fraillon, "For Readers."
27 Fraillon, "For Readers."
28 Fraillon "The Bone Sparrow," no page.
29 Fraillon "The Bone Sparrow," 289.
30 Fraillon, "Zana Fraillon on Writing about Refugee Children."
31 "Books about Refugees and Asylum Seekers."
32 "The Bone Sparrow Teaching Resource."
33 "The Bone Sparrow Teaching Resource."
34 "Little Rebels 2021 Winner."
35 Dassu, *Boy, Everywhere,* 280.
36 *Reflecting Realities*, 10.
37 Dassu, *Boy, Everywhere*, 24.
38 Dassu, *Boy, Everywhere*, 52.
39 Dassu, *Boy, Everywhere*, 71.
40 Dassu, *Boy, Everywhere*, 135.
41 Dassu, *Boy, Everywhere*, 226.
42 Dassu, *Boy, Everywhere*, 227.
43 Adichie, "The Danger of a Single Story."
44 Dassu, *Boy, Everywhere*, 209.
45 Dassu, *Boy, Everywhere*, 270.
46 Zatat, "Meet A.M. Dassu."
47 Dassu, *Boy, Everywhere*, 281.
48 Dassu, *Boy, Everywhere*, 1.
49 Dassu, *Boy, Everywhere*, 280.
50 Dassu, *Boy, Everywhere*, 283.
51 "What Is IBBY?"
52 Vassiloudi, "International and Local Relief Organizations," 39.

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16

REFUGEE NARRATIVE PEDAGOGY

A Cultural Refugee Studies Approach

Erin Goheen Glanville

Because of their central role in global humanitarian advocacy, refugee narratives enjoy significant cultural capital and are circulated in a wide variety of educational contexts.[1] Research on the persuasive power of narrative indicates narratives can teach refugee realities in transformative ways to non-refugee learners.[2] Yet refugee education and teaching refugee studies in Canada—as in every nation-state—also takes place within a broader political context. Governmental and humanitarian concerns have thoroughly shaped refugee narrative pedagogies. Educators who wish to reflect critically on their pedagogy for teaching (with) refugee narratives face at least two challenges: guiding learners to recognize and read beyond prevalent nationalist and humanitarian frames, and leveraging the capabilities—while respecting the complexities—of narratives for teaching refugee studies in diverse classrooms.

This article considers three entangled questions to explore those challenges: what do refugee narratives teach, how do refugee narratives teach, and how are refugee narratives taught? Diverse educational experiences underline the subtle, contextual nature of any potential answers; the most precise answers will depend on further questions. To understand what and how refugee narratives teach, we might ask: who has produced the narrative, under what institutional mandates, and using what method of production? Under what conditions and in what contexts has it been circulated? How has it been used to further particular arguments or ideologies? What aesthetic and rhetorical traditions is it in conversation with? To develop a pedagogy for teaching refugee narratives, we might ask: who is the learner and who is the teacher? Where and for what purpose are narratives being taught?

The established reading practices of broader publics are a significant part of this context. In other words, what approaches to learning through refugee narratives are already in play for learners? My research and teaching practices over the last decade suggest that similar ways of reading refugee narratives can be found in the Global North across different national contexts, subcultures, educational environments, and political moments. I describe this dominant practice of reading as "imaginative humanitarian ethnography" (IHE).[3] IHE readings of refugee narratives tend to prioritize ethics over aesthetics, to assume a non-refugee learner, and to interpret refugee cultural production within the urgent, action-oriented frame of humanitarian communication. This approach can limit the critical interventions of specific refugee narratives, by treating them as interchangeable, interpreting them for predetermined "learning outcomes," underestimating the meaning-making role of rhetoric and genre, privileging etic interpretations, and reinstating uneven social relations both in the classroom and between non-refugee reader and textual testimony. IHE produces patterned stories that pathologize characters coded as foreign and traumatized and that offer arrival as moral closure. It invites empathetic, earnest thematic interpretations, with the assumption that those themes can be generalized to "reveal what it's like to be a refugee." A humanitarian narrator is often used to help non-refugee learners draw conclusions, which

turns refugee lives into anecdotal object lessons for larger ideologies. IHE is, at least in part, a product of the cultural capital of humanitarian storytelling in the global refugee regime[4] and of the role of the arts in citizenship, democracy, and human rights education—that is, CDHRE.[5] The common practice of teaching refugee narratives as imaginative ethnography within a celebrated humanitarian state raises the question: how can refugee narratives be taught such that they help learners move beyond humanitarian values and patriotism and instead establish culturally sustaining and empowering learning environments and pedagogies for diverse learners, especially for those with a refugee background?

This chapter makes the case for developing an alternative contextualized, critical pedagogy specific to refugee narratives. I argue for a Cultural Refugee Studies Pedagogy (CRSP) that frames stories as more than reports on life as lived, and rather as layered sites of intervention. That is, they are always *intervening* in, or at least in conversation with, already existing narratives of forced migration that objectify refugee lives by leveraging common refugee tropes to garner "noble" emotional responses, like empathy. CRSP shifts the learner's gaze from refugee experiences to refugee discourse and cultural narratives; it explicitly connects refugee studies with refugee education to support a diverse group of learners; it employs literary analysis tools such as close reading to avoid thematic ethnography; and it models and invites various modes of engagement to link critical, creative, and personal reflection. In what follows, I explore what CRSP might look like via three configurations of the relationship between refugee narratives and pedagogy. The chapter's title "refugee narrative pedagogy" deliberately omits prepositions between "narrative" and "pedagogy" and leaves open the questions of whether "refugee" modifies "narrative pedagogy" or serves as a descriptor for "narrative" only, as part of the phrase "refugee narrative pedagogy." Each configuration unearths a different body of scholarship and corresponding agenda for refugee cultures, narratives, and pedagogy. I have left the title deliberately compressed so that this chapter can explore the relations among these words in different configurations.

First, I consider refugee narratives as public pedagogy, drawing on the empirical results of community workshops I ran on refugee representation to describe what reading practices might look like in informal education (2009–2016). Next, I consider pedagogy for teaching refugee narratives in formal education, outlining an extended five-step learning cycle that approaches refugee narratives as sites of intervention (2015–2017). In the final section, I describe the innovative approach to researching narrative pedagogy offered by Worn Words, a community-engaged research-creation project I completed in the School of Communication at Simon Fraser University (2017–2019). Worn Words develops critical refugee studies mediamaking praxis to produce educational videos that treat discourse as the subject of refugee narratives and that ground refugee discourse in diverse refugee perspectives. Its central output, *Borderstory*, uses anticolonial filmmaking techniques to innovate narrative form and support the kind of learning encounters a CRSP envisions. It is offered here, both as a resource for educators and as an example of the efficacy of "making" as a learning method.

Defining Keywords

To begin, it is helpful to define key terms. The scholarly conversations this chapter contributes to—forced migration, education, and literary cultural studies—are multidisciplinary, so each keyword (refugee, narrative, and pedagogy) can be defined differently depending on the discipline. Within traditional literary studies, *narrative* is distinguished from story as the recounting of what has happened, as opposed to the events themselves. Marita Eastmond distinguishes helpfully among life as lived, life as experienced, life as told, and life as analyzed.[6] The term *narrative* is also used within cultural studies to refer more generally to the discursive construction of reality. An implicit narrative can emerge out of discourse—a set of terms used to normatively delineate social practices and policy—or through the repetition of narrative tropes. Cultural studies then attempts to uncover counternarratives that are obscured by more powerful cultural narratives. In this second sense, the study of narrative includes surfacing patterns and naming implicit norms in a popular culture text. For the sake of clarity, in this chapter, I will use "narrative" to refer to the recounting of a story and use "cultural narrative" to refer

to a discursive construction. CRSP makes use of literary tools for analysis even as it accounts for the way narratives and their interpreters are embedded in larger cultural narratives.

Pedagogy considers "how" someone teaches and what a teacher needs to know to foster the learning they are aiming for. Since 1894, pedagogy has also been paired with "public" or "popular" to refer to the way that texts in popular culture both (re)produce hegemonic narratives and can function as strategic interventions into and against dominant culture.[7] Building on cultural studies, Education scholarship has defined *public pedagogy* as the various places and processes where informal learning happens, whether in institutions such as museums or in popular culture or grassroots movements.[8] Public pedagogy exists "at the intersection of education and politics" and includes sites, languages, and spaces that shape identities and structures.[9] Unless otherwise indicated, I use the term "public pedagogy" in this chapter to refer to the considered use of refugee narratives in informal educational contexts, and I use the term "popular pedagogy" to refer to the ways refugee narratives circulate in popular culture and media and contribute to and intervene in cultural narratives without the presence of an intentional educator.

Critical pedagogy, as defined by Sherene Razack, is an intentional approach to education that "resists the reproduction of the status quo by uncovering relations of domination and opening up spaces for voices suppressed in traditional education."[10] Michalinos Zembylas' description of critical pedagogy as a "theory and praxis in which teachers engage students in critical analysis of their experiences, advocate liberation from oppressive structures … and encourage transformative social action," points to the influence of Paolo Freire, followed by the work of Henry Giroux.[11] Razack's critique of Freirian critical pedagogy as Western-centric is extended by Zembylas' observation that critical pedagogy depends in large part on the value of empathetic experiences. Smaro Kamboureli refers to this as the "humanitarian pact" that elides the refugee subject by prioritizing an affective encounter between citizen reader and text.[12] Both Razack and Zembylas point out the need to rework critical pedagogy to recognize learner positionalities and to consider how empathetic encounters are experienced differently within educational contexts. Zembylas further argues that decolonizing human rights education cannot be about creating "noble" affective connections but must also include facing the "difficult knowledges" of concepts like empathy and the way transnational conditions that cause suffering also produce inequalities in the classroom.[13] A cultural studies classroom pedagogy accounts for the public pedagogy of refugee narratives and assumes a diverse learning community to empower learners with a refugee background.

Finally, I am concerned with the specificities of narrative and pedagogy for teaching and learning about *refugee cultures*. Traditionally the term *refugee* is anchored to a person who has been legally recognized as adhering to the definition found in the 1951 Refugee Convention: someone who has crossed an international border and needs state protection. Previously, I have used refugee in a broader sense to encompass people who have been "unwillingly displaced by environmental, economic, social, or political adversities" and who may still be seeking protection or be unable to seek state protection.[14] The variabilities of displacement revealed in contemporary global refugee narratives call for this kind of definitional flexibility. Further, the legal definition found in the Refugee Convention is of less significance for our discussion of pedagogy precisely because we are exploring how refugee narratives can teach beyond humanitarian and state-centered mandates, both of which are vitally concerned with legal definitions. Cognizant that people may strategically or viscerally identify with the term refugee before, after, and while navigating asylum systems or may disown it altogether, when referring to people, I write "learners with a refugee background." For the purposes of this chapter, I use the term refugee to refer to a popular figure shaped by and present in cultural texts.

CRSP begins with the assumption that *refugee cultures* and *refugee narratives* point to something more than a one-to-one correspondence with human experiences of displacement and yet invites an analysis grounded in the politics of that experience. Marguerite Nguyen and Catherine Fung define cultural refugee studies as "a subset of critical refugee studies, focusing on the rhetorical or aesthetic as the starting point of examination."[15] They approach refugee narratives as "representational" and argue that

"trac[ing] the narratological strategies writers use to represent refugee subjectivity" leads to a focus not only on "thematic terms … but also [on their] formal elements."[16] This is a significant point for our discussion of a pedagogy specific to refugee narratives because refugee studies classrooms often prioritize ethical issues and themes over aesthetic forms. As Nguyen and Fung point out, "refugee cultural production as a body of work … intervenes in the ideological and teleological underpinnings of existing narratives," including cultural narratives.[17]

The CRSP I propose reads refugee narratives as multimodal sites of intervention linked to the global refugee regime, national politics, educational policies, local communities, and artistic processes. Subject to conditions of production, circulation, and consumption and linked to the communities they narrate, refugee narratives are aesthetic and rhetorical sites that help learners understand the ethics and politics of cultural production referencing forced displacement; they are sites around which learners can gather to reconsider cultural narratives about shared global realities. A CRSP approach does this by explicitly teaching about the public pedagogy of refugee narratives, assuming learners may have a refugee background, attending to aesthetic and rhetorical forms, and integrating experiential learning to demonstrate the stakes of both artistic practices and representation. As I demonstrate in the final section, incorporating the creative process of making into this approach can also enhance learning.

Refugee Narratives as Public Pedagogy

Developing a critical understanding of how refugee narratives function as popular pedagogy is necessary for enacting an effective classroom pedagogy because public and popular pedagogies are unquestionably shaping encounters among learners and texts in the classroom. Globally, the popular pedagogy of refugee narratives has been thoroughly associated with state or humanitarian discourses, or, as in the case of Canada, state humanitarianism.[18] My neologism "imaginative humanitarian ethnography" attempts to classify the recurrence of two interpretive questions that I observed readers bringing to refugee narratives in informal education contexts: "what is it like to be a refugee" and "what can I do to help?"[19] IHE is motivated by the belief in universal ethical claims that lead the reader to observe, describe, and locate refugee experiences in imaginative texts as a discrete set of cultural patterns. This way of reading believes in the ability of fiction to host participant observers who can then create actionable (empathetic) knowledge. Given the predetermination of humanitarian frames, which elide other narrative interventions, the pedagogical potential of this kind of reading remains limited.

My involvement in community education began in 2009, as I completed my doctorate. Postcolonial diaspora studies was starting to conceptualize the relation of forced migration to theories of transnationalism, but its methods were largely critical and text-based, limiting its usefulness for practitioners. To bring texts into conversation with community, I shifted to empirical methods and ran focus groups that explored how postcolonial and diaspora refugee narratives might serve refugee–activist groups.[20] Together, we viewed popular narrative media and discussed their educational value. Part of my intent was to understand how refugee narratives already educate in popular culture. But I also asked participants to consider for what purposes and in what contexts they would use these narratives to educate. Later I turned the focus group research design into educational workshops and taught refugee narratives as public pedagogy in community contexts for hundreds of participants in Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, including sponsorship groups, faith communities, support organizations, and professional development for teachers. Crossing international borders required me to contextualize the workshop for basic knowledge on asylum policy and suggestions for follow–up action. However, the global nature of humanitarian reading cultures made CRSP effective across borders.

The workshop pedagogy was shaped by the parameters of informal education. To challenge the interchangeability of refugee narratives, the structure of the discussion was deliberately contrastive. Two texts or media would be read against one another to distinguish rhetorical situations, authors, and aesthetic strategies. Often, I screened two videos along the axis of traumatized victimhood and resilient anger or celebration. This contrastive structure opens a conversation about emic narratives (written

from within the experience) vs. etic narratives (written from outside the experience) and also serves to establish the cultural figure of the refugee, recognizing its prevalence as a first step toward critical literacy. Once we discuss the limitations of a humanitarian framework, narratives with a richly nuanced lifeworld become salient. To help learners notice these distinctions, I foregrounded close reading skills. Discussion questions and worksheets would limit the scope of our inquiry to the text itself. For instance, I might have learners read a brief news article on the possibility of Mexican refugee claimants entering Canada and ask them to name the repeated words, the strong vocabulary, and any significant imagery. Then we might read a poem about a refugee claimant's experience in Canada and unpack an unusual central metaphor. Close reading techniques refocused learners on the narrative form and away from a thematic reading, slowing down the interpretive process so that the tendency toward overdetermined learning outcomes could be interrupted. But what made that interruption generative was the participatory nature of dialogue around refugee narratives. Most often, these conversations happened within a diverse group of invested interlocutors. A creative, open-ended, reflective conversation grounded in concrete descriptions of the aesthetic and rhetorical strategies of the texts opened lateral thinking and was observably enriched by the convergence of a variety of life experiences.

In informal educational contexts then, a participatory, contrastive close reading practice can help to make explicit the cultural figure of the refugee and attendant cultural narratives, even as it opens up the imaginative horizons of learners. Admittedly, though, these public pedagogy initiatives were limited in a number of ways. The next section considers how this pedagogy might be expanded for formal education. In a classroom, a group becomes an interpretive community that dialogues over time to meet a series of complex learning goals. In contrast, informal education is often a single event using accessible popular texts. My experience of informal education's limitations included: the learning outcomes tended to weigh heavily toward critical media literacy skills; time limitations eliminated full-length narratives or complex literary texts that could host close listening to refugee lifeworlds; emic narratives we discussed were single-authored, leaving the diversity of migration journeys untouched; and because the events were run by groups interested in refugee support or sponsorship, they were advertised for (and drew more) non-refugee participants. I planned events with the assumption that some but not most of the participants would have a refugee background. Often, educators who participated would ask for resources to replicate the workshops themselves, but I was not aware of any critical digital resources that addressed cultural narratives for community education. These limitations necessitated the Worn Words project, discussed further in the third section, which is producing open educational resources to support critical analyses of culture. The narrative form I landed on for the film *Borderstory* offers an answer to some of these pedagogical issues I faced in my public pedagogy workshops. *Borderstory* brings emic and etic perspectives into conversation, avoids the problem of singularity by incorporating a range of cross-sector voices, and was collaboratively storyboarded to ensure it was a meaningful narrative for people with both refugee and non-refugee backgrounds. It serves as an educational resource for the classroom pedagogy I explore in the following section.

Classroom Pedagogies for Refugee Narratives

The overlap between refugee studies (teaching about forced migration) and refugee education (teaching learners from a refugee background) is a crucial space for reflecting on what refugee narratives teach, in tandem with how one might teach them. My experiences of teaching refugee narratives in classrooms with both refugee and non-refugee students have revealed complex dynamics and prompted regular reflection on my teaching practice. A CRSP that assumes a diverse classroom begins by asking how refugee narratives can be taught in such a way that learners who have experienced displacement are empowered. As a counter example: with input from refugee support organizations, British Columbia's Ministry of Education produced a guide titled *Students from Refugee Backgrounds—A Guide for Teachers and Schools.*[21] The Guide provides support to schools in welcoming students and their families with refugee backgrounds. In its structure and stated purpose, the Guide circles again around IHE via the

two questions I encountered in workshops: "what is it like to be a refugee?" and "what can readers do to help?" The elision of refugee students is further highlighted in the way resources are categorized on the BC Teacher Federations' Refugee Resource List. Refugee education resources are intermingled with lesson plans for teaching forced migration in the social studies curriculum, lacking any explicit distinction between refugee education and refugee studies. This lack of clarity obfuscates the overlap between refugee education and refugee studies and thus misses an opportunity to ask the more difficult pedagogical question of how to teach refugee studies in diverse classrooms that include refugee students. In other words, what pedagogical approaches to refugee narratives will also support refugee students?

A starting point for answering this question lies in helping students hedge what can be known through refugee narratives. This returns us to our opening questions: what and how do refugee narratives teach? My proposed CRSP reads stories of forced migration as *sites of intervention*.[22] Refugee narratives do not intervene only as aesthetic or moral objects. Also reflected in this pedagogy is the fact that narratives are complex *sites* of layered mediation and relationality. In a refugee narrative, the recounting of a person's particular experiences and the narrative form that is chosen to communicate those experiences encounter a listening or reading public—sometimes a public with connections to the story and sometimes a public with no frame of reference for the story. This encounter between narrative and public takes place within the local context of neighborhoods, schools, provincial policies, and cultural communities. Panning out, the encounter also takes place within the larger context of the global refugee regime, including key actors such as nation-states and humanitarian organizations. These are the layers of power and relationship, policy, law, and culture within which stories of forced migration teach. Teaching refugee narratives as public pedagogy explicitly connects them to these different layers to uncover the dynamics not only of refugee life but also the dynamics of those contextual layers, as systems which people seeking refuge must navigate and about which they can offer unique critical knowledge. This pedagogy is particularly powerful when paired with creative assessments, where students experiment with creating their own sites of intervention to learn from the constraints and possibilities of that process.

To enact CRSP, I have developed a five-step cycle for undergraduate and graduate courses. This five-step cycle is a living inquiry into—rather than a template for—how refugee narratives can be studied in a way that acknowledges what they can and cannot teach and how they teach.

1 Name and unpack common cultural narratives and associated tropes in refugee cultural production. Students are introduced to examples of narrative patterns circulated by humanitarian and government organizations in advertisements, political speeches, and storytelling events, and develop critical media literacy specific to refugee narratives. For example, we explore the impact of natural disaster metaphors, which dominate news media representations of refugee migration, on cultural narratives and the responses of refugee communities.

2 Contextualize cultural production, as well as the concept of refugee cultures, as part of the global refugee regime and local support sector. Students learn about the global refugee regime and its key actors and consider the way institutional mandates shape narrative arts, connecting the texts to their production. This allows us to nuance our understanding of what can and cannot be learned from different mediations of refugee cultures. For example, a humanitarian advertisement can teach us about an organization's mandate, but it likely does not illuminate refugee experiences.

3 Widen student imaginaries of refugee lifeworlds by shifting attention to emic, transnational, and critical-creative narratives. Students are introduced to IHE and invited into ethical reading practices that listen closely to published narratives, interviews, digital media, and guest speakers for the profusion of refugee cultures and perspectives on learners' shared realities. One way I have experimented with displacing objectifying and generalizing tendencies is by inviting a community member with refugee experience to speak on the class subject as an expert rather than giving testimony.

4 Frame our pedagogical engagements as potential interventions into dominant discourses reproducing norms around refugee cultures. Students reflect on how each emic narrative shifts humanitarian

or governmental tropes through intentional rhetorical and aesthetic choices. An example is doing a close reading of *The Best We Could Do* by Thi Bui to understand how the imagery of water is being returned to and reinterpreted by the author's family experiences of displacement.

5   Experiment with critical making to rewrite or redefine hegemonic narratives based on personal, familial, or public refugee experiences. Throughout this learning cycle, I give students prompts to respond creatively, analytically, and personally to the class materials. The portfolio that emerges is a blending of different engagement modes. Students can then develop a critical–creative narrative project that emerges from these reflection exercises. This kind of critical making helps students to understand more intimately the limitations and possibilities of narrative arts for mediating human displacement. Engagement in experiential learning is key to this approach as it sharpens the political stakes of cultural studies. Likewise, practicing literary analysis in community clarifies the stakes of narrative forms. Together, experiential learning and literary analysis lay the foundation for a final critical-making project.

CRSP has the potential to be transformational for educators. It produces a thick understanding of refugee narratives in local and global contexts, and it produces reflective discussion on the appropriate limits and potentials of narrative art forms. It recognizes the pressures of public pedagogy already at work within refugee narratives and attempts to empower refugee and non-refugee learners alike as knowledge holders, rather than storytellers or examples. *Borderstory*, which we will now turn to, was produced using a Cultural Refugee Studies methodology I developed. The film serves as a prototype for the kind of educational tool that can support educators who want to take up this critical approach to narrative at the intersection of refugee studies and refugee education. In diverse classrooms, it can prompt a discussion that centers on refugee discourse rather than refugee subjects and lay the groundwork for a different approach to learning through refugee narratives. The research praxis also points to the effectiveness of "making" as a learning process. Created in collaboration with artists and community members, this multimedia documentary invites multimodal engagement and opens possibilities for shifting how refugee narratives are taught and how and what refugee narratives teach.

Worn Words: Narrative Production as Research Methodology and Narrative Media as Educational Resource

"Digital Storytelling as a Method for Refugee Dialogue in Canada" is applied media research I conducted as part of a SSHRC-funded postdoctoral fellowship at Simon Fraser University.[23] This research developed critical refugee studies filmmaking praxis by producing educational films on refugee discourse in conversation with community members to mobilize critical knowledge for generative dialogue. Worn Words is the public-facing title of this project and refers to the way words are worn in varied ways by people, the way asylum discourse has been worn down, and the way asylum labels wear people down. It is a research-creation project that asks how shifting narrative production and form can establish different social relations in the learning environment by re-narrating asylum discourse. Developing an integrative research methodology that combines creative mediamaking practices and critical refugee theory, the project produces open educational resources for teaching cultural refugee studies in informal and formal educational contexts. Worn Words responds to the gaps noted earlier in the public workshops I ran, but it also builds on previous theoretical interventions in the field of postcolonial studies.[24] It asks: What might critical refugee research look like as praxis in educational media production, and what narrative forms can mobilize critical knowledge in a way that supports dialogue across difference? The research was done in consultation with various artists and refugee support communities. A central partner throughout was Kinbrace Community Society, an innovative refugee claimant housing and support organization in my neighborhood.

Each Worn Words film takes a key concept in refugee discourse—such as listening, refugee, welcome, border, security, humanitarian, and trauma—and re-narrates these words using diverse perspectives.

One of the most significant outputs for Worn Words is *Borderstory*, a 24-minute multimedia documentary released in August 2020.[25] *Borderstory* unpacks the word border using storytelling animation, illustration, and cross-sector research interview footage. It tells and then challenges the narrative of securitization by sharing border stories that open the listener's imagination to what borders mean to refugee claimants and what borders could be. Border was chosen as a keyword based on conversations with refugee activists. Crossing an international border is a prerequisite for claiming asylum, and globally, borders have garnered much discussion as they become increasingly securitized, enacting hostile policies for refugee claimants. Border, as both site and concept, is the fulcrum for refugee experiences and migration policies.

Making *Borderstory* consisted of three overlapping stages.[26] The first was developing a research ethics protocol that responded thoroughly to literature on the ethical challenges in refugee research. The second stage was completing fourteen semi-structured research interviews and collecting interview footage. The interviewees were approached as experts on refugee discourse and prioritized to provide cross-sector and experiential perspectives. The interview process positioned participants as experts whose knowledge I was mobilizing. The third stage included working with a videographer, an animator, musicians, and my community partners to edit the film. Here, I prioritized relationality above productivity, which meant slowing down to listen carefully to feedback so that we could make a film that felt empowering to all the collaborators. I consulted on the project more broadly and on specific phases of media production through conversations with employees of local and national support organizations. The following discussion of Worn Words considers, firstly, the research methodology that produced *Borderstory* and, secondly, the pedagogy *Borderstory* enacts and supports.

Methodology

Borderstory is a prototype for future educational resources produced using a cultural refugee studies research methodology. Two of its methodological interventions are pertinent to our current discussion of how and what refugee narratives teach. The first is in the area of narrative inquiry in forced migration research; the second is in the area of narrative knowledge mobilization on refugee issues.

The first methodological intervention of Worn Words mediamaking praxis relates to what refugee narratives teach: specifically, focusing the attention of narrative inquiry on refugee discourse rather than refugee lives. Narrative inquiry emerged in the 1980s as a qualitative research method that listens to the stories people tell to understand the significance research subjects give to certain phenomena. The aims of narrative researchers include understanding the way narrative makes meaning for particular subjects and also the way a reconstruction of those narratives produces knowledge for the researcher. Narrative inquiry is used in forced migration research with the excellent intent of centering human experience. Yet refugee communities have noted that they are over-researched at times or that the data produced by their most vulnerable stories have little immediate impact on their communities. Worn Words responds to these concerns by making *refugee discourse* the subject of study rather than people seeking refuge. Interviewees were invited based on their public profile and invited to speak as experts on the narratives that get attached to the concept of borders. They were not asked for their personal stories, and the analysis of the interviews did not attempt to reconstruct the narratives of interviewees. People seeking refuge and former refugees were positioned as knowledge holders and co-creators. In this way, the project renegotiates the domain of knowledge for narrative methods in forced migration research. The subject of my research is the systems that people inhabit and the way these systems publicly demarcate the subjectivity of people seeking refuge. Refugee discourse is the system studied in this project, but the methodology could be taken up to interrogate other kinds of systems as well.

The second methodological intervention of Worn Words relates to how refugee narratives teach: specifically, prioritizing questions of narrative *form* in the mobilization of critical migration knowledge. Because refugees are considered marginal subjects, their stories are often categorized in education as counternarratives just by virtue of their topic. However, as the collaborative video editing process for

Borderstory unfolded, it became clear that using familiar story forms would re-entrench particular epistemologies, such as humanitarian frameworks. The reproduction of cultural narratives and tropes was occurring at the level of narrative structure, containing, shaping, and ultimately impeding my attempts at disseminating new knowledge. By focusing only on mobilizing critical knowledge through story, I would have reproduced the narrative patterns I was trying to avoid. Instead, the interview footage needed to dictate a new narrative form, and the method of critical making became imperative.

Choosing the narrative tradition, medium, digital platform, and genre that will mobilize a story determines to an extent what reading publics it will engage and how. In humanitarian communication, the phrase "changing the narrative" around refugees refers to the desire to speak about refugee migration as a matter of resilience rather than victimization or social burden, yet "changing the narrative" is notoriously difficult. At a professional development day that I facilitated on humanitarian storytelling ethics, one support worker asked me, what *are* the formal elements of a story that can be reworked in our storytelling? They noted that a higher volume of refugee stories or even new data about refugees is not enough. Those are already at their disposal. Changing the narrative is difficult rather because of consumer expectations for a familiar story form and the assumed rhetorical and aesthetic forms for narrative mobilization of refugee cultures.

So Worn Words changes the narrative by crafting an innovative narrative form that is shaped by the critical knowledge it contains. The form that I developed for *Borderstory* was a short animation that visualizes the submerged cultural narrative of securitization—that is, the belief that nation-state borders are the primary source of security for citizens. The ending of the animation sidesteps narrative closure, so it is rewound and told again. This time around, the story is interrupted at multiple points by footage from research interviews that challenges or nuances the narrative. Concretely, this form undoes the common epistemological assumptions of humanitarian mobilizations of refugee narratives in three ways. Instead of introducing refugee stories through the voice of a narrator who explains why we are hearing the anecdote, *Borderstory* is multi-voiced without an overarching narrator. Instead of visually focusing on human figures or personal experiences, *Borderstory* visualizes the border as the main character via the shapeshifting form of yarn. Yarn, of course, connotes both the weave of discourse and the constructed nature of narratives. Instead of a linear story that begins in a "far" "wartorn" land, travels through a middle passage, and ends in a Western refugee receiving nation, *Borderstory* is told using fairy tale motifs and does not offer closure. The narrative proceeds recursively through rewinding and interruption. In this way, *Borderstory* and the larger Worn Words project mobilize critical knowledge by attending to narrative as an epistemology and inviting viewers to imagine both their own story and the possibility of a better story.

For CRSP, these methodological interventions point to the importance of broadening what learners expect to learn through the study of refugee narratives and of attending to the epistemology embedded in the narrative form itself. Concretely, it underscores critical making as a generative method for understanding refugee narratives and the usefulness of close readings to understand the cultural politics of narratives.

Pedagogy

Borderstory has enjoyed significant uptake in both academic and community education. Because it is an open educational resource, what is known about its use comes from those who write to me with feedback and from online analytics. The film has been used in at least 25 university courses on 6 different continents in courses ranging from international relations, public health, English literature, political science, sociology, and media studies. Community organizations on 4 continents have let me know they were planning on screenings. It has over 2500 views on Vimeo as of the time of writing, and those views come from around the globe.

Preliminary feedback from educators and community members points to its ability to not only open a critical-constructive conversation on a difficult topic but also to invite participation from variously positioned listeners. One viewer's description of the pedagogical work of *Borderstory* was that

it is a "pass-the-mic textbook" on borders. The perspectives that stand in tension within the film reflect listening, rather than urgent action or empathetic exchange, as the aim for mobilizing refugee narratives. The film models disagreement and energized dialogue as a way of refusing IHE and assumes a diverse learning environment. The pedagogy that is both enacted and engendered by this pass-the-mic textbook is concept-based, multi-voiced, experientially informed, and foregrounds learners' curiosity as the mode for critical learning.

In December 2020, in partnership with UBC, SFU, and half a dozen community organizations, I organized an online viewing and discussion of *Borderstory*.[27] The cross-sector organizing committee put together a panel of experts and advertised the public webinar as an invitation for attendees to consider their own border story in relation to the stories of the film. The 3-hour webinar drew over 300 registrants. Our markers for success were that it was a diverse gathering that included people with refugee experience, promoted goodhearted curiosity and self-reflection, and honored the complexities of the topic by prompting critical perspectives about borders. Based on the responses we received, these markers were met. The pre-event survey indicated we were drawing an audience that included people with and without refugee experience. The exit poll comments suggested attendees experienced the film as a site of intervention on a number of different levels. The predetermined humanitarian and nationalist "learning outcomes" that are often present in refugee narrative as public pedagogy were not named in participant comments about the event. Instead, responses emerged that spanned different modes of engagement. The learning outcomes for participants were, variously, a more complicated conceptualization of borders, a sense of healing, an invitation to tell their own story, energy for more mutual encounters in refugee welcome, and dreams for structural change. In the exit poll, one attendee began by sharing their own story of displacement. Then they wrote, "This [event] was nice. There are few people I can listen to or speak with that would understand [my experience of being an asylum seeker]. So it was healing to hear from others that shared in this life choice." A response from someone else read, "Very thought provoking. We need to continue to share how are lives are continually enriched by the newcomer families we have met and get to have as part our community." A third response merely read, "I am now thinking how to start a global movement." These and other comments we received provided the organizers with a sense of the social locations from which different participants came to the event as well as the way its learning aims engaged them.

As a site of intervention in the public pedagogy of refugee narratives, *Borderstory* also had the unexpected outcome of changing panelists' experience of narrating their own lives for educational purposes. A significant conversation took place near the end of the event. One panelist who had shared about their personal journey during the event commented that the experience had been different from previous experiences of community education. They had felt less emotionally vulnerable because the conversation centered on collective curiosity. Their comment offers insight into how, and not just what, *Borderstory* teaches. As a pass-the-mic textbook, around which learners gather to hear stories about a keyword in refugee discourse, when the film finishes, no one is left in the spotlight; it invites listeners to keep passing the mic to hear about how other experiences can further layer our understanding of borders. It becomes a participatory project of curiosity about shared narratives and the different ways our lives intersect with them. *Borderstory*'s narrative form makes the question "what is it like to be a refugee" somewhat irrelevant. And the question "how can we help refugees" is overturned by the inversion of power in the film. By collecting different perspectives on the same cultural narrative, the film helps learners to see the personal implications of refugee discourse and the depth with which diverse cultural knowledge can help us understand the world.

Conclusion

Refugee narratives are apposite sites for thinking through the complexities of critical pedagogy. The objectification, generalization, and fetishization of refugee cultures and the alienation of refugee learners can be interrogated using educational narratives, but only if our pedagogies and the narratives we teach

refuse those tendencies and invite new practices of reading. In this chapter, I have traced the evolution of my own practice of CRSP: from community workshops to classroom pedagogy, to the development of pedagogical resources. Engaging the organizing questions within a scholarly community—What do refugee narratives teach, how do they teach, and how are they taught?—could clarify the situatedness of this chapter's conceptualization of CRSP. By offering my own pedagogies, I hope to provoke further exploration by scholar-practitioners, including context-specific approaches to teaching refugee narratives; curriculum that incorporates experiential learning appropriate for each stage of learning; cultural studies approaches to reciprocal community-engaged learning; and productive incorporation of research-creation methods in the classroom.

Notes

1 In Canada, the number of resources for helping schools to support refugee students and to teach refugee studies has been growing since the Liberal government's 2015 resettlement program that facilitated the migration of 25,000+ Syrian refugees in one year. Testifying to the centrality of creative narratives for refugee studies pedagogies, almost all the curricular resources on British Columbia Teachers' Federation Refugee Resource List are grounded in cultural production. I see this as representative of a broader trend in pedagogical approaches to teaching refugee narratives: narratives are celebrated as an ideal tool for teaching refugee studies in a classroom where the non-refugee learner is implicitly normative and refugees are the object of study.
2 Oschatz, "Long-Term Persuasive Effects in Narrative Communication Research."
3 Goheen Glanville, "What Happens to a Story?"
4 Sagy, "Conversion to Peace."
5 Zembylas, "Reinventing Critical Pedagogy."
6 Eastmond, "Stories as Lived Experience," 249.
7 For an overview of public pedagogy scholarship, see Sandlin et al. "Mapping the Complexity of Public Pedagogy Scholarship."
8 Sandlin, "Mapping the Complexity of Public Pedagogy Scholarship," 339.
9 Chun, "The Intersections between Critical Pedagogy and Public Pedagogy."
10 Razack, *Looking White People in the Eye*.
11 Zembylas, "Reinventing Critical Pedagogy as Decolonizing Pedagogy," 406.
12 Kamboureli, "Writing the Foreign."
13 Zembylas, "Reinventing," 48.
14 Coleman, *Countering Displacements*, xiv.
15 Nguyen and Fung, "Editor's Introduction," 3.
16 Nguyen and Fung, "Editor's Introduction," 3.
17 Nguyen and Fung, "Editor's Introduction," 3.
18 Nguyen and Phu, *Refugee States*.
19 Goheen Glanville, "What Happens to a Story?"
20 Goheen Glanville, "Refracting Exoticism."
21 https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/diverse-student-needs/students-from-refugee-backgrounds-guide.pdf.
22 See Heather Johnson's use of this phrase to describe her methodology for ethnographic research in refugee camps.
23 Worn Words' filmmaking and related mobilizations have been funded by Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Dragonfire Fund held at Vancouver Foundation, UBC Centre for Migration Studies, and UBC Office of Community-Engaged Research.
24 See Goheen Glanville, "Rerouting Diaspora Theory"; also, Coleman et al. *Countering Displacements*.
25 https://vimeo.com/427545591.
26 For more on the methods and methodology of this project, see Goheen Glanville, "The Worn Words Project."
27 https://sppga.ubc.ca/events/event/refugees-and-borders-remapping-the-world-we-think-we-know/.

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PART V

Border-Crossing

17

BORDER-CROSSING, IDENTITY, AND VOICE IN CENTRAL AMERICAN AND U.S.-CENTRAL AMERICAN REFUGEE NARRATIVES

Regina Marie Mills

One of the first struggles in discussing Central American and U.S.-Central American refugee narratives is that most Central Americans have never had their status as refugees recognized. Despite fitting the definitions laid out in the 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1980 Refugee Act, the majority of Central Americans fleeing Guatemala and El Salvador had their asylum and refugee applications rejected by the U.S. during the civil war period (1960–1990) because they were fleeing governments "friendly" to the U.S.[1] As the civil war period in Central America mapped directly on to the Cold War, those imagined as fleeing communism—such as Cubans and Nicaraguans—were frequently welcomed with open arms. At the same time, many Central Americans who had the right to claim refuge stayed in their countries of origin or were exiled, either by force or choice, to other nations in Central America, South America, or the Caribbean. Thus, building from Vinh Nguyen's "refugeetude" and Bridget Hayden's structural and politico-economic definition of the refugee, I do not define "refugee narrative" through a legalist lens.[2] The Central American and U.S.-Central American refugee narratives I consider sometimes reproduce and at other times question "conventional understandings that confine refugee to a legal definition, short time frame, and pitiful existence."[3] Rather than pinpoint an authentic refugee voice, this chapter identifies how the Central American refugee, as literary trope and as material subject, is mediated and represented as well as how refugees claim narrative space.[4]

Taking a capacious view of the genres which U.S.-Central American and Central American refugee narratives employ as well as their relationship to the Latin American testimonio tradition, this chapter considers the representation of border-crossing, voice, and vectors of identity. I trace how the "voice" of Central American refugees has been mediated by non-Central American actors through the collaborative genre of testimonio. While testimonio has provided a medium through which women and persecuted political organizers can share their struggles and represent larger structural issues in their countries of birth, these testimonios have often been racialized to center ladino (mestizo/non-Indigenous) and non-Black voices. Thus, I also examine past and present refugee narratives that reclaim Black Central American, Indigenous, and gendered voices, and that do not easily map onto the Cold War narratives and testimonios previously produced. Ultimately, I read a shift in Central American and U.S.-Central American refugee narratives: while testimonios have focused on finding and giving voice to refugees, more recent refugee narratives have moved to a consideration of whose voices matter in order to challenge narrow definitions of the Central American refugee experience.

This chapter first examines the influence of testimonio on Central American and U.S.-Central American refugee narratives, which sits at the borders of life writing, political tract, dialogue, and

fiction while being historically grounded in refugee experiences. Testimonios centralize the question of audience and illuminate the struggle to get the Global North to listen and act. Then, I examine a variety of genres—from life writing to social media to fiction—to highlight the prevalent topics of current refugee narratives, namely gang violence, domestic violence, and the need to represent refugee narratives outside of mestizaje.[5] I examine how these works imagine themselves in relation to refugee status and exile, their interrogation of "voice" and the power to speak, and their navigation of ethno-racial identity. While this chapter emphasizes the continued influence of the civil war period on current narratives of migration, my argument underlines how today's refugee narratives converse with this past so as to help us better understand contemporary racial politics. The chapter's conclusion extols the pedagogical value of fictional refugee narratives in the literature classroom. In my analysis of the different mediums through which Central American and U.S.-Central American refugee stories are mediated, voiced, and silenced, I show both the enduring influence of the civil war period in today's refugee narratives as well as a meaningful shift to issues of gender, race, and Indigeneity, which illuminates the complex experiences of those who migrate. These experiences also push readers to consider the limitations of current assumptions around refugeeness and whose stories represent the Central American refugee.

Central American Refugee Narratives as Testimonio

The testimonio was the first means through which people read Central American refugee narratives. Unlike non-Central American Latinx narratives which appropriate refugee narratives with good intentions but often sideline the politico-economic circumstances of their stories—such as Cherríe Moraga's *The Last Generation* (1993), Ana Castillo's *Sapogonia* (1990), Gregory Nava's *El Norte* (1983), and more recently Valeria Luiselli's *Tell Me How It Ends: An Essay in Forty Questions* (2017) and *Lost Children Archive* (2019)—testimonio grounds itself in the historical, social, political, and economic context of the speaker, guiding readers through the factors that push and pull activists and bystanders to find refuge or to stay. As Ricardo Ortiz notes,[6] the 1990s saw an explosion of literature about the impact of the Cold War on Latin America in the wake of two key works: exiled queer Cuban Reinaldo Arena's *Before Night Falls* (1992) and Rigoberta Menchú's testimonio, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (1983), which gained mainstream recognition after Menchú was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992.[7] Menchú's narrative has been written about and debated at length.[8] However, many other testimonios have come before and followed after, both in Central America and the U.S., denouncing undemocratic regimes who saw any calls for change as communist revolution and responded with extreme violence.[9] They also revealed the role of U.S. foreign policy in Central America in producing decades of civil wars, economic instability, and authoritarian governance.

Most testimonios are acts of collaboration and translation, whether from Spanish or an Indigenous language to English or from the context of the past to the present. Through a testimonio,[10] as defined by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, "the narrator intends to communicate the situation of a group's oppression, struggle, or imprisonment, to claim some agency in the act of narrating, and to call on readers to respond actively in judging the crisis."[11] Central American testimonios are frequently presented in clear, accessible language, though sometimes political or religious jargon is used. The assumed audience for a major Central American testimonio is usually considered to be left-leaning, if uninformed of the region and its history. Thus, while testimonios are often presented as one person's voice, they are meant to represent an all-too-common experience, usually suffered by a persecuted cultural or political group. These texts serve a social and persuasive function, analyzing the politico-economic forces and governmental actions that have led to mass displacement.

For example, Roque Dalton's *Miguel Mármol* is based on interviews conducted with Mármol about the Salvadoran Communist Party in the 1920s and 30s, the 1932 *matanza*, and its aftermath.[12] Mármol (like Dalton) escaped a death sentence in El Salvador and fled the country, living in several different nations throughout his life.[13] Barbara Harlow and Jean Franco both argue that this narrative is not merely about Mármol's own life, but about the life of the Communist Party, its evolution, and the conflict between

intellectuals and peasants in the Party.[14] According to Harlow, "Mármol insists throughout his narration on reconstructing his personal identity as a political analysis."[15] Thus, while this testimonio clearly takes on the story of a refugee fleeing from anti-communist forces in El Salvador, the narrative focuses less on the story of his life as an exile and more on unraveling the circumstances which led him and so many others to be expelled from El Salvador. Furthermore, Dalton outrightly states his own connection to Mármol, despite his clearly stated disagreement with some of Mármol's testimony. He writes, "I feel my duty as a Central American revolutionary is to *assume* him: just as we assume, in order to see the face of the future, our terrible national history."[16] In "assuming"—accepting, aligning with, and investing in— Mármol, Dalton does more than appropriate his testimony; he both assumes the truth of his statements (even those he believes may be misremembered) as well as his values and political investments. Having lived in exile for fear of his own life, Dalton argues that "assuming" Mármol's testimony is a way to understand the Salvadoran past and to imagine a revolutionary future.

Similarly, María Teresa Tula, an early member of CO-MADRES (The Mothers and Relatives of Political Prisoners, Disappeared, and Assassinated of El Salvador "Monseñor Romero"), tells her story to name the crimes of the Salvadoran state but also to provide insight into her development as a feminist subject.[17] The testimonio, like Mármol's, is a retrospective, beginning in her childhood but then focusing primarily on her political organizing. When she began the process of interview and transcription with Lynn Stephen, she was already applying for asylum, and thus, the testimonio was compiled as Tula transitioned from a subject of the Salvadoran state to U.S. asylee seeking resident status. She discusses how difficult giving voice to her life experiences in the U.S. has been:

> Telling my story in the United States is difficult. Maybe this isn't part of U.S. culture, but people here don't believe things until they see them. I suppose that is natural. Many people who listen to my story pay attention and are very supportive. Others don't believe it. They say they just can't imagine how it could be true. […] People in the United States have never lived in the middle of a war. This country is always preparing for wars in other countries.[18]

Tula points to a contradiction, a tension within U.S. narratives of credibility. The people to whom she tells her story—both the white Americans who attend her events and the U.S. legal regime which arbitrates what counts as "well-founded fear"—need "evidence" beyond testimony. Though legally, testimony is a form of evidence as much as DNA testing is, Tula in some ways restates the idea of "he said, she said," a phrase used to undermine, denigrate, or show skepticism of her testimony. Tula seems to understand that her voice and material experience as a Salvadoran woman (the "she said") is suspect compared to the "he said" of the Salvadoran and U.S. governments.[19]

At the same time, Tula also asserts the fact that the U.S. has not experienced war on their own soil means that they themselves have no idea what it means to live in a warzone. Of course, war has occurred on U.S. soil in the Civil War, the U.S.-Mexico War, and in the wars for territory with Indigenous nations, though no one alive today has experienced those wars.[20] For many Americans, war is something that happens elsewhere, not here. Tula's statement implies a question: why does the U.S. believe it can determine the evidentiary standard when they do not have the experience to do so? Tula's experience of liminality while she tells this story—a subject of neither El Salvador nor the U.S.—allows her to use the narrative to reflect on how her voice is and is not heard.[21] In ending her testimonio, she questions the conditions necessary to be believed on a personal level and, at a national level, what must happen for Americans to believe that Salvadorans deserve a government that guarantees the same rights and responsibilities to which Americans themselves feel entitled.

Central American testimonios have historically navigated the struggle to be heard both in Central America and the U.S. In addition, due to their mediation through translators and editors, these testimonies show the investments of organizers. Therefore, Central American refugee testimonios reflect the voices of the speaker and the person trusted with the story. Thus, readers can see both the socio-historical context from which the refugee speaks and from which the mediator listens and attempts to repeat.

Navigating Identity in U.S.-Central American and Central American Refugee Narratives

While questions of voice and audience—how one's voice is mediated beyond the realm of one's nation of origin and who can be expected to listen—were a focal point of testimonio refugee narratives in the civil war era, contemporary texts bring to the fore how Central Americans navigate anti-Blackness, domestic violence, gang affiliation, and the civil wars' afterlives. In this section, I examine three vectors of identity—race, Indigeneity, and gender—to consider how Central American refugee narratives are told, who benefits from their telling, and how reliving these narratives impacts the teller and their audience.

The mestizo narratives that dominate refugee stories rarely consider the experience of Afro-Central Americans and Afro-Indigenous peoples. Indeed, despite the fact that Indigenous peoples were primarily targeted in the civil wars, their stories are often centered through mestizo lenses.[22] Increasing access to and focus on social media as a medium that allows groups traditionally shut out of the publishing industry or large media outlets to gain visibility has led some to question how we remember the civil war period and whose voices have been privileged in shaping narratives of the era. For example, when Salvadoran *Los Angeles Times* reporter Esmeralda Bermudez announced the #SalvadoranSeries, "a collection of stories documenting what became of the hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans during the U.S.-backed war,"[23] some Salvadorans, such as Afro-Salvadoran activist Danielle Parada, questioned the project, namely the lack of clarity about how the narratives would be used, if there would be compensation, and how refugee narrators would be supported in reliving their trauma. In addition, Parada brought up a recurring issue in Central American Studies: the erasure of Black and Indigenous Central Americans' testimonies.[24] As Maritza E. Cárdenas contends, conceptions of Central Americanness and particularly of the Central American state subject have historically excluded women, Indigenous, and Black peoples.[25]

Black Indigenous Garifuna and other Afro-Central American narratives, whether from refugees or those who stayed during the civil wars, have not been widely published.[26] In the U.S., there has been some attention paid to internal refugees, such as Garifuna migrant communities in New Orleans forced to relocate in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.[27] In Central America, a recent *NACLA* report details an oral history project that gathers Garifuna testimonies regarding the Guatemalan armed conflict. Though referred to as "their war"—that is, a mestizo and Maya war—Garifunas suffered the violence of forced conscription, torture, and murder as well as other acts based in anti-Blackness.[28] However, neither the 1998 Catholic Church-backed truth commission nor the 1999 UN-backed commission solicited Garifuna testimony.[29] Because of this disinterest in documenting Garifuna refugee narratives, there are few texts for scholars to turn to.

However, social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram can provide platforms for these narratives. As Paul Joseph López Oro shows, social media serves as "a medium for archiving Garifuna ancestral memory" and "opens up an alternative digital diasporic self-making."[30] While López Oro as well as Jared Johnson and Clark Callahan have focused specifically on the uses of social media in shared celebrations of Garifuna Settlement Day and navigating issues of transnational identity,[31] social media can also unearth refugee testimonies shared orally within Garifuna and Afro-Central American communities and provide a larger audience for their stories. For example, in June 2021, Parada shared a thread on Twitter about her father's experiences as a teacher in San Miguel (which has a significant Afro-Salvadoran population) during the Salvadoran civil war, educating readers both on the targeting of teachers, students, and intellectuals during the war as well as the struggles that educators faced continuing to teach in a warzone.[32] These new orientations toward what might be viewed as the well-documented Central American civil war period as well as the increase in stories by and about refugees offer the opportunity to re-write our knowledge about the period. They also provide readers a way to connect the stories of today's refugees to the testimonies of the past.

More recent refugee narratives in the wake of the Central American civil wars detail not only the continuing effects of those conflicts but also the devastation caused by domestic violence. Contemporary

refugee narratives, particularly by women, often detail domestic violence as the primary motivating factor for migration. The collection of Salvadoran American art and writing *Izote Vos* (2000), for instance, includes explicit and implicit narratives of forced migration to escape gendered violence.[33] Frequently, these writers also contextualize domestic violence alongside the civil war and its aftermath. For instance, Salvadoran undocu-poet Javier Zamora's poem "Aftermath" illustrates how the El Salvador of the 1980s bleeds into the late 2010s. He writes, "Little has changed. Uniforms/aren't soldiers or guerrilleros–/they're tattoos or policemen."[34] These reflections on how the civil war continues in different clothing are similar to his description of the domestic violence and misogyny his mother faces in the poem, "Mom Responds to Her Shaming."[35] However, due to the quotidian nature of the violence she experiences, the poet's mother does not view herself as a refugee and likely could not lay claim to this legal category. Asylum courts have not always viewed fleeing from domestic violence, gang violence, or from being identified as a member of a gang (accurately or inaccurately) as an acceptable basis for asylum. For example, in 2018, then-attorney general Jeff Sessions declared domestic and gang violence-related asylum claims ineligible.[36] However, as Zamora's poems show, violence against women is difficult to separate from the crimes of the Central American civil wars and their aftermath. These women flee not only from their partners but also from their fathers and broader society. In addition, gendered violence has frequently been a tool of war, through the forced labor of women and girls for domestic tasks (cooking, shelter) and/or for sex. In the context of war and other acts of patriarchal violence, staying with an abusive partner may be a safer choice than attempting to escape or living as a single woman.[37] Domestic violence victims must deal with the shame and stigma of abuse, especially since friends and family may not view it as abuse at all. Despite the common U.S. policy of "white men saving brown women from brown men,"[38] domestic violence victims still struggle to be recognized as legitimate refugees.

Claudia D. Hernández's *Knitting the Fog* (2019) details her mother's escape from her abuser in Guatemala from the perspective of a young narrator. The memoir, presented through essays, vignettes, and poetry, depicts in graphic detail the physical abuse, alcoholic tirades, and infidelity that Mamá is subjected to. However, she also represents her own mother as a fighter, not a passive, angelic victim. When describing the physical abuse, Hernández portrays a professional wrestling match with Mamá and Papá as contenders. Hernández "cheers" when her mother fights dirty, using her nails or "the pointy heel of her shoe as a hammer" because she knows that her dad has the physical and societal advantage.[39] Besides being acts of support for her mother, her cheers are also "cries and wails" that go unheeded by her parents and by the community.[40] The choice to flee Guatemala early in the story is one of the only ways to respond to those pleas because Mamá's community supports, tacitly and overtly, the misogynist violence.[41] Hernández provides the reader a window into her and her sisters' lives after the escape to the U.S., shaped by great struggle and other forms of violence but also opportunity and support.[42] The child's perspective allows Claudia to provide a voice for the Central American child migrant, who rarely gets to voice their own stories.

The voices of domestic violence victims and children have generally been doubted unless they are the "right" kind of victim. Similarly, the state and the media often question refugee claims by those whose lives have been affected by gang violence. Historically, but especially during the Trump presidency, gang members, former gang members, or those affected by gang actions have been seen as illegitimate refugees. Because of their perceived or actual role in the perpetration of violence, these asylum seekers muddy the supposedly clear lines between victim and perpetrator. For example, in Zamora's "Second Attempt Crossing," a young man with an MS-13 (Mara Salvatrucha) tattoo on his chest protects the poem's speaker from ICE abuse.[43] The young man was trying to leave the gang, but eventually "the gang [he] ran from/in San Salvador/found [him] in Alexandria."[44] The transnational nature of gang violence—epitomized by the MS-13 story in which a Los Angeles-based gang of mostly Salvadorans grows beyond the U.S. due to aggressive deportation policies—has increasingly become the center of contemporary refugee narratives. These narratives frequently center the victims of this violence but also show the difficulty inherent in avoiding or escaping the tendrils of gangs and their influence.

Gang affiliation is a vector of identity in Central America that can determine one's livelihood. Salvadoran journalist Óscar Martínez's *The Beast* [*Los migrantes que no importan*] is a collection of Central American refugee narratives that mixes the testimonio genre with the fact-finding conventions of journalism and focuses on the power of gangs throughout Central America and Mexico. Martínez rides along La Bestia, the train that many Central Americans ride on top of for the Mexican leg of their journey north. Set in the mid-to-late 2000s, Martínez highlights refugee narratives after the civil wars, but not divorced from its context.[45] His work draws a straight line from the Central American civil wars to Central American asylum seeking in the twenty-first century. For example, as Jean Franco notes, many Guatemalan kaibiles (special forces) and other Central American death squad members have easily integrated into the post-civil war drug cartels that Martínez documents.[46] In *The Beast*, migrants escape gang violence, rival gangs, and forced conscription into gangs.[47]

Living and working in El Salvador in the post-civil war period, Martínez, as the mediator of the text, differs from the primarily white, North American women, such as Margaret Randall and Lynn Stephen, who served as linguistic and cultural translators during the testimonio boom discussed above. At the time of its writing, he would not be considered a refugee, though during his years as a journalist, he has taken jobs abroad and discussed the threats of violence he faces in choosing to stay in El Salvador. While *The Beast* comments on Mexican immigration policy, gang violence, and gender-based violence, the book does so without marginalizing refugee experiences. Although Martínez endures the same journey as these refugees, he is keenly aware of the difference between his own experience as a journalist and the urgency of the migrants he documents. Martínez only details the refugees' journeys and rarely offers us a clear-cut ending, except when that ending is death. Since he wants to stay within journalistic conventions, he avoids offering imagined joys or successes to those with whom he loses touch. This structure cannot promise redemption or safety for those whose stories it tells and thus may read to some as what Claudia Milian calls "Guatepeorian" representations of Central American corruption, anguish, and loss.[48] However, Martínez depicts the full humanity of each migrant in a situation that is far from humane. Because the act of fleeing can be so haphazard, so urgent, the future is hard to imagine and so frequently, these texts reside solely in the present. As Martínez writes, "The difference between fleeing and migrating is becoming clearer to me. Fleeing takes speed. […] Migrating, though, takes strategy."[49] In the gang violence refugee narrative, fast pacing and a necessary tunnel vision frame the story, embodying the urgency and exigence that characterize the refugee's need to flee.

These recent refugee narratives demonstrate how the civil war period continues to shape the present circumstances that lead Central Americans to flee the region. They also push against the anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, and supposed illegitimacy ascribed to victims of domestic and gang violence that has shaped the representative "Central American refugee" image.

Refugee Narratives in the Classroom

As detailed above, there are myriad ways to approach refugee narratives—from how voice manifests in the text (or is foreclosed) to the representation of gender, race, Indigeneity, and identity. Refugee narratives also provide an excellent entryway into the theoretical lens of human rights and literary studies,[50] particularly how literature engages ideas of revenge, justice, and reconciliation.[51] My own background as the daughter of a Guatemalan immigrant who arrived during the 1980s, and the silence that made it so I had no knowledge of the Guatemalan civil war before graduate school, inspire my approach to teaching this subject.[52] I use literature like Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier* as well as human rights documents like the 1999 Guatemalan Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) to bring refugee narratives to the fore. This literature broke the silence for me, and I have seen it do the same for my students.

U.S.-Central American and Central American refugee narratives also welcome discussions on terminology, particularly how we name those who move across borders and those who advocate for change in society. In teaching the definitions of the terms, "refugee," "asylum seeker," "migrant," and

"immigrant," we recognize how slippery and ideologically motivated these terms can be.[53] The U.S. has long stigmatized and criminalized border-crossers no matter their reason for crossing, but in light of the immigration policies enacted in the 2010s, students must understand the history behind immigration from Central America and how that history drives present mobility patterns. In addition to these border-crosser terms, we examine human rights documents, such as the Paris Principles on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2007), so we can explore terms like "child soldier." In *The Tattooed Soldier*, Sgt. Guillermo Longoria, as a seventeen-year-old forced conscript, is placed at the border between child soldier and adult soldier. Thus, like the gang-related refugee narratives in *The Beast* and *Sin Nombre* (film, 2009), we might also consider Longoria's story a refugee narrative, but one that subverts an expectation of uncomplicated victimhood or easy sympathy. Similarly, we consider what "reform," "revolution," and "subversion" mean. What would it mean to fear for your life if you sent an email to your Senator or signed an online petition supporting a new law? What options are available when reform and revolution are conflated by one's own government?

The historical context and terminology discussions provide the foundation for introducing a human rights and literary studies framework. I offer my students four possible ways to analyze a text through this lens: representation (how human rights figures like refugees are represented in a text); human rights as metaphor (how human rights terms are used figuratively to represent other experiences); narrative (how human rights language enhances or limits what kinds of stories can be told and how); and themes (how literature offers answers to key questions of human rights, like what justice looks like). By introducing both the thematic and literary concerns of this framework, we can discuss refugee narratives for their social relevance as well as their narrative capacity. Which stories are and are not legible to an audience who, like Tula notes in her testimonio, has never lived in a country that was a warzone? How do such narratives show that the economic and the political are not easily separated? How does the use of terms like refugee or child soldier constrict the ways we view people and characters? How can refugee narratives subvert our understandings of innocence, complicity, and guilt? Human rights and literary studies frameworks also better situate domestic legal frameworks, like squatters' rights. For instance, *The Tattooed Soldier* calls readers' attention to the precarious citizenship of homeless people,[54] who without a residence may not easily access welfare programs or basic rights like voting.

While this chapter cannot hope to capture the entire richness of U.S.-Central American and Central American refugee narratives,[55] I have offered some starting points that capture the struggle to be recognized, to give voice to one's experience and be heard, and to navigate identity in the overlapping discourses of Blackness, Indigeneity, gender, and gang affiliation in the U.S. and Central America. While many scholars, myself included, have been quick to point to the silence that engenders Central American refugees, migrants, and their successors, we must also recognize that so many of us have spoken, through traditional publishing and media, in the margins, and in the networks provided through classroom discussions, social media, and flesh-and-blood communities. This rich archive of refugee narratives challenges us and expands our knowledge of refugeeness in the past, present, and future.

Notes

1 García, *Seeking Refuge*, 113; Hamilton and Chinchilla, *Seeking Community in a Global City*, 52–3, 135; Hayden, "What's in a Name?," 476. For Guatemala, the armed conflict covered 1960–1996. For El Salvador, 1979–1992.
2 Nguyen, "Refugeetude," 109–31; Hayden, "What's in a Name?," 480, 485.
3 Nguyen, "Refugeetude," 111.
4 In defining "refugee," I adopt Nguyen's definition of the refugee subject: "Refugee subjects, as I see it, 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." Nguyen, "Refugeetude," 115–6.

5 "Mestizaje" is a discourse of "mixedness" that celebrates the Indigenous, African, and European roots of Latin American identity. However, mestizaje often uncritically celebrates this diversity to discredit structural racism in Latin America and the Caribbean. See Telles and the Project on Ethnicity and Race in Latin America, *Pigmentocracies* and Hooker, *Theorizing Race in the Americas.*

6 Ortiz, "The Cold War in the Americas and Latina/o Literature," 77.

7 The Spanish subtitle of Menchú's testimony—*y así, me nació la conciencia*—as John Beverly notes, more forcefully centers the usually marginalized Indigenous woman as subject. Beverley, "The Margin at the Center," 96.

8 See Stoll, "The Battle of Rigoberta," part of *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*, written as one of many responses to Stoll's allegations that Menchú's testimonio contained falsehoods.

9 See Tijerino and Randall, *Doris Tijerino*, and Alvarado and Benjamin, *Don't Be Afraid, Gringo.*

10 For foundational scholarship on testimonio, see Beverley, *Against Literature*; Beverley, *Testimonio*; Beverley and Zimmerman, *Literature and Politics in the Central American Revolutions*; and Harlow, *Resistance Literature.*

11 Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 282.

12 Harlow speaks to the importance of the collaborative nature of testimonio for the genre, but especially for *Miguel Mármol.* Harlow, "Testimonio and Survival," 72.

13 For a detailed account of the writing of *Miguel Mármol*, see Gould and Lauria-Santiago, *To Rise in Darkness.*

14 Harlow, "Testimonio," 74–75; Franco, *Cruel Modernity*, 153–5.

15 Harlow, "Testimonio," 82.

16 Dalton, *Miguel Mármol*, 23.

17 Tula and Stephen, *Hear My Testimony,* 3–4; 128–9; 178.

18 Tula and Stephen, *Hear My Testimony,* 174–5.

19 For an examination of documentary testimonios and recent *cine testimonios* on Indigenous feminisms, see Escobar, "Testimonio at 50," 17–32.

20 Of course, some may argue that the MOVE bombing in Philadelphia or the violence enacted against Standing Rock protestors show that war-like violence is not that far from U.S. experience. See Anderson and Hevenor, *Burning Down the House* and Bowser, *Let the Bunker Burn.*

21 In doing so, she navigates Gayatri Spivak's classic questions. Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

22 For an example of work centering indigenous voices, see Escobar, "Testimonio at 50," and Speed, *Incarcerated Stories.*

23 Bermudez (@BermudezWrites), "BIG NEWS …"

24 Parada (@sadgirldanny), "I wanted to address …"

25 See Cárdenas, *Constituting Central American-Americans.*

26 For scholarship on Garifuna in Honduras, see Anderson, "When Afro Becomes (Like) Indigenous," 384–413, and Anderson, *Black and Indigenous.* In the U.S., see England, *Afro Central Americans in New York City.*

27 Garza, "Twice Removed," 198–217.

28 Artiaga, "The Garífuna Voices of Guatemala's Armed Conflict," 422.

29 Artiaga, "The Garífuna Voices of Guatemala's Armed Conflict," 424.

30 López Oro, "Digitizing Ancestral Memory," 166, 169.

31 Johnson and Callahan, "Media and Identity in the Margins."

32 Parada (@sadgirldanny). "A little snippet …"

33 Kim and Serrano, *Izote Vos,* 8, 16. For another important collection of Central American-American voices, see Hernández-Linares, Martinez, and Tobar, *The Wandering Song.*

34 Zamora, *Unaccompanied*, 32.

35 Zamora, *Unaccompanied*, 50.

36 Benner and Dickerson, "Sessions Says Domestic and Gang Violence Are Not Grounds for Asylum."

37 Saldaña-Portillo, "The Violence of Citizenship in the Making of Refugees," 11–15. In this article, she provides four women's accounts of why they sought refuge. For the women, gangs targeting them—for food, sex, or their children—was the primary motivator.

38 Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

39 Hernández, *Knitting the Fog*, 10.

40 Hernández, *Knitting the Fog*, 10.

41 Hernández, *Knitting the Fog*, 23.

42 Hernández, *Knitting the Fog*, 115.

43 Zamora, *Unaccompanied*, 9.

44 Zamora, *Unaccompanied*, 10.

45 For example, he writes that Los Zetas' original armed wing included "Mexican army deserters—some of whom trained at the US-led School of the Americas." Martínez, *The Beast*, 3.

46 Franco, *Cruel Modernity*, 97.

47 Martínez, *The Beast*, 21–22, 59.

48 Milian, *Latining America*, 129. Guatepeorian portrayals of Central America and Central Americans cast the region and its people as violent, brutal Others. From the pun, "De Guatemala a Guatepeor," which means

"from bad (mala) to worse (peor)," it defines Guatemala (and those from countries like it) as something perpetually bad that will inevitably get worse. Milian, *Latining America*, 130, 131.

49 Martínez, *The Beast*, 23.
50 See McClennan and Moore, "Aporia and Affirmative Critique," 1–19; Naimou, *Salvage Work*; Parikh, *Writing Human Rights*; Shemak, *Asylum Speakers*.
51 Mills, "Literary-Legal Representations," 96–117; and Vázquez, "Interrogative Justice in Héctor Tobar's *The Tattooed Soldier*," 129–52.
52 Mills, "On *The Tattooed Soldier* and What We Carry in Migration."
53 Nguyen, "Refugeetude," 117; Zetter, "More Labels, Fewer Refugees," 174.
54 Mills, "Literary-Legal," 105–9.
55 For example, the persecution of queer and trans communities, state violence against environmental activists ("Just as the state once persecuted the 'communist,' so it now targets the environmentalist," Escobar, "Testimonio at 50," 18), and the growing number of Central American climate refugees. Ayazi and Elsheikh, "Climate Refugees."

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18

THE CANADIAN FUGITIVE SLAVE ARCHIVE

Contesting the Refugee Narrative[1]

Charmaine A. Nelson

When in any state, the oppression of the labouring portion of the community amounts to an entire deprivation of their civil and personal rights; when it assumes to control their wills, to assign them tasks, to reap the rewards of their labour, and to punish with bodily tortures the least infraction of its mandates, it is obvious that the class so overwhelmed with injustice are necessarily, unless prevented by ignorance from knowing their rights and their wrongs, the enemies of the government. To them, insurrection and rebellion are primary, original duties. If successfully thwarted in the performance of these, *emigration suggests itself as the next means of escaping the evils under which they groan* … Many, in spite of all opposition, in the face of torture and death, will *seek an asylum in foreign lands*, and reveal to the ears of pitying indignation, the secrets of the prisonhouse.[2]

In his groundbreaking work on African American fugitives who had escaped from American slavery to Canada, Benjamin Drew characterized the new arrivals as refugees. More than a century later, Ken Donovan echoed Drew, when, in referring to the same northward movement of enslaved African Americans, he argued that, "Offering safe haven to refugees has a long history in the territory that became Canada, especially since fugitive slaves came to the country from the United States after the end of the War of Independence, after the end of the War of 1812, and as part of the Underground Railroad later in the 19th century."[3] Drew's early use of "refugee" and the work of generations of scholars like Donovan reveals how this term, usually taken up to celebrate Canada as a multicultural, color-blind state, has relied on an erasure of the complex histories of enslaved mobility. As Drew's nineteenth-century interviews reveal, in Canada, where slavery was abolished in 1834, formerly enslaved Black people from the U.S. continually confronted racism in housing, education, and employment. Indeed, although they imagined the northern land as a beacon of freedoms, rights, and opportunities denied to them in America, their stories of flight, settlement, and attempted integration served to indict the supposed racial openness and tolerance of this British territory. In the context of a transatlantic world where slaveholding and free states, held by competing empires, often shared borders, crossing these borders promised instant freedom through the distance placed between enslaved runaway and owner. However, border crossing was precarious, for the new state did not necessarily promise welcome, asylum, or refuge for enslaved fugitives.

This chapter contributes to understandings of refugee narratives by rethinking the historical experience of refugees (the people seeking asylum) and the refuge that they sought (the state offering entry, acceptance, and protection) within the context of the transits of enslaved people of African descent escaping from bondage between the U.S. and Canada. However, instead of the expected northward

journeys, I want to flip the script and also think about the reverse migrations of enslaved fugitives fleeing south from Canada into the United States. Within the world of this north/south border-crossing, the term refugee has been misapplied to enslaved fugitives who, although seeking asylum within the eighteenth-century period prior to British abolition (1834), customarily did not receive it. Instead, enslaved fugitives were routinely forced into clandestine performances of freedom, rather than being fully and legally enfranchised as free people by the states or provinces to which they had fled. This chapter contemplates who the category of refugee was allowed to accommodate in the eighteenth-century transatlantic world. To examine the experiences of enslaved fugitives fleeing from Canada is to remember Canada as a space of slavery. It is to contest the nation-state's retroactive fabrication as a safe haven for enslaved African American fugitives. Doing so is to problematize the comfortable identification of enslaved fugitives fleeing to Canada as refugees.

In the period of the Underground Railroad, the years between the British abolition of slavery and the end of the American Civil War (1834–1865), the term refugee came to be frequently misapplied to enslaved African Americans seeking freedom through their northward flights to Canada. A consideration of Black "refugees" within Canada generally evokes images of Drew's subjects, enslaved African Americans whose northward flights allowed them to gain liberty in their adopted homeland. The compulsive recitation of such narratives is essential to deep-seated Canadian notions of racial tolerance and the ideal of a nation made up of good, northern white populations who saved Black Americans from tyrannical slavery. As I have explained above, this myth of unconditional welcome is a retroactive fabrication that does not match the active historical denial of asylum which Drew documented in his first-hand interviews with the self-liberated African Americans.

Indeed, this myth is a way for white Canadians to differentiate themselves morally from their southern white American cousins. Rehearsed across Canada and embedded in national curriculum from the earliest years of grade school, teaching the Underground Railroad in this way is a strategy to render historical white Canadians racially innocent by removing Canada from the landscape of Transatlantic Slavery. This work entails the erasure of two hundred years of slavery under two empires, Britain and France, up until 1834. This chapter seeks to undo this glowing narrative and to challenge its veracity. I wish to interrogate the misapplication of the term refugee to enslaved Black fugitives altogether because it validates the false "safe haven" narrative. Using the fugitive slave archive to do deep readings of individual notices which documented the flights of Black enslaved people away from Canadian enslavers, this chapter exposes overlooked alternative narratives of escape (north-to-south border-crossing) that reveal the porousness of borders and the territorial and political complexity of flight as freedom-seeking in eighteenth-century Nova Scotia and Quebec. Challenging the myth of a universal white Canadian welcome, I want to remember the southward migrations of enslaved Blacks away from Canada and consider the ways that these un(der)explored flights challenge the notion of Canada as a race-blind, racism-free state.

Crossing the Canada–U.S. border prior to 1834, in either direction, had more to do with passing oneself off as a free person than any real desire to attain state-sanctioned asylum that was in most cases unattainable anyway. This historical reconsideration of the contexts in which enslaved fugitives sought to escape their captors enables us to better grasp the complexities of the concepts of refuge and refugee as they were shaped in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries prior to their legal definition in Canadian immigration legislation.

How did the worlds of the refugee and the fugitive converge and diverge? To address this question, I examine the archive of fugitive slave advertisements, notices which were printed in newspapers and at times as larger stand-alone bills for public display. Fugitive or runaway slave advertisements demonstrate slave owners' exploitation of print technology to justify slavery, extend their social control, produce and embed a racial hierarchy, and criminalize the enslaved for the act of "self-theft" (79). Printed across the Americas, the Caribbean, and even Europe, such advertisements were created by enslavers who requested public assistance to recapture enslaved people—the women, men, and children—who resisted through flight. Coupled routinely with promises of cash rewards and threats of legal prosecution, as I

have argued elsewhere, the textual descriptions were unauthorized visual portraits, stolen likenesses.[4] But these notices were also the precursor to the literary genre of the fugitive slave narrative. However, while the books that came to be written or dictated by formerly enslaved people like Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Mary Prince were largely authentic descriptions of their lived experiences, slave advertisements routinely criminalized the enslaved with false details of thefts and immoral behavior as a way to garner public sympathy and incentivize participation in the person's recapture. Although often cited in Canadian slavery studies scholarship in passing or for other ends, unlike in the American South, the Caribbean, and northern South American nations like Brazil, these Canadian sources have yet to be fully discovered or explored. We can expect to find repositories of fugitive notices in Canada in every province where slavery met the printing press prior to 1834, including Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia (including Cape Breton), New Brunswick, Quebec, and Ontario. While Frank Mackey has compiled and transcribed slave notices for (British) Quebec, Nova Scotia advertisements are less definitive in scope. The Nova Scotia notices that I analyze here are compiled from citations in the published articles of William Renwick Riddell, Robin Winks, and Allen Robertson, as well as from my own primary research. My analysis of fugitive slave advertisements reveals that the slave owner descriptions of the enslaved people's strategies of resistance and the regularized inclusion of threats against ship captains signaled their knowledge of the enslaved fugitives' desire to seek refuge and become refugees. Clearly, fugitive advertisements performed several roles: they acted as technologies of captivity and border policing and represented the desired racial hierarchy of the white colonialists, deployed to secure white privilege and power.

Fugitive or runaway slave advertisements provide a window into the lives and worlds of the enslaved. In narrative form, they literally described—from the enslaver's perspective—how, when, from where, and even why an enslaved person had escaped. They are representations of resistance, depictions of individual and collective quests for freedom. But in the hands of enslavers, this resistance was rescripted as crime. They narrated not refuge, but the quest to obtain it, and the drive to thwart those quests. They are evidence of the bravery of the enslaved and their determination in the face of the cooperative (slave owner and state) pursuit to have them re-captured and re-enslaved. Due to their intention, fugitive advertisements were far more honest than the contemporaneous slave auction and sale notices in which the "slave" as commodity was presented almost always as free from defect—meaning honest, healthy, and obedient. It is important to note, however, that this archive is an incomplete representation of resistance through flight. Often published weekly, enslavers failed to print ads for those they recaptured quickly.

Runaway slave advertisements, ubiquitous across the Americas, are what Shane White and Graham White have referred to as, "the most detailed descriptions of the bodies of enslaved African Americans available."[5] As David Waldstreicher has noted, such advertisements were generally premised on four categories, "clothing, trades or skills, linguistic ability or usage, and ethnic or racial identity."[6] The manipulation of these categories could alter the perception of one's class and race. The enslaved understood this well. In ads printed in various regions, enslavers lamented that they did not know what clothing runaways were wearing and hinted that the freedom seekers intended to change not just their dress but the perception of their racial identities. Therefore, although the enslaved were subjected to pervasive surveillance, the enslaver as narrator was commonly unreliable, at least to a degree. Due to this body-centered logic, the ads placed paramount importance on the appearance of the fugitive's body both in terms of biological characteristics—such as skin color, hair texture, height, build—and adornment—such as the color, material, type, and style of clothing, footwear, and wigs. The advertisements also disclose bodily marks, scars, and disfigurements, like (small) pox marks and scarification, missing digits and limbs from accidents and frostbite, and other deformities that resulted from the pervasive use of corporal punishment, unsafe labor, and illness.[7] The fundamental conflation of blackness with criminality provides a means of understanding the origins of our current practices of racial profiling and abuse in (border) policing as a product of a centuries-long history.

While enslaved fugitives were refuge-seekers, they were very seldom refugees in the legal or political sense popularized by, say, the UNHCR or in Canadian legislation on refugees—documents that were

shaped in response to post-World War II humanitarian crises and, in the latter case, to the end of exclusion laws and the introduction of official multiculturalism. While it may seem anachronistic to consider the status of enslaved fugitives within the context of refugee narratives, this approach is warranted precisely because African American fugitives have historically and continue to be labeled refugees both in public discourse and academic scholarship, a retroactive fabrication which facilitates the Canadian attachment to narratives of the Underground Railroad in which white citizens are hailed as abolitionist saviors and longstanding and ongoing structural racism is erased. Our recognition of these fugitive slave ads for people fleeing from their Canadian enslavers can serve to rupture this entrenched fiction. Furthermore, the flight of self-liberated African Americans to Canada should not be regarded as a movement into a space of asylum, but a transit from a horrible place of racism and slavery to a slightly less horrible place of racism that had only recently abolished slavery.

From North to South: Flights across the Canada-U.S. Border

Despite, or perhaps because of, the pervasive violence of colonialism and the nature of the "peculiar institution," as slavery was known, enslaved people resisted their "slave" status, asserting their freedom by claiming their mobility and removing themselves from their enslavers and often from the regions of enslavement. However, after escape, fugitives rarely had access to state-sanctioned freedom through a legal re-designation of their identities. They were often unable to attain refuge legally and were in many cases denied permanent sanctuary and freedom. Moreover, they continued to encounter institutional racism and were denied access to state-sponsored asylum or the welcome of a host community.

Permanent escape was often elusive in the context of a transatlantic world wherein European empires held and exchanged territories, state and civilian actors pursued the fugitives for profit and to substantiate their own racial and ethnic identities as "superior," and borders were permeable, shifting, and policed. The greatest desire of any fugitive was arguably permanent escape elsewhere to a free state, a place not only where they could pass as a free person but also where they would find protection and defense of that freedom through the state's laws and policies. However, permanent escape to a place where state-sanctioned asylum was sought and extended—a defining characteristic of refugeeness—was a condition that eluded most enslaved fugitives.

Many Blacks fleeing in both directions across the Canada–U.S. border attempted to achieve something other than permanent escape, something other than refugee status. Instead, they fled to another region where slavery was still practiced, intending to blend into a free Black or, depending on their appearance, other free population, and take on a new identity. They sought conditional freedom when the unconditional freedom of refuge was impossible.

Attaining freedom for the enslaved was a problem because mobility itself was an issue. As an impoverished population, the majority of their travel was done on foot, not on horseback or in carriages, as elite whites traveled.[8] Furthermore, in tropical plantation colonies like Jamaica, enslaved people were also hampered by shoelessness, the ubiquitous sign of enslavement.[9] The pain of cracked skin and diseased, injured, or bruised feet commonly plagued the enslaved, restricting their ability to travel across long distances. While illnesses and infections like chigga[10] tormented the enslaved in tropical colonies, in northern temperate colonies with cold winters, evidence—in the form of missing digits—from labor accidents, corporal punishment, and frostbite, showed up in fugitive slave advertisements like the one placed on August 10, 1780 for the return of the 25-year-old "Negro Lad named fortune" who had "lost the toes off his right Foot."[11]

Where Is Elsewhere?

Whereas refugees seek an elsewhere of another state with different and more amenable governance, for an enslaved fugitive elsewhere was, at least initially, anywhere that could provide a safe haven. This haven might offer sanctuary for short or long periods of time, depending upon the nature of the plan

and a network of support. While the slave owners' descriptions of escapes often disclosed the prepared-ness of the fugitives for their flights, two Quebec advertisements for enslaved females display the gulf separating a carefully thought-out plan from a desperate and ill-conceived one. When Cloe, described as "A NEGRO WENCH" fled from the Jewish merchant Judah Joseph of Berthier, Quebec, Joseph's advertisement disclosed that "She got out of a garret window by the help of a ladder" and subsequently departed in a canoe with an unidentified man.[12] Cloe likely had the ladder placed in the correct position at a time when it would not be noticed.

Furthermore, that her co-conspirator, described as "a man of low stature and dark complexion, who speaks English, Dutch, and French" was apparently awaiting her arrival at that precise moment, speaks to prior communication between him and Cloe.[13] In sharp contrast, when Bell, named as a "Mulatto Negress" fled from her enslaver George Hipps of Quebec on August 18, 1778, she did so without shoes or stockings.[14] Bell's lack of footwear indicates a hasty escape and, connectedly, the urgency of her flight for various reasons including, possibly, corporal punishment or sexual violence.

Although, in many cases, the haven sought by the fugitive clearly implied a certain, albeit precarious and temporary, safety, in other instances, safety must have been completely elusive. This would surely have been the case for many whose flights were meant to reunite them with family and loved ones. Published on March 11, 1784, John Turner Senior's second notice of three, for the enslaved "Negro-Man, named ISHMAEL," seems to imply this possibility.

Unlike many other notices, Turner's included Ishmael's place of origin, "Claverac near Albany."[15] In so doing, Turner's advertisement implied not only the direction in which Ishmael was most likely headed but also the reason for such a decision. Turner's notice, and others like it, point out that when reunion with loved ones was the ultimate goal, the refuge implied in running away was elusive and fugitives instead ran toward places of increased peril.

Fugitive slave advertisements circulated widely due to the cheapness and materiality of printed material. Circulation was often calculated to blanket a region using multiple newspapers. In one case, a

Figure 18.1 John Turner, "FOURTEEN DOLLARS Reward," *Quebec Gazette*, March 11, 1784, vol. 968, p. 3; Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BANQ), Montreal, Canada.

native of Virginia and the former mayor of Williamsburg, John Holt, placed fugitive slave advertisements in both New York and Philadelphia papers, while searching for Charles Roberts.[16]

Quebec fugitive slave advertisements also elucidate slave-owner uncertainty about the elsewhere to which the enslaved were fleeing. Of the 51 Quebec fugitive notices for enslaved people of African descent that Mackey has identified, 8 anticipate multiple potential destinations. Besides William Gilliland's 1771 notice for Ireland (enslaved) and Francis Freeland (indentured) who fled from him in New York state,[17] ads posted in Quebec Gazette including James Crofton's May 14, 1767 notice,[18] Mile Prentice's of July 23, 1778 notice,[19] an anonymous advertisement of August 10, 1780,[20] John Mittleberger's of October 4, 1781,[21] and John Saul's of September 9, 1784,[22] all mentioned Montreal and Quebec as places where conspirators could collect their rewards and/or return the captured fugitives. Hugh Ritchie's notice, dated November 4, 1779, which was also printed in the Quebec Gazette, for Nemo and Cash named Sorel and Quebec as the locations where conspirators could return the pair.[23] A later advertisement placed by John Saul on December 14, 1789 in the same newspaper added St John's to the list of the two other cities (Montreal and Quebec) as a place where the "Negro wench" named Ruth could be delivered.[24]

Since many enslavers assumed that by the time of printing, the fugitive had already crossed regional borders, they understood that the fugitive's capture might entail their forcible relocation back into the enslaver's territory. When the notice from May 22, 1794 placed by Azariah Pretchard Senior in the Quebec Gazette for "A NEGRO MAN named Isaac" urged readers to "take up said Negro and confine him in any of the jails or prisons in the province of Lower Canada," Pretchard surely understood that to do so meant forcibly transporting Isaac across a provincial, possibly even a national border, which he had likely already crossed.[25]

The ads reinforced the borders or at least asserted the authority of slave-holding empires across these borders, thereby closing off the avenues open to fugitives. Only one of the Quebec notices explicitly acknowledged the desire of fugitives to cross borders and, in so doing, perhaps claim some sort of asylum or attain the official status of refugee. As mentioned above, John Turner Senior's March 1784 notice for Ishmael explained that he hailed from Claverac near Albany and also provided the name of his previous owner, Master C. Spencer.[26] The notice also offered that Ishmael was known to pass himself off "as a Free Negro," a tactic which Turner surmised could more easily "effect unnoticed his intended Escape out of the Province."[27]
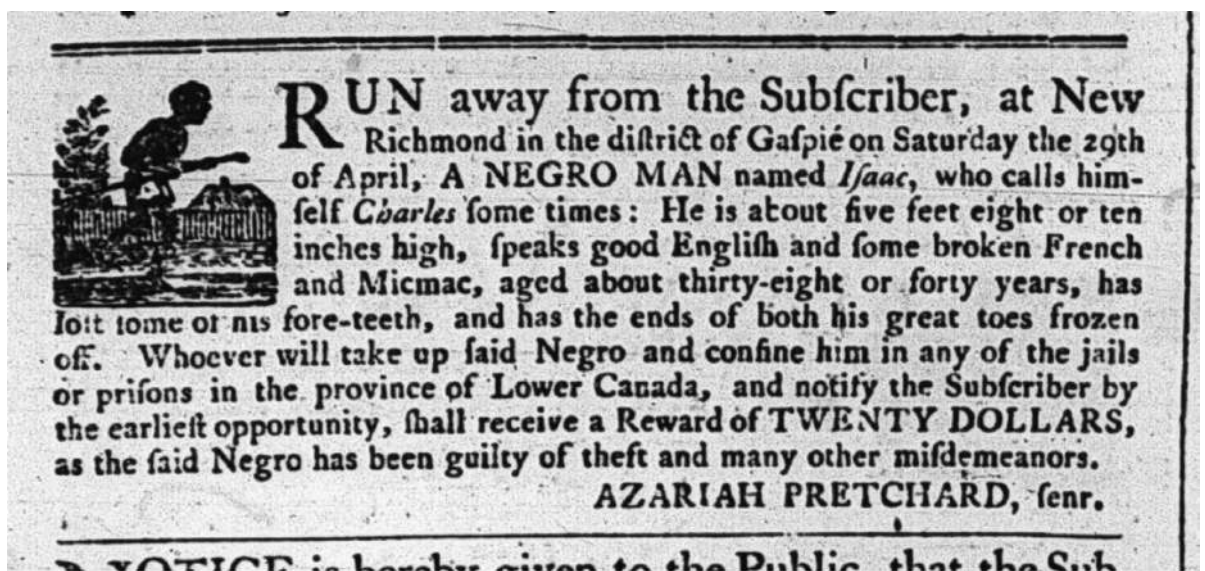
Figure 18.2   Azariah Pretchard senr., "RUN Away from the Subscriber," *Quebec Gazette*, May 22, 1794, vol. 1506, p. 5; Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BANQ), Montreal, Canada.

Tactics of Escape: Passing and Passes

By passing, Ishmael participated in a widespread practice essential to resistance and escape. For the enslaved, whose escape and long-term freedom were frequently premised upon their ability to pass as free, it was essential to observe and mimic the dress, habits, manners, and customs of free people. It is unsurprising, then, that the advertisements scrutinized precisely these aspects of the runaway's identity—the text inscribing certain traits as essential—while alluding to the false identities that the fugitive might appropriate in order to pass (usually as free)—false in the sense of their foreignness in the minds of the white owners and in the desires of the owners to suppress any indication of the enslaved as a "self-motivated" individual, a person. The enslaved attempted to re-fashion themselves and in so doing to re-narrate their lives, namely through what Waldstreicher calls "acts of cultural hybridization," to transform how others, mainly whites, perceived them.[28] To the extent that one's re-narration as a free person involved a new imagined future and an invented and convincing past, these freedom-seekers engaged in a daring and perilous form of reinvention.

Fugitive advertisements frequently note the intention of the enslaved to subvert their recapture by manipulating or changing their clothing. For an enslaved person, the correct clothing was essential to pass as a free person. But the promise of social transformation entailed in what Rebecca Earle calls the "subversive, or disruptive, potential" of "clothing acts," which held a "highly varied ability to shape identity, particularly racial identity" was not at all readily accessible to the enslaved or any impoverished population.[29] Since poor clothing was often a sign of enslavement, possession of alternative clothing could mean the difference between recapture and freedom. Unsurprisingly, fugitive advertisements regularly contained accusation of the runaway's theft of clothing.[30] Indeed, the long and detailed list of the runaway's clothing was meant to identify the enslaved as only one of the commodities that had purportedly been stolen from the enslaver.[31] But, as Waldstreicher clarifies, "Some took [clothing] for use, for resale value, and, perhaps for spite all at once."[32] Indeed, the spite motive should not be underestimated since it was the enslaved who were forced not merely to launder but also often to produce or mend their enslaver's clothing. Significantly, then, the frequency of such thefts complicates our ability to discern differences in sartorial acts between enslaved and free Blacks.

Some basic assertions can be made, however. For one thing, the frequency with which slave owners accused the enslaved of clothing theft and conflated the use of the supposedly misappropriated clothing with attempts at passing, meant that in many cases enslaved populations were forced, through prohibition and deprivation, to dress in ways that aligned with their lower racial and socio-economic status. As Waldstreicher has argued, "Sometimes different or finer clothes increased the chances of passing for free or being unrecognized."[33] However, the reverse was also true, with well-dressed "Negroes" being accused of theft or attempting to disguise their enslaved status. Well-dressed Black people routinely provoked suspicion due to the quality and cost of the materials and other adornments and the cleanliness and newness of the items.[34]

In response, advertisements sought not only to reconstitute the connection between the runaway and the category of the slave—which self-fashioning dismantled—but also to naturalize it. Thus, the slave-owning class sought to criminalize demonstrations of agency by the "self-motivated" people who were enslaved.[35] While many advertisements included descriptions of the fugitive's body, slave owners also detailed the orality of that body, the speech patterns, languages, and accents of the enslaved. The tactic was understandable since, in the process of brokering their freedom, the enslaved person most likely had to converse with various people. The ability to suppress a speech impediment or disguise a pronounced or uncommon accent would thus have proven essential to their ability to escape permanently. As Waldstreicher has discerned, "Owners hoped that slaves and servants could be marked by their very proficiency in language, as in the case of Cato, who, though branded as a boy in Jamaica, 'speaks English as if country born.'"[36] The description "speaks good English" appeared in Andrew Reynolds's September 7, 1790 notice for the runaway named Dick who was described as a "Negro Boy Slave" in the Royal Gazette and Nova Scotia Advertiser.[37]

While clothing and speech—understood as denoting both accent and language ability—were manipulated by the enslaved to facilitate escape, fugitives also drew on these elements in the creation and exchange of literal passes. As Waldstreicher has noted, "Written passes allowed slaves and servants, unlike the serfs of old, to move over large areas in the service of their masters' interest."[38] Passes were printed or hand-written documents that, when legally obtained, were secured from current or former owners or through legal procedures that confirmed the manumitted status of its holders. In other cases, passes were documents that stated the parameters in which an enslaved person could circulate on behalf of their slave owner or a third party who had rented them. Often even shorter than the fugitive ads, they were themselves future-making narratives which delimited one's potential mobility. The Montreal vintner, James Crofton's fugitive notice for "A Mulatto Negro Slave, named Andrew," explained that the Maryland-born man was "supposed to have with him forged Certificates of his Freedom, and Passes."[39] Just as in tropical regions, whites surveilled the mobility of Black people in northern sites of Transatlantic Slavery, hoping to narrow the routes of escape.

Escape by Sea

In the colonial transatlantic world, the infrastructures of empire were most easily built in maritime settings that facilitated a vast sea trade that included enslaved Africans. A more difficult vision of escape to an elsewhere removed from the territory of enslavement thus involved ship travel. As I argue elsewhere, this essential access to shipping places facilitated the flow of merchant ships stocked with slave-produced goods and the enslaved peoples themselves. But Canadian ports like tropical ones also offered a pathway to freedom for enslaved people who dared to run. Since a substantial number of Black men were free sailors in the British Empire, enslaved Black male fugitives attempted to blend into this group of free Black sailors upon their escapes from maritime territories like Nova Scotia and Quebec. This pathway was far more accessible to enslaved males who could more easily be given the accouterment to pass themselves off as a free Black sailor.[40]

Yet, the more that the sea became a tried-and-true avenue of escape, the more slave owners sought to block this vital route of refuge. The enslaved also had profound reasons for despising and fearing sea travel. Although the smallest percentage of the slave minority community in Canada was African-born, depending upon their age at the point of original embarkation, many may have actually remembered the Middle Passage. But even for those who had not experienced the Middle Passage for themselves, recollections their elders shared—or refused to share—likely impacted their own feelings and fears about the Atlantic Ocean. To call the sea voyage from Africa to "New World" destinations horrific is an understatement.

Given the "tight-packing" below the deck of shackled, unclothed people as a standard practice where a sufficient supply of oxygen was impeded by the number of people and the lack of adequate air holes, the excruciating nature of the physical discomfort was surely compounded by the unsanitary conditions. Furthermore, physical and sexual violence were rampant onboard slave ships. Since the memory of such horrors was the fabric of their diasporization, to seek to escape by sea must have been for the enslaved a harrowing, even debilitating proposition. The African-born male enslaved in Quebec City known only as Joe—documented in five escapes between 1777 and 1786[41]—may have been a survivor of two Middle Passages.[42] Yet, we know that Joe tried unsuccessfully to escape from William Brown, his enslaver and the owner of the Quebec Gazette, aboard a ship.[43]

Despite this gruesome memory, the enslaved people of African descent still valiantly attempted to board ships, a prospect that meant going back, deliberately, into a space of trauma. Of the fifty-one fugitive notices for Black people which Mackey has uncovered for British Quebec, seven contain explicit threats directed at the captains of ships. Sarah Levy's fugitive notice for "a Mulatto Man named WILL" warned that, "All Masters of Ships, or others are hereby cautioned against conveying or assisting him to get off."[44]

By the close of the eighteenth century, as the fugitive notice of James Frazer demonstrates, Quebec slave owners had perfected the threatening language aimed at "All masters of vessels and all others."[45]

When seeking to capture "a Negro Man named Robin or Bob … a Negro Woman named Lydia or Lil" and a "mulatto child, named Jane about four years old," the fugitive notice published in the Montreal Gazette on August 20, 1798 warned that people were "hereby forbid to harbor, employ, carry off, or conceal, said negroes, as they will be prosecuted in the highest manner, the said James Frazer hath the Protection of Government for said negroes."[46]

The phrase "carry off," when coupled with a legal threat, underscored the fears of slave owners that the people they enslaved would find not just temporary refuge but potentially, at the end of a voyage, asylum and legal freedom. The sea offered the most direct and clear-cut path, however harrowing, to enduring freedom for enslaved peoples of Canada, as it did in other parts of the Americas.

Conclusion: Black Fugitives and the Elusiveness of Refuge

In maritime settings like Halifax, Montreal, and Quebec City, ship travel symbolized not merely an escape from one's owner but also, through the removal to a new region or colony, the increased ability to "pass" out of slavery altogether as a free person. However, as I have argued throughout, the possibility of a true, state-sanctioned refugee status for the enslaved fugitive was largely unattainable since it required the enslaved to be able to remove themselves both from their enslaver and from the vast reach of empire to another region or state in which slavery no longer existed and in which the new state would sanction the fugitive's asylum.

Given that a northward escape from the United States entailed inevitable interaction with a white majority citizenry who had only recently abandoned slave holding themselves, Black fugitives were not guaranteed a welcome in the regions that would become Canada. Although the term refugee officially applied to some cases of Black northward migration, especially when, openly encouraged by the British Empire, in practice during the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812, the British exploited the African American enslaved populations' desire for freedom to bolster its military ranks, incentivizing Black settlement only to renege on the official promises of welcome, support, and freedom.[47] The same is true for the British mistreatment of the Jamaican Maroons who were out-migrated to Halifax in 1796.[48] In all cases, the British failed to provide the necessary food, clothing, land, employment, and housing for the liberated Black populations to comfortably settle without fear or danger.[49] Within this context of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century North American slavery, the enslaved fugitives who escaped in both directions across the Canada-U.S. border did not attain refuge, since the places to which they fled were still parts of the Americas, where bordering states were frequently complicit in slavery and the ongoing presence of enslaved Blacks in the same spaces ensured enduring practices of racism. In such conditions, fugitives who crossed a border did not necessarily attain the promise of legal freedom and refuge. Instead, they confronted the pervasive racial machinations of empire that pursued them into the new territory and from which they developed further evasive tactics.

Notes

1 An earlier version of this chapter was published as "The Canadian Fugitive Slave Archive and the Concept of Refuge" in *ESC: English Studies in Canada*.
2 Drew, *The Refugee*, italics added.
3 Donovan, "Slavery and Freedom," 29.
4 See Charmaine A. Nelson, "'Ran away from her Master … a Negroe Girl named Thursday': Examining Evidence of Punishment, Isolation, and Trauma in Nova Scotia and Quebec Fugitive Slave Advertisements," in *Legal Violence and the Limits of the Law*, eds. J. Nichols and A. Swiffen (New York City: Routledge, 2017).
5 White and White, "Slave Hair and African American Culture," 49.
6 Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways," 249.
7 Nelson, "'Ran away from her Master,'" 72.
8 See Nelson, *Slavery, Geography, and Empire*, 317, 319, 320.

9 Nelson, *Slavery, Geography, and Empire,* 350, 360, 373, 385 n75.

10 While chigga-foot is sometimes regarded as fungus-infected feet, the chigga is actually a flea-like insect, which bores into the flesh and, if left undisturbed, will create a nest and lay eggs. Nelson, *Slavery, Geography, and Empire*, 350, 385 n75, n76.

11 Anonymous, "Ranaway from Carleton-Island," transcribed in Mackey, 323.

12 Joseph, "Run Away from the Subscriber in the Night of the 13th Instant," transcribed in Mackey 334, 540 n58.

13 Joseph, "Run Away from the Subscriber in the Night of the 13th Instant," transcribed in Mackey 334, 540 n58.

14 Hipps, "Ran Away from My Service," transcribed in Mackey, 321.

15 Turner, "Fourteen Dollars Reward," transcribed in Mackey, 326.

16 Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways," 253, 267.

17 Gilliland, "Six Dollars Reward," transcribed in Mackey, 318.

18 Crofton, "Run-away, from James Crofton," transcribed in Mackey, 315.

19 Prentice, "Run Away on Friday Night the 10th Instant," transcribed in Mackey, 320–1.

20 Anonymous, "Ranaway from Carleton-Island," transcribed in Mackey, 323.

21 Mittleberger, "Run Away from the Subscriber," transcribed in Mackey, 323–4.

22 Saul, "From the Subscriber on Thursday the 12th August Last," transcribed in Mackey, 323–4.

23 Ritchie, "Ran-away," transcribed in Mackey, 323.

24 Saul, "Run Away," transcribed in Mackey, 332.

25 Pretchard, "Run Away from the Subscriber, at New Richmond in the District of Gaspié," transcribed in Mackey, 337.

26 Turner, "Fourteen Dollars Reward," transcribed in Mackey, 326.

27 Turner, "Fourteen Dollars Reward," transcribed in Mackey, 326, italics added.

28 Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways," 248.

29 Earle, "Two Pairs of Pink Satin Shoes!," 177.

30 Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways," 253.

31 Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways," 254.

32 Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways," 253.

33 Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways," 253.

34 Waldstreicher gives the example of two Black men who were pre-emptively incarcerated by a jailer in New Brunswick, New Jersey, for wearing "fine clothing" (253).

35 Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways," 248.

36 Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways," 260.

37 Reynolds, "Forty Shillings Reward."

38 Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways," 262.

39 Crofton, "Run-away, from James Crofton," transcribed in Mackey, 315.

40 Thomas Thistlewood, the overseer at Vineyard Pen, Jamaica (1750–1751), wrote about giving Phibbah the enslaved domestic (with whom he also shared a sexual and emotional relationship) a pass so that she could be absent from the pen (livestock plantation) to sell cloth. Morgan noted that she sold cloth for 30 days in a period of 7 months and was away from the pen for a total of 18 days. Meanwhile, several enslaved male penkeepers (Julius, Simon, Scipio, Guy, and Charles) spent between 11 and 145 days away from the estate in one year. In comparison, Dick the mulatto driver spent 35 days off the estate (Morgan 54–55, 59 n14).

41 For more about the conditions of slave ships for the enslaved, see Rediker, *The Slave Ship.*

42 While five of the notices for Joe were placed by his owner, William Brown who owned the Quebec Gazette, the sixth notice was placed by the sheriff James Shepherd, Esq when Joe escaped from "his Majesty's Goal" on February 18, 1786 with a white criminal named John Peters. (sic)

43 Joe could not have arrived directly in Canada from Africa since slave ships did not travel such routes. His presence as an African-born person in Quebec City therefore must have been the result of multiple displacements and a possible secondary ship transit which I have called the Second Middle Passage. See Nelson, *Slavery, Geography, and Empire*, 7, 85, 127.

44 Levy, "Run Away on the 11th Instant," transcribed in Mackey, 315.

45 Frazer, "Nine Dollars Reward," transcribed in Mackey, 338–9.

46 Frazer, "Nine Dollars Reward," transcribed in Mackey, 338–9.

47 During the Revolutionary War, several colonial officials issued proclamations incentivizing the enslaved to abandon their white revolutionary slaveholders and cross to British lines. But the victory of the Continental Army prompted the British to evacuate Black Loyalists, white Loyalists, and those the latter group enslaved from Boston, Charleston, New York, and Savannah (Whitfield 18). Recorded in "The Book of Negroes," some 3000 Black Loyalists sailed from New York between 23 April and 30 November 1783 to resettle in Nova Scotia, alongside their white slaveholding counterparts.

48 Between 550 and 600 Black Jamaicans arrived at Halifax in July 1796 on the ships named Dover, Mary, and Ann ("Maroons of Nova Scotia").

49 Wentworth, "Letter to Richard Molesworth," 377–9. In a personal letter to his friend, Governor Wentworth expressed regret that the Jamaican Maroons had been deceived with regard to their resettlement in Nova Scotia and lamented their desire to leave.

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19

TO THE EDITOR

Partition Refugee Relief and the Making of the "Pakistani Muslim Citizen" in Punjab

Aalene Mahum Aneeq

> Every Muslim should … realise the gravity of the situation. This is the greatest crisis in the life history of the Muslims in India. Therefore, all Muslims (men and women) must … shake their lethargy and should go forward to help their distressed brethren.
>
> (Letter to the Editor, *Pakistan Times*, October 2, 1947)

What role does religion play in refugee narratives and how does it configure the dynamic processes of resettlement and assimilation after migration? The excerpt quoted above, pertaining to the influx of refugees into Pakistani Punjab after India's partition, provides unique insights into this question. India's decolonization and partition in 1947 displaced more than ten million people and was one of the largest mass migrations in world history. Partition and its violence, as noted by Sunil Purushotham, created new regimes of sovereignty and citizenship in both India and Pakistan.[1] For the refugees moving to Pakistan, migration was not just across physical but also social and ideological terrains. It signified their transition from being subjects of British empire to being citizens of a new nation–state;[2] it also indicated the culmination of their religious and ideologically driven efforts to create a Muslim homeland within the subcontinent. While most Muslim Punjabi refugees had to seek refuge in Pakistan once the subcontinent was engulfed by partition violence,[3] many of them, prior to the partition, had also been motivated to join the Pakistan Movement for various religious as well as political and economic reasons.[4] How, then, did their ideas of Muslim nationalism and Islamic brotherhood translate in the wake of the massive refugee influx in post-independence Pakistan? This chapter shows that religion became an important means for managing the mass refugee migrations in the nascent Muslim nation. Discourses co-produced by the refugees, local citizens, and the Pakistani state employed religious language to encourage volunteerism and cooperation between Muslim locals and the refugees. In advocating for refugee relief, these discourses also shaped narratives of "good citizenship." Yet, as the last section of the chapter shows, these narratives of harmony and cooperation were disrupted when material constraints and competition of resources led to contested relations between the refugees and locals. Consequently, the refugees continued to make claims to aid and belonging through the language of religiosity and the citizens' moral duties. Ultimately, this chapter shows how religion helps us understand the relationship between community, mutual aid, citizenship, and nationalism in Pakistan. It also highlights that the experiences of refugees and the broader public discourses about "rights" and "duties" significantly shaped the idea of citizenship in Pakistan.[5]

The influence of religion in the Pakistan Movement has been much debated in scholarship, and it is worthwhile to trace its background here. The Pakistan Movement, in the early to mid-twentieth century, was a part of the Indian Independence Movement that aimed to create Pakistan from the

Muslim-majority areas of India. While some have argued that the agenda of the movement was to create Pakistan as an Islamic State, many others have argued that the Muslim League—Indian Muslims' political party that advocated for the creation of Pakistan—had a secular agenda to ensure political representation of Muslims in the subcontinent.[6] Setting aside the debate on what the Muslim League envisioned, it is important to note the *means* by which it garnered public support. Scholars such as Ian Talbot and David Gilmartin have shown how religious rhetoric and sloganeering was heavily used by the League during its campaign for the 1946 provincial election in the Punjab. Political support of religious leaders such as the *sajjada nashins* (descendent of a Sufi master) and *sufi pirs* (saints) rendered great religious legitimacy to the League's campaign. Additionally, religious symbols were used in the political campaign, such as mosques as a platform to make political speeches and the Quran as the political symbol of the Muslim League.[7] In this way, the elections coalesced into a demand for Pakistan which in turn was perceived as a quest to "protect" Islam.

In the public imagination, the idea of Pakistan and the survival of Islam were deeply conflated. This had been further entrenched by influential clerics such as Shabbir Ahmed Usmani, who were writing about the religious significance of creating Pakistan in the Urdu press, pamphlets, and magazines. Pakistan was compared to and legitimized through the example of the creation of Madinah in 622 CE as the city of refuge for the Muslims of Arabia. Usmani argued that the purpose for the migration of Muslims in India was similar to the Prophet Muhammad's historic migration from Macca to Madinah wherein the latter was established so that Muslims could practice their religion freely. Similarly, he predicted that just as the state of Madinah flourished due to remarkable cooperation between the *muhajirin* (migrants) and *ansaar* (locals), Pakistan too would witness cooperation and harmony between the refugees and locals. In this way, Pakistan was important not just for the Indian Muslims but also for Islam itself as it would enable Muslims to destroy parochial identities of class, language, ethnicity, etc., and to unite under the banner of Muslim brotherhood.[8] Thus, the language of the Pakistan Movement was laden with religious sentimentality.

On the eve of partition, two starkly contrasting sentiments came into being for Muslims. One was the jubilation over freedom from Britain and India. The other was the horror of the deadly violence and massacre that engulfed the subcontinent, with Punjab being its epicenter. Punjab contained about one-third Sikh population scattered throughout the center, where the dividing line between India and Pakistan was to run. While deciding the boundaries, the Boundary Commission categorized regions by Muslim or non-Muslim majority. This led to the breakout of civil war and systematic ethnic cleansing plans in various cities with the Muslim and non-Muslim groups trying to violently eliminate each other to establish majority and hegemony.[9] Amid bloodshed, looting, rape, and abductions, the Boundary Line was announced on August 17, 1947, resulting in frenzied migrations as millions of people suddenly realized they were on the wrong side of the border. A wholesale transfer of populations happened as Hindus and Sikhs moved toward East Punjab and Muslims moved toward West Punjab.

Within three months, more than two million Muslim refugees had moved to West Punjab by rail, foot, and lorry convoys.[10] Many were attacked by marauding gangs on the way and ended up not surviving the journey. Others made it but ended up dying in refugee camps due to starvation and disease. These refugee camps were set up throughout Punjab, supervised by the Punjab Boundary Force, the Military Evacuation Organizations, and the Ministry of Refugees and Rehabilitation. Yet this was a gargantuan task for the nascent state which was incapacitated to handle the situation. In this context, calls for volunteer work were being made to the public, especially in a moment of "national crisis." Much of the Punjab violence had solidified brutal images about the Hindus and the Sikhs in the minds of Muslim refugees.[11] Hence, this collective trauma generated solidarity between the refugees and locals, unmatched by the other provinces. Locals subsequently took up refugee assistance and relief work as a religious obligation and resorted to helping their fellow Muslims with passion and "moral" spirit.

This story of refugee resettlement and the significance of religious narratives has not been adequately studied in scholarship. Unlike other Pakistani provinces such as Sindh, which also received a large number of refugees from India, and where tensions between refugees and the locals occasionally turned

violent, resettlement in Punjab remained relatively peaceful. Scholars such as Talbot and Gurharpal Singh have argued that the violent division of Punjab during Partition permanently colored the imaginations of refugees who felt a deep injustice at the hands of the other religious communities. Subsequently, they were more susceptible to narratives of national unity once they were in Pakistan.[12] Additionally, Muhammad Waseem argued that since most Muslim refugees in Pakistani Punjab were coming from Indian Punjab, their resettlement process remained smooth due to cultural and religious assimilation with the Punjabi locals.[13] Yet, these explanations are simplistic and demand a more nuanced understanding of Punjabi refugee resettlement. This chapter investigates how and why "Muslim" identity contributed to a seemingly smooth refugee resettlement and assimilation process. It also questions the extent to which the Punjabi resettlement experience remained conflict-free.

To answer these questions, this chapter uses the editorial section (e.g., Letters to the Editor) of the Lahore-based newspaper *Pakistan Times* during the period from 1947–48.[14] It supplements these letters with oral histories from partition survivors—conducted by students as part of a history course—to explore discourses about refugees produced around the time of partition. *Pakistan Times* was founded by the Punjabi leftist politician Mian Iftikharuddin and was popular among the English-educated upper and middle classes. Despite its leftist and progressive credentials, it gave space to a wide variety of religious and patriotic opinions, which were likely to be even stronger in more conservative newspapers. The letters under analysis were written both by refugees and locals. However, as this chapter will point out, these categories of refugees and locals were not mutually exclusive as many "resettled refugees" also took over the role of the local hosts for later refugees. Moreover, while some letter writers stated whether they were a refugee or a local, others did not clarify and only signed off with their name and location. Regardless of the letter writer's status, both refugees and locals produced discourses about resettlement, religiosity, and belonging in tandem, at times in unity and at times in conflict with each other. The editorial space showcased this plurality and richness of refugee voices and narratives. Letters to the editor became a form of public sphere where refugees and locals interacted, where problems were underscored and "solved," where ideologies were disseminated, and where, according to Anderson's concept of "imagined communities," constructs of Pakistani identity, citizenship, and the nation were shaped.

This chapter argues that letters to the editor in the *Pakistan Times* point to a dynamic tension that existed at the heart of refugee resettlement in Punjab. These letters, when examined together, show the unfolding of a complex process of citizen-making. On the one hand, discourses of pan-Islamism, Muslim brotherhood, and the Islamic concept of *hijrah* (migration) were inextricably tied to volunteerism, refugee relief, and cooperation between refugees and locals. This intertwined dialectic between the refugees and locals produced unique ideas about what it meant to be a good "Pakistani Muslim citizen." On the other hand, these discourses were undercut by a parallel reality, in which constraints of space and resources led to contested relations between locals and refugees, especially at the time of evacuee property allotments. This contradiction between religious ideas of good citizenship and material anxieties reigned large in the narratives of Punjabi refugees' resettlement post-partition.

Religious Morality, Refugee Relief, and Muslim Brotherhood

To begin, it is important to ask who is a refugee and who is a local? Deconstructing these categories through oral accounts of refugees reveals that the boundaries between the two were, in fact, quite blurred as partition refugee migrations occurred in phases. Families that had political information and the means to move earlier, migrated to West Punjab in the months preceding partition. These refugees came at a time when resources were more freely available, so they resettled relatively quickly. In some cases, families sent one member of the family, such as a son or brother, to Pakistan to scout for jobs and accommodation ahead of their migration. The rest of the family followed after partition was announced. It was eventually these early refugees—the ones who came before their families—who took on the role of hosts and helped their families resettle. These refugees-cum-hosts would also appeal for help on behalf of subsequent, underprivileged refugees who were languishing in refugee camps.[15]

Refugee experiences were also deeply mediated by class, wealth, and social connections.[16] A recurring theme in many narratives is how, after months of being shifted around in refugee camps, refugees would come across an acquaintance holding a critical position such as that of a *patwari* [local accountant/authority] or a "collector" who eventually helped them out.[17] Knowing the right people at the right time, therefore, facilitated bureaucratic processes. Interestingly, these interactions between the "everyday state" and citizens also blurred the boundaries between the categories of "state," "refugees," and "locals." Refugees who had worked with the Muslim League before independence now worked with the state machinery after moving to Pakistan to coordinate and facilitate refugee relief activities there. I draw on personal family history here with the example of my great-grandfather who worked for the Muslim League, was a refugee from Jullunder, and after resettling his family in West Punjab, supervised protests with other refugees from Jullunder, alongside being president of the District Muhajireen Committee in Lyallpur to secure refugee rights.[18] The Punjab Police Files mention him and numerous other Muslim League workers who, as resettled refugees, were advocating and fighting for the rights of fellow refugees from their districts, and were consequently seen as subversive workers of the Muslim League.[19] All this is to say, it was these refugees, already resettled or connected with government processes, who often took over the role of becoming the spokespersons for other refugees, and partook in activities of hosting and advocacy. The division between refugees and locals often broke down or blurred in this context.

The letters to the editor found in newspapers then showcased a plethora of opinions, often articulated in a religious language to urge citizens to engage in social service for refugees. These appeals highlighted the Muslim-ness of the refugees, the religious motivation of their *hijrat* (migration), and notions of Islamic brotherhood to foster narratives of volunteerism. Government officials and religious leaders took the lead in urging for "religious" volunteer work at refugee camps. For example, the cleric Maulvi Abdul Karim moved to West Punjab from Gurdaspur and led refugee protests and appealed to locals to help refugees with food and clothes.[20] Maulana Mawdudi, leader of the religious political party Jama'at Islami, also played a prominent role at this time. Mawdudi's appeal, published in *The Pakistan Times*, was interesting because of his explicit disavowal of any state-building motivations in the name of "pure" religious motivations. He insisted that those who apply to volunteer to help refugees should be "gifted with fellow-feeling," should have "no other motive but that of pleasing the Creator" and that "for such a help God will reward them and his Reward is enough."[21] According to his conception then, religious duty was separate from patriotism, and the goal was not even about easing the refugees' plight but about pleasing God.

Similarly, the rhetoric of other letters was also couched in religiosity. Letters that equated the Indian Muslims' migration with the *hijrat* to Madinah offered resettlement-related suggestions using historical and religious precedent. One letter from a Lahore resident said:

> This is not the first occasion that a calamity has befallen the Muslim nation. We should always take a lesson from our Holy Prophet … During the Hijrat, the Holy Prophet (peace and blessing be on him) distributed all the Mohajirs [migrants] by entrusting one Mohajir to each family of Ansars. Similar steps should be taken [now] and every family … should feed one Mohajir … In cases of families of Mohajirs consisting of more than one member, the charge of the family should be entrusted collectively to a group of families.[22]

Additionally, some letters also creatively suggested ways to assist the refugees while placing them within a religious pretext. For instance, one anonymous letter urged Muslims to take inspiration from philanthropic activities that local Punjabis had engaged in during World War II, such as opening free canteens for leaving or returning soldiers. However, the letter argued that the present plight of Muslim refugees was more acute and that the "sacrifices made by these refugees are far greater and nobler than the soldiers who fought in the last War."[23] Thus, there was a strong sense that Pakistan was created as a religious duty, and this entailed a greater responsibility on Muslims to come to the aid of refugees.

Another element present in the letters was emphasis on frugality, with religious undertones. People urged one another to cut back on purchasing and consuming seemingly luxury items, which were seen not only as insensitive given the plight of the refugees, but also as "un-Islamic." For instance, one anonymous letter emphasized that people should reduce their cigarette consumption and contribute surplus money toward the refugees instead. Likewise, a debate revolved around movie tickets, whereby people argued over whether cinema houses should be closed for being a waste of money and moral values. It was argued that the money should instead be paid to the national donation funds for refugees. A Lahori resident retorted to this suggestion saying that the closure of cinemas would not benefit the refugees in any way. The writer suggested that the price of cinema tickets should instead be increased with a tax—to be called Refugee Tax—to go toward the government-run Refugee Fund.[24] Similarly, a letter from a local suggested that since there were approximately 40 lakh families in West Pakistan, every family must accept one refugee for lodging and food and that "if there is to be any feast, an equal number of refugees, if not more, must also be fed."[25]

On the other hand, complaints of malpractice were made by some refugees who accused other refugees of engaging in opportunistic behavior. For example, one refugee in Rawalpindi protested against other refugees from Amritsar who were complicit in "anti-social and un-Islamic activities"—that is, engaging in black market activities and collaborating with local shopkeepers to create price increases. Here too, moral reprimands were made that such malpractices are "harmful for our poor Muslim brethren," "cannot be tolerated for a minute in our Islamic State" and are "lowering their hard-won reputation in the eyes of their brethren who up till now respect them as brave and chivalrous fighters of Islam."[26]

It is important to note not only the socio-political content of these letters but also the religious language of their articulation. These letters and the ideas they produced were not just driven by the anxiety to rehabilitate refugees; they were also formulating and molding ideas about citizenship in the new country. In this regard, a distinct notion of the ideal Pakistani Muslim citizen was propagated. It was this ideal citizen who was to contribute to the nation by helping fellow Muslim refugees.

Nation-Building and Active Citizenship: Building the Muslim Community

The issue of partition refugees led to prolific discussions in the editorial space regarding volunteerism and ideal citizenship. One sees the prevalence of republican and collectivist notions of citizenship—similar to the ones in India at this time—whereby the common good was emphasized to bring about social cohesion after partition.[27] However, in the Pakistani case, one can see how republican values were accompanied by an emphasis on "religious duty" as the prime motivator. Needless to say, the early years after independence were an intellectually productive period when newly decolonized subjects were trying to evolve unique ideas about how they perceived their relations with the state and the community at large. Simultaneously these conceptions of citizenship were also drawing from a global and historical context.

One of these ideas revolved around "active citizenship," in line with global trends in the twentieth century. From the United States and Great Britain to China and Japan, there was a deep focus on the physical aspect of "good" citizenship: "building character" and "training the mind and body," particularly of the youth, to serve the nation. Similarly in pre-partition India, Hindu anxieties about "population decline" and "national efficiency" had led to the building of special gymnasiums and exercise centers to improve the physical health of young boys.[28] Physically fit boys were seen as crucial contributors toward social work and political activity to help the Indian nation, such as during Gandhi's mass campaigns of the 1920s and 1930s. Similarly, youth participation was prominently seen during the "pan-Islamic" Khilafat Movement, a political protest launched by Indian Muslims in 1919 to restore the Ottoman caliphate. Various societies sprung up to garner public participation, gather donations, and engage in pressure group activities to negotiate with the British.[29] Hence, in both Hindu and Muslim conceptions, being a good citizen meant being "able-bodied" and contributing vigorously to social causes.

The colonial state in India also had its own beliefs around "good citizenship," and as we will see later in this chapter, these influenced post-colonial ideas of citizenship in Pakistan. Firstly, the legitimacy of the empire was a primary concern for the British so good citizenship was deeply tied to loyalty and political obligation. These notions of citizenship can be observed in the colonial pedagogical enterprise in which obedience, discharging one's duties, and loyalty were important pre-requisites for an ideal citizen who could claim his or her rights only after that. Secondly, education played an important role for the empire such that it would "inspire the Indian youth with higher ideas as to his social and political duties and a truer sense of what he owed to his present government."[30] Thirdly, a moral rather than political language was used to emphasize how children must obey parents, students must obey teachers, shopkeepers must be honest with customers, and so on, so that the government can then discharge its duties toward the people. "Cooperation" was the core characteristic of good citizenship. Fourthly, the colonial state saw the Indian people's attachments to family, caste, and religion as divisive. Thus, Indians were urged to unify across caste and class differences if they wanted to embody the conception of the ideal citizen and nation. Finally, the chronology of good citizenship and nationhood was also important such that it was necessary to adopt the "qualities" of a good citizen before being granted the status of an independent nation.[31] Thus, notions of good, active citizenship were defined in colonial accounts in a way that aided the legitimacy of colonial rule.

In the post-colonial Pakistani state, the same qualities of loyalty, duty, and responsibility were emphasized for nation-building and state consolidation. For example, letters making appeals to the people to help fellow refugees continued to emphasize the language of "moral duty." Such letters would often end with a statement such as, "We must not expect the government to do everything and must not shirk our own individual responsibility as free citizens and as Muslims"[32] and, "We have achieved Pakistan. Let us prove that we are worthy of this freedom. Let us act like the citizens of free and progressive States by making a concerted effort to relieve the sorrows and suffering of our brethren."[33]

Moreover, instead of a universalist interpretation of citizenship that cuts across local caste, ethnic, and class divisions, the building blocks of Pakistani citizenship were ostensibly religious. Many letters justified the need for locals to help refugees by emphasizing a sense of religious brotherhood which would cut across class differences. One letter urged rich locals to invite refugees who are living out on the streets to live in their homes. This, the writer believed, would "help in bridging the gulf between the ruling classes and the ruled" and that if "we approach it in the name of Islamic brotherhood we may succeed in resolving many of our complexes." The writer asserted that "human life should be valued over everything else and no man should feel happy unless he can honestly claim to have saved one Muslim life."[34] The virtue of helping refugees hence played a key role in the construction of nation and citizenship in the nascent post-colonial state.

The idea of active citizenship was also explicitly gendered. The ideal Muslim male was supposed to be given physical training to protect the Muslim communities, especially refugee communities, from attack. In October 1947, a discussion circulated regarding the creation of "Home Guards" by making use of ex-servicemen from the British-Indian army from World War II. It was suggested that "given the necessary weapons and proper organization," derived from the expertise of ex-servicemen, armed Muslim villagers would be "more than a match for [violent] raiders."[35] A letter from a Lahori resident suggested that with coordination between the Police and Home Guards, the Pakistani state would "have at its disposal a well-disciplined force of volunteers who will become a bulwark of national defence." He further added that "This will also be a beginning of making every able-bodied Muslim into a soldier and … we can easily have two million or more soldiers of Islam."[36] Thus, masculine ideas of physical fitness were propagated so that through their volunteerism, Pakistani men would protect the Muslim refugees and villages under attack. Another Lahori resident suggested that the Pakistani State should "set up national clinics to look after the health of the younger generation and establish gymnasium in large numbers for the physical training of the future army that will defend the honor of the nation."[37] Letters to the editor therefore connected religiosity, volunteerism, and armed defense. In this

sense, volunteerism was not always driven by values of cooperation and harmony, but also by religious revivalism that expanded the space for religious violence and antagonism.

Likewise, women were urged to play a more prominent role in nurturing positions such as performing relief work in refugee camps. Before independence, women had been strongly encouraged to take part in political activism and support the men in the nationalist movement. After independence, women were encouraged to switch from the political sphere to social work. Women leaders such as Fatima Jinnah, Begum Ra'ana Liaqat, and Begum Shahnawaz mobilized their networks to quickly create organizations such as the Women's Relief Committee and the Pakistan Voluntary Service. These organizations provided first aid, distributed food, clothing, and blankets, and looked after the well-being of trauma-stricken refugees in camps.[38] They also regularly visited hospitals to provide clothes and nursing help. The maternal instincts of women were appealed to repeatedly in newspaper letters suggesting that "every family must provide a quilt for the refugees, to be distributed by the women's branch of the Muslim League"[39] and that provision of "winter clothes should primarily be their [women's] concern. Let the women of Pakistan prove that they are good managers." Distribution of clothes, quilts, and food was therefore seen as an important duty of "patriotic" women. However, the passion and zeal of women volunteers is evident from the fact that they jumped to action even before official state authorities did. These women's contributions to social work not only provided immense relief to refugees in camps but they also solidified the image of an ideal Pakistani woman, as one who served her Muslim community through social reproductive work.

Additionally, following colonial ideas regarding the significance of citizenship for the youth, the education sector was heavily emphasized for nation-building and volunteer work. One letter urged that students must display exceptional sacrificial spirit for the cause of the nation, especially medical students who possessed the requisite medical knowledge to work in refugee camps. Another refugee asserted,

> [The] potential powers of the student and teaching community should not be under-judged but utilised without delay. The work needs whole time devotion and loss of one year's studies. This is no loss as compared to the great work that would thus be accomplished.[40]

Another letter highlighted that the education department should contribute to refugee work as students and teachers imbibed human values that would be necessary in nursing-related work.[41]

In yet another discussion, multiple letters engaged with the issue of compensating university students involved in relief work. Some urged that incentives must be provided to students who are taking their time out for volunteer work.[42] However, this was critiqued particularly when West Punjab University decided to award free degrees to students engaging in refugee work using the precedent of awarding war degrees during World War II. One critic argued,

> The analogy of war degrees is altogether irrelevant in this case. It is forgotten that it was no more than an imperialist bait to enlist as many Indian students as possible to fight for them in the last War. At that time it was definitely a boon for the students because it suited their slavish mentality. Now circumstances have altogether changed. We are a free nation now. Our students should not be considered so low, as to work for their nation only when they are offered free degrees.

The letter fiercely argued that offering free degrees would mean that "not a single student who could help his suffering Millat [nation] in this hour of need" would do so "without hope of reward … In other words, it would be a blot on the fair name of the Muslim nation."[43]

What emerges through these discourses is the model of the ideal Pakistani citizen. Here, republican values of duty toward the Muslim nation gained primacy over the individual rights of the citizens. This emphasis on duty, service, and brotherhood was also believed to provide a unifying framework for the Muslim community despite differentiations along class, ethnic, and caste lines. The Pakistani man was

to financially contribute toward the refugee cause; he also had to be proficient in thwarting any armed attacks on vulnerable Muslim communities. The Pakistani woman was to be trained in the specifics of nursing and first aid and was required to possess the maternal spirit to immediately volunteer to help the refugees. The youth, in addition, were to take a leading role as dutiful and patriotic citizens ready to sacrifice their time to serve the nation through social work. In all of this, service, cooperation, honest dealings, frugality, and hospitality with fellow Muslims and refugees—under the framework of Muslim brotherhood—were the prime values that defined the good Pakistani Muslim citizen.

The Other Side: Conflict and Competition

The newspaper appeals and discourses of cooperation and Muslim brotherhood did achieve success in the form of local citizens voluntarily helping refugees in exceptional ways. Oral accounts of refugees speak about how, despite inadequate facilities, corruption, and often apathetic attitudes of government officials, locals rushed forward to help. One railway employee narrated how, as trains upon trains would arrive from India, local volunteers would arrive at the stations to help even before the government officials could reach them. Another spoke about a midwife facilitating the delivery of a relative's baby in the refugee camp.[44] Yet another expressed gratitude toward a local stranger who offered their entire family rent-free lodging in his flat while the neighbors provided food and company to help the family resettle. Oral narratives of the refugees made the same references as in the newspaper appeals—that the locals took on the role of the *ansaar* taking inspiration from Islamic history.[45] Still others made repeated statements about the Muslim nation being "one" at that time.

At the same time, these narratives are also accompanied by stories of exploitation and hostility, especially once the refugees moved out of the camps and started settling in new areas on assigned evacuee property. These properties were abandoned by evacuating Hindus and Sikhs and were allotted by the government to the refugees in lieu of what they had left behind in pre-partition India. While the attitudes of locals were hospitable during relief work in camps, they changed to hostility particularly at the stage of property allotment and resettlement of refugees. At this point, fear of a scarcity of jobs, housing, and resources generated narratives of competition along with social, political, and economic anxieties. There is now ample research that shows how evacuee property was illegally appropriated by locals and influential politicians. The Ministry for Refugees and Rehabilitation recorded that more than 50 percent of the abandoned houses and 36 percent of the shops were illegally taken over by locals once they were vacated by evacuees.[46] Moreover, areas where there was a greater competition for resources inevitably led to greater conflict between refugees and the locals. For example, in Gujranwala city, where for every two evacuees there were three incoming refugees, accommodation was scarce.[47] Chaudhry Jaleel Khan, a refugee from Delhi, narrates in his autobiography how influential locals illegally occupied evacuee property and tipped off the local *patwaris* to hide the property papers and prevent allotment to refugees. Hence, the city saw the rise of numerous illegal squatter settlements in which property-less refugees took shelter.[48] Nevertheless, refugee narratives also delineate how the refugees persisted in protesting against corrupt practices and in some cases, would win the fight against the *patwari*.[49]

In this context, refugees raised appeals against the unfair attitudes of the locals and the government through newspaper letters, a stark contrast to the narratives of harmony discussed earlier. They complained of employment positions and vacant businesses being occupied by locals instead of being allocated to the dispossessed refugees. They reported rampant corruption, nepotism, and bureaucratic delays in getting jobs.[50] Others complained of discrimination. A series of letters also protested against restrictions placed on refugee lawyers who were not being granted licenses to continue their practice after moving to West Punjab. Here again, the appeal was not based on a demand for rights but on the fact that these lawyers should be listened to as they had graduated from Aligarh University, whose contributions to the Pakistan Movement were considered paramount.[51] Another letter on the same issue lamented that the existing rules made refugee lawyers ineligible for enrolment in the West Punjab High

Court "even after the creation of the Pakistan Dominion," which it argued should "in all propriety and justice, be a haven for all afflicted Muslims."[52] Letters also complained of opportunist individuals, especially local shopkeepers, who were creating exorbitant price hikes on essential commodities and creating difficulties for the refugees. These refugee complaints are corroborated by other sources too, especially the Punjab Police Abstract Files 1948, which reported almost daily how refugees organized protests in the various cities of Punjab.

Similarly, some letters from the locals also undercut ideas of cooperation by venting their anxieties of being overrun by the refugees. One letter openly announced that the refugee influx from India should be stopped and that Muslims on the other side of the border should accept Indian citizenship.[53] Another lamented how evacuee commercial and business establishments were being distributed entirely to incoming refugees with little business experience. This letter argued that the "original population of West Punjab" was already "backward in literacy, business and industry" and that the government's policy of allotting business properties to refugees would lead to the rise of a class of refugees who would be the leading industrialists and mill-owners of Pakistan while the "original population would remain in the backwaters."[54] Scarcity of resources, whether real or perceived, led to strained relations between the locals and refugees and provided an alternative reality to discourses of brotherhood.

What one sees in these letters to the editor is a plethora of competing and conflicting opinions. While refugee letters that highlighted malpractices and grievances evidence a disruption of the ideal citizen category, they often again used the moral framework to highlight why the individuals—often called "enemies of the people"—were not in line with established ideals of the nation. In its entirety, the corpus of letters in *The Pakistan Times* also underscores the duality and tension that existed at the heart of Punjabi refugee resettlement: while locals extended exceptional hospitality to refugees when they were in camps, both materially and discursively, this welcome was often disrupted once refugees started resettling in new houses and jobs in the city and material constraints took precedence.

Conclusion

The picture that emerges is, firstly, of the significance of letters to the editor as a narrative genre that displays a multitude of refugee voices. As seen in the discussion, refugees used this medium to articulate the difficulties they were facing and communicated the ways in which they could be helped by the government and local communities. While other narrative forms such as autobiographies and oral stories focus more on refugee experiences, editorial letters were brief, purposeful, and very much oriented toward problem-solving and claims-making. For the historian, this is an indispensable archive that stretches the imagination in thinking about the scale of logistical and practical challenges that arise during the process of refugee resettlement.

Secondly, this genre gives specific insights about Punjabi refugees' experiences. The plethora of contrasting opinions seen in the newspaper letters prevents us from homogenizing and de-individualizing refugee narratives and experiences. Moreover, combined with oral accounts, they problematize our stereotypical image of partition refugees as weak and helpless. While refugees did remain at the mercy of what was happening to them, they were simultaneously loud, vociferous, and displayed astonishing agency. Some had the means to foresee the situation before partition and to make the necessary preparations to facilitate their move. No doubt, some refugees also climbed up the social ladder because of the gains made after partition.[55] At the same time, we can also problematize the strict divisions between locals, refugees, and the state. We have seen how there were overlaps between these categories such that people often occupied multiple identities at the same time. A refugee or a migrant who moved earlier subsequently adopted the role and tone of a local while receiving later groups of refugees, as can be seen from some refugee letters. This also underlines how refugee discourses cannot be dissociated from discourses produced by the locals; both were influencing, evolving with, and speaking to each other.

Despite the difficulty with categorizations and definitions, one does see a particular trend in middle-class Punjabi discourses regarding the heavy use of moral language while making appeals and complaints.

Appeals used religious rhetoric to implore people to unite and volunteer to help. Complaints employed religious reasoning to emphasize how exploitative activities were un-Islamic and against the established ideology of the nation. These narratives of imagined unity and religious camaraderie did provide a semblance of cohesion, and despite the horrors of partition, mitigated the blow that Muslim refugees received upon reaching Pakistan. These narratives were undercut, however, when material anxieties took over at the time of evacuee property allotment. These opposing forces of religious motivation and economic considerations created a dynamic tension in the locals' behaviors. It is this duality that is also expressed by refugees in their narratives.

Letters to the editor were not just a venting space for the refugees. In fact, as this chapter has shown, they also shaped discourses that constructed the ideal citizen in the nascent Pakistani nation. Borrowing from colonial ideas, and building on them using religious metaphors, the ideal Pakistani was loyal to the state, cooperative with fellow Muslims, and ready to sacrifice his all for social work. Such a citizen was to be mindful of the ideological basis of the creation of the country and to fulfill that aspiration, playing their part in creating a safe space for the Muslim refugees from India. This narrative of duty helped the new country in its nation-building stage. It also, however, remained silent on non-Muslim communities. Although some letters raised concerns about the un-Islamic nature of retaliation against non-Muslim communities,[56] the conversation around this was minimal. To this extent, the religious discourses had the effect of excluding certain populations from understandings of the ideal Pakistani citizenship. How those ideas have evolved to shape discourses of ideal citizenship in the present day is a topic for further research. In sum, this chapter has shown how the discourses around refugee resettlement in the early years after Pakistan's independence had a significant bearing on how the citizens imagined their role and position in the newly decolonized state.

Notes

1 Purushotham, *Raj to Republic*, 291.
2 See Sherman, "From Subjects to Citizens"; Chatterji, "South Asian Histories of Citizenship."
3 See Zamindar, *The Long Partition*, 7 for a discussion on using "displacement" rather than "migration" to describe the movement of refugees of that time.
4 See Talbot, *Pakistan: A New History*; Raza, "The Illusory Promise of Freedom."
5 I am grateful to Ali Usman Qasmi and Yasmeen Arif for their valuable suggestions during the writing of this chapter. Any remaining errors are my own.
6 For discussions on the idea of Pakistan, see Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman*; Devji, *Muslim Zion*; Dhulipala, *Creating a New Medina*.
7 See Talbot, "The 1946 Punjab Elections" and Gilmartin, "Partition, Pakistan, and South Asian History: In Search of a Narrative."
8 Dhulipala, *Creating a New Medina*, 360–1.
9 Brass, "The Partition of India and Retributive Genocide in the Punjab," 78–9.
10 Government of Pakistan, *The Journey to Pakistan: A Documentation on Refugees of 1947*.
11 Waseem, "Partition, Migration, and Assimilation," 204–10.
12 Talbot and Singh, *The Partition of India,* 143.
13 Waseem, "Partition, Migration, and Assimilation," 211.
14 For refugees in Sindh, see Ansari, "Everyday Expectations of the State during Pakistan's Early Years."
15 See Khan, *Jidd-o-juhad-e-Hiyaat* [Life Struggles].
16 Talbot and Singh, *The Partition of India,* 105.
17 Zahid Aleem, interviewed by Muhammad Hassan, November 14, 2020.
18 Punjab Police Secret Abstracts of Intelligence (PPSAI) 1948, para 215.
19 See *PPSAI* 1948.
20 *PPSAI*, February 7, 1948.
21 "Maulana Maudoodi's Appeal to Pakistani Muslims," *Pakistan Times*, October 7, 1947.
22 Ali, "The Deluge," *Pakistan Times*, October 11, 1947.
23 "Refugee Canteen," *Pakistan Times*, October 23, 1947.
24 Jeelani, "Refugee Tax," *Pakistan Times*, October 7, 1947.
25 "Desperate Remedies," *Pakistan Times*, January 6, 1947.
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20

IRAQ AND THE WORK OF THE FRAME

Angela Naimou

Jamal Penjweny's photography series *Saddam is Here* (2009–2010) features people in everyday scenes in Baghdad—at home, in a dentist's office, working in the butcher shop, on the street, next to rubble, at a market stall—holding a paper printout of Saddam Hussein's face over theirs.[1] A lone figure in army fatigues crouches as he holds Saddam's face over his own; three seated men socializing in dishdashas form a trio of Saddam faces; a woman sits at the edge of a bed or bench, a Saddam face held as if floating above her red lace lingerie two-piece and socked feet, next to the figurine of a skeleton swigging liquor. The 12 photos spotlight the incongruities between Saddam's monochrome portrait and its surrounding full-color frame of life in the capital.

Each composition in the series plays on the picture within a picture. This portrait of Saddam, dressed in military shirt, head in three-quarter profile, face turned slightly forward, with eyes gazing toward the space just above your own, was printed widely in the tightly controlled Iraqi newspapers of his presidency. Penjweny recontextualizes the image so that it indirectly mocks Saddam's obsession with self-framing even as his affective power resurfaces in the life-size paper mask, reasserting Saddam's presence in everyday life.[2]

In photography, framing is the technique of focusing the viewer's eye on one part of the image (its subject) by blocking other parts with something in the scene. The Iraqi subjects in each photo are in this way framed by a paper Saddam that blocks their actual faces from view, directing our eyes to the rest of the scene. But the object used for the framing technique is itself a visual focal point, a notorious face inside a white margin positioned almost exactly where the living subjects' faces are, despite not being visible. The displayed face of Saddam and the hidden face of a Baghdad resident become at once the embedded subject and the frame of the other. Saddam is presented as the conceptual frame for the lives of the Iraqi subjects in the photos, while the scenes of their everyday post-Saddam lives visually enframe the reproduction of his face.

Commenting on its own embeddedness within a history of frames, the series plays on the idea of the body politic and on Saddam's assertion as the premier subject of visual cultural production, to be seen and praised not only in newspapers but also in framed portraits on walls, as statuary in public squares, and as celebrity leader on television. Saddam's portrait provides a metonymic visual cue for a regime that spectacularized internal displacement and mass expulsion campaigns as the strength of sovereignty. Indeed, throughout Iraq's history, "forced migrations from Iraq have been closely tied to projects of state-making and efforts to assert sovereignty, govern a diverse country, control and discipline groups that are seen as a threat, and silence oppositional political movements."[3] In Penjweny's series, Saddam's image as national sovereign transforms into an echo of the target, a mask masquerading as all of Iraq, and the shadow-lines of Saddam's regime as the framework of Iraqi life, its parameters being the conditions of possibility that last so much longer than Saddam.[4]

Figure 20.1   Jamal Penjweny, image from *Saddam Is Here*, photographs on paper, 23 ⅓ in × 31 ½ in (60 × 80 cm), 2009–2010 (used with permission of the artist).

This chapter asks how framing operates as an analytic and aesthetic challenge to the global border regime in visual art by Jamal Penjweny and ethnographic narrative by Zainab Saleh. Enframing the border and embedding the global framework in everyday life, they theorize the border regime not in the narrow sense of its involvement in the act of migration but in its embedded function as a troubling framework of people's lifeworlds, interfering in their leaving and residing, living and dying, thinking and making. Recent literature by Iraqi writers in the world has brilliantly reimagined the frame structure as a way to theorize borders and narration for life and death, as linked back to the multilingual collection of stories within the frame story of Shahrazad in *Alf Layla wa Layla* (*One Thousand and One Nights*).[5] In this chapter, however, my examples come from Penjweny's and Saleh's uses of frame and embedment in photography, documentary, and ethnography as genres for reframing the border regime.[6]

Trinh T. Minh-Ha describes theory as "a constant questioning of the framing of consciousness—a practice capable of informing another practice […] in a reciprocal challenge."[7] The technique of panning, for example, prompts viewers to question the work of the frame: "each pan sets into relief the rectangular delineation of the frame," thus marking the unmarked frames of dominant documentary and ethnographic modes.[8] The works examined in this chapter theorize the border regime as a generative assemblage of marked and unmarked frames, built along the ruts of empire, producing categories and identities through "a regime of movement," and registering its operations of accumulation, extraction, expulsion, and confinement onto embodied human subjectivities.[9]

Borders "are the infrastructure of a durable racism and oppression" that people without papers—the "illegal" travelers—transgress, often along the material routes made for colonial extraction.[10] Reflecting on ways of seeing the border from "the other side," Shahram Khosravi traces a border infrastructure of pierced steel planks and railways, powered by ideas of "racial time" and the deportability of refugees and migrants. Along the Baghdad-Berlin railways, built to transport oil, people traveling without papers

from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Iran repurpose it as a migratory route, interfering with the border regime that functions to steal their time, enframe, or expel them. Their interaction with borders changes "an infrastructure of empire" into "an infrastructure of resistance."[11]

But those who do not migrate are also interacting with the border regime as it is embedded in everyday life, whether in Berlin or Baghdad. One goal of the chapter is to dwell on the multidirectional work of the border regime as an active frame, extending itself in ways that generate new relations and convergences for Iraqi lifeworlds. Just as refugee narratives may not involve actual migration, narratives that theorize the global border regime of international law and its effects on embodied subjectivities need not involve the crossing of an international boundary.

In producing art while continuing to reside in Iraq or Iraqi Kurdistan (as Penjweny does) and in narrating the movement of life across the border system (as Saleh does), each theorizes the border as embedded in everyday life and as part of the coloniality of the international order. Their work is part of broader intellectual and artistic challenges to imagine the conditions for living despite the violence and abandonment enacted through border regimes, whose framing practices produce legal categories to control and exploit mobility and immobility on a global scale. Such art and thought on the border regime activate a relationship between frame and embedded positions, a method of "critical juxta-posing" that brings together "seemingly different and disconnected events, communities, histories, and spaces to illuminate what would otherwise not be visible about the contours, contents, and afterlives of war and empire."[12]

Flexible and conceptually complex, the frame narrative structure continues to be an active site of narrative experimentation on the border regime, where links between life, death, and narration get woven and frayed. In one sense, the border has been so overdetermined by the metaphor of the frame that it may seem like this approach would only reproduce a reified border as the inert container or lines of a nation—the same may be said for a discussion of "embedded narratives" and post–2003 Iraq. Yet, a fuller consideration of the frame as form and as function understands that it always works in a trans-formative relation to the material being framed, inserted, or embedded.[13]

Attending to the work of the frame in refugee narratives can become an aesthetic practice that challenges the conceptual grammars of border systems in international law. The border as a method for dividing, multiplying, and managing lives is also a method for reaffirming the legitimacy of the inter-national legal order. As international law gets embedded into people's lives and memory, the border multiplies what gets recognized as the frame and the enframed. Refugee narratives that experiment with the work of the frame can throw into question the unjust parameters of legal refuge, by pulling the coloniality of the contemporary international order into the narrative as an active framework for understanding contemporary migration and displacement.

This chapter examines forms of Iraqi cultural and knowledge production that scramble accounts of the border as frame and the person as its insert. Tracking the embeddedness of the frame itself, these narratives also engage in a project of reframing the border. In such a project, unlikely subjects—such as Saddam's face, the citizens who outlived him, the dead that were lost to him, and the refugees who fled him—enframe our understanding of the international legal order.

Marked and Unmarked Frames

At their most basic, frames are made of parts joined together to enclose or to support something: pic-ture frames embellish, protect, and direct our attention to the "insert"; corporeal frameworks provide form and mobility to our bodies; conceptual frames establish parameters and order in the production of knowledge. As boundary, conceptual frame, and corporeal framework, the global border regime is also embedded within the framework of people's lives. Like Saddam's portrait, the border serves as a parameter embedded within an international border system that organizes conditions for life and death through categories of illegalized and legalized migration, across spaces of confinement and refuge.

The international border system depends on multiple sleights-of-hand in its shuffling between borders as the frame of the state and borders as the framework of an international legal order, in which sovereign states exercise the right to manage the mobility of humans and goods. Countering a grounding fiction of international law—that states make the international law they obey or disobey—Luis Eslava and Sundhya Pahuja reveal the work of the state as a frame concealing the international legal order and its "world-making work." As they put it, "rather than international law being a creation of the state, making and remaking the state is a project of international law."[14] The myth that international law was created to enforce norms between states disavows the civilizational development schemes that framed criteria for self-determination of mandated territories like Iraq, even as the global economic system had already established the postcolony's financial indebtedness and dependency on industrial production of "center nations."[15] Bordering practices create and frame refugee migration as if it were an exceptional form of migration, even as the border regime organizes the governance of "ungovernable life" as statecraft and migration management regime.[16] As an ordering regime "assembling and assembled through racial-capitalist accumulation and colonial relations," border operations exceed a national frame and go unmarked.[17]

Imperial projects have been long at work in making and destroying the state of Iraq, even before the 1958 Free Officers' military coup overthrew the British-installed monarchy and declared an independent republic. A brief sketch of twentieth-century Iraq border history may be helpful here. Ottoman-controlled provinces were invaded by Britain in World War I initially as a direct colonial project that then became part of the retooled imperial project of development through the newly formed League of Nations Mandate System. This system divided administrative control between imperial powers for former Ottoman and German-controlled territories, categorizing them along a racial-political axis of lower to higher stages of development or "readiness" for self-rule. Iraq, mandated territory constituted as a monarchy under British protection in 1921, became an independent state in 1932. British, U.S., and Iraqi professionals launched the development project organized by contemporaneous theories of human, social, and political development no less than the simple project of control. The British spoke of guiding and preparing Iraqis for nationhood while innovating mass bombing campaigns to exert "control without occupation."[18]

The border regime traffics in the interrelationships between mobility, expulsion, refuge, extraction, and containment. As war and insecurity were imposed on people in Iraq through the state and the international legal order since 1990, residents effectively were limited to the options of sheltering in place despite danger; becoming internally displaced in Iraq and Kurdistan, often without the documents needed to access basic services; living without legal status nearby in Iran, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, or Syria, under increasingly difficult or unlivable situations; or, fleeing elsewhere through intricately complex state-international procedures for classifications and conditions of residence, assistance, expulsion, or return.[19] Add to this precarious situation the population of refugee subjects that had been living in Iraq, including stateless Palestinian refugee subjects, and a large number of stateless persons who fall outside the assistance purview of the UNHCR response to the Iraq Situation, a response delayed by several years after the 2003 invasion and itself coordinating between approximately 70 NGOs.[20]

Iraq is unexceptional in perforating the liberal humanitarian frame for refugee narratives. Meanwhile, the longer histories of migration regimes and Iraq are sometimes vacated or minimized in contemporary refugee discourse, tacitly reinforcing the racial concept of a national state beset by sectarianism. Kept to the margins of nationalist narratives have been Iraq's multiracial citizens, its South Asian migrant labor force, and professional class of "foreigners" with temporary or permanent residency since the British colonial schemes under late Ottoman rule through the present post-2003 war and occupation labor apparatus. Historian Stefan Tetzlaff puts this migration history in the context of imperial interventions and changes to the relationship between British-colonial India and the Persian Gulf region, noting colonial Indian migration to Iraq of migrants ranging "from unskilled laborers to policemen and clerks, who had been picked up from a variety of different labor regimes and would be channeled into Iraq by forms of free and unfree migration."[21]

Figured as "vehicles of emancipation" and "containers of 'intractable'" problems, postcolonial states become legal infrastructure for the international order and raw material for colonial, imperial, and liberal developmentalist projects.[22] Iraq outlines a history of frames designed to contain decolonization dreams. The strategic incoherence of migration regimes, overlapping and accumulating, affords their flexibility and scalar fungibility between local, state, national, international, and global. Iraq also closed its borders to its citizens through travel bans, such as the travel ban Iraq began in 1983 that closed the path of exile to Zainab Saleh, her mother, and sister after her father, threatened for his ties to the Iraqi Communist Party, died in 1982, during the Iran-Iraq War.[23] Being on the move is never unbound from staying home, and these experiences inhabit multidirectional time-spaces that confound simple narrative trajectories.

Jamal Penjweny and the Visual Frame

The afterlives of Saddam in *Saddam Is Here* haunt the rifts and the binds between staying in Iraq and leaving. His rule heavily exploited forced emplacement, internal displacement, and expulsion as techniques of state development and control throughout the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), the disappearances of Kurdish people in "prohibited zones," the mass expulsion campaigns against Shi'a families abandoned at the border with Iran, the Gulf War, the mass displacement following the state draining of the marshlands in the South, and the travel bans during the UN-imposed sanctions (1990–2003, certain conditions continuing after the U.S. occupation). Refugee migrations were recognized and coordinated by the UN in some cases. More often, migrations took the form of chronic small leavings variously categorized in law—individual or small family escapes by overstaying visas, illegalized migration, asylum applications, or channels such as family sponsorship laws whose criteria did not involve qualifying evidence of fear. In this sense, the affective afterlives of Saddam inhabit the larger enmeshment of life in the global border regime.

These histories shaped Jamal Penjweny and many in his generation as "a child of war."[24] He describes his time as a child in a refugee camp—what may have been a camp for internally displaced persons in the Kurdish borderlands—his family having fled to Sulaymaniyah from their border village of Penjwen, which saw heavy aerial bombardment and military campaigns in the early years of the Iraq-Iran War. His work is surrounded by the complexity of local conditions of displacement and emplacement—the confinement, abandonment, forced migration, and expulsion that have marked everyday life in Iraq, not to mention the specific colonial histories that produced Kurdish nationalist struggles.

Penjweny describes his art as both "embedded in the history of this country" and "intrinsically linked to [his] experience of living on the border."[25] In contrast to the Iran-Iraq frontiers, where "'the state' becomes almost meaningless"—and where Penjweny has produced other work including video pieces on smuggling—the *Saddam* series, shot in Baghdad, plays on the capital and its overdetermination with a nation-state. Penjweny relocated to Baghdad post-invasion as a photojournalist, situating himself in the capital and at the border, within and outside the frame of his work. Recounting his shift from war reportage to more conceptual documentary art projects, he explains: "I am a part of the reality that my work represents."[26] The *Saddam is Here* series is thus in oblique conversation with Penjweny's art and humanitarian photography projects that are explicitly centered on Syrian refugees and refugee camps, including Iraqi refugees in the camps in Kurdistan along the Iraq–Iran border.

During Saddam's regime, it was as if Saddam were the Iraqi border itself. The ostensible target of war and devastating sanctions, Saddam was made and unmade by the violence-authorizing fictions of state borders and international law, as if he were both the parameter and the structural condition of life, reaching directly into people's spheres of living and dying. Through Saddam's face, the series directs our attention to the embeddedness of the dead within the frames of the living. One condition of possibility for Penjweny's series is of course that Saddam's regime is no longer there to punish them for holding his picture in a potentially deflating way. But the image of Saddam accrues other affective resonances: the visual reminder of political failure, of how the struggle of a generation "was forestalled by the

European- and US-backed reign of Saddam Hussein," and the feeling of anguish for all who lost friends and family to him directly or from chronic stress.[27] Saddam's image is embedded in post-Saddam life.

Embeddedness is a method for bringing the frame into relation. It can evoke the absent-presence of the ghost as a social figure.[28] In Penjweny's series, the embedded figure is a ghost of sovereignty, a nightmare sovereign interrupting a national future. As Penjweny explains the series' origin and intended effect, "Saddam is here. Iraqi society cannot forget him even after his death because some of us still love him and the rest are still afraid of him. … His shadow is still following Iraqi society everywhere." The series title maps Saddam in particular places but also affectively anywhere and everywhere: in each photo, he is held "here," as if on the face and in the headspace of each of the subjects, as if he were both revenant (Saddam is back) and location (you are here).

The visualization of Saddam's presence in the series may belong to what Roland Barthes terms the *studium*, the effects designed by the composition of the photograph and whose application participates in socially available knowledge. But anyone with feeling linked to the image of Saddam's face, and to Iraq, also will feel the charge of what Barthes called the co-presence of *studium*, the *punctum*: the detail in the photo that wounds or pierces a viewer, extending itself to interrupt or break the photograph's visually available meaning. Barthes described the *punctum* as incidental and accidental, exceeding the photographer's intentions, and centered on the subjective experience of being the viewer delighted or pained by an aesthetic experience apparently beyond the photographer's conception: "Certain details may 'prick' me. If they do not, it is doubtless because the photographer has put them there intentionally."[29] The wounding in Penjweny's series is embedded in the making of the series itself: when asking for volunteers to participate in the series, he explained, "Some people insulted me. Others praised me. His portrait always triggered a reaction, though … Saddam is in their mind-set and their daily actions."[30]

Barthes' account of this visceral charge was limited to the act of viewing the image, but it may also open up the process of making the photographs in the series: in the frame are not only subjects but also viewers. Each participant-subject viewed the photo of Saddam before collaborating with it by raising it toward the camera lens—they are subjects but also viewers of the photocopies of a once-ubiquitous public face that retains its wounding subjective force. Something like the *punctum* is doubly there, participating in the scene itself, unpredictable and inaccessible to the camera and the viewers.

Saddam is Here participates in the reworked institutional art frames of Iraq as well. The series initially was featured in the National Pavilion of Iraq at the 55th Venice Biennale (2013), billed as the first pavilion in the Biennale's history to exhibit work by Iraqi artists living and working in Iraq. Curated by Jonathan Watkins, director of the Ikon Gallery in Birmingham (UK), and commissioned by Ruya Foundation director Tamara Chalabi, the Iraqi pavilion was the result of their travels to studios, homes, and galleries throughout Iraq, where they met with artists to curate the pavilion and connect artists to each other and to the international art world despite extreme resource and travel restrictions.[31] Participation in the Biennale can grant a form of "soft power," and indeed the Ruya Foundation participates in shaping post-Saddam narratives of Iraq. Tamara Chalabi is part of a wealthy elite family that shaped Iraqi politics, sometimes notoriously. As the Ruya Foundation curates a vibrant post-Saddam Iraqi national art scene for the art world, works such as *Saddam Is Here* also call into question the promise of a better Iraq after Saddam.

Art infrastructure in Iraq was overwhelmingly government-supported until its collapse in 2003. The theft of artworks and artifacts; the destruction of institutional infrastructure of art education, retention, patronage, and exhibitions; and the effort to survive the daily insecurity of life was compounded by the explicit targeting of artists, teachers, and intellectuals. Baghdad had been a regional hub in the international art world despite Ba'ath party patronage and surveillance of Iraqi artists before the long leaving by artists and collectors during the 1990s sanctions and then the mass displacements clandestinely or through informal arrangements in Jordan, Syria, and elsewhere.

Nada Shabout's assessment of post-2003 Iraqi visual culture as "bifurcated" tracks multiple severances—between artists in Iraq and aesthetic developments in the international art world, between

artists in Iraq and Iraqi artists abroad in various conditions, and also between artists in Iraq post-2003 and their knowledge of the artistic production that had formed a national and largely modernist tradition that flourished in the 1940s–1960s, the high decades of national development in post-Mandate Iraq. The major fork in the path of visual cultural production since the 1990s "has been the disjunction caused by the isolation between Iraqi artists who remained in Iraq and those who developed in exile."[32] Shabout notes that artists who stayed in Iraq relied on the cultural traffic between Iraq and Jordan, "Iraq's portal to the rest of the world," since the sanctions. The result for artists in Iraq was "a detached and decontextualized glimpse of art developments elsewhere," in contrast to exiled artists "who had steady and free access to new developments in global art, both through print and exhibitions." Writing before 2013, Shabout outlines the conditions of mass migration, paired with post-2003 suppression and insecurity, as leading to a vacated modernist, nationalist professional Iraqi art tradition and the rise of "untrained amateur Iraqi artists" whose production is creating multiple new directions. Shabout writes of how the sanctions-imposed isolation of artists within Iraq "made a discourse of unified Iraqi art (Iraqi art inside and outside Iraq) absurd."[33]

The novelist Ali Bader makes a similar observation. Attending a post-2003 conference that brought together Iraqi intellectuals from "inside" and "overseas," he noted that exile no longer means expulsion but rather mobility and stability. Iraqi citizenship, by contrast, meant enforced deprivation and difficulty traveling within one's own borders. Bader writes, "It all seemed to be part of an absurd game of place—nothing more than that—a game that marginalized people by using the idea of place, temporarily dislodging them from their positions, and labeling them as insiders or outsiders."[34] Running throughout these discussions is not only the postcolonial state as prison but the global border regime as a carceral framework differentially confining some and protecting others.

As an artwork embedded in Iraq but circulated internationally from Venice to U.S., UK, and European venues, Penjweny's *Saddam Is Here* reworks tensions within a national framework for collective memory and political possibility. It also enframes a visual culture that had shifted from a project of modernist national and aesthetic development, most famously encapsulated in Jawad Salim's monumental sculpture *Nusb al-Hurriyya* (1961), to one subjected to the pressures of Ba'ath authoritarian aesthetics: bricks inscribed with the leader's name and piled on top of ancient Babylonian ruins, honorific songs, poems, statues, and, of course, portraits.[35]

The international border regime becomes the shadow lines of *Saddam Is Here*, as a conceptual and material framework for the carcerality and classification of postcolonial mobility, belonging, and residence. That frame is reworked as a form of domestic care and grief in Penjweny's short video "Forgotten Women." It explores the relationships between grieving women and their photographs of loved ones: opening with the sound of camera clicks and a series of photographs of a woman and photos of her loved ones killed by warfare, Penjweny's video then follows each woman as she walks around her home spaces, recounting the death stories they carry. The video highlights the process of listening to the women's stories and following them as they move further into their homes to retrieve their photographic evidence to which we bear witness—their loved ones in photos protected by glass and ornate frames, wrapped in layers of protective cloth, tucked into locked cabinets.[36] "Forgotten Women" evokes the gendered patterns of maternal mourning as the invisible counterpose to the masculinist power condensed into the picture of the leader in *Saddam is Here*. "Forgotten Women" and *Saddam is Here* feature enframed photographs of the dead, separate projects that invest each work with stark differences in the affective relationships between living figures who hold pictures of the sovereign and the beloved dead.

Frame Narrative and Zainab Saleh's *Return to Ruin*

The frame narrative inherently establishes a boundary and crosses it. Frame narratives can, like Trinh's cinema, become a praxis of theorizing one's relation to frame-making. Refugee and migration narratives specifically can reconceive of framer and framed beyond inside/outside, insecurity/security, legality/illegality, and so on.[37] Here, I want to turn to Zainab Saleh's *Return to Ruin: Iraqi Narratives of Exile*

and Nostalgia, part of a larger current of recent writing that takes assemblage as a deliberate strategy to highlight the work of the border as frame in Iraqi diasporic lifeworlds. Noting the limitations of the legal category of refugee in the particular context of Iraqi refugee narratives since the 1970s, Saleh tracks the variously knotted together conditions of refuge, expulsion, and confinement, from illegalized migration to the experiences of forced disappearance, imprisonment, deportation, internal and regional displacement, and compulsory immobility within Iraq that continue to affect the experience of being part of a diaspora.

A complex reworking of embeddedness and framing structures Saleh's *Return to Ruin*. Saleh narrates and analyzes the stories of Iraqi exiles in London across generations of upheaval and embeds her autoethnographic narrative reflections between the main chapters. Organized around interviews with multigenerational diasporic subjects in London, Saleh describes the study as a way "to write Iraqis back into [U.S.] imperial history,"[38] even as she and her interview subjects note that they did not interpret U.S. imperial encounters with Iraq as a salient frame for understanding their lives. Indeed, Saleh noted that the anti-war movement she encountered in New York ascribed the frame of U.S. imperialism with so much explanatory force that it could not speak to how imperial and sovereign postcolonial formations have made, remade, and unmade the borders, the racializing legal categories of the *muhasasa* system for factious political life, the conditions of living and dying, and the manifold frames and fractures of sociality in Iraqi lives. As Saleh puts it, Iraqis she met in London and Iraq "felt that we were pawns in an international game of politics and that our lives did not matter."[39]

In this context, U.S. imperialism appears as a frame doubly devoid of life: as she notes, a frame "predicated upon the ongoing erasure of life" in Iraq.[40] As if in counterpoint to Penjweny's visual repetition of Saddam as metonymic frame embedded in everyday life, *Return to Ruin* re-inscribes U.S. imperialism into the diasporic lifeworlds of exilic communities from Iraq living in London. Saleh draws the arcs of her interview subjects' stories into relation with that of her own family, all from within the imperial frame. The book insists on highlighting the imperial framework as lodged in the postcolonial state and embedded, embodied, in specific diasporic subjectivities. Theorizing "return" in the context of South Vietnamese refugee memory, for example, Long T. Bui writes powerfully of the militarization of refugee memory among U.S. Vietnamese American veterans, so that the memory of "losing" South Vietnam became a framework for fighting to "win" the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.[41] Understanding U.S. imperialism as historical assemblage refuses the politics of compartmentalization into discrete frames of war and refugee memory.

While Saleh's stated purpose is to write Iraqis back into the history of U.S. imperialism, the ethnography itself reverses the narrative directionality between frame and embedment: it powerfully reads U.S. imperial history as embedded within Iraqi lives. Saleh constellates five life stories of Iraqi Londoners as a multigenerational history that echoes Iraq's own multigenerational history, tracing as she does exilic subjects active in each generation of Iraqi statehood, from political activism during the monarchy to statehood, revolutions, and the aftermaths of the 2003 invasion. Each chapter provides an account of how an Iraqi diasporic subject understood themselves in relation to Iraq and to the diasporic Iraqi community in London. The first two full-length chapters feature the life story of Hanan, an Iraqi Communist woman active in the anticolonial movements of the 1940s and 1950s whom Saleh narrates as a nostalgic subject, and then the story of the slightly younger Khalil, whose political commitments in Iraq and the London diaspora moved away from Left nostalgia toward pragmatic democratic aims. Saleh connects Hanan and Khalil, who were family acquaintances in Iraq, to her parents' political dreams for Iraq and their involvement with the Iraqi Communist Party.

Saleh, as the ethnographer framing the narration, spotlights herself in relation to the frame and to the embedded stories she narrates and analyzes. These life stories narrate multiple inscriptions of refugee diasporic narratives.[42] For example, Hadjar, from the same generation as Saleh, was deported at seven years old with her family to Iran in the mass expulsions of Shi'a Arabs and Kurds, when the regime in the early 1980s denationalized families that had held Persian nationality during Ottoman

rule, rendering them stateless and their assets seized as internal "Iranian" foreigners and threats to the nation.[43] As Saleh notes, the 1980 resolution allowing *taba'iyya* denaturalization was an adaptation of the Iraqi Nationality Law of 1924, drafted by British officials, and which formally bestowed Iraqi nationality to "all inhabitants of Iraq" but provided for "differential inclusion in the country by categorizing people on the basis of the nationality they held prior to the establishment of the Iraqi state." Passed along the paternal line, Ottoman colonial nationality meant first-class citizenship, and Persian nationality meant second-class citizenship.[44]

Saleh's personal experience surfaces occasionally as life writing that links her to her interview subjects. But it is her lifelong encounters with the border regime that generate the narrational framework of the book. Saleh names the short personal reflections nestled between each chapter "interludes," as in the instrumental compositions that are connective pauses between verses of song. The interludes are breaths of pause or music of a different mode between chapters, but they are also enfolded by the chapters, quietly resonating with the life narratives each chapter presents, fashioning a relationality between her and her interview subjects. The interludes and standard chapters enframe each other, bringing the standard ethnographic narrative chapters on the five Londoners into a relationship of mutual care with the interludes of Saleh's life writing, from childhood to her migration alone to the U.S.

Saleh writes in one interlude of how she and her family nearly became diasporic Iraqi subjects seeking refuge in London, along with her mother and sister. When in 1990, the regime lifted the travel ban on citizens, Saleh and her mother and sister traveled to London for a two-month visit with her mother's sisters.[45] Iraq invaded Kuwait during the middle of their visit, raising the possibility of staying in London, potentially as refugees seeking asylum. Saleh recounts her mother's fear over losing the career she had built despite Ba'ath harassment, and her mother's certainty that the regime "would not survive this fatal mistake." Saleh and her sister, meanwhile, were intimidated by the sudden prospect of switching schools. Faced with an unanticipated decision of whether to seek refuge in London, they decided to return home, where the misery of the war, the procedural brutality of sanctions, and the punishing threats of the regime would exhaust them.

Saleh's final interlude recounts her accidental survival of the border regime, which combined state power with international sanctions to target people for confinement and dispossession. Confined to the country in collapse under the dictatorship and international sanctions, without permission to travel abroad to do a PhD in English literature, with her sister also unable to obtain permission to start a new job across the border, with her mother relentlessly harassed by the Ba'ath regime at her workplace, and without her father, who had died of stress years before, Saleh and her mother and sister were thrown into deep despair. In late July 1997,

> We chose to end our lives because we believed that there was no other way of escaping the tyranny we had long endured under Saddam Hussein. The regime seemed strong, and there was no hope that the sanctions would be lifted. The future looked bleak. Death seemed like the only way out of the situation. My mother and sister died, but I lived.[46]

Saleh did not expect to survive the border controls woven through Iraqi lives as a multiscalar necropolitics during sanctions, from the local permits office to the UN headquarters. The protracted and extreme sanctions were an astonishing siege on life, making use of the everyday functions of targeted abandonment and targeted violence inherent to border control in the international order. The border as agent and frame for the "invisible war" foreclosed the idea of a future.[47]

This moment, which precedes her eventual move to the United States, recalls Saleh's earlier interlude, when the sudden prospect of a future as asylum seekers in the UK felt overwhelmingly difficult for the family to imagine. Narrating the seeming impossibility of an escape into more livable futures, both interludes also enframe each other. Saleh's narrative structure reveals how the border regime would continue embedding insecurity into their lives, whether they chose refuge or return.

Reframing Borders

Saleh's method of narrative interludes resonates with Penjweny's reworking of frame and embeddedness to understand the bordered living of Iraq, so many times postcolonial, a site for innovating the uses of borders as weapons and of marking bodies as borders, wherever they are.[48] Such refugee narratives refuse the imaginative hold of the border regime and reframe it in time and space. To counter border imperialism through a politics and poetics of refusal is also to reflect on how "border and rule" changes all its survivors of confinement and expulsion, and how it acts upon complex relationships between the living and the dead, as well as to call for a future unembedded by its frames.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1 Penjweny, *Saddam is Here*. The series was exhibited elsewhere, including the MOMA/PS1 exhibit *Theater of Operations: The Gulf Wars, 1991–2011* in New York, 2019.
2 Thanks to Maziyar Faridi for suggesting to me that Penjweny's focus on the ongoing presence of Ba'athism evokes Anselm Kiefer's Heroic Symbols from 1969, a photography series of Kiefer performing the Hitler salute across Europe. See also Huyssen, "Anselm Kiefer," 41.
3 Saleh, "New Texts Out Now."
4 See Motha's *Archiving Sovereignty.*
5 Examples in contemporary fiction include Hassan Blasim's *God 99* (Iraq-Finland), Ali Bader's *Tobacco Keeper* (Iraq-Belgium), Ahmed Saadawi's *Frankenstein in Baghdad* (Iraq), Sinan Antoon's *The Corpse Washer [Only the Pomegranate Tree]* and *The Book of Collateral Damage* (Iraq-U.S.). See also criticism by Barbaro, "De-composing 'Human' Bodies in the Mirror of Iraqi 'Monsters;'" and Sakr, "The More-than-Human Refugee Journey."
6 For a study of mainstream contemporary life writing used to advance the war on terror, see Whitlock, *Soft Weapons.* For a theorization of detainee life writing and narratological violence, see Slaughter, "Life, Story, Violence."
7 Trinh, "Film as Translation," 123.
8 Trinh, "Film as Translation," 117.
9 See Kotef, *Movement and the Ordering of Freedom: On Liberal Governances of Mobility*, 5.
10 I use Khosravi's phrase in *"Illegal" Traveller.*
11 Khosravi, "What Do We See if We Look at the Border from the Other Side?" 414–5.
12 Espiritu, *Body Counts*, 33–4.
13 See Mezzadra and Neilson, *Border as Method.*
14 Eslava and Pahuja, "The State and International Law," 118. See also legal theorist Achiume's "Race and Empire" and "Migration as Decolonization."
15 Eslava and Pahuja, "The State and International Law," 122.
16 See the medical ethnography by Dewachi, *Ungovernable Life.*
17 Walia, *Border and Rule,* 35.
18 Pursley, *Familiar Futures,* 42.
19 U.S.A for United Nations High Commission on Refugees, Iraq Refugee Crisis Explained.
20 UNHCR, *Iraq Situation.*
21 Tetzlaff, "The Turn of the Gulf Tide," 8. See also Walia on migrant workers in post-occupation Iraq, 135–6.
22 Eslava and Pahuja, "The State and International Law," 130–1.
23 Saleh, *Return to Ruin*, 77.
24 Fantappie, "Jamal Penjweny."
25 Fantappie, "Jamal Penjweny," and "Jamal Penjweny" in *Art Represent*. The village of Penjwen is about 60 miles from the city of Sulaymaniya, which may explain the slight difference in public bios that locate his birth in both places.

26 "Jamal Penjweny," *Art Represent*.
27 Saleh, *Return to Ruin*, 77.
28 See Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*.
29 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 47.
30 Penjweny, quoted in Fantappie, "Jamal Penjweny." See also Fried, "Barthes's *Punctum*."
31 Ruya Foundation is an Iraqi-registered NGO directed by Tamara Chalabi. For an unsparing review of Tamara Chalabi's memoir, see Roston, "The Family Business."
32 Shabout, "Bifurcations of Iraq's Visual Culture," 17.
33 Shabout, "Bifurcations of Iraq's Visual Culture," 17.
34 Bader, "Iraq," 106. Bader established his career in Iraq before leaving for Jordan in 2001 and living in a refugee camp in Belgium before settling in Brussels.
35 See Pursley on Salim's aesthetics in the context of political pressure: Pursley, *Familiar Futures*, 199–228.
36 Penjweny, "Forgotten Women."
37 On refugee gratitude as a perpetual indebtedness to liberal empire, see Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom*. On South Vietnamese refugee diaspora and the Iraq War, see Espiritu, *Body Counts*; and Bui, *Returns of War.*
38 Saleh, *Return to Ruin*, 6.
39 Saleh, *Return to Ruin*, 207.
40 Saleh, *Return to Ruin*, 209.
41 See Bui, *Returns of War,* especially 122–68.
42 Saleh notes that the diasporic subjects she interviewed in London insisted for multiple reasons on their status as exiles or expatriates (al-mughtaribeen) rather than as refugees (al-lajee'een).
43 Saleh, *Return to Ruin*, 143.
44 Saleh, *Return to Ruin*, 152.
45 Saleh, *Return to Ruin*, 171.
46 Saleh, *Return to Ruin,* 205.
47 See Gordon's *Invisible War* on Iraq sanctions as a comprehensive assault on everyday life. See also Mbembe "Border as Bodies" and "The Idea of a Borderless World" for border as violence on planetary living.
48 See Mbembe, "Bodies as Borders."

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PART VI

Health and (Dis)Ability

21

THE BIOPOETICS OF HEALTH

Caribbean Refugee Narratives

April Shemak

Refugees and asylum seekers must often give testimony based on their physical health to be granted asylum.[1] Their very bodies offer powerful testimonies, and the disabilities that are a result of political violence in the nation of origin can often serve as evidence of the need for protection. While showing corporeal and/or psychological evidence of harm may strengthen a case for asylum, ill health has also been used to deny asylum. For example, in the early 1990s, Haitian refugees who tested positive for HIV were detained for over a year in Camp Bulkeley at the Guantanamo naval base, where they were left in limbo with the threat of repatriation.[2]

This chapter examines how testimony is shaped by health in Caribbean literature about refugees.[3] I analyze texts that represent how health infringes upon refugee testimony vis-a-vis asylum hospitals and other healthcare settings.[4] In so doing, these texts constitute what I refer to as a biopoetics of refugee health. Biopoetics, I argue, offers an alternative way of imagining Caribbean refugees, who are often defined by the biopolitics—the management of life—of the nation-state and global humanitarian organizations. Biopoetics foregrounds the life-giving force of language and narrative in creating life that exists outside of biopolitical attempts to control and manage it. Biopoetics merges health and writing. It is the literary and linguistic portrayal of life as it is defined in relation to health. By portraying life that is greater than a biopolitical notion of "bare life,"[5] biopoetics challenges biopolitical determinations of life and health that plague refugees. Biopoetics also signals the testimonial aspects of the health of the body, allowing refugee testimonial voices to be heard even when biopolitical forces attempt to silence them. It is especially important to explore refugee testimonies of health as a biopoetics that counters biopolitical dehumanization.

In this chapter, I examine the biopolitical intersection between testimony and health in three Caribbean literary portrayals of refugee patients and refugee caregivers. First, I explore how through the use of the literary device of interior monologue, Cecilia Rodríguez Milanés' "El Loco" offers the testimony of a Cuban refugee in an asylum hospital. "El Loco" portrays how the refugee patient's internal dialogue disrupts the medical establishment's biopolitical interpretation of him. I then look to Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*, which portrays the difficulties that ill health and injured bodies pose to testifying Haitian refugees who were targeted in the state-sponsored 1937 massacre in the Dominican Republic. In the final section of the chapter, I examine the juxtaposition of health and an African refugee in England in Caryl Phillips's *A Distant Shore*. The biopoetics of this novel is incomplete as the two narrators—one a refugee—can no longer testify by the end of the novel. My intention is not to perform deep analysis of each of these texts but rather to demonstrate how the trope of health is pervasive in Caribbean refugee narratives, resulting in the creation of a biopoetics as an alternative to the biopolitics that seeks to constrain refugee lifeworlds. By considering the portrayal of health and the

body, I draw upon postcolonial theory and disability studies to consider how these narratives call into question the notion of the normative human.[6]

The work of Franz Fanon, a seminal decolonial theorist, is instructive for thinking about the pivotal role of refugee health narratives. Fanon highlighted the key role of health as a biopolitical focus of colonial power. Indeed, to consider the revolutionary decolonial politics of Fanon requires one to consider the pivotal role of health in structures of colonialism. Fanon's role as a medical doctor in French colonial Algeria allowed him a view of the psychic health effects of colonialism for Algerian patients. In *A Dying Colonialism* (1959), Fanon discusses the connection between colonial politics and Western medicine. He charts the chilling complicity of physicians with the colonial authority, noting that doctors were often also landowners, and they could yield economic gains from both the colonial medical enterprise and their colonial land holdings. Additionally, European doctors could be explicitly tied to the machinations of colonialism, aiding in torture procedures: "In the colonial situation, going to see the doctor, the administrator, the constable or the mayor are identical moves."[7] Fanon's theories provide a helpful framing for exploring how contemporary biopolitics often bears the traces of colonialism. Moreover, Fanon imagined the anti-colonial, nationalist, revolutionary movement as inseparable from questions of medicine, doctors, and health. His theories are helpful in thinking through the role of health in refugee migration and biopoetics.

Through their portrayals of non-normative refugee bodies, the texts that I discuss disrupt the notion that only able-bodied citizens should possess rights and protections. As Ato Quayson writes, "Disability teases us out of thought, to echo Keats, not because it resists representation, but because in being represented it automatically restores an ethical core to the literary-aesthetic domain while also invoking the boundary between the real and the metaphysical or otherworldly."[8] The refugee narratives that I examine prominently foreground how statelessness and health converge to form an "ethical core," which becomes vital to the testimonials found in them. The ethical core of refugee biopoetics reveals the inhumanity of biopolitics. Refugee narratives that juxtapose refugees and health are tied to the body and life, functioning as a biopoetics that challenges the biopolitical obstacles (i.e., geopolitical borders, checkpoints, detention, linguistic requirements, etc.) that refugees must navigate in order to gain asylum.

Hospitality and Health

I take literally the lexical associations between hospital and hospitality to consider the portrayal of Caribbean refugee testimony vis-à-vis health. The etymology of the word "hospice" shows the origins of this association as it could refer to someone who was healed or a stranger who was granted refuge. Moreover, the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "hospital" as a "house or hostel for the reception and entertainment of pilgrims, travellers, and strangers; a hospice."[9]

Jacques Derrida explores the philosophical roots of "absolute hospitality"—the act of granting the stranger unconditional welcome—and the laws of hospitality as those forms of border control and legislation that hinder unconditional hospitality.[10] One thing that can be gained by examining health in relation to hospitality and migration is the examination of the relationship between refugee bodies, geopolitical borders, and narrative. The refugee narratives that I examine in this chapter demonstrate how the very foundation of hospitality rests upon caring for the health of the stranger.

The texts that I analyze highlight ambiguities that can occur when the citizen and the refugee encounter one another within the spaces where hospitality and health come together—at the threshold of the nation and/or the home where the stranger/refugee seeks entrance in a hospital and other healthcare settings. I explore how health becomes a conduit and/or obstruction of hospitality. Bodies that maintain corporeal borders adhere to established norms. Rosemarie Garland Thompson describes these bodies as the "normate" by which all bodies are measured. When a body does not adhere to physical norms, society defines them as abnormal.[11] Garland Thompson points out that what is considered physically normal is always socially constructed. Refugees are often configured as existing on the margins of a

political society organized around the nation-state. When they transgress geopolitical borders, refugees are often viewed as a biopolitical threat to the national body politic. Similarly, refugees are often disregarded when their bodies do not adhere to biopolitical configurations of wellness to offer successful testimony for asylum claims.

The testimonial narratives I consider offer biopoetics by merging the governmentality of life (biopolitics) with which refugees contend and fictional prose (poetics) to suggest that refugee testimony has the potential to subvert the conditional hospitality that states and institutions offer. While a theory of biopoetics has developed in relation to the theory of posthumanism, I do not use it in this capacity.[12] Instead, I build on Édouard Glissant's notion of "Poetics of Relation," which considers how migration leads to creolization that challenges colonialism's aim to maintain discrete racialized boundaries. Glissant speaks in terms of colonialism and the forced migration of slavery to consider how creolization developed and thrives in the New World. His work is relevant to refugee migration and the creolizing effect of inserting the refugee/guest/stranger into the host space, particularly in the Caribbean.[13]

The idea of biopoetics is also related to what Nevzat Soguk refers to as "ontopoetics"—whereby the refugee uses their own body as a text to testify to their experiences.[14] Just as the refugee's body serves as a text in an "ontopoetics," biopoetics narratives explore the relationship between refugees and health.

In sum, by considering refugee narratives of health, we can analyze the corporeal and governmental limits of the host nation. In this sense, refugee bodies testify in and of themselves and they exceed the governmentality of the state and medical establishment. As I discuss below, these narratives have the potential to subvert the very definitions of "host" and "stranger." When we consider "refugee," "testimony," and "health" together, we can critique the normative physical and social body. We see that health and refuge are inextricably intertwined and that refugee narratives demonstrate this entanglement, one that reveals the state's governmentality as well as refugees' attempts to testify or express themselves as complex human subjects.

Interior Monologue and Testimony

Cecilia Rodríguez Milanés's short story "El Loco" from the collection *Marielitos, Balseros and Other Exiles* portrays the story of a Cuban refugee from the 1980 "Mariel Boatlift," when American citizens' attitude toward Cuban refugees shifted from a welcoming "open door" policy to one of mistrust. The story takes place in Miami and centers around José Manuel Escobar Vidal, a male Cuban "Mariel" refugee, during his evaluation at a mental hospital where he has been sent after killing a police officer. He has been at the mental hospital for one and a half years and was initially deemed mentally incompetent, but after a petition from the slain police officer's family, the case has been reopened and he is again being assessed by doctors.

The title of the story "El Loco" refers to the derogatory nickname (meaning "crazy") given to José. It is a dehumanizing term that refers to his fragile mental state. The fact that the protagonist is referred to in this way signals how his identity is deleteriously shaped by the medical mental health establishment. He is known only by his perceived behavior, which does not conform to the norms of the Western medical establishment. Biopolitics is evident in his medical file which provides a sterile description of when and where he had previously been institutionalized. Thus, the story uses the literary device of interior monologue as a means to provide access to José's testimony. As such, the interior monologue functions as a biopoetics within a healthcare institution that pathologizes refugees with disability.

José's interior monologue challenges official narratives of the U.S. government that portray Cubans who fled Fidel Castro's regime as desirable refugees.[15] Instead, "El Loco" represents the experiences of a Cuban "Mariel" refugee of 1980, when there was great mistrust of the refugees on the part of U.S. citizens. While the U.S. government previously welcomed anti-communist Cuban refugees, especially light-skinned elite Cuban refugees, during the height of the Cold War, the Mariel Boatlift was marked by a poorer and darker-skinned migrant population.[16] Although refugees like José may not be able to speak back vocally to the medical establishment due to trauma, physical disability, and linguistic

limitations, Rodríguez Milanés uses the literary device of the interior monologue, which serves as the story's biopoetics as it allows a space for José's testimony.

"El Loco" represents the mental hospital as the site where the mentally disabled "Other" converges with the refugee "Other." It is where José encounters the physical, mental, linguistic, and national "normate" expectations of Western medical doctors. "El Loco" also demonstrates how José's ability to testify is shaped by the disciplining function of the U.S. and Cuban nation-states, refugeeness, and the biopolitics of the Western medical enterprise. It is through his interior monologue that readers gain access to José's thoughts so that it serves a biopoetic function that subverts the biopolitical interpretation of him by the medical establishment. Without José's interior monologue, the only portrait of him is that which is created by doctors' interviews and official documents.

Illness is located in José's physical body *and* his mind, but the text does not explain the origins of the illness. A doctor describes José: "He's got severe language disabilities, he's illiterate, and has sixty per-cent hearing loss in both ears."[17] Readers only learn of the multiple traumas that José has experienced from his interior monologue, which switches between the present day in Florida and the past in Cuba. The story begins with doctors speaking among themselves questioning his mental state: "'You mean this guy hasn't been found competent yet?'"[18] Being found "competent" depends on adhering to the medical establishment's biopolitical norms. If he is found competent, he will stand trial for the murder of the police officer. A murder trial would demonize José, and exonerate, if not esteem, the nation-state in pursuit of "justice."

Throughout the story, the "official" evaluation of the doctors, which is textually represented with standardized print on the page—and includes the doctors' dialogues among themselves and their interviews with José—competes with José's testimony of his own traumatic and conscious experi-ence in the form of an interior monologue narrative, which is represented in print via italicized and standardized text. José takes over the narrative with his interior monologue that speaks directly to the reader: "There they are, my doctors—the balding man and my pretty young cubanita—with their clipboards and white smocks."[19] José's interior monologues take on a voyeuristic quality as he undermines the authority of his doctors by describing them in dismissive ways. In doing so, he reveals his awareness of what is happening to him and his attempts to exert his own agency in interviews with doctors that seek to define him as incompetent.

Before being institutionalized at the mental hospital, José was homeless in Miami. He lived under a highway overpass. His life in the U.S. is as difficult as it was in Cuba, subverting the narrative of the U.S. as the "promised land" for refugees. José's homelessness is linked to the murder of the police officer (for which he has been institutionalized), which he describes as an act of self-defense. He narrates, "That fucking policeman kicked me in the belly and tried to throw me in the dumpster so I took his gun and made him stop."[20] For José, U.S. biopolitical authority is represented by the police officer and his treatment of homeless people as garbage to be disposed of. At the same time, José's mental condition is tied to his past life in Cuba and the biopolitical authority of the Cuban government, which imprisoned and tortured him.

José explains how his murder of the police officer was not the first time he had killed someone. He reveals that he killed a man in Florida, which he describes as a post-traumatic stress flashback: "The first man I killed was a skinny guy with a blue and white hat and matching shirt. He had simply walked down Calle Ocho with a smile that brought my torturer back to life. He looked just like him. So damn skinny, like Gutierrez. I couldn't help it. It was him, to me, it was him."[21] The murder is tied to José's time at a Cuban prison, long before he is in the U.S., because the man reminded him of a prison guard who beat him when he was there.

Indeed, throughout "El Loco," it becomes clear that the past in Cuba and the present in the U.S. often blend together for José. For example, within the same paragraph, he narrates one sentence about his current circumstances in Florida, and in the next sentence, without a transition from the present to the past, he refers to those "Cuban guards" and it is unclear whether he is speaking of his present circumstances or his past imprisonment in Cuba: "Those fucking Cuban guards don't do anything but curse so I curse and spit back at them."[22]

José is even more othered in the asylum hospital than most because of his difficulty with normative forms of expression. One doctor who evaluates him explains, "His handwriting is chicken-scratch and what comes out of his mouth is hardly intelligible."[23] The doctor's assessment of José focuses on what he sees as physical deficits that hinder his ability to communicate with the medical establishment. Indeed, it is because of biopolitics that José's institutional assessment is pursued at all. The doctor explains that "The D.A.'s been on my back because that cop's family threw a petition at her with 5,000 signatures on it just to get this moving. I mean, the [police officer] was about to retire, thirty years on the force, you know, they want to crucify [José]."[24] While the doctor makes an assessment of José's inability to communicate based on his limited information of him, in his interior monologue, José explains that he has a "mangled tongue."[25] "Chicken-scratch" handwriting and a mangled tongue also become part of the story's biopoetics as they reveal the difficulties of rendering expressions of trauma legible, given institutional demands and state violence.

Language further complicates José's ability to testify to the doctors since he only speaks Spanish. The normative process of turning the refugee into a U.S. citizen is entangled with health and "coherent" speech. For example, the U.S. requires its citizens to speak English and José's Spanish-only language use is a hurdle for the medical establishment, so that Dr. Montes is required to interview him as she is the only bilingual doctor. Yet, she also has difficulty understanding him and he refuses to answer her assessment questions.

That the doctors cannot decipher José's speech signals the way that bureaucratic medical institutions often disregard the voices of those on the margins of society, deemed foreigner or deviant. Thus, the story demonstrates that a biopoetics that exceeds biopolitical forms of testimony is required in order to grasp a fuller understanding of refugee existence. Rodriguez Milanés's use of the interior monologue literary device offers readers insight to José's thoughts and provides the broader context that is needed to understand his physical disabilities. Most significantly, the interior monologue grants José a degree of agency within the story as it becomes apparent that he understands what is going on and he chooses when to cooperate with doctors. For example, the interior monologue reveals that José finally decides to comply and answer Dr. Montes's questions because he wants to spend more time with her, not because he wants to participate in the biopolitical process.[26] José's motivations for testifying to the doctor are not necessarily out of a desire to tell the truth but to get her attention by responding to her questions and telling her what she wants to hear. In doing so, he manipulates the biopolitical function of the interview. He also writes a legible statement about what happened when he shot the police officer. José's testimonial statement serves as a biopoetics that subverts the biopolitics that Dr. Montes's interview represents. Dr. Montes then rewrites his statement and gives it back to him to verify. The act of rewriting José's statement means that Dr. Montes must engage with José's biopoetics. Seen through his interior monologue, his physical and linguistic disabilities become a form of biopoetics that challenge the biopolitical conditions of the mental hospital.

Dr. Montes expresses her abject reaction to José: "He's so disgusting; he smiles at me with those broken teeth and then puts his arms right across the table as if to show me his scars."[27] Her disgust is tied to his physical traits that appear outside of the norm, but they are also ambiguous signs because it is unclear if his disfigurement is the result of physical abuse in the U.S. or Cuba. The ambiguity surrounding José's physical disfigurement—broken teeth and scars—threatens the fixity of the biopolitical space since the doctor cannot decipher José's body. That the medical enterprise in the U.S. maintains geopolitical boundaries is indicated by one of the questions José is asked by Dr Montes, regarding whether he knows where he is. She gives him an encouraging nod when he responds "USA."[28] Thus, doctors judge Jose's physical and mental competence as part of the medical and legal biopolitical structures that uphold U.S. geopolitical borders.

The story ends with José's point of view: "He [a male doctor] gets up, I start yelling and the guards come and push me around but the tall black one pushes a stick in between my ribs so I bite him."[29] José deviates from the norm so strongly that he is subdued with physical restraints and a shot of tranquilizing medicine. In sum, José's non-conformity to physical, mental, and linguistic norms reveals

ambiguity surrounding the discourse of U.S. hospitality toward Cuban refugees. It suggests that a condition of U.S. hospitality is that refugees adhere to its norms of submissiveness, or else there are violent consequences.[30] José's outburst suggests an unwillingness to comply and subsequently, the biopolitical force of the medical establishment subdues him. Under these conditions, José's interior monologue becomes an effective literary device that allows a space for his testimony. Through it, readers are given a view into the violent workings of the biopolitical state.

Health and Race

In this section, I move to a discussion of Haitian refugees who fled the 1937 "Parsley Massacre" in the Dominican Republic as portrayed in Edwidge Danticat's novel *The Farming of Bones* (1996). While there are many differences between José, the Cuban refugee protagonist in "El Loco," and Amabelle Désir, the refugee narrator in *The Farming of Bones,* both texts reveal how biopolitics often hinges on the control of refugee testimony and refugee health—and how refugee testimony and health are thus intertwined. Amabelle is a refugee survivor of U.S.-backed Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo's 1937 order to eradicate any trace of "dark-skinned" Haitians from the Dominican Republic. The novel portrays how language becomes central to the massacre as parsley was used to "test" victims; if a person could not trill the Spanish "r" to pronounce the Spanish word for "parsley"—"pejeril"—they would be targeted as a Haitian. During the massacre, Amabelle is tested in this way as her mouth is stuffed with parsley by her perpetrators before she has any opportunity to testify or make a pronouncement.

While she has lived most of her life in the Dominican Republic, working as a domestic servant for an elite Dominican family, Amabelle flees the murderous violence of Trujillo's regime that was based on the racist ideology of "antihaitianismo" that equated darker complexions with evil. The biopolitics of the Trujillo regime—here ethnic cleansing—attempted to eradicate those people with dark skin to "whiten" the Dominican citizenry. *The Farming of Bones* is one of the few texts about the massacre that has been written in English.[31] Given the paucity of narratives that record "El Corte" (Spanish for "the cutting"), *The Farming of Bones* carries biopoetical significance as it recalls an event in Dominican and Haitian history that would otherwise be forgotten.

One of the biopoetical tropes that connects *The Farming of Bones* with "El Loco" is the mangled tongue of the refugee survivor. Both José and Amabelle face difficulty testifying coherently to their experiences because their tongues, the sources of enunciation, have been disfigured. In *The Farming of Bones*, the testimony of survivors of the massacre is directly affected by the racialization of health.[32] Similar to José's mangled articulation that is represented in "El Loco," Amabelle's tongue is mangled from having been targeted and beaten during the massacre, which makes her ability to testify to her experiences nearly impossible.

Amabelle's mangled tongue is both a physical inhibitor of speech as well as a literary symbol of how the biopolitical state tries to silence people with dark skin. She describes being beaten and parsley is used to torture her when it is stuffed down her throat by the perpetrators: "My mouth filled with blood. I tried to swallow the sharp bitter parsley bubbling in my throat."[33] After the torture, when she wants to speak to other survivors of the massacre, she is unable to do so because her mouth is so disfigured. She explains, "My voice came out in one long grunt."[34] However, her first-person narrative describes in visceral detail the physical pain that she feels after the beating: "I shivered from a fever slowly rising from the hollow of my bones. My chipped and cracked teeth kept snapping against the mush of open flesh inside my mouth."[35] This kind of graphic testimonial narrative, as it points to the disfigurement that results in speech disability, serves as a biopoetics that challenges biopolitical governmental narratives that seek to deny the massacre.

Even more powerful than Amabelle's individual testimony is the novel's foregrounding of the voices of multiple survivors' stories, a collective biopoetics that challenges the biopolitical attempts to silence them. There is a hospital run by nuns on the Haitian side of the border where survivors go to receive treatment. As she recovers from her injuries there, Amabelle witnesses overworked hospital staff and

desperate survivors, including ones who have "burns that had destroyed most of their skin, men and women charred into awkward poses, arms and legs frozen in mid-air, like tree trunks long separated from their branches."[36] Amabelle's narrative becomes a collective testimony, a biopoetical force that gives voice to other victims of the massacre's brutal physical violence.

Although the survivors of the massacre want to testify to governmental officials to seek justice, the tribunal that is set up for that purpose is ineffective and signals only the façade of justice; officials are not intent on seeking reparations. Thus, survivor testimony has no value in an official capacity. Instead, survivors end up telling their stories to each other: "As they ate, people gathered in a group to talk. Taking turns, they exchanged tales quickly, the haste in their voices sometimes blurring the words, for greater than their desire to be heard was the hunger to tell."[37] Moreover, long after verbal or written testimony can be offered, Amabelle's body evidences the lasting effects of the massacre. She narrates, "because of my bad knee, one of my legs now appeared much shorter than the other."[38] The description of the lasting physical effects of the violence becomes a biopoetic testimonial to the state-sponsored massacre.

Refugee Caregivers and Hospitality

While thus far I have discussed narratives about refugees as victims, in this final section, I analyze the role of the refugee-as-caregiver in Caryl Phillips' novel *A Distant Shore,* which represents refugee migration from Africa to England.[39] While the novel does not take place in the Caribbean or feature a Caribbean refugee, the author, Phillips, was born in St. Kitts and raised in Britain and can thus be considered a Caribbean-British author, and the African refugee at the center of *A Distant Shore,* Gabriel (later known as Solomon), comes to stand in for the larger Black refugee diaspora. While Gabriel is from an unnamed African country, his character represents many experiences of Black migrants everywhere and exposes the inequities of the host/guest relationship. Significantly, through caregiving and health, the status of the refugee changes from that of guest to that of host. In doing so, the novel reveals how threatening it is to the white host nation when a Black refugee becomes the "host." Dorothy is the other main narrator in the novel and she is Gabriel/Solomon's neighbor in the English village where he eventually resides. The narrative jumps back and forth through time in both Gabriel's and Dorothy's narratives. At times, Dorothy remembers her childhood with her mother, father, and sister in England. At other times, Gabriel remembers his past life in Africa and his journey to England. The care that Gabriel/Solomon can offer Dorothy by driving her to her doctor's appointments reveals how health is central to the creation of solidarity between refugees and citizens of the "host" nation.

Even Gabriel's first moment on English soil, after he leaps from a ship that he clandestinely rides from France to England, is marked by a disruption of health when his leg is injured as he hits the water and washes up on shore. Like Amabelle in *The Farming of Bones*, his refugee passage is marked by bodily injury and state-circumscribed mobility. Since he can barely walk, he and a fellow refugee, Bright, end up staying the night in a dilapidated house they find. There, Gabriel encounters an English girl who has bruises from abuse at the hands of her father. Gabriel is arrested for rape of the girl when her father discovers the two asleep in the abandoned house. Although he is not ultimately convicted of rape, Gabriel understands that in the eyes of many English people, he will always be suspect and he changes his name to Solomon in order to alter his already precarious identity.

The disruption of identity the name change represents reflects the radical alterity that an African refugee like Gabriel/Solomon represents, which is heightened by his inability to reconcile the memories of his tormented flight from his country. At the same time, England is also being transformed as noted by Dorothy: "England has changed. These days it's difficult to tell who's from around here and who is not. Who belongs and who's a stranger."[40] Here the body politic has also become ambiguous and racially mixed, disrupting the notion of a "white" Britain. Dorothy's remarks suggest that the notions of hospitality—the relationship between host and stranger—are being reconfigured as England is increasingly populated by immigrants and refugees. The porous geopolitical borders that mark refugee

migration to England is also reflected in the fragile corporeal borders of many characters in the novel. By portraying Gabriel/Solomon in a caregiving role, the novel signals that native white Britons need the care of racialized refugees to maintain wellness.

The theme of hospice manifests in various forms throughout Phillips' novel—sometimes within medical centers or actual hospitals while at other times in informal settings of caregiving such as Dorothy's home or Gabriel/Solomon's car.[41] The refugee-as-caregiver represents a significant reversal of roles that holds particularly subversive potential. *A Distant Shore* features a Black refugee who becomes a caregiver in a majority-white host space, an ambiguity that disrupts the assumed roles of hospitality. In doing so, Gabriel/Solomon obtains a degree of agency, which holds the potential to subvert the white host/Black stranger relationship. However, this places him in a more precarious position since he is viewed as trespassing the host/guest boundary.

Gabriel/Solomon's first-person narrative, which reveals the lack of hospitality that he encounters in England, serves as a biopoetic challenge to the biopolitics that he encounters as a refugee. Indeed, Gabriel/Solomon's role as a caregiving host is juxtaposed with the lack of care that he experienced while in British custody. While in a British prison awaiting trial for rape, Gabriel is housed in a cell with an Iraqi refugee, Said, who is desperately ill. While the prison authorities neglect Said's health, Gabriel attempts to care for him. He begs the night warder to call a doctor for Said, telling him, "I've seen this type of illness before. It is like malaria, but it is something more than this. I think Said is dying if we don't find a doctor."[42] By the time the doctor finally arrives, Said has died, and when the warden indicates that he will leave the body in the cell, Gabriel becomes hysterical and is strapped to the bunk and the doctor gives him a shot to sedate him. Thus, for refugee prisoners, Western medicine is a form of governmentality similar to that in colonial spaces that Fanon discusses in *A Dying Colonialism*, as noted earlier in this chapter. In *A Distant Shore*, the prison doctor acts as part of the disciplining apparatus of the state rather than as an agent of hospice. Indeed, the entire event is treated as a bureaucratic task as the doctor explains to the prison warden that "they should be here for the body before too long."[43] The biopolitics of Western medicine silence the biopoetics of Gabriel/Solomon by tranquilizing him. His subsequent role as caregiver to a British citizen becomes all the more subversive given the silencing and death of a refugee that he witnesses in a British prison.

Once the rape charge is thrown out and he is released from prison, Gabriel/Solomon takes a job as a night watchman for housing development at Stoneleigh, where he is also given a home of his own in which to live. In doing so, he moves from the space of a refugee to that of a host and gains a degree of agency within the nation. As an attempt at integrating with his community, he volunteers to drive people to their doctor appointments at the local medical center. However, Gabriel/Solomon is wary of institutional forms of hospice. Upon his first visit to the local medical center, he doesn't know whether he should cross over the threshold to speak with the nurse on duty: "I do not know if I should enter, or if I should wait and talk to her from where I am standing."[44] Gabriel/Solomon's hesitance is a response to a prior experience with racial exclusion in England.[45] His white British sponsor, Mr Anderson, explains the British xenophobia toward refugees: "There's an awful lot of you, and the system's already creaking to breaking point. I mean, things are particularly bad if you want to get into one of our hospitals. People are upset."[46] Thus, Gabriel/Solomon's hesitance to enter the medical center, the space of hospice, indicates that he is wary of being viewed as an interloper in the health system.

Gabriel/Solomon attempts to recuperate Britons' perception of refugees as a drain on health resources when he offers to drive his neighbors to their medical appointments. When he goes to Dorothy's door and offers to drive her to town, she mentions that she needs to go to the doctor and he arranges to pick her up the next day and leaves. That the entire exchange takes place in Dorothy's doorway signals it as a threshold of hospitality where one is either allowed entrance or turned away. In another kind of reconfiguration of the modes of hospitality, Gabriel/Solomon has not requested anything from Dorothy but offered her hospitality from her own doorstep, which is significant as he is the refugee/guest who offers care to the British citizen/host. He narrates: "This is a woman to whom I might tell my story. If

I do not share my story, then I have only this one year to my life."[47] For Gabriel/Solomon, testifying to Dorothy about his life would constitute a biopoetics that he ultimately does not have a chance to fulfill because a group of unidentified, but assumed to be white, neighbors begin a xenophobic campaign to drive him out of the town by sending threatening letters and leaving dog feces at his front door. The xenophobia culminates with his murder when he is kidnapped and beaten to death by a group of young people with ties to the village.[48] A former (white) student, Carla, confesses to Dorothy that she initially lured Solomon out of his house and her friends kidnapped him and beat him to death. Although she admits to Dorothy that she was an accomplice to the murder, Carla does not go to the police to confess and thus, nobody is arrested for the crime.

After Gabriel/Solomon is killed, Dorothy's mental condition deteriorates. When she fights with a local homeless woman and ends up in the police station, Dorothy's doctor arranges for her to go to a mental asylum, the ultimate space of displacement and alienation. The novel ends with Dorothy in the mental hospital, narrating that she is being watched over by an "exotic nurse." Her xenophobic beliefs are translated in the healthcare setting vis-a-vis her perception of the nurse as "exotic." In a scene that is reminiscent of José in "El Loco," as Dorothy sits out in the garden, she refuses to talk to the nurse, but via the literary device of interior monologue, readers have access to her thoughts of distrust for nurses, doctors, and the broader medical enterprise. The implication is that the biopolitics of the Western medical establishment silences both the refugee/guest *and* the non-normative citizen/host. The rights and protections of the citizen disappear for the citizen/host in the mental asylum. Dorothy further breaks with hospitality when she refuses to play the role of host: "I don't like visitors and I don't want any more."[49] This statement echoes the nativist sentiment that Dorothy espouses earlier in the novel when she states, "England has changed," referring to how racialized refugees and immigrants are changing the ethnic makeup of Britain's national body politic.[50] However, she ultimately does not control the space of the asylum, and a visitor—her ex-husband—still intrudes upon her. Her response to him is not conversation, but violence and screaming, which results in a scene that echoes Gabriel's experience with biopolitics in the prison cell as well as José's in the hospital in "El Loco." She too is pinned down by the nurse and sedated, signaling that she is a hostage within the mental asylum and must adhere to its biopolitics. In the last lines of the book, Dorothy thinks, "I had a feeling Solomon understood me. This is not my home, and until they accept this, then I will be as purposefully silent as a bird in flight."[51]

The biopoetical force of *A Distant Shore* is that it demonstrates how the violation of the laws of hospitality harm not only refugees/strangers but also citizens/hosts. Upon being institutionalized, Dorothy comes to understand a bit better the refugee's experience of statelessness/homelessness and the management of refugee life at the hands of the biopolitical state/hospital.

At the same time, the novel reveals the obstacles to the creation of alliances between refugees and citizens. The text's biopoetic potential grinds to a halt as the book ends with death and illness and the biopolitical silencing of the narrators. There is a collapse of potential solidarities between citizens and refugees that is signified by the murder of the refugee, Gabriel/Solomon, and the mental breakdown and hospitalization of the citizen/host, Dorothy.

Conclusion

Each of the narratives that I discuss in this essay reveals how health becomes a vector for the tensions surrounding refugee testimonial narratives. At times, refugee testimonies hold the potential to be a biopoetic subversion of the power structure that has been configured through biopolitics. At other times, they cannot compete with the biopolitical forces they confront, whether it be through the state asylum process, the government that a refugee is fleeing, or the Western medical enterprise. Considering refugee health narratives requires acknowledgment of the violence committed by adhering to a Western medical "normate" and recognition of the need to move beyond this approach to allow more refugee testimonials to emerge in all their rich complexity.

Notes

1 See the website: Yale Center for Asylum Medicine. Also, note that I use the term "refugee" to refer to a person who has fled violence in their nation of origin and has gone to another country in search of rights or protections that can be provided by a nation's government. Thus, I use the term "refugee" more broadly than the official United Nations' definition of the term.

2 For more about HIV and Haitian refugees, see Farmer, *AIDS and Accusation*. See also Paik, *Rightlessness*.

3 None of the authors that I discuss identifies as a refugee, but their work is known for shining a light on the issues of refugee migration. I define "Caribbean literature about refugees" broadly to include literature about Caribbean refugees as well as literature by Caribbean writers about African refugees.

4 For more on the role of hospitals in determining refugee status, see Hoffman, "Immigrant Sanctuary or Danger."

5 Giorgio Agamben discusses the idea of "bare life" in *Homo Sacer*.

6 For more on the relationship between disability and refugee narratives, see Dawson, "Stasis in Flight."

7 Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, 139.

8 Quayson, *Aesthetic Nervousness*, 22.

9 *Oxford English Dictionary*.

10 Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, 77-81.

11 Garland Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies*, 8. See also Tobin Siebers, *Disability Theory* and Sharon L. Snyder and David T. Mitchell, *Narrative Prosthesis*.

12 See Brooks, "Literary Biopoetics"; Kulcsár-Szabó et al., *Life after Literature*; and Yelin, "From Biopolitics to Biopoetics."

13 Andreas Weber briefly discusses Glissant's "poetics of relation" in his analysis of biopoetics.

14 See Nevzat Soguk, "Splinters of Hegemony: Ontopoetical Visions in International Relations."

15 The 1966 *Cuban Adjustment Act* granted asylum to all people leaving Cuba for persecution.

16 Portes and Stepick, *City on the Edge: The Transformation of Miami*.

17 Rodríguez Milanés, *Marielitos, Balseros and Other Exiles*, 924.

18 Rodríguez Milanés, *Marielitos, Balseros and Other Exiles*, 923.

19 Rodríguez Milanés, *Marielitos, Balseros and Other Exiles*, 923–4.

20 Rodríguez Milanés, *Marielitos, Balseros and Other Exiles*, 970–1.

21 Rodríguez Milanés, *Marielitos, Balseros and Other Exiles*, 961–2.

22 Rodríguez Milanés, *Marielitos, Balseros and Other Exiles*, 964–7.

23 Rodríguez Milanés, *Marielitos, Balseros and Other Exiles*, 936.

24 Rodríguez Milanés, *Marielitos, Balseros and Other Exiles*, 101.

25 Rodríguez Milanés, *Marielitos, Balseros and Other Exiles*, 104.

26 Rodríguez Milanés, *Marielitos, Balseros and Other Exiles*, 105.

27 Rodríguez Milanés, *Marielitos, Balseros and Other Exiles*, 942–3.

28 Rodríguez Milanés, *Marielitos, Balseros and Other Exiles*, 104.

29 Rodríguez Milanés, *Marielitos, Balseros and Other Exiles*, 1009–10.

30 Yvonne Lamazares's novel *The Sugar Island* (2000) represents an earlier moment of Cuban refugee migration than that which is portrayed in "El Loco."

31 English-language narratives include works of Haitian literature that have been translated into English, such as Jacques Stephen Alexis's *Compère Général Soleil* (trans. 2004; original 1955) and René Philoctète's *Massacre River* (trans. 2008; original 1989). Freddy Prestol Castillo's *You Can Cross the Massacre on Foot* was translated by Margaret Randall in 2019 from Spanish and is one of the only Dominican portrayals of the massacre.

32 I discuss this in more detail in *Asylum Speakers*.

33 Danticat, *The Farming of Bones*, 194.

34 Danticat, *The Farming of Bones*, 194.

35 Danticat, *The Farming of Bones*, 197.

36 Danticat, *The Farming of Bones*, 206.

37 Danticat, *The Farming of Bones*, 209.

38 Danticat, *The Farming of Bones*, 301.

39 Phillips has also explored the topic of refugees in his non-fiction work. See *New World Order*.

40 Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 3.

41 Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 55.

42 Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 68.

43 Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 74.

44 Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 261.

45 While he was staying with the Andersons, their home was vandalized with graffiti with a hateful, xenophobic message aimed at him.

46 Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 256.
47 Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 266.
48 Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 77–78.
49 Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 276.
50 Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 3.
51 Phillips, *A Distant Shore*, 277.

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REFUGEE RACE-ABILITY

Bodies, Lands, Worlds

Y-Dang Troeung

In her book *Decarcerating Disability*, Critical Disability Studies scholar Liat Ben-Moshe defines race-ability as "the ways race and disability, and racism, sanism, and ableism as intersecting oppressions, are mutually constitutive and cannot be separated, in their genealogy (eugenics, for example), current iterations of resistance (in the form of disability justice, for example), or oppression (incarceration and police killing, for example)."[1] This chapter draws on Ben-Moshe's work to attend to the assemblage of power formed through the intersections of race, disability, and refugee life. I theorize what I call *refugee race-ability* as an analytic that seeks to grasp the entangled ways in which race and ableism exert their force upon refugee life, generating in turn their own refugee forces and epistemologies of resistance. Refugee race-ability is informed by Michel Foucault's understanding of power as productive: power disciplines the body and the mind in ways that are not merely destructive but also rehabilitative, corrective, or capacitating. Moreover, power-knowledge is never entirely monolithic—it domesticates subjectivity and renders the body docile just as it opens unforeseeable spaces of resistance. In turn, I use the term "refugee" here not as an object of power-knowledge that names migrant populations of a "host" state who qualify for asylum and thus meet the political status of a refugee. Rather, I understand "refugee" as a means of seeing and accounting for all those displaced and dispossessed by war, whose forms of resettlement may cross the boundaries of space (from one region to another) as well as time (from before and after the destructions of war), and whose experiences of racialization and disability are conjoined by war and its afterlife.

This chapter begins by developing a framework that brings the fields of Critical Refugee Studies and Critical Disability Studies together to revisit the histories and afterlives of the Cold War in Cambodia, where three decades of "hot" fighting on Cambodian territory resulted in the widespread physical and psychological impairment of over 4 million Cambodian people. In the chapter's second half, I look at how Cambodian refugee artists have located the crip Cambodian refugee body-mind at the center of their artwork, even when such artwork does not include narratives of people themselves, but torn landscapes and other remnants of war. Such works, I argue, highlight how refugee "bodies and minds are unevenly caught up in, or differentially materialize around, global processes of uneven development," including the disabling structures of war, imprisonment, resettlement, deportation, and neoliberal divestment.[2] These systems form the matrices of "race-ability," the way in which dominant formations such as criminalization "entails the construction of both race (especially blackness) and disability (especially mental difference) as dangerous."[3] I read these contemporary visual artworks through a lens of refugee race-ability to offer an alternative paradigm to Euro-American liberal disability rights frameworks that, as Critical Disability Studies scholar Jasbir Puar argues, are "invariably infused with certitude that disability should be reclaimed as a valuable difference—the difference of

the Other—through rights, visibility, and empowerment discourses—rather than addressing how much debilitation is caused by global injustice and the war machines of colonialism, occupation, and U.S. imperialism."[4] At the same time, in turning to disability within the afterlife of the Cold War, I hope to avoid the rhetorical conflation of disabled peoples "with the remnants of wartime trauma."[5] As Natalia Duong argues, it is important to see war and colonial violence as a primary cause for unfathomable amounts of death and debility in the Global South, while also understanding how the consistent rhetorical conflation of war and disability can result in disabled bodies being represented as monstrous or horrific war remnants, rather than allowing "for disability to be valued."[6]

By narrating the conditions that produce refugee disablement as well as its long-lasting consequences, refugee race-ability refuses both the devaluing of disabled bodies as mere war remnants as well as the discursive occlusions of war and its afterlives as they have conditioned and continue to condition the lives of Cambodian people. In this chapter, I trace refugee race-ability through narrativizations not of bodies but of bodies of land, which can also tell histories of violence and debility. I route the Cold War in Cambodia through disability and vice versa in order to underscore the imperial and racial vulnerabilities of debilitated populations made differentially available for death and injury. This framework is not simply about inclusion but about interrogating the systems that make populations vulnerable to and available for capture in carceral locales. A refugee race-ability framework seeks to construct an intersectional, abolitionist lens through which we can interrogate the multivalent ways in which refugee life and disability come together in the afterlife of war.

Critical Refugee Studies, Critical Disability Studies

The field of Critical Refugee Studies sutures the analysis of liberal warfare to that of refugee life, refusing the rhetorics that aim to mask the imperial interventions that transform large swaths of people into both refugee populations and disabled populations simultaneously. According to Mimi Thi Nguyen in her book, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages*, liberal warfare references the wars that are framed as exceptional events fought in the name of delivering freedom and democracy to places deemed illiberal.[7] As an assemblage of philosophies, representations, and structures of enforcement, "the gift of freedom," Nguyen asserts, "is not simply a ruse for liberal war but its core proposition."[8] Liberal war depends upon the discursive construction of a named and racialized Other of U.S. liberalism whose supposed unfreedom makes them both redeemable (as refugees) and expendable as "incidental" collateral damage.[9] Seeing the refugee as "damaged" speaks not merely to the racial histories of war and Otherness, but to the refugee body itself as a subject of damage. In this framing, the "gift of freedom" is not merely a condition of refugee subjects granted asylum, but to all those whose bodies are framed as racialized Others irrecoverably damaged by war. In her book *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)*, Yến Lê Espiritu argues that this re-disciplining of refugee subjectivity operates through a "damage-centered" discourse that constructs the refugee only as a humanitarian problem to be solved, a problem located within "the bodies and minds of the refugees rather than in the global historical conditions that produce massive displacements and movements of refugees to the United States and elsewhere."[10] Like the wartorn "homeland" itself, the event of refugee asylum does not represent a break from imperial projects but, as Eric Tang writes, can reinvigorate "the terms of liberal warfare—violence, captivity, collateral damage."[11] Tang's work on Cambodian refugee communities in the U.S. reveals how U.S. colonial and imperial projects have remain unresolved, and that "Cambodian refugee resettlement in the U.S. hyperghetto … represented not the end of this project but its continuance."[12] Refusing to depict the Cambodian refugee experience as exceptional or "lucky" compared to the refugees who remained in Cambodia, Tang analyzes the racial formations of urban divestment, incarceration, and deportation that enfolds the lives of Cambodian refugees within a longue durée of liberal warfare, thus illustrating how the temporality of refugee resettlement functions as a renewed state of refugee captivity.[13]

Bringing these insights from Critical Refugee Studies to the field of Critical Disability Studies, I argue that refugee race-ability helps us illuminate the ways in which refugee bodies are marked by

disability, impairment, and differential vulnerability to premature death in ways that have yet to be adequately addressed in the existing scholarship. As Critical Disability Studies scholars have argued, there is a need to attend to the production of disability (and, by extension, of refugee disablement) in the Global South, wherein eighty percent of the world's people with disabilities are located. Nirmala Ervelles, for instance, argues that the "violence of imperialism is instrumental not only in the creation of disability but also in the absence of public recognition of the impact of disability in the third world."[14] Helen Meekosha likewise proposes a "southern theory of disability" that "specifically incorporates the role of the global North in 'disabling' the global South."[15] For Puar, the field of "southern disability" is not simply an epistemological corrective of what is "left out" of the Euro-centric paradigm disability studies: "it is, rather, a constitutive and capacitating absence."[16] In her focus on the carceral–ableist and settler-colonial structures of power encompassing the lives of Palestinian inhabitants of Gaza and the West Bank, Puar theorizes debility as an analytic that destabilizes the disabled/non-disabled binary underpinning liberal disability rights frameworks. Debility, Puar argues, can be understood as "a process rather than an identity or attribute, a verb and a doing rather than a happening or happening to or done to."[17] Debility "not only deindividualizes disability," but nuances it "through attention to populations and their differential and uneven precarity."[18]

Just as bodies are made differentially vulnerable through their exposure to state violence and bodily injury, they are also capacitated and regulated through the biopolitics of diagnosis, medicalization, and cure. As Liat Ben-Moshe explains, a core stance of Critical Disability Studies involves the work to "depathologize dis/ability from notions of deficiency" and "to untangle disability from medicalization and diagnostic categories."[19] The work of disability justice calls for a productive tension between a social model of disability (that accounts for the debilitation of war and genocide) and a politics of care and accessibility (that advocates for structural access to medical care for disabled refugee subjects). People of color across the globe are at higher risk of disablement and impairment, as inflected by poverty and immigration status; at the same time, they encounter more obstacles in accessing medical treatment, care, and support.[20] At this vexed intersection of the biopolitics of medicalization, Ben-Moshe calls attention to the limits of conceptualizing disability only in terms of biopolitics and debility: what we also need are frameworks "for ways of effectively living with disability."[21] Ben-Moshe finds the potential for navigating this juncture in what she calls "'*dis-epistemology*,' letting go of attachment to certain ways of knowing"—that is, rejecting absolutism, and foreclosing certainty for "what must be done, what will lead to the best results for a noncarceral future."[22] The abandonment of certainty in favor of humility and contingency is also central to critical disability scholars Merri Lisa Johnson and Robert McRurer's notion of "cripistemology"—a mobilization of "remote locations, styles, and modes of transmission for prohibited knowledge about disability."[23] Extending a core stance of crip theory, which is the abandonment of compulsory able-bodiedness, cripistemology aims to think "from the critical, social, and personal position of disability," while also expanding the focus from physical disabilities to "the sometimes-elusive crip subjectivities" of non-visible or undocumented disabilities.[24]

What might a cripping of Critical Refugee Studies look like? As an analytic, refugee race-ability offers a hermeneutic of cripping the refugee narrative, if you will, in the service of refugee and disability justice, not just for the individual, but at interlocking scales of community, from the collective, to the transnational, to the planetary. Critical Refugee Studies has increasingly sought to delineate the refugee narrative as a form with recurring generic and thematic elements. Refugee race-ability might strive to point out the neoliberal instrumentalization of disability as a resource or the logics of cure underpinning what Sharon Snyder and David Mitchell call "narrative prosthesis"—a genre of narrating disability that reifies the normative able-body by plotting the body's return to capacitation as narrative resolution. Narrative prosthesis, Puar explains, "pivots on the exceptional accident and triumphant rehabilitation from it."[25] It includes the story of disability—and by extension refugee displacement—only as an obstacle to be overcome or superseded. As such, narrative prosthesis has many similarities to what Eli Clare terms the medical industry and media's exaltation of the "supercrip" figure—the inspirational disabled person who has acquired success at all odds, *despite* their disability.[26] As Gada Mahrouse has

pointed out, the rhetorical figure of the "supercrip" in Critical Disability Studies has the counterpart in refugee studies of a "super refugee" figure, whose "inspirational stories … similarly entrench a notion of responsibility at the level of the individual and not on society."[27]

By reading through a framework of refugee race-ability, we might see the ableist formations that permeate conventional Vietnamese American refugee narratives, for example, which are often distilled into a before-and-after structure involving an account of "refugees languishing in backward and destitute Vietnam," followed by a redemptive story of their "flourishing in the cosmopolitan and affluent United States."[28] As Viet Thanh Nguyen has argued, ethnic and refugee writers are often expected to translate ethnic cultural details into a sense of traumatic memory, as cultures and ways of life that produce damaged subjects, as a means of affirming the "American Dream, the American Way, and American exceptionalism."[29] Reading through a lens of refugee race-ability thus confronts what Catherine Fung and Marguerite Nguyen describe as the "tension between the ethics and aesthetics of making refugee experience visible," by returning continually to the geopolitical particularities of refugee experience that have produced wartime afterlives of debility and carceral subjection.[30] Both Critical Refugee Studies and Critical Disability Studies thus enact a needed interruption of what the "literary" and "aesthetic" is and can be when it comes to the narratives of refugees as subjects of debility, who refuse to conform to the scripts of normative personhood.

A Genealogy of Disability and the U.S. Bombing of Cambodia

The making of refugee disability in Cambodia and the Cambodian diaspora has its genealogy in the U.S. transpacific Cold War formation that saw the transformation of Cambodia into a proxy site for the "Cold War's darkest chapter," wherein Cambodia became "one of the most heavily bombed countries in history—perhaps *the* most heavily bombed."[31] During the Cold War, the U.S. military's "Operation Menu" (1969–1970) and "Operation Freedom Deal" (1970–1973) authorized the use of long-range B-52 aircraft to carpet bomb the Cambodian border regions of the so-called "Ho Chi Minh Trail" to root out North Vietnamese military supply lines in Cambodia.[32] Dropping more bombs on Cambodia between 1965 and 1973 than the Allies dropped in *all* of World War II combined,[33] the U.S. military intervention in Cambodia exemplified what Achille Mbembe calls necropolitics—the various ways in which "weapons are deployed in the interest of maximally destroying persons and creating *death-worlds,* that is, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer upon them the status of the *living dead*."[34] The mass bombing of Cambodia—which U.S. media reported as one-off incidents of "wayward bombs," "misdirected" airstrikes, and "accidental bombings"—created such death-worlds where the "living dead" were symbolized as both a violent racialized enemy and a damaged, debilitated subject. Meanwhile, one of the central causes of such debilitation and violence—the bombs that created disabled bodies *and* produced the radicalizing conditions for the Khmer Rouge—were cast as incidental accidents. An August 6, 1973 *Tuscaloosa News* article, for example, employed the euphemism "wayward" to refer to the supposedly stray, misdirected path of a B-52 bomb—the bomb that supposedly deviates from its intended target to strike an incidental site of collateral damage. This rhetoric of collateral damage was used to dismiss and evade accountability for the casualties sustained by the town of Neak Luong in August of 1973, one of the deadliest U.S. airstrikes waged on Cambodia during the Cold War. Though Nixon had repeatedly denied his role in ordering the bombing of Cambodia, the 1973 massacre at Neak Luong shifted the official state narrative from one of disavowal of responsibility for dead and debilitated bodies to a language of necessary, pre-emptive aggression against a violent racialized enemy. Nixon thus admitted that "he [had] approved secret bombing raids in Cambodia, and [that] he vigorously justified them as necessary to protect American lives."[35] Mobilizing the image of the U.S. military as a benevolent savior engaged in a just war in Southeast Asia, Nixon framed the new incursion into Cambodia as an act of pre-emptive strikes against an increasingly violent force using wayward bombs that would create dead and debilitated peoples *over there* rather than in America. As Nixon said when faced with mounting

criticism from the Senate and the House, "We could cop out, but if we do, *our children* will live in a very dangerous world."[36] Viewing Cambodian children's lives as utterly expendable in the service of purportedly safeguarding American children's lives, Nixon's rhetoric bluntly cast the Cambodians affected by America's wayward bombs into justifiable collateral damage for fantasies of imperial liberation for the democratic world writ large.

As the Cambodian civil war wore on, the Khmer Rouge were able to rise in power by using the destruction and loss of life to recruit new followers to the regime's cause. The regime enlisted the poor, destitute, and debilitated to join the revolution against the imperialist and capitalist class that had oppressed them for generations. Gathering up survivors of the U.S. bombings, Khmer Rouge leaders were known "to point to the skies to the American planes that were bombing, and say: there's your enemy."[37] From fewer than 10,000 cadres in 1969, the Khmer Rouge regime grew to over 200,000 cadres in 1973.[38] Such radicalization occurred within a population that was not occupied or directly colonized, but who were subjects of debilitation: victims who were maimed, traumatized, or otherwise debilitated by America's wayward bombs. The trauma and fear of the bombs gave the Khmer Rouge a believable and effective narrative when they stormed into the capital city of Phnom Penh on April 17, 1975 and evacuated the entire city of nearly two million people using the pretext of an impending U.S. bombing attack. The U.S. bombing of Cambodia left a legacy of body counts, maiming, and belated injury; the Cambodian genocide that came afterward subjected Cambodian people to death and injury on a completely different magnitude of order. The Cambodian genocide enveloped an entire population of over six million people, killing a quarter of this population and debilitating the rest in physical and cognitive ways that are not yet fully understood. As Puar recounts about her fieldwork in four refugee camps in the West Bank, "there was not a single family or group of people among those we conversed with in the refugee camps that did not have close proximity to family and community with histories of disability."[39] In Cambodia and in the diaspora, I have likewise yet to meet a Cambodian family that was untouched by the violence of the war and genocide. As Cambodian Canadian graffiti artist, FONKi Yav, explains in the biopic documentary film *The Roots Remain*, "I always say, each family in Cambodia, and every person you meet here is directly linked to the genocide."[40]

The disproportionate disability and refugee displacement of the Cambodian population has not arisen by happenstance but as a function of the racial calculus of empire that has shaped this population's malleability through consecutive regimes of U.S. imperialism, Khmer Rouge genocide, and U.S. liberal warfare, necessitating a refugee race-ability analysis that allows us to consider the overlapping logics of the refugee and disabled figure. While the disabled subject might lose a limb, a cognitive capacity, or an "ability," the refugee subject is characterized by the loss of a house, a family, or a homeland. Dis-placement and dis-ability both suggest loss or negation (of place or of ability), and both figures are subjected to narratives of damage and overcoming that often erase, dismiss, or obscure the very conditions of such "damage" (war, colonial violence), as well as the infrastructural limitations that such subjects face and which cannot be merely "overcome." In turn, refugee race-ability also compels us to revisit the terms upon which we identify "the refugee" as a figure defined by migrancy and asylum within the Global North. On Cambodian land, the legacy of the Cold War continues to exert its disabling force, as Cambodia—along with Angola and Afghanistan—is one of the most heavily landmined countries in the world. Since the fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, the belated triggering of these landmines—often by young children or poor farmers who work the land—has claimed more than 64,000 casualties. It is estimated that nearly 2,000 square kilometers of land remain laced with landmines and other unexploded ordnances (UXOs).[41] As a country with one of the highest concentrations of UXOs in the world, Cambodia in many ways inhabits "a twilight realm in which everyday life remains semi-militarized by slow violence and in which the earth itself must be treated with permanent suspicion, as armed and dangerous."[42] The threat of UXO-related death, maiming, and disablement thus confronts the ongoing subjection to war and its afterlives that do not only affect the subject of refugee asylum, but people in Cambodia who live in their "home countries" yet cannot

return to a landscape that was once able to sustain life and regeneration for the new generation. Instead, the land after war continues to remake trauma and loss anew.

In the diaspora, systematic formations such as poverty and racialization have contributed to "substantial health disparities" within Cambodian refugee communities, including their disproportionate vulnerability to "stroke and cardiovascular disease which, in turn, are leading causes of premature death and disability in the United States."[43] Such "group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death"—Ruth Wilson Gilmore's definition of racism—is suggestive of the social and political underpinnings of trauma and disability.[44] In the words of Aihwa Ong, Cambodian refugees have moved "from a regime of power of death [in Cambodia] to a regime of power over life [in the United States]."[45] Even as Cambodia and the Cambodian diaspora, by virtue of their Cold War history, comprise a disproportionate rate of disability relative to the rest of Asia and to the population of asylum countries, there has been scant attention to disability paid to Cambodian people within critical disability frameworks. In the remainder of this chapter, I track the resonances of refugee race-ability across an eclectic archive of photojournalism, visual art, and museum spaces that addresses the afterlife of the Cold War in Cambodia and its legacies of refugee debilitation.

Refugee Race-Ability across the Archival Land(Scape)

A photograph of a scorched landscape outside of Phnom Penh stands as a rare photojournalistic archive capturing the early destruction wrought by the U.S. bombing of Cambodia. With its monochrome palette depicting a lone survivor, ruined landscape, and darkened skies, the photo evokes the tones and composition of an apocalyptic death-world made by U.S. aerial war. Taken by British photographer and former Cambodian refugee camp relief worker Colin Grafton, this photo was exhibited as a part of the

Figure 22.1   A Cambodian Landscape in the Aftermath of the U.S. Bombing of Cambodia, near Thakmao, 1972.
Source: Photo by Colin Grafton.

2015 exhibition "Before the Fall" held at Bophana Audiovisual Center in Cambodia in Phnom Penh. The caption of this photo includes Grafton's ominous ruminations about the volatile political conditions that were taking shape on the ground level during this time: "The explosions set up a continuous sub-bass rumble that rattled the windows all night long. I remember thinking about the human beings who were down on the ground under this monstrous onslaught. If they survived, they must suffer such trauma. What would happen to their minds? Enter the Khmer Rouge."[46] These reflections call attention to the accumulation of sonic violence and its tormenting effect on the people. Recalling the improbability of survival ("If they survived") in a bomb's perimeter, Grafton also remarks upon aerial warfare's making of mad subjects—subjects whose anger, desolation, and despair would harden into a radicalized collectivity that would relentlessly seek its revenge on the "imperialists and landowners" in the years to come. This madness is featured in the photo's landscape, which is both a surreal and awe-inspiring combination of beauty and terror, as well as itself a subject of debilitation in its broken infertility, its stripped buildings and trees. The debilitation of the land is tethered to the lone human walking through it, who does not stand tall *against* a scarred and sublime landscape but is conjoined *with* it. Read through refugee race-ability, we see the lone figure—whether granted asylum or not—as a person made into refugee subjectivity through the displacement of war and the debilitation of the land. The apocalyptic tones of Grafton's photo illustrate the conditions of displacement and refugee-making, as one "life-world" transitioned into a "deathworld," transforming anyone caught within this change into subjects of refugee debilitation. Grafton's title and remarks also center this moment of apocalyptic change onto the U.S. collateralization of Cambodian life during the Cold War, which powered the rise of the Khmer Rouge guerilla insurgents—who would then go on to become the genocidal Khmer Rouge regime in 1975. In so doing, Grafton's work eschews a simple victim/perpetrator account to insist instead upon the landscape of *endemic* debilitation that was Cambodia during the Cold War and beyond.

Figure 22.2   From "Bomb Ponds" Series, 2009, by Vandy Rattana.

Picturing the scarred Cambodian landscape four decades after Grafton's photo, Cambodian artist Vandy Rattana's "Bomb Ponds" (2009) photo series offers another compelling entry point for thinking about the entanglements between war, refugee life, and debility in Cambodia. Idyllic and tranquil in appearance, Rattana's bomb ponds are former bomb craters overgrown with fecund foliage in Cambodia's Eastern provinces.[47] Merging photojournalism and artistic practice, Rattana's photographs, as the artist describes on his website, seek to "articulate the psychological wounds of Cambodians who survived the American carpet bombing between 1964 and 1973."[48] If the articulation of collective wounds is part of Rattana's aim, however, his approach to doing so is visually abstracted and aestheticized in a way that elucidates the illegibility and invisibility of Cambodian wounding in the global disability imaginary. In the photo series, we grasp the materiality of threat and debility that lurks just beneath nature's tranquil surface. The picturesque, pastoral scenes layer over a grotesque history of U.S. military crusade in Cambodia. Even though no people are present in the photograph, the landscape traces human interaction, both in the bomb that created the crevice, and in the agricultural grid of the rice field that grows around it. Rather than mark a moment of refugee-making here, the bomb pond expresses refugee *re*making of land itself, where the scars of its debilitation remain visible but have been re-used to create the conditions for new growth. While Grafton's photo was apocalyptic in tone, the bomb ponds series stray from tragedy as well as optimism. The muddiness of the bomb pond itself is reflected in the muddy sky, and trees stand from afar like onlookers. If Grafton's photo signals the sonic violence of the bomb, Rattana's photos signal the silence of refugee debilitation, the aphasic loss of speaking that comes from telling one's story of war and trauma again and again and again.

In a video installation piece that accompanies Rattana's photo series, Cambodian farmers give accounts of the belated arrival of toxicity, maiming, and death that has unfolded in the bomb regions over the past four decades. These interviews take place in far-reaching rural spaces, what Puar might describe as the "elsewhere" zones of U.S. imperial occupations where debility has been "offshored." In these "off the grid" coordinates of U.S. transpacific Cold War empire, not only is disability "disavowed but is done so through the belated arrival of such disability."[49] As one Cambodian farmer says to the camera while pointing to ponds, "the story about the bomb ponds is true, we didn't make this up."[50] Chronicling the social climate of denial and epistemic injustice in which their testimonies have been repeatedly invalidated, the survivors in the video must turn to the earth itself as evidence. Read through a refugee race-ability lens, we might understand the earth not merely as a subject of debilitation but as resembling the war's continual presence through its ability to continually make subjects of debility, and to cause constant fear and "damage" to the communities who live nearby.

In Rattana's video, we see how Cambodian farmers have adjusted to living amidst unexploded ordnances, and have found colloquial and vernacular idioms to describe the everyday terror of living on land that threatens to harm. Whereas refugees continue to be positioned against a dark and tragic past, the ongoing tragedy of unexploded ordnances remakes refugees just as it remakes debilitated subjects. Even still, the survivors of the U.S. bombing of Cambodia have taken to narrating the landscape's grotesque morphing with the hope that their voices might facilitate some form of redress or reparation. As one survivor in Rattana's "Bomb Ponds" video states, "if the U.S. government has already see[n] this devastation, please could they help rebuild the country?" "Bomb Ponds" ultimately questions, however, whether any kind of reparation, economic or spiritual, can take place when the Cold War past remains embedded in the earth in the form of unexploded ordnances that continue to remake debility and disability over and over again.

Race-Ability and the Land(Mine)

About 400 km northwest of the site of Rattana's "Bomb Ponds" in Sambour, Kratié province, the most heavily bombed region of Cambodia, one arrives at the Cambodia Landmines Museum, a small, unassuming space about 25 km north of Siem Reap. I visited this museum on three different occasions between 2015 and 2018. The museum's exterior entrance walkway is formed by two rows of large,

rusted metal bomb canisters labeled "Aircraft Bomb, USA, Russia." Unlike the more visited war and genocide memorials in Cambodia such as the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and the Choeung Ek Killing Fields, the Landmines Museum distinctively frames the rise of the Khmer Rouge and the genocide of 1975–1979 within a Cold War context—one that highlights the international culpability of nations such as the U.S. and the Soviet Union in Cambodia's wartime past. An entire room, Room 2, is devoted to the history of the U.S. bombing, naming Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger specifically and explaining that the "bombing of Cambodia resulted in the loss of an estimated 600,000 civilian lives and contributed significantly to the rise of the Khmer Rouge." The visitor reads about the unexploded ordnances through the story of a young boy in Battambang in 2009 who "lost an arm and hand to a cluster munition that lay unseen in a farm field for over 30 years." The museum's curation explains that the boy currently lives at the Cambodia Landmine Museum Relief Center along with other orphans who have been similarly injured. In another gallery, the visitor is taken through a history of the post-genocide era when "most of [the landmines] were laid during the 20-year guerrilla war that followed the overthrow of the Khmer Rouge (January 7, 1979)." This was a period when the U.S., along with other Western nations such as Britain, continued to support the Khmer Rouge's seat at the United Nations while covertly supporting the regime's ongoing insurgency against the Vietnamese army. Today, an estimated 5.1 million Cambodians live in danger of buried landmines left over from the 20-year guerilla war, and the burden of demining has fallen overwhelmingly on everyday Cambodians. In short, the museum space, in its haphazard and ad hoc way, registers multiple valences of debility stemming from the Cold War, to collateral damage, to child soldiering, to maiming, toxicity, death, injury, and demining. The museum is in a relatively confined space with little aesthetic mediation and an emphasis on the visual display of facts and statistics, forcing the visitor's inescapable confrontation with what Puar describes as "the vastly uneven geopolitical distribution of disability, and our (U.S.) complicity in producing debilitation elsewhere."[51]

The public face or "poster child" of the museum is a Cambodian man named Aki Ra, the museum's founder. Written as a first-person account, the museum's welcome placard explains that Aki Ra was a former child soldier conscripted by the Khmer Rouge during the Pol Pot era at the age of ten, later by the Vietnamese army after 1979, and then again in 1989 by the Cambodian National Army. During his time, Ra laid thousands of landmines. In 1993, after two decades of war, Ra began working for the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) to clear landmines and UXOs. Later, he began returning to the minefields to remove the mines by hand on his own, with little safety protection and makeshift demining tools. Troubled by the number of orphaned children maimed and injured by the mines, Ra and his wife began adopting these children into their family. He eventually collected enough military waste material to form the Cambodia Landmines Museum in 1994, displaying a wide assortment of mines he had personally removed and deactivated over the years.

In the biographical documentary film *A Perfect Solider*, Aki Ra narrates the extensive personal costs he has incurred as a result of his demining: toxic exposure, the trauma of witnessing countless demining accidents, PTSD, helplessness, and despair. In spite of this, Ra comments in the film that "I realized I planted landmines that injured or killed many things. Now I try to remove the landmines that I and others planted."[52] As the film makes clear, his work of demining and museum commemoration seems partly driven by a desire to atone for the personal responsibility he feels as a former soldier who participated in the laying of the landmines—and the countless deaths and maimings that ensued as a result—in the first place.

Aki Ra's desire for atonement has been praised by Western critics as heroically exceptional in his pursuits—modeling "the profoundly hopeful malleability of the human mind and spirit" by single-handedly removing around 50,000 land mines during his lifetime. There is no discounting the extraordinary nature of Ra's story as a person whose body has been made available for injury time and time again, first as child soldier enlisted into the war, then as deminer thrust to the frontlines of the humanitarian transitional occupation, and finally as worker/cultural ambassador enlisted by the NGO industry to be the face of the Landmines Museum. At the same time, Ra's story of atonement and responsibility

toward those maimed and killed by bombs risks being told in insolation. Despite the impact of U.S. bombs and the transnational arms profiteering that fueled the Cold War, it is still Cambodian bodies that become subjects of risk and affective atonement, who are to be debilitated further. Indeed, a refugee race-ability reading might cast Ra's case as a form of productive debilitation, or what Puar describes as the "speculative rehabilitative economy," wherein debilitated bodies become valued and praised because of their debilitation and their depiction "as parts that are modulated with forms of life and their variegated temporalities."[53] Irrespective of the intentions of individual actors, the story of Ra and the Cambodian Landmine Museum risks incorporation into an economy wherein disability in Cambodia is rendered profitable, while also limiting the effects of atonement and responsibility toward the already racialized and debilitated subject.

Conclusion: Debt, Debility, and Reparation in the Afterlife

Another way to interpret Aki Ra's story of atonement, aside from its individuation, is to understand such atonement as a form of shared debt and responsibility to help alleviate the debilitating suffering of so many Cambodian people in the wake of the Cold War. The story of atonement then is also a story about the inextricable, yet widely ignored relationship between structural debt and debility. The view held by many Cambodians is that Cambodian people owe a moral debt to each other to redress the harms of the past, and that this moral debt is shared too by the U.S., who can only repay such debt through reparations, in some form or another, for its past war crimes in Cambodia. This spirit of relationality and futurity contrasts sharply, however, with the toll that continues to be exacted on Cambodia by the U.S. in financial terms. The U.S. government has reissued renewed calls for Cambodia to repay a wartime debt of 276 million U.S. dollars (now 500 million U.S. dollars) that was incurred from 1972 to 1975. In February 2017, U.S. Ambassador to Cambodia William Heidt insisted at a press conference in Phnom Penh that "it's in Cambodia's interest not to look at the past, but to look at how to solve this [debt] because it's important to Cambodia's future."[54] In other words, Cambodia's future is dependent upon its forgetting of the historical context in which the U.S.' Cold War-era foreign policy in Cambodia helped create the conditions for the loan in the first instance. The U.S. bombing of Cambodia devastated the country's civilian and agricultural infrastructure and contributed to a massive food shortage that paved the way for the U.S. to then step in with a loan to Cambodia in the form of agricultural commodities. The loan was made to the Lon Nol government, a regime seen by many as having come to power illegitimately through a U.S.-backed coup in 1970. Presumably out of fear that it will have to repay reparations to Cambodia, the U.S. government continues to obscure this history of covert intervention and secret war in Cambodia, using the debt, ironically, as a means of obscuring its own culpability in Cambodia.[55]

More than demonstrating U.S. hypocrisy, the demands for Cambodia's debt repayment expose the terms of liberal warfare that Nguyen describes as the slow, "poisonous promise" of the gift of freedom.[56] As Nguyen writes, "the gift demands a reciprocal return of value that cannot simply be repaid in financial terms—though such terms are not *not* included in the tally."[57] That Cambodia continues to owe a debt to the U.S., and not the inverse, illustrates how the afterlife of the Cold War in Cambodia continues to be structured by both physical and psychological debilitation—a refusal to recognize or validate a violent and traumatic past, whose afterlives of unexploded ordnances, toxicities, and hyperghettos continue to remake refugee life. As a "figurative economy or narrative structure" of "debt imperialism," the repeated invocation of Cambodia's financial debt to the U.S. works to perpetually foreclose a discourse of U.S. reparation to Cambodia, while continually recasting debilitative conditions onto future generations.[58] According to the Cold War myth of the U.S. rescuing and liberation, damages sustained by Cambodians are deemed what Lisa Yoneyama terms "'prepaid debts' incurred by those liberated by American intervention."[59] In Cambodia, these "pre-paid debts" are not only reminders of the damages sustained during the Cold War, but that Cambodian refugee subjects remain subjects of damage, debility, and displacement, in their unbroken relation to U.S. empire.

This irony is illustrated perhaps most poignantly in the scenes of Qingming, the annual festival to honor the dead in Cambodia, when Cambodians traditionally burn fake money or gold in remembrance of their ancestors, transferring to the afterlife the commodities that are of most value in Cambodian society at any given time in history. Today, the Cambodian riel as a national currency remains too devalued; piles of fake U.S. dollars are frequently set alight for the dead instead. In this way, if only for a day, Cambodian subjects refuse the logics of debt imperialism, calling attention to the U.S.' role in ongoing structures of dis-placement and dis-ability.

Notes

 1 Ben-Moshe, *Decarcerating Disability*, 5.
 2 Chong, *The Oriental Obscene*, 22.
 3 Ben-Moshe, *Decarcerating Disability*, 28.
 4 Puar, *The Right to Maim*, xvii.
 5 Duong, "Agent Orange Bodies," 395.
 6 Duong, "Agent Orange Bodies," 396.
 7 Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom*, 3.
 8 Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom*, xii, 12.
 9 Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom*, 141, 173.
10 Espiritu, *Body Counts*, 22.
11 Tang, *Unsettled*, 44.
12 Tang, *Unsettled*, 44.
13 Tang, *Unsettled*, 13.
14 Erevelles, "The Color of Violence," 118.
15 Meekosha, "Decolonising Disability," 668.
16 Puar, *The Right to Maim*, 16.
17 Puar, *The Right to Maim*, 73.
18 Puar, *The Right to Maim*, 72.
19 Ben-Moshe, *Decarcerating Disability*, 29.
20 Ben-Moshe, *Decarcerating Disability*, 29.
21 Ben-Moshe, *Decarcerating Disability*, 30.
22 Ben-Moshe, *Decarcerating Disability*, 126.
23 Johnson and McRuer, "Cripistemologies," 130.
24 Johnson and McRuer, "Cripistemologies," 134.
25 Puar, *The Right to Maim*, 85.
26 For more on the supercrip figure, see Clare, *Exile and Pride*.
27 Mahrouse, "Producing the Figure of the 'Super-Refugee'," 182.
28 Espiritu, *Body Counts*, 97.
29 Nguyen, *Nothing Ever Dies*, 204.
30 Nguyen and Fung, "Editor's Introduction," 2.
31 Owen and Kiernan, "Bombs over Cambodia," 63.
32 Chandler, "The Khmer Rouge in a Cold War Context," 12.
33 Owen and Kiernan, "Bombs over Cambodia," 67.
34 Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, 91.
35 Cannon, "Nixon: I Gave Order for Secret Bombing."
36 Cannon, "Nixon: I Gave Order for Secret Bombing," italics mine.
37 Oliver, "Remembering the Killing Fields."
38 Owen and Kiernan, "Roots of U.S. Troubles in Afghanistan."
39 Puar, *The Right to Maim*, 157.
40 FONKi Yav, qtd. in Francoeur and Marchand-Boddy, *The Roots Remain*.
41 Roberts, *Landmines in Cambodia*, 31.
42 Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*, 227.
43 Marshall et al., "Diabetes and Cardiovascular Disease Risk in Cambodian Refugees," 113.
44 Wilson, *Golden Gulag*, 28.
45 Ong, *Buddha Is Hiding*, 18.
46 Grafton, "Before the Fall."
47 Rattana, "Bomb Ponds."
48 Rattana, "Bomb Ponds."

49 Puar, *The Right to Maim*, 89.
50 Vandy Rattana, "Bomb Ponds."
51 Puar, *The Right to Maim*, 67.
52 Aki Ra, qtd. in *A Perfect Soldier.*
53 Puar, *The Right to Maim*, 153.
54 William Heidt, qtd. in Meyn and Sokhean, "US Hits Back At Government Over \$500 Million Debt."
55 Elizabeth Becker, qtd. in Wright, "With War-Era Debt Demands, US on Shaky Moral Ground."
56 Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom,* 20.
57 Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom,* 169.
58 Kim, "Settler Modernity, Debt Imperialism," 41.
59 Yoneyama, *Cold War Ruins.*

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23

"MANY HANDS LIGHTEN THE LOAD"

Health Lessons from San Diego during the Time of COVID-19

Christiane Assefa

"During the pandemic, we never closed the organization, even one day. We were open. We decided to keep the office open because we've seen a lot of increase of domestic violence cases here … So, we kept this office open during the pandemic and we never closed," one member of the San Diego Refugee Communities Coalition (SDRCC) shared with me on an early afternoon Zoom call in the spring of 2021. From her perspective, the organization did not have the option to close its doors or work from home. This sentiment was shared broadly among all members of the SDRCC, who continued working through the pandemic; some scheduling in-person appointments one at a time to maintain social distancing, others distributing personal protective equipment (PPE) to those standing in line outside their community centers seeking services and support that ranged from rental assistance, legal advice, job application assistance, and more.

In this chapter, I explore narratives produced through the grassroots activism of the SDRCC to trace how forcibly displaced communities produce and contest narratives regarding health. The SDRCC is an organizing collective led by communities who have experienced the generational impact of forced displacement and have deep ties with their local surroundings in San Diego, the second-largest resettlement city in the U.S. and home to over half of all refugees in the state of California. Recognizing a need for collaboration among refugees across the San Diego region, two refugee community health advocates brought together a group of organizations they had long-standing relationships with to design and create a grassroots, refugee-led coalition. The SDRCC is made up of refugee communities from Somalia, Palestine, South Sudan, Iraq, Burma/Myanmar, Haiti, Afghanistan, Eritrea, and Ethiopia; the coalition centers shared experiences of forced displacement as a key point of unity. The outbreak of COVID-19 deepened the stakes of the coalition as they formally met as a group for the first time in February of 2020—just months before El Cajon and City Heights, neighborhoods that are home to many refugees, had some of the highest numbers of COVID-19 cases in the county.[1]

While each member organization of the SDRCC provided essential work vital for refugee families at the onset of the pandemic, they also conducted an assessment with 306 families in twelve different languages to measure the impact of COVID-19 on San Diego's refugees. The data proved what they instinctively knew—that the pandemic adversely impacted the health, employment, housing, and education of refugees in San Diego County. Of the 306 families in the sample, 42 percent had at least one member who lost their job, 60 percent of families were unable to pay rent, and 36 percent lived in fear of eviction. 70 percent of families were concerned about access to food. 85 percent were concerned their children were not getting the support needed to participate in distance learning. The SDRCC

responded rapidly to the urgent needs of their communities by providing PPE delivery, tech support and training, rental assistance, youth programs, support groups, and more. Their organizing model was developed with a commitment to serve through their everyday interactions with their communities. Through a praxis of solidarity, the coalition produced critical narratives regarding refugee health and the role of collaboration within the non-profit landscape.

Organized in three parts, this chapter documents the definitions of health and wellness that emerge from the grassroots refugee organizing in San Diego during the COVID-19 pandemic; the impact of Title 42, and how the SDRCC responds to the enduring legacy of slavery and xenophobia in the U.S.; and the coalitional building work of the SDRCC as a refugee praxis of solidarity.[2] In this chapter, refugee narratives on health are primarily shaped by the everyday experiences of forcibly displaced communities in San Diego who organized to meet the needs of refugees and refugee families during the COVID-19 pandemic. By centering the oral histories of members of the SDRCC, this chapter outlines the organizing practices of the SDRCC as a refugee praxis of solidarity that extends beyond structures and histories of displacement and racialization. Further, the narratives put forth by the coalition challenge public health and medical definitions of health that often engage the systematic marginalization of communities of color through problem-oriented inquiries on health disparities or outcomes. The SDRCC mobilizes a vision of refugee health that centers empowerment and agency, as well as material efforts to improve the lived experiences of refugee communities. The narratives in this chapter pose critical questions about the social production of health and what it means to locate health as a site of political struggle.

On Methods

This chapter relies on a set of twelve oral histories I conducted with members of the SDRCC that focused on the emergence of the SDRCC, their unique coalitional model, and the scope of their work over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic. This project was developed in collaboration with the SDRCC at every step, from the development of primary goals and research questions to identifying material ways the research could support their ongoing work. Through a focus on the needs of the coalition, I was able to conduct virtual oral histories with members of the SDRCC, who are identified by pseudonyms in this chapter. Through my own community organizing work, I had established relationships and familiarity with many members of the SDRCC and, despite the virtual medium, the oral histories very much felt like conversations and an opportunity to pause and reflect on what the coalition had accomplished. Averaging about one hour in length each, this set of oral histories illuminates the personal narratives of refugees in San Diego during a particular moment in time, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the context of refugee communities, oral history is a particularly useful method to contest dominant narratives that depict forcibly displaced communities as helpless and in need of aid. Rather than visual images of despair, starvation, and fear circulated in news media and politics, oral history can center narratives that refuse to reproduce violent images of abjection and instead uphold refugee dignity and knowledge production. The everyday activities of the coalition are material sites where narratives are produced and actively deployed as a strategy to address the needs of vulnerable communities. In this way, the reflections and personal accounts of SDRCC members in this chapter facilitate an understanding and documentation of refugee definitions of health, wellness, and coalition building, locating grassroots organizing as a site of knowledge and narrative production.

Refugee Narratives of Health and Wellness

In their narration of health and wellness, SDRCC members gave primacy to the everyday life and collective well-being of their communities. The coalition provided rent support, tech support for online learning, domestic violence intervention, counseling, diaper drop-offs, PPE delivery, and more, as community health responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. By addressing the intimate ways marginalized

communities experience the pandemic beyond the scale of individual bodies and health, the SDRCC challenges neoliberal conceptions of health that operate at the local scale in San Diego and that assert that health is exclusively an individual responsibility.

In San Diego, wellness is a lifestyle. Dominant narratives regarding health in "America's Finest City" highlight outdoor activities such as surfing, cycling, hiking, and long-distance running as defining features of the region, asserting that one must take it upon themself to maintain one's health through personal choice and physical activity. This can be observed in the 2020 ten-year Impact Report of *Live Well San Diego*, a project of the local government to improve the health of residents of San Diego County. Their vision is guided by data that measures poor behavior, disease, and death as markers for public health intervention. These determinants are highly racialized, particularly in the context of the historical role of public health agencies to surveil and regulate racially marginalized communities believed to be sources of contagious disease. Nayan Shah illuminates how racial codes are mediated through public health to produce citizen subjects, arguing that "modern public health crafted a strategy of both state regulation and bourgeois self-regulation that linked the conduct and consciousness of the individual self with the vitality of society overall."[3] Based upon liberal values that reinforce the idea that good health is a result of individual choices, *Live Well San Diego* makes the role of systemic oppression on health and healthcare auxiliary and is a useful example of how dominant narratives regarding health and healthcare operate in the local context.

In contrast, the SDRCC's narrative of health challenges the neoliberal myth of individual responsibility. Amid a global pandemic disproportionately impacting racially marginalized and working-class communities, committing to a collective effort to meet the immediate needs required for refugees *to live* stands in stark contrast to, and challenges, local public health narratives and initiatives that use *death* and disease as primary measurements for health outcomes. The SDRCC promotes a conception of health that addresses systemic violence, such as racism and xenophobia, while centering dignity, empowerment, and solidarity. These grassroots efforts inform the narratives that emerged from the oral histories conducted, in which the deep ties between housing and political agency consistently emerged as key components of health for refugee families.

Housing as Healthcare

"First it's health, health and housing," Ousmane said, "and that is why we had a lot of issue when San Diego is too expensive in housing. And we were losing a lot of community members moving to other states that is very low income so they can afford to pay for their rents." The Somali Bantu community Ousmane's organization serves in San Diego primarily lives in the City Heights neighborhood, but over the years, he tells me, many community members have been forced out of San Diego, moving to places like Nashville, Tennessee and Buffalo, New York. Narratives about housing and home repeatedly came up in my conversations with different members of the SDRCC, some discussing the increase in rental assistance requests during the pandemic, others talking about how vital a safe and secure community is when resettling and creating a new home. War and militarization are often the initial events that produce refugees, and in places like San Diego, gentrification is a second process that continues to destabilize and displace.

During the pandemic, housing became a critical public health strategy to address COVID-19 outbreaks, as people were instructed to shelter in place by local and state governments. The prevention of the spread of COVID-19 relied upon secure housing for all and yet, the SDRCC found that 60 percent of refugee families were unable to pay rent and 36 percent lived in fear of eviction. Not only does this illuminate how and why housing is critical to health, but why affordable housing is a critical site of political struggle for marginalized communities. During the pandemic, rent prices increased by 9 percent in San Diego, making the price of average rent in San Diego $2,075 USD.[4] For refugee families, who often live with extended family members, the pandemic not only posed a challenge in terms of the growing cost of living but the overall quality of living as well. SDRCC members shared the challenges of living in two-bedroom apartments that served as a classroom, work office, and site of recreational

activities for all family members. For those who were essential workers, it was nearly impossible to socially distance themselves from children and vulnerable family members when returning home from work. The pandemic illuminated a crisis in affordable and quality housing that fits the specific needs of refugee families. While many white-collar workers in California moved their families to more affordable regions of the U.S. to purchase homes with more indoor and outdoor space, this option was not available for low-wage workers who were losing their jobs.

In working to help families make rent, the SDRCC met the immediate, urgent needs of refugee families and created a space that helps establish a vision of health as housing equity. One SDRCC member shared the following with me that for their individual organization,

> The question has been, how do we link the social service work to advocacy and to building community power? And I think the pandemic presented us with that in a more material way. So, for example, rental assistance being a more short-sighted solution to housing inequity, but how do we as a center help community access those resources? And from there actually build power to advocate for broader measures to ensure housing access?

Pairing service and support work with a vision of political empowerment is central to what makes the SDRCC such a critical space. Rather than recruiting community members to participate in political campaigns without any shared understanding or grassroots interest, SDRCC member organizations work to meet their community where they are to foster the connection and trust necessary for political transformation.

Political Agency

Responding to my question on what health looks like for her community, Awat, an Iraqi community leader based in El Cajon, said: "The reason we want equity and the reason we want access is so that our community members can live the lives that they want for themselves and that they're able to live up to their full potential … at the heart of it is the political agency." While solutions for equity in health and healthcare often lead to campaigns advocating for healthcare for all, or best practices for healthcare workers treating diverse populations, the SDRCC recognizes that health is deeply political, personal, and mediated through every aspect of culture and society. Ayaan, a local leader and member of the SDRCC, states that health means her Somali community is empowered with "the tools that they can make a decision, like, do you have all the information to make decision[s]? Asking the right questions, and getting the right information, learn how to ask and how to advocate [for] themselves." Political agency not only empowers individuals and communities, but it also creates opportunities for marginalized communities to think beyond the immediate short-term needs of their families and loved ones, and to think more broadly about their long-term goals and interests. This suggests that health is not just about our physical bodies but instead is tied to the systems we exist within.[5]

Awat's conviction, as well as her imagination, is apparent as she moves her arms in a circular motion, describing what community health means. Drawing from her deep engagement with refugees in El Cajon, she narrates everyday experiences that illustrate her definition of health:

> Health means school. Health means city council to make a good decision about our city. Health means government. Health means President. Health means political. Health means newspaper. Health means street driving. Health means enough services. Health means me, me being able to connect and to make good decision[s], but how can I make a good decision if everything around me is not good, is not healthy. So I think it's all … This is what happens … If I imagined health in a map. This is how I draw health.

Looking beyond individual bodies, Awat's narrative on health and wellness illustrates a relationship between health and historical and systemic violence. Awat expressed that her Muslim refugee clients

want to feel safe walking on the sidewalk in El Cajon and need resources that provide culturally competent intervention for domestic abuse—they fear going to the police as they know racialized stereotypes of Muslim men in the criminal justice system in the U.S. will not bring about the type of care and support they need. The SDRCC struggles for political agency that takes into account the impact of historical violence against racialized and forcibly displaced people. While health and wellness are dominantly determined in the medical field and public health through the absence of disease or by health outcomes, SDRCC members argue that health is socially constructed and produced through various determinants, such as the government and education system, that exist outside of the control of individuals.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease."[6] Though the WHO identifies peace, shelter, education, a stable economy, and social justice as fundamental conditions for health, as the leading global health institution, they do not confront the extractive nature of capitalism, or the enduring impact of colonialism (in various iterations), as impeding upon the health and well-being of communities across the world.[7] Though there is little consensus on a singular definition of health disparities, or health inequality, among public health scholars, Paula Braveman defines it as "systematic, potentially avoidable differences in health—or in the major socially determined influences on health—between groups of people who have different relative positions in social hierarchies according to wealth, power, or prestige."[8]

While much progress has been made in how public health addresses power and difference as key factors in determining health outcomes, the SDRCC narratives on health and wellness pose critical questions on how to meaningfully engage difference beyond the scale of individual patients and/or healthcare providers.[9] Solutions to ensure the positive health status of historically marginalized communities must extend beyond clinical, statistical, or individual health to really grapple with broader social, economic, and political transformations. Further, beyond health status and outcome, and as Title 42 evidences, the bodies and health of refugees are weaponized and their racial markers are used to depict them as threats to the security of the nation. The SDRCC narratives and definitions of health expand public health research on race and racism to consider not only the broader economic, political, and social factors that shape health and health outcomes, but also how working-class, racially marginalized communities struggle for health equity and transform what health and care fundamentally mean. Rather than examining individual bodies, the SDRCC produces a critical analysis of health and political agency through grassroots organizing work that centers community empowerment and agency.

Title 42: Anti-Black Racism, Xenophobia, and Health as a Site of Power and Control

Drawing from their individual lives and everyday experiences, SDRCC members narrated how health is socially and politically produced. While the first section of this chapter documented the narratives on health that emerged through oral histories with the SDRCC, this second section historically situates the narratives and grassroots organizing of the SDRCC within the legacy of anti-Black racism and xenophobia in the U.S. This illuminates the stakes of the narratives SDRCC members put forth regarding health as a site of political struggle. This historicization is important as it demands an engagement with the past to contextualize and give force to the conditions of the everyday (the present), destabilizing dominant narratives that attempt to detach the past from the contemporary moment.[10] The impact of systemic issues on health and bodies became widely apparent during the COVID-19 pandemic, as different communities were differently impacted by the virus economically, socially, and politically. CDC regulations, executive orders, and statewide mandates became the norm. While mask mandates and stay-at-home orders became politically polarizing topics, there was a specific pandemic policy that drew from the U.S.' enduring history of anti-Black racism and xenophobia: Title 42.

On March 20, 2020, days after the first COVID-19 stay-at-home order in the U.S. was issued, the Trump administration used the CDC's special legal authority to put into place Title 42 of the Public

Health Service Act: an "Order Suspending Introduction of Certain Persons from Countries where a Communicable Disease Exists."[11] Using the spread of COVID-19 as a pretext, Title 42 has effectively halted asylum processes in the U.S. and resulted in the immediate expulsion of refugees and asylum seekers to their country of origin, or Mexico. Almost immediately, immigrant rights activists and organizations identified the administration's motive to progress their anti-immigrant campaign promises by enforcing a public health policy that specifically targets refugees and asylum seekers at the U.S. southern border. Since August 2021 and as of time of writing, 1,172,134 people have been deported under Title 42.

Title 42 follows a series of xenophobic executive orders and policies that enact bans, deportations, and raids to target refugees and asylum seekers (i.e., the Muslim Ban, the Border Wall project, mass deportations, and the expansion of ICE's power). These policies were bolstered by the narratives of the Trump's administration that depicted forcibly displaced people as criminals coming from "shithole countries" and undeserving of citizenship. What makes Title 42 unique is that it is facilitated through the top institution of public health in the U.S., the Center for Disease Control. Under the Biden administration, as of time of writing, Title 42 continues to strategically utilize a pandemic and global health crisis to progress an agenda that politicizes health and bodies. From a historical standpoint, this is not the first time the U.S. has deployed health, or wellness, as a site of power and control.[12] Title 42 reveals that health continues to be an important site of inquiry for understanding, and struggling against, the codification of racism in public health policy and the racialized curtailing of migration.

"This is not something I set out to do, there was simply a need," says Roseline during a mid-afternoon phone call. "First it was twelve people, by the end of the week forty, and by the end of the month it was 400 people." Roseline founded her organization through a grassroots response to the growing number of Haitian refugees arriving at the U.S./Mexico border in 2015. Based in San Diego, Roseline and her organization have been at the forefront of grassroots organizing efforts that serve the needs of Black immigrants and refugees. Over the course of the pandemic, through the support of the SDRCC, her organization has worked to meet the needs of local Black refugee families in San Diego and Tijuana—providing PPE delivery and cash assistance—while also advocating at the national scale against the disproportionate rate of deportations of Black refugees and asylum seekers under Title 42.

Despite promises to halt deportations during the first 100 days in office, the Biden administration continued to deport Black (and specifically Haitian) refugees.[13] For those organizing at the intersection of immigration and anti-Blackness, it came as no surprise when images of Border Patrol officers on horseback chasing Haitian refugees crossing the U.S. southern border circulated in news media in September of 2021. Many drew connections between the U.S. domestic slave trade, police origins in slave-catching, and the abuse faced by Haitian refugees at the hands of U.S. Border Patrol. This connection is not evidenced by a singular event of misconduct by a border patrol officer, but rather is a contemporary manifestation of the legacy of settler colonialism and slavery. For example, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act and the 1830 Indian Removal Act set the groundwork for the implementation of anti-immigration laws that facilitate bans and deportations today. As A. Naomi Paik argues, "plenary power over people within, but not of, the nation, and the infrastructures of removal … [were] first established against American Indians and self-emancipated Black people, before being deployed against foreign-born non citizens."[14] Further, as Rosaline emphasized, detention, whether in the U.S. carceral system or immigration system, is a public health concern. In the context of COVID-19 and state responses to the pandemic, public health becomes a particularly critical site of analysis to understand the different mechanisms of control and abjection faced by those who are not considered "of" the nation. The lived experience of forcibly displaced people reflects the hierarchical logic deployed by the state that asserts refugees are threats to the health and well-being of the nation-state and its citizens. While the strategies of detainment, exclusion, and deportation witnessed during the pandemic are a result of a public health policy, the resulting struggles faced by forcibly displaced people

are evidence of the afterlife of slavery. The specific impact of Title 42 illuminates how the enduring legacy of anti-Black state violence impacts the health and lived experience of racialized and displaced populations, and how health is a critical site of political struggle. In short, the lived experiences of Black refugees in the U.S. make clear the connections between slavery, settler colonialism, policing, and immigration.[15]

In a panel on Haiti, migration, and imperial border regimes, Rosaline stated that despite the mass distribution of vaccines in the U.S. and the rollback of COVID-19 health codes such as stay-at-home orders, mask mandates, border closures, and travel restrictions, Title 42 remains and denies basic public health protections to refugees and asylum seekers. Further, the conditions of detainment actually increase the spread of COVID-19. The American Public Health Association (APHA) addressed the impact of detainment on the health of refugees, stating that "immigration detention centers, particularly crowded facilities, enhance the spread of infectious diseases, as became evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. In July 2020, the Department of Homeland Security reported 969 current COVID cases out of a total of 3,780 confirmed cases and three deaths since the beginning of the outbreak."

The condition of detainment in immigration detention centers reflects broader practices of policing and incarceration in the U.S. While transmission of, and deaths due to, COVID-19 in immigration detention centers rose, in prisons in the U.S. death rates increased by 50 percent from the five years prior to the pandemic.[16] While dominant narratives correlate policing with criminal violence, a history of policing reveals that post-Emancipation, the makeup of prison populations changed because policing became an avenue through which Black people and their labor could continue to be exploited. Abolitionist writer and activist Mariame Kaba argues that prisons and police were never really about crime; instead "prison became a site for continuing to control Blackness."[17] The criminalization of Black people is rooted in a history of anti-Black racism in the U.S., and similar strategies of criminalization and detainment deployed in the carceral system are deployed in the immigration system, impacting the lives of Black refugees.[18] The mass removal of Haitian refugees and asylum seekers in Del Rio, Texas under Title 42 resulted in more than 15,000 Haitian migrants being deported in September of 2021 alone. Such numbers, I contend, show how the lives of refugees are shaped by a history of anti-Black racism, colonialism, and xenophobia in the U.S.

From the 1999 police murder of Guinean immigrant Amadou Diallo in New York City to the 2016 police murder of Ugandan refugee Alfred Olango in San Diego, it is evident that immigration is as much a Black issue as policing is an immigration issue. While narrating how important safe and secure housing is to health, Ousmane tells me that in 2018 two Somali Bantu youths were arrested and sent to a juvenile detention center. "We were new," he says, "and we don't know what projects we have to do for the kids, for the youths." Today, the Somali Bantu Community of San Diego has developed programs to ensure the youths have after-school activities to participate in to prevent this type of incarceration and detainment. However, these experiences faced by Black refugees are not individual or community-based failings; they are rooted in a long history of policing and immigration policy in the U.S.

"I do not think that our communities would have been able to get the amount of support for COVID assistance without the coalition [SDRCC]," Rosaline shares. "The Haitian community did not receive CARE support, but we could get vaccines and community health workers because of the coalition." Rosaline's organization is the only organization in the SDRCC that explicitly addresses the incarceration, detainment, and deportation of Black refugees. However, as the narratives regarding housing and political agency that emerged through the oral histories with SDRCC members evidence, the border "crisis" and forced displacement extend beyond the context of detainment and removal. As Tiffany Willoughby-Herard argues, "Refugee status and experience is a potent example for thinking race relationally, because—like the forces that tether enslavement, plantation labor, and lynching—the social category of the refugee is essential to racial-state making."[19]

As a multi-racial, refugee-led coalition, the SDRCC does not subordinate the experiences of Black refugees when centering the experience of forced displacement as a point of unity across difference.

Their place-based organizing practice is a refusal to be moved, a powerful tactic in the face of a practice of statecraft that attempts to control, criminalize, and detain racialized communities. The coalitional model of the group is a critical site in which the hierarchical and anti-Black strategies of the state are not replicated, and the health and wellness of racialized and forcibly displaced people are given primacy. "There is nothing else like it in the area," Rosaline tells me as she describes the SDRCC. "This is priceless, and speaks volume about what is possible, what we can do together … it is a good coalition [of organizations] who are dedicated to helping community, and it is not just one. It is Somali Bantu, Somali, Karen … we have a Creole saying: many hands lighten the load."

Narratives on Solidarity and the Organizing Model of the SDRCC

The SDRCC model is where the work happens; it is how the narratives regarding housing, political agency, and displacement emerge. Deploying narrative as emerging through social action, this section displays how hierarchical power structures and modes of relation are disrupted through the coalitional model of the SDRCC. Referencing Dean Spade's work on mutual aid and solidarity, this section highlights how the SDRCC's model of coalition building creates space for vulnerable communities to share resources and knowledge, strengthen their capacities, and mobilize together.[20] Through their model, the SDRCC developed a refugee praxis of solidarity that is primarily concerned with cultivating a space of empowerment. Three key elements, drawn from the oral histories, capture their coalitional model and inform their capacity to directly meet the needs of refugee families in San Diego County: shared understanding; the desire to take collective action; and collaborative, participatory decision-making processes.

"The pandemic actually worsened a lot of the pre-existing conditions of the people we work with," one member of the SDRCC shared with me. "So where people were already struggling to keep jobs or find work, or where they were struggling to make ends meet and pay rent, or get their kids caught up on school—all of those challenges that we saw families struggling with before the pandemic were exacerbated." The SDRCC's model of solidarity enabled the collective to meet the needs of their community without presupposing a solution for change. This model centers on the need to (1) provide direct services and support while (2) developing the leadership of refugees and (3) creating space for collaboration among the individual members for ongoing advocacy work. These three approaches reflect the shared understanding among the coalition that the health and well-being of their communities were not exclusively impacted by the pandemic—but that there were also structural factors that had long infringed upon the general well-being of forcibly displaced and racialized communities in San Diego.

Composed of 12 ethnic-based community organizations that serve refugees and immigrants across San Diego County, the member-leaders of the coalition have a shared understanding of the lived experiences and needs of refugee families. One member of the SDRCC, Janah, a daughter of Palestinian immigrants, shared with me what is lost when immigrant and refugee experiences are conflated, emphasizing that "the resettlement process here is awful. You're only getting assistance for the first ninety days, and you're supposed to find a job in ninety days not knowing the language, and they're really low paying jobs and you can't support your family." The ability to identify the lack of a kinship network, English language skills, or money as real barriers that distinguish the refugee experience from the experiences of immigrants who come to the U.S. with a student visa, work visa, or family sponsorship displays the critical awareness members of the coalition bring to their work. While attentive to this distinction, there continues to be an acknowledgment of larger processes that contribute to the movement of people across borders, regardless of their status as an immigrant, refugee, or undocumented person. As Janah put it, "These families are here because of U.S. imperialism."

As refugees themselves, children of refugees, or immigrants, the members of the SDRCC intimately understand the unique set of challenges that face communities with limited support or choice in

their movement across borders. This acknowledgment serves as a critical foundation for the coalition. Further, members of the coalition recognize how the refugee experience is shaped by different historical and social processes, such as Islamophobia and anti–Black racism. This produces a sense of mutuality that guides the programs and services provided by the SDRCC and is reflected in the broad array of work led by each member organization. For example, one member organization of the coalition works explicitly to address domestic violence among refugee families in San Diego County. Based in El Cajon, they provide culturally competent wrap-around services that include legal assistance, counseling, and financial assistance. Another member group is an advocacy organization that is leading campaigns around redistricting, youth leadership, and surveillance and policing. Rather than approaching the work of the coalition as a single-issue struggle, the group unites around a shared commitment to serve refugees and refugee families in San Diego.

While each community organization pursues individual programs, direct actions, and advocacy campaigns, they recognize the power in joining forces. The coalition values the leadership and niche of each member organization, and this appreciation for autonomy is reflected in their understanding of the implications of being a refugee-led coalition in a non-profit landscape proliferated by well-meaning, but often not community-based organizations. "Because we're a refugee organization, we're a small organization," one member told me. "When it comes to funding, always the big organizations get all the funding and they left us for nothing … they expect us to do all the work for them. That was not fair for us. Now, together, we're very strong. People will hear our voice and our people." One of the most persistent assertions made by members of the SDRCC was a desire for refugees to take collective action. In this case, beyond the politics of representation and tokenization, having one's voice heard and participating in politics is a form of narrative agency.

In recognition of the capacity for refugee communities to provide the care, support, and advocacy that they know they need, the SDRCC implicitly challenges a neoliberal non-profit landscape in San Diego that produces a scarcity mindset, cultivating competition among community organizations who often apply for the same funding opportunities to keep their doors open and do the work that is needed.[21] In the context of a coalition in which the operating budget of member organizations relies on the direct contributions of the community, and amounts to as little as $800 annually, finding ways to financially support refugee-led organizations is crucial. Many refugee resettlement non-profits in San Diego tend to provide aid or charity and maintain administrative norms that aim to shape refugees into subjects worthy of citizenship and inclusion in the U.S. nation-building project. In contrast, the SDRCC challenges the competitive and exclusionary nature of non-profits by applying for grant funds together, which are then redistributed to member organizations of the coalition through a consensus-based decision-making process. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, the SDRCC was able to secure funding from San Diego County to hire community health workers. As a result, many of the community organizations were able to hire folks from their community to do COVID-19 outreach, education, and support. For some organizations, this meant they were able to hire their first staff members, provide compensation for community members who were already doing this work without pay, keep their community centers open, or provide health insurance and hazard pay to their staff for the first time. The administrative capacity to manage or host funds is limited for newer organizations, so more well-established member organizations serve as fiscal sponsors, even in cases in which they do not directly benefit from the grant.

Another key way that the SDRCC challenges the competitive and exclusionary culture of non-profits is through a consensus-based decision-making process. While there are different types of consensus processes, a consensus is generally about creating a cooperative dynamic in which "only one proposal is considered at a time. Everyone works together to make it the best possible decision for the group. Any concerns are raised and resolved, sometimes one by one, until all voices are heard."[22] This process ensures that the power of decision-making is not left to one or two individuals, but instead carefully considers everyone's capacity and interest. In the SDRCC, this means that different organizations

step back when a potential grant, collaboration, or project does not work for them at the time of the proposal. For example, one member organization is leading a redistricting campaign in San Diego that is separate from the primary work of the coalition. They explain:

> It's like there is a sense of grace or like, 'Hey, we don't have capacity. … we're still supporting the coalition, but we can't be part of this grant.' Or even the redistricting campaign, I came with the proposal for the coalition to engage in redistricting. Only like three or four orgs have the capacity to do that, but it's something that still the coalition decides is important and those three or four orgs will participate representing the coalition.

Active participation and agreement are not required for the SDRCC to pursue a proposal; rather, in understanding varied capacities, the coalition identifies the relevance and value of a proposal and delegates who will participate and how, based on expressed interest. This decision-making process has worked for the specific needs of the coalition, driving their work and the collaborative culture of their model.

The model of the SDRCC is a mode of organizing that fosters empowerment and support. During COVID-19, the coalition served as a site of support for members to discuss the challenges of serving their communities during a pandemic. "As a leader of the small ethnic community-based organization, I have kind of very unique struggle compared to some in the bigger nonprofit or mainstream organizations. That kind of struggle, it's easy for me to share with this group," shares one member. Support and care are key aspects of the collaborative capacity-building style of the coalition. Not strictly a professional space, members describe the weekly meetings as an opportunity to share what is going on with their personal lives and their work with their communities. Awat agrees, stating that specifically within the SDRCC, "English is our second language. So with confidence, we talk, that it's okay if I make mistake or my language is not good because it's the issues with everybody."

Developing the leadership of the coalition members is a central goal for the coalition and its collaborative, participatory model. There is an intergenerational aspect of the coalition that fosters an exchange of ideas and knowledge that is not unidirectional. Youth-led organizations receive mentorship and support from older organizations, and members who are well-established share their standard operating procedures and personal knowledge about the political landscape of San Diego. The youth push the older organizations by bringing political vision and advocacy efforts that expand the scope of work the coalition pursues individually and collectively. Members of the coalition recognize and understand the generational impact of forced displacement as an ongoing process rather than a singular event or legal status. Therefore, intergenerational partnership-building is evident in terms of the makeup of the coalition and the individual organizational commitments. This intergenerational aspect is also critical for how members of the coalition think about succession of leadership and fostering the development of members of their organizations. As one member described: "My hope is still somebody someday soon, that one of our community staff can be in my position, and then I'm going to be just a backup kind of supporting person. I don't need to be the director here." In acknowledgment of this, the SDRCC is able to foster a space to build capacity for individual organizations, develop their leadership intergenerationally, and consider succession strategies—as the hope is to pass on the baton to the next generation of leaders.

The unique model of the SDRCC is a valuable site of knowledge production where a refugee praxis of solidarity is developed. This model of partnership building is consensus-based, intergenerational, and refuses to reproduce the administrative norms of the non-profit industrial complex. This informs their desire to take collective action and collaborate across cultural, language, racial, and religious differences. Lastly, SDRCC members work to collectively recognize that the problems faced by their communities are not individual failings, but larger social and political issues that need to be changed.

Conclusion

Produced through the creation of a coalition of care and solidarity, the narratives throughout this chapter forward a story about how refugees in San Diego responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. Through personal narrative and oral history, the SDRCC provides unique critiques of systems of harm by actively collaborating to create a world beyond individualism and competition at different scales. This chapter drew on oral history to locate refugee narratives produced through grassroots organizing. By doing so, it located grassroots organizing work as a valuable site of knowledge production and refugees as knowledge producers. This narrative analysis centers refugees as critical subjects while demonstrating how the SDRCC defines health as a socially constructed category that is historically situated within intersecting histories of xenophobia and anti-Black racism in the U.S. In response, the SDRCC creates a model of coalition building that is a refugee praxis of solidarity.

Notes

1 Al-Rousan and Anderson, "Refugees and COVID-19," 1.
2 Title 42 is a xenophobic public health policy implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in the immediate expulsion of refugees and asylum seekers arriving at the U.S. southern border.
3 Shah, *Contagious Divides*, 7.
4 Molnar, "San Diego Rents Keep Rising."
5 Agard-Jones, "Bodies in the System."
6 World Health Organization, "Constitution."
7 World Health Organization, "The Ottawa Charter."
8 Braveman, "Health Disparities," 180.
9 Scholars of Critical Race Theory and Public Health mobilize social determinants of health as a key strategy to push public health research and scholarship toward a critical engagement with systems of oppression and the politics of knowledge production.
10 In *Security Theologies*, Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian deploys everydayness as a theoretical and methodological approach to consider how the experiences of Palestinians living under occupation are shaped by a daily onslaught of surveillance, control, and subordination by Israeli settler colonialism. Shalhoub-Kevorkian writes, "attention to mundane and routine activities reiterates the feminist notion that the 'personal is political' and alludes to the way in which the everyday is a space for oppression and domination" (2).
11 Center for Disease Control, "Order Suspending Introduction."
12 Reproductive Justice activists and scholars have written extensively about the particular ways Black women's health and bodies have been historically deployed as sites of power and control in a U.S. context. See Roberts, *Killing the Black Body* for reference.
13 "Breaking: ICE Deports Black Immigrants."
14 Paik, *Bans, Walls, Raids*, 79.
15 Maynard, "Black Life and Death"; Willoughby-Herard, "'The Whatever That Survived.'"
16 Anderson and Jingnan, "COVID Spread in Federal Prisons."
17 Kaba, *We Do This*, 73.
18 As the Black Alliance for Just Immigration reports, "while Black immigrants make up only 7.2% of the noncitizen population in the U.S., they make up 20.3% of immigrants facing deportation before the EOIR (Executive Office of Immigration Review) on criminal grounds" (40).
19 Willoughby-Herard, "'The Whatever That Survived,'" 149.
20 Spade, *Mutual Aid*. Spade engages in a critical assessment of mutual aid, solidarity, and key aspects of organizational culture in social movement-building spaces. This section of the chapter is deeply shaped by Spade's insights, particularly aspects of group culture emphasized in section five of the book.
21 As Spade writes in *Normal Life*, a problem with the dominance of the non-profit sector is the creation of "competition between groups for scarce resources" (178).
22 Butler and Rothstein, "On Conflict and Consensus."

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PART VII

Care and Kinship

24

AFFECTING APPEALS

Armenian Refugee Narratives in the Archives of Early Humanitarian Discourse

Veronika Zablotsky

There is no recovering from this loss. …
We still belong to the logic of the executioner,
through and through.[1]

Preceded by the Hamidian massacres of 1894–1896 and the Adana massacre of 1909, the genocidal extermination campaigns launched by the Ottoman government against its Armenian, Greek, and Assyrian citizens in 1915 resulted in the death, displacement, or forced assimilation of almost the entire Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire.[2] Survivors found themselves exposed to the elements in the Syrian desert, confined to refugee camps and orphanages in present-day Lebanon and Greece, displaced to the recently Sovietized Caucasus section of the Armenian homeland, or exiled as asylum seekers, adoptees, or "picture brides" in Western Europe and the Americas. In the U.S., high-ranking diplomats and philanthropists such as the former U.S. President William Howard Taft, industrialist Cleveland Hoadley Dodge, and Henry Morgenthau, former U.S. Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire, formed the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, which built on the preexisting infrastructure of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions to "provide relief and to assist in the repatriation, rehabilitation, and reestablishment of suffering and dependent people of the Near East and adjacent areas."[3] Renamed and incorporated by an Act of U.S. Congress in 1919, Near East Relief deployed novel media technologies such as the motion picture to appeal to the charity of the American public and generate donations in the U.S. and elsewhere to house, clothe, feed, train, educate, and employ the scattered remains of the once-thriving Ottoman Armenian community. This chapter focuses on first-person narratives that emerged in the context of these international fundraising campaigns and argues that they hinged on patronizing and ventriloquistic representations of Ottoman Armenian refugees as docile and desirable subjects of Western paternalism.

While the Ottoman Armenian diaspora produced a wealth of writing and literature on the unspeakable destruction of the Armenian genocide—the Great Crime of the *Medz Yeghern*—and the devastating experience of loss and exile in its aftermath,[4] international humanitarian organizations such as Near East Relief enlisted the services of American editors, screenwriters, and film directors to produce a rather peculiar body of Anglo- and Francophone writing *on behalf of* Ottoman Armenian refugees. Through a case study of the first-person memoir *Ravished Armenia: The Story of Aurora Mardiganian, The Christian Girl Who Lived Through the Great Massacres* (1918), edited by the American writer Henry L. Gates, and the book's silent film adaptation *Auction of Souls* (1919), a Hollywood movie that was commissioned by the American Committee on Armenian and Syrian Relief, I examine how the Armenian-language oral testimony of Arshaluys Mardigian, a 17-year-old Ottoman Armenian refugee from Çemişgezek in the

Tunceli province of present-day Turkey, was mediated by the Western gaze and turned into a spectacle of violation. Drawing on archived communications by the American Committee on Armenian and Syrian Relief, multiple scripts and a campaign book of *Auction of Souls*, select newspaper clippings, and later videotaped interviews with Arshaluys Mardigian, I trace how humanitarian agents transformed Armenian-language oral testimonies into *affecting appeals* that authorized the West as a moral agent of relief while drowning out the political demands and restitution claims of Ottoman Armenian community leaders and survivors. As defined in this chapter, the early twentieth-century genre of the Armenian refugee narrative is characterized by the *de facto* authorship of white editors who drew on the narrative conventions of abolitionist writing while representing Ottoman Armenian genocide survivors as "martyred" Christians, innocent "maidens," and "attractive" orphans to hail "white savior" figures who might speak and act *on their behalf*.[5] By representing Ottoman Armenian women, in particular, as captive, enslaved, and pitiful objects of Western charity, these editors further appropriated the subject position of *the witness* and reproduced the colonial logic of Western patronage that was enshrined in the League of Nations mandate system.

As neither the category of crimes against humanity[6] nor the concept of universal human rights had been codified in international law yet, the *affecting appeal* functioned as a discursive strategy that combined Christian missionary discourse and abolitionist tropes with moral and racial imaginaries of white supremacy and the international eugenic program of so-called civilizational "progress."[7] To appear unthreatening, innocent, and "deserving" of aid, Ottoman Armenians had to demonstrate proximity to whiteness—a legal status secured by the "right to exclude"—because the "generosity" of Western donor publics was predicated on gendered and racialized coordinates of "worth."[8] This alienating dynamic accounts for *telling silences* in the sense of utterances made but erased from the cultural record of early humanitarian campaigns in the Near East. After a discussion of the objectifying logic of humanitarian discourse, therefore, the final part of this chapter highlights the political demands and agential assertions of Ottoman Armenian refugees such as Arshluys Mardigian who insisted on juridical redress in the aftermath of genocide. Though confined to spaces of gendered subalternity, her demands for legal accountability exceeded the admissible semiotics of vulnerability and pointed toward a justice that has yet to come.

Gender, Race, Religion: Armenian Refugee Narratives Reframed

In November 1917, Arshaluys Mardigian was one of the first Armenian survivors of the Ottoman government's genocidal extermination campaigns to arrive in the U.S. After prolonged detention on Ellis Island—a port of entry that doubled as a quarantine station, prison ward, and deportation hub—she was taken in by V. Vartanian, an Armenian social leader and tailor living with his family in the Washington Heights neighborhood of New York City.[9] Vartanian made every effort to reunite Mardigian with her older brother Vahan, who had emigrated to the U.S. about a decade prior to the deportation orders that violently took the lives of the siblings' parents and remaining family members. In a final attempt to generate publicity for Mardigian's search, the Vartanian family organized a community gathering in June 1918 with "American ice cream and Armenian wine and laughter of both nations," as described by a journalist of the *New York Tribune*, "to celebrate the safe arrival in this country of Miss Ashalus Mardigian, a beautiful Armenian girl refugee."[10] The occasion also drew the attention of *The Sun*, another large newspaper, which titled, on the same date, "Armenian Girl, 17, Tells of Massacre."[11]

Instead of focusing on Mardigian's search for her brother, *The Sun* published a detailed account of the events that had led her to seek asylum in "the land of freedom." Described as a "story out of the ordinary"—"told swiftly in Armenian" and translated by Vartanian, "her kinsman"—this report in *The Sun* contained no plea or call to action. It was simply presented with a remark that Mardigian's passage to the U.S. had been funded by an "Armenian General."[12] The *New York Tribune* mentioned that "a committee of Armenians" had helped her escape from Russian-occupied Erzurum after many months as a fugitive in the Kurdish mountains.

Though Mardigian could not be reconnected with her brother, she was soon visited by the screenwriter Henry Leyford Gates and his wife, the novelist Eleanor Brown Gates, who had seen a publishing opportunity and tracked her down at the address that was given in the newspapers. The pair took up residency at a nearby hotel and proceeded to write down Mardigian's oral testimony, interpreted to them on the spot by Vartanian, over several sessions. The translated account was turned into a series of weekly dispatches in the *New York American* and eventually transformed into a first-person memoir, the best-seller *Ravished Armenia*.[13] Without her consent or prior knowledge, the unaccompanied minor found herself a warden of the Gates as the writers petitioned to assume legal guardianship and changed her name to Aurora Mardiganian. "He said I am your poppa and Mrs Gates is your mamma, because I do not understand what the guardian is," Mardigian recalled during an interview with the historian Anthony L. Slide in 1988; "They shouldn't have changed my parents' [her given and last] name."[14] As her court-appointed legal guardians, the Gates' severed her kinship line and usurped the genealogical power of naming—rendering her an orphan once over. To appeal to the presumed preferences of their American readers, they swept aside the search for Vahan, her only surviving brother, and erased the key role of the Armenian community's involvement in her survival, including Vartanian's role as an interpreter.

The first-person narrator of *Ravished Armenia*—represented as "Aurora Mardiganian, the Christian Girl"—eclipsed the voice of the survivor. Mediated not only by several layers of translation but also shaped by American racial and sexual logics, *Ravished Armenia* centered on Mardigian's abduction and escape from "the harem" as a main theme that fascinated white middle-class audiences who desired to "save" Armenian women while imagining themselves "inheritors of the abolitionist tradition."[15] Resonant with the "abolitionist editing" of white antislavery advocates who fictionalized or reframed the oral testimonies of African American ex-slaves to appeal to "the reader's sympathy," Henry L. Gates patronized Mardigian as a dependent—"little Aurora"—and proceeded to narrate *on her behalf* from the first-person perspective and in "our own language," as he claimed, by placing his narrating self *in her stead*.[16] Thus, Gates not only spoke *for* the survivor but also in a manner of ventriloquy *as* her. Furthermore, he deployed strategic attestations to "reliability and good character," and reassured the reader, "every word is true."[17] He also thanked a number of British diplomats and American missionaries for verifying "these amazing things, which little Aurora told me that I might tell them … to all the world."[18] As argued by Shushan Avagyan, this reduced the survivor to "the status of a suspect in need of paternalistic figures to testify on his or her behalf."[19]

Commissioned by the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief, the bestselling memoir *Ravished Armenia* (1918) was swiftly rescripted into a silent movie, *Auction of Souls* (1919), which was shot in Southern California and featured the survivor Arshaluys Mardigian in the role as "herself"—reenacting the "story" of Aurora Mardiganian—as interpreted by the editor Henry L. Gates, Oscar Apfel, screenwriter and director of the film, and Nora Waln, press secretary of the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief in charge of the final script's eighth "humanitarian" reel.[20] Overseen by William Selig, a Hollywood pioneer who built his career on traveling minstrel shows and exotic animal zoos, the production obfuscated its many layers of mediation and instead promised "authenticity," as a groundbreaking innovation that prefigured the aesthetic ambitions of humanitarian discourse to document and expose the pain and suffering of refugees.[21] The resulting set of narrative fragments assimilated the "Otherness" of genocide—its unfathomable scope and scale—into preexisting racial, sexual, imperial, and missionary explanatory patterns while constituting the figure of the refugee as a dependent "other" that had to perform pure victimhood and innocent goodness to incite compassion in American viewers.

Exploiting the Orientalist appeal and shock value of "refined, educated girls, from homes as good as yours or mine, sold in the slave markets of the East," *Ravished Armenia* turned Mardigian's eyewitness account of sexualized violence and human trafficking into a spectacle of "savagery" that framed the crime of genocide—30 years before its codification in international law—as a function of racial "otherness" ascribed to Islam vis-à-vis Christian "civilization."[22] The film's central allegory of the

"auction block"—as the antinomy of the altar, the symbolic space of refuge—also invoked the discourse of "white slavery" to incite moral outrage about the systematic abduction of Armenian women and children into Turkish, Kurdish, and Bedouin households.[23] Through a complex set of affective displacements, projections, and appropriations, the American public was encouraged to identify with the suffering of Ottoman Armenians as a dependent people who were distant yet "kindred" and therefore racially "harmless." "Think of yourself in a similar position," U.S. President Woodrow Wilson suggested in 1917.[24]

By positioning Ottoman Armenia as "a little island of Christians, surrounded by backward people of hostile religion and hostile race"—presumably "superior to the Turks intellectually and morally"—the interwar relief campaign of Near East Relief keyed into the racial anxieties of white Americans who considered *themselves* racially superior to African Americans and resisted their political emancipation in the U.S.[25] Nora Waln's foreword to *Ravished Armenia* imposed the racial frame of whiteness as property—derived from ongoing histories of conquest, settler colonialism, slavery, forced assimilation, and genocide in the Americas—as an inverted "stage of sufferance" in which the racialized Other was "enslaving" an innocent "white" proxy-self.[26] By enacting this supposed "reversal," American cultural production on the Armenian Genocide constructed a humanitarian projection screen for white victim phantasies while erasing the specificity and embeddedness of Ottoman Armenian experience in the West Asian homeland. Furthermore, it failed to develop a vocabulary of legal accountability in relation to a constituted state that set out to exterminate its own citizens—as a people—by the calculus of denaturalization, dispossession, displacement, and exposure to death in the desert. Instead, by framing Armenian refugee narratives in relation to racist, Islamophobic, and Orientalist ideas about "the East," international humanitarian organizations such as Near East Relief legitimized Western imperialist expansion through the newly instituted League of Nations mandate system. As "Aurora" was infantilized as a "little girl," so too was Mardigian made to stand in for an emasculated people in need of protection by "the mothers and fathers of the United States."[27] This willed failure to *listen* on the survivors' own terms reinforced patronizing, assimilationist, and imperialist ways of seeing while silencing Armenian political claims to dignity, belonging, and self-determination in the Ottoman Empire.

Furthermore, by asserting that "Americans have never failed to help the weak, or the oppressed, or the distressed anywhere," the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief also denied the complicity of the U.S. in centuries of slavery and genocide.[28] This hypocrisy was noted by James W. Johnson, then field secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and contributing editor at the *New York Age*, a leading African American newspaper, when he reported on a series of lynchings in 1918 and asked, "In view of these terrible crimes … and as yet no serious attempt made to punish a single person that took part in them … how can the white people of Tennessee, of the South, of the country expect the American Negro to give them the least credit for sincerity when they speak in horror about atrocities … in Armenia."[29] Another journalist with the *Times Plain Dealer* pointed out, with notable sarcasm, "Not all persecuted Christians are in Armenia. A goodly [sic] number of us are to be found in Georgia, Texas, and other parts of the South."[30] Despite the negation of Black presence in the archives of early humanitarianism, Black counter-publics in the U.S. cast an oppositional gaze upon the benevolent self-image of American whites as "warm hearted Christian people."[31] Yet, as noted by Reverend Dr. Maloney at a New York meeting of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association in 1922, Black communities—painfully familiar with the experience of racial persecution, enslavement, dispossession, sexualized violence, and the forced severance of family bonds—were "contributing throughout the length and breadth of this land for suffering Armenia."[32]

At a distance from white supremacist frames of empire and war-making, transhemispheric solidarities may have emerged as relational alternatives if the "deservingness" of Armenian refugees had not been constructed through the lens of forced assimilation, eugenic discourse, and colonial statecraft. While Armenian political representatives were neither invited nor seated at the Allied peace conference in Paris, their displaced and stateless constituents, the Armenian people, were patronized as endangered

"white" Christians, cast as "pathetic little survivors," subjected to technocratic scrutiny, and relegated to the status of quintessential victimhood—an orphaned nation looking to the West to secure its survival—at the foundational juncture of the international refugee regime.[33]

Genocide as Spectacle: Reenactment and Violation on Screen

In the absence of legal avenues to advance Ottoman Armenian visions of justice and reparations, the genocidal policies of the late Ottoman government were turned into a spectacle of violation for Western consumption on screen. Under the impression of a nationwide appeal for charitable donations by U.S. President Woodrow Wilson in January 1919, *Auction of Souls*—advertised as a "tremendous motion picture spectacle" based on *Ravished Armenia* (1918)—premiered on February 14, 1919 with Arshaluys Mardigian in attendance at Hotel Commodore in New York City. Accompanied by a nationwide poster and advertisement campaign, *Auction of Souls* was commissioned by the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief to "crystallize the sympathies of the American people into the giving of prompt and ample aid."[34]

In *The Washington Times*, Mardigian's train journey from New York City to Los Angeles was celebrated as a "triumphal trip" that transformed the survivor—figured as "Aurora, the Christian Girl Refugee"—from a "persecuted little waif" into a "princess."[35] Though journalists claimed that Mardigian had "a delightful experience," among people who believed themselves to be doing "everything in their power to atone for the cruel wrongs she had endured and wipe out the searing effects of the past," the production of *Auction of Souls* exploited the vulnerability of Arshaluys Mardigian and retraumatized her on camera for the entertainment of moviegoers, whose admission fees would double as donations to Near East Relief.[36] While eschewing questions of legal accountability and redress, the humanitarian campaign on behalf of Ottoman Armenians exemplified the extractive relationship of charity, as the pain of survivors was commodified as capital—albeit sanctioned by the presumably "selfless" nature of the relief effort—through filmic technologies of capture.

Mardigian had been approached by Henry L. Gates and Eleanor Brown Gates, her court-appointed legal guardians, with a contract she could neither read nor understand. Looking back on the experience in 1988, she explained, "I said I don't know what in that paper is. I said, I don't understand my language much. I don't understand your English." Before she was made to sign, Mrs. Gates explained that she was "going to have her picture taken"—by which Mardigian understood a "still photograph."[37] Agreeing on this false assumption, she was "brought" to California and coerced to embody the Orientalist fantasies of American editors, screenwriters, and Near East Relief advocates without being shown the movie's script. From scene to scene, she was to "copy a copy of herself," as interpreted by her agents and handlers, and instructed to "become a 'hyperreal' Aurora."[38] A full-page advertisement in *The American Weekly*, a Sunday supplement of the *New York American*, claimed that the survivor had "enlisted her services" and "undertaken to re-enact in a carefully, faithfully reproduced motion picture her heartrending sufferings and experiences" to help raise $30,000,000 for Near East Relief in "gratitude for her rescue."[39] The campaign committee explained, to this effect, "no apology need be made for using the motion picture screen, the modern medium of publicity."[40]

As Mardigian performed a highly mediated version of her testimony, she was the sole Armenian on set, surrounded by white actors and extras "with red fez and tassels on." She recalled, "The first time I came out of my dressing room … I got shock [sic]. I thought they fooled me. I thought they were going to give me to these Turks to finish my life. So I cry very bitterly."[41] Made to feel vulnerable and alone, the survivor was retraumatized on set for *Auction of Souls* and remained afraid for the rest of her life: "To this day I got scared that the Turks are going to come and get me."[42] The psychoanalyst Dori Laub, himself a Jewish child survivor of the Holocaust, observed that the "act of telling might itself become severely traumatizing, if the price of speaking is re-living; not relief, but further retraumatization."[43] Only if "truly heard or truly listened to," the witness might work through the unspeakable events and reconstruct a narrative.[44] Decades before the notion of trauma was apprehended in such therapeutic

terms, Mardigian was forced to live through a "return of the trauma," again and again, externalized against her will as the "scene in which crime becomes spectacle."[45] She recalled, "I had to act how I escaped from Turkish harem house," and repeated how she was told, "Come down this rope and act like you're escaping."[46] When she fell 20 feet and broke her ankle, a reporter claimed that she was "suffering gladly … for Armenia."[47]

This self-serving interpretation of Mardigian's injury epitomizes the violence of humanitarian discourse, both literally and figuratively, which displayed the suffering of the survivor for the entertainment of strangers, in a strange land, while imposing their language, will, and redemptive rationale of recovery. In an indictment of "compassion" in the face of state-sponsored dehumanization, Mardigian commented on the humanitarian desire to "understand" without listening: "When they killed my parents, and the blood was running red. None was there to see. No Americans. Only God in his Heaven."[48]

Once time came to promote the film, Mardigian suffered a nervous breakdown and was forcibly confined to a covenant until she threatened to end her own life. She recalled, "I said I don't want to go there. The Turks gonna come and kill me, and I don't wanna be all alone. I was scared and until this very day I get scared."[49] She then fled to New York City where she was "reconciled" with her legal guardians in court even though they withheld her pay. In the meantime, seven "Aurora impersonators" traveled the country and promoted the film in her stead.[50]

Unfailingly, advertisements for the film praised the authenticity of the set and costumes. Audiences could expect to see "real harems," "reconstructed with faithful historic attention to detail," showing, for the first time, an "authentic reproduction of the modern slave markets."[51] The American Committee for Relief in the Near East believed that it had created an "epoch making" picture that would convince "the audience that it was seen [sic] an actuality" by showing a "rather sordid, secret sale of girls."[52] For good measure, press secretary Nora Waln instructed Oscar Apfel, the film's director, to "flash on some few scenes of the refugee camps."[53] An announcement of the San Francisco premiere praised the "sensational picturization" of slave markets "as they actually exist today" and offered titillating details about "refined and beautiful" Armenian girls, "stood up naked and sold to the highest bidder."[54] "Without resort to imagination," spectators would be confronted with "the suffering and persecution by the Turks of these pitiful Armenians … as [it] actually happened."[55] The "popular appeal" of *Auction of Souls* was grounded in claims to "truthfulness" that only heightened the voyeuristic pleasure of Western spectators.

Film posters, illustrated newspaper advertisements, and other promotional materials circulated by the American Committee for Relief in the Near East depicted Aurora as a petite, scantily clad figure with radiant white skin, exposed feet, bare shoulders, and flowing dark hair in the "clutches" of a monstrously large, swarthy "Turk" with a bloodied sword. *Auction of Souls* also featured a crucifixion scene in which the naked bodies of eight young women were mounted on a row of large wooden crosses at the Santa Monica beach in Los Angeles.[56] Framed by long black wigs, the radiant whiteness of these figures—played by American extras—conflated notions of racial and moral "purity" and thus made the bodies of Armenian women available as the imaginary ground of a staged confrontation between Christianity and Islam. It represented "Armenia" as a virgin figure—akin to Christ—that was "sacrificed" because the West failed to intervene on her behalf. As evidenced by its original title, "Armenia Crucified," the film invoked racist and Orientalist themes to explain the genocidal destruction of the Ottoman social fabric—as an attempt to reverse its "inter-communal syntheses"[57]—while eroticizing Christian martyr iconography for shock value. Thus, eyewitness accounts of the systematic rape and abduction of Armenian women in the Ottoman Empire were reduced to a projection screen for racial anxieties about "miscegenation" in the U.S.[58]

While embedded in imaginaries of Christian conquest in the Near East, the humanitarian advocacy of the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief was carried out "through sexual stimulation, not despite it."[59] Due to support from high-ranking diplomats and "society people," as the *Chicago Herald and Examiner* pointed out, the "daring film" with "scenes … sensational to a degree not

heretofore permitted" was approved for "mature" audiences above sixteen years of age. The "obvious good intent, … its historical fidelity and its crusading character," as noted by a sympathetic journalist, "justified its release."[60] "Restoring Armenia," so the 1919 special report of the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures attested, was a "crusade" that should "appeal to every drop of red blood in America's manhood and womanhood."[61] In the United Kingdom, however, *Auction of Souls* was banned "on the ground of indecency" until modifications were approved by Scotland Yard in 1920.[62]

Though Aurora was advertised as the main character, *Auction of Souls* portrayed her as a warden and sidekick of Miss Graham, an "English girl" that is only briefly mentioned in *Ravished Armenia* as a "very young and pretty" teacher who was abducted by Ottoman soldiers at a school for orphaned Armenian girls.[63] Played by Anna Q. Nilsson, Miss Graham was elevated to the *de facto* main character. In the surviving script, she is described as "blonde, in contrast to her scholars" and adopts Aurora after her mother and siblings are murdered. She then accompanies her "in disguise" and follows her into captivity—on the eponymous "auction block." Though an entirely fictitious rendition of Mardigian's account, Miss Graham served as a racial point of reference for Western audiences who lacked familiarity with the Near Eastern scene. While acting out the fantasy of a white woman's abduction into the Oriental harem, Miss Graham also authorized Mardigian's testimony, demonstrated her proximity to whiteness, and represented the Allied West as a parental figure that could adopt Ottoman Armenians as a subject people.[64] Lastly, Miss Graham reflected the gendering of humanitarian discourse as the provenance of white women who were tasked to forge affective bonds across racial boundaries and geographic distances. Before the curtain falls, Aurora is shown alone, "gazing off at the Statue of Liberty," aboard a vessel taking her to safety to the U.S. As Aurora remains suspended at sea, the audience is spared the "burden" of her survival. After the Los Angeles premiere of *Auction of Souls*, a reviewer remarked that "Aurora … seemed to be living the part she was playing," though he deemed "her work … unexceptional."[65]

Elevated to the status of patriotic duty, cities across the U.S. engaged in fundraising contests and formed volunteer committees to encourage residents to attend screenings at local movie theatres.[66] Private showings went for $10 a seat—then a substantial sum—and were often accompanied by music and dance shows in Armenian costume. Between January 1919 and April 1922, *Auction of Souls* was screened over a thousand times in the U.S. alone. The movie was also advertised in Spanish and shown by the Caribbean Film Company in Puerto Rico and Cuba. Distributors purchased the rights to screen *Auction of Souls* in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru. It was also screened in Australia.[67] Given the spectacular turnout, aided by the promotion of the "Armenian relief movement," commentators surmised, "no picture ever shown in the world has had such a tremendous influence for good."[68]

Yet, as quickly as *Auction of Souls* had been produced and put into circulation, it disappeared from public consciousness after its final documented screening in Bristol in 1924. Despite Arshaluys Mardigian's transformation into "Aurora Mardiganian," an "extraordinary icon," the survivor died alone in an assisted living facility in Los Angeles in 1994.[69] As her remains were left unclaimed, they were cremated and buried in an anonymous grave site.[70] Soon after her violation as an unaccompanied Armenian refugee was captured on camera so that "all America may see and know and understand," the eight reels of *Auction of Souls* were lost somewhere between New York City, Buenos Aires, Marseilles, and Yerevan.[71] Though fragments survived and later resurfaced, the original nitrite film would have long decomposed and evaporated into a highly combustible gas. In this narrow sense only, the instability of the medium corrected the ethical failure of the production to recognize Armenian refugees as "epistemic agents" and seekers of justice.[72]

Telling Silences: Gendered Subalternity and Justice

On gendered subalternity, Gayatri C. Spivak writes, "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow."[73] When entering "a narrative *for us*," however, "they become figurable."[74] In the absence of redress, framed and

captured in the discursive short-circuit of humanitarian relief and the patronizing logic of the League of Nations mandate system, Arshaluys Mardigian was figured as a "Christian Girl Refugee" whose irreparable loss of self, people, kin, and homeland could be commodified and assimilated into a "story" for others—a colonial production of Western superiority and Oriental "barbarism" that infantilized, objectified, and whitewashed Ottoman Armenian survivors as a proxy of the Western self before the eyes of "civilized humanity."[75]

At the contemporary juncture, the story of "Aurora Mardiganian" has been unearthed, yet again, as humanitarian awards are endowed in her name; her likeness continues to appear in documentary films, museum exhibits, and video installations; and *Ravished Armenia* has been translated in multiple languages and reimagined as a graphic novel.[76] With few exceptions, these renewed engagements celebrate the voice of Arshaluys Mardigian, the survivor, without critically reflecting on the many layers of mediation that constitute *Ravished Armenia* and *Auction of Souls* as a cultural record of coercion and exploitation by the American Committee for Armenian and Syrian Relief. In the name of protection, *telling silences*—surrounding not only the radical break of genocide but also the political subjectivity of survivors—continue to haunt the international refugee regime as an aggregate of othering logics that exert symbolic and material force into the present. As argued by the literary theorist Marc Nichanian, the self-appointed mandate of the West to adjudicate worth and justice by granting or denying "relief" and recognition remains integral to the humanitarian apparatus and produces shame—an affective technology of silencing—"each time testimony was exhibited, presented, offered as proof … of our own death."[77]

As the Ottoman public stood by, supported, and profited off the expropriation, expulsion, and forced conversion of Ottoman Armenians, Assyrians, and Greeks, the testimonies of displaced survivors were captured and reconfigured into refugee narratives to appeal to the "external gaze."[78] Aware of this mandate, another Ottoman Armenian survivor, Pailadzo Captanian, ended her French-language memoir *Mémoires d'une Déportée Arménienne* (1919) with the words: "all we ask from the civilized world is justice."[79] Far from awaiting salvation by the West, however, Armenian refugees and survivors like Mardigian and Captanian, among so many others, articulated political visions that defied gendered expectations and demanded redress beyond relief. Despite their alienated condition as refugees in the U.S., France, and elsewhere, many survivors confronted the executioners' "stubborn will to exterminate" with an impossibly defiant "will to witness."[80]

Decades after Arshaluys Mardigian's forced (dis-)appearance in *Auction of Souls*, J. Michael Hagopian, an Armenian American filmmaker and child survivor of the Armenian Genocide, found her "hiding out some place in the Bronx."[81] Filming her on a divan, in a colorful blouse and with a red bow in her grey hair, he asked her to speak to the "causes" of the Armenian Genocide. She responded with a condemnation of denial and juridical impunity. By insisting on the political agency of survivors, Mardigian reappropriated the medium of film to break with the ventriloquistic logic of the Armenian refugee narrative in early humanitarian discourse. The Ottoman government "had no right to kill their own citizen," she gravely exclaimed, and must not be allowed to "cover it up and deny."[82] On revenge and vigilante justice, however, she ruled, "I don't believe in that." Two years after Gourgen Mgrditch Yanigian, an Armenian genocide survivor from Erzurum in present-day Turkey, assassinated two high-ranking Turkish consulate officials in Santa Barbara—an act which inspired the formation of the Armenian Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia (ASALA)—Mardigian insisted on accountability in a constituted court of law. Those responsible must be held juridically liable, she argued, "That's the way. Not by guns and swords." Justice, she emphasized, meant the right to return and the return of land and property to Ottoman Armenians and their descendants.

In the face of ongoing denial by the Republic of Turkey—"an intergenerational, sustainable discrimination policy that gives future members of the victim group continued reason to feel threatened"[83]—Mardigian asked, "Where are they [displaced Ottoman Armenians and their descendants] supposed to go?" "[We] lost the lives, lost the land, lost the country, lost the properties, lost the everything," she exclaimed forcefully. "They have to answer to this," she demanded, and "return all the losses." Calling

on the United Nations and the U.S., she indicted, "Why do they have to keep quiet now?" In this way, Mardigian rejected the affecting appeal as a humanitarian technology without any legal consequence to perpetrators or the slightest attempt at redress. She insisted on the equalizing logic of the law, instead, and repeated several times throughout her account, "That's not justice." Thus, the survivor opposed the ongoing denial of legal and ethical responsibility with a resistant verdict of her own—that is *not* justice—and emphatically rejected the "catastrophic loss of law" that resulted in the near-total destruction of the Ottoman Armenian community.[84] Beyond juridical redress—which will always fall short of the magnitude of the loss and crime of genocide—her refusal insisted on a *new* kind of justice to come, an impossible justice deferred.

Notes

1 Eng and Kazanjian, *Loss*, 127.
2 On the Armenian Genocide, see Suny, *"They Can Live"*; Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide*; Hovannisian, *The Armenian Genocide*.
3 See "An Act to Incorporate Near East Relief," Sixty-sixth Congress, Session I, Chapter 32, Section 2, Public No. 25, District of Columbia, August 06, 1919.
4 For example, see Nichanian, *Writers of Disaster*; Oshagan, *Remnants*.
5 *De facto* authorship by white European or American editors of Armenian first-person memoirs remains a significant pattern. For example, see *Unending Journey* (1939) by Agnacia Manuelian, *Hannah's Story: Escape from Genocide in Turkey to Success in America* (1990) by Hannah Kalajian, and *Efronia: An Armenian Love Story* (1995) by Efronia Katchadourian.
6 The category of genocide was first codified as a crime against humanity under international law in the *United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (Res. 260 A, III) on December 09, 1948.
7 The Armenian case illustrates that eugenic logic considerably shaped early humanitarian discourse (see Zablotsky, "Governing Armenia"). On abolitionism and the genre of the slave narrative, see Nichols, "Slave Narratives" and Nichols, *Many Thousands Gone*. See also Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones*.
8 Harris, *Whiteness as Property*, 1714.
9 "Arrival of Armenian Girl," *New York Tribune*, 16.
10 "Arrival of Armenian Girl," *New York Tribune*, 16.
11 "Armenian Girl, 17, Tells of Massacre," *The Sun*, 6. In this article, Vartanian's first name is abbreviated as "K." and his residential address is given as 534 West 178th Street in New York City.
12 In later interviews, Arshaluys Mardigian confirmed that she was sent to the U.S. by Andranik Ozanian, an Armenian general who commandeered an Armenian volunteer regiment in the Russian imperial army.
13 Bone, *The Curse of Beauty*, 236.
14 "Aurora Mardiganian," Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 12.
15 Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones*, 136.
16 Nichols, *Slave Narratives*, 107.
17 Avagyan, *Becoming Aurora*, 7; Gates, *Ravished Armenia*, 9.
18 Gates, *Ravished Armenia*, 9.
19 Avagyan, *Becoming Aurora*, 10.
20 "Criticism of Reel VIII," Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 19.
21 See Erish, *Col. William N. Selig*.
22 Gates, *Ravished Armenia*, 13.
23 On the moral panic surrounding "white slavery" around the turn of the century and its continued symbolic force, see Grittner, *White Slavery*; Doezema, *Sex Slaves*. On the racialization of Armenians as legally "white" in the U.S., see Okoomian, "Becoming White"; Craver, "On the Boundary"; Zablotsky, "Governing Armenia." In hopes of "recovering" abducted Ottoman Armenian women and children, the Armenian Relief Committee for Mesopotamia collaborated with the League of Nations High Commissioner for the Protection of Women and Children in the Near East who took in survivors at the League of Nations Reception House in Aleppo. On these Armenian search and rescue missions, see Ekmekçioğlu, *Recovering Armenia*; Watenpaugh, *Bread from Stones*; Rowe, "Armenian Women Refugees"; Tachjian, "Gender, Nationalism, Exclusion."
24 "President Wilson Appeals," *New York Tribune*, 6.
25 Gates, *Ravished Armenia*, 15–16.
26 Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 17.
27 Gates, *Ravished Armenia*, 12.

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28 "President Wilson Appeals," *New York Tribune*, 6.
29 Johnson, *New York Age* 31, no. 22 (1918): 4.
30 Johnson, *New York Age* 34, no. 14 (1920): 4.
31 "Like a Story," *The American Weekly*, 3.
32 "U. N. I. A. Going Strong," *The Negro World*, 7.
33 See Harbord, *Conditions in the Near East*.
34 *Campaign Book,* Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 27.
35 "Like a Story," *The American Weekly*, 3.
36 "Like a Story," *The American Weekly*, 3.
37 "Aurora Mardiganian," Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 12.
38 Avagyan, *Becoming Aurora*, 12.
39 "How Little Aurora," *The American Weekly*, 1.
40 *Campaign Book,* Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 27.
41 "Aurora Mardiganian," Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 12.
42 "Aurora Mardiganian," Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 12.
43 Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 67.
44 Felman and Laub, *Testimony*, 67.
45 Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 17.
46 "Aurora Mardiganian," Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 12.
47 "Ravished Armenia," *The American Weekly*, 3.
48 "Aurora Mardiganian," Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 12.
49 "Aurora Mardiganian," Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 12.
50 See Slide, *Ravished Armenia*.
51 *Campaign Book*, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 27.
52 "Criticism of Reel VIII," Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 19.
53 "Criticism of Reel VIII," Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 19.
54 "Play Stars Girl Sold into Harem," *The San Francisco Union*, 14.
55 "Symbolic Prologue is Feature of Stirring Armenian Story," *San Francisco Call and Post*, 18.
56 Erish, *Col. William N. Selig*, 209.
57 Kebranian, *Lost in Conversion*, 255.
58 See Pascoe, *What Comes Naturally*.
59 Torchin, *Ravished Armenia*, 217.
60 "Crucifixion of Girls Shown in Band Box Film," *Chicago Herald and Examiner*.
61 "Special Report of the National Board of Review of Motion Pictures," January 25, 1919, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 26.
62 "British Drop Film Ban: American Picture of Armenian Horrors Allowed after Cutting," *The New York Times*, January 20, 1920.
63 Gates, *Ravished Armenia*, 61–63.
64 See Melman, *Women's Orients*.
65 Price, "'Auction of Souls,'" 24.
66 See Slide, "Ravished Armenia/Auction of Souls."
67 Slide, "Ravished Armenia/Auction of Souls."
68 "Second Week," *Los Angeles Evening Herald*, 20.
69 Avagyan, *Becoming Aurora*, 12. See also Ghosh, *Global Icons*.
70 Slide, *Ravished Armenia*, 28.
71 *Campaign Book*, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Folder 27; see Matiossian, "The Quest for Aurora."
72 See Altanian, "Genocide Denial"; Mouradian, *The Resistance Network*.
73 Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, 274.
74 Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason,* 245.
75 Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion*, 120.
76 For example, the Initiative for Development of Armenia (*IDeA*) Foundation awards an "Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity" since 2016. Atom Egoyan curated a video installation titled *Auroras* which played in an infinite loop at Maxim Gorki Theatre in Berlin in 2016 and 2018. The animated documentary *Aurora's Sunrise* by Inna Sahakyan was released in 2022.
77 Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion*, 120.
78 Nichanian, *The Historiographic Perversion*, 120.
79 Captanian, *Mémoires d'une Déportée Arménienne*.
80 Eng and Kazanjian, *Loss*, 126. On the notion of a "will to witness," see Kebranian, *Lost in Conversion*, 246.

81 J. Michael Hagopian featured parts of the interview in *The Forgotten Genocide* (1975), a short documentary commissioned by the Armenian Revolutionary Federation and the Armenian Democratic League.

82 All citations are from two audio- and video-recorded interviews with Arshaluys Mardiganian conducted by J. Michael Hagopian on March 23, 1975 in New York City and March 29, 1984 in Los Angeles. Both are deposited as one digital file in the Visual History Archive of the USC Shoah Foundation.

83 Altanian, "Genocide Denial," 1.

84 Eng and Kazanjian, *Loss*, 126.

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25

FEARLESS FACES

Motherhood and Gendered Mobility of North Korean Refugees in Jero Yun's Films[1]

Eun Ah Cho

Introduction: Refugees, Women, and North Koreans

Since the great North Korean famine (*konanŭi haenggun*) in the mid–1990s, there has been an ongoing exodus of North Koreans to China. Indeed, the number of undocumented North Koreans in China is now difficult to even approximate.[2] When captured, Chinese police forcibly return North Korean border crossers to North Korea, where they are severely punished and forced to labor. Those not captured become stateless in China, where the category of refugee does not exist. These North Koreans, however, are de facto refugees due to the lack of opportunities for upward mobility and the absence of institutionalized shelters. Although they exist outside the legal boundary of refugees, I designate North Korean border crossers into China (and South Korea) as refugees in this chapter.

Some scholars are concerned about using the term "refugee" because of its implication of passivity, but I find refugees to be agents who actively question the concept of the citizen and the boundaries of the nation-state, based on Yến Lê Espiritu's definition of the refugee: one who "constantly remind[s] others of the arbitrariness and contingence of identity borders and boundaries," who is not only "a critical idea but also … a social actor whose life, when traced, illuminates the interconnections of colonization, war, and global social change."[3] Considering North Korean refugees' social status and lack of material and psychological stability, the risk of repatriation during their stay in China, and their reluctance to settle in South Korean society, North Korean border crossers—particularly those I discuss in this chapter through South Korean director Jero Yun's films—can thus be considered refugees.

Contemporary North Korean border-crossers are not technically forced to cross the border due to war or political persecution. Because they choose to leave their country under their own free will, their voluntary escape itself can be considered a criticism of North Korea. When North Korean refugees turn their backs on North Korean society, which is characterized by collective surveillance and self-criticism, they are ready to accept the risk of disconnecting from their familial and national relations. It is not an oversimplification to say that the refugees' disconnection from North Korean families thus signifies their willingness to cut their relationship with the state.

More than seventy percent of the North Korean refugees who arrive in South Korea are women, and regardless of their marital status, they tend to cross the border alone. While the North Korean male citizens are more visible in the official working space, the female citizens have more room to make an excuse to the authority to become invisible for their domestic responsibilities. Thus North Korean refugee women have more opportunities to cross the border and the middlemen at the border prefer female escapees for their border businesses and crimes, which results in the feminization of the Sino-North Korean border. At the same time, North Korean women's higher ratio

of border crossing also provides them a possibility of overturning the hierarchy within the patriarchal family structure. Among the North Koreans who have settled in South Korea and China, about 30,000–40,000 regularly send money back to their families and relatives in North Korea.[4] Sung Kyung Kim estimates that North Korean women regularly send back to their families at least six million dollars per year, which is possible due to the transnational connections between North Korean refugees, Korean-Chinese individuals living in China, Chinese individuals living in North Korea, and North Korean locals.

How does this process of sending money change the senders' roles and relationships within their families in North Korea? Furthermore, how do the geographical and contextual changes in the refugee women's locations challenge their conception of a clan-based family relationship? Finally, how can these women's subjectivity be maintained despite their sense of losing home? I address these questions by focusing on Jero Yun's trilogy about North Korean women: *Madame B* (2016), *Beautiful Days* (2018), and *Fighter* (2021). Making the documentary *Madame B* motivated the director to make a fictional film, *Beautiful Days*, and his interests in North Korean refugee women continues in his most recent film, *Fighter*. Given resonant themes and concerns, I thus designate these three films as a trilogy and demonstrate how the director's emphasis on the refugee women's roles as money-makers transcends two generations, from mother to daughter. By exploring the role of the refugee women's monetary remittances, I examine how the films represent the changing meaning of family for North Korean refugees. However geographically dispersed the family unit, there is a tacit agreement between the border crossers and the family members left behind in the films in terms of money to be sent and received.

Rather than pathologize the deconstruction of the family itself due to the women's displacement, I forward a feminist refugee analysis, exploring how refugees are being, doing,[5] and crossing family. Borrowing Nancy Folbre's expressions, "being" and "doing" families, I stress that familyhood is not a given but is formed based on the family members' efforts to *be* and *do* (act as) family. In their devotion to *do* the family, the North Korean women depicted in Yun's films understand that their labor, as well as the national border, is gendered. I argue that these women characters may be analyzed beyond the director's intention to portray a narrative of idealized motherhood. Although the female protagonists in the films practice mobility by crossing the Sino-North Korean border, the director imagines the mothers—a particular woman's role—via an image of immobility: that they are always "there." I do not argue that the family is not valuable. Instead, I object to the mystification of familyhood as a sacred realm that cannot be questioned, because such discourses have always risked taking for granted women's sacrifice.

In this chapter, I will first discuss the women's crossing of the border and the concept of family to critique the films' seemingly limited portrayal of North Korean women as mothers and their gendered relationships with their children. The director's idealistic portrayal of motherhood in the context of a separated family fails to highlight the women's escape from their past, instead linking them solely with the role of mother by erasing their other identity markers. However, these women nonetheless chose to live their lives as refugees by developing their own rules and becoming strong and fearless women who have been rarely represented in Korean cinema.

Second, I will examine how the refugee women's stories are narrativized through the camera's focus on their faces, stressing their self-imposed silence and gendered mobility. Whether expressed verbally or nonverbally, the refugee women's bodies contain their own narratives. Focusing on the gendered mobility of border crossing, I argue that despite the portrayals of traditional motherhood as ever sacrificing for their progeny and the risk of falling into patriarchal representations, Jero Yun's films can be seen as introducing a collaged subjectivity of a new womanness. The gendered relationships between the children and the mothers reveal the patriarchal order within which the mothers have survived. By breaking the relationships and maintaining a certain distance from their children, the mothers achieve their agency. A feminist counter-reading of the films thus suggests that the North Korean refugee women are represented as fearless, strong, self-reliant, and committed to their own life choices.

Motherhood Challenged: Ruling Son and Distancing Daughter

Since the Sunshine Policy[6] of the Kim Dae-Jung administration (1998–2003), which facilitated increased reconciliation and cooperation between North and South Korea, South Korean films have gradually depicted North Koreans. The unusual box office success of two independent documentaries, *Old Partner* (2009) and *Breathless* (2009), changed independent filmmakers' perception of the genre of independent film as a commercial risk and a form of burning their own bridges. Among them, a few filmmakers have showcased representations of North Korean refugees in South Korean society. They focused on the stereotyped images of and socio-economic discrimination faced by North Korean refugees, revealing the reality in which they struggle to survive in their new society. For example, Pak Jung-bum's *Journals of Musan* (2010), Jeon Kyu-hwan's *Dance Town* (2010), and Kim Kyung-mook's *Stateless Things* (2011) all portray North Korean defectors as marginalized individuals in South Korean society. While these South Korean directors have criticized the state-imposed status of North Korean defectors as second-class citizens as well as the neoliberal structure of South Korean society, Jero Yun has gone further, portraying the North Korean border crossers' complex motives for border crossing as well as their incomplete journeys even after their resettlement.

Since directing the short film *Hitchhiker* (2016), Jero Yun has increasingly focused on North Korean refugees' relationships with their own families. In *Hitchhiker*, a South Korean police officer earns money for his family living in an English-speaking country for the sake of his child's education, while a North Korean man makes money in South Korea to financially support his family in North Korea. Although the two main protagonists do not explicitly exchange words, they understand each other's hardships as the breadwinner for the rest of their family. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's notion of "homosociality," or the friendship and camaraderie between men, is a key concept of this short film wherein females are invisible in their family narratives.[7] In this way, *Hitchhiker* is not far from a story about a head of the family (*kajang*) that sacrifices their own life for the rest of their family. The two men from the South and the North reach a common understanding under the umbrella of patriarchy. The "umbrella" is both a metaphor and a symbol deployed in crucial scenes, which the director represents through the use of slow cuts. For example, the South Korean police officer opens an umbrella alone when he goes to a convenience store to buy liquor (*soju*) and dried squid for the North Korean man. In another umbrella scene, the police and the North Korean man are under the same umbrella when they go to a bar together. This umbrella can represent a unified Korea, but I argue it is also a homosocial commonality based on a shared patriarchal order.

Jero Yun began narrowing his focus from North Korean refugee issues to North Korean women after meeting Mrs. B for his documentary *Madame B*; he then went on to make two fictional films, *Beautiful Days* and *Fighter*. This trilogy about North Korean women centers on their interiority as well as their family relationships and separation. Family separation is a crucial topic for understanding North Korean refugees, because North Koreans' separation is not only a consequence of their border crossing but also a motive for them to decide to cross the border. North Korean refugee women's separation from their families in North Korea is a part of the separated family (*isan'gajok*) issue on the Korean peninsula that began with the division of Korea before and after the Korean War (1950–1953). North Korean refugees are not only a result of North Korea's failing system but also of the political and gendered violence tied to the division of Korea. Therefore, North Korean refugees' dislocation and relocation should be considered a result of the continued division between South and North Korea.[8]

The films depict the passing on of this history of division and separated families to the next generation via the transmission of the women's narratives to their sons and daughters. The separation does not only occur between North Korean women and their families in North Korea but can also include new relationships with the people they meet in China. Due to frequent border crossings and displacement, the refugee women create communities that they inevitably must leave soon after arrival. The separation becomes a motive for the women's family members to cross the border, but reunion does not always guarantee the resolution of conflicts.

The films *Beautiful Days* and *Fighter* depict the stories of adults who cross the border to find their mothers, who defected alone from North Korea to China and eventually to South Korea. Their mothers left them when they were very young, so they have little memory of them. Nevertheless, the absence of a mother gives them mixed emotions, such as longing and anguish, and pushes them to break their silence as adults. In these films, the children demonstrate mobility that is emotionally dependent on their mothers, while the mothers showcase mobility that is physically burdened due to their imbalanced relationships with their children. The children of the refugee women feel that their mothers abandoned them when they left, but the ways in which the children return to their mothers differ according to their genders. The son in *Beautiful Days*, for example, violently intrudes into his mother's life, demanding his mother's apology for leaving him. This parallels one son in *Madame B* who says in an interview that he would never *let* his mother leave for her Chinese husband, while the mother desperately wants to live with the Chinese husband. Although the daughter in *Fighter* also holds strong love-hate feelings toward her mother, she does not interrupt her mother's new life in South Korea, but rather watches her from a distance.

Beautiful Days demonstrates how the relationship between a mother and a child can be violent because of such distance. In *Beautiful Days*, Zhen Chen's relationship with his mother is dramatic. Zhen Chen visits South Korea to find his mother and delivers his dying father's message. Encountering his mother, Zhen Chen mimics the ruling language and gestures that he learned from the patriarchal order. When he learns that his mother works at a bar, Zhen Chen spits the insult "filthy bitch" at her. He interrupts his mother while she is drinking *soju* and takes the bottle away from her. His gestures are projections of patriarchal violence because his father (not his biological father, but the Korean Chinese farmer whom he believed to be his real father) never practiced such acts. The mother, however, has no intention of losing to her son, despite his mimicry of oppressive language. Confronting her son, the mother throws the *soju* cup on the floor, breaking it and asking, "What is wrong with my work at a bar? I do what I can do."

Immediately afterward, the son regrets having cursed his mother to her face. He does not know how the woman had protected him, even though he was a son of the Korean Chinese middleman who had raped and sold her to the Chinese farmer. His self-positioning as a surrogate of his Chinese father leads him to attack a South Korean man who is in a relationship with his mother. Out of fear, he soon regrets his failed attempt of killing the South Korean man and cries when his mother tells him the man survived. In this scene, the camera shows a profile view of Zhen Chen crying, and he soon turns around, seeking a hug from his mother. The mother then holds her son's head between her head and chest. This image of a mother's embrace is a representation of motherhood that the director pursues throughout the movie, and repeats when the woman visits her Korean Chinese husband before he dies. In this scene, the woman displays a form of quasi-motherhood to her husband, who is longing for her return. Although these scenes are the images that the director wanted to use to represent the ideal woman, there are clear limitations to this visual narrative. These images of the woman in the pose of the Madonna justify the woman's sacrifice and at the same time purposefully reverse the status of the woman's "filthy" body to that of a saint or sacred mother. What saves this movie from evoking typical motherhood clichés are the following moments: the woman's embrace of her son ends abruptly and the woman gazes into the void next to her sleeping son. In a similar way, the Chinese husband observes an emptiness on the woman's side of the bed after receiving her embrace.

The abrupt cuts and visible editing between the shots leave the audience wondering if the mother's embrace indeed happened at all. Considering the mother character has limited dialogue in the script and does not express her emotions toward others, the Madonna scenes feel artificial and excessive. Hence, these scenes can be interpreted as a fantasy of the son and the husband as well as of the director, who intends to resolve the audience's dissatisfaction with the blunt and tearless mother figure. The violent relationship between the mother and son reveals the fundamental masculinist violence with which the woman has lived, and this violent definition of clan-based family is the conventional familyhood that the woman wants to escape. Given that the woman was impregnated by rape, it is perhaps too much to

demand that she displays sacrificial and devoted motherhood. It can be another form of violence. For the woman, the family she creates by being sold and raped was not a source of comfort or reliance but a shackle that chained her to the human trafficker. She was alone in overcoming the pain she endured to survive and to make money. What the film demonstrates, then, is that North Korean refugee women are trying to escape not only the particular political and economic conditions in North Korea but also a restrictive definition of the clan-based family.

In the final scene, Zhen Chen wears a suit and puts a spoonful of rice into his mouth as if he can now understand everything about his mother. He shows this gesture of forgiveness for his mother after receiving his father's will and a bankbook. The father's order, "Do not blame your mother," and the bankbook showed him that his mother continuously remitted money to him despite her absence. The father's order provides the son with a justification to forgive his mother, and the mother's money clearly diluted his negative feelings toward her. According to ethnographer Evangeline O. Katigbak, who explores emotional remittances in another context, the sender's remittance is an "act of sacred love," and the sender expects "the same sacred feelings in return."[9] While these sentiments bind family members together, the monetary remittance is also the sender's message to the left-behind family in an attempt to eliminate the risk of being forgotten, and to ensure the family will "prepare for their eventual return."[10] By doing so, the senders invest money into their present and future relationships with the rest of family in their home country. The cases of North Korean refugees, however, are different because they escaped from their home and do not intend to return. Unlike Katigbak's case study on transnational familyhood in the Philippines, the North Korean refugees' emotional remittances are not quite reciprocal, but rather one-sided; the senders cannot expect "the same sacred feelings" from the left-behind family in return.[11] Instead of positive feelings such as love and gratitude, a negative feeling, or emotional debt, is more prevalent among North Korean refugees because the escapees' displacement or failed identification can be worrying for the family members left behind. Therefore, the refugees often send money home to assuage the guilt they may feel toward their family. When it comes to the case of transnational mothers, "sending emotional remittances is often seen as a form of penance for leaving their children behind."[12] The woman's monetary remittances may present an act of penance to the son, but her attitude never changes, regardless of the son's transformation upon receiving his mother's bankbook. Despite her frequent disappearances and border crossings, she remains constant and permanent, still not saying a word or delivering expressive feelings toward the other characters, which should be appreciated as her own way of narrating her story.

In *Beautiful Days* and *Fighter*, the women's roles do not quite overcome the stereotypical narratives of women in a family—they are still either sacrificial mothers or devoted daughters who must save their left-behind family members by sending them money. The North Korean women's money-making and their financial remittance, however, change their relationship with the rest of their family. Money-making and remittances are the last fortress for the women because without such evidence, the women cannot prove their fierce struggle. These women are sometimes sold to and by middlemen and are often continually trying to escape from their current location. They have never been officially recognized as refugees, nor do they have any proof of identification. Thus, the question arises: where can evidence be found that testifies to the existence of these undocumented travelers if they should die after embarking upon their journey to cross the border? Money-making and remittances comprise tangible material evidence for the women in an existential sense.

Fighter is the story of Gina, a North Korean girl who defected to South Korea alone. Her mother left her family fourteen years prior, settled in South Korea, and formed another family. The movie does not center on Gina's defection story; rather, it focuses on her present-day life in South Korea. She is working multiple part-time jobs to send money to her father in North Korea in order to enable his defection to South Korea. The image of women sending money to support others continues from mother to daughter in this movie. According to Gina, her mother sent some money a couple of times to the rest of her family in North Korea, but soon disconnected from the family. A scene where Gina sends money does not appear in the film, but her everyday life is dominated by making and sending

money. She also falls in love with boxing at first sight, and this sport becomes an outlet for her unheard screams and reduces the tension from her everyday work. *Fighter* demonstrates how social hierarchy, money, and gendered conflicts are interwoven in a refugee woman's everyday mobility. For example, there is a hierarchy between Gina, a young refugee woman, and the middleman she must inevitably rely on due to the illegality of sending money to North Korea. Although Gina, as a customer, purchases a "service" that the middleman offers, she is beholden to the middleman because this secret route is the only possible way for her to connect with her father. The relationship between North Korean refugees and middlemen in terms of monetary remittances is imbalanced as well as violent because the refugee customers cannot even question if the middleman charges more risk fees to ensure security.

As a newly relocated stranger, Gina does her best to make more money, but her low cultural capital invites her to the world of gendered labor. When Gina messages the middleman "Byul-i-*oppa*" to ask him about more work for more money, he suggests that Gina should work at a bar. Although she immediately rejects the idea, he leaves room for Gina to change her mind. When her father asks why she is referring to the middleman by the title, "*oppa*," which is used by a woman toward an older man and can be a highly gendered term under certain circumstances in Korean culture, Gina expresses her annoyance and says that the middleman asked her to do so. This response shows that even the relationship between the middleman and the customer is gendered.

These gender-specific risks, inequality, and discomfort in Gina's daily life make her every movement highly gendered. For example, the real estate agent who introduced Gina to her small rental studio treats her as a socially underprivileged woman who has no one to rely on. Gina's daily mobility is fully exposed to the real estate agent, and he often appears as she is on her way to buy groceries; he even waits in front of her house when drunk. As an act of self-defense against the agent's sexual harassment, Gina punches him, but the next day, he returns to her, pushing at her a medical certificate, threatening to accuse her of violence as a North Korean to the police if she does not pay the settlement money. Notably, Gina does not show her frustration by succumbing to violence (as the female protagonist does in *Dance Town*) but protects herself by training her body and earning money to settle the case. Gina's spatial mobility may have stopped after her arrival in South Korea, but her mobility as a physical practice continues. As David Harvey puts it, "The only form of resistance is to move."[13]

Although *Fighter* centers on Gina's achievement of her agency and understanding of her mother, she is reluctant to find her mother at first. Gina keeps her distance from her mother, and even after they encounter one another, she does not ask her mother why she left her family in North Korea. After a series of incidents, her mother finally has a chance to explain to Gina what happened, but does not directly apologize. She delivers her story from a third-person point of view: "There was a girl. She wanted to escape from the village to see a bigger world." Before the mother's story gets melancholic, Gina verbally cuts her off, as if she understood her already because she crossed the border herself. In this way, she brings the focus of the story back to herself, and the distance between the two remains. In the ending sequence, Gina is watching her mother who is sitting at Gina's boxing match, and the last shot is a close-up of her mother's faint smile. With the relationship between the mother and the daughter, *Fighter* demonstrates how these two women become independent by maintaining their own distance from each other and repositioning themselves as two women rather than as a mother/daughter dyad.

The Faciality of Refugee Women: Visage, Silence, and Gendered Mobility

The director showcases frequent close-up scenes, as if trying to see past the women's faces to view a deeper interiority. A face, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is a system of surfaces and holes. Close-ups in film treat faces as landscapes or plateaus and create relationships with other traits, such as lines, wrinkles, shapes, and cracks.[14] In creating these relationships, other body parts can carry faciality. This section examines the faciality of the women's visages, their mobility, the torn-out first page of a journal, and silence. It explores how this faciality discourages the expectation of the conventional idea

of motherhood—which has been discussed in the previous section—and instead presents a collaged subjectivity of the women.

What then is the face of refugee women? To non-refugees, who are inside the legal boundary, refugee women, who are outside the boundary, may present an abstract image or beings who are invisible in the non-refugees' ordinary lives, even if the refugees are physically proximate to them. North Korean refugee women are faceless when they are referred to as a group but perhaps too visible when they appear via commercial channels, such as television shows or the covers of their autobiographies.[15] The faces of pretty and young but sad-looking girls who hold words inside them via silence have become the representative image of North Korean refugee women since the cover image of *In Order to Live* (2015) by Yeonmi Park, a celebrity refugee who actively engages with her followers online. The celebrity North Korean women's beauty and femininity have become a stereotyped image for all female North Korean refugees. At first glance, the North Korean women in Jero Yun's films appear like a stereotypical refugee woman who has lost her voice. The films, however, gradually challenge the assumption that a counternarrative of resistance must privilege the subaltern's voice, showing instead that face, mobility, and silence can carry a different kind of power and agency.

Jero Yun's *Beautiful Days* also depicts the beautiful yet sad face of a North Korean refugee woman. Far from showing a face full of fear and anxiety, however, the movie focuses on this woman's strategic and self-imposed silence and makes the audience wonder about her story beyond her role as a mother. The opening scene begins with sudden and grandiose music that takes the audience to an ambiguous time and space in the woman's life. The camera zooms in for a slow-motion close-up of the woman's face from a low side angle as colorful light from behind her creates a silhouette of her face, and even her cigarette appears as a timeless object. The close-up scene lasts for more than one minute and fades out when the woman's face sinks into the darkness. The shadow of the woman's silhouette implies the woman has a dark story, and the film conveys her strong interiority through frequent close-up techniques.

The camera's obsession with the woman's face is, in fact, a strategic way to overcome the actress's beauty and perfect proportions, which are far from people's preconception of a refugee woman. The cast of *Beautiful Days* drew people's attention, and the film was frequently mentioned in Korean mass media because of the popularity of the actress, Lee Na-Young, who played the mother's role. In the film, she acts with her eyes and face instead of through dialogue. The character's silence is based on the refugee woman's pain, a pain that cannot be verbalized or shared with others. Even if the others knew her stories, the pain of the woman is solely hers. The mother disappeared from the life of her son, but even in the current situation where the son appears before her, she makes the son wait in silence. She does not make an active gesture to ask for forgiveness because she literally survived every moment on the boundary between life and death. Silence does not mean the absence of language; rather, it means the power to make the other wait. In that sense, silence in the relationship between the woman and her son is not the opposite of a voice, nor is it an absence of subjectivity. In the scene of silence, where the spectators await the woman's words, her silence is projected from the screen despite its immateriality and absorbs the spectators into it like a blackhole. While the woman demonstrates the faciality of silence to build her strategic relationships with her son and the spectators, she is active in the practice of mobility. At dawn, when everyone is asleep, she opens the door and disappears by riding away on a motorcycle parked outside the gate. She also refuses her husband's request to return. Although she is a refugee without official documentation, no one can prevent her mobility. Rather than romanticize her mobility, however, I argue that her ability and capability to move without settlement symbolize her (recognition of) power.

It is worthwhile to carefully examine Gina's character in *Fighter* and compare her to previous cinematic depictions of North Korean refugee women as timid, passive, and ignorant. Presented as part of a new generation of North Korean refugees, Gina does not hesitate to react to South Koreans' preconceptions about North Koreans. She points out that South Korean media portrays North Koreans as either savages or war machines. Unlike most North Korean refugees in South Korea who want

to assimilate into South Korean society by erasing their North Korean accent and traits, Gina rather questions her coworker, "Haven't you seen a person from North Korea before?" When the real estate agent demands she pay a hospital fee, she works even harder and eventually throws the money at the man. The camera zooms in on Gina's smiling face as she walks away from him, which signals a birth of a new refugee woman. *Fighter* is a crucial work, not only for Jero Yun's filmography but also for the narrativization of North Korean refugees, for it demonstrates sexual discrimination and violence against refugees that might also resonate with non-refugee women.

In *Fighter*, the camera frequently captures close-ups of Gina's face, brows, and physical mobility. The camera captures Gina's contemplative moments, when, for example, she focuses on training and running, as well as her emotional expressions, such as crying, frowning, and showing disappointment. These scenes of mobility are accumulated and gradually build on Gina's character. The movie focuses on Gina's desire to be strong, rather than her desire to assimilate into the existing order. With her mobility and bodily awakening portrayed through the scenes of hitting, jumping, running, and sweating, she writes her own embodied narrative. Her rediscovery of her own body begins when she is shocked by the bodies of South Korean women boxers. Starting her part-time job at a boxing gym, Gina finds herself fascinated by the female amateur boxers' body movements and their musculature. By using camera angles, the director takes shots that are from Gina's point of view as she watches the South Korean female boxers' bodies. These queer moments motivate her to think of using her own body as a means of making money.

Notably, the relationship between South Korean and North Korean women appears only superficially in cinematic representations of North Korean refugees. In most films, the refugees' relationship with the local people mainly centers on the male-male relationship or the relationship between South Korean men and North Korean refugee women. A North Korean refugee man, for example, learns violent language from a hierarchical relationship with South Korean men (*Journals of Musan*) or North Korean refugee women are sexually violated by South Korean men (*Dance Town* and *Stateless Things*).

Figure 25.1   Screenshot by author. The camera's close-up on Gina's frowning face. In this scene, Gina is chewing a dry squid, suppressing her anger toward her mother. The director actively captures Gina's facial expressions in *Fighter*.

South Korean women's roles are limited, and they appear as refugee women's coworkers or as agents of the National Intelligence Service (*Dance Town*).

With Gina, Jero Yun breaks ground by demonstrating a North Korean refugee woman in physical confrontation with South Korean women. By contrasting Gina's working body to the South Korean amateur boxers' trained bodies, the movie brings up the issue of the classification of women's bodies. While the South Korean amateur boxers wear sport bras and confidently showcase their fit bodies, Gina wears a t-shirt with a hooded neck, hiding her torso and head. Compared to the mobility of the South Korean female boxers, Gina is invisible and exists outside the boxers' realm. She practices her mobility in the very early morning when no one is on the street. Gina, as a newly arrived refugee, practices her desire to walk freely in her new place through early morning jogging because, as a worker who barely makes a living, she cannot freely walk around during the daytime hours. She is shown either working her night restaurant shift or sleeping in her off-hours. Gina also practices her mobility in the dark, after the South Korean female boxers have finished their activities. Upon the gym coach's spontaneous suggestion of a boxing match, South Korean boxers scoff at the thought that Gina could beat them. When Gina appears before the boxers as a boxing match counterpart, however, the boxers feel very anxious and displeased by this unexpected interruption of the expected order. While hierarchy and disparity presuppose the mobility of discrimination, Gina appears holding a boxing glove instead of a floor-cleaning mop, resisting this premise.

The woman's silence in *Beautiful Days* and Gina's practice of physical mobility in *Fighter* constitute the face of a North Korean refugee woman; nevertheless, the final faciality is represented through women's journals. Specifically, the women in *Beautiful Days* and *Madame B* keep a journal. The spectators do not have a chance to investigate the contents of the journal, but that book becomes the face on the screen. For example, in *Madame B*, when she crosses the borders to move from China, Laos, and Thailand to South Korea, she writes her thoughts and feelings in a journal while on a bus that joggles on the uneven dirt road. Her practice of writing in this scene strikes the spectator since it does not quite match with her emergent and precarious situation. In the feature film, *Beautiful Days*, when her son leaves after persistently asking her to explain why she "abandoned" him, the woman secretly puts her personal journal in his bag. Her memories have presumably been written chronologically from the first-person point-of-view and will now interrupt the son's daily life. Before passing along the journal, however, the woman tears out the first page of the journal on which the story she did not want to convey—the secret of her son's birth—was written.

The torn-out page and the woman's hand tightly holding the margin of the book become the face of this close-up scene. This scene where the woman is sitting in the dark with light falling on her left hand at an oblique angle clearly shows the contrast between the white background and the black letters on the page. The woman takes some time, carefully tearing out the first page of the journal and mourns it (i.e., the page as a face). The journal is conventionally regarded as a record of private thoughts, as opposed to public speech, and is often dismissed as a genre that is bounded by limitations in representing a political voice. In this film, however, the woman organizes, edits, and reconstructs her memories in the journal, thus creating the story of herself. Her story is reshaped and articulated through her own autobiographical techniques. Who is this record for? This record—since it is not in the form of a letter—is for herself, which helped her to anchor herself to the reality of her life. Her journal as a format is notable because it indicates that the authority of memory, recording, and editing is hers as the protagonist of the narrative. In this way, the woman maintains her subjectivity, which she never surrendered.

The refugee woman's displacement may seem to distance her from the sense of being one's self and in the home. However, the woman's face, silence, and the torn-out page of the journal function as fractured windows through which the women's subjectivity becomes visible. These fractured windows may resonate with what Devika Chawala says about "scattered subjectivities." Chawala elucidates that the refugee women do not sense "feeling-at-home as subjects who dwell-in-travel," and visually presents this division of the states as scattered.[16] Although it is an imagined scattering, the distance between the senses of being-at-home and dwelling-in-travel is not insurmountable. Indeed, the different aspects

of the woman's subjectivity are held together by a certain anchor such as the woman's journal and are patched like a collage from a long-distance view. Thus, collaged subjectivity creates a new face and each piece of the face holds tightly to the others in the service of the totality. The close-ups of the women's visage, body parts, and the journal pages in Jero Yun's films achieve their independent faciality, but at the same time, newly and collectively configure the visuality and agency of the refugee women. The director's reading of the North Korean refugee women, which began with Mrs. B and now concludes with Gina's mobility, showcases a refugee woman's selfhood and desire.

Conclusion

North Korean refugee women in Jero Yun's films migrate beyond the boundary of the patriarchal family, developing their own conceptions of morality and independence, in contrast to the stereotypical images of Korean mothers as devoted and sacrificial within the setting of a clan-based family. In contrast to the first impression that the films may offer a conventional image of Korean women, a feminist counter-reading of the female protagonists of these films suggests that they can be read as an opening for a new refugee womanhood. This chapter questions the discourse regarding clan-based families that takes mothers' sacrifices for granted and implicitly tolerates patriarchal violence against them. Despite the physical and emotional distance between the women and other family members, the refugee women continue to send money to their families back in North Korea and China. Monetary remittance becomes tangible evidence of their existence and also becomes a motivation in itself that prompts these women to transcend the limits of patriarchal conceptions of the family.

The faciality of the women's visage, silence, mobility, and the torn-out page of the journal creates a collaged subjectivity of the women; their strong interiority intersects refugeehood and womanhood. These close-up scenes of the refugee women provide different narratives of refugee women, which resist the conventional expectations on women's limited roles in the domestic realm. By doing so, the films let these women move and achieve, opening a new chapter for refugee women whose faces look back fearlessly.

Acknowledgment

Notes

1 An earlier version of this chapter was published as "Crossing Families: North Korean Refugee Women and Monetary Remittances in Jero Yun's *Mrs. B, A North Korean Woman* (2016), *Beautiful Days* (2018), and *Fighter* (2021)" in *S/N Korean Humanities*.
2 Yet, to give an idea, UNHCR mentions that the number of North Korean border crossers residing in China are approximately 30,000–50,000 in 2006. Margesson, Chanlett-Avery, and Bruno, "North Korean Refugees in China and Human Rights Issues."
3 Espiritu, *Body Counts*, 3, 12.
4 Kim, "'The Stranger' in the Division System," 61.
5 Folbre, *The Invisible Heart*. Evangeline O. Katigbak also uses these expressions a couple of times in her study, "Moralizing Emotional Remittances."
6 The eighth president in South Korea, Kim Dae-jung, launched a policy of reconciliation and cooperation with North Korea. He continuously practiced his attitude toward North Korea by supporting it economically. In 2000, Kim Dae-jung met Kim Jong-il, the supreme leader of North Korea at the time, and received a 2000 Nobel Peace Prize for peace and reconciliation with South Korea's neighboring countries.
7 Sedgwick, *Between Men*.
8 According to South Korean law, "*[I]san'gajok* refers to a spouse, former spouse, or relatives who were separated due to the South–North military demarcation line regardless of the reasons for their separation." This definition is based on article two of "the law for the confirmation of South–North separated family's identity and

the encouragement of exchange between the family members," which was enacted in 2009. See the Ministry of Unification, "The Law for the Confirmation of South-North Separated Family's Identity." Since the law does not specify the time frame of a family's separation, it can include any type of separation between family members as well as those that occurred as a result of the Korean division. Therefore, based on the current law, family separation between North Koreans qualifies as *isan'gajok*. Gwi-Ok Kim also pointed out that the South Korean government does not officially categorize North Korean defectors as dispersed families. Kim outlined that the North Korean defectors are also the victims of the Korean division, and the government should recognize them as dispersed families for family reunions and returns home. Kim, "Study on the Korean Dispersed Families," 326.

 9 Katigbak, "Moralizing Emotional Remittances," 529.
10 Katigbak, "Moralizing Emotional Remittances," 531.
11 Katigbak, "Moralizing Emotional Remittances," 529.
12 Katigbak, "Moralizing Emotional Remittances," 532.
13 Harvey, *Paris*, 42.
14 Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 170.
15 Regarding gender politics of the North Korean refugee women in South Korean television shows, see Cho, "'Becoming' North Koreans," 26–50.
16 Chawala, *Home, Uprooted*, 146.

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QUEER REFUGEE HOMEMAKING

Lesbian and Gay Refugees' Oral Histories and Photovoice Narratives of Home

Katherine Fobear

In this chapter, I focus on the oral history and photovoice projects of Juliet, Sara, and Samuel,[1] three lesbian and gay refugees who gained asylum in Canada on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity.[2] Through their selected photographs and oral histories, I explore how queer refugees narrate stories of migration, settlement, and feelings of home through intimacy and queer domesticity. While home is conventionally understood through a heteronormative lens that ties it to the heterosexual nuclear family, this chapter presents an intimate queer archive of Juliet, Sara, and Samuel's narrative constructions of home. Rather than reproduce flattened narratives of refugee victimhood—fleeing persecution to find freedom elsewhere—this chapter understands queer refugees as sexual and emotional beings who express, want to express, or are denied the means to express both their sexual identities and desires and their intimate relationships and domestic needs.[3] Being able to live with their same-sex partners and create a private homelife together, free from heteronormative persecution and violent intrusion, was a motivating catalyst for Juliet, Sara, and Samuel to migrate and claim asylum. Through their oral histories and photovoice projects, Juliet, Sara, and Samuel reveal how their sense of home rests in between national borders and memory, in the intimacy and daily domestic rituals they share with their partners. Their narratives demonstrate that home, as an affective concept outside of state heteronormative and gendered constraints, is a continual process that is as much about intimacy, relationships, and domesticity as it is about a physical dwelling and political asylum. Queer refugee homemaking challenges the conflation of "home" with both "nation-state" and "heteronormative domicile." Migration and settlement are as much "intimate" as they are "forced," as experiences and places that are significant to refugees are remapped onto new locations in their adopted countries, connecting past and present.

Narratives are important for queer asylum seekers, not only to gain asylum but also to build a sense of belonging and home for themselves in the face of instability and precarity. For this chapter, I selected excerpts from the photovoice and oral history interviews that highlight affective relationships. Before migration, Juliet and Sara were in a lesbian relationship with one another, while Samuel had to end his partnership in his country of origin out of fear of violence but quickly found his current husband after arriving in Canada and claiming asylum. Intimacy in this chapter is defined as the private moments or daily actions a person experiences with someone with whom they are in a romantic relationship. It can encompass physical affection and emotion as well as the daily routines, language, and sharing of time and space that people in partnership have with one another. Queer domesticity is defined as the act of creating a domestic space and sense of home outside of heteronormative constraints. Through their stories and photographs, Juliet, Sara, and Samuel reveal that they experienced persecution not only based on their sexual orientation but also for defying gender norms in their private, intimate, and

domestic lives, as queer couples living together. Thus, creating a private domestic space where they can not only be intimate with one another but also engage in daily rituals of queer domesticity informs the narration of home for Juliet, Sara, and Samuel. It is also an act of resistance against social, economic, and political forces meant to erase them and their relationships.

This chapter uses oral history and photovoice to allow the participants to direct their narratives through storytelling and be active participants in the final analysis of their narratives. Oral history as a methodology has a long history in refugee and diaspora studies.[4] The personal narratives collected from long and extended oral history interviews provide insight into how refugees make sense of their worlds and how they perceive the impact of social, political, and cultural change in their everyday lives. The majority of the oral history interviews were conducted in English. For two of the interviews, they were conducted with the use of a Spanish translator. The interviews presented in this chapter came from the interviews I conducted in English. Juliet, Sara, and Samuel were fluent English speakers. The oral histories were conversational and semi-structured, consisting of three parts: the first on refugees' experiences in their country of origin as well as their journey to and resettlement in Canada; the next on refugees' understandings of home; and the third on refugees' conceptions of belonging. Participants received interview transcripts and were compensated for their time. Additionally, photovoice offers a chance for the participants to further unpack what home and belonging mean to them. Also known as participatory photography, photovoice involves having participants select or take photographs on a key theme or question and then narrate the meanings behind each photograph. For this project, participants were asked to select, or capture using a camera, ten to twenty photographs that represented home and belonging to them. The selection and captioning of photographs allowed the participants to express different kinds of knowledge and affectual experience that may not be readily or easily articulated through interviews or conversations alone. Using oral history and photovoice also allowed Juliet, Sara, Samuel, and I the opportunity to reflect critically together and circle back to key points or insights about their experiences and narrative constructions of home.

I come to these stories as an outsider, but also as an active listener and participant in dialogue with Juliet, Sara, and Samuel. The excerpts and photographs selected are heavily curated through my own interpretative authority as a queer cisgender white non-refugee settler academic and activist. I spent four years as a volunteer and settlement assistant for Rainbow Refugee, a non-profit organization based in Canada and dedicated to assisting those claiming asylum on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, and HIV status.[5] I worked with more than a hundred queer refugees claiming asylum in Canada by preparing them for their hearings, serving as an expert witness, assisting with finding shelter and resources, and providing moral support during the entire process and afterward. My interest in home and belonging comes from my daily work with queer refugees and seeing how their experiences complicate national and institutional narratives of refugee victimhood. Homemaking is agentic in that it involves intentional actions and desires. In the face of institutional, political, and material constraints, queer refugee homemaking is an act of resistance against heteronormative repression and erasure across nation-state borders.

Juliet and Sara

SARA: We started to live together. She moved into my place. That way, we could be together and not be afraid. And that's when it all started to become bad. We became targeted. Even when we did not tell anybody. We did not have boyfriends. People got suspicious and found out that we were in a relationship. That's when the violence started.[6]

Sara and Juliet met in 2011 while sharing a train car to the capital city of their country of origin in Central Asia. They quickly became romantic partners and moved in together, hiding their relationship from family members, coworkers, and outsiders. Juliet and Sara experienced heightened surveillance and violence as a lesbian couple, in both private and public spheres. The violence Sara and Juliet

experienced as financially independent women in a relationship was further impacted by strict gender social norms and misogyny. Family members disowned them. Former boyfriends and male friends physically and sexually attacked them. Coworkers refused to work with them. One of Sara's coworkers broke into their apartment and sexually assaulted Juliet and Sara. When they went to the police, they were turned away because they were lesbians. Police officers would also target them and extort money. Sara was raped by a police officer after reporting an attack. Persecution followed them through several relocations within their country. Finally, they were kidnapped and repeatedly sexually assaulted by the husband of a female acquaintance.

The extreme violence Sara and Juliet experienced was motivated by restrictive cultural gender norms, heteronormativity, and homophobia that targeted them explicitly as a lesbian couple. James Wilets writes that violence against sexual minorities should be seen as a part of overarching gender violence and oppression, rather than a separate violence based solely on sexual orientation. Sexual minorities are "gender outlaws."[7] Their persecution involves intolerance of both homosexual relations and defying traditional gender roles. The persecution Sara and Juliet experienced points to the necessity of looking at how anti-queer violence targets not only a person's sexual orientation but also their gender and relationships. Sara and Juliet lived in a country with restrictive gender norms governed by a restrictive gender hierarchy. As queer women, they not only defied gender expectations but were a threat to the hierarchal patriarchal power structure that subjugates women as subservient to men in both public and private spheres. By living together, even discreetly, Sara and Juliet became more susceptible to persecution. Trying to create a home outside of heteronormative and patriarchal constraints made them a threat to the status quo. Wanting to stay together meant that wherever they went within their country, they would be hyper-visible and therefore vulnerable to more persecution.

In their photovoice, Juliet and Sara did not present photographs taken prior to their arrival in Canada. This was partly because they had very few photographs or documentary evidence of their life together in their country of origin. The constant violence and fear made them afraid to go out in public together. Even private photographs, letters, or mementos seemed too dangerous, as their home was frequently broken into. The photographs taken and selected for this project show how home rests in the intimacy they experience in their private dwelling as well as the ability to go out in public as a queer couple. Coming to Canada was not only a way to escape horrific violence but also a means to reclaim parts of their domestic relationship that were previously denied. As much as Sara and Juliet felt safer in Canada as a lesbian couple, they have also experienced heteronormative surveillance by Canadian immigration officials and economic hardship as immigrant women. Sara and Juliet's photographs and story reveal that violence against and marginalization of queer non-white bodies do not stop at national borders. Yet, in defiance of this marginalization, they engage in queer refugee homemaking through their attachment to one another. Juliet and Sara's oral history and photovoice challenge Canadian discourses that depict non-Western queer refugees as gratefully escaping persecution in order to find freedom and acceptance in the liberal West. Instead, they present a much more complicated narrative of love, loss, and longing both for their country of origin and in what they experience in their current settlement.

In Juliet and Sara's narrative and photovoice, we see a queer archive of intimacy in which they frame their experiences through the hardship they endure as well as cherished moments of being together outside of heteronormative constraints. Through their relationship, Juliet and Sara archive not only the facts of their story but also the knowledge of what informs their sense of home and belonging.

JULIET: When we arrived in Canada, we did not make a refugee claim. … We needed to leave as fast as possible. We did not know about the refugee claim very well. …

SARA: It was terrible at the airport. Actually, when we were at the airport they almost sent us back. Because we just wanted to leave [Central Asia]. I don't know why, but we just picked Vancouver. We had no reservations for hotels and no one is coming to pick us up. The immigration officers asked us so many questions. They unpacked all our luggage. They didn't even let us meet. We were in different rooms. We were separated.

JULIET: Yeah, we were separated. It was terrible.

SARA: I couldn't breathe. I don't know. I was crying. I couldn't breathe. Because I was not able to breathe they let us be in the room together. I was sitting on the floor and she [Juliet] was sitting on the chair. And she [Juliet] said, "Come sit next to me." I sat next to her.

But, the customs lady came in and saw us and she was so mad. She said, "Who told you that you could sit together? You have to get back here." We didn't even have the chance to talk together. We couldn't touch.[8]

This is the first experience Sara and Juliet had in Canada. In researching how to leave, they found a news article about a gay man from their country successfully claiming asylum in Canada. Juliet reached out to a former acquaintance who had relocated to Toronto. The person agreed to be their contact for their visitor's visa. Once Sara and Juliet arrived in Canada, they were detained and questioned for eight hours by the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA). Eventually, CBSA officers managed to talk over the phone with Juliet's acquaintance. The phone call convinced the officers that Juliet and Sara would not be a flight risk, and they were allowed to leave the airport.

Juliet and Sara's oral history of coming to Canada speaks to how national security borders threaten queer bodies and relationships. People crossing borders become highly surveilled; governments' control of immigration and mobility infiltrates every aspect of their daily lives. For those who have already crossed many borders in their countries of origin, particularly social boundaries of sexuality and gender, feelings of precariousness may only intensify once they cross into another state.[9] CBSA officers have the authority to detain and question incoming migrants they think are suspicious. As two non-white women coming from Central Asia with little knowledge of Vancouver, little money, and no hotel reservation, Sara and Juliet were immediately suspected. They did not fit the CBSA officers' definition of a legitimate visitor to Canada. Canada has a long history of regulating immigration based on race, gender, and class. Migration is built upon a Western white male model of privilege.[10] It can be more difficult for women, especially non-Western and non–white women, to accrue enough financial and social support to qualify for a visa to enter Canada, and they experience policing of their race, gender, and class on entering the country.[11] Assumptions and norms surrounding race, gender, and class determine who is allowed entry into a state's territory and given the right to stay.[12] Women applying for a visitor's visa must prove attachment to their country through financial and relational ties. Independent female migrants from outside the West and unaccompanied by a male companion are heavily scrutinized and policed at the border on the suspicion that they are being trafficked. This has not only restricted non-white and low-income women from coming to Canada but also reinforced heteronormative norms of gender and sexuality for incoming migrants. Bodies coming through borders are deemed heterosexual and cisgender by default, and queer bodies are either erased or made hyper-visible.[13] As non-white and non-wealthy women traveling to Canada, Juliet and Sara were deemed suspicious upon arrival. CBSA officers did not recognize their queer relationship. The officers never questioned them about their relationship to each other and why they were traveling together. Being detained by the border guards further traumatized Juliet and Sara and made it difficult for them to seek help from the CBSA. Juliet and Sara left not knowing how they could make a refugee claim in Canada. The experience made them afraid to tell people about their situation and seek assistance.

Unsure about the asylum process and fearing deportation, they became more and more distressed about finding a way to stay in Canada before their visas expired. Eventually, Sara and Juliet grew to trust the manager of a local hostel they were staying at and confided in her about their situation. The woman told them that they could make a refugee claim and gave them the phone number of a lawyer. The lawyer got them in contact with Legal Aid, and they started their refugee claim. This lawyer also connected them to Rainbow Refugee, where volunteers helped them prepare for their hearing.

When Juliet and Sara's asylum hearing finally came, it was a mixture of relief and catharsis. They testified together about their experiences and fear of being further targeted if sent back to their country of origin. The immigration officer listened carefully to their story, asking them clarifying questions

to look for any inconsistencies. After finding them both credible and their fear of persecution evident, the officer granted them asylum. In many ways, Sara and Juliet were lucky. They were able to work with Rainbow Refugee and their lawyer to prepare for their joint hearing. This meant they were clear and consistent and felt more confident in telling their queer refugee narrative in a way that would be legible to the Canadian settler state. Many refugees do not have access to these legal and institutional supports. Sara and Juliet's hearing took place on February 14, and Juliet would later recount it was the best Valentine's Day they ever had.

Juliet and Sara's oral history reveals a counter-narrative to Canadian state discourse surrounding queer asylum seekers that depicts them as finding automatic safety, acceptance, and freedom in the neo-liberal West. As much as Juliet and Sara were escaping persecution, they also experienced precarity and trauma in Canada. During their asylum hearing, Juliet and Sara could not speak about the hardships they were experiencing in Canada as non-white queer refugee women. Instead, their narrative had to be constrained in order to make their case to the Canadian Immigration Board member as to why they needed to stay in Canada and could not be deported. They could not speak about the trauma they encountered entering Canada or their struggles in finding safe and stable housing or employment.

Yet, in their oral history, Juliet and Sara talk about these experiences not in terms of being better or worse in Canada or their country of origin, but connecting all of these experiences as part of their story of migration and survival as a couple. Likewise, their photovoice around home provides additional complexity that goes beyond the limited narrative demanded by the Canadian Immigration Board to make a credible asylum claim. Their pictures and narration of home reveal how home is both a place of queer affirmation as well as a place of precarity.

AUTHOR: What do you need to have a good feeling of home?

SARA: Love. You need love. Happiness. I feel that when we are together in our place. It is much better than before.[14]

Getting asylum meant that Sara and Juliet would not be sent back, but it did not guarantee them survival or living well in Canada. Even with asylum and work permits, they struggled to financially support themselves because it was difficult to access stable employment and well-paying jobs. Affordable housing in Vancouver was scarce. The constant moving and fear of homelessness caused considerable stress and anxiety. Renting a room with roommates and surrounding neighbors also created anxiety, as they continued to fear being attacked or harassed. Most of the time, Sara and Juliet stayed in their bed-room, not enjoying the rest of the house and the yard. Yet, even within this darkness there is also light. As Sara commented, "Happiness. I feel that when we are together in our place." The ability to share a living space together, despite the struggle, is where happiness and hope are located. In reclaiming this space of intimacy, Sara and Juliet affirm their relationship to one another and hold hope for better days. In the moments of intimacy in this private shared space, Juliet and Sara feel a sense of home.

AUTHOR: How do you feel when you two are alone together in your room?

JULIET: I think we feel safe, mostly. Sometimes I feel scared, but that is mostly outside [of their apartment]. Here I feel good. We can be close.

SARA: It is safe here. But there were times where we felt very afraid. But I think it is because of the fear we have. Sometimes loud noises or people scare us. And that's because we had to always be afraid. Always had to keep watching. Could not trust anyone.

We never got a chance to get used to holding hands or kissing on the street. We only could do that alone in our room. So home is that special place where we can be together. I am happy to come back here when I know she is here. This room is special.[15]

While the physical place that Juliet and Sara were staying in did not feel fully like home, they felt at home together in their room. Juliet and Sara purposely did not take pictures of the room they shared.

Figure 26.1   Picture of Grouse Mountain, photograph by Juliet, April 2015.

That was their private space that was special just to them, and in maintaining that privacy, they maintain a sense of home for themselves. This feeling is reminiscent of bell hooks' conception of "homeplace", which is not just a physical dwelling but also an affective and relational space that resists the objectification and erasure of minoritized bodies, such as Black or refugee bodies.[16] It is an affirming space of care and love. Sarah Elwood writes that for "many lesbian communities, the act of creating a homeplace is a refusal to be silenced in the face of a rigidly heterosexual culture."[17] By constantly working to maintain this private domestic space, this space of queer intimacy, Juliet and Sara resist gendered power structures that threaten to suppress their relationship and existence.

JULIET: This picture is special because we are together. It is our first hike together here. It was beautiful. We wanted to go to Grouse Mountain. It was a special day for us. It reminds me of my country, what I love about my country. The mountains. We love the mountains.
SARA: It looks so magical. The clouds and the sunlight. Yeah, I miss the countryside. The goats and the sheep. All the green and the mountains. And it gets so quiet there. It is very peaceful. Yeah, I wish we could see this more.
JULIET: This was a way for us to experience that just a little. What is different is that we could not enjoy the countryside in our country because of the violence. But here we can experience it a little. We can go on a hike together. It is peaceful. We can finally share this together. This mountain is now our mountain.[18]

The photovoice of Grouse Mountain enables Juliet and Sara to represent a queer remapping of a public location that crosses national borders and time. Juliet and Sara were denied public displays of

affection and access to public spaces in their country of origin. Moreover, they do not feel completely safe or welcomed in Canada. As non-white refugee lesbians, they experience multiple marginalizations that make daily living a struggle. However, even in this struggle, there are points of reaffirmation and reclamation. They frame Grouse Mountain, a very popular tourist destination in Vancouver, in relation to what they were denied in their country of origin. Visiting public places affirms their relationship and creates a sense of intimacy in public. By loving each other, Juliet and Sara create a radical space of intimacy that challenges static notions of home outside of heteronormative and national boundaries. Grouse Mountain transforms into a domestic and intimate queer space for Juliet and Sara. Their narrative of Grouse Mountain queers the boundary between public and private, remapping home as something they create with one another even if the house in which they were renting a room did not make them feel at home. Through Juliet and Sara's affectual attachment and narrative remapping, Grouse Mountain becomes more than just a physical location. In this space of here and there, past and present, Juliet and Sara reclaim moments of intimacy that were previously denied.

Samuel

Like the stories and photographs provided by Juliet and Sara, Samuel's oral history and photovoice highlight the importance of queer intimacy, specifically through domestic artifacts and rituals. Although Samuel did not migrate to Canada with a queer partner, his migration and subsequent claim for asylum were motivated by a desire to build a domestic homelife with another man without fear of persecution. His relationship with his current husband, Allen, whom he met shortly after arriving in Canada, informs Samuel's experience of belonging and home.

SAMUEL: My partner, Allen, and I love to go on this walk on the weekends with our dog. … This walk is special. But it is also special because a lot of these places have deeper memories to me. Like, you will see this later on, but, like, for some of these places, they were the first things that I ever saw when I arrived here. So it's like past and present meets when I walk with Allen. I always remember these places for their memories. It's a good visit. Like a visit with family. There's good times and bad times, but most importantly you are experiencing them with the person you love.[19]

Samuel's photovoice is a carefully cultivated collection of staged photographs representing the intimate and private homelife he has with Allen. In discussing the photographs, Samuel recounts the loss of a private queer domestic homelife in his country of origin while also cherishing the one he currently has with Allen. The everyday rituals and objects that make up his domestic life are also a way for Samuel to create a home after multiple displacements as a queer refugee. Home is created in the daily domestic intimacy he shares with Allen.

SAMUEL: This is a picture of our little dog. She will be eight years old in April. Adopting our dog was really special to me. I had a dog with Leo [Samuel's former partner in his country of origin]. I loved her so much. We would go on walks together as a family. We would take her on vacation with us. It's sad. The neighbors in my building found out about us [Leo and Samuel]. They decided to poison our dog in an attempt to get us to move out of the building. Losing my dog was devastating. It just was more proof that I would never be able to live the life I wanted for myself.[20]

Samuel lived in a large metropolitan city in Central America. He enjoyed a successful career and a loving family who accepted his queerness. Prior to coming to Canada, Samuel was in a relationship with a man named Leo. They lived together in a small apartment and kept to themselves. Despite their attempts to stay discreet, their relationship was discovered by neighbors, who sent a priest to perform an exorcism in front of their home. Samuel would find graffiti outside his apartment door, with homophobic slurs and messages telling them to leave. Feces and garbage were thrown at their windows.

Figure 26.2   Picture of small dog, photograph by Samuel, May 2014.

A neighbor started a petition to have the police arrest Samuel and Leo for indecency. While these acts of violence were upsetting, Samuel felt determined not to be bullied. It was not until Samuel and Leo's beloved dog was poisoned that Samuel became fearful for their lives. They decided to end their relationship and move out of the apartment.

SAMUEL: It was time to leave. … What kind of life was that? I spoke with my mom that night, and she said that she didn't want me to end up murdered, basically because of being gay. It was a very difficult decision, but that's basically when I decided to leave. I decided to sell whatever I had and just got on a plane and came to Vancouver. I just wanted to live a normal life.

AUTHOR: What is a normal life for you?

SAMUEL: To be able to be in a relationship with the man you love and not have to worry about someone harassing or beating you up. Not having to constantly hide who you are. Enjoy moments with friends and boyfriends without having people harass you or worse. You know, be able to share a life with someone. Live together and build a life.[21]

The violence Samuel experienced is similar to what Juliet and Sara experienced in that he was targeted not just because of his sexual orientation but also because of his relationship with Leo. Their relationship defied gender norms by not conforming to culturally specific versions of heterosexuality and masculinity, specifically machismo. Machismo is a cultural construction of masculinity found in Hispanic and Latinx communities that largely emphasizes male dominance, heterosexism, and a rigid gender hierarchy. Queer men, effeminate men, men who do not live up to the tenets of machismo are situated near the bottom of the gender hierarchy and are seen as a threat to the gendered order and male dominance. Two gay men building a home together, sharing domestic tasks often assigned to women, and creating a family unit directly challenges machismo and makes them vulnerable to

further persecution. While Samuel and Leo were not physically assaulted, the violence they experienced was specifically targeted at their home and the domestic life they had built together. With the encouragement of Samuel's family, especially his mother, Samuel researched relocating to Canada and learned that he could claim asylum based on the persecution he experienced as a sexual minority. He emailed Rainbow Refugee and they connected him with a lawyer. Within a couple of weeks, he booked a plane ticket and left for Vancouver. After arriving in Vancouver, Samuel applied for asylum.

While waiting for his asylum hearing, Samuel met Allen, who would later become his husband. Their relationship quickly developed and Allen gave Samuel a place to stay while they waited for the refugee hearing. Although not knowing if Samuel would be able to stay in Canada was stressful for them both, they supported each other. Samuel believes that he would not have been able to get through his asylum process without Allen's love and support. Allen testified about their relationship at Samuel's hearing. Samuel shared the story of his previous relationship and his past experiences of violence. The judge listened attentively and granted Samuel asylum. This meant Samuel could stay in Canada and build a future together with Allen. Not long after, they were married.

SAMUEL: This is a picture of our two teacups. Allen loves tea, so I learned to enjoy tea. I love drinking tea together and reading a book. It is our special time together. It makes me feel at home.[22]

SAMUEL: These are pictures of our belongings. We love to read, so that's our bookshelf. It is interesting how we have moved so many times in seven years, but we still have a few things that we take with us everywhere. It makes wherever we go home.[23]

Maddan Sarup writes, "particular objects and events become the focus of a contemplative memory, and hence a generator of a sense of love. Many homes become private museums as if to guard against the rapid changes that one cannot control."[24] The loss of domestic artifacts and precious mementos through
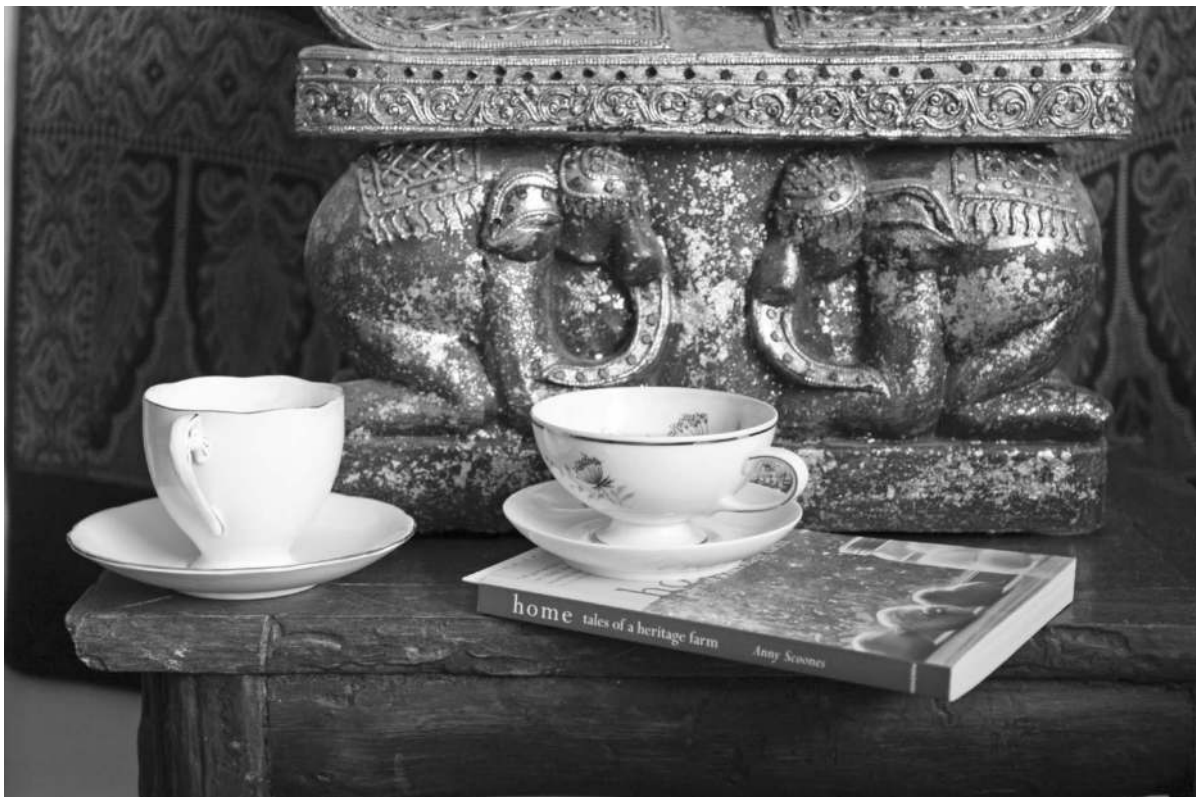
Figure 26.3   Picture of teacups on a book, photograph by Samuel, May 2014.

Figure 26.4   Picture of a bookshelf and books, photograph by Samuel, May 2014.

forced migration can feel like an added layer of displacement. For queer refugees like Juliet, Sara, and Samuel, who were denied safety in their private dwellings, domestic artifacts and mementos become symbols of a hopeful future in which they can build a home away from heteronormative persecution. The teacups, the bookshelf, and the living room furniture are material touchstones to the affectual and relational aspects of home and belonging. These objects tell a story for Samuel. Like for Sara and Juliet, for Samuel home is not a final destination but a living process of construction that changes as he moves forward in his life with Allen. His stories and photographs reveal how homemaking practices are deeply connected to his sense of self and placement. Through the everyday rituals of drinking tea, reading, and taking walks with Allen, Samuel creates a sense of home in displacement. The objects serve as a queer mnemonic archive that roots Samuel's narrative of migration and settlement. They are imbued with affectual rituals that root his sense of home. They are a reminder of what he was denied in his country of origin but also reaffirm Samuel and Allen's commitment to one another. They represent both the past and the present for Samuel.

While research has looked at how domestic rituals, objects, and relationships impact refugees' experiences of settlement, very little work has focused on queer refugees. This is partly because of a general overlooking of the lives of queer communities at the domestic level.[25] Andrew Gorman-Murray and Rebecka Sheffield write that the majority of queer research has examined lesbian, gay, and trans lives outside of the domestic sphere, in the social world of predominantly gay/lesbian bars and parties.[26] Less research has been done on the intimate and domestic spheres of queer lives.[27] Gorman-Murray

writes that domesticity and homemaking practices help queer individuals develop a holistic sense of self that embodies their public and private selves simultaneously.[28] Queer domesticity challenges sexual and gender norms that relegate the domestic sphere to the domain of heteronormativity and patriarchy, guided by a strict gender binary, a gendered division of labor, and the dominant heteronormative ideals of family production. The queer individual is placed outside of the domestic, as if not wanting or belonging in this realm. Queer refugees are placed even further outside of this narrative, often framed as family-less or domestic-less due to their cross-border migration. Being displaced does not always mean that the connection to family and home is gone. Queer refugees may experience rejection from family and displacement from the domestic as they are forced to relocate. Many also maintain strong connections either to their biological families or homelands. Many also create new connections, new families, and new domestic configurations within their countries of arrival. Samuel's pictures speak to the importance of recognizing and acknowledging the complexity that personal and familial relationships play in queer migrants' lives. The objects Samuel displays speak to the necessity of the domestic as both a driving force in his forced displacement and a core component of his sense of home and belonging. Queer domesticity is an intimate archive of identity construction and reconstruction as queer persons work to affirm their public and private lives and resist heteronormative and patriarchal norms that dehumanize and delegitimize them.

Conclusion

Queer refugees' narratives reveal the emotional and relational experiences of migration that are outside of state heteronormative constraints. Juliet, Sara, and Samuel orally and visually narrate queer refugee homemaking as a process of forming intimacies with significant partners and close companions. Queer homemaking is an act of resistance against societal and state control, creating an intimate act of defiance against erasure that spans across state borders. The combination of extended oral history interviews and photovoice provides a unique opportunity to explore the ephemeral aspects of home that may not be captured in textual narrative alone. Being able to return to ideas of home through their migration narrative as well as through photographs allowed me—as well as Juliet, Sara, and Samuel—to think about how home is a constant creation and how their relationships and emotions orient their stories of forced migration and settlement. This mixture of methodologies also allows refugee participants to challenge the linear narratives often forced upon them through state institutions in the process of asylum. Rather than the constricted narrative of fleeing and persecution required for asylum claims, oral history and photovoice allow refugee narratives to jump back and forth in time, allowing them the opportunity to add additional details of struggle as well as moments of joy. Juliet, Sara, and Samuel never said they hated their countries of origin, only that the lives they wanted to live with their current or future partners were not possible there. Canada offered protection but also brought with it other experiences of precarity and trauma. Connecting photovoice and oral history centers their voices and agency in navigating restrictive institutions and material constraints in order to create a home outside of heteronormative oppression.

Juliet, Sara, and Samuel's narratives provide a nuanced understanding of queer refugee experiences of home and belonging. For Juliet and Sara, their current dwelling—a rented room in a house shared with others—is not a home because of political and material constraints. They struggle to survive as queer immigrants. Yet, they create a sense of home through their shared intimacy. It is an affective home outside of heteronormative and neoliberal citizenship that the Canadian state does not provide. Samuel also does not feel that his current dwelling is a home. For him, home is less about the physical building and more about the daily rituals and objects that serve as a living queer archive of the life he builds with Allen. Through their oral histories and photovoice, Juliet, Sara, and Samuel reveal that home is not settled in one particular place or location. Instead, it is a transnational and continual process of queer refugee homemaking, "evoking the sense that one can feel 'at home' in any number of spaces, relationships, and conditions."[29] Home is a place where one can dwell, "to be who one is" as well as to

"imagine, to pine for or to claim agency as a creative practice despite others' opinions that one's biological makeup, sexual desires (or lack thereof), or affective affinities frustrate tradition."[30] Sara, Juliet, and Samuel pursue spaces of affirmation, intimacy, privacy, and love—all the elements they describe as constituting a home—to ground their lives in the face of forced displacement. Regaining this intimacy and creating a space of affirmation and homemaking allows for a sense of queer refugee belonging.

Notes

1 Juliet, Sara, and Samuel were participants in my 2012–2016 research on forced migration and settlement in Canada of sexual and gender minority refugees. The names used in this chapter are pseudonyms and the names of their countries of origin are omitted in order to ensure confidentiality. While this chapter only focuses on Juliet, Sara, and Samuel, the larger project, on how queer refugees experience and articulate their sense of home and belonging, involved 15 other LGBT refugees.
2 I use the phrasing lesbian or gay, LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, or trans), or "queer" refugees to refer to individuals who file a refugee claim based on fear of persecution because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. The participants referred to in this chapter self-identified as lesbian and gay. "Queer" is also used as a way to recognize the diversity of sexualities and gendered experiences and expressions that sexual and gender minorities engage with around the world.
3 Mai and King, "Love, Sexuality and Migration," 296.
4 Trower, "Regional Writing and Oral History," 87–105.
5 For more information about Rainbow Refugee, please visit: https://www.rainbowrefugee.com/.
6 Interview with Juliet and Sara, February 21, 2015.
7 Wilets, "Conceptualizing Violence," 990–1049.
8 Interview with Juliet and Sara, February 21, 2015.
9 White, "Archives of Intimacy and Trauma," 75–93.
10 Razack, "Race, Space, and the Law".
11 Mahler and Pessar, "Gender Matters," 27–63.
12 Keenan, "Safe Spaces for Dykes in Danger?," 43–61.
13 Lewis, "Deportable Subjects," 174–94.
14 Interview with Juliet and Sara, April 13, 2015.
15 Interview with Juliet and Sara, February 21, 2015.
16 hooks, *Belonging a Culture of Place*.
17 Elwood, "Lesbian Living Spaces," 17.
18 Interview with Juliet and Sara, April 13, 2015.
19 Interview with Samuel, May 17, 2014.
20 Interview with Samuel, May 17, 2014.
21 Interview with Samuel, April 23, 2014.
22 Interview with Samuel, May 17, 2014.
23 Interview with Samuel, May 17, 2014.
24 Sarup, *Identity, Culture and the Postmodern World*, 88.
25 Gorman-Murray, "Reconciling Self," 285–303.
26 Gorman-Murray, "Reconciling Self;" Sheffield, "The Bedside Table Archives," 108–20.
27 Manalansan IV, "The 'Stuff' of Archives," 94–107.
28 Gorman-Murray, "Que(e)rying Homonormativity," 149–62.
29 Bryant, "The Meaning of Queer Home," 263.
30 Bryant, "The Meaning of Queer Home," 263.

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"LITTLE KNOWLEDGES"

Shifting Visions of Childhood, Care, and Technology in the Contemporary Novel of Forced Migration

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"Do not come. Do not come," said the newly elected Vice President of the U.S., Kamala Harris, in the spring of 2021, as she warned Guatemalans against seeking refuge with their northern neighbor.[1] Ravaged by two hurricanes and the global pandemic in 2020, as well as by the ongoing effects of poverty, gang violence, state neglect, and climate change, Guatemala and other Central American countries have, for decades, been witnessing the flight of their citizens toward uncertain futures elsewhere. Children, in particular, have been leaving their home countries in alarming numbers. Indeed, as Amnesty International reports, children make up not only 30 percent of all migrants and asylum-seekers from Central America and Mexico, but 50 percent of them cross the border by themselves.[2] While the Biden administration has not been oblivious to the plight of unaccompanied children, its migration deterrence strategies have mostly continued the policy of turning a blind eye to children's visions of their own well-being—a point that did not escape UNICEF in 2021, when it invited the U.S. to establish more "child-sensitive" landscapes of care at its borders.[3]

Building on UNICEF's call for child-centered practices and infrastructures, in this chapter, I explore the intersectionality of childhood, care, and technology in the context of contemporary narratives of "forced-migrant" children from the Northern Triangle and Mexico, described by Giorgia Doná and Angela Veale as those who "fle[e] violence in general."[4] My goal, in this respect, is to examine how the contemporary novel of forced migration dramatizes and disturbs the ongoing association of childhood with immobility, passive reception of care, and non-technology, thus reshuffling not only its traditional geographies but also the representations and archives of the child-refugee. As scholars have been arguing, such collapsing of childhood, innocence, and dependency has been particularly damaging to children who move outside the traditional geographies of childhood, or rely on technologies to care for themselves or others. At the same time, as Thomas Smith and Ria Dunkley point out, the growing anxiousness concerning the technologization of childhood speaks to the enduring construction of children as technologically innocent, and the association of care with the protection of that innocence.

Childhood as I thus see it here figures not only as a complex, undeconstructed synecdoche for sedentary and bounded forms of living, and a repository of other "homely" metaphors, but, more importantly, as a technology for the production, delimitation, and enclosure of domestic spaces, and for doing, in the words of Ian Hutchby and Jo Moran-Ellis, the "identity work" of producing and incorporating differences.[5] Moreover, as Crystal Parikh might argue, the unaccompanied, innocent child also features as a synecdoche for the modern refugee writ large. While signifying the refugee's difficult relationship to the rights they have as a subject of international human rights, the

unaccompanied child also indexes their enduring representation as a "blameless, honorable, and redeemable [victim]," as Cotton Seiler writes.[6]

What I thus describe as the metaphorization of childhood as immobility, dependency, and non-technology, requires, on the one hand, a questioning of how the child themself figures as a technology for governing, and for delineating political majorities and communities of care. On the other hand, though, it demands a study of how technologies intervene in cultural constructions of mobile childhoods, and, more importantly, how moving children use or repurpose technologies according to their own embodied knowledges and priorities, thus expanding the meanings and spaces of childhood. To evoke the protagonist-mother of Valeria Luiselli's novel *Lost Children Archive* (2019), such non-hegemonic, or "little knowledges" include a variety of technological competences and skills, empowering children to enact their visions and trajectories of well-being. As she poignantly puts it: "The only thing that parents can give their children are little knowledges: this is how you cut your own nails, this is the temperature of a real hug, this is how you untangle knots in your hair."[7]

Following a brief overview of the narrative landscape surrounding the moving child, my analysis focuses specifically on the role of material, narrative, and symbolic technologies in *Lost Children Archive* (2019). What interests me is how Luiselli's novel repurposes childhood into a symbolic technology for unearthing and connecting lives and routes that have been rendered invisible by the normative geographies of child-refugeeness. By using the child as a "pivot" to imagine more generous frameworks for representing those who flee different forms of violence and neglect, *Lost Children Archive*—and the contemporary novel of forced migration in general—thus invites us to move not only beyond the normative politics of age but also beyond the ambit of refugeeness.[8] Working to stretch the conceptual and political spaces of forced displacement, the moving child acts, in this sense, as a technology for re-negotiating notions of childhood, well-being, and belonging, on the one hand, while also furthering the emergence of alternative technological imaginaries and ethics through their non-hegemonic literacies and priorities, on the other hand. Suturing, thus, the junctures of human and technological infrastructures, *Lost Children Archive* can also be read as a technological or infrastructural novel, recycling, among others, railroad's mnemonic resources as technologies of emplottment.

My inquiry develops in two steps. In the first section, the study explores how the sentimental narrative of the child as innocent, dependent, sedentary, and non-technological impacts the recognition of children's priorities regarding movement and care. It is the contemporary novel, I maintain, that provides more spacious imaginaries, reshuffling the traditional geographies of childhood, and highlighting connections and assemblages that moving children create with their human and technological environments. As I also argue here, Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive* can be read as a post-refugee and a post-representational novel, expanding the political and conceptual vocabulary of forced (im)mobilization beyond that of refugeeness, while highlighting the role of representation in children's vulnerabilization. In the second section, the chapter investigates the "identity work" performed by technological childhoods in Luiselli's novel, as these either safeguard or challenge the normative intersections of age, race, and care. Building on Seiler's inquiry into the "The Origins of 'White Care,'" this part of the analysis firstly highlights the racialization of the childhood/care nexus, as well as the role of technologies in securing and enforcing it. What I claim here is that Luiselli's novel operates as a critique of the simplistic metaphorization of childhood as subjection to care, as well as of the continuous investment of this metaphor in the production and securitization of "domestic" spaces, and in the policing of difference. At the same time, my analysis also investigates the novel's production of a non-normative and assembled technological subject, a subject who embodies the shifting boundaries between the human and the machine, while also navigating and repurposing technologies for their own empowerment and welfare. By valorizing non-hegemonic literacies and perspectives on and along the tracks, Luiselli's novel thus works to envision more generous and child-specific technologies of representation and mobility.

More Than Innocence

"Growing up undocumented, I learned that the price of my innocence was the guilt of my parents," writes Karla Cornejo Villavicencio for *The New Yorker* as she describes her life as an undocumented child in the U.S.[9] As she goes on to explain, the life of a Dreamer child like herself is precariously balanced between paradigms of victimhood and criminality, of care and illegalization. Indeed, since the announcement of the DREAM Act (2011) and of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program (2012), the archetypal images of "innocent young kids," "[unlawful] actions of their parents," and "criminals who endanger our communities" have emerged as the official taxonomy for debating the scope, limits, and nature of relief directed at undocumented families.[10] Even as I write, political pundits are continuing to manage the flow of people and narratives at the U.S. southern border through images of innocent children and their "uncaring" parents, of "anchor" babies and their "senders."

The idea that innocence polices the borders of national communities, while securing inclusion and care at the price of "other" illegalities—as Villavicencio poignantly testifies—is not new in the context of refugee and childhood studies. Innocence, Miriam Ticktin argues, "purports to separate the deserving from the undeserving … functions to limit the numbers of people admitted … [and] works as part of a binary: the flipside is guilt."[11] Within this logic, the "innocent child" can be seen to operate not merely as a rhetorical tool, or a device of selective humanitarianism, but, more importantly, as a mechanism of differential inclusion of moving bodies into the national body and its security discourses. Considering, though, the omission of age, that is, child-and-youth-specific oppressions from U.S. asylum law, forced-migrant children are frequently compelled to format their relief pleas in the language of innocence and victimhood, thus risking separation from their communities.[12] In this sense, programs such as Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) promise relief to children who "cannot be reunified with … parents because of … [a]buse, [a]badnonement, [or] [n]eglect," while also curbing their rights of family reunification.[13]

At the same time, Western discourses of childhood innocence are also frequently wielded against individual children too, denying them care. "We [the West] are torn, obligated to protect migrant 'children,' but frightened and resentful of alien 'juveniles,'" writes Jacqueline Bhabha, adding that "[o]ur neglect of child migrants' rights is … a strategic compromise that represents our unresolved ambivalence."[14] As Bhabha explains here, moving children are often met by the mixed feelings of Western publics and mobility regimes, who identify them either as subjects of the state's responsibility to shelter the vulnerable, or as "threatening, unruly, and uncontrolled outsiders," that the state needs to protect its citizens from.[15] Premising relief on community loss, and refusing care to those who do not satisfy the normative ideas of childhood, discourses of innocence and victimhood often provide inclusion only at the cost of vulnerabilization and illegality—of the migrant children and their caretakers. Rather than creating broad, resilient, and sustainable networks of protection and caregiving for the moving child, such discourses disregard the complexity of children's relations, practices, and infrastructures of help and support.

Read in this light, stories of unaccompanied border crossings alert us to the urgency of developing not only child-centered visons of care, but also of expanding the archives of forced displacement beyond the representational and political ambit of (child) refugeeness. With their almost fantastic tales of struggle and survival, camaraderie and family love, these stories have captured the readers' imagination, unsettling the fictions behind the normative geographies of childhood and care. The accounts of children's rides on top of freight trains, known as *La Bestia*, have been particularly gripping, yielding a variety of representational formats, and striding the boundary between realism and fiction. The work of embedded journalists has been at the forefront of attempts to document the lives of unaccompanied children, producing titles such as Sonia Nazario's *Enrique's Journey* (2006), Óscar Martínez's *The Beast* (2013), and Lauren Merkham's *The Far Away Brothers* (2017). Without exception, these non-fictional narratives rely on novelistic techniques to portray children's hazardous journeys North, developing

multilayered narrative fabrics, creating complex characters, or using focalization to provide deeper insights into the migrants' plight. Indeed, many of the accolades lavished on these titles highlight the fictional spill-over effects of such hard-to-believe and hard-to-bear stories, with reviewers repeatedly praising the expansion of representational spaces and registers to accommodate the life stories of children who flee violence.

Also particularly receptive to the topic of unaccompanied border crossings has been the young adult novel, including titles such as *All the Stars Denied* (2018) by Guadalupe Garcia McCall, *The Grief Keeper* (2019) by Alexandra Villasante, *Illegal* (2020) by Francisco X. Stork, *We Are Not from Here* (2020) by Jenny Torres Sanchez, as well as *The Only Road* (2017), *The Crossroads* (2019), and *Santiago's Road Home* (2021) by Alexandra Diaz. Though not marketed as a young adult novel, *Across the Hundred Mountains* (2006) by Reyna Grande similarly revisits the topic of forced child migration. Narrating children's displacement from "normal environments" of childhood and care, these young adult novels reveal the precariousness of "home"—both familial and national—as a permanent site and metonymy for modern childhoods, with violence, poverty, natural disasters, illegality, and transnationalization of labor markets repeatedly tearing down and reorganizing the supporting walls of sedentary living.[16] These contemporary narratives of the moving child dramatize, in other words, the failure of the traditional frameworks of "childhood" and "refugeeness" to provide recognition to the sites of relationality, responsibility, and support that both sustain and are sustained by children, while also calling for a valorization of the caring priorities of those who flee different kinds of violence, regardless of their standing or location within the inter-*national* world order. To put it in the words of John Horton and Michelle Pyer, such literatures interrupt the simplistic notion of children and young people as "intimately, normatively and fundamentally connected to contemporary assumptions, discourses and spaces of care, caring and caregiving … [while] not actively engaged in 'caregiving' themselves."[17] Endeavoring, thus, to envision more capacious and inclusive politics and communities of caring, these young adult novels bring to light children's visions of home and well-being, mediated through non-hegemonic technological knowledges—of transportation and communication vehicles, cultural practices, and identity and mobility regimes.

What makes Luiselli's *Lost Children Archive* stand out within this narrative landscape is its effort to document those lives and communities lost in the archives of childhood and refugeeness. Rather than narrating merely the lives of those recognized as "child refugees," the novel searches through the layers of the American landscape and history for stories of forced displacement that have been rendered unrecognizable or marginal by the normative forms of representation, politics, and welfare. The novel thus charts the car journey of one patchwork family—a mother with her daughter and a father with his son—from New York to Arizona at the height of the child refugee "crisis" at the U.S. border. Combining different narrative voices and focalizing perspectives, the novel's plot interweaves the family's story with the trajectories of different forced displacements in the borderlands, from the present to the past, from the historical to the fictional. Among these is also a group of forced-migrant children, who are crossing unnamed geographies on top of train cars, and whose story is told as a novel-within-a-novel, titled *Elegies for Lost Children*, and written by the fictitious author Ella Camposanto. While the journey is supposed to enable the parents to collect materials for their respective documentary projects on lost lives and histories—with the father building an "inventory of echoes" of the last Apaches, and the mother seeking to re-cover the story of unaccompanied minors "from the perspective of the children involved in it"—their archiving projects are derailed as their two children overtake both the plot and the story by running away.[18] Believing, namely, that the unity of their own patchwork family depends upon the discovery of two lost Mexican girls—who are also daughters of their mother's friend, Manuela—the children flee, hoping to find the girls in the so-called Echo Canyon. By querying the right of archiving and representing "lost" voices, particularly those of children, the novel also makes a most apt contribution to the debates surrounding both the ethics of such narrative exposure, and the politics of appropriating minor perspectives and her-stories—as the fallout from Jeanine Cummins's novel *American Dirt* (2018) has made painfully and embarrassingly obvious.

Thus, what makes Luiselli's novel so timely is its wariness not only toward traditional representations of the (child) refugee, but also toward representation itself. Relinquishing the project of expanding the representational frameworks of refugeeness, *Lost Children Archive* reads, instead, both as a post-representational and a post-refugee novel. The novel, in this sense, repeatedly underscores the role of representations in the vulnerabilization of moving populations, while being itself driven by a set of "[p]olitical," "[a]esthetic," "[p]rofessional," "[e]thical," "[pragmatic]," and "[r]ealistic" anxieties related to children's representability and its own representational politics.[19] Yet, rather than retreating from the responsibility of remembering or anticipating those absent from the archives and spaces of forced displacement, *Lost Children Archive* explodes the sites of representation, continuously creating new (inter-)textualities, perspectives, and lines of telling. By continuously alternating, redoubling, overlaping, and confusing narrative voices and storylines—those of the mother and the boy in the main narrative, of the children from the *Elegies*, as well as those of media accounts, official histories, and migration reports—the novel unravels any attempt to produce reliable and appropriate-able archives of moving childhoods, which can be mined for new subjects of majoritarian politics. Such post-representational narrative politics is particularly poignant in "Echo Canyon," one of the novel's final chapters, portraying—punctuation-free save for commas—the meeting between the protagonist's two children and what seem to be children from *Elegies*, as in the following lines:

> who's there, who's there I said, who's there, he says, and hearing the sound of his voice, the four children look at one another in relief, because it is a real voice, finally, clearly not a lost desert echo, … so they smile at one another, and first the older girl and then the younger one, and then the two boys, peek their faces around one side of the open door of the gondola, four round faces were looking right at us from the other side of the old train car, so real I didn't believe they were real, thought can this be or am I imagining things, … and then we heard the four faces say Geronimoooo back to us, Geronimoooo, the two children say to the four of them from the other side of the abandoned gondola, a boy and a girl, and it takes them all some seconds to realize that they are all real, them and us, us and them, but when they do, they all, the four, the two, the six in total, step into the empty, abandoned gondola … I noticed, night was coming, why don't we make a fire, I said to the five of you, una fogata, I said, and we all agreed it was the right thing to do ….[20]

With the narrative and spatial trajectories of different lost children crossing in the Arizona desert, the novel initiates here a series of echoes, bringing the children from different fictional levels closer and closer together, until they finally meet in a limitless, that is, flowing textual landscape unpunctured by periods. By redoubling and shifting between different personal pronouns—"I," "he," "they," "us," "we"—as well as between different narrative and fictional levels, and different narrative and focalizing positions, the novel both grows the archives of children's displacements and losses and highlights their tenuous representability. It forfeits, in this way, creation of fixed, docile, and bounded (narrative) subjects. Although such literary politics is neither innocent of the violent emplotment of children's lives, nor amounts to a complete "refusal of representation," as Dimitris Papadopoulos, Niamh Stephenson, and Vassilis Tsianos might call for, it thwarts the formation of easily representable, and thereby incorporable, subjectivities and knowledge, leaving them forever mired in the circumstances of the novel's plot.[21] Simply said, Luiselli narrative ethics keeps representation as unsettled and as ambiguous as possible, while wrapping the children, their stories, and voices in almost-protective layers of discourse and yielding only fuzzy, mirage-like testimonies to their lives and trajectories.

Building on Luiselli's previous work on unaccompanied minors in *Tell Me How It Ends* (2017), *Lost Children Archive* also carves a political space between the refugee—or "someone who has already arrived somewhere, in a foreign land, but must wait for an indefinite time before actually, fully having arrived"—and people whose lives have been made both unlivable and invisible by the violence of organizing majoritarian forms of living.[22] As the protagonist-mother concludes: "[S]omeone who is

fleeing is still not a refugee."[23] In order to tell the story of children "lost in 'the ashes' of the archive" of refugeeness, *Lost Children Archive* exploits almost every single literary tool—such as the redoubling of narrative voices, the intersecting of narrative levels, and the confusion of genres—to open up spaces of representation, thus drawing attention to peoples and communities who have been marooned by the archives of national and economic life.[24] Rather than essentializing the voice or "perspective of the [moving] children," the novel, for example, drafts a larger map of forced displacements across the Americas—from Geronimo and the Apaches to the Mexican inhabitants of the U.S. southwest, from the enslaved African American children to the children of the Orphan Train Movement, from the inhabitants and workers of industrial ghost towns to the homeless people in the streets and the protagonist's own children.[25] Inviting more generous scales of representation and reading, the narrative thus engages and spans various geographies of childhood and forced (im)mobilization in ways that neither provincialize the caring acts and communities of children from the Global South as "separate but equal" from/to the normative Western childhood—pace Sarada Balogopalan—nor overemphasize the relationship between children and refugeeness.[26] Instead, the narrative projects what Doná and Veale describe as resistant "*geo*-politics of childhood and forced migration," valorizing children's relationalities to their surroundings, on the one hand, while shifting relentlessly between different geographies, histories, and genres of displacement, on the other.[27]

As Luiselli's novel thus displays with its shifts in the scales and perspectives of representation, such geopolitics is also fully invested in what Emma Velez defines as the "*duty* to care given our fundamental dependency and vulnerability," ricocheting the stories of loss, participation, and responsibility between and across the borders of different narrative and spatial regimes.[28] Fiction, in this context, plays a crucial role for carving out these alternative spaces and majorities, with the main boy and girl in the novel constantly challenging their parents (and readers) to make leaps of imagination, using phrases such as "what if," "what would happen … if," "I wonder," and, most memorably, "suppose," with the boy asking his mother: "Suppose you and Papa were gone, and we were lost. What would happen then?"[29] To echo Karen Sánchez-Eppler, such leaps between fiction and literality, and between different epistemic and representational levels, "disrupt the usual scales of historical significance, [while] enacting and inviting imaginative play."[30] Even more so, as I will argue in the next section, such mobile literacies refer to an alternative politics of children's embodied practices and knowledges—or "little knowledges" as Luiselli calls them—used by the novel and its young protagonists to navigate the uncaring technologies of forced mobilization and envision more caring ones.

Mobile Literacies

The experiential and conceptual closeness of technology and culture, of displacement and language, and of mobility and translation, is perhaps nowhere so aptly and beautifully expressed as when the protagonist-mother informs her children that "in Greek, the word for being taken somewhere by a bus [is] μεταφέρω, or metaphor, so we should feel lucky about being metaphored to our next destination."[31] Indeed, *Lost Children Archive* can also be read as a technological or infrastructural novel, using the mnemonic resources of mobile and mobility technologies—most specifically, those of the railroad—to retrieve and reconnect alternative geographies of displacement and childhood. The novel's politics of scanning the layers of historical and technological debris for lost life stories, and of stitching them together, could, moreover, itself be described as a kind of "infrastructuralism," or as Caroline Levine might put it, a literary "practice of attending closely to the jostling, colliding, and overlapping of social, cultural, technological, and natural forms."[32]

When the family car is pulled over by the police, the family experiences another form of being "metaphored," as they are subjected to racial discipline through the metaphorization of childhood *as* reception and securitization of care. Namely, as the policewoman explains to the parents: "[I]n Virginia, we care for our children. Any child under the age of seven has to ride in a proper booster seat."[33] While highlighting the biopolitical intimacy of the state and the market through the commodification of

safety, this rhetorical gesture also testifies to the ongoing recruitment of childhood—as innocence in need of protection—for purposes of patrolling and managing different mobilities. Given the uncertainty, and even anxiety, regarding the parents' race and immigration status in the novel, this stop-and-frisk scene highlights the metaphorization of childhood as care within the genealogy of what Cotton Seiler describes as "white care."[34] According to Seiler, "white care" refers not only to the "articulated whiteness as an acquired disposition to *care*" but also to the belief that such dispositions are nurtured in the course of "long infancy, during which one either received (as a child) or gave (as a parent) care absolutely."[35] Read along these lines, the family's encounter with the police testifies to the role of the childhood/care nexus for the policing of bodies through the enactment of whiteness as care—on the individual and state level. In other words, when the policewoman scolds the parents for lacking a safety tool, and, therefore, not caring "properly" for their children, she does not merely assume the state's authority as a *parens patriae* to provide care through securitization and discipline. Rather, she also sets into motion a process of racialization that, on the one hand, secures the state's right to intervene as an expression of (white) care, while ensuring, on the other, that the two racially ambiguous bodies are disciplined—that is, "put into their places" or immobilized—by being marked as non-caring, and therefore, racially other.

Even more so, this scene speaks volumes about the association of child care with immobilization, that is, with sedentary, bounded forms of living. Also, it testifies to the role of technologies in managing and optimizing—or "boosting"—the relationship between children and care, while also highlighting cultural anxieties concerning children's unregulated and "unproper" access to both mobility and technology. Fanned by what Smith and Dunkley describe as "dichotomies of children/nature … as innocent, and technology/culture … as corrupting and unhealthy," such anxieties frequently reflect the gap between the "adult," or hegemonic notions of safety and care, and those envisioned by children themselves.[36]

With the entire narrative landscape of Luiselli's novel being both littered and held together by different technologies, its child protagonists struggle to enact a different politics of safety and care by mining for technological and symbolic resources at the margins of "adult" infrastructures and imaginaries. In this context, the freight train—*la bestia*—dominates as the leading technology of both forced (im)mobilization and self-care. As its name suggests, the train in *Lost Children Archive* is both a cruel vehicle and a vehicle of cruelty, figuring as a junction of human and technological infrastructures that wrack human lives and bodies, reducing them to criminals, cargo, or human rubble. The train's figuration as an assemblage of the human and the inhuman, the living and the non-living, is fueled by the language itself, envisioning it, for example, as "the spine of an enormous worm or a beast."[37] More importantly, the train, and the railroads in general, figure in the novel as the "spine" of other inhuman infrastructures—of the state, human trafficking, and organized crime—assembling an entire geography of forced (im)mobilization that destroys, or evacuates, "tribes, families, people, all beautiful things," while leaving behind only "debris, dust, erasure."[38] Cutting through national spaces and markets, this violent landscape also creates separate jurisdictions that impose duties on children and their safety. To echo Jacob Soule, the novel thus tells of life journeys organized by infrastructures rather than by chronologies, as children move from station to station, from checkpoint to checkpoint, their lives governed by itineraries, timetables, and agendas. As Luiselli, in this regard, writes:

> Sometimes, when the train was about to cross near one of the police or military posts that mushroomed silently along the way, [the children] were told to jump off. … They walked like this until the man in charge signaled it was time, and then they cut through the bush … and caught up with the slow-moving train again some miles ahead.[39]

Here, Luiselli's novel unleashes the entire violence of its narrative infrastructure on children's life stories via a fragmented and multilevel plot—a gesture that, even as it evokes political urgency, nonetheless inadvertently participates in the production of vulnerabilities through representational engineering.

Portraying the adjustment of children's bodies to the train's speed and jerking movements, as well as to its size, shape, and material, the novel narrates, moreover, the railroad's intervention into the boundaries between the human and the non-human. "They occupy the entire space there, stiff but warm, lined up like new corpses along the metal roof of the train gondola," states the omniscient narrator of *Elegies for Lost Children*, describing the melding of children's bodies with that of the train, and their reduction to inanimate shapes.[40] As a space and a technology of dehumanization, the railroad diffuses, in these lines, the physical and ethical contours of the human being, melting the boundaries between human and technological bodies. Intervening, thus, into the production and signification of corporality, the railroad technologies are seen here as violently reworking the child's body, producing reshuffled political subjectivities out of human and non-human materials. Moved by her desire for safety and care, this minor subject comes as deeply entrenched within social and economic infrastructures that govern through different technologies of cruelty, figuring, in the words of Alexander Weheliye, as a "technological assemblage of humanity."[41]

Against this landscape of dehumanization, the novel works to project a more "caring" politics of representation and knowledge by memorializing, and bringing closure, to unknown and unrecognizable lives that were dissembled by the railroad. The urge to memorialize the loss of lives on and along the tracks is particularly strong in Luiselli's novel, as the narrative, for example, compels the reader to assume the position of the omniscient narrator, as well as the literal view of a bird, to witness the unwitnessed death of a "woman who … rolled off the side of the roof of their gondola … and kept on falling, until her body thumped flat …. The first living thing to notice her, the next morning, was a porcupine …."[42] Her absence is also noticed by one of the girls in *Elegies*, who commemorates the woman's "kind[ness]" by recalling how "[o]ne night, when the girl … had screamed and wailed and cursed for water, the woman had given her the last sip from her canteen."[43] Calling for more generous representations and literacies, the novel thus challenges the reader to reconstruct the dis-re-membered life stories from the "little knowledges" of those whose perspectives have been declared—or made—impossible.

Even more so, the novel also invites the reader to imagine technologies and their ethics differently, valorizing the role of children's embodied knowledges and practices in the re-signification of the many technological artifacts dispersed throughout the novel, being discarded as old and broken by the adult world. Aside from hijacking logistical resources from international markets by transforming freight trains into vehicles of passenger transportation, the unaccompanied children repeatedly mold railroad technologies and infrastructures according to their literacies and visions of welfare. Sitting atop gondolas, "[t]he children," writes Luiselli, "played in these tunnels—held their breath as the train sped into the darkness, only allowed to breathe again when their gondola had made it across the arched threshold back into the light …."[44] Similarly, the moving children from Camposanto's *Elegies* transform the train into a music instrument by using their hands, empty bottles, and shoes to "hit … the beast with all their accumulated strength, fear, hatred, vigor, and hope. And once [they've] found the beat and stayed on it, [they] cannot suppress a deep, visceral, almost feral sound, which begins in a howl, travels around the group of children contagiously, and ends in roaring laughter."[45] Narrating the playful overlaying and rewriting of railroad infrastructures with the rules and regimes of children's games in these lines, the novel testifies to the complexity of children's technological priorities and literacies. As the children, namely, "whack" the train to address their needs for safety, companionship, connectivity, play, entertainment, and freedom from fear, they envision not only the expansion and resignification of technological spaces but also an alternative technological ethics that is rooted in notions of sustainability, resilience, malleability, and diversity.[46] In the case of the railroad, the consequences of what might be described as care-based technologies and technological ethics are particularly far-reaching, as the migrant children and the novel itself recycle this "old" technology of mobility, transcontinental interconnectivity, and progressive politics to advance new and emerging subjects and visions of rights. By reusing it, moreover, to unearth and connect different sites of injustice—as I have argued above—the technological ethics of *Lost Children Archive* also remind of the railroad's ongoing circulation not

only as a technology incapable of remembering and repairing the desolation left behind by its forward-movement but also as a vehicle of novel oppressions.

The children's need for caring—that is sustainable, resilient, and accessible—technologies is nowhere so obvious as when the displaced children from Camposanto's *Elegies* discover a discarded, broken cell-phone, transforming this old technology, in the following lines, into a "smart," new one, adapted to their immediate needs:

> Then [the boy] suggests a game, tells all of them to watch him and listen carefully. First he hands the dead phone to one of the girls … and says, "Here, call someone, call anyone." … She … takes the collar of her shirt and stretches it outward, looking at something stitched in its inner folding. She pretends to dial a long number, and then holds the phone up tight to her ear. Yes? Hello? We're on our way, Mama, don't worry. We'll be there soon. Yes, everything's okay. … The boy sitting next to her, one of the older ones … takes the phone from her and also dials, but he places it to his mouth as if it were a walkie-talkie. … Self-consciously, he looks around him, holds the phone to his mouth, and burps into it. Then he laughs with the awkward, uneven waves of puberty. … He passes it to the next boy, the third boy, who pretends it is a bar of soap and cleans his body with it, silent. … Next to him, the youngest of the children, boy three, smiles, shyly, under his sucked thumb. He slowly unplugs his thumb from his mouth. … So he takes a deep breath and, looking at the phone still cradled in his palms, starts whispering into it. … The sixth boy takes his phone again, knows he has no words left to say. After a few moments, he tells the rest of the children that the phone is also a camera, and now they all have to huddle together for a portrait, and they do.[47]

No longer a mere commodity, the smart-phone that emerges in these lines reflects the technological and caring priorities of unaccompanied, moving children, translating their needs for family, and physical and psychological well-being into imaginary functions and applications, that go beyond sheer telephoning—such as those of a walkie-talkie, a microphone, a bar of soap, a recorder, or a camera. As a result, the children also operate the re-discovered technology differently, "hold[ing] [it] up tight to [their] ear," to their mouths, across their bodies, in the palms of their hands, cradling it, or huddling in front of it. Moreover, by talking, burping, whispering, and keeping silent and still in front of the imaginary smart-phone, the children use it to enact their childhoods, while exhibiting alternative technological literacies, that in the words of Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, figure as "manifest[ations] and … displays of social competence."[48] The moving child in Luiselli's novel thus invites the reader to imagine not only more generous technologies but also more expansive narratives of childhood, valorizing children's "little [technological] knowledges" in order to envision their well-being, even as they leave the confines of home.

Those Who Have Been Coming, and Those Who Are Still to Come

Building on Luiselli's notion of "little knowledges," in this chapter I have tried to chart what could be described as a minor epistemology of displacement and childhood within the contemporary novel of forced migration. As I have argued in the first part of my analysis, this archive, and *Lost Children Archive* in particular, calls for a shift away from the traditional frameworks of both refugeeness and childhood, working to disrupt the metaphorization processes that collapse the cultural imaginaries of the refugee with those of childhood innocence, haplessness, and immobilization. Reading, in this sense, as a post-refugee novel, *Lost Children Archive* uses the figure of a moving and technological child to unearth and connect different sites of forced (im)mobilization, thus illuminating the conceptual and political space between the refugee and the forced-migrant. At the same time, *Lost Children Archive* also features as a critique of representation itself, or even as a post-representational novel, interrupting the production of reliable knowledges and subjectivities through the mechanics of the plot. Focusing on the role of

technologies in the production of non-hegemonic childhoods and notions of welfare, on the one hand, and on the translation of children's technological literacies and priorities into technological imaginaries and ethics, on the other hand, the second part of my analysis claimed that *Lost Children Archive* exposes the investment and the technologization of the childhood/care nexus in the production of "domestic" spaces. The novel, as I also argued, valorizes technological practices and imaginaries of the forced-migrant child in order to disturb the metaphorization of childhood as subjection to care, thus enabling the emergence of more child-specific visions of well-being.

What *Lost Children Archive* teaches us, in the end, is the historical complicity of the novelistic genre with the narratives and technologies of unstoppable progress, while, at the same time, also entrusting it with the project of reworking the normative scales of representation and politics, and making visible minor knowledges and subjects—those who have been coming, and those who are still to come.

Notes

1 "Kamala Harris Tells Guatemala Migrants: 'Do Not Come to U.S.,'" *BBC News*.
2 Amnesty International, "Facts and Figures."
3 UNICEF, "New Approach Needed to Ensure Protection and Care for Unaccompanied Migrant Children in the United States: Press Release."
4 Doná and Veale, "Divergent Discourses, Children and Forced Migration," 1274.
5 Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, "Introduction: Relating Children, Technology and Culture," n.p.
6 Seiler, "The Origins of 'White Care,'" 31.
7 Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 185.
8 Sánchez-Eppler, "Geographies of Play," 42.
9 Villavicencio, "Waking Up from the American Dream."
10 National Archives and Records Administration, "Remarks by the President on Immigration."
11 Ticktin, "What's Wrong with Innocence."
12 For a further discussion of how the exclusion of "age" from the asylum law impacts the narrative and legal venues through which children and young people format their pleas for rights and recognition, see my *Americanization of Human Rights*.
13 U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, "Special Immigrant Juveniles."
14 Bhabha, *Child Migration and Human Rights in a Global Age*, 11, 14.
15 Bhabha, *Child Migration and Human Rights in a Global Age*, 11.
16 Heidbrink and Statz, "Parents of Global Youth: Contesting Debt and Belonging," 548.
17 Horton and Pyer, "Introduction: Children, Young People and 'Care,'" 1, 2, 13.
18 Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 21, 20.
19 Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 79.
20 Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 330–1.
21 Papadopoulos, Stephenson, and Tsianos, *Escape Routes*, 60.
22 Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 47–48.
23 Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 47.
24 Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 23.
25 Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 20.
26 Balagopalan, "Childhood, Culture, History," 25.
27 Doná and Veale, "Divergent Discourses, Children and Forced Migration," 1276.
28 Velez, "Toward a 'Care-ful Geopolitics' of *La Frontera* in the Era of Trump," 343.
29 Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 75, 117, 160, 162.
30 Sánchez-Eppler, "Geographies of Play," 54.
31 Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 173.
32 Levine, "Infrastructuralism, or the Tempo of Institutions," n.p.
33 Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 46.
34 Seiler, "The Origins of 'White Care.'"
35 Seiler, "The Origins of 'White Care,'" 18, 24.
36 Smith and Dunkley, "Technology-Nonhuman-Child Assemblages," 304.
37 Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 288.
38 Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 146.
39 Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 310.
40 Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 142.

41 Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 11.
42 Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 225.
43 Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 226.
44 Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 226.
45 Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 313.
46 Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 313.
47 Luiselli, *Lost Children Archive*, 305−8.
48 Hutchby and Moran-Ellis, "Introduction: Relating Children, Technology and Culture," n.p.

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PART VIII

Land/Water Ecologies

28

REFUGEE ECOLOGIES

The Elements, Flora, and Fauna in Refugee Narratives

Marguerite Nguyen

In this chapter, I analyze what I call the "refugee ecologies" of two Vietnamese American novels, lê thi diem thúy's *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* (2003) and Monique Truong's *Bitter in the Mouth* (2010), to understand the interactive relationship between refugee characters and their environments. More specifically, I examine the integral role that depictions of setting play in refugee narratives. Setting can be understood as a literary manifestation of environment, the latter being a broader, interdisciplinary term that deals with all aspects of the socio-material world.[1] Traditionally, setting has been interpreted as an enclosed entity—a passive container or background for a story, the physical "place or places within which … the narrating instance(s) occur."[2] In recent scholarship, setting is presumed to be much more vitalized, whether with regard to the location that situates a narrative or the human and non-human forms that populate it. To adapt Amitav Ghosh's words for describing literary storyworlds, setting is "demonstrably alive."[3]

Gangster and *Bitter* show how refugee settings—located, respectively, in San Diego, California, and Boiling Springs, North Carolina—are fundamentally made by histories of displacement that are integral to our perceptions of the environment. If "literary ecology" is a method of reading that pays attention to the interrelatedness of human and non-human entities within a narrative setting,[4] the concept of refugee ecologies offers a little more specificity, highlighting the histories of colonialism and forced migrations that animate human–non-human milieus. In contrast to institutional definitions that posit "refugee" as a legal category that is no longer applicable once the refugee is resettled, refugees' depiction of their surroundings—in particular, I will be exploring water, fire, flora, and fauna—mark refugeehood as ongoing given the recurrence of violence and displacement caused by varied imperial practices stretching across the *longue durée*. Refugee ecologies reveal a recursivity of time, space, and biological matter that maps the ongoing ruin tied to forced displacement while also offering ways to imagine renewal and home in the face of ongoing environmental vulnerability and ecological damage.

Defining Refugee Ecology

"Ecology" was first coined by German zoologist Ernst Haeckel in 1866, and refers to the biological relationships among living entities, or the "'economies' of living forms."[5] The root *eco* comes from the Greek *oikos*, meaning household or dwelling place.[6] Literary ecology examines the mutually animating relationships among human and non-human entities that inhabit the same narrative dwelling, and as such, entails close engagement with details of setting. What constitutes and energizes a setting produces the look, feel, and history of a time and space. Setting can include a diverse array of depictions ranging from landscapes to waterscapes, natural to built environments, and so forth—in short, the human,

non-human, and anything in between and beyond that spectrum—and compels discernment of how relations of power bear upon these formations.

The UNHCR's 1951 and 1967 Refugee Conventions, which define "refugee" as someone who is temporarily stateless and can demonstrate "reasonable fear of persecution," set up a model for articulating refugeeness and play a significant role in establishing parameters for the refugee narrative as a literary category. To make a case for legal asylum, refugees must convincingly depict a persecuted past and need for a new *oikos*, or dwelling place, essentially dividing their notions of selfhood and home into separate times, spaces, and subjectivities. Of course, refugees' often multiple movements imbue ideas of self and home with varied and braided imaginings. Thinking about refugee ecologies becomes useful because it affords comprehension of stateless subjects' continual exposure to precarious movement and environmental harm, revealing overlapping, often conflicting ecological maps of existence that must be navigated in order to survive.

In lê's and Truong's storyworlds, refugees engage their surroundings in complex ways that display how refugees muddy classifications of identity, home, and the human to proffer cross-historical, cross-species connections. Such interfaces open possibilities for new forms of survival, dwelling, and biological and historical kinship, as refugees in these novels are entangled in deep histories of multiple forced migrations that require creative ecological understanding. Yet, there is much ambivalence in the refugee ecologies studied here. At the same time that they present alternative epistemologies of the environment, there is often no final, authoritative vision of what refugee possibility should look like. The aggregate of shifting ecological maps that refugees craft and negotiate results in indeterminate visions of refugee worldmaking. Such contingency and constant adaptation are important, however, in asserting refugee existence beyond official scripts that abstract only political and legal value from the forcibly displaced.

Methodologically, attention to refugee ecologies intersects with "elemental ecocriticism," an approach that Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Lowell Duckert describe as focused on the "material agency" and intimacies of elemental substances and processes.[7] My interest in refugee ecologies also intersects with critical refugee studies, echoing the field's scholarship on the geopolitics and racialization of certain environments, such as refugee camps[8] and refugee memorials,[9] while focusing more on the environment as a literary device that determines how the refugee character takes shape.[10] As such, this chapter echoes Emily Cheng's interest in how human and "more-than-human" interactions help to realize refugee stories.[11] In concentrating on relationships between refugee characters and settings, I extend critical refugee studies' aim to center refugees as "intentional beings" by foregrounding literary environments as also transformative actors. Consideration of refugee ecologies reveals how settings play a crucial role in determining who, where, and what we imagine the refugee and refugeehood to be.[12]

Elemental Matters: lê thi diem thúy's *The Gangster We Are All Looking For*

lê thi diem thúy's *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* details a young Vietnamese refugee's resettlement in California. Among the first-person narrator's central preoccupations are the traumas of forced displacement, the disorienting environment of San Diego, and the memory of her brother's death by drowning in the South China Sea, an event that occurs prior to migration. The protagonist meditates on all these issues throughout the novel, and it is by engaging and transforming her relationship to specific elements of the environment—in particular, palm trees and waterscapes that exceptionalize southern California as an iconic paradise—that she is able to remember and reconnect with deceased kin and colonial pasts. In doing so, *Gangster* disassembles American mythologies of California that cloak cycles of colonialism and trauma, which are then brought to the fore by elements of the Earth.

One of the novel's first confrontations with an idealized California setting occurs early in the novel, when the protagonist, her father, and four "uncles" deplane in San Diego to meet Mel, their sponsor. The six-year-old narrator is immediately confronted with a glossy, glamorous image of southern California upon walking through the airport terminal: "I saw a poster of a man and a woman at the beach, lying on

striped towels, sunning themselves between two tall palm trees. Above the palm trees were large block letters that looked like they were on fire: SUNNY SAN DIEGO."[13] The relaxed positioning of the figures conveys embodied enjoyment of water, flora, and fauna, all of which exist in unison and extend through the "calm, sleeping waves of the ocean."[14] The horizontal and vertical vectors of the image work harmoniously to erase traces of power and privilege, advancing what is essentially a variation of settler colonial logic—the image of California as a comfortable, secure site of bodily and emotional pleasure, a verdant, consumable ecology of abundant resources and beauty.

For *Gangster*'s protagonist, this same environment signifies displacement and fragmentation of home and kin on both sides of the ocean. Rather than naturalizing plenitude and possibility, for the narrator, palm trees are unsettling and incongruous to the landscape, possessing an "odd grace" and requiring much human labor for them to flourish.[15] As opposed to completing the idealized spectacle of Californian fun-in-the-sun, the narrator's Pacific Ocean locates multiple traumas, including the harrowing journey by boat and separation from her mother. An expansive material repository of multiple traumas, West Coast waters connect the California coast to the South China Sea to recall not only the boat journey and division of kin but also the brother's drowning in Vietnam: "Twenty years ago, my brother's body was pulled from the South China Sea and left lying on the beach to dry."[16] In contrast to the image of southern California as a site of enjoyment and pleasure, the refugee's relationship to the environment holds dispossession and ongoing bodily and psychic struggle. The narrator can only depict these calamitous moments through fragmented, opposing evocations of light that achieve no dialectical synthesis: "I don't remember darkness and I don't remember light."[17]

Gangster can be situated as part of an Asian American literary history that contests settler colonial notions of the American West. Hegemonic narratives typically posit the Pacific as the nation's frontier of cultural, economic, and political possibility, or what Christopher Connery describes as the U.S. myth of "the Pacific Ocean as temporal destiny."[18] Evyn Lê Espiritu Gandhi describes Pacific-facing imperial expansion in terms of a "transpacific settler colonial condition," whereby settler ideology inherently infuses Asian American subjectivity and homemaking, resulting in complicity with settler colonial logic.[19] A host of Asian American critical imaginings that attempt to dismantle settler reifications of the Pacific range from Maxine Hong Kingston's fraught imaginings of China within the landscape of California,[20] to Oliver de la Paz's Asian American Oregon,[21] to Craig Santos Perez's poetics of CHamoru resistance to U.S. militarism and violence.[22] Critical Asian Americanist ecologies of the West expose the fictiveness of the U.S.'s eco-dreams, as Julie Sze might call them, which couch the nation's westward-looking economic and political agendas in terms of Pacific environmental beauty and richness.[23]

Within this genealogy, *Gangster* highlights how a refugee perspective confronts settler colonial ecologies of the West, drawing pointed attention to ongoing conditions of geographic, corporeal, and psychic displacement despite institutional and cultural expectations of triumphant refugee resettlement. On a more fine-grained level, *Gangster*'s deconstruction of America's Pacific eco-dreams is largely organized around the palm tree, not as a symbol of Californian pleasures and plenitude but as a displaced object, thereby positioning the palm tree in kinship with refugees. Palm trees are everywhere in *Gangster*, "[lining] the length of many roads,"[24] and they are diverse, as noted in a library book the narrator reads: "There were many varieties of palm trees. Among them, the Alexandra, the Australian feather, the betel-nut, the book, the broom, the coconut, the date, the dwarf, the fern, the fishtail, the wine, and the walking stick."[25] Such arboreal ubiquity gives the impression that all palms are "native" to the region, suggesting that California is naturally full of palm trees as well as the resources needed to nourish them.

Yet, only one type of palm tree is Indigenous to southern California, the *Washingtonia filifera*, commonly referred to as the California fan palm or petticoat palm. Noticeably, it is left out of the library book's record of palms.[26] While this species can thrive in dry conditions, it requires a consistent water source to survive, which is often found underground. Thus, fan palms tend to huddle around riverine sources, oases, or faults near which one also finds the region's famous artesian springs.[27] On this point,

Cahuilla Native Americans specify that their name for Palm Springs, their home, is Sec-he ("boiling water"), while the Spanish name for the same area is *Agua Caliente* ("hot water").[28] In Indigenous culture, Palm Springs refers to both *Washingtonia filifera* and the mineral springs, showing how Native American naming practices identify the botanical itself *and* the context of its existence. The Cahuilla also use palms as a source of food and medicine and for constructing baskets, fires, and houses.[29] Fan palms' material and cultural importance for the Cahuilla reflects an epistemology of interconnection that values the recursivity "of all things, … humans, land, plants, and animals."[30]

Overriding Indigenous epistemologies, centuries of settler colonial projects premised upon environmental dominance led to palm trees' omnipresence to serve colonial capitalist ends. Beginning in 1769, Spanish missionaries transplanted other species of palms from the tropics—namely, the Canary Islands and Mexico—to bring the Mediterranean stateside and make southern California "America's Mediterranean littoral, its Latin shore, sunny and palm-guarded."[31] Palm trees also signified proof of faith given their Biblical ties to Palm Sunday and Ash Wednesday. Forced palm transplantation extended through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as city planners imported more palms to promote the idea of California as a tropical paradise rather than parched desert, a logic that required massive control of water to sustain palms' ornamental life.[32] A gardening blitz lasting into the 1930s, partly spurred by the Los Angeles Olympics in 1932, secured the palm tree's status as southern California's "preeminent decorative plant"[33]—"an ersatz tropical substitute, a veritable stage set," as Victoria Dailey writes.[34] Palm tree proliferation in southern California has thus been integral to waves of settler colonial and capitalist development projects, reflecting what Justin Hosbey and J.T. Roane describe as "the Western epistemology of 'taming' nature for the sake of commerce."[35]

In *Gangster*, the absence of the native palm from the dictionary of palms reveals how narratives serving settler colonialist ends work to delete Indigenous ecology and history. But the novel's narrator refuses to let this slide, engaging closely with the long history of settler colonialism in the Americas and grasping its connection to U.S. military and economic hegemony in Southeast Asia. For example, her refugee epistemology oriented around displacement emerges when she observes the palm trees decorating her family's apartment complex as artificial and out of place: "There were four palm trees planted at the four corners of the courtyard and a central staircase. … The steps were covered in fake grass, like the set of an old Hollywood movie."[36] The palms' dulled glamor emphasizes the artificiality of their value as a prized commodity and spectacle. Their dislocated history as traced here, in turn, becomes associatively linked to the narrator's own alienation, as the palm motif shifts meaning to denote the narrator's hand, with the palm accruing metaphorical power as a depiction of both palm trees' and her own uprootedness. Recalling Ocean Vuong's comment that "the metaphor in the mouths of survivors [becomes] a way to innovate around pain,"[37] the narrator imagines the palm line of her hand branching out into a series of arteries that places various forms of violence within the same environmental frame: "the line seems to get longer and deeper, becoming a river, a tunnel, a trench or the roots of the trees. … Sometimes … I imagine that my palms are all sand, desert; no river, no tunnel, no trench, no tree."[38] There is no clear boundary separating warscapes from "natural" landscapes; both morph into one another to inscribe a refugee ecology wherein these spheres coexist.

But ambivalence undergirds the narrator's foray into human–non-human kinships, as the relationality among various entities of the Earth she describes comes to rest in an image of aridity, with the palms of her hands becoming "sand, desert," and then, finally, a stunted palm divorced from water. By linking her own experience of refugee estrangement to the morphological deprivation of an under-nourished palm tree, the narrator creates a refugee ecology that connects otherwise forgotten cross-species displacements.[39] But rather than comfort and community emerging from discovered kinships, a sense of further alienation prevails in this scene.

Yet, the narrator's meditation on her own displacement and dispossession via the palm tree metaphor leads her to water as not only a substance of peril and death but also a source of nourishment. In addition to holding trauma, aqueous spaces also become sites of survival and generativity. In asking her mother, "Where does water go when it goes away," the narrator expresses a youthful curiosity about elemental

patterns on the one hand, particularly since water has so significantly defined her family's lives.[40] But she is also inquiring about her brother's posthumous existence in the atmosphere. As a drowning victim, the brother is overtaken by seawater and forever identified with it. The mother's response to the girl's question, "It [water] goes into the air or it goes into the ground," asserts the recirculation of water and all that it contains, revealing what Cheng describes as water's ability to link different times and spaces in the novel.[41] Thus, water's movement gives the narrator a way to imagine her deceased brother as still circulating in the world, continuing to accompany the girl on Earth, as do "the sky and sea."[42] Refugee losses are carried not only in memory but also on the material level of the molecule, transported within the movements of the elements.

The narrator's heightened sensitivity to ecological relations reveals how histories of forced displacement are harbored in both human and non-human entities that the elements put into contact: "I thought that everyone and everything I missed was hovering behind the sky. … I could tear the sky open and my mother, my brother, my grandfather, my flip-flops, my favorite shells, would all fall down to me."[43] The shared experience of displacement the narrator finds with palms provokes a broader reimagining of the environment as not only in kinship with but also protective of the dislocated, becoming a space where these beings can find one another. Elemental admixture helps the young refugee craft her own narrative of a southern California setting, resulting in an ecology that is transnational and comprised of intermingled species—one that is creative and mobile in ways that exceed institutional subjection of refugees to conditions of environmental harm from which they must be "rescued."[44]

The final scene of *Gangster* refuses to submit to historical forgettings, summoning historical-ecological pasts on the verge of being cut from memory. One spring night, the father drives the mother and narrator to a southern California beach, leading them "toward the sea."[45] The ocean looks dark, but the appearance of obscurity breaks, as both sea foam and small fish glisten in the water beneath the full moon: "Out from the darkness of the sea, wave after wave of small, luminous bodies washed to shore."[46] The fish gravitate toward the refugee family, as if the fish are adrift, and the family are beachcombers. The father smiles as he "pointed at the fish, as if we knew them," and this interspecies recognition—forming what Erin Suzuki might call a "recursive" form of "transpacific kinship"—reflects the ongoing interfaces of all earthly matter.[47] Whereas earlier in the novel, the narrator's refugee remembrance juxtaposes darkness and lightness only to hit a dialectical dead end, here darkness and lightness join to achieve visibility, freeing the narrator in a new way: she takes off running, "like a dog unleashed, toward the lights."[48]

An archive of past and present, the beach is appropriately joyful and unsettling in this scene. As the aquatic creatures writhe on the sand, they would seem to be risking their lives, sacrificing underwater breath that keeps them alive to directly inhale potentially deadly "salt night air."[49] The lights cast by the fish scales under moonlight reassuringly connect Earth to the cosmos while also reflecting the tragic circumstances of the brother's passing, as they recreate the familiar sights and sounds of Vietnamese mariner life that were disturbed by the brother's drowning: "as they did every night that season, the squid boats dotted the horizon. The lights the fishermen lit to lure the squids into the nets bobbed in and out of sight, troubled beacons."[50] Yet, in connecting maritime Vietnam with coastal California, *Gangster* reconstitutes America's Pacific by transforming refugee abjection into modes of memory, survival, and light. Here southern California is not a coastal commodity of ahistorical dreams; instead, San Diego's elements, flora, and fauna become defined by successions of forced migration. Refugee engagement with the elements enables the protagonist to come close to making a dwelling—one oriented around a refugee ecology that finds nourishment and stewardship in the elements.

Southern Flora in Monique Truong's *Bitter in the Mouth*

Bitter in the Mouth takes us to the U.S. South and is set primarily in Boiling Springs, North Carolina, an inland town in Cleveland County. The novel is told from the perspective of Linh-Dao Nguyen Hammerick (Linda), a Vietnamese American transracial adoptee who has auditory-gustatory synesthesia,

whereby words are experienced as tastes—Linda calls these manifestations "incomings." Linda's biological parents die in a mysterious trailer fire in Chapel Hill, where they are living before the Fall of Saigon, when Linda is around six years old.[51] This event leads to Linda's adoption by DeAnne Whatley Hammerick and Thomas Hammerick, the latter having loved Linda's biological mother, Mai-Dao, when they were both studying at Columbia University. Other key characters include Linda's gay uncle, "Baby Harper," whom Linda refers to as her "first love," and Kelly, Linda's closest school friend with whom she has a lasting but fraught relationship.[52]

Denise Cruz has noted the important effort that *Bitter* makes to recast the "South" of American literary history.[53] The novel's "overlay of queer, global, and rural imaginaries"[54] avoids enforcing simplistic interpretive models that often read the U.S. South as an embodiment of stereotypical binaries: "black and white," "empowered and oppressed," "traditional and modern," "national and regional."[55] I would like to add to Cruz's insights a focus on *Bitter*'s conjuring of a North Carolina setting through specific floras that speak to deep legacies of forced displacements in the region with which Linda finds meaningful connection. If lê's *Gangster* pulls from Pacific landscapes and associated aqueous histories, *Bitter*'s inland environment is more Earth-bound and organized around the racialized and gendered symbolism of magnolias and dogwoods, with the added component of fire and its ability to unravel narratives of whiteness forcibly abstracted from local botanicals. These regional flora highlight a refugee ecology attuned to local Native American and African American understandings of botanical life and homemaking, bringing Atlantic-leaning histories to bear on Vietnamese diasporic subjectivity when the proximity of Southeast Asian environments appears out of reach.

To understand the critical role of fire in the novel, it is necessary to register the kind of ground that fire potentially destroys. In *Bitter*, the dominant landscape is curated to display a floral beauty and elegance that naturalizes white presence and longevity, obfuscating settler colonial history. Iris Burch Whatley, Linda's adoptive grandmother, embodies this system of value most prominently. Her name expresses her self-appointed role as a living testimony of social ideals, evoking the qualities of wisdom and renewal often associated with the iris flower. Obsessed with "the next generation," she harbors all her clan's secrets, including most details of Linda's history, in order to maintain a purist, whitened family narrative.[56]

These connotations of "iris" work in tandem with other botanicals to synthesize an overall ecology of southern whiteness. Among them are magnolias, which are Indigenous throughout various parts of the U.S. Gulf Coast and Southeast and are believed to be one of the oldest flowering plants. They have a thick, spreading, and low-branched form that is bathed in large, fragrant blooms when at their peak. As the state flower of Louisiana and Mississippi and sometimes used as a Confederate emblem, the magnolia is iconic, often taken as a symbol for the white supremacist U.S. South.[57]

When Iris begins to plan for her death, she asks that magnolias drape her coffin at her funeral— "boughs and boughs of them."[58] Her request to be mourned through a dense canvas and perfume of magnolias reflects a desire to be visually and aromatically nested in the iconography of the Confederate South, naturalizing her own value within it. White supremacy, thus, manifests and diffuses on multiple sensory levels—optically, given typical associations of magnolias with white blooms, and olfactorily, whereby magnolia scent associates this whiteness with sensory pleasure.

Yet, Iris's projection of magnolias as an organic symbol of white regional descent is undermined by the reality that magnolia blooms are globally sourced. She dies in February, when they are off-peak, which means that the flowers must be transported from South America to Boiling Springs by way of a florist in New York City. The family must wait for delivery "in the freezing cold," delaying the funeral itself.[59] While the flows of a globalized economy circumvent the limitations of magnolias' deciduous cycles, the Global South supply chain exposes the lie of Iris's blanched ecology in which magnolias are reified as natural, native symbols for white family and social value. Linda captures the irony of trying to whitewash and compress southern identity and region within the hardy, sprawling materiality of magnolias, whose white blooms are actually underpinned by brown: "a cascading river of glossy green leaves with brown suede undersides, creamy blossoms the size of soup bowls floating among them."[60]

Alongside southern appropriations of irises and magnolias as supposed concretizations of whiteness, there is the dogwood tree that sits in the backyard of Iris's "green-shuttered colonial" house, a floral vestige of family and regional prestige and pedigree.[61] The dogwood also occupies a mythic place in narratives of the U.S. South. As the state flower of North Carolina, it is promoted as "a radiantly beautiful flower which grows abundantly in all parts of this state," in the words of the state's General Assembly, and is prized for its beauty and indigeneity, like the magnolia.[62] It was also a favored botanical at George Washington's and Thomas Jefferson's homes, giving the dogwood the imprimatur of American heritage while also tying presidential gardening tastes to histories of enslavement.[63]

Linda displays irreverence toward Iris and the dogwood, deconstructing ecologies of southern whiteness that bury contexts of settler colonialism and enslavement. In one scene, Iris introduces a young Linda to drinking Dr Pepper, possibly spiked, straight from the bottle. The elderly matriarch presents this gesture as a special initiation—an act of southern hospitality."[64] Anthony Ryan Hatch writes that sugar and its effects on the body must be understood in terms of biopower, as sugar's various commodity forms are rooted in enslavement and plantation economies.[65] Following Hatch's observation, Iris's insatiable obsession with sugar—with "jelly doughnuts, apple fritters, cinnamon twists, and chocolate-covered crullers"—can be seen as a manifestation of (over)consumption, one that she divorces from the slave history of sugar's manufacture.[66] Iris can then disavow or at least distance herself from the region's plantation economy, as her family's wealth is directly derived from it: they "had made their money in cotton, which was another way of saying that they had made their money in slaves."[67]

Linda's recognition of her own implication in the exploitation of racialized labor leads her to reject Iris's invitation to indulge in the overconsumption of sugar. She pours the Dr Pepper onto the ground and, pointedly, around the dogwood: "I went out to the backyard of my grandmother's house and soaked the roots of her dogwood tree with it."[68] In drenching the Earth with the soda's noxious mix of sugars and chemicals, Linda refuses a taste for sweetness cultivated through enslavement.

North Carolinian botanicals infused with racist and gendered ideologies form the botanical grounds that will be destroyed by fire in *Bitter*. The fatal fire, which occurs in Chapel Hill, destroys the trailer home, kills Linda's parents, and orphans Linda, but it is unclear how it starts. Linda learns from her adoptive mother, DeAnne, that "the firemen had found me on the gravel driveway of the adjacent trailer home. … I was wrapped in a sheet. I appeared to be sound asleep while a fire ate its way through the narrow corridor that I had called home."[69] While Linda is the only one "who was there, the only one who had survived," she cannot remember the event or who carried her out of the trailer: "The years of my life with them, the life before *this* life, had been erased or, rather, my memories of them had been erased by my benevolent brain."[70]

In models of the Black South, such as those outlined by Thadious Davis and Stephen Nathan Haymes, no matter where southern African Americans live, they carry with them oral histories and epistemologies of home.[71] As a Vietnamese American with no access to Vietnamese diasporic history, Linda struggles to accept the narratives of her adoptive family as her own. But *Bitter* suggests that, in the absence of a narrative archive of memory that a diasporic community might be able to provide, bodily memory exists. For instance, while Linda remembers nothing of the fire, the fire itself leaves its mark on Linda by impressing its colors and taste on her physical being. As a chemical occurrence, fire burns structures, people, and Earth, as Steve Mentz remarks.[72] It needs air in order to burn, having the "ability to spread and permeate."[73] Fire is "kinetic energy unleashed," as Anne Harris writes, gathering up everything in its path and physiologically altering all human and non-human forms embroiled in it.[74] This element, in other words, can embed history in the body in the absence of memory and narrative.

In *Bitter*, fire's emissions instill in Linda a complex sensorium that counteracts the dull whiteness of her surroundings as enforced by racialized ecologies. When Thomas asks a young Linda what her favorite color is, she responds, "fire," clarifying, "I like red and yellow and orange and blue" and demonstrating how it is the rich color scheme of fire that determines her optics and emotions.[75] Fire also shapes Linda's subjectivity through taste. In addition to remembering the conflagration's color patterns, Linda also recalls the fateful night through a *taste* that she associates with the unknown person who

carries her away; the event takes the form of "a taste of bitter in [her] mouth."[76] The taste of bitter is something Linda returns to time and time again, as the novel's title makes clear, and such gustatory retention shows how Linda incorporates fire through physical, tactile remembrance of the event rather than what "happened."

In *Gangster*, the narrator develops a refugee ecology of recursivity, in which living and dead matter recirculate in the environment, forging cross-species, cross-temporal, and cross-spatial intermingling through the stewardship of the elements. In Truong's novel, a similar epistemology emerges, except here, it is fire that retains material remnants of Vietnamese diasporic history and impresses them upon Linda. This preservation allows Linda to, in turn, "[swallow] the hurt" to live on.[77] As Bessel Van Der Kolk writes of trauma survivors, even when a traumatic event can't be narrated, "the body keeps the score," becoming a living testimony of a Vietnamese diasporic past where regional history would prefer to erase it.[78]

But fire not only destroys, it also creates, and for Linda, embodiment of fire's material properties through the specific form of synesthesia she experiences creates an intimacy between refugee subjects and the elements, one that refuses to whitewash the environment and forget the refugee past. Fire's somatic imprint, in turn, forms a basis from which the novel dislodges fire from being tied to trauma alone. Put differently, corporeal preservation of fire within Linda enables cognitive reimagining of fire; her sensory (bodily) experience of it enables sentient (cognitive/conscious) perception that keeps Vietnamese cultural context alive. Such creative marshaling of fire's destructive force manifests in Linda's synesthesic incomings, which appear to randomly associate words with tastes but that have noticeable roots in the fire.

Perhaps the most striking instance of synesthesia's ability to act as a form of bodily memory-making can be found in Linda's biological mother's name, Mai-Dao, which endures as part of Linda's name. Given that the second syllable of the name, "dao," denotes peach or peach blossom in Vietnamese, this Vietnamese lexical signature inserts Vietnamese inscriptions of color and taste into the North Carolinian environment. As Amanda Dykema argues, such linguistic mixing is also evident in the trope of bitter itself. Bitterness organizes Linda's memory of life in North Carolina, and it is also a comforting flavor found in Vietnamese plants and dishes that Mai-Dao likely prepared for a young Linda.[79] Taste allows Linda to fuse the event of the fire that destroys her first knowledge of family and home with the ability to move that past forward into the present. The association between fiery colors and kinship ties extends to Linda's other relationships as well. "Wade," Linda's childhood crush, provokes the taste of orange sherbet, while "Kelly" triggers that of canned peaches—all shades and flavors tied to the reds and oranges of fire. Linda's kaleidoscopic sense of sight and taste physically embodies not only dispossession but also kin networks—a crafting of community.[80] As water does in *Gangster*, fire in *Bitter* facilitates emergence of a refugee orientation centered on alternative understandings of environment, kinship, and care that emerge from profound loss.

Linda's reimagined relationship to local flora constitutes an individual refugee ecology on one level, but it also points to long historical narratives of familial loss and displacement in the region. These cross-temporal echoes illustrate how a refugee ecology can re-enliven history, particularly as it is populated by displacements spanning diverse imperial pasts. Evoking *Gangster*'s protagonist's fascination with the encyclopedia of palms as an official history, in *Bitter* Linda is intensely curious about the contents of a book titled *North Carolina Parade: Stories of History and People*. Within this book, certain tales stand out to Linda, including those of Virginia Dare, the first English child born in colonial America on Roanoke Island in 1587 who, like Linda, is orphaned; George Moses, who was born into slavery around 1798 and became the first African American published poet in the U.S. South; and "a boy from Kitty Hawk village," who witnesses the first flight famously undertaken by the Wright brothers in 1903 in Kill Devil Hills.[81] Linda finds echoes of her own life in these vignettes, grasping something familiar about the dilemma of creating *oikos* when violently removed or threatened with violent removal from existing experiences of family and home.

The Dare and Kitty Hawk characters bring into focus Native American history along the Outer Banks, a chain of barrier islands that lie primarily off the coast of North Carolina on which English

settlers established their first colony on Roanoke in the 1580s, which notoriously failed. Popular stories of the "Lost Colony" assert that it completely disappeared after John White, the colony's Governor and Virginia Dare's grandfather, had taken a trip to England and returned to the island in 1590 only to find no settlers, a disappeared Dare, the letters "CRO" carved on a tree, and the word "Croatoan" carved on a post.[82] As Linda comments, popular narratives perpetuate a story of "the crime of [Dare's] kidnapping or mass murder" by Native Americans.[83] But scholars have shown that Native American practices of reciprocity and choosing kin likely allowed absorption of the English into Roanoke, Croatoan, Secotan, and other Indigenous communities, paralleling Indigenous integration of hundreds of enslaved Africans and Indians who had been left on the island.[84]

Integration by Native Americans would have enabled English survival, as the former had long navigated the area's environmental peculiarities—its dense forest, windy conditions, and distance from the continent.[85] Indigenous practice of carving names on trees manifests Indigenous intimacy with the environment, dramatically performing interconnection between Native Americans and local flora; the tree's surface literally makes visible the community, and the community makes the tree more visible. Indigenous-botanical recursivity can also be looped back to regional magnolias, whose different parts Indigenous groups in North Carolina have long used in teas and bitters and to treat various ailments, and to dogwood blooms, which signal harvesting time for Native Americans. Linda's excavation of Dare's biography and the importance of Indigenous ecology to Dare's possible survival compels recognizing regional botanicals as material artifacts that document the region's rhizomatic networks of community and upend the myth of naturalized white power and pure, direct lines of descent.

Additionally, *Bitter*'s portrayal of George Moses places critical emphasis on enslaved labor in North Carolina and the poetic creations he carved from Earth-bound conditions. Living among enslaved subjects who toil the earth to produce tobacco—and who would have been the ones responsible for planting and caring for the U.S. South's prized flora—George Moses learns from his mother to reassociate movements of the Black laboring body with the rhythms of spiritual words and songs. Linda imagines him "mesmerized by the up-and-down rhythm of hard labor" and by the "comfort in the sounds of worship."[86] In a poem that Linda describes as a "call-to-freedom … disguised within a devotional message," George Moses turns Black spirituality upward and away from Earth: "Rise up, my soul, and let us go/Up to the gospel feast; Gird on the garment white as snow,/To join and be a guest."[87] This hymnal poem positions Earth as a sphere where free movement for the enslaved is impossible, where North Carolina is a state that exploits and restricts the movement of Black bodies. We can push this logic further to note the local landscape as also a site of terror, with trees forced to serve as sites and witnesses of lynching. Moving beyond these Earth-bound oppressions, George Moses imagines community within a non-human, celestial space, one found in the heavens and that welcomes the enslaved as kin.

The emergent refugee ecology in *Bitter* archives multiple histories of violence and erasure, and their unearthing provides a precedent for Linda's crafting of identity and home outside legal and cultural matrices of the refugee regime and white supremacist state. Thus, for Linda, fire cannot be reduced to a history of military violence or an isolated event that kills her parents; it also marks a comma and transition into a different life and alternative historicization. By pushing the more destructive associations of fire to reveal possibilities for living and forming community, Linda enacts what Gaston Bachelard describes as imagination's capacity for altering elemental images' meaning and function.[88] In this way, the event of the fire and the material remnants of violence it contains are always inside her corporeally, as evidenced by her synesthesia, shaping a refugee ecology organized around cross-temporal histories of forced displacement and worldmaking.

However, despite these trans-historical linkages, Linda has no community of color with which to connect in the present. Her racial isolation may speak to the force of assimilation, or, it may speak to the possibilities, as opposed to the guarantees, of creative ecologies that refugees may craft. The ambivalence I see in *Bitter* crystallizes in the final moment of the novel, when Linda finally learns the circumstances of her adoption yet doubts the veracity of what she knows about her autobiography: "I decided it didn't

matter. At least it was a story, I thought. We all need a story of where we came from and how we got here. Otherwise, how could we ever put down our tender roots and stay."[89] Here, story precedes one's "roots"; it is the narrative of an environment that configures one's attachment to, and potential transformation of, setting. The vulnerability of "tender roots" makes Linda's ability to forge *oikos*, whether through material or metaphorical ecologies, a necessary but fundamentally tenuous project.

Conclusion

Attention to refugee ecologies reveals competing narratives of literary setting—in my study, comprised of the elements, flora, and fauna and the different values they are imagined to have—and shows how environments are defined and animated by deep histories of dislocation. In turn, specificities of region determine what aspects of setting require reimagining in order to craft more habitable spaces, as well as how a new *oikos* is to be made. Palm trees in *Gangster* allow lê's narrator to see her own migration reflected in her surroundings, while the prominence of water in her life and environment preserves refugee trauma while allowing for that past to recirculate in the atmosphere to cultivate an emerging Vietnamese diasporic consciousness. Truong's Linda deconstructs how flora is appropriated to reify white nativism and enforce racial hierarchies, with fire becoming an elemental process that retains refugee pasts while burning to ashes the grounds upon which white supremacist ideology rests. Thus, lê's and Truong's protagonists do not presuppose the authority of dominant narratives of regional ecology, whether stories of pleasure and plenitude associated with California's sun-soaked, palm tree-rich coasts, or tales of white nativism rooted in a blanched North Carolina landscape. Rather, *Gangster* and *Bitter*'s refugee narratives start elsewhere, with the fundamental fact of dislocation, evidenced in and told by the environment itself.

Acknowledgment

Notes

1 Schliephake, "From Storied," 232.
2 Prince qtd. in Hones, "Literary Geography," 685.
3 Ghosh, *The Great*, 6.
4 Schliephake, "From Storied," 232.
5 Sarkar, "Ecology."
6 Mellor, *Feminism*.
7 Cohen and Duckert, "Eleven Principles," 4. Elemental ecocriticism might be seen as a subcategory of "material ecocriticism," an interpretive approach that Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann describe in terms of analyzing the materiality of narrative worlds as active narrative forces. Iovino and Oppermann, "Introduction," 2.
8 Espiritu, *Body Counts*.
9 Tran, "Remembering," 80.
10 Critical refugee studies' close eye toward the racialization of refugees also links to models of "racial ecology," which posit the interdependence of "race and environmentalism." Nishime and Williams, "Why Racial Ecologies?" 3.
11 Cheng, "Environmental Violence," 116. I began this chapter in 2020 at the invitation of the Handbook editors. In 2022, I came across a volume in which Cheng's insightful essay appears. I see our analyses, both interested in environmental aspects of lê's novel, as complementary. Cheng considers how *Gangster*'s environment speaks to the continued "violence of racialized poverty, resettlement, and trauma in the United States" as tied to the Vietnam War (117), and I am concerned with layers of cross-species displacement in *Gangster* and how refugees craft a sense of home therein.
12 Espiritu, *Body Counts*, 11–12.
13 Truong, *Bitter*, 6.
14 lê, *Gangster*, 6.

15 lê, *Gangster*, 140.

16 lê, *Gangster*, 126.

17 lê, *Gangster*, 108.

18 Connery, "The Oceanic," 299.

19 Gandhi, "Historicizing," 50, 66–67.

20 Kingston, *The Woman Warrior*.

21 de la Paz, *Requiem*.

22 Perez, *From Unincorporated Territory*.

23 Sze, *Fantasy Islands*, 1, 4–6, 89.

24 lê, *Gangster*, 140.

25 lê, *Gangster*, 106.

26 Purcell, "The Desert," 5.

27 Masters, "A Brief History."

28 Patencio and Boynton, *Stories*, 99.

29 Patencio qtd. in Lewis, "The Desert Cahuilla," 40; Purcell, "The Desert."

30 Madrigal, "Reclaiming," 135.

31 Starr, *Inventing*, 65.

32 Cheng, "Environmental Violence," 124.

33 Masters, "A Brief History."

34 Dailey, "Piety."

35 Hosbey and Roane, "A Totally Different," 70; Madrigal, "Reclaiming," 135.

36 lê, *Gangster*, 91.

37 Vuong, "The 10 Books."

38 lê, *Gangster*, 64.

39 For an insightful discussion of how palm trees' particular morphology helps to create the novel's anti-teleological arc, see Cheng, "Environmental Violence," 125.

40 lê, *Gangster*, 63.

41 lê, *Gangster*, 63; Cheng, "Environmental Violence," 117–8.

42 lê, *Gangster*, 89.

43 lê, *Gangster*, 21.

44 Cohen, "The Sea Above," 112.

45 lê, *Gangster*, 157.

46 lê, *Gangster*, 158.

47 lê, *Gangster*, 158; Suzuki, *Ocean Passages*, 87.

48 lê, *Gangster*, 158.

49 lê, *Gangster*, 158.

50 lê, *Gangster*, 127.

51 Linda and her parents are in the U.S. during the "Fall of Saigon," but they do become stateless persons displaced from Vietnam.

52 Truong, *Bitter*, 4.

53 Cruz, "Monique Truong's."

54 Cruz, "Monique Truong's," 718.

55 Cruz, "Monique Truong's," 730.

56 Truong, *Bitter*, 133, 166.

57 Sansing, "Flags."

58 Truong, *Bitter*, 7.

59 Truong, *Bitter*, 236.

60 Truong, *Bitter*, 7.

61 Truong, *Bitter*, 57.

62 "Blossom."

63 "Historic Trees."

64 Truong, *Bitter*, 170.

65 Hatch, *Blood Sugar*, xii.

66 Truong, *Bitter*, 9.

67 Truong, *Bitter*, 55.

68 Truong, *Bitter*, 10.

69 Truong, *Bitter*, 279.

70 Truong, *Bitter*, 279.

71 Davis, *Southscapes*; Haymes, "An African Studies Critique."

72 Mentz, "Phlogiston," 58.

73 Mentz, "Phlogiston," 58; Harris, "Pyromena," 37, 28.
74 Harris, "Pyromena," 37.
75 Truong, *Bitter*, 18.
76 Truong, *Bitter*, 280.
77 Truong, *Bitter*, 38.
78 Van der Kolk, *The Body.*
79 Dykema, "Embodied," 126.
80 Cruz, "Monique Truong's," 728–9.
81 Truong, *Bitter*, 53.
82 Weger, "Virginia Dare."
83 Truong, *Bitter*, 52.
84 Lowery, *Lumbee Indians*, 26.
85 "European Colonizers."
86 Truong, *Bitter*, 140.
87 Truong, *Bitter*, 141.
88 Bachelard, *Air and Dreams.*
89 Truong, *Bitter*, 282.

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29

WRITING, BELONGING, FORGETTING

Waterscapes in Bangla Dalit Refugee Literature

Himadri Chatterjee

How does a person without a homeland remember the loss of home? Can the already *Bahiskrit* (exiled) become *Udbastu* (refugee) as well? B.R. Ambedkar had once remarked, "Gandhiji, I have no Homeland."[1] Ambedkar had met Gandhi a month before the second roundtable conference of 1932 to discuss the marginalization of issues of the oppressed castes within the canvas of anti-colonial struggle.

At the time, these two leaders of anti-colonial struggle, social transformation, and postcolonial nation-building in South Asia were staking their representational claims on behalf of the most exploited and excluded sections of Indian society: the Dalit. The demands presented by Ambedkar and Gandhi on the Dalit's behalf were diametrically opposed. Ambedkar demanded separate electorates for the "untouchables" within the limited democracy of the British colonial state in India. Gandhi was opposed to the treatment of the oppressed caste population as a minority politically separated from Hindu society. He envisaged the upliftment and empowerment of the oppressed castes within the frame of Hinduism.

Ambedkar's comment about having no homeland, quoted above, is doubly significant: first, it marks the separation between the discourse of the nationalist anti-colonial movement and the oppressed caste communities' struggle for dignity. Second, these comments, made before the 1947 Partition, antici-pate the difficulty of anchoring belonging for severely socially marginalized groups. What if we were to generalize Ambedkar's sense of *unbelonging* as a common element of Dalit experience in India—and therefore in Bengal? Even though a native of Maharashtra, Ambedkar had a historic connection to Bengal. He was elected to the constituent assembly of India from Bengal. His election was a feat of organizational labor by Jogendranath Mandal, the most significant figure of Dalit politics in Bengal in mid-twentieth century. Mandal was also the first law minister of independent Pakistan. He later escaped communal violence in his "homeland" and arrived in India in 1950. The violence that followed uprooted much of his community from Pakistan. He remained a significant figure in Dalit refugee pol-itics until his demise in 1968.[2]

This chapter probes the fraught intersection of Dalit and refugee literature in Bangla. The first dif-ficulty of addressing this convergence is the lack of publication, translation, and academic reflection on texts by Dalit refugee writers.[3] Second, academic scholarship on the 1947 Partition has only relatively recently begun to discuss the eastern states of West Bengal and Assam[4] as well as the caste question.[5] Dalit refugee narratives from western Punjab have also been subsumed within the generalized frame of partition migration.[6] In West Bengal and Assam, the 1947 Partition was not the last episode of communal hostilities and mass migration. From 1947 to 1971, there were several waves of migration. Upper-caste refugees migrated earlier while oppressed caste communities arrived later.[7] The time lag in migration delayed the appearance of refugee literature from these communities. The difficulties of

writing were exacerbated by ritual exclusion from traditional institutions of learning. Over the last decade, a number of scholars have begun to focus specifically on Dalit experiences of migration and rehabilitation. But how do we conceptualize Dalit and refugee unbelonging—two different forms of exclusion—as part of a singular dynamic of subject formation?

The exile endured by India's oppressed caste communities is a practical, physical reality experienced every day—not a philosophical or mythological one—although those elements have been mobilized to legitimize their age-old marginalization. Since the 1980s, Dalit literature has become an increasingly significant canvas of social criticism, resistance,[8] and struggles over identity formation,[9] as well as witness testimonies to collective suffering[10] and post-colonial atrocities.[11] Ecology is one of the more recent additions to the frameworks for studying Dalit literature. Dalit literature, activism, and knowledge production are significant correctives to upper-caste ecological thinking that is characterized by functionalist justifications of the caste system.[12] Over time, Dalit writings, both autobiographical and otherwise, have come to be considered a critical source for writing social history in India.[13] As such, this chapter attends to narrations of nature in Dalit refugee writings in Bangla, exploring questions of memory, forgetting, and collective identity formation.

Writing/Forgetting

When members of Dalit communities speak of their permanent exile and everyday exploitation in their life writings, they narrate the reality of being "treated worse than cats and dogs."[14] Maybe such a "homeland," a theater of humiliations, can be and should be forgotten. Why narrate its loss? That is perhaps why Manohar Mouli Biswas, one of the foremost intellectuals among Dalit refugees, has made it difficult to track his story of displacement and refugeehood in his autobiography. A prolific poet, essayist, critic, political commentator, short story writer, editor, publisher, and activist, Biswas was displaced from Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan) sometime after the Partition of India. He belongs to the Namasudra community—the community of Jogendranath Mandal. It is a large rural community of eastern Bengal, who were and remain a powerful presence in electoral politics in Bangladesh, West Bengal, and Assam. The community has faced and resisted caste prejudice and exploitation in eastern Bengal since the late nineteenth century.[15]

The writing style that Biswas adopts throughout his autobiography demands familiarity with the history of the region and of the community. He refuses to give even his year of birth directly. He mentions the Bengal Famine of 1943, a catastrophe caused by careless wartime provisioning policies adopted by the British government, as the marker of his birth. He constantly leaves behind clues about the geography of his childhood, such as the name of a town famous in the annals of Namasudra history as the place of publication of one of its most prominent poets from the early twentieth century—the name of the city where he dreamt of going to college. But for the most part, Biswas is reticent to name particular locales. For example, he writes in his autobiography:

> That Bahanno Gram [fifty two villages] I was speaking of, those villages are located at the edges of a beel [waterbody], which used to have a name. The name almost comes to mind but then recedes behind a veil. As if a very intimate one is playing hide and seek with me. It chases me, an aggrievement. I tell you as an aggrieved, alright then, I will not bring your name to my lips. Stay hidden behind that veil.[16]

The passage alludes to several markers of forced displacement without locating them with easily decipherable keywords. Communities like "Bahanno Gram" and "Chianobboi Khan" are significant locations for the nineteenth-century history of anti-caste movements in Bengal. The waterbody mentioned here is a common feature of southeastern Bengal. It is a young delta full of shifting distributaries, oxbow lakes, silted channels of dying streams, brackish water lakes, and tidal lakes connected to canals or small rivers. He does not remember the name. With an anger only the beloved is capable of,

he refuses to remember what cannot be forgotten. "Even if the name refuses to come to mind, what remained intensely embedded in consciousness must be spoken"[17]—so begins the next paragraph as he launches into a description of this tidal lake that was once a landmark for his home. He remembers the trees, the fields, and the crops. He remembers the plenty. He remembers the easy hospitality of his community. He remembers eating fish, an amount that would sound like a fairytale if mentioned now.[18] He also remembers the occupational prejudices of his own community, their refusal to commercialize certain products, like milk and vegetables, afraid that such an act would change their caste status. He writes, "Instead of laying bare the easy truth I would rather stay imprisoned in the inner pain of my silence."[19]

The exact name of the place is forgotten. How significant are this forgetting and this silence? If the forgetting is underlined so boldly and the location, in the form of detailed descriptions of the landscape, are written so painstakingly—what is achieved by veiling the name? Carefully, the author creates a neighborhood and establishes a locale but refuses to verify the exact address. The significance of this forgetting has to be understood in relation to the discourse on property and compensation in India and Pakistan after Partition. There were legislations supporting compensation for the refugee families, proportional to the loss of property sustained due to the partition of territories and ensuing communal violence. These laws were implemented weakly, but with demonstrable prejudice against the newly minoritized populations on both sides of the border.[20] To begin with, the national leadership was as focused on the western theater of Partition as the historians would remain for the next several decades. The implementation of laws mandating compensation was originally limited to the refugees from the western provinces only.[21] When the regulations on compensation opened up further, it was still necessary to produce complex documentary proof substantiating the claim.

The vulnerable social position of a Dalit family usually results in a negligible claim to property. This is further exacerbated by their lack of documentation. Most significantly, the intense social prejudice and exclusion faced by Dalits hardly instill an anchored sense of belonging or pride of place. We will encounter an example of landscape writing by a significantly propertied member of a different Dalit refugee community in the next section. We shall note then the differences between the iterations coming from two different classes within communities of similar ritual status. It was quite fashionable among upwardly mobile refugee families, across caste identities, in West Bengal to inscribe their pre-Partition address prominently on the front wall of their homes—often on marble plaques—complete with all administrative markers of belonging. Biswas's forgetting of the name is also a repudiation of this popular regional refugee culture of prominently showcasing their previous belonging under categories like *Adi Nibas* (ancestral residence) or *Purbo Nibas* (previous residence). Such claims of belonging were matters of serious cultural transactions like marriage, food preference, religious rituals, architecture, aesthetics, and sporting cultures until the end of twentieth century in urban West Bengal. They remain fairly significant still in the smaller towns and rural areas.

Biswas's adoption of this style of writing is deliberate. Unlike an earlier style of prose writing where upper-caste Hindu refugees of Partition romanticized the social landscapes of their lost villages, this style of writing resists the easy resolution of this particular tragedy into the national tragedy of territorial or civilizational severance.[22] The nostalgic content of this earlier genre of writing was characterized by an erasure of social tensions and presentation of idyllic locales that could sharply communicate the suddenness of loss. Biswas resists the nostalgic flattening of social geographies of the past. The following paragraphs will unpack how he writes the experience of inequality into descriptions of natural landscapes.

In his autobiography, Biswas never mentions border crossing or communal riots commonly noted in other refugee narratives from India. The significance of breaking this pattern cannot be overstated. The deliberateness of Biswas's style and its poignant absences force the reader to take note of a complex geography and ecology that refuses to easily categorize itself as Partition literature. It is not until the tenth and very last chapter of the first part of his autobiography that he directly addresses his migration

from Bangladesh to India. Even then, he touches lightly upon the forced nature of the migration and the religious politics that caused it. He writes:

> I had seen the country becoming independent in childhood. I had seen the country getting partitioned. I had witnessed the religious division of this country.
>
> Neither could I understand religion in my childhood nor was religion a matter of any interest through my family.
>
> It was not religion but poverty that was hanging like a sword over my head. … In the days of disaster each human being must leave his home and come stand outside. I did so as well. I sought refuge in the home of distant relatives in a border area of West Bengal. All they had was a small thatched hut. Walls of clay. The roof leaked during the rainy season.[23]

He writes the moment of his becoming refugee through nature. The word that he uses for disaster is of particular significance. *Sarbonash*, *Khoti*, and *Anishto*, are some preferred terms in Bangla for intentional harm. Instead, he uses the word *Durjog*, which is used primarily to mean natural disasters, to name the cause of displacement. The *disaster* of becoming refugee becomes a natural force, like torrential rain. The word is a complex derivation of *Dur* and *Jog*. *Dur* is a commonly used prefix for pointing out a negative event, experience, or quality. *Jog* is distinctly connected to classical Indian metaphysics. It may variously mean meditation, addition, and cosmic conjunctions. This last one is of particular interest. This word is in popular use in Indian astrology, where *Jog* is understood as a time of specific potentialities. Climatic conditions being capable of devastation yet partly predictable makes them fit this term well. For a people tied to a riverine land, opening up to a vast estuary and a bay whipped by cyclones, inclement weather is an everyday companion. It is often trying and entirely uncontrollable. With the use of the word *Durjog,* the author subtly pulls us away from framing the moment of pogrom and displacement as harm caused by one community against the other. Instead, he makes space for thinking of it as an inevitable and inclement force—explicable but without a determinate perpetrator. The malice of the moment is written away. He carries through the metaphor by mentioning the leaky thatched roof, which is an artifact of peasant lives in rural Bengal to this day.

Biswas's autobiography engages with refugeehood by writing forgetting. Ricœur, in his landmark consideration of the question of memory and history writing, uses the figure of the exiled Athenian archon and general Themistocles to make the first major pivot toward framing the concept of forgetting as a creative possibility rather than a loss or erasure. This figure marks the limit of artificial memorization and recall and allows the exiled to contemplate an end to the suffering of "remembering what he did not want to."[24] Writing, the foremost mnemic device, is wielded like a scalpel excising hurt. The most intensely and intimately acrimonious episode of nation-building in post-colonial South Asia is forced to retreat into a quieter place. This forgetting is strategic. It is not an erasure. It is designed to help the reader escape the arrest of big history—to allow the quiet unfurling of small memories. This strategy allows the author to foreground other aspects of the experience of exclusion and displacement, beyond the already overburdened discourse on religion. By opening up other registers of memory and history, Biswas allows for critical distance to build between his identity and the Hindu society, which is an increasingly politicized, consolidated, and combative majority in India.[25]

One such aspect is written in his explorations of a Piscean sociality. Fishing in the river and the lakes, common for young boys in the waterscape being discussed, the author spent his time observing the variety, behavior, and movement of fish in water. The hierarchy of the various sizes and types of fish became a way for him to speak of the inequality of living in his erstwhile home.

> I had observed signs of strong koulinyo [caste privilege] among the aristocratic fish. They swam with favorable currents towards better things in life. The major carp would not swim with the rohita, who in turn would stay away from the mrigal carp and the mrigal would stay away from the helicopter catfish. They would each follow the aristocratic traditions of their

own caste. The smaller fish, swamp barbs, koi, and common cat fish would stay forever in the shallows of the beel. They were happy simply to be alive. Their presence near the aristocrats was undesirable, unbefitting. I observed this. I found a great deal of similarity between these non-aristocrats and the people from my own community.[26]

The hierarchy of caste is foregrounded in nature. Unlike the canvas of natural disaster that helped mute the intensity of communal violence, in this passage, nature becomes a dynamic ground of distinctions, movements, inhabitation, observation, and realization. The detailing of this Piscean sociality draws the reader into the intimate nook of an observant child witnessing the social reflected in a watery canvas after school hours. An extension of learning into leisure and politics into nature creates a space which is not so much a memorial to a lost home as a deconstruction of that home.

To scale up this deconstruction, the author mentions a dialogue between Guruchand Thakur, a central religious figure of the community, and Gandhi. In East Bengali colloquial, Thakur tells Gandhi that his people are hungry and uneducated. To them, the meaning of freedom and subservience are the same. Only when they are fed and educated will they join Gandhi's struggle for independence.[27] This conversation is a near-perfect echo of Ambedkar's conversation with Gandhi, lending credence to our earlier generalization. The author's sudden shift from standard Bangla to a local dialect suggests that the sentence is meant to function as a flag of an authentic critique of the nationalist movement for decolonization. The language marks the place of rupture—the colloquial form of a vernacular breaking from the national.

One may ask, if such care was taken by the author to avoid the playing up of the context of forced migration, why then shall we expend any hermeneutic labor into teasing out these clues? It is because the nature of this writing also loops back to less talked about aspects of that same migration, especially the differential effects of the Partition on different caste communities. Writing forgetting is not quite an erasure. It is a strategic suspension of certain aspects that allow the highlighting of others. Specifically, it helps draw attention to the inequities of social hierarchies that marked the lives of the refugee population even prior to displacement. It allows us to suspend the Hindu-Muslim binary that takes up vast proportions of the popular history of Partition, so that one may breathe without gasping under the ideological weight of that tragic loss turned into fuel for periodically unleashed riots against citizens of the "other" faith. In sum, for Biswas, nature writing is intimately entangled with narratives of forced displacement, just as memory is profoundly intertwined with an aesthetics of forgetting.

Mukul Sharma, while comparing this autobiography to two other Dalit autobiographies from other regional and linguistic contexts, avoided commenting upon the story of migration embedded within the narrative.[28] While extracting episodes of "nature writing," he passed over the political geography of nation-building and population movements in South Asia. I would argue, through a brief consideration of a selection of texts by other refugee writers from the oppressed caste communities of West Bengal, that memory impacted by the experience of forced migration generates a multifaceted politics of belonging essential to and inherent in the form of nature writing presented in these narratives. This memory often becomes a force barely controlled by the author. "I am oppressed by the weight of my memories,"[29] he writes. "So many words have broken through the doors of the past."[30] He acknowledges his filtering of the narrative when he mentions, "so many stories have been left behind in the cage."[31] He clarifies that he had intended to create a "documentation" of his community's struggles with marginalization. Yet, nature writing seems to break through the surface of intention and leave behind a deliberate trace of home.[32]

Storied Lands

Madhumoy Pal's work has been pioneering in mapping autobiographical narrations of Dalit refugees of Partition. In *Deshvag: Binash O Binirman*, he writes:

> Two women were telling stories about their homeland … most of their stories were made all of sighs. The light of smiles, the light of girlhood, the light of celebrations would dazzle for a

few moments, like the horizon of the sea just before sunset. In the next moment, the sunset of despair would envelop pleasure … I was sitting or lying on a grass mat and listening. Maybe it is misleading to say "listening," some of it was reaching my ears … the landlady (of the slum room) told my mother, "Your son will have no homeland." My mother had answered, "Neither do I have one." Didimoni said, "You can still speak of Kishoreganj. I will speak of Sherpur. Malati speaks of Kasharibajar. Krishna's mother bubbles with sentiment while speaking of Barishal. What will Krishna speak of? They will have no homeland."[33]

Home is the stories from home, the stories of home. The two women in the above passage were sitting in a Kolkata slum. One had already moved permanently from East Pakistan to Kolkata and the second was in the process of doing the same. The reason for narration is stated here at the edge of loss. Where will the next generation belong? What will they speak of? The dissolution of belonging brings with it attendant generational, linguistic, and cultural alienation. The next generation is less enthusiastic to preserve what used to make the displaced a community. The ground of common memories is lost and it becomes harder to pass on the wealth of memories that has little to do with the lives of the younger generation. That young man was Madhumoy Pal—on the grass mat "sitting or lying" absent minded enough to forget his own body. He would go on to write the above passage to introduce this pioneering collection featuring Dalit memories of Partition and dislocation in Bengali.

In contrast to Biswas's autobiography, editorial collections curate narrations for record-keeping and transmission to later generations as something akin to life histories. Such record keeping is often couched in the desire to have one's own family history written. The editor himself speaks of how he attempted to convince his mother to write. The mother objects thrice, "Will I be able to?"—"There is too much to write down"—"What use will it be anyway?" The editor answers, "It will become the homeland of your children."[34] The editorial project brought together a diverse group of voices. This diversity is represented in their styles of writing and their approaches to memory. I will discuss sections from an essay in the collection to demonstrate how Dalit refugee writers speak to this project of creating a homeland by preserving images of waterscapes and life stories as part of a collective process of intellectual production. The essay discussed in the following section approaches memorialization through a language that stays close to statist conceptions of territory and security. It represents the majority tendency and voice in Dalit refugee literature.

Running counter to the tendency of writing through forgetting, the next author presents us with an example of near-perfect remembrance. Manivushan Ray writes:

> I came home on 15th August, 1947. The shape of Jalpaiguri district in those days resembled a revolver—facing east. The butt of the revolver contained four police stations and one was located in a place that resembled a trigger. Just below Jalpaiguri there was Tetulia, Pachagar, Boda and Debiganj. Patgram was on the trigger spring. Twelve other police stations made up the body of the revolver.[35]

Here the purpose of description is not in question. The intent to record has been realized to its full extent by schematizing the landscape into three successive images. Firstly, one is thinking of a district map rather than a homeland. Secondly, the homeland is distributed into police beats to help insert it within the territorial imaginary of the nation-state. Finally, the social tension inherent in the moment of Partition is well represented in the image of the revolver, complete down to the trigger spring. Coiled and ready for violence, this statist imagery is quickly filled up with stories of flag raising, competitive sloganeering, escalating tension, and triggering of violence. After escaping under threat of violence and harassed by the security forces of the fledgling state of Pakistan, the landscape of home makes a comeback with the qualification that the descriptions of home may be "unbelievable for people of the present generation."[36] The qualification is followed by a detailed description of property, including the

building materials of the house and the various domestic infrastructures maintained by the family over generations:

> The house stood on two acres of high land. Nelshadara and Lohagara, two rivers to the east. Our village was named after the second … climbing the bank after crossing Lohagara, one may see the courtyard of our house. An entire acre of land was only for threshing crops. In the middle and at the western edge there were two wells girded with concrete rings and also on the western edge was a massive east facing concrete house. Turning left from the concrete house – the main gate of our residence. An arch gate opened into the acre spanning guard wall. Right after the gate there was a small lawn. Two rice silos to the east and west. To the west, near the guard wall, a massive warehouse … across the wall, to the south, there was a mango orchard and a pond. Inside the wall, to the fire corner, there was an 'open room.' This room was equipped for parboiling rice, making puffed rice or flattened rice or cooking food for upper caste guests or people who prefer to cook their own food. Through the eastern gate there were two cattle sheds. There were fifty cows, calves, steers and twenty-five buffaloes.

He also marks the humiliation and fear of facing security forces while crossing the border:

> The so-called border security forces of Pakistan stopped us at Chilahati. They took away most of the money we had managed to bring with us. The fact that they allowed us to cross with our two carts, some furniture and our honor was the only small mercy afforded by God.[37]

Ray, an upper-class Dalit man, uses a language of description wholly different from Biswas. State apparatus, cartography, and property provide a three-pronged strategy of generating the perfect record or description of the lost homeland. Here nature is inserted into the frame of the built environment. Rivers, especially, become markers of direction and boundaries of private property.

In contrast to Biswas's autobiography, Ray's essay abjures forgetting because it remembers and represents like the state. This example runs counter to the earlier text for a couple of reasons. First, this text marks undulations and fractures within the imagined whole of the Dalit community. While poverty was a central theme for Biswas, Ray came from a Dalit community (Poundra-Kshatriya) with significantly greater claim to wealth and a history of having served as the soldiery of local princedoms. The experience of poverty and exclusion helped deromanticize the landscape for Biswas, while for Ray the loss of home was compounded by the significant loss in property and hardships that came after. The idea of a Dalit community encompassing all ex-untouchable and oppressed communities remains a primarily ideological device that has gained in political popularity in the last few decades but it is far from a consolidated social reality. There are significant micro-regional variations in ritualistic and economic standing of various communities that are part of the broad governmental category of "scheduled caste."

Second, the description of property holdings and location, detailed down to the last geographical landmark and administrative boundary, was precisely the kind of memory necessary for making compensation claims. Legal knowledge concerning property and village boundaries are essential for most medium and big landlords in eastern India because they have faced at least three distinct periods of peasant insurgencies and social movements led by communists in the 1940s, late 1960s, and early 1980s. Ray in fact mentions the earliest communist-led peasant insurgency. The Tebhaga movement had led thousands of sharecroppers across Bengal to resist unfair rents in the mid-1940s.[38] Ray laments that though his family weathered that rebellion, religious violence and Partition finally pauperized them.

Collective Self as Knowledge Object

The editorial project of capturing memory and forgetting is one example of the collective process of narration available within this context. There is an anthropological path as well, whereby the community collectively generates auto-ethnographic descriptions. In 2004, inspired by the world ethnological

conference, the Namasudra community decided to come together for a gathering in order to demand cultural recognition and formal citizenship in India. The "mahasammelan" or great gathering drew a roadmap for research into the history and anthropology of the community. This Mahasammelan was considered to be part of the legacy of gatherings which have been held twice in recorded history—in 1881 and in 1924. Accordingly, several elders, political activists, authors, teachers, and ex-bureaucrats from the community came together to formulate a list of anthropological characteristics of the group. A collection of poems written by a member of the community in the early twentieth century was recovered and reprinted with a long preface. The preface cites a resolution that was passed at the grand gathering on November 7, 2004. The resolution stated eight features that marked the Namasudra community as an autochthonous race of the Bengal delta:

1   Autochthons of Bengal Delta
2   Non-Aryan people
3   Expert sailors
4   Amphibious
5   Experts at ship building
6   Skilled at farming, especially rice/paddy farming
7   Physically short and muscular. Many are tall. They have deep and wide chests, hardy, capable and improved physique. Both fair and dark, of medium build. They have dark, luminous eyes and black hair. Men wear their hair long
8   Warrior[39]

Natural habitat was being insistently flagged as integral to Namasdura identity. The autochthonous connection with Bengal's delta, rivers, river trade, sailing, and boat building all point at a certain undisputable connection with and right over the landscape, especially the waterscapes of Bengal. For a community under constant threat to their legal citizenship, this is a politically significant claim. Moreover, this declaration gave a major impetus to the projects of recording and disseminating the memories of first-generation refugees. Manohar Mouli Biswas was one of the organizers of the great gathering of 2004. While being circumspect of recording personal memories of dislocation, Biswas was open to creating a strongly anchored community capable of making collective cultural decisions.

This collective intellectual practice was not aimed at creating literature so much as approximating a social scientific consensus on collective identification.[40] The project of forgetting the homeland or at least framing it beyond nostalgia and romance is connected—through a productive conceptual tension—with the practice of collective self-identification. The genesis, method of publication, and circulation of the above list is an interesting case in point. The initial set of documents circulated at the gathering did not contain any agenda items pointing to the preparation of such a list. The President of the organizing committee, Dr. Upendranath Biswas, was an officer of the Central Bureau of Investigation. He was trained as a sociologist from the University of Calcutta which was once a center for dissemination of colonial expertise in anthropology. He had studied the discipline in the 1960s, before the critical turn in anthropology could affect change in post-colonial Asia. He is also a member of the Asiatic Society, a storied colonial institution that was active in the production of orientalist knowledge since its foundation in late eighteenth century. From his academic training, one may argue that late-colonial conceptions of autochthony and indigeneity deeply affected the project of building the community's autoethnographic accounts. A news bulletin circulated by the organizers on the eve of the mahasammelan declared:

> The Namasudra mahasammelan − 2004 is a scientific and well planned programme of an ancient community (*Race*) of Bangla. Therefore, it is part of a continuous historical and cultural research agenda into ethnology. The dictionary meaning of ethnology is the science of racial typology of specific human groups. This is based on research on the uniqueness of the occupational and religious way of life of that particular race.[41]

The organizers were intent on identifying the Namasudra community as a *Race*. The idea of racial origin of caste differences was a central thesis of colonial ethnology, institutionalized by Herbert Hope Risley and others.[42] Leading figures of social scientific inquiry in India have been emphatically critical of this colonial construction. As demonstrated here, the thesis has seeped into popular anthropological and auto-ethnographic practices. Upendranath Biswas was a member of the West Bengal Legislative assembly from 2011 to 2016 and also the Minister for Backward Class Welfare.[43] He has advocated for a community history of the Namsudras, especially focusing on their naval capabilities. He has tried to trace a civilizational narrative back to the pre-Buddhist era in several discourses across community platforms. This form of autoethnography is organized, collective knowledge production, and it is anchored in the community network for legitimation and circulation.

This community infrastructure of knowledge production is significant to Dalit communities due to historic exclusion from formal educational institutions. Manoranjan Byapari, a celebrated Dalit refugee author and current member of the state legislative assembly once visited an academic session discussing his writings. He later wrote, "I felt like a fly sitting on a covered glass jar full of honey."[44] The space of community knowledge, however, is also internally contested. For example, while the Researcher's Council nominated by the working committee of the organizers remained circumspect about projecting religious tensions as a cause of refugeehood and deprivation, the President and the Secretary mentioned the minority status of the Hindus in Bangladesh and alleged attempts at "ethnic cleansing" in their communications on May 15, 2004. The convener's address went further to draw a comparison between the Holocaust and the forced exodus of the Namasudra community from Bangladesh. Such ideological dissonance may have contributed to the non-publication of the full collection of resolutions and minutes as well.

There are notable differences among both social scientific and literary-minded intellectuals from the community when it comes to frameworks of political engagement and nature writing. Sunilkrishna Mandal, a second-generation refugee, writes about a swamp near the rehabilitation settlement where his family lived after Partition in a distinctly different tone, when compared to the community's emphasis on a proud history associated with the waterscapes of Bengal. His account foregrounds the alignment of death and nature through a remarkable anecdote:

> Tragic events of that snake and insect infested swamp still make me shudder. The day was overcast and stifling … as we entered the swamp waters again there was a spot where the water hyacinths were disturbed and heaped high—I tried jumping across like a monkey but landed to the side of the heap. I caught on to the bole of a taro plant. I was submerged in water up to my chest. I turned back to see a dead man, head high, almost standing up. A few hours or a little while ago someone must have left the body in the swamp for funeral purposes. For the poor people of the area, a cheap and easy method for funeral was *dhapantor*. All of my limbs started shaking, my heart almost stopped beating. Only fear and more fear. There were no elders in our group. Having no other recourse, I started screaming. Everyone nearby arrived as fast as they could. Everyone was stunned by the huge and grotesque dead body.[45]

The word *dhapantor* (emphasis added) is a sarcastic neologism. It is a complex combination of *Dhap* and *Ontor*. *Dhap* is the word used for swamps, marking older flood planes and dead river channels in the East Bengali dialect, the dialect of the refugees from erstwhile East Pakistan. *Ontor* is a word variously used to denote "limit." In various combinations, it may denote interiority, difference, distance, passage, or end. It is a play on the word *Lokantor*, often-used to mean death and the transference of the spirit to the next world or plane. *Dhapantor* is how the author christens the process of transfer of the poor man's soul to the next plane—abandonment in the swamp—buried in a shallow grave of water hyacinths. A final devaluation of an impoverished body—for which, purification by fire is too costly a luxury.

In Mandal's writing, the reflexive calm of Biswas's waterscapes is absent. The pride of belonging and mastery over water underscored by the community's collective knowledge production is also not to be found. Nature becomes a place of horrors, a theater of devaluation and defeat.

Conclusion

The criticism of nostalgic refugee literature in Bangla has been in turn critiqued and advanced in two ways. The first path situates refugee nostalgia as an alternative form of belonging which replaces the nation-state with "desh."[46] The word *desh* in Bangla is affectively anchored to the landscape of the village or district of one's belonging. It is still commonly used by migrant workers to distinguish their home village from their place of work. In this framework, the intimate sense of loss faced by each refugee is construed as a political act that resists narratives of rehabilitation. The second path identifies nature writing, especially trees, as a symbolic accumulation of justice claims or memories of a more just time.[47] One may extend this second path to ask how various elements of nature writing are deployed in refugee literature to anchor memory and politics. Carola E. Lorea, for example, has studied how the sea functions as a threshold, a limiting object that separates the refugee from home.[48] Her study of the songs of Namasudra refugees resettled in Andaman islands seems to run counter to the claims of naval prowess by the community members gathered at the mahasammelan.

In the preceding discussion, I have tried to establish four ways in which nature writing is deployed by Bengali Dalit refugee authors. (1) Nature writing is deployed as part of strategic forgetting in order to complicate narratives of belonging and causes of displacement. (2) Nature is used as an adjunct to property, inserted within the apparatus of the nation-state. (3) Nature is framed as an anchoring object by the community to produce anthropological accounts of collective identity. (4) Nature is marked as a canvas of poverty, death, and humiliation, disrupting the collective effort toward claiming natural affinities to certain ecologies.

Let us take a look at a final example of nature writing from this genre that extends the potentialities of the first type of deployment of nature writing. The passage below comes from an autobiographical piece written by a renowned refugee painter, Ganesh Haloi:

> When our boat reached the middle of Brahmaputra, there was a great storm. The river went mad. Passengers started crying. I was transfixed with fear. I watched the boatman calmly tie two slats of wood to the two ends of the boat. The boat stopped taking on water. We were saved. I have seen the same tactics of tying slats to boats caught in storm in sculptures of Borobudur. But, that was much later.[49]

Haloi travels across vast time and space to write a single paragraph of a few sentences about his memories of a river in his lost homeland. The traversed space is somewhere between a remembered homeland and places of future travels. The time is somewhere in between ancient Borobudur and recounted childhood. His visual journey sketches a long-forgotten path of civilizational and cultural connections that once spanned Buddhist principalities across south and southeast Asia.[50] The astute curator and artist is not unaware of the resonance of the move. The connection between Brahmaputra and Borobudur, between northeast India and southeast Asia is deeply ensconced in the history of religion, art, and naval technology. In these few sentences, the remembered waterscape becomes a canvas of dispersal. It allows home to be placed far back in the past and also in a time "much later"—where one may yet travel. In the most recent elections to the state legislature in West Bengal, several legislators from the Namasudra community were elected on tickets from the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party. It remains to be seen how the intellectual field of Dalit refugee writings reorients around the changing electoral politics of the community.

Notes

1 Omvedt, *Ambedkar*, 40.
2 See Sen, *The Decline of the Caste Question*.
3 Several scholars and editors have pointed out this lack. A notable one is Sinharoy, "On a Bengali Dalit Autobiography." An editor and author who has been instrumental in recovering, republishing, and popularizing

writings of this genre is Madhumoy Pal. I will be discussing his work in greater detail later in the chapter. In the last two years, two very significant volumes of translation have been published: Charal and Dasgupta, *Dalit Lekhika* and Chatterjee and Mukherjee, *Under My Dark Skin Flows a Red River*. These volumes have helped introduce Bangla Dalit writings to a national and international audience. However, these volumes have not treated Dalit refugee writing as a distinct genre, even though they have included translations from a number of such writers and activists.

4 Possibly the earliest comprehensive history of partition, refugee influx, and rehabilitation in eastern India was Chakrabarti, *The Marginal Men*. This lonely volume was followed by a spate of new scholarship after a decade, beginning with Bose, *Refugees in West Bengal*.

5 The most recent addition to this line of inquiry is Bandyopadhyay and Chaudhury, *Caste and Partition in Bengal*. Bandyopadhyay was also one of the initiators of the discussion with his article "Partition and the Ruptures in Dalit Identity Politics in Bengal."

6 Kaur, *Narrative Absence*.

7 Chatterji, *The Spoils of Partition*.

8 Beth, "Dalit autobiographies in Hindi."

9 Beth, "Hindi Dalit Autobiography."

10 Nayar, "Bama's Karukku."

11 Nayar, "The Poetics of Postcolonial Atrocity."

12 Sharma, *Caste and Nature*, 10.

13 See Kumar, *Writing the First Person*.

14 Omvedt, *Ambedkar*, 41.

15 Bandyopadhyay, *Caste, Protest and Identity*.

16 Biswas, *Amar Bhubone,* 31. All translations are provided by the author.

17 Biswas, *Amar Bhubone*, 31.

18 Biswas, *Amar Bhubone*, 32–35.

19 Biswas, *Amar Bhubone*, 32.

20 For a detailed consideration of the dynamics of property management and marginalization of minorities after Partition, see Zamindar, *The Long Partition and The Making of Modern South Asia*.

21 Chakravarty, "Post-Partition Rehabilitation of Refugees in India," 7.

22 Chakrabarty, "Remembered Villages."

23 Biswas, *Amar Bhubone*, 84.

24 Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 514.

25 See Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925 to 1990s*; and for a historical unpacking of key thinkers and ideas animating Hindu nationalism, see Sharma, *Hindutva*.

26 Biswas, *Amar Bhubone Ami Beche Thaki*, 78.

27 Biswas, *Amar Bhubone Ami Beche Thaki*, 86.

28 Sharma, "'My World is a Different World.'"

29 Biswas, *Amar Bhubone*, 82.

30 Biswas, *Amar Bhubone*, 82.

31 Biswas, *Amar Bhubone*, 82.

32 Biswas, *Amar Bhubone*, 83.

33 Pal, "Deshvikhari," i–ii.

34 Pal, "Deshvikhari," iii.

35 Ray, "Ei Janome Ghotale Mor Janmo Janmantar," 103.

36 The scale of property holding described by the author may seem quite fantastic due to the widely held assumption that most families of Dalit origin are burdened with severe poverty. Also, the claim to have had fantastic amounts of property is often a legitimizing device for refugees and a target of derision for non-refugees. Ray, "Ei Janome," 109.

37 Ray, "Ei Janome," 110.

38 See Cooper, *Sharecropping and Sharecroppers' Struggles in Bengal*.

39 Biswas, *Jatiyo Jagaran*.

40 This is an interesting reversal of the dynamics of constitution of the anthropological domain of knowledge concerning refugees since the mid-twentieth century. See Malkki, "Refugees and Exile."

41 Working Committee of World Ethnological Conference, *News Bulletin*, 1.

42 Dirks, "G. S. Ghurye and the Politics of Sociological Knowledge."

43 "Backward Class Welfare" is the official name of the ministry. The words "backward" and "depressed" have been in use since late colonial period and continue to be in use in the names of ministries and in policy documents. Ambedkar was instrumental in the retention of the term "backward" especially in relation to affirmative action policies.

44 Byapari, *Ittibritte*, 366.
45 Mandal, *Amar Jibon Amar Sangram*, 21–22.
46 Raychaudhury, *Nostalgia for "Desh."*
47 Dasgupta, *The Lie of freedom*.
48 Lorea, *Migrating Songs*.
49 Haloi, *Mrityur Michil*, 118.
50 Chatterjee, *Forgotten Friendships*.

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30

BEING INDIGENOUS AND REFUGEE

The Duality of Palestinian and American Indian Narratives

Eman Ghanayem

There are groups in the world whose literary productions transcend a singular definition. This is especially the case with what I describe here as the unbounded genre of writing while forcibly displaced. Displacement in this context is understood as the lived experience of those who are expelled from their original home or homeland by colonial forces, or forces motivated by land usurpation and the establishment of a new order in the aftermath of physical and discursive erasure.[1] This colonial displacement creates an ambivalent new life lodged in the space between a historical rootedness to land and the sudden loss of that physical connection. In other words, it is a life that exists on the spectrum between Indigeneity and refugeehood. This kind of ambivalence invokes important questions: are those displaced still Indigenous if they are now technically refugees? If some Indigenous populations were not physically displaced but are oppressed by the new colonial order, how different does that really make them from refugees who were forced to move? Is the literature produced by colonially displaced authors Indigenous, refugee, both, or something else?

This chapter understands rigid boundaries between *Indigenous* and *refugee* as enforcing a social invisibility akin to colonial erasure. In fact, the overlap between an Indigenous person and a refugee, and their connection to colonial dispossession, is most illuminated in the example of Indigenous populations displaced by what is known as settler colonialism. A particular but representative type of colonialism, settler colonialism is defined by a drive to settle on an already inhabited land, replace an Indigenous population violently, create a national origin story that erases Indigenous presence, and build institutions (legal, cultural, academic, etc.) to disseminate its false narrative and uphold the process of settlement.[2] This chapter argues that displacement caused by settler colonialism demands troubling the boundaries between refugee and Indigenous narratives, precisely because many refugees were and remain Indigenous despite this colonial displacement. It also invites us to read literature in an intersectional and relational way that observes overlaps in displacement and understands settler colonialism as a global phenomenon constructive of comparable realities. Major examples that speak to these demands are found in Palestinian and American Indian writings.

Not to be understood in exclusive terms, Palestinian and American Indian literatures represent two groups of people whose existence continues to suffer from a relentless settler colonization. These narratives attest to the duality of being both Indigenous and refugee and the tensions between feeling displaced and grounded at the same time. In the two instances of Palestinian and American Indian writings, we can see how refugees can also be Indigenous and how Indigenous Peoples can also be refugee. Erasing the intersection between the two results in telling an incomplete story of where these communities come from, where they are now, and how and why they write. To deny Palestinians the

right to be Indigenous and to deny American Indians the right to be refugee is to erase their core existential crisis.

In the following sections, I first outline an intersectional approach to the issue of colonial displacement. I then define colonial erasure and assert the decolonial impetus of Indigenous and refugee writings, which I read together and without reinstituting a unique categorization. To demonstrate this reading, I highlight three major patterns in Palestinian and American Indian literatures: a centering of origin and land, a plotline that moves intergenerationally, and a commitment to a particular *Indigenous hope* that imagines a place beyond colonization. Ultimately, this chapter highlights the inefficacy of bounded genres of analysis that fixate on singular classification, recognizes the critical significance of literatures produced under colonial conditions, and foregrounds their role in teaching us why place matters, what settler colonialism does, and how to write and read against it.

Boundaries of All Kinds

I begin this section with an observation that demands critical reflection: the United Nations does not recognize any people in the world as both refugee and Indigenous. Given the worldwide resonance of intersectionality, a theory that brings to light social invisibility and invisible subjects, and its social impact on how we now recognize amalgamated social existence and violence, this UN misrecognition, or lack of recognition, comes with grave implications.[3]

First, by not recognizing refugees as also a displaced Indigenous population, the UN—in its own capacity, but also as representing international arbiters of global crisis—is denying the fact that refugees come from a specific place and are deeply bound to that place. In fact, a commonly established distinction between the refugee and other comparable figures, like the migrant or the citizen, lies in the former's loss of their place of belonging: a historical and cultural home they did not want to leave. Regardless of the conditions that precede it, a refugee's loss of their homes is a non-choice, a literal and unforeseen uprooting, an existential rupture that changes *everything*. Despite this popular perception of refugees, and the refugees' perception of themselves, institutions like the UN are mainly concerned with the project of resettling refugees in countries that could naturalize them anew, or at minimum, could temporarily alleviate their need for basic resources. This bureaucratic approach sees the transferring of refugees into a new country as a corrective strategy of some sort, a fair compensation for losing one's access to everything they and their parents and their grandparents before them had. The logic here being that if refugees lose their country, then finding them another country solves the problem. This perspective understands belonging in non-Indigenous terms and, by doing so, compromises the fundamental relationship between refugees and the origin they lost. In other words, to the UN and similar institutions, the strong connection to homeland, the very heart of refugee struggle, is tragically erased.

Second, the denial of a refugee's Indigeneity forces those in this position into a contested legal status. This contestation turns them into what historian Mae Ngai calls *impossible subjects*.[4] Ngai understands migratory movement and the construction of borders as subject to nationalist, racist, and colonialist policy. For Ngai, impossibility results when those in power refuse to acknowledge the violence that made refugees, hold themselves accountable, and offer the displaced real safety. The legal difficulties surrounding resettlement projects and the admission of migrants who exhibit racial and financial precarity—particularly in the context of the United States which Ngai writes about—becomes an excuse to reject these subjects as "impossible." Ngai's terminology fits into this chapter's critique of the lack of legal language to describe those who are Indigenous and displaced. There is not a term in UN vocabulary that describes groups like the Palestinians and American Indians and truly comprehends their situation: people who are living under ongoing settler colonialisms, who experience displacement continuously, who are minoritized by settler society and denied self-determination, and whose desire for a return and the end of their colonization is always put into question. Impossibility here removes the colonially displaced from legibility. Because Palestinians are commonly understood as refugees—in UN records, the largest refugee population in the world—their Indigeneity is not

recognized internationally, despite clear evidence from the Israeli government that expulsions were and are made to transplant settlers and grow an exclusive nation-state. Because American Indians, along with many Native Hawaiians, First Nations, and Alaska Natives, are technically within the geographical boundaries of North America, the history of state-sanctioned removals, allotments, relocations, forced assimilations, forced adoptions, and attacks on tribal sovereignty is not recognized by the U.S. as a colonial process that turned Indigenous Peoples into refugees. To wrap the colonially displaced in the false impossibility of what should really be a straightforward admission of their duality as both Indigenous and refugee is discursively and materially violent. And though this violence is not always or necessarily done intentionally, constructed impossibility stunts the lives of those displaced and does nothing to end the colonialism that keeps them uprooted.

The UN's erasure of the overlap between Indigenous and refugee experiences exemplifies the current state of the dominant language about them. It is a language that assumes a certain legality to define a crisis, establish victimhood, and propose interventions that are bureaucratized and managed through discrete classifications. Entering the domain of literary criticism, we can discern similar problems around literary approaches to refugee narratives. Literatures written by displaced authors are often shaped by what we perceive to be a "pure" refugee story—a story that unfolds linearly in response to a singular crisis. For readers, the plot comes to life as the tumultuous event of the characters becoming refugee unfolds, with occasional flashbacks to what life was like before, in pre-displacement time and place—the *then* and *there* are severed by the *now* and *here* of refugee life. And though our vocabulary for displacement is expanding, much of literary criticism still upholds a limited perspective of refugees and their complex storylines and identifications. Both sites of classification, UN policy and literary canonization, have yet to contend with the Indigenous subtext that informs refugee feelings, thinking, and political struggle. There also needs to be an overt recognition of the colonial conditions that have too often turned the historically Indigenous into the newly displaced.

Colonial Erasure and the Genre of Writing while Displaced

Colonial erasure, in the literary sense, silences narratives that speak of the existence and true measure of colonial violence. In the context of settler colonialism, the settler nation needs to maintain a "national creation story" to collectivize disparate groups of settlers and rationalize their existence.[5] Jean O'Brien (White Earth Ojibwe), in her historical examination of New England in the nineteenth century, theorizes the settler tendency to "write out" Indigenous existence as a process of "firsting" and "lasting."[6] Perceiving New England as the birthplace of the American nation, New Englanders saw themselves as originals, inheriting the land from "vanishing Indians" and continuing a settler legacy that will stand the test of time.[7] This self-modeling relied on disseminating that story extensively, such that it turned into a conviction so powerful that New Englanders were unable to recognize Indigenous presence altogether, even in the spaces they physically shared.[8] The myth of the "dying" or "dead Indian" that still circulates in the cultural imagination of the U.S. comes out of this colonial process. Other myths include the racial stereotyping involved in making Natives into "savages." Though the "Indian savage" does not circulate in today's social institutions as rigorously as it did in the early beginnings of the U.S., it continues to underlie the thinking of many Americans and their inability to recognize the cultural legacy and continuing contributions of Indigenous Peoples. In that sense, both the "dead Indian" and "Indian savage" tropes obscure Indigenous existence and erase their narratives from the dominant settler story.

In a similar way, the violent creation of Israel made it difficult for Palestinians to narrate their story without having to maneuver forced erasures, especially when telling the truth about 1948, the year Israel was founded, which Palestinians name the *Nakba*, or the Palestinian Catastrophe. During the Nakba, Zionist militias killed nearly fifteen thousand Palestinians, committed almost seventy massacres, raided 774 cities and towns, and destroyed 531 of them.[9] Many scholars deploy the notion of "memoricide" to describe the process through which Israel erased Palestinian history and pre-1948 memory to write its

own Zionist state narrative.[10] Alongside this historical corruption, the harms of the Nakba seeped into Palestinian identity and self-expression. Elias Sanbar, a Palestinian French historian, states, "Although Palestinian identity was not born in 1948, nevertheless this year left its imprint on this people's national personality, as if its facial features had changed, or its voice had suddenly acquired a different resonance."[11] Palestinian American literary theorist Edward Said explains the Nakba as "a monumental enigma, an existential mutation for which Arab history was unprepared."[12] He also describes it as "[a] deviation, a veering out of course, a serious deflection away from a forward path."[13] Along with this veering out, Palestinians' relationship to land after 1948 shifted from groundedness to that of being "out of place" and "out of time." As Sanbar puts it: "By departing from space, the Palestinians, about whom the whole world agreed to say 'they do not exist', also departed from time. Their history and their past were denied. Their aspirations and their future were forbidden."[14] Traumatized by their displacement, Palestinians are always partaking in a process of narrating what is lost, in the hope of reconstructing a belonging and history they are constantly refused.

As evident in these examples, the elements of Indigenous stories that are erased include their setting, the history of place, and the communities created and ruptured in relation to land. This erasure also includes the temporality of displacement—when it started and what junctures set it in motion. Colonial erasure disrupts the place and time of refugee stories when it refuses to speak of their Indigenous loss. Refugee stories are defined by the moment of becoming refugee rather than embedded in the origin story of being Indigenous. By the same token, readers understand Indigenous stories through an assumed boundedness to place without considering the exilic nature of their existence. In the context of settler colonialism, scholars have theorized this erasure as intended to prime a western, settler, white narrative that sets itself as the starting point of the story, as the main and sole source of action. The American literary canon at large exemplifies that pattern. Its classifications, often established geographically or periodically, fall sometimes into binarized pairings: British and American, postmodern and modern, and so on; or are established through identity markers that uphold the settler state as presumably inclusive and multicultural: like in the case of gender (e.g., women's writings), ethnicity (e.g., African American literature), sexuality (e.g., queer writings), and so on.

This approach leaves little room for duality—or intersectionality, multiplicity, and divergence, especially the kind that defies colonial society and its warped perception of itself and others. In this chapter, I do not give a unique classification for this dual refugee-Indigenous literary expression. Instead, I understand both Palestinian and American Indian writings as sharing similar patterns that can be described as the aesthetics and politics of writing while displaced, while being Indigenous and refugee, and while living under colonial conditions. In the remainder of this chapter, I discuss major themes that appear in the plotlines of Palestinian and American Indian writings. I organize these themes under three headings that centralize displacement as the common denominator: displacement as a story of place, displacement as cyclical violence, and displacement as epiphany.

Displacement as a Story of Place

In his memoir, *I Was Born There, I Was Born Here* (2009), Palestinian writer Mourid Barghouti reflects on his several exiles through the metaphorical coupling of "here" and "there." The memoir begins with movement across checkpoints and borders, a recurring motif in his narrative. Barghouti tells the story of traveling in a taxi from Ramallah across multiple contested landscapes to reach the Palestinian-Israeli-Jordanian border on a trip out of Palestine. We later find out that Barghouti has actually lived most of his life in exile. Barghouti's story of displacement is complex, taking us through the many settings of what Edward Said called "territories of experience."[15] As a child during the Nakba, Barghouti experiences his first displacement when his family is forced to leave Jaffa. As a young adult, Barghouti travels out of the West Bank to study in Egypt and is eventually forced to stay there during the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, his second experience with exile. Despite his later marriage to famous Egyptian novelist Radwa Ashour and the conception of their Egypt-born son Tamim, he is also pushed out of Egypt, his third

displacement. Barghouti is then escorted to Budapest where he lives for many years before he is eventually granted permission to travel between Jordan, where his exiled mother lives, and Palestine, his homeland, following the 1993 Oslo Accords.

As Barghouti narrates the journeys he has made between the places that have shaped his life, the text begins to resemble what Seneca scholar Mishuana Goeman (Tonawanda Band) describes as an Indigenous literary cartography, a map of place that is informed by both forced displacement and the displaced person's memories of their traditional home.[16] Readers can observe the impact of Barghouti's exiles whenever he describes the landscape around him, which he does with an overbearing sense of grief and forgetfulness. While describing his trip in the taxi, he writes:

> I'm not familiar with these roads that Mahmoud [the taxi driver] is taking, and not just because my geographical memory has faded during the years of exile; the sad and now certain truth is that I no longer know the geography of my own land. However, the car is now traveling over open country and there's no sign of paved roads, traffic lights, or human beings as far as the eye can see. It's going across fields and I don't know how this is going to get us to Jericho.[17]

In his narrative, Barghouti not only articulates personal loss, but he also tells the story of a place in pain. Barghouti's literary map constantly reveals the Israeli Apartheid Wall, checkpoints, and environmental wounds (such as those caused by regular uprootings of Palestinian trees) as monuments of colonial defacement. His map defies the logics of a colonial cartography that naturalizes Israel, a settler colony, and denies Palestine's historical geography—a continuing practice of erasing Palestine that takes new forms.[18] In one of his many remunerations on place, Barghouti declares, "I tell myself, some homelands are like that: getting into them is hard, getting out of them is hard, and staying in them is hard. And this is the only homeland you have."[19] He then explains, centering a colonial "master" as the rupturing force, "The traveler to Palestine does not cross its threshold in order to enter, he dwells at that threshold for a period that is not determined by him and waits for the instructions of the masters of the house, who determine everything."[20]

The threshold Barghouti wants to cross into is not only a geographical one, but a psychological one as well:

> [The] Occupation changes distances. It destroys them, upsets them, and plays with them as it likes … The Occupation closes the road between two cities and makes the distance between them many times the number recorded on the maps. The Occupation throws my friend into prison and makes the distance between him and his living room one to be measured in years and in the lives of his sons and daughters.[21]

The distance Barghouti laments characterizes the transition from Indigenous to refugee, which manifests as an existential problem and an "anxiety," as he terms it throughout his memoir. He poignantly states, "The soldier of the Occupation stands on a piece of land he has confiscated and calls it 'here' and I, its owner, exiled to a distant country, have to call it 'there.'"[22] The "here" and "there" in the memoir's title and storyline not only represent the colonial temporal–spatial corruption of distance that Barghouti describes, but their coupling also traverses the boundary between Indigenous and refugee in the context of settler colonialism. Palestinian storytelling becomes the means to constantly shift between the two, between homeland and exile, past and present, a place that was and an occupation that divides, for the main purpose of evidencing Indigeneity and refugeehood as twinned plots in the story of colonial displacement.

Deborah Miranda's *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (2013) mirrors Barghouti's memoir in its exploration of settler colonialism's fragmentation of a place and its people. A member of the Ohlone-Costanoan Esselen Nation of California, Miranda's multiform memoir combines the history of Spanish missionization in California with her family history. Miranda begins the memoir by telling the story of

her parents, which then sets the tone for the remainder of her interpersonal reflection and reclamation of Indigenous home and ancestor. Miranda announces at the start of her introduction: "California is a story. California is many stories."[23] She then introduces her parents. Their relationship to place is also clearly defined:

> One of the stories California tells is this: In 1959, my mother met my father. Madgel Eleanor Yeoman encountered Alfred Edward Miranda. She was twenty-five years old, he was thirty-three. She had been born and raised in Beverly Hills; he had been born on the Tuolomne Rancheria (a California Indian reservation) and raised on the mean streets of Santa Monica. Her father ("Yeoman") was of English descent, her mother ("Gano" or "Genaux") of French ancestry and possibly Jewish. Al was Chumash and Esselen, his mother from the Santa Barbara/ Santa Ynez Mission Indians, his father from the Carmel Mission Indians. Midgie was fair-skinned, black-haired, and blue-eyed. Al was so dark his gang nickname was "Blackie." His skin was decorated with various homemade gang and Navy tattoos, along with the name of his first wife. Soon "Miche," his nickname for my mother, would join that collection.[24]

This intimate genealogy Miranda confides in her readers paints a picture of racial difference that, in the context of California and U.S. settler colonialism, can be understood through the place-based binary of *Indigenous* and *settler*. Though Miranda does not clearly state that her parents' contrasting identities constitute the primary cause of their constant clashing, the memories she shares about abuse, her difficult childhood, and her unresolved feelings of loss and alienation speak of irreconcilable difference or impasse. Of course, this analysis does not suppose or claim that interracial relationships in the U.S. inherently constitute a problem. But place matters, and place in Miranda's life story matters greatly. The history of California is a history of forced missionization, border violence, and the large-scale oppression and exploitation of Natives, Native women, and Native labor. Displacement in Miranda's tale takes us from personal conflict into deep-seeded historical trauma inflicted on land—a rupture that Miranda herself constantly experiences in the unshakable feeling of out-of-placeness and daily reminders of colonial erasure.

Miranda's story of California, which she periodizes through four timelines: 1776–1836 ("Missionization"), 1836–1900 ("Post-secularization"), 1900–1961 ("Reinvention"), and 1961–Present ("Home"), includes Native women assaulted by padres, Native men's forced servitude on the missions, and Native families made to migrate or break apart. Though her stories speak of immeasurable atrocity, Miranda explains how a true narrativization of place counters colonial omissions and how, for her, storytelling alleviates the pains of her formative years when people used to constantly tell her that she was "not a real Indian" and that "California Indians were extinct."[25] Land factors greatly in Miranda's assertions of colonial erasure and Native history. In telling the story of her ancestors who experienced rape, oppression, and removal, she illustrates how these were acts that colonizers used to justify a cultural uprooting. She explains how the U.S.-Mexico War resulted in many of her relatives being denied a belonging to Mexico and were subsequently relegated to California and the prejudiced regulations of U.S. blood quantum policy. Similarly, she explains how state-controlled allotment and tribal recognition made the Mirandas landless or, as she puts it: "Indians without land."[26] The Esselen People were miscounted in the 1905–1906 Kelsey census and, by 1925, announced extinct by American anthropologist Alfred Kroeber. But their physical existence succeeded in countering that erasure; their "bodies" become, as Miranda puts it, "bridges over which our descendants cross, spanning unimaginable landscapes of loss."[27] Bodies as a landscape in the context of Native landlessness underlie Miranda's storytelling, family history, and political intentions. Against settler colonial erasure, land as a story, and storied land as evidence, is able to survive and prove that an Indigenous tie to home can never be really severed. Miranda's story narrates Indigeneity as a form of belonging that fuses people with land, almost to the degree of interchangeability: bodies as topographic elements akin to bridges and landscapes that move in time and evolve but never fully disappear. Her storytelling tells an Indigenous fact: Natives

may become refugees, but they can never lose what made them first, what made them *originally*; they can never be without a homeland.

Barghouti's and Miranda's memoirs anchor themselves in real places and a memorialization of place that, even when fractured, remains grounded. Storytelling becomes the means to paint a literary cartography sensitive to the complex belongings of here and there, white and dark, Indigenous and exiled, and their confluences in settler colonial contexts. Both authors work through this web of seemingly contradictory associations, but, more importantly, they locate it within their lived displacement, all the while showing what story looks like when land is centered as the primary thing to tell.

Displacement as Cyclical Violence

In her analysis of what defines a diaspora or diasporic condition, Kim Butler explains how diasporic identification must involve a generational experience with displacement.[28] Diaspora as a concept and experience gives room to include and contemplate the intersectionality of Indigeneity and refugeehood in the narratives of those displaced by settler colonialism. The generational element in particular characterizes a great sum of Palestinian and American Indian writings. Mourid Barghouti's writings speak of his mother and son and their placement within the history of the Nakba, or "ongoing Nakba" as Palestinians have dubbed it.[29] Deborah Miranda's tale of California through a long family history reconstructed from "old government documents, BIA forms, field notes, the diaries of explorers and priests, the occasional writing or testimony from Indians, family stories, photographs, [and] newspaper articles" serves as archival genealogy, a history of generations in pain that equally testifies of survival.[30]

The list goes on. In Palestinian and American Indian fictions, many writers intentionally create plotlines that move through multiple episodes in a family's life as they move through multiple rupturing events and geographies of displacement. In *Mornings in Jenin* (2010), for instance, Palestinian American author Susan Abulhawa writes the story of a Palestinian family from Jenin that, like Miranda's periodization, highlights important events in the history of colonized Palestine, which include "El Nakba" (1948), "El Naksa" (1967), and "El Ghurba" (or Exile). The history of *Mornings in Jenin* begins in 1941, in the village of Ein Hod in Jenin during the harvest season. Abulhawa introduces readers to a Palestinian fallahi household, the family of Yehya (Abu Hasan), whose daily monotony is hardly bothered by the subtle procession of an imminent expulsion.[31] Abu Hasan's sons, Hasan and Darweesh, become the reason that the story, and the family line, splinters into two paths, two disjointed yet related narratives of displacement, as the events of 1948 set the brothers apart. The novel progresses forward, showing how Hasan's and Darweesh's descendants carry the weight of the Nakba and the choices they make along the way about where to go, what to do to survive, and how to find home.

Abulhawa's own experience as a 1967 refugee who moved to the U.S. shapes the novel's trajectory.[32] The novel's prelude centers Amal, a Palestinian American who travels back to Palestine during the Second Intifada (2000–2005), a time that culminated in atrocities against Palestinians across the West Bank and Gaza. In April 2002, Israeli forces invaded a refugee camp in Jenin and killed dozens of Palestinians in what became known as the Jenin Massacre. Amal is visiting Jenin during that event and is confronted by a soldier who presses the muzzle of his rifle on her forehead. As Amal stares at him, the "petitions of memory [pull] her back, and still back, to a home she had never known."[33] This is how the novel opens before it reverts into a sequence of memories: past joys in the harvest season, a Jewish-Arab friendship, weddings and grandchildren, expulsions and refugees amassed on foot, an Israeli kidnapping of Hasan's and Dalia's second child in the chaos, a hard life in the refugee camp, deaths and disappearances in the family, the kidnapped son raised by Jewish settlers, Amal—Hasan and Dalia's third and last child—living in an orphanage then moving to the U.S., the lost son found but now identifying as an Israeli named David, and Amal eventually reuniting with her brother and family. The novel ends with Amal's daughter, Sara, befriending David's son and living permanently in Palestine. It also ends with Amal getting killed by the Israeli soldier and her death being mourned by her extended family. The two events counteract one another—not in a manner that underplays the real events of the

massacre or Amal's death, but to give way for the new generation to appear in the midst of this cyclical violence and promise to survive beyond it, thereby actualizing Abulhawa's title for the novel's conclusion, "*Nihaya o Bidaya*," an end and a beginning.

Similar to *Mornings in Jenin*, Chicago-born Standing Rock Sioux writer Susan Power's *The Grass Dancer* (1994) is written as a multi-generational tale stretched across a history of colonial removals. Power casts as her characters four generations of a Native family inhabiting the Standing Rock Reservation between the years 1864 and 1982. Through distorted chronology and multiple narrators, the novel presents the struggles between closely related characters. These include Harley Wind Soldier, his grandmother Margaret Many Wounds, his mother Lydia and aunt Evelyn, and their ancestor Ghost Horse; and Anna Thunder, her ancestor Red Dress, her daughter Crystal, and her granddaughter Charlene. *The Grass Dancer*'s many narratives spring from the ancient story of Red Dress and Ghost Horse. The chapter titled "Snakes" takes the reader to the year 1864 in which Red Dress goes on a secret mission assigned by Elder spirits to Fort Laramie, leaving behind her beloved Ghost Horse. As Red Dress bonds with the colonial settlers at the fort using her diplomatic skills and good command of English discourse, she earns their trust enough to obey the Elders' orders to kill some of the fort's head officers. Red Dress is killed in the process, and she is unable to cross over to the world of spirits to eventually unite with Ghost Horse. And so, she remains in this world guiding and protecting her living relatives.

As a Standing Rock Sioux story, *The Grass Dancer* is about kinship and tribal belonging in the context of continuous violence. The reader is introduced to a web of familial and social relations. These include mother-daughter, father-son, sister-sister, grandmother-grandson, ancestor-descendant, husband-wife, and Indigenous–non-Indigenous relationships. The characters connect to one another with such definitive ties that the actions of one character reverberate with great effect throughout the narrative. Like Abulhawa, Power centers the family's contemporary descendant and their struggle for self-identification and homeliness. Harley Wind Soldier, the youngest descendant in his family, loses his father at a young age; his mother, Lydia, vows to be silent in mourning, only choosing to use her voice to sing in communal gatherings. At the start of the novel, Harley also loses his love interest, a grass dancer that captures his affection at an intertribal powwow. All the deaths described in the novel are outcomes, direct and indirect, of the historical and everyday ramifications of settler colonization across family and community, but Harley's grief isolates him and inflicts him with a myopia that deters his healing.

As the novel narrates multi-generational stories, readers begin to understand Harley's predicament and see the full extent of settler colonial violence and Indigenous survivance.[34] In the chapter about Margaret Many Wounds, for instance, readers get insight into the cyclicity of settler colonial violence at a historical intersection. The story is about Margaret dying, and her twin daughters, Lydia and Evie, making their mother's favorite soup as a young Charlie sits by her side. On her death bed, Margaret tells an imaginary audience the story of her two loves: Charles Bad Holy MacLeod, an Indian-boarding-school returnee who dies of tuberculosis; and Dr. Sei-ichi Sakuma, a Japanese American doctor she meets in an Internment camp in 1942. Lydia and Evelyn are a product of their affair and, metaphorically, the intersection of two violences, two displacements: one Asian American and one American Indian. Evie finds out who her real father is upon overhearing her mother's tale, and this newly discovered genealogy becomes the character's needed closure for the identity crisis she exhibits throughout the chapter. Margaret dies at the end of it, but Power tells us that she meets *everyone* in the afterlife: her ancestors and Charles await her at the council fire, past the Sea of Crises, the Sea of Serenity, the Sea of Fertility, and the Lake of Dreams, at the very end of Spirit Road. The novel itself concludes with a similarly profound revelation: Harley spends days in a "medicine hole," fasting and baring his mind to vision. Harley, too, is visited by his ancestors who tell him stories he did not know, of heroisms and breathable moments outside cycles of harm. In the *mise en scene* of repeated violence, the characters who know it well find one another, their bloodlines unsevered, and they bind themselves to a communal space even in their death. Harley emerges out of the hole with that knowledge, and his story moves forward—not necessarily happily, for the cycle continues and Red Dress remains stuck in the earthly world, but certainly more surely.

Cyclicity describes the nature of violence in the historical context of these novels. But cyclicity also connotes a rotation around an unyielding center. In the context of *Mornings in Jenin* and *The Grass Dancer*, readers can see how dispersion when bound to family becomes an elastic existence: a displaced Indigenous family may stray, but they can always rebound. Indigenous stories take the form of what Choctaw writer LeAnne Howe calls "a tribalography," a tribal creation story. "Native stories," explains Howe, "pull all the elements together of the storyteller's tribe, meaning the people, the land, multiple characters … and connect these in past, present, and future milieu.… [Tribalography] comes from the native propensity for bringing things together … and for symbiotically connecting one thing to another."[35] In *Mornings in Jenin* and *The Grass Dancer*, symbiosis is achieved through this act of gathering, which is often achieved through Indigenous and exiled women and their labors of homemaking, story-telling, and radical love. Abulhawa's and Power's cyclical narratives fall into what Palestinian scholar Lena Jayyusi describes as the "iterability, cumulativity, and presence" of Palestinian stories, or, more capaciously, stories written under unending colonial violence.[36] Though iterability, cumulativity, and presence describe the nature of that violence as well, the stories and memories created in response to it uphold the consistency of a ritual and refuse to be forgotten. *Mornings in Jenin* and *The Grass Dancer* prove that, despite cyclical displacement, their characters and who and where they come from will always be remembered.

Displacement as Epiphany, or *Indigenous Hope*

In the face of colonial erasure of all kinds, Palestinian and American Indian writers speak of hope. Describing the relation between memory, the power of the imagination, and finding the place that is home, Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish writes in *In the Presence of Absence* (2006), the last book that he wrote—a self-elegy and memoir in verse:

> Place does not become a trap as it becomes an image, for memory has enough wit to root place firmly in place and to arrange trees in harmony with the tune of desire. Not because place is in us even when we are not in it, but because hope, the power of the weak, is difficult to barter. There is enough well-being in hope to travel the long distance from the vast non-place to the narrow place. Time, which we feel only when it is too late, is the trap waiting for us at the edge of the place where we arrive late, unable to dance on the threshold separating beginning from end![37]

Darwish's fear of running out of time in the process of getting home is in line with Sanbar's and Said's claims about the strain of chronology in the context of the Nakba and, I would add, colonial expulsions more generally. Place, however, is open for a fluid imagination that charters a way for Palestinians to find home: a collective hope that Darwish's apparent anxiety about time—which drives the text as a self-elegy—cannot deny.

Cherokee writer and critic Daniel Heath Justice speaks of hope, as well, in his analysis of common features in Indigenous writings from North America. In *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, he writes, "Our mindful stories, in all their forms and functions—and whether vocalized, embodied, or inscribed— honour the sacrifices of those who came before us … affirm Indigenous presence … [and give] us hope that we'll have a future, too."[38] For Justice, the hope-giving skills of Native authors grow when the self meets others, human and otherwise; when they commit to service and kinship.[39] Asserting the necessity of learning from and committing to one's environment, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Mississauga Nishnaabeg) writes about "Indigenous intelligence" to describe Anishinaabe ways of forming communal knowledge through the process of witnessing and absorbing how land functions.[40] Palestinian writer Ghassan Kanafani shares a similar insight in his investigation of what he calls "popular intelligence," a form of Indigenous intelligence evident in Palestinian fallahi oral poetry created in the context of battling colonial forces to document a village's fight and steadfastness.[41] "Intelligence" for

both Simpson and Kanafani describes a creative thinking that moves the colonized beyond invisibility and despair and into the place of resistance, national storytelling, and communal responsibility. In that sense, this type of intelligence is of the kind that makes better humans.

Epiphany, as I use it, explains the process of witnessing colonial violence and developing a consciousness that is hyperaware of place and displacement as a violence that warrants action. Epiphany describes revelations that lead to movement: a move toward place and a move to liberate it. The authors discussed in this chapter attest to the complexity of place-based belonging and the need to make intentional moves toward hope and resistance—a resistance to being an eternal refugee, a resistance to being colonized and erased, and a resistance until return. Indigenous epiphanies intrinsically tie to place as they manufacture hope. In the stories discussed here, a cathartic process takes place when characters align themselves to a grounded sense of home in the face of cyclical violence. Abulhawa's Amal returns to Jenin; Power's Harley is returned by his family—living and dead—to who he is and why his existence matters; Barghouti's exile is softened by his capacity to narrate Palestine as an eternal home regardless of imposed distance and effacement; and Miranda concludes her journey of reconstructing her family history with the assertion that "who we are is where we are from. Where we are from is who we are."[42] These authors' narrativization of their home and people is necessary for surviving the *here* and *there* of settler colonial violence. It is a practice that disrupts the boundary between *refugee* and *Indigenous* to allow those who are both to tell the stories they want to tell, and to be understood in the ways they intend. Here, Indigeneity does not differentiate an identity politic; rather, it reminds readers that place matters in stories of colonial displacement. The hope to reinstate refugees to their homelands is equally significant to fully understand why displaced authors write. Indigenous hope, in that sense, enacts intelligent creations: the creation of life-affirming narratives, of plotlines that gather those dispersed, and of places and people unbounded by violence—all done with a futuristic intention, an actionable desire, to make refugees feel home again. Barghouti, Miranda, Abulhawa, and Power move with that intention; the epiphanies they contrive in their texts and for their readers, especially those also displaced, teach that colonization can never truly colonize home; hope will house them always.

Notes

1 Displacement does not have to always be colonial, but this chapter focuses on this particular kind of it. The definition offered here includes both internal and external displacements, i.e., displacements within and outside the geopolitical borders of one's homeland.
2 A lengthier definition of settler colonialism can be found in Maya Mikdashi's introduction to a special issue of *JADMAG* titled "Settler Colonialism," published in the Winter of 2017.
3 Intersectionality as a term that encompasses social duality was theorized by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in response to the U.S. law's lack of intersectional approach in matters of race and gender, which in Crenshaw's perspective has rendered women of color invisible. See Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins."
4 Ngai, *Impossible Subjects.*
5 Choctaw writer LeAnne Howe uses the term *national creation story* to describe a nationalist tendency to create stories that encompass and justify a nation-in-the-making (this should be understood separately from tribal creation stories). See Howe, "The Story of America: A Tribalography."
6 O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting.*
7 O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting,* xii–xiii; xxii.
8 O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting,* xi–xiii.
9 Awad, "The Conditions of the Palestinian People."
10 The term originally comes from Pappé, *Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine.* Also see Rashed, Short, and Docker, "Nakba Memoricide"; and Masalha, "Settler-Colonialism, Memoricide and Indigenous Toponymic Memory."
11 Sanbar, "Out of Place, Out of Time," 90.
12 Said, *Reflections on Exile,* 46.
13 Said, *Reflections on Exile,* 47.
14 Sanbar, "Out of Place, Out of Time," 90.
15 Said, *Reflections on exile,* 175.
16 Goeman, *Mark My Words,* 26.
17 Barghouti, *I Was Born There,* 10.

18 I am here referencing the erasure of Palestine in digital space. Users of Google Maps, for instance, upon searching for major Palestinian places may be able to find them but "Palestine" itself is not termed.
19 Barghouti, *I Was Born There,* 39.
20 Barghouti, *I Was Born There,* 39.
21 Barghouti, *I Was Born There,* 79–80.
22 Barghouti, *I Was Born There,* 80.
23 Miranda, *Bad Indians,* xi.
24 Miranda, *Bad Indians,* xi–xii.
25 Miranda, *Bad Indians,* xiv.
26 Miranda, *Bad Indians,* 68.
27 Miranda, *Bad Indians,* 74.
28 Butler, "Defining Diaspora, Redefining a Discourse," 192.
29 See Khoury, "Al-Nakba Al-Mustamirra"; and Khoury, "Rethinking the Nakba."
30 Miranda, *Bad Indians*, xx.
31 In Arabic, *fallahi* means rural, and it is used in Palestinian culture to describe those whose family lines and traditions originate from village communities.
32 *1967 refugee* describes Palestinians who were displaced because of the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, what Palestinians call *Al-Naksa*, the Relapse, a repeated Nakba.
33 Abulhawa, *Mornings in Jenin,* xiii.
34 *Survivance*, as theorized by Chippewa writer and critic Gerald Vizenor, describes Indigenous survival achieved through Indigenous storytelling and creative cultural acts. See Vizenor, *Manifest Manners.*
35 Howe, "The Story of America," 42.
36 Jayyusi, "Iterability, Cumulativity, and Presence."
37 Darwish, *In the Presence of Absence*, 19.
38 Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter,* xix.
39 Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, 82.
40 Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 172.
41 Kanafani, *Adab al-Muqawama.*
42 Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 194, 208.

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PART IX

Spatiality and Cartographies

31

ALTERNATIVE SPATIAL IMAGINARIES

Refugees' Counter-Narratives of Settlement and Mobility in Patras

Marco Mogiani

"Greece is a big prison of the European Union/One day the chains will be cut/and the bells of freedom will ring even in the Vatican Church./The dangers will end in the Mediterranean salt/and the new morning will rise in the western cities./But the important question is: will racism end?" Thus recited a graffiti on the wall of a big, empty room in the abandoned textile complex of Peiraiki–Patraiki (Figure 31.1), which a group of Sudanese refugees was squatting in as they attempted to surreptitiously reach the nearby port of Patras, Greece in 2015. The Sudanese refugee who was guiding me around on that warm June evening, during the fieldwork I was conducting,[1] seemed particularly keen on showing me not only those hidden areas of the huge factory that, despite my regular visits, I could have never discovered on my own, but also the multiple ways in which refugees themselves had turned those empty spaces into living places through everyday practices, activities, and even artistic productions.

All of these engagements—together with other, sometimes less perceptible acts, strategies, and means that refugees have produced and enacted in their everyday efforts to survive and escape—constitute what I call refugees' counter-narratives of settlement and mobility. While European and national dispositions on asylum have constructed a dominant narrative that, on the one hand, victimizes refugees to control their bodies and, on the other, criminalizes failed asylum seekers to exploit their living labor,[2] refugees in Patras, I argue, have elaborated their own counter-narratives of settlement and mobility through the spatial and mental re-appropriation of everyday spaces. In so doing, they have claimed their "right to space, whilst simultaneously enacting a right to 'not-settle,' a *right to mobility*."[3] Far from simply reproducing the narrative of victimization/criminalization, such counter-narratives, the chapter argues, continuously intertwine with, evade, and challenge the dominant ones, through practices of negotiation, contestation, and resistance that allow refugees to enact their real or imagined freedom of settlement and movement.

This chapter will investigate two interrelated moments of these counter-narratives. First, it will look at the general process of "building the commons"[4] as a way for refugees to construct their livelihood and escape the dominant attempts to contain them through reception and detention centers. Through the occupation of empty buildings, the reorganization of their everyday life, and the practices of care and sharing, refugees in Patras escaped and sometimes openly challenged the complex assemblage of humanitarian and securitarian measures designed to delimit their mobility.[5] Second, the chapter will examine the process of knowledge production—in particular, the adoption of bodily tactics of invisibility and elusiveness, the invention of their own language, and the visual production of writings and graffiti—as a way for refugees to retain agency over their bodies, grasp its immediate surroundings, and open up alternative ways to continue, in their minds or through their deeds, their journey toward another European country.

Figure 31.1 The poem written by some refugees in one of the abandoned factories.
Source: Picture by the author, 14/06/2015.

Through these corporeal, mental, and visual practices, refugees have imagined and disclosed alternative narratives of borderless mobility, challenging the dominant victimization/criminalization narrative that often entraps their desires and aspirations. Despite the constraints of the European border regime, this chapter ultimately argues, these combined moments bring to light alternative imaginaries and practices through which refugees conceive, represent, and re-appropriate the space surrounding them, redrawing and enacting their own counter-narratives of settlement and mobility.

Before proceeding, however, two caveats are in order. While this chapter takes into consideration the narratives of "refugees," the composition of the people I met in Patras was actually variegated. While some had indeed applied for asylum and were awaiting a decision, others had deliberately evaded the asylum process, hoping to leave Greece without leaving traces to apply for asylum elsewhere. The decision to claim asylum is, at the same time, highly subjective and dependent on the European asylum policies themselves. The latter have indeed increasingly restricted the legal possibilities to apply for asylum and created uneven asylum conditions across the European territory—a situation that many asylum seekers knew pretty well, influencing their decision to continue their journey. With this in mind, I use the word "refugee" as a general term to indicate any person who escaped their own country in search for a better and safer life somewhere else. In so doing, I attempt to achieve a twofold purpose. First, I aim to void the term "refugee" of any legal meaning and to reject the official classifications and divisions operated by institutions and international organizations. Second, and no less important, I intend to do justice to the people I met in Patras, who would often call themselves refugees, even when they were not officially recognized as such.

The second caveat concerns the term "narrative." Ontologically, I use a more extensive definition of narrative, which considers not only the mere production of written texts, stories, acts, or artistic forms—as is the case of the graffiti—but also, more broadly, the production of knowledge

and imaginaries of settlement and mobility. In the case of refugees' counter-narratives, therefore, the writing of graffiti is only *one* among many ways through which such narratives are expressed, together with the organization of their daily activities in the factories, the mental mapping of the myriad of streets and alleys surrounding them, the enhanced knowledge of the multiplicity of ways to cross the fences and enter the port area, and a more impalpable control over their own bodies and language. These narratives, intimately generated from the contingency of everyday life, are developed in refugees' minds, imparted to newcomers and other refugees, and occasionally shared with the curious researcher, who incessantly attempts to reconnect the different threads of this narrative. Through these variegated and ever-changing counter-narratives, I argue, refugees have elaborated and adapted their own living conditions in the city and devised subversive strategies for cross-border mobility.

Epistemologically, this conception and practice of counter-narratives is locational, as it is inherently grounded in the time- and place-specific social and economic conditions of the people that develop it;[6] relational, as it is dialectically connected to other, superimposed narratives;[7] performative, as it involves more or less visible, direct, and concrete actions;[8] and in perpetual motion, as it continuously changes as the individual and social conditions change.[9] In this respect, the counter-narrative is not meant to construct universal truth claims nor to replace grand theories.[10] Rather, it is only through the dialectical, animated, and sometimes conflictual relationship with other narratives that local stories might come to life and acquire meaning. Refugees' counter-narratives can therefore only be discussed in relation to the dominant European narratives of settlement and mobility that have been developed to regulate refugees' movements, as well as to the more specific social and economic conditions in Greece and Patras and their development over the past decades. It is to the analysis of such dominant narratives that I now turn.

Refugees' Settlements in Patras

The first refugees appeared in Patras in the early 1990s, in a period of great transformations at the European, national, and local levels. At the European level, the process of European integration was proceeding at a fast pace, in the attempt to connect and homogenize an increasingly wider common market. This process, however, could not have taken place without the reconfiguration of European borders and the regulation of the mobilities traversing them. The Schengen system[11] and the Dublin Convention represent two milestones in this respect: while the former relocated border controls outside, across, and within the European space, restricting and criminalizing the presence and circulation of third-country nationals,[12] the latter attempted to harmonize asylum policies, establishing common minimum standards that de facto created different asylum systems and conditions across Europe.[13] In a context of increasing border securitization and curtailment of legal migratory channels, these dispositions have entrapped incoming migrants within a victimization/criminalization framework.[14] When their asylum claim is accepted, refugees are included in the humanitarian infrastructure of assistance and integration, often deprived of their agency and autonomy. When their claim is rejected, or when they deliberately refuse to undergo the asylum procedure, failed asylum seekers and migrants suddenly turn into unauthorized subjects, who are often treated as social threats and asked to leave the country—unless they join the informal labor market in a position of subordination and exploitation.

At the national level, after two decades of sustained emigration, Greece started to attract migration flows from the Balkans and the Middle East during the 1980s, which caught the country utterly unprepared. In that period, the first migration and asylum policies saw the light, within a framework that however conceived migrants and refugees either as an exploitable labor force or as a threat to social security.[15] The development of the Greek asylum system is paradigmatic in the way it has regulated the settlement and mobility of asylum seekers within a victimization/criminalization framework that operated in accordance with ever-changing labor market needs.[16] The old asylum system, managed by the Hellenic Police, was infamously notorious for its low recognition of status rates, which would compel potential asylum seekers either to stay in the country invisibly and join the ranks of

an exploitable workforce, or to move to other European countries without leaving traces. The new Asylum Service, in force since June 2013 under the framework of the Common European Asylum System, has brought a significant increase in the recognition rates of asylum or subsidiary protection and a staggering reduction in response times. Yet, it remains largely underfunded and understaffed, exacerbating the living conditions of potential asylum seekers and refugees in a country hit by a fierce socio-economic crisis.

At the local level, the city of Patras was undergoing significant changes throughout this period. The process of de-industrialization during the 1980s led to the closure of several factories in the city and in the whole region, making way for a tertiarization of the economy. Despite the creation of certain centers of excellence in the educational and health sectors, this process further fragmented working conditions and enlarged the informal economy. During the same period, the city's port was developing as a strong link between the Middle East, Italy, and the rest of Europe. The Balkan Wars and the disconnection of the small port of Igoumenitsa in northern Greece from the rest of the country led to a significant increase in transit traffic through the port of Patras. The environmental and logistical problems connected to this—the port was indeed located in the city center—prompted the expansion of the port, which was constructed just in front of the abandoned factories in the southern periphery of the city.

It is in this context that the first refugees appeared in Patras. Trapped in a country with scarce possibilities to apply for and obtain asylum, refugees arrived in Patras determined to escape through its port, looking for more secure and stable asylum conditions in other European countries. Since the early 1990s, a few hundred Kurdish refugees, fleeing from the social and political instabilities in south–eastern Turkey, have started to occupy abandoned buildings and depots around the old port. At the beginning of the 2000s, about 500 Kurds were estimated to live around the port area and another 1,500 in the rest of the city, although many tended to avoid the formal registration procedures.[17] Processes of gentrification, however, were constantly threatening their precarious livelihood: following eviction from the old fish market, subject to renovation from the municipality, refugees recreated another settlement in a wealthy residential area, close to the northern entrance of the port and the marina.[18]

By that time, however, the number and composition of refugees had changed significantly. With the start of the war in Afghanistan in 2001, the first Afghan refugees appeared in the city, settling in the camp around the port area. The peculiar position of the settlement attracted widespread opposition: local authorities and nearby residents were worried about potential security concerns; urban developers were resolute to re-develop the area in view of the upcoming 2004 Olympics and the celebrations for the 2006 European Capital of Culture; and real estate agencies were preoccupied by the potential reduction in the prices of properties and rents.[19] Yet, the camp continued to grow: between 2007 and 2008, around 200 tents and sheds could host about 1,500 occupants, while a mosque, some small shops, and a playground made it resemble a small village. As the camp grew, so did tensions with citizens and local authorities. Only the destruction of the camp conducted by the police on an early July morning in 2009 put these tensions—at least temporarily—to rest.

The destruction of the camp necessarily reshaped refugees' desires and practices of settlement and mobility. Those who had managed to abandon the camp before the raid or to avoid arrest either scattered into the city or attempted to leave the country.[20] Two years later, with the inauguration of the new port in the southern periphery of the city, the few hundred refugees scattered in the city occupied the remains of the industrial area just in front of it, dividing along national and ethnic lines. In 2015, at the time of the fieldwork, about 50 Sudanese refugees—arrived in Greece in the late 2000s—40 Tajik Afghans and 60 Hazara Afghans were squatting in the former textile complex of Peiraiki–Patriki, the paper mills Ladopoulos, and the wood factory AVEX, respectively. National and ethnic divisions seemed subverted however in the dilapidated premises of VESO B, where refugees from different backgrounds would gather for conversations or prayers. From these abandoned factories—turned into precarious and liminal living places—refugees have projected, through their mental, corporeal, and visual counter-narratives, their longstanding desire to continue their journey to other European countries where they could be finally granted asylum.

The Occupation of the Factories

The first step in the elaboration of refugees' counter-narratives of settlement and mobility is constituted by the organization of everyday life, from the re-appropriation and re-adaptation of the abandoned factories to the elaboration of daily activities and survival strategies. This "building of the commons,"[21] which is intimately related to, and grounded in, the immediate social reproduction, does not merely constitute the overarching framework within which refugees' counter-narratives develop but, I argue, is part and parcel of such counter-narratives themselves. To put it differently, if narratives are usually conceived as a way to express, represent, and give literary or artistic form to our everyday life, here I propose an ontological overturning, conceiving everyday life as a form of narrative itself. If, following Charles Taylor,[22] "we must inescapably understand our lives in narrative form," this kind of narrative should include not only artistic or literary representations of everyday life but also the multiplicity of visible and invisible ways through which everyday life itself is, metaphorically speaking, written and enacted. The "building of the commons" is, therefore, an interesting place to start the analysis of refugees' counter-narratives of settlement and mobility in Patras.

Despite their status of "permanent temporariness,"[23] refugees have occupied the empty spaces of the factories and turned them into their own living place, providing them with renovated, affective meanings. A small entrance with chairs and an improvised kitchen replaced the former administrative offices in Peiraiki-Patraiki, while a flight of stairs led to the arranged dormitories. Similarly, in one of the warehouses, a small "living room" was created with a few chairs and tables, allowing refugees to chat, drink some tea, or play chess. In front of it, some clothes hung from a couple of lines, while a trolley lay against the wall, ready to carry the heavy water tanks around the factory (see Figure 31.2). In this process of transformation of precarious and unfamiliar spaces into socialized places, which

Figure 31.2 The re-appropriation of abandoned spaces through everyday use.
Source: Picture by the author, 15/03/2015.

Laura Hammond[24] calls "emplacement," not only are groups formed and forged but also social and cultural practices are reproduced to make sense of that place. Separated from the living room, a small carpet allows refugees to have some privacy to execute their daily prayers. Just behind the "living room," a small room has been turned into a kitchen, equipped with a camp stove powered by a gas cylinder. Other offices located on the ground and first floors have become sleeping areas.

This "building of the commons"—which occurs in similar ways in the other factories—is never fixed or predetermined, but always involves "strategies of reproduction within the broader contingency of social reproduction, i.e. within conditions of need."[25] If the factories represent a necessary dwelling solution for dozens of refugees attracted by the possibility of living on a tight budget and leaving the country in a relatively independent manner, it is the organization of everyday activities that create the commons, allowing commoners to "decide for themselves the norms, values and measures of things."[26] This is itself a building of a life, a narrative.

Far from establishing national or ethnic demarcations, the division into groups allows a better management and employment of the few resources available, enables the inclusion of newcomers, and facilitates the formation of networks of mutual aid and assistance.[27] Within the groups, every person participates in the provision of food and in the preparation of meals according to a rotational basis. A participant explains:

> Five, ten, or fifteen people together put money and buy some food. We do that in groups, and shop together, because if you want to buy everyday food, you cannot get that much every time. You have to be together: you put €5 each, go to the supermarket, and buy food and everything you need. It's cheaper.[28]

By definition, commons necessitate protection from the external world, while maintaining a certain degree of openness toward newcomers and users.[29] Unlike the dominant narrative that tends to entrap refugees within an inescapable dimension of victimhood and/or culpability, the initiation of newcomers confers them, concurrently, responsibility inside the group and autonomy from it. Stretching beyond local and national levels, kin and social networks constitute powerful organizing forces to establish connections between people well before coming to Patras and to determine the group to which every newcomer is assigned once they arrive. Such connections are further reinforced through word-of-mouth and digital networks of knowledge that Trimiklionitis, Parsanoglou, and Tsianos call "mobile commons."[30] After some time in Athens, a Sudanese refugee received information that in Patras, people attempted to reach Italy by hiding in ferryboats, and decided to go there.[31] "When I was in Athens, every person was speaking about that [Patras]," recounted another Afghan refugee.[32] Once at the factory, newcomers are initiated to the group's mechanisms and procedures. For the first three days, they usually do not participate in the purchase of food or in the preparation of meals; rather, they learn about the organization of the group, the best places to enter the port area, and the most efficient techniques to sneak underneath lorries. Only afterward can they join the group life and collaborate in the daily expenses.

The building of the commons, however, is not simply related to the organization of everyday life but entails also the development of "a world of knowledge, of information, of tricks for survival, of mutual care, of social relations, of services exchange, of solidarity and sociability that can be shared, used and … expand[ed]."[33] During this process, "[v]alues practices, such as loyalty to friends, conviviality, mutual aid, care, and even struggles, are developed,"[34] transforming the lifeless spaces of the factories into lively places that evade dominant humanitarian/securitization narratives[35] and bring into being alternative imaginaries of care and affect. Such practices are performed within and across different groups, ensuring that no one is left behind. Following a failed attempt to sneak under a lorry that left him injured, for example, a Sudanese refugee was carefully looked after by other group members, who would regularly pay him a visit to bring him some food or to chat with him. Given the peripheral position of the factories, refugees often have to rely on their own means and capabilities for their survival, even in problematic situations. The presence of someone with medical skills, for instance, not only

allows refugees to avoid long excursions to the city center, where some medical NGOs are located, but reinforces the spirit of solidarity within the group. During an informal conversation, a Yemenite refugee mentioned the example of a fellow companion who would always look after sick people, taking care of their wounds or problems.[36] Such acts of self-protection enlarge the boundaries of solidarity and mutual support, eschewing the dominant mechanisms of carceral or medical confinement, while providing refugees with renovated agency and security.[37]

The Re-Appropriation of Streets, Vehicles, and Routes

The organization of everyday life through the building of the commons is only one of the multiple aspects that constitute refugee counter-narratives in Patras. Another, interrelated aspect involves the imagination and practice of escape and mobility. In Patras, the occupation of the abandoned buildings has proceeded pari passu with the spatial and mental re-appropriation of the maze of passages, alleys, and shortcuts surrounding the factories, often hidden from sight or inaccessible to vehicles. The whole port area, therefore, has become "a canvas" that those who struggle "to find a place in the city and a place in the world"[38] continuously attempt to memorize, draft, and reshape to their own needs. The extensive knowledge of the streets has allowed refugees, on the one hand, to escape police chases or intrusions, and, on the other, to elaborate, more or less successfully, tactics to access the port area. When the police unexpectedly penetrate the settlements, staying concealed within the premises or sneaking off through breaches and back passages can be of vital importance to avoid confrontations or capture.[39] Similarly, during the daily cat-and-mouse chases between police hunters and migrant preys,[40] taking refuge inside the factories or reaching the adjacent railway line, where police cars cannot go, could enable refugees to avoid document checks and potential arrest.[41]

Yet, these "narratives of dislocation"[42] are not always linear and successful, but can be temporally delayed or fractured and spatially diverted or arrested. Police raids inside the factories continuously alternate with regular stop-and-search operations in the streets and hide-and-seek pursuits during busy boarding times, complicating the possibilities for refugees to cross the border. Far from arresting or detaining people, police and private security forces seem to push them away from the port area, thus regulating their unruly mobilities and delaying their chances to reach other destinations. For example, despite having managed to cross the check-in area hidden under a lorry, a Sudanese refugee was discovered during the pre-embarkation security controls and pushed away from the port area: "No chance today; tomorrow it will be better, inshallah."[43]

Another important aspect of refugees' counter-narratives of mobility involves the profound knowledge of how to concretely access such transport networks. As the legal channels to reach the European territory have been progressively curbed, potential asylum seekers have been forced either to open up alternative and dangerous routes or to surreptitiously infiltrate the "cramped spaces"[44] of ships and lorries, unfit for corporeal transportation. Unlike the safe mobility of "legitimated passengers," openly visible and yet protected from the violence of speed,[45] the mobility of refugees is necessarily made invisible and concealed in the "vehicular crypts,"[46] in the attempt to evade the multiplicity of border controls that protect and regulate logistical networks. Invisibility, however, does not simply mean the clandestine occupation of such empty spaces, but it also entails a more profound and complicated process of physical and mental preparation of the body to make it fit for the dangerous journey. The choice of clothes certainly represents a first, important step to hide the body: in the darkness of the hidden crypts and interstices inside lorries, black or greasy clothes often escape the initial, quick glance of police officers and lorry drivers.[47] During an informal conversation with a group of refugees heading toward the port area, a Sudanese refugee once explained to me why they were all dressed in black. Despite the high temperatures of a sunny day at the beginning of June, the camouflage would allow them not only to cover up the traces of dirt resulting from hiding inside those filthy spaces, but also, and most importantly, to remain invisible. However, he concluded, once he had reached Italy, he would have immediately removed those dirty clothes and been "clean and shining" again.[48]

However, the choice of clothes might not be enough. During the everyday performance of border crossing, the body needs to conceal or remove its uncertainties, be trained for potential chases from the police, or be flexible enough to sneak under lorries.[49] In this respect, biological time and physical characteristics might generate differentiated mobility patterns. While younger and healthier bodies are usually more adept for the daily cross-border attempts, as well as more legally protected in case of arrest, elderly, corpulent, or disabled bodies are often disadvantaged, and their actual chances to migrate are delayed or hindered. During one of my regular visits to the Ladopoulos factory, a group of refugees made me guess how old they were, hoping to look younger than their real age in order to deceive police controls and gain access to more rights.[50] In contrast, the inability to participate in the daily attempts to cross the border—either because of their age or due to temporary injuries—might protract the presence of asylum seekers in the country, potentially exacerbating their legal status as well as the possibility to support their family back in their home country.

Reimagining Settlement and Mobility through Language and Graffiti

Just as any attempt to produce and shape space for capitalist development cannot take place without a previous mental and visual elaboration from spatial planners and architects,[51] so too refugees' processes of re-appropriation of space cannot take place without a parallel process of mental imagination of alternative strategies of settlement and mobility. In other words, the everyday activities that refugees perform seem to be not just the mere reproduction of survival strategies of accommodation and flight, but rather the careful implementation of mental imaginaries that first develop in their minds and then materialize through the elaboration of their own language and in the visual production of writings and graffiti.

As Foucault reminds us, language allows us to "establish … the empirical orders with which [we] will be dealing and within which [we] will be at home."[52] Through language and senses, every person can perceive and gain a sense of control over their surroundings. As an Afghan refugee once told me, "We don't speak English, Farsi or Greek, but only the language of how to go under a truck."[53] This particular language makes use of some terms which refugees soon become familiar with once they arrive in Greece. The term "χαρτιά" (pronounced "khartiá" and translated as "documents"), which informally defines the one-month paper released soon after the irregular entry into the country to give migrants the possibility to ask for asylum, immediately enters the everyday vocabulary, exemplifying its concrete importance in their daily life. Similarly, the expression "Φύγε, μαλάκα!" (pronounced "Phíye, maláka" and translated as "Piss off, asshole!"), often used by public and private security forces at work in the port area and by lorry drivers to keep infiltrators away, becomes common among refugees themselves either to mimic police forces or to mock each other.[54]

However, refugees also form and articulate their own language from the materiality of their everyday life, attributing a particular name to the objects surrounding them and to the activities they perform. Through the creation, re-signification, or subversion of specific terms, "language becomes a *carrier of* or a *means to expressing* subjectivity, agency and identity in exilic settings."[55] The activity of sneaking under a lorry is known among some groups as "doing the dingle," from the name they give to the axle of the lorry from which they hang, while others term it "the work"[56] or, in other cases, "the game,"[57] epitomizing its occupational or recreational character, respectively. By the same token, the internal fence of the port, surrounding the embarkation area and concretely establishing different "markers of sovereign jurisdictions"[58] among the relative police forces, is depicted by some as the "fire line," beyond which a different border regime is activated, and violence is intensified. In the reconstruction of a Sudanese refugee, inside the "fire line" security measures are reinforced, and police can employ force or hold people in custody, while outside of it, the police usually just push people away from the port area.[59]

Similarly, writings and graffiti do not merely symbolize a recreational pursuit nor an embodiment of the inhuman conditions in which refugees are forced to live, but also a way to express their resentment against the European border regime or their hopes to leave the country, opening up a myriad of imaginary spaces and networks that can materialize at any time.[60] The journey, in this respect, is often

depicted as a liberation, the termination of the despicable conditions in Patras and in Greece more generally, and the obtainment of the long-awaited emancipation. "Suffer, but don't give up, because the freedom will be priceless," proclaimed another graffiti in Peiraiki-Patraiki.[61] The idea of the journey and the longing for leaving Greece is a recurrent theme in both writings and drawings, sometimes intertwined with reminiscences from their country of origin. In another building at the entrance of Peiraiki-Patraiki, the portrait of a popular Sudanese musician, Mostafa Sid Ahmed, is depicted on the wall, and the lines of one of his songs next to it thus recite: "We are with birds, and birds don't know borders, because they have neither maps nor passports."[62]

The location of graffiti—enclosed within the factories' walls—prevents a widespread socio-spatial visibility, but their politically contentious nature, with their continuous references to the journey toward other parts of Europe, clearly emerges.[63] Sketches of ships and lorries are recurrent in many drawings around the factories, often accompanied by stick figures in their attempt to sneak under their bellies. Such illustrations are sometimes filled with rituals and traditional practices, disclosing refugees' ambitions to breach tangible passages along the Adriatic route. Drawings of lorries are sometimes surrounded by the names and dates of those who actually managed to cross the border, or had attempted to, as a way to exorcize the life-threatening journey and instill courage among future travelers. During one of my first visits to Peiraiki-Patraiki, at some point, a Saudi Arabian refugee stood up from the circle of fellows where he was having a conversation, went to the makeshift fireside, and took a firebrand. When he came back, he wrote his name on the top of the lorry already drawn on the wall, followed by an arrow and the destination: Italia. Today, it was his chance to arrive to Italy, "inshallah."[64] In another case, the lorry—accompanied by the word "dingle" underneath—is depicted as a means of transport among the many that refugees have used, or will have to use, in order to reach Italy.[65] The lorry becomes part of a vaster network chain, tracing a hypothetical journey through a borderless map, with a few arrows indicating the desired direction to Italy.

Conclusion

Either through ideal representations conveying their desire to escape or through the materiality of everyday practices, refugees in Patras have forged their own counter-narratives of settlement and mobility. Emerging from the materiality of their everyday life, such counter-narratives have not only made sense of refugees' place and of "their social being in the world,"[66] but they have also negotiated and challenged the dominant narratives of victimization/criminalization. Despite the continuous limitations imposed on their freedom of settlement and mobility, refugees have built, shaped, and performed their own counter-narratives, imagining or concretely enacting their ideas of dwelling and escape, making Patras a secondary yet important transit port for those refugees attracted by the possibility of continuing their journey to other European countries. Refugees in Patras, in fact, are not "here to stay;"[67] yet, rather than submitting to the severe dispositions of the Common European Asylum System, they have claimed their simultaneous right to settle and to cross the border, challenging or evading the security mechanisms imposed and implemented from above. The occupation of urban spaces and the daily infiltrations into the port, however, are not simply confined to the periphery of the city, but have reverberations at the national and European levels, tacitly contesting a whole series of legal barriers that are actually in place to inhibit refugees' access to the European space. Within the framework of the European border regime, the daily struggles of refugees in Patras transcend the local scale, establishing and developing a close-knit pattern of interrelations and articulations that connects to other struggles across the European continent.

Notes

1 The fieldwork was conducted between January and September 2015. During this period, I met dozens of refugees (mainly from Afghanistan and Sudan), carried out 18 semi-structured and 20 informal interviews, and collected a great deal of information and stories through everyday encounters and conversations. Most of the

interviews were conducted in English, and only a few of them required the assistance of other refugees for the translation from Farsi or Arabic.

2 Squire, "Unauthorised Migration beyond Structure/Agency?," 254–72.
3 Hole, "How Does the Movement of Migration Journey through the European Border Regime?," 51, her emphasis.
4 De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*.
5 Walters, "Foucault and Frontiers," 138–64.
6 Anthias, "Where Do I Belong?," 491–514.
7 Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity," 605–49.
8 Berns, "Performativity," 370–83.
9 Schulenberg, *Marxism, Pragmatism, and Postmetaphysics*.
10 Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*.
11 Initially conceived as an external multilateral agreement, the Schengen system became part of the European *acquis communautaire* with the signing of the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1997. Since then, all member and candidate countries have to enforce its provisions, harmonizing their visa policies and strengthening their external borders.
12 Walters, "Mapping Schengenland," 561–80.
13 Mouzourakis, "'We Need to Talk about Dublin.'"
14 Squire, "Unauthorised Migration beyond Structure/Agency?"
15 Maroukis, "Irregular Migration in Greece," 93–113; Cheliotis, "Punitive Inclusion," 78–99.
16 Mezzadra and Neilson, "Between Inclusion and Exclusion," 58–75.
17 Papadopoulou, "'Give Us Asylum and Help Us Leave the Country!,'" 346–61; Spinthourakis and Antonopoulou, "'This Is Not My Country,'" 75–82.
18 Hole, "How Does the Movement of Migration Journey through the European Border Regime?"
19 Mantanika, "Displacement and the Visibility of the Invisibles"; Lafazani, "A Border within a Border," 1–13.
20 Hole, "How Does the Movement of Migration Journey through the European Border Regime?"; Lafazani, "A Border within a Border."
21 De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*.
22 Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 51.
23 Bailey et al., "(Re)Producing Salvadoran Transnational Geographies," 125–44.
24 Hammond, *This Place Will Become Home*.
25 Hansen and Zechner, "Intersecting Mobilities," 122.
26 De Angelis, "The Production of Commons and the 'Explosion' of the Middle Class," 955.
27 See Tilly, "Social Boundary Mechanisms."
28 Semi-structured interview with M. T., Afghanistan, 03/05/2015.
29 De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*.
30 Trimikliniotis, Parsanoglou, and Tsianos, *Mobile Commons, Migrant Digitalities and the Right to the City*.
31 Semi-structured interview with T. O., Sudan, 06/06/2015.
32 Semi-structured interview with A., Afghanistan, 01/06/2015.
33 Papadopoulos and Tsianos, "After Citizenship," 190.
34 De Angelis, *Omnia Sunt Communia*, 12.
35 See Walters, "Foucault and Frontiers."
36 Informal conversation with A., Yemen, 01/06/2015.
37 Innes, "In Search of Security," 263–83.
38 As cited in Trimikliniotis, Parsanoglou, and Tsianos, *Mobile Commons, Migrant Digitalities and the Right to the City*, 4.
39 Informal conversations with M. T, Afghanistan, 02/04/2015, and A., Sudan, 25/05/2015.
40 Andersson, "Hunter and Prey," 119–49.
41 Field notes, 17/04/2015.
42 Anthias, "Where Do I Belong?"
43 Informal conversation with A. R., Sudan, 06/08/2015.
44 Chu, "Boxed In," 403–21.
45 Martin, "Desperate Passage," 1046–52.
46 Galis, Tzokas, and Tympas, "Bodies Folded in Migrant Crypts."
47 Hole, "How Does the Movement of Migration Journey through the European Border Regime?"
48 Informal conversation with M. K., 05/06/2015.
49 Khosravi, "The 'Illegal' Traveller," 321–34; Galis, Tzokas, and Tympas, "Bodies Folded in Migrant Crypts."
50 Field notes, 27/07/2015.
51 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*.

52 Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xx.
53 Informal conversation with an anonymous migrant, 10/07/2015.
54 Field notes, 15/03/2015.
55 Skalle and Gjesdal, "Introduction," 11, their emphasis.
56 Hole, "How Does the Movement of Migration Journey through the European Border Regime?"
57 Informal conversation with an Afghan refugee, 18/09/2017.
58 Novak, "The Flexible Territoriality of Borders," 742.
59 Informal conversation with B., Sudan, 20/06/2015.
60 Toenjes, "This Wall Speaks," 55–68.
61 Field notes, 15/03/2015.
62 Field notes, 05/06/2015.
63 See Al-Mousawi, "Aesthetics of Migration"; Waldner and Dobratz, "Graffiti as a Form of Contentious Political Participation," 377–89.
64 Field notes, 15/03/2015.
65 Field notes, 14/06/2015.
66 Somers, "The Narrative Constitution of Identity," 618; see also Anthias, "Where Do I Belong?"
67 Borgstede, "'We Are Here to Stay,'" 162–80.

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32

LETTING KARST MOUNTAINS BLOOM

Decentering the Secret War in Hmong American Literature and Art

Aline Lo

The late Hmong American poet Pos Moua opens his expansive poetry collection *Karst Mountains Will Bloom* with an explanation of the title, rooting it in a Hmong imaginary that touches on religion, displacement, and language. This image of karst mountains, which are formed by the dissolution of porous rock and are home to deep caves and underground pools, and, more specifically, the image of them blooming, captures both the grim destruction of Hmong lives brought upon by the Secret War and the romanticized stories of Hmong survival.[1] In his explanatory note, Moua first introduces karst mountains by tracing Hmong populations and histories as they have moved through time and geography, linking "our ancestral lands" to the "great rivers" of South China and Southeast Asia before finally ending on "our villages and fields beside the limestone pinnacles of the karst mountains and hills."[2] Moving from the mythical lands of China, the more recent "pinnacles" of Laos, and his own implied resettlement in the U.S., Moua employs karst mountains as the touchstone for understanding Hmong ways of being. When he adds that the mythical image of karst mountains "always remains foremost in the mind of every Hmong," Moua is gesturing to the complex histories of dislocations and migrations that have both defined and circumscribed Hmong peoples.[3] For it is not simply the actual mountains that remain "foremost in the mind of every Hmong," but the symbolic, mythical idea of home that is complicated and shaped by the longer history of Hmong displacement and autonomy.[4]

A continually deferred and despatialized trope in the Hmong imaginary, karst mountains have taken on new resonances with the recent remaking of Hmong peoples as Secret War refugees.[5] In his note, Moua captures how this simultaneously real and mythical place, especially in relation to the Secret War, is imbued even more deeply with an expansive temporality, becoming a symbol that is rooted in the past, present, and future:

> I was born among these karst mountains and lived part of my childhood high up on those inconsolable ranges. Now, far away, I feel those mountains lingering in my heart. I still yearn to return to them. I once heard a wise, elder woman say, "It is prophesied that when we mortals have seen karst mountains bloom, it is then that the hour of love and peace will have permeated the sky and earth with a flood wave like none before." This was etched into my psyche since youth. My sister died in those mountains. My grandmother and grandfather, my aunts and uncles, and my cousins, and almost all my father's family died during the Secret War, their deaths too sad for me to write about.[6]

In this excerpt, Moua begins with his own past, his own relationship to karst mountains, having lived among "those inconsolable ranges" as a child. The quick pivot to his present life in the U.S. points to a personal longing and an individualized understanding of these mountains as home. It is in this distanced moment of personal memory and yearning that Moua turns to the more mythical, collective image of karst mountains blooming, situating his own experiences and emotion within a larger Hmong imaginary.

The prophecy of love and peace, which has been passed down through an oral tradition, is tied to the act of witnessing an explosion of flora and fauna on these often sparse, rocky formations. Its implied promise is the stability of a fixed home and, also, a return to such mountains in order to bear witness to this impossible beauty and future.[7] This unfulfilled promise, then, means that home, peace, and return are continuously deferred, that these concepts really only exist in the imaginary even as they are planted in a knowable, familiar image.[8] For these mountains do exist and the tangibility of this prophetic image is immediately felt in the litany of people that Moua has lost in "*those* mountains."[9] These tragic deaths, which are tied to the Secret War, amplify the overlapping sense of hopeless longing and hopeful deferral symbolized by blooming karst mountains. This is all to say that karst mountains have been and continue to be a compelling image and that, for Hmong Americans, this image has become even more powerful because of the Secret War and refugee flight and resettlement.

Undoubtedly, the Secret War and its direct link to Hmong refugeehood plays a pivotal role in fashioning Hmong American lives and art, but, most often, the conflict, when it is discussed, has been centralized to the exclusion of any other narrative.[10] Conducted clandestinely and adjacent to the U.S. War in Vietnam, this secret operation was meant to bypass Laos's declared neutrality by recruiting, training, and arming various local ethnic minority groups and waging an unprecedented bombing campaign in the area, most especially, on Laos. The Secret War has often been subsumed under the Vietnam War, which, itself, has been understood through the Cold War and the U.S.'s self-aggrandizing mission to push back Communism. As many Critical Refugee Studies scholars have argued, one of the other dangers of a singular, U.S.-centered narrative is that it allows for a flawed recuperation of Southeast Asian refugees that, ultimately, redeems Western imperialism.[11] In the case of the Secret War, the erasure of Hmong involvement meant even less control over the stories told or not told about Hmong refugees, Laotian Hmong who did not aid the U.S., and other subsequent Hmong diasporic communities. Even once more historical information became available, the narrative still emphasized key military players and bereft Hmong refugees, contributing to the existing general perception of the U.S. as benevolent savior. Hmong peoples in America also participated in the proliferation of this monolithic narrative, particularly as a way to advocate for formal recognition and rights. Although it is true that Hmong people are largely in the U.S. because of the Secret War, the conflict and its representative, General Vang Pao, have become so definitive that, Mai Na Lee argues, it might seem as if "Hmong history begins and ends with the Secret War and Vang Pao's alliance with the United States."[12] This alliance, brokered between the U.S. government and certain Hmong peoples during the Secret War, has become its own epistemological framework, producing a version of Hmongness that seems to originate solely from that militarized relationship. The Secret War, thus, simultaneously obscures stories about Hmong Americans and constructs a singular narrative wherein Hmong people only matter because of their service to the U.S.

Using karst mountains as a way of reading Hmong cultural production, then, allows us to recognize the complexity of studying refugee, especially Hmong American, histories and narratives: put simply, one cannot understand the whole mountain by just reaching its summit. Instead, one must attend to the longer histories and mythologies that lie beneath the surface, to the many caves that have been overlooked, to the interconnected networks that enable the karst mountain to bloom. Indeed, the post-Secret War resettlement process that has strewn Laotian Hmong across various Western countries and throughout the U.S. is only a small part of the long history of Hmong displacement and persecution.[13] On the other hand, karst mountains, with their hidden fissures and caves, can also represent the long reach of the Secret War which has made Hmong American stories largely invisible to a wider public. Under its shadow, Hmong American writers and artists have had to reckon with reconstituting seemingly unsubstantiated lives.

While recognizing the Secret War's significance, its place as the impetus for Hmong America, there is also, I argue, a desire to decenter its importance, to gesture to that longer history of displacement, and to trace the many other forms of trauma, resilience, and the seemingly mundane. In turning to karst mountains as a metaphor for approaching Hmong American cultural production, I am insisting that we look beyond the monolith of the Secret War even as it towers above Hmong America. And, in affirming the everyday, I extend the work already established by Yến Lê Espiritu and Lan Duong who argue for a feminist refugee epistemology, "a looking practice that captures the quotidian details of displacement and emplacement in refugee lives."[14] This chapter, then, reads the various ways in which Hmong American cultural producers have attempted to confront and complicate the Secret War in order to, I argue, reinstate Hmong-centered knowledge, stories, and "quotidian" ways of being that challenge the often de-humanizing and static narrative of the Secret War.

In approaching Hmong American literary and visual art through the analytic of karst mountains, I am not only foregrounding an understanding of place and meaning-making that is rooted in the Hmong imaginary, but am also proposing a model that champions the generative abilities of Hmong American writers and artists rather than the recuperative narrative of the Secret War. In pulling the works of the poet Mai Der Vang, the writer Kao Kalia Yang, and the visual and performative artist Dej Txiaj Ntsim Koua Mai Yang together, I argue that reckoning with the Secret War means understanding its many iterations, recognizing that it is not always at the center of Hmong American cultural productions. I begin, thus, by analyzing Vang's "Dear Soldier of the Secret War" (2017) which deals directly with the Secret War and then end with a discussion of Dej Txiaj Ntsim Koua Mai Yang's durational performance *Hnav HMoob/Wear HMong* (2018-) which treats resettlement in the U.S. as simply one of many issues facing Hmong American representations. My discussion of Kao Kalia Yang's *The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir* (2008), then, presents a transitional reading in which I argue that the author successfully subverts the essentializing narrative of the Secret War. While I am careful to note the specificities of these various genres—poetry, life writing, visual and performance art—I also want to draw wider connections in order to both acknowledge and complicate the weight of the Secret War on Hmong American cultural production. To be sure, there are many texts that do not deal directly with the Secret War, but, here, I'm interested in the works that confront it in order to demonstrate the many ways in which it is, ultimately, decentered.[15] To do so, I offer readings of various texts across genres to reveal a repositioning of the Secret War and refugeeness that makes way for the richness and fullness of Hmong and Hmong American experiences. The image of karst mountains, particularly as it is discussed in Pos Moua's description, is, then, a metaphor for the multiple ways in which we must attend to Hmong American art if we are to reckon with the Secret War and its refugee afterlives. More broadly, the analytic of karst mountains decenters war narratives to reveal new ways of reading refugee stories that have often been flattened by tropes of Western military intervention and resettlement.

The Cracks in the Karst Mountain: Mai Der Vang's "Dear Soldier of the Secret War"

Rooted in a Hmong cosmology of spiritual and ancestral return, Mai Der Vang's first poetry volume *Afterland* intentionally begins by speaking to a soldier of the Secret War, outlining the brutal reality of this alliance and laying bare the U.S.'s betrayal.[16] Taking on the form of an apostrophe poem, where the speaker directly addresses an absent figure, "Dear Soldier of the Secret War" never uses the lyrical "I" and, instead, employs the second-person "you" to focus on the Hmong soldier who is left behind by the U.S. From this removed perspective, the speaker can take on a seemingly neutral tone, describing how the soldier "once felt the American hand/that blew its breath/to drive the fire," how "your Hmong village is a graveyard" now that the U.S. has "gone home."[17] Only using "you" and "they" when referencing the Secret War, the speaker excludes or excuses themselves from the immediate action. It is not "I," but "you" who clasped "the American hand" in alliance, and it was "they" who "ended the war" and went home.[18] The focus on the soldiers, both the Hmong "you" and the American "they,"

also positions the speaker, the absent "I," as an afterthought, as an outside interlocutor who must try to make sense of the Secret War.

Like the soldier's family who become collateral damage during the Communist retaliation, the speaker, although not an active part of the military actions, is intimately aware of the violence and the betrayal and is left to reckon with the aftermath. Continuing to address the soldier, the speaker asks about the others who have suffered because of the Secret War. The questions ask first about the wife, then the son, then the younger brother who "followed [the soldier] into combat."[19] With each person and each image, the speaker makes it clear that no one can evade the atrocities brought upon by the Secret War. Images of "your" wife being "dragged" by the "Pathet Lao," "naked, screaming and bleeding/by her long black hair," of "your son's head in the rice/pounder, shell-crumbled," of "your" brother's tongue "sliced off," "boiled," and "forced … down your throat" are too horrific and precise to forget.[20] The specificity of each query reveals both the horrors endured by those "guilty" through association, and the speaker's deep knowledge of this violence. Although, initially, it was only the soldier, the singular "you" who was involved with the Americans, the Secret War quickly and horrifyingly consumes the family, the village, and the speaker's imagination. The only people who seemed to have escaped unscathed are the Americans, the other soldiers of the Secret War.

Although Vang's poem begins by directly addressing and questioning the Hmong soldier, it shifts to and ends on the American soldier, a proxy for the U.S. government, making it clear that all Hmong peoples were an afterthought of the Secret War. After describing the fate of the family, the speaker asks if the Hmong soldier also thinks "of the American returning/to the coffee cup," to the comfort of "new linens/in a warm bed."[21] These seemingly small markers of safety and security are significant when compared with the missing wife, the mutilated son, the defiled brother, the traumatized and abandoned Hmong soldier, and the haunted speaker. What is simply "nightly news" for the American soldier is an excruciating, confusing, and slow process of waiting and betrayal.[22] Left with the remaining ammunition and in "ragged fatigues," the Hmong soldier is no longer a "Soldier," but an easy target who is not saved but must watch the last "American plane take off,/distant above Long Cheng," the unofficial air base of an unofficial war.[23] Addressing the Hmong soldier one last time, the speaker asks:

How loud do you beg in your gut,

Pleading to some invented god
or ancestor or politician:

all of our thousands who died on your side,

> *why won't you authorize*
> *another plane.*[24]

The question begins, again, with a question directed at "you," the Hmong soldier, following the general structure of the poem. And, once more, the speaker and the soldier are distinct, separated by their different positions as the outside observer and the internal actor. When the Hmong soldier begs, it is in *their* gut, in their most inner organs and being. Yet, in that last question, the speaker and the Hmong soldier become one, turning the American soldier into the addressee. The question of culpability is now laid at the feet of the Americans as the Hmong soldier and the speaker merge into one entity. The latter come together to claim "*our thousands who died on your side*." The final "you" who won't authorize another plane is solely the American soldier, the American government. Thus, it is the enablers of the Secret War who are explicitly and urgently called into question at the end. For, if we are to be critical of the Secret War, it is not enough to simply recall the Hmong soldier, the subsequent victims, the Pathet Lao, and the abandoned airfield of Long Cheng; instead we must, as Vang does in her poem, denounce the costly actions of the U.S. and ensure their legacy, not as the saviors, but as perpetrators and betrayers.

Vang's poem, by explicitly refusing to portray the U.S. as savior and selfless champion of democracy, challenges the monolithic narrative of the Secret War even as it speaks directly to it. Ma Vang's argument that Hmong refugees have been problematically connected to an imperial iteration of "soldiering" lends further credence to the poem's final accusation.[25] According to Vang, although many Hmong were used in military actions, their perceived statelessness, compounded by the illicit nature of their recruitment and service, allowed for the U.S. to fashion them as contracted mercenaries who had needed to be saved from primitivity. When the U.S. lost and retreated from Southeast Asia, these "mercenaries" were easily transformed into refugees who the West could graciously save and who would reinforce the legitimacy of Democracy.[26] Yet, what Vang and my analysis of Mai Der Vang's poem argue is that these savior narratives only serve to recover the military loss and to cover up the imperialist actions of the U.S. To return to this chapter's opening analytic: Vang's poem, by calling attention to the differences between Hmong and American soldiers, locates and opens up the fissures in the karst mountain so that events like the Secret War become cracks susceptible to dissolution.

Dissolving the Secret War in Hmong American Life Writing: Kao Kalia Yang's *The Latehomecomer*

Writing about her family's experiences as Hmong refugees resettled in Minnesota, Kao Kalia Yang cannot ignore the Secret War. Yet, she is able to decenter the event as she, instead of focusing on the soldier's story, chooses to honor the life of her grandmother. In the last chapter of *The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir*, when the Yang family is finally faced with the grandmother's passing, Yang is able to move away from the Secret War in order to honor this important woman's life. As Yang writes:

> My grandmother's death was the first natural death in our family since 1975. It was the outcome we had been struggling so long for: a chance to die naturally, of old age, after a full life. The funeral would take us back to before the war, before the refugee camps of Thailand, before the life in America—all the way up to the clouds again.[27]

In using 1975 as a marker, Yang anchors her understanding of life and death in the Secret War, pointing to, as she does in the next line, the fact that many had not been lucky enough to live a "full life." The sense of loss implied here not only makes the grandmother's life remarkable and worth recording but also marks the many other lives and stories that were lost because of the Secret War. The grandmother's "natural" passing stands in sharp contrast to Pos Moua's long list of family who perished in the karst mountains, their deaths left untold because they are too painful, "too sad" for him to have written about.[28] On this rare occasion, then, Yang's family is able to perform a proper Hmong funeral—one that does not and, clearly, cannot erase the Secret War, but that "would take [them] back to before [it]" and honor the full and rich life of the grandmother. The funeral, more than any other part of the memoir, offers an opportunity to tell a more complex story both alongside and against the monolithic narrative of the Secret War.

Seizing narrative control of a seemingly minor moment at the funeral, in which footage of the Secret War is spliced ahead of a video recording of the grandmother, Yang is, I argue, able to reassert a more complex understanding of the woman whom she loves and knows deeply, thereby supplanting the problematic, essentializing refugee story. Set in the middle of the funeral rites and the chapter, this scene best reveals how art and the personal can subvert and modify monolithic narratives like that of the Secret War. When literally faced with images of "bombs being dropped" over Laos, Yang turns to her authorial agency and embodied knowledge of her grandmother to correct a militarized trope of Hmong refugees. Reaffirming her methods of storytelling and understanding Hmong lives, Yang becomes her own karst mountain, drawing from deep pools of collected memories to produce a rich and verdant narrative landscape. In this particular scene, Yang is careful to position herself as the narrator as her perspective is crucial to recognizing the problematic centering of the Secret War and to reframing

the grandmother. Among the "over five hundred" people "crowded in the room," Yang is "up front" and "lucky enough to see the images" on the small and "static"-filled screen.[29] Her Uncle Eng has just made some heartfelt remarks about his mother and, when struggling to finish his speech, he pivots to the video as a means to further commemorate her memory. From her vantage point, Yang is "not ready for the sight of airplanes zooming across the sky, bombs being dropped," images "spliced from a French documentary of the Vietnam War in Laos."[30] It is, indeed, an unexpected way to introduce a woman who lived many years before the Secret War occurred and who did not allow that historical event to define her life. Yang, taking full advantage of her power to change the narrative, does exactly what Espiritu and Duong outline within feminist refugee epistemology, looking to "intimate domestic and familial interaction" in order to subvert the traumatic war footage.[31] Even when the Secret War images are replaced with contemporary video footage of the grandmother, Yang is even "less prepared" to see her "alive on the screen," to see her simplified to any moment whether public or private.[32]

For Yang, knowledge of her grandmother is rooted in physical interactions and their embodied relationship rather than the Secret War footage or the home video recording. Thus, with her expert eyes, she seeks out and relates the things that make the grandmother "real" to her, that tie this woman to her. From the video, she identifies the exact location and names the various family members who surround the grandmother on the screen. She notes how her grandmother's face has aged, acknowledging the "heavy lids" and "dimples" that are now "deep in … wrinkled cheeks."[33] She recognizes the black shoes as "the 'cool' pair Dawb [Yang's older sister] and [Yang] had gotten [the grandmother] during the summer."[34] When the grandmother's body, in the video, begins to recede from view, Yang is still able to recognize her "because the gait was uneven, lopsided."[35] Through Yang's intimate knowledge and narration, a fuller version of the grandmother is revealed: one that places her among family, that demonstrates how she was loved and cared for, that individualizes her life and body. Ma Vang's reading of the grandmother also touches on this idea of embodied knowledge, insightfully arguing that "Yang's representation of grandmother's feet embedding dirt from different nation-states" is a form of recording and remembering.[36] Vang's assertion, like mine, emphasizes Yang's careful attention to the grandmother's body and how that knowledge is used to challenge the minimizing narrative of the Secret War. Ultimately, Yang's textual representation of her grandmother captures a richer and more complex memory than the video recording or the grainy French footage of the Secret War. While the latter might seem like the most apt manner to represent a "Western" understanding of Hmong refugees as primitive, life writings like Yang's and the analytic framework of karst mountains remind us that the Secret War is merely one part of Hmong histories and ways of being. We must expand beyond the simplistic image of militarized Hmong men and victimized Hmong women to capture the intricacy figured by karst mountains.

When Hmong Feminist Refugee Epistemologies Bloom: Dej Txiaj Ntsim Koua Mai Yang's *Hnav HMoob/Wear HMong*

Touching on a complex, intersecting array of issues such as race, gender performance, Hmong identity, cultural appropriation, and memory, Dej Txiaj Ntsim Koua Mai Yang's durational performance *Hnav HMoob/Wear HMong* largely critiques racialized and gendered understandings of Hmong women, making the Secret War simply one of the many caves that lie within the karst mountain range, one event in the long history of Hmong peoples.[37] Although Yang's earlier work more directly addresses the Secret War, I turn to this later project in order to highlight the complex and intertwining passages of Hmong America, gendered bodies, refugee lives, and Hmong cultural production.[38] Yet, Yang's *Hnav HMoob/Wear HMong*, in which she wears Hmong and Hmong-inspired clothes every day, is really a continuation of her earlier work, which was always interested in textiles and dress. Unlike the literary texts I have discussed in this chapter, Yang's visual art and durational performance often place her physical body as the site of analysis, prompting the audience to take note of corporeal elements such as movement and facial expressions as well as social and temporal factors like location, time, and, possibly, sound. Started in August of 2018, Yang, who is, as of the writing of this chapter, still immersed in this

project, wears Hmong clothing in her everyday life, documenting herself mostly through photography, but sometimes video and drawing. Viewers may encounter her work both intentionally and unintentionally; through a chance encounter in person, via social media, or at a gallery such as her MFA show at the University of Minnesota. However it is experienced, the project illustrates both the racialized and gendered body's vulnerability as well as its power to tell and hold stories.

My own reading of Yang's work largely draws from her website, in which she has curated and exhibited many of the photos and arranged them chronologically, grouping them by periods of time.[39] Analyzing the photos together in this manner illustrates the productive tension between the revolutionary and mundane as Yang's clothed body, which may initially seem "out of place," becomes "naturalized" through repetition and duration. It is also through this tension that questions tied to haunting, longing, gender norms, and Hmong displacement arise. Yet, focusing on one image also produces its own, equally important version of this tension and these questions. Once again, the framework of karst mountains makes apparent the need to consider the whole and the parts. Thus, in my brief reading of *Hnav HMoob/Wear HMong*, I examine the collected photos alongside a singular picture from the series, arguing that this layered analysis further displaces the Secret War narrative by emphasizing feminist refugee artistic practices and epistemologies.

Although no photo in Yang's project documentation is identical, their pronounced similarities minimize the divide between "Art" and "Life" and call to mind the everyday richness and complexity of Hmong women before, during, and after the Secret War. In many of the photos, Yang's clothed body, with a few exceptions, is the focal point, usually posed so that the clothes, which are often combinations that are clearly Hmong-styled, are easily viewed. In the photos, Yang does not flinch from being seen in these clothes and her blank expression draws attention to her clothing rather than her face. With this focus on the clothed body, the intentional donning of Hmong and Hmong inspired clothing seems jarring at first, reminders of an "older" way of gendering the body. However, the quantity and similarities across the photos, especially in the earlier part of the series, help to de-emphasize the clothes so that they are understood as everyday dress for Yang. The implied bodily movement captured in the photos as well as the repetition and mundaneness of the backgrounds also help to reify Yang's project as a daily, embodied routine, a built-in part of her life.[40] Indeed, a feminist refugee epistemology relies on the recognition that the everyday act of living is an artform, that the racialized, gendered body carries its own history and meaning. Yang's project, by repeatedly dressing the body in Hmong clothes, explicitly honors the women who have been erased and silenced by the events like the Secret War, whose artistry is only valued during special occasions, whose contributions and skills have gone largely unrecorded. Her work is, thus, similar to Kao Kalia Yang's in that it also desires to remember and showcase Hmong women as real, complex individuals. For Dej Txiaj Ntsim Koua Mai Yang, wearing Hmong clothes and making it a daily practice renders Hmong women more visible and holds others accountable for expunging and essentializing them.

Looking more specifically at individual photos, especially those that are contrived to be like tableaus and include more context and bodily posturing, allows for a more nuanced understanding of how Hmong clothes are often used to mark the, usually, female body as foreign, primitive, and ready to be rescued. Yang's photo titled "Day 182" perfectly captures the competing narratives surrounding Hmong Americans, particularly women as measures of Western acculturation and "modernization." In the photo, Yang, dressed in her Hmong-styled clothing, is seated on a rattan stool, sewing or embroidering an item in front of a bus stop advertisement that features a young Hmong woman in full Hmong clothing looking over the shoulders of two white individuals who appear to be working on a laptop. The advertisement for Metropolitan State University in St. Paul, Minnesota reads: "Transfer your credits and finish your degree." The ground is covered in a thick blanket of snow, and in the far background sits a Taco Bell. While it might be easy to simply and quickly dismiss the advertisement, which problematically uses a traditionally dressed Hmong woman to signify a "student-in-need" and also implies that Hmong women need to be "modernized," as blatantly racist, Yang's presence in the photo adds another layer of critique that is harder to parse. Seated in front of the advertisement and participating in the gendered act of sewing, she simultaneously *is* and *is not* the Hmong woman in the poster.

Figure 32.1   Dej Txiaj Ntsim Koua Mai Yang's "Day 182."

Yes, the use of traditional Hmong clothing in the ad is comically out of place and racist, but Yang's own dress is incongruent, particularly with the snow and the Taco Bell. Both the implied coldness and the very public nature of a bus stop make this an illogical place to perform a time consuming and domestic task like sewing. Thus, both the model and Yang, to varying degrees, seem to have been transported from another time and place. Side by side, they seem to reify the contradictory image of Hmong women as holders of tradition and, with Western intervention, harbingers of change.

Yet, there are important differences between the static ideal and the actual person: foremost, the awareness that Yang is not an ad model and will eventually get up to continue her day and her life. In the photo, Yang is seated directly in front of the ad, her body clearly existing outside of the frame that is the bus stop. Unlike the flat image of the traditionally clothed Hmong woman, Yang takes up real space and her body suggests movement and active engagement with her task. She is not looking over the shoulders of the white individuals, but looking intently at her own handiwork. Whereas the ad model seems to tentatively include herself in the activity of the white pair, Yang's body is turned away from them so that they almost seem to be peering at her work and learning from her example. This autonomy is also affirmed through Yang's surroundings as the coat on the ground next to her and the visible path of downtrodden snow lead viewers to imagine movement and future action. Even the Taco Bell helps to suggest the present day and Yang's existence in it. Thus, "Day 182" captures both the troubling representations of Hmong refugee women and the complexity of being a Hmong woman and having to navigate sometimes conflicting social expectations. But, as Yang demonstrates in this photo, it is not complexity that threatens to diminish and essentialize Hmong women, but the inability to be complex. If the ad model were allowed to step out of the frame, she would certainly find that there is more to being Hmong American than simply finishing one's degree. Like the grandmother in Kao Kalia Yang's memoir, one cannot be defined by a singular narrative of refugee-ness, of the Secret War. Instead, a feminist refugee epistemology asserts that the everyday body is a crucial and formidable site of knowledge and contingency. Dej Txiaj Ntsim Koua Mai Yang's work attends to the daily multiplicities and possibilities of Hmong lives rather than dwelling on the Secret War, calling to mind the similarly intricate and subterranean cracks and caves in the karst mountains. Like the prophetic image of karst mountains, Yang's work recalls the larger historical erasures of Hmong peoples and their complex lives and also gestures to a future that centers Hmong knowledge, art, and ways of being.

Conclusion

While there is no escaping the fact that trauma, war, and displacement shape refugee lives, refugees are informed by so much more than these qualifying conditions. While the Secret War is an important moment and concept in understanding Hmong American cultural production, it is dangerous to allow it to be the central, sole peak which artists must summit. To let it stand alone is to ignore more expansive and critical modes of inquiry like a feminist refugee epistemology and, as I have proposed, a karst mountain analytic that is rooted in Hmong knowledge and that seeks to underscore the complexities presented in Hmong American cultural productions. Undeniably, the Secret War is essential to Hmong American art, but it should not essentialize our readings of works by Hmong and Hmong Americans. Instead, using karst mountains as a symbol that connects Hmong pasts, presents, and futures reveals forms of representation that reach beyond the Secret War and the narrow, savior narrative that so often accompanies it. My own readings insist on the specificity of karst mountains as they not only act as a topographical charting of the various ways in which Hmong American artists have reckoned with the Secret War but also invoke Hmong understandings of futurity that complicate refugeehood. Turning to refugee-centered methods of analysis can unearth the fixture of war within refugee studies, supplanting it as *the* source of refugee cultural productions. For, indeed, there are many sources from which refugees can draw in order to imagine, understand, escape, and amplify their stories. The analytic of karst mountains is simply one method among many. But, importantly, it challenges us to look deeper into the cracks, to wander through and explore the many caves, and to examine the sinkholes in order to attend to the first blooms.

Notes

1 For an insightful critique of the Secret War, see Vang's *History on the Run*. There, she discusses it as an "interimperial event of decolonization," meaning that the war continued imperial practices under the guise of decolonization (28).

2 Moua, *Karst Mountains Will Bloom,* xiii.

3 Moua, *Karst Mountains Will Bloom,* xiii.

4 Although this chapter is largely interested in creative interpellations of the Secret War, particularly as a means to complicate its legacy, much of my thinking continues the re-positioning that is happening in the fields of History and Critical Ethnic Studies. Most notably, Mai Na Lee and Ma Vang have provided critical perspectives on the Secret War and its essentializing narrative. For more on issues of statelessness and Hmong histories, see Vang's *History on the Run*; and Lee's *Dreams of the Hmong Kingdom*. Vang is especially critical of positioning Hmong as stateless, calling it a "problem of 'modern time consciousness'" rather than "an issue of Hmong ontology" (17). See also Ogden, "Tebchaws." Ogden's essay discusses a Hmong return to Southeast Asia as a real possibility, whereas I am interested in the mythic, improbable idea of returning to karst mountains.

5 See Vang, "Writing on the Run." Vang reads the recycling of karst mountain imagery, among other acts of literary formation, as evidence of "the impermanence of home" and a challenge to the recuperative narrative of refugee resettlement (93). Vang also writes about the appearance of mountains in Hmong American literature in *History on the Run*: "Hmong American literary representations often include mountains and hills to reclaim such sites as places of belonging" (160).

6 Moua, *Karst Mountains*, xiii.

7 In *Dreams of a Hmong Kingdom,* Mai Na Lee also links this prophecy around karst mountains to Hmong desires for sovereignty: "Perhaps it is because a Hmong leader often endures a crisis of personality—as a Hmong leader but also a 'slave' of the state—that he yearns ever so deeply to lead a 'free' people. Also, for this very reason, the Hmong still await their sovereign king, who, it is prophesied, will return when rocks sprout flowers and the rivers flow uphill" (12).

8 I use the idea of home broadly here and am careful to avoid the term "homeland." I would agree with Mai Na Lee that "homeland" in the modern context is complicated for Hmong Americans. In *Dreams of a Hmong Kingdom*, she writes, "Only in the last few decades did Hmong nationalists, using oral traditions and history, begin to construct the notion of a Hmong homeland" (21).

9 Emphasis mine.

10 For more Hmong American literary themes, see Lo and Pha, "Hmong American Literature and Culture."

11 For more on Critical Refugee Studies, particularly on the recuperative use of Southeast Asian refugees, see especially Espiritu, *Body Counts*; and Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom.*

12 Lee, *Dreams,* 17. Lee also credits this narrow understanding of Hmong history to the success of Jane Hamilton's *Tragic Mountains* as it helped expose the Secret War to a wider public: "Since the publication of Jane Hamilton-Merritt's *Tragic Mountains*, Hmong and non-Hmong alike have begun to absorb and reproduce the perception that Hmong history begins and ends with the Secret War and Vang Pao's alliance with the United States" (17).

13 There are Hmong peoples in various countries beyond those in the Western diaspora. It should also be made clear that not all Hmong in Laos sided with the U.S. during the Secret War.

14 Espiritu and Duong, "Feminist Refugee Epistemology," 590.

15 For an overview of Hmong American literature, see, once again, Lo and Pha, "Hmong American Literature and Culture."

16 For more on Vang's *Afterland,* see Ma Vang's extended reading of the final, long poem "Afterland" in *History on the Run*. Both Pos Moua's collection *Karst Mountains Will Bloom* and Soul Vang's debut collection *To Live Here* also open with poems that deal directly with the Secret War.

17 Vang, *Afterland*, 1–3, 6, 5.

18 Vang, *Afterland*, 4.

19 Vang, *Afterland*, 15.

20 Vang, *Afterland*, 7, 8, 9–10, 12–13, 17, 18, 19.

21 Vang, *Afterland*, 20-21, 22–23.

22 Vang, *Afterland*, 30.

23 Vang, *Afterland*, 47–48.

24 Vang, *Afterland*, 49–54.

25 Vang, *History on the Run,* 28.

26 Hmong refugees, in particular, as Ma Vang argues, were not fighting for *their* "country" and were not directly part of the "Cold War postcolonial war-making," which made it even more simple to position them as in need of saving. See Vang, *History on the Run*.

27 Yang, *The Latehomecomer,* 231.

28 Moua, *Karst Mountain*, xiii.

29 Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 260.

30 Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 260, 261.

31 Espiritu and Duong, "Feminist Refugee Epistemology," 611. This particular footage is especially troubling as its violent images attempt to overwrite the grandmother's life with the "military atrocities" of both the U.S. and France, which has its own terrible and exploitative history with Southeast Asia. The irony of the French making a documentary about the U.S. war in Laos is not lost on me, although I do not have the space to give it full attention here.

32 Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 261.

33 Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 261.

34 Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 261.

35 Yang, *The Latehomecomer*, 261.

36 Vang, *History,* 162. Her larger reading of the text, especially the grandmother as a figure of historical "dragging" also works to "unsettle the masculinist narratives of loyalty and refuge and assert Hmong presence in becoming" (178).

37 The use of "HMoob/HMong" rather than "Hmoob/Hmong" is part of a fairly recent movement to be more inclusive of the Green dialect, which, under the Romanized Popular Alphabet of the Hmong language, would spell "Hmong" as "Mong." For the sake of consistency, I have opted to use "Hmong" as it is the spelling used by most of the artists in this chapter. In doing so, however, I may simply be replicating the erasure of the Green Mong dialect by opting for the most "used" spelling. I deeply apologize for not having a better solution to this problem.

38 For example, Yang's early works featured drawn or painted images of warplanes, bombs, Long Cheng or reprinted photos of the U.S. war in Southeast Asia. Works from this series, *The Hmong American Experience*, were used to accompany Schein and Thao's "vignettes and reflections" in "Scenes Lost from Gran Torino," 293–304, which largely deals with the Secret War. In another work, "Hmong Clothes #1, Khaub Ncaws Hmoob #1," Yang is dressed in traditional Hmong clothes made from camo nylon fabric, fringed with bullet shells as she holds a toy gun at her side.

39 For the sake of transparency, I should add that I served as the outside reader of Yang's MFA thesis.

40 See especially "Day 52" on Yang's website.

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33

ISLANDS OF WRITERS
Tracing an Archipelagic Literature

Kieren Kresevic Salazar

In 2019, Somali writer Warsan Weedhsan and I posed a question within refugee communities in Indonesia. We reached out to our friends and networks through community leaders and WhatsApp chat groups, asking: "Do you want to be a writer?" We heard back from refugee people who had long-held literary ambitions and from those who were already published writers. Together we formed a collective of 40 writers who came from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, Eritrea, and Myanmar. The writers collective aimed to convene a community whose members could work freely as creative actors, and make a space for writers to practice their craft. As the collective matured, we created a literary magazine and named ourselves *the archipelago.*

the archipelago collective met each week in four groups spread between Jakarta and Cisarua, a town a few hours outside of the capital where living costs are lower. In our first meeting in November 2019, the writers crammed into a borrowed children's classroom at the Refugee Learning Centre, a refugee-led school in Cisarua. We sat in a rough circle and read aloud from the work of Kurdish writer Behrouz Boochani, who in June 2013 had been staying in the former social housing towers of Jakarta's Kalibata City.[1] He had traveled to Indonesia after the offices of *Werya,* the Kurdish magazine he founded, were raided by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in Ilam, Iran.[2] The next month, Boochani and 75 others left the southern coastline of Indonesia on a poorly equipped fishing boat.[3] They were saved at sea by a British freighter, only to be picked up by an Australian navy warship and imprisoned on Manus Island in Papua New Guinea.[4] In his novel, *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison* (2018), Boochani writes of his first days in prison, confined to a row of shipping containers beside the island's shores:

> Faced with prisoners who reach out to their mates by yapping, yelling pointlessly and laughing loudly, I long to create, to isolate myself and create that which is poetic and visionary …. I have reached a good understanding of this situation: the only people who can overcome and survive all the suffering inflicted by the prison are those who exercise creativity. That is, those who can trace the outlines of hope using the melodic humming and visions from beyond the prison fences and the beehives we live in.[5]

Boochani frames his work from Manus Prison as creative from the outset. This defines an artistic project that not only includes his celebrated first novel, *No Friend,* but stretches across a vast body of literature, journalism, academic essays, film, photography, and theater. Moreover, this creativity represents his survival strategy against the prison's systematic torture: Boochani survives not by writing about his prison experiences, but by "[tracing] the outlines of hope using the melodic humming and visions from

beyond the prison fences."[6] His project extends far beyond his incarceration by settler colonial Australia. Rather, he reframes his experiences in Manus Prison through his expansive imagination as a novelist, Kurdish and Persian literary traditions, and his education in political theory.

As *the archipelago* collective read Boochani's words from the classroom in Indonesia, they took his artistic project as a starting point to articulate their own creative vision and survival practices. They write beyond their present displacement where they live indefinitely without rights in Indonesia, on the other side of Australia's closed borders. The collective creates literature that forges relationships between the islands they cross in search of safety, their multilingual literary traditions, and their individual creative practices. Together they form an artistic community based on a shared identity as writers. Throughout the chapter, I avoid characterizing the writers as "refugee writers." These writers stake a claim to artistic creation and therefore, this nomenclature seeks to honor that claim by distinguishing them for their creative work rather than for the persecution they face. I also use the term "refugee people" instead of "refugees." In my literary collaborations with displaced writers, I have witnessed how the designation of "refugee" acts as a prescriptive identity that overdetermines how displaced people are received as they navigate the world around them. "Refugee people" is a gesture away from dehumanizing tropes of refugee identity.

This chapter reads *the archipelago* and Boochani through and with each other to unpack how their creative practices operate *spatially*. Displaced writers create narratives from sites violently restricted by nation-states that limit their movement, deny their rights, and reject their demands for asylum. To contend with this literature is to understand how their creativity represents both an intellectual intervention and the urgent necessity to fight for survival. I wish to emplace these writers within what philosopher Jonathan Pugh characterizes as a "spatial turn" in the humanities that "accentuates spatial interconnections and movements rather than static territorial form."[7] A spatial analysis affords a reading of how the literature of displaced writers challenges fixed notions of space where "static territorial form" inflicts prolonged suffering onto the lives of refugee people. Archipelagos offer a useful analytic through which to read spatially, particularly in the context of forced migrants' island-island movements in the archipelagic nations of Indonesia, Australia, and Papua New Guinea. I draw from archipelagic studies and sociologist Lanny Thompson who conceives of an archipelago as an "open system of relationships among islands" that "might be a way of tracing complex relationships that transverse, crisscross, and entangle the supposedly unitary territories of states, areas, and islands that make up the globalized world."[8]

The first section examines how Boochani defines an artistic identity as a novelist in contrast to the prevailing reception of his work as a non-fiction testimony of the refugee experience in Manus Prison. Boochani's claim to a writer's identity resists colonial readings of *No Friend* that recenter the settler colonial nation, by opening archipelagic connections beyond an Australia-Manus Island dialectic. The second section considers how *the archipelago* collective uses the spatial analytic of the archipelago to draw new cartographies and challenge colonial and racialized fantasies of Australia's separation from Asia. The third section explores how an archipelagic literature from writers of *the archipelago* and Boochani operates spatially by weaving archipelagos through language and geography to forge South-South connections.

Reading *the archipelago* and Boochani's work as creative rather than journalistic or testimonial enables us to engage with how they create new knowledge: displaced writers produce an archipelagic literature through a creative process of imagining beyond the boundaries of the refugee experience, and in turn, the archipelagos created in their narratives strive toward new geographic imaginaries by mapping rhizomatic relationships across islands.

Claiming a Writer's Identity

At the time Boochani was entering his fourth year of imprisonment in 2017, he had established himself as a prolific journalistic force. He published frequent accounts of the Manus Prison System for *The Guardian* and other international English language media. His Twitter feed and Facebook page had

become authoritative sources of news from the prison. Boochani was incessantly quoted by foreign journalists covering Australian refugee policy. He seemed to be the informant par excellence, producing a large body of reportage and autobiography and speaking at high personal risk from within the prison. His was one of few voices able to penetrate mainstream media and tear at the secrecy the Australian government enforced on the private security companies, guards, psychiatrists, and nurses who kept the prison running. However, when I traveled to Manus Island in August 2017 to study Boochani's practices of resistance, he spoke of his frustration with journalism. Writing for the *9th Annual Maroon Conference,* Boochani expressed dismay that although he has "been writing [on Manus Island] as a journalist for four years … the Australian people still do not realise exactly what is going on here. It seems no one recognises the situation as a form of systematic torture."[9]

Instead of journalism, Boochani wanted to create artistic work. Rather than a journalist reporting from Manus Prison, Boochani saw himself as an artist engaged in a larger intellectual project. Earlier that year, he had released the feature-length film, *Chauka Please Tell Us The Time,* co-directed with Iranian filmmaker Arash Kamali Sarvestani. The film uses the motif of the endemic Manusian Chauka bird to depict an intimate conversation between Boochani, the local people who live beside and work as guards within the prison, and Australian poet Janet Galbraith. *Chauka* weaves together his Kurdish identity with local Manusian culture, focalizing South-South relationships that situate the torture of refugee people within Australia's colonial exploitation of Papua New Guinea. In so doing, he disrupts the narrow mainland-island paradigm of refugee people trapped on a remote island by the settler colonial state of Australia.

Yet Boochani struggles to be recognized as a writer and artist. His creative work is often subsumed by the desire of critics, advocates, and audiences to take his creative output as factual autobiography, centering his testimony of the prison's abuse rather than his artistic interventions. In our conversations, Boochani criticized how whenever his film was covered by the media "all that they are interested in is 'Oh an asylum seeker made a film about Manus.'"[10] His film was received by Western viewers primarily as a political outcry against inhuman refugee policies. Most reviews of *Chauka* focused on the traumas faced by the prisoners and how the film had been covertly shot by Boochani on a mobile phone. The reception of *Chauka* constricted Boochani's intervention to that of the informant who offers a glimpse of the suffering facing those on the inside of the prison. However, according to Boochani, "this movie is not only about the refugees, this movie is about the local people, this movie is about the Manusian culture, this movie is about Kurdish people, this movie is about life, this movie is about humanity. This movie is not about politics; politics is only a part of this movie."[11] This chapter argues that by reading displaced creatives as writers and artists, we can see how their works do more than speak back to the nations that exclude them.

To further unpack this tension, I wish to consider how Boochani manifests his creative vision into a novel that he believed would expose the structures of systematic torture of Manus Prison. During the days we spent together, Boochani was completing the final stages of his novel *No Friend* and its translation from Persian to English with philosopher Omid Tofighian. It was to be a creative work that expounded his own theories on human experience. He believed the novel could convey "some idea about life. I have some idea about life's meaning, about the world. I have some idea and I share it. It is my philosophical way, my philosophical view, about how I understand my life. I describe it and share it with the reader."[12] In his own words, he does not seek to show readers the grim reality of imprisonment nor elicit empathy in the pursuit of policy change. Boochani's offering to the reader is his "philosophical view": his poetry and his vision.

However, since *No Friend* was published in 2018, it has been widely lauded as a non-fiction autobiography of Boochani's years in Manus Prison. In 2019, Boochani won the Victorian Prize for Literature, Australia's richest literary award. Within this award, *No Friend* won the Prize for Non-fiction. The book won the National Biography Award and the Australian Book Industry Award for General Non-Fiction Book of the Year. In the coverage of his novel's release, media reports across the globe focused on the incredible story of Behrouz Boochani, a refugee person who had typed out a book in secret on

a mobile phone, sending WhatsApp messages in the dead of night so that his phone, a prohibited item, would not be confiscated. The *New York Times*' headline when Boochani won the Victorian Prize is emblematic: "Book Written By Detainee Via Whatsapp Gets A Top Prize."[13] The novel's reception as a non-fiction text stands against Boochani's self-actualization as an artist and novelist. It seeks to limit his intervention to the first-hand perspective of a witness, a prisoner whose writing serves to bear testament to trauma.

When displaced writers are subordinated into the position of trauma witnesses, their work can be appropriated by the settler colonial nation-state, betraying the colonizing compulsion to assimilate radical actors. The judges of the Victorian Prize found that "what's happening on Manus Island essentially is an Australian story—it's part of our experience, it's something that we need to own, that we need to understand."[14] While the panel acknowledged Australia's implicatedness in Manus Prison, this recognition quickly becomes possessive. The judges' claim that Boochani's novel is part of an Australian experience locates the merit of Boochani's writing in its ability to issue a testimony that contributes to the Australian story. The Director of the Wheeler Centre, the literary institution that administers the award, declared the novel "an indelible contribution to Australian publishing and storytelling."[15] By the same token, many prominent writers have claimed Boochani as an Australian writer. In the novel's own Foreword, Booker Prize-winning novelist Richard Flanagan hails Boochani as "a great Australian writer" whose "words have now irrevocably become our words."[16] This critical reception bestows an Australian identity onto a supposed victim of Australian exclusion, neatly folding Boochani's work within the embrace of the settler colonial nation-state.

In reality, these discursive gestures flatten the material differences that constitute Boochani's subject position as a Kurdish writer denied asylum by Australia, writing from Papua New Guinea. Flanagan's invocation of Boochani's writing as "our words" nullifies the rich presence of Kurdish literary traditions, language, and history layered throughout the novel and lassoes his literary and critical writing within notions of settler colonial Australia. Boochani himself makes no claims to be an Australian writer. It is precisely the ability to become Australian that has been denied to him.

In 2021, I curated a panel for the Makassar International Writers Festival with Indonesian writers Lily Yurianti Farid and Intan Paramaditha. We brought Boochani and Tofighian together with three leaders and writers of *the archipelago*—Warsan Weedhsan, J.N. Joniad, and Erfan Dana—to speak on their writing practices. Boochani elaborated on the tension he embodies between journalism and literature. Although he formerly worked as a journalist in Iran, he explains how he does not "trust in the language of journalism" and finds that "it is very superficial and part of the power structure … [journalism] is not a strong language to challenge the system."[17] Boochani's novel is a deliberate turn away from journalism. While *No Friend* charts Boochani's asylum journey from Indonesia to Australia and imprisonment on Manus Island, he foregrounds the novel as part of an intellectual project where he seeks to challenge the power structure of the prison. He reflects: "I thought that literature is a strong and powerful language…. I try to really write a literary piece and a piece of art … through art we are able to challenge the images which are created about the refugees."[18] It is only when we read Boochani's work as art rather than testimony that we can access his resistance to the systemic violence he faces as a refugee person. By articulating a writer's identity, Boochani argues for his creativity to be fully considered. *No Friend but the Mountains* is a novel that resists assimilation by the nation-state.

In Indonesia, writers in *the archipelago* make a similar claim to a writer's identity. Speaking on the festival panel with Boochani, Weedhsan describes how "I have a dream to be a great writer in the future. So, my articles about refugees is not only to tell the refugee stories. It's also showing the strength, creativity and talent that immigrant people have to their own dream."[19] Weedhsan's dream to be a great writer parallels Boochani's longing to create art in Manus Prison. Though she writes "articles about refugees," her writing and literary work goes further. Weedhsan works within *the archipelago* to foster the development of other writers as they work toward their artistic dreams in community: she articulates how the purpose of the collective "is not only to take their voices,"[20] but instead to cultivate the creative aspirations of the writers collective's members. As writers, Boochani and *the archipelago*

demand to be read for their intellect and imagination. By defining their identity artistically, displaced writers can transform their refugee experience from a prescriptive category into the ground for creative intervention. As I will explore in the following sections, this forms an archipelagic literature that destabilizes the nation-state by revealing new geographic formations. By fighting for an artistic identity, displaced writers insist on the most radical dimensions of their work.

New Cartographies of *the archipelago*

In 2020, *the archipelago* collective began producing more and more creative work. We decided to create a literary magazine where we would have the agency to frame the texts we publish as we see fit, in contrast to the critical reception of Boochani's novel as autobiography. As we started work toward this magazine, I asked each writer in the collective to propose a name. We voted and decided on Darfurian writer Mahdi Zain's suggestion to name us *the archipelago*. Zain first encountered the Arabic word الأرخبيل (archipelago) as a synonym for Indonesia during a high school geography lesson in Sudan. Years later, this archipelago moved from periphery to center as a result of his displacement. For Zain, the archipelago is "the icon that illuminates my road to free my thoughts and achieve my dreams to be a writer. I picked this name for it can unify us as writers with different goals, countries, attitudes, as it unifies its islands."[21] In naming the collective through the archipelago, he brilliantly harmonizes the spatial figure of a constellation of islands with his experiences as a writer in Java in communion with other writers across islands. He weds the literary with the spatial. This name guides the collective and the literary magazine. It is not a magazine of refugee people. Rather, it is a magazine of archipelagic thinking—literary and artistic works which entangle relationships across islands, reimagining the world spatially. In this way, *the archipelago* acts against a colonial gaze enacted onto the works of refugee people, emphasizing the South–South connections they weave and reading them as art, not testimony.

This archipelago holds within it a multitude of ethical tensions. Our meetings take place in English for the sake of mutual intelligibility. Writers are encouraged to write in their mother tongues or whichever language they prefer. However, most choose to write directly in English. Their choice is influenced by the aspiration of most refugee people in Indonesia to be resettled in anglophone resettlement nations such as the U.S., Canada, and Australia. Learning English is often one of the first priorities for refugee people who have recently arrived in Jakarta, signaling entry to a globalized anglophone world that privileges a human rights discourse that supposedly guarantees safe haven. This linguistic and power dynamic is further complicated by my positionality as a writer of color educated in the U.S and bearing both Australian and Peruvian nationalities. Archipelagic thinking offers a practice for navigating these tensions, imperfectly and without dissolving the imbalance in power between refugee people and interlocutors who are not displaced and who often hold the privileges of citizenship in the Global North. I define my role within the collective as a facilitator, to foster relationships between writers and to support their work by using the institutions I am part of to secure and redistribute resources. In planning the writers groups together with Weedhsan, we repeatedly emphasized to the writers that our collective was not a workshop or a writing training. Any such training in how to write is in the first instance impossible given an understanding of the complexity of each writer's linguistic, cultural, and literary traditions. Moreover, it inevitably colonizes the writing produced by applying the instructor's literary conventions onto the group. It was imperative that, like Boochani, each writer creates their own language.

On August 15, 2021, we appointed two new editors who are Hazara writers in Indonesia, in response to the Taliban takeover of Kabul. These editors work directly with writers in Persian and have autonomy to judge and solicit new work. Within *the archipelago* magazine, I am one of five editors as of the time of writing. Conscious of the long history of Western academics and writers mediating the creative work of writers in the Global South, I refuse practices such as line editing, instead engaging in a back-and-forth conversation with each writer on how to develop their craft. The figure of the archipelago emphasizes the importance of the relationships across space and language that the writers collective and editorial

team represents. Through these archipelagos, we stake a contingent grassroots practice that aims to spread power and resources while continuously interrogating our complicities and shortcomings.

Holding foremost the claims of displaced writers to an artistic identity, I wish to turn to how *the archipelago* writers' literary work operates spatially. I will illustrate how their texts create new, divergent cartographies through archipelagic thinking, in the context of Australia's violent bordering and exclusion of refugee people in Indonesia. *the archipelago* website features a map that opens on a view of the islands of Indonesia, West Papua, Papua New Guinea, and Northern Australia. Within the frame of the map, the viewer is immediately confronted with the closeness of these islands; the Australian Torres Strait Islands and the southern edge of Papua New Guinea's coastline meld into one another. Southern islands in the Indonesian archipelago are revealed as irrevocable neighbors to northern Arnhem Land. The map uses a satellite terrain view to accentuate these proximities, rendering visible the pale whisps of reefs and submerged islands that further fill the ocean between continents and bely the separation between Asia and Australia. In this way, the map responds to Suvendrini Perera's suggestion that "the massivity and *thereness* of island–Australia, 'large and whole,' is very much a matter of *how* we read this geo-body, the space 'on the map.'"[22] This starting view when readers open the map on *the archipelago* website visualizes how the work of refugee people traces a transnational archipelago made up of the islands of Southeast Asia, Melanesia, and Australia, taking up Perera's provocation to change *how* we read this space on the map.

This map offers a new archipelago-making cartography in response to the foundational myths of island Australia. Perera unpacks how, in 1803, the charts created by British navigator Matthew Flinders are the first to "identify the coastlines of the places known to previous European explorers as New Holland and New South Wales as part of a connected landmass, one that he now names 'Terra Australis' or, for the first time, 'Australia.'"[23] Settler colonial Australia is birthed from Flinders' charts; it comes into being only once the island's complete coastline has been charted. This island solidity intentionally destroys the "highway in the sea" of the historic Malay Road, which connected northern Australian

Figure 33.1   The archipelago map as at November 23, 2021, www.thearchipelago.org.

Indigenous peoples within complex trade routes with islands that today constitute part of Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Malaysia and other islands of Oceania.[24] Once mapped, Australia can be made separate, reflecting how "Islands of the Western imaginary … [are] defined by their insularity, their inwardness, their sense of interior."[25] In contrast, the map of *the archipelago* seeks to write over the lines Flinders drew, to amplify divergent assemblages of island-island relationships.

Flinders and the formation of settler colonial Australia as island-continent reflects what Francis Maravillas identifies as an Australian existential anxiety as the Southern antipode of the North. Maravillas writes of how "the trope of the South … marked Australia's anxious location as White settler colony on the fringes of Asia."[26] Australia was formed by British colonial fantasies of a Great South Land that could counterbalance Asia. This Great South Land was to be explicitly white, reflecting a racial anxiety over the Indigenous peoples of Oceania. Therefore, protecting the separateness, insularity, and whiteness of the Australian island against refugee people is an act of self-preservation for colonial fantasies of white antipodes. It is against this colonial fantasy that Boochani writes and *the archipelago* map intervenes.

Australian practices of imprisoning refugee people extraterritorially on carceral islands allow the nation to stop the southward movement of refugees arriving from Indonesia and Malaysia and to consolidate its borders as separate from Asia. This reflects a long history of British colonists using carceral islands to form and sustain the settler colonial nation. Australia began with land violently stolen from Indigenous peoples, then repopulated with exiled British convicts. In order to take land from First Nations peoples, "relocation to carceral islands was also part of frontier warfare and territorial acquisition, which violently displaced Indigenous Australians from their lands."[27] Subjects like Boochani who hinder the coming-into-being of Australia as a white antipode have been exiled to carceral islands since the beginning of British colonization. Amy Nethery finds how "by providing a space both separate and invisible to the community, Australia's carceral islands served as a solution to a recurring problem for a young nation apprehensive about the composition, durability and security of its community."[28]

Refugee people arriving by boat to Australia directly challenge the insularity of island-continent Australia by crossing the borders that ensure the nation's ongoing separation from Asia. Were their travels to be mapped, it would reveal Australia as one of many islands of its region. Refugee people threaten "the moat that surrounds the unassailable fortress of the newly inaugurated modern nation-state of Australia."[29] Understanding the existential threat represented by displaced people who ask for safety in Australia, both liberal and conservative governments have staged an elaborate two-decade-long war on asylum seekers in, and crossing from, Indonesia. They spend billions for the Australian Navy to patrol the seas, and have ruled that refugee people who arrived in Indonesia after July 2014 will never be considered for resettlement in Australia. Consequently, in 2018, the UNHCR began holding large town hall events among refugee communities in Indonesia, informing them that they should expect never to be resettled, or to wait 25 years. These events set off a cascade of self-harm and suicides in refugee communities.

The collective's map is populated with markers that open into literature and art published by *the archipelago*. The words and images of these creative works fill the map, emplacing their work spatially. Take Jakarta, where many of the writers live. On the map, Jakarta becomes a place filled with the narratives of refugee people, overlaid with Dari and Somali words. It is painted by artists from diverse cultural traditions and situated within the experiences and artistry of refugee people, who in turn are positioned within a transnational archipelago of their work on the world map. In this way, the map decenters Australia, even as its archipelagos disrupt Australia's white antipodality. That is, the cultural materials on the map emplace the bodies of refugee people into a material assemblage, locating their experiences within a palimpsest of relationships across islands, entangling national borders. This highlights South-South relationships between Indonesian people and refugee people—largely from Afghanistan, Somalia, Sudan, Myanmar, and Eritrea—who live and work creatively across the map's archipelagos.

In this way, archipelagic thinking extends far wider than the rapport between nation-state and island of exile, mainland and island, heeding Françoise Lionnet's warning against postcolonial readings where

"[c]ritiquing the center, when it stands as an end in itself, seems only to enhance it; the center remains the focus and the main object of study."[30] Through the sustained accumulation of creative pieces and markers, the collective's map traces myriad archipelagos between islands. These archipelagos draw new demarcations, displacing traditional borders like Flinder's charts of Australia to reveal rhizomatic interconnections across places. *the archipelago* materializes Irit Rogoff's view of geography as "an alternative set of relations between subjects and places … which determine both belonging and unbelonging" and contributes to Anne McNevin's characterization of "a spatial field of human interaction that defies subordination to conventional cartographies and simplistic scalar registers."[31] The colonial fantasies of settler colonial Australia as a white antipode are subverted and replaced with complex ties across many islands, fashioned through literature and visual art.

Archipelagic Literature

The literature of *the archipelago* collective performs similar spatial maneuvers as the map, becoming an archipelagic literature that decenters the nation-state. I would like to examine how three short stories from *the archipelago*'s launch in 2020 write their subjects within complex linguistic, social, and geographic formations. Sade Del, a Hazara writer, employs archipelagic thinking through his entanglement of languages. In his short story, "The Uncalled Guest," he writes of a morning walk to the local market, where he is stopped by two young Hazara boys running from a group of Indonesian boys:

> One of them had his glasses broken. His face was punched, his lips were bleeding. He said La La Jan, they have beaten us. We escaped but still they want to catch us. … The Indonesian boys looked angry. They ran toward us in their Sarong and Songkok. They stopped running, staring at me.
>   "Orang Pakistan, Orang Pakistan," one of them said.[32]

When the Hazara boys speak to the narrator, there is an absence of quotation marks—their dialogue melds into the narrator's storytelling. In contrast, the Indonesian boys' taunts are written conventionally, creating a divide between how the narrator encounters each group's voices. Del continues to the market, where he buys internet data for his phone. He meets a familiar shopkeeper: "'Mau Apa Mister?' She asked. 8 GB Indosat Berapa? I asked. Yag Lag, she said in Hazaragi. Oh Mahal 4 GB, I said. Char GB? Ok Boleh! Boleh! With a smile."[33] In the telling of this everyday occurrence, Del signals a shift in register when the shopkeeper switches from Bahasa Indonesia "Mau Apa Mister?" to employ Hazaragi words such as "Yag Lag." The conventional quotation marks drop away, and through Hazaragi, the narrator and the shopkeeper enter into a closer connection, illustrating the frequent interactions between Indonesian and Hazara people. Writing in English without translation, Del challenges hegemonic discourses by creolizing the English language. He slides between English, Dari, Hazaragi, and Indonesian throughout the story, doing so fluidly and with ease, without marking any of the languages as foreign or needing to directly explain words' meanings.

Importantly, an archipelagic literature gestures at the Australian mainland without centering it. Two short stories, Sumaya Nilab's "Car Journey" and Helma Sepid's "The Red Sky," examine the writers' first arrival to Indonesia. In "Car Journey," Nilab's narrator steps out of an airport somewhere in Indonesia. In the story, Australia is a dark premonition: "My brother's hardships on his way to Australia had not left me with a good imagination, but with all the fears inside me, I took my shoulders back and kept my head up."[34] Nilab foreshadows the narrator's expected end point of her migration, yet it is a passing reference, a glance forward from her brother's past, while the story focuses on her first encounters with Indonesia. In Sepid's short story, "The Red Sky," the narrator arrives at a wharf where their smuggler "points to the sea and says, 'Australy, Australy' and laughs. We know he is mocking us but no one has the least tendency to fulminate."[35] Australia figures as the intended destination of the narrator's asylum journey, but the foreshadowing of Australia arrives from the smuggler's

perspective. The narrator herself rejects the smuggler's mockery. Rather, Sepid writes this moment inside of a multigenerational understanding of migration. The narrator flashes back to her family history in Afghanistan, crafting parallels between her exit to Indonesia and her father's migration fleeing Afghanistan to Iran. These stories portray refugee people as situated within long histories of migration across different regions, carry the writers' language traditions into the places they currently reside, and assert agency over the narrative of refugee people living in Indonesia.

Similar to the work of *the archipelago*, Boochani's novel traces complex archipelagos that reorient the geography around him, reinforcing South-South relationships. As a novelist, Boochani centers his Kurdish identity. The novel intersperses scenes from Indonesia and Manus Island with flashbacks to the narrator's childhood within what he portrays as a cauldron of war, hiding in caves above Ilam while the narrator's mother offers her children stories when there is no food. The narrator struggles against the "abominable nativity" of a stateless Kurd born in Iran.[36]

> I am disintegrated and dismembered, my decrepit past fragmented and scattered, no longer integral, unable to become whole once again. The total collection of scenes turns like pages of a short story …. I must confess that I don't know who I am and what I will become …. As I grow older, the images form into coherent islands, but they never lose that sense of fragmentation and dislocation. Life is full of islands; islands that all appear to be completely foreign lands in comparison to each other.[37]

The peripatetic form of the novel which moves between Manus Prison and Ilam mirrors the narrator's struggle to cohere his own identity, grappling with a "disintegrated and dismembered" sense of self as a result of his fragmented past. This conflict with memory disallows any denouement for the narrator's past, reflecting how this narrative is told from a position of indefinite imprisonment, a story without an end. This highlights Boochani's epistemic position as writing and theorizing from a position of displacement, revealing the impossibilities of return and arrival for many displaced individuals and contrasting with teleological memoirs produced after refugee people have been resettled. Boochani's narrator tries to bring together his fragmented memories since childhood. To do so, he imagines his life as a "total collection of scenes turn[ing] like pages of a short story."[38] Boochani's writing process is a spatial one: his novel is an archipelago of the dislocated islands of the narrator's memories between Ilam, Indonesia, and Manus Island. An archipelagic formation enables these islands to be placed together as a single text, while remaining as separate islands, a constellation that does not unify. *No Friend* embodies an archipelagic literature in Boochani's writing method, which uses fragmented memories to render South-South relationships between Kurdish Ilam and Manus Prison.

As the narrator analyzes the islands of memory he realizes that "there were practices of escape … signifying practices. Practices of escape that reform real-life encounters into fantastic scenes and incidents, reformulate reality in the most brilliant of ways."[39] I read this practice of escape as Boochani's literary intervention into his lived experiences. This represents an evolving writing practice that refashions the systematic torture of the prison into "fantastic scenes" that enable a reimagination of the prison. Extending our spatial reading, we can open up how *No Friend* reformulates the confines of the prison to create new geographic entanglements. Boochani traces the historical and contemporary relationships underlying Manus Prison to bring into being an archipelagic vision of the spatial connections between Iran, Manus Island, and the Australian island.

Later in the novel, the narrator wanders along the edge of the prison fences closest to the ocean. He notices a building that is gradually collapsing, its walls full of holes. Inside, he finds the walls painted with cartoon animals, the smiling faces of nuclear families, the letters of the English alphabet, and birds in flight. The narrator has found a former kindergarten classroom used fifteen years earlier. Manus Prison had first incarcerated refugee people at the behest of the Australian government as part of a "Pacific Solution" to arriving asylum seeker boats between 2001 and 2008.[40] The juxtaposition between jovial cartoon paintings and the trauma faced by imprisoned young children is held together by the

building's decay, representing the fading memory of these children's imprisonment. The prison risks being forgotten, never written into history and memory.

In November 2017, all prisoners were violently moved to a new prison site closer to Lorengau, the local town, after twenty-three days of peaceful protest. The prisoners had refused to leave, knowing that they were being relocated to obscurity—after four years, Manus Prison had become a contested political site in the eye of the Australian public and international observers. After forcibly moving the prisoners, the original Manus Prison was demolished, its buildings razed to the ground. Boochani's novel resists this erasure. He writes Manus Prison into history and transgresses the Australian story by challenging what Ernest Renan tells us is the necessary forgetfulness of nation-building.[41] Boochani sketches a condensed history of the prison, recalling how "During the 1950s the Australian Navy seized a large piece of land that back then was a dense jungle. They destroyed the jungle and established a large garrison. Long before this area was transformed into Oscar Prison, it was an entertainment ground for Navy officers so they could play baseball."[42] The prison was built on Lombrum Naval Base, a base first established by the U.S. Navy in April 1944, in their fight against the Japanese occupation of the Admiralty Islands.[43]

Walking through the kindergarten classroom, which then housed a recently arrived group of Sri Lankan refugee prisoners, the narrator is struck with the conclusion that "This space is part of Australia's legacy and a central feature of its history—this place is Australia itself—this right here is Australia."[44] With this claim, Boochani writes Manus Prison and Australia into interconnection, marking them as at once overlapping and apart. By naming the classroom as "Australia itself," Boochani flips the Australian government's attempts to exclude refugee people by imprisoning them on carceral islands overseas. He creates a new critical geography that writes the prison into Australia. Boochani engages in Édouard Glissant's notion of errant thought, thought that "silently emerges from the destructuring of compact national entities that yesterday were still triumphant and, at the same time, from difficult, uncertain births of new forms of identity that call to us."[45] He issues a new cartography, redrawing Australia as an archipelago that extends to Papua New Guinea, challenging the national borders that keep asylum seeker boats out and protect the unitary monolith of mainland Australia.

However, Boochani's novel traces further archipelagos that reinforce South-South relationships beyond the Australia-Manus dialectic. Boochani depicts how Australian authorities attempt to shape the prisoners' views of the Manusian people:

> They have spent quite some time forming an image of Manus Island in our minds, a savage image of the people, the culture, the history, the landscape. As a result, I think Manus must be an island with a warm climate and full of insidious strange insects. That instead of wearing clothes, the people of Manus cover their sexual organs and waists with broad banana leaves …. The information we had access to explained that the Manusians are cannibals. Rather than striking fear into me, these thoughts hearten me, inspire me.[46]

Before being deported to Manus Island, the immigration officials create a racist, imperialist depiction of Manus Island and its Indigenous peoples. Boochani disassembles the colonial construction of cannibalism through humor and absurdity. The narrator imagines that "perhaps they will delight in eating my bony arms, I think. No doubt they would fight over this …. Especially if those arms are like mine: little hair, delicate and long."[47] By satirizing the possibility of being dismembered and eaten, Boochani ridicules the division and fear the immigration officials seek to inculcate among the prisoners.

Throughout the novel, Boochani examines the solidarity between the prisoners and the Manusian prison guards. The narrator highlights how the prison guards are subordinated by Australian colleagues who hold all positions of power in Manus Prison. Local people earn one-fifth of the wage of Australian guards, leading the narrator to conclude that they too fall at the bottom of the prison hierarchy. Prisoners trade cigarettes with the Manusian guards, "who smoke in secret the cigarettes they have received from the prisoners; they smoke at the end of halls, in dark and hidden corners of the prison, out of sight from

the Australians, and shaking in fear."[48] Boochani emphasizes how Manus Prison oppresses the Manusian people just as it acts against the prisoners themselves. The Australian antipodal fantasy seeks to colonize and subjugate the Manusian people who do not fit into its white imaginary, just as it incarcerates refugee people. Australian officials perpetuate this colonial impulse. By focusing on solidarity with the Manusian guards, Boochani eschews simplistic interpretations that reinforce the colonizer's sense of an isolated mainland, and instead demonstrates the potential of archipelagic literature to weave South-South relationships.

Conclusion

Recognizing the significance of the archipelagos these writers build, I do not wish to glamorize a symbolic structure that is constructed around the lived experiences of long-term trauma and suffering. In Indonesia, many writers in *the archipelago* write while experiencing the effects of PTSD and severe depression, particularly exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Writing often occurs on mobile phones, in shared rented rooms, in a state of intense precarity without an end date. I do not wish to paint an pitiful picture of these writers' circumstances, nor lionize them as resilient and superhuman. Rather, it is significant to this analysis to recognize the material realities of disenfranchisement, statelessness, and discrimination that displaced people live each day. These are also realities beyond my own comprehension and ability to represent, as a writer with the privileges entailed by citizenship and education in the Global North.

Boochani writes, "I practically killed myself to write this book. This book is the product of internal deterioration, the product of reopening bloody wounds festering deep down inside, it is the product of years of living in isolation, years of being alone."[49] As a writer, Boochani will "cut through [his] experiences like a knife, cut through with aggression, with a tongue like a sword, cutting deep within oneself."[50] Creating an archipelagic novel through this series of cuts reveals the heavy labor Boochani and the writers of *the archipelago* undertake in breaking open current colonial cartographies to imagine archipelagic geographies and craft their own language. In acknowledging the difficulties refugee people work with, from, and through, this chapter privileges them as writers: producers of new knowledge who use the space around them to reorient the globe through the figure of the archipelago.

Notes

 1 Boochani, *No Friend but the Mountains,* 5.
 2 Zable, "Behrouz Boochani tells of the horrors of Manus Island."
 3 Boochani, *No Friend,* 11.
 4 In his novel, Behrouz Boochani "renames the Manus Island Regional Processing Centre … as 'Manus Prison,'" which the novel's translator Omid Tofighian describes as an act to "own the prison … he names it, defines it and critically analyses it on his own terms." In this chapter, I take up Boochani's terms, eschewing the governmental euphemism of a regional processing center.
 5 Boochani, *No Friend,* 126–8.
 6 Boochani, *No Friend,* 128.
 7 Pugh, "Island Movements," 12.
 8 Thompson, "Heuristics Geographies," 57–61.
 9 Boochani, "A Kyriarchal System."
10 In-person interview between the author and Behrouz Boochani, Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, August, 2017.
11 In-person interview between the author and Behrouz Boochani, Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, August, 2017.
12 In-person interview between the author and Behrouz Boochani, Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, August, 2017.
13 Kwai, "Book Written By Detainee."
14 Young, "How A Man Detained On Manus Island Won."
15 Kwai, "Book Written By Detainee."
16 Boochani, *No Friend,* ix.

17 Rumata Artspace, "Immobility and Displacement."
18 Rumata Artspace, "Immobility and Displacement."
19 Rumata Artspace, "Immobility and Displacement."
20 Rumata Artspace, "Immobility and Displacement."
21 "About," *the archipelago*.
22 Perera, *Australia,* 59.
23 Perera, *Australia,* 59.
24 Perera, *Australia,* 59.
25 McMahon, "Australia, the Island Continent," 182.
26 Maravillas, "Boats, Borders," 2.
27 Roscoe, "A Natural Hulk," 48.
28 Nethery, "Separate and invisible," 86.
29 Maravillas, "Boats, Borders," 3.
30 Lionnet and Shi, *Minor Transnationalism,* 3.
31 Rogoff, *Terra Infirma,* 7; McNevin, "Border Policing," 411.
32 Del, "The Uncalled Guest."
33 Del, "The Uncalled Guest."
34 Nilab, "Car Journey."
35 Sepid, "The Red Sky."
36 Boochani, *No Friend,* 262.
37 Boochani, *No Friend,* 265.
38 Boochani, *No Friend,* 265.
39 Boochani, *No Friend,* 265.
40 "Manus," *BBC News.*
41 Renan, "Qu'est-ce Qu'une Nation?"
42 Boochani, *No Friend,* 158–9.
43 "Lombrum Naval Base," Global Security.
44 Boochani, *No Friend,* 158.
45 Glissant, *Poetics of Relation,* 18.
46 Boochani, *No Friend,* 83.
47 Boochani, *No Friend,* 83.
48 Boochani, *No Friend,* 83.
49 Boochani and Tofighian, "Literary Experimentation and Shared Philosophical Activity," 132.
50 Boochani, *No Friend,* 263.

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34

SPATIAL EMPATHY IN REFUGEE VIDEO GAMES

Nathan Allen Jung

In a 2017 essay published in *The Financial Times*, Pulitzer-prize winning author Viet Thanh Nguyen writes: "As the refugees cluster in camps; as they dare to make a claim on the limited real estate of our conscience – we deny we can be like them and many of us do everything we can to avoid our obligations to them."[1] Nguyen's essay interweaves familial and national histories to explore nationalism, humanism, and refugeeism during an acute crisis in global migration. This particular passage stands out for its mix of real and metaphoric spaces ("camps" and the "conscience") and for the way it connects such spaces to readers' empathy for refugees. While it is common to think of maps, borders, and movement in contexts of refugeeism, and while we often invoke pathos to prompt ethical obligations, Nguyen integrates these elements. He clearly spatializes emotion in the essay, and in so doing, he highlights "spatial empathy," an under-discussed aspect of contemporary refugee discourses.

This chapter examines the relationship between space and emotion in refugee narratives, focusing specifically on refugee-centered video games. Owing to their coupling of story and spatial movement, such games are ideal objects for an analysis of space in refugee narratives. Players must, for example, encounter the emotional elements of these games through their own, self-directed navigation of the gameworld. This allows for a more situated and interactive experience of the overlap between space and emotion than one might find in a novel or photograph.[2]

I use a framework of affective geography to ask how and why emotions are spatialized in so-called "serious games"—that is, games with explicitly activist aims—about the refugee experience. Affective geography refers to how our physical experiences of space subtend a literal and metaphorical distance from others' experiences of space, and ultimately impact emotional connections like empathy. Empathy is crucial to this chapter because it is arguably the most common mechanism used by serious games to achieve political ends like increasing investment in refugees grappling with the push factor of geopolitical conflict, and addressing environmental degradation. Ultimately, such games foreground the relationship between emotions and space in order to elicit unique forms of politically engaged empathy for both non-refugee players and for refugee players seeking to engage with their own experiences and/ or with the experiences of other refugees. This spatial empathy, I argue, uses players' experiences of game-space to highlight the conditions needed for empathy, rather than guaranteeing its production.

To make this argument, I expand on my work in transmedia narratives and diasporic time-geography[3] with four goals in mind: first, to shine a light on the overlooked corpus of refugee games generally, and to provide more detailed analyses of three such games—*Cloud Chasers* (2018), an adventure game with roleplaying elements that uses science fiction to examine the movement of climate refugees; *Resilience* (2020), which also uses science fiction tropes to explore resource management in the space of the refugee camp; and *Path Out* (2017), an "autobiographical narrative adventure" that employs shifts

in chronology to represent space and memory in displacement. These games have been discussed by scholars in various combinations, but not together, and not in the context of my second goal, which is to view the self-directed navigation of spaces in these games as a contribution to both refugee narratives and research on spatial theory and refugee displacement. My third goal is to connect refugee games to affective geography, and by extension, to contribute to the field of human geography by highlighting the relevance of these geography subfields to the spaces of video games. Finally, I ask how we might use the similarities in these games' approaches to spatial empathy to better account for contemporary refugee narratives and the social conditions serving as their backdrop. What can the way that these games organize space tell us about the relationship between refugee "camps" and the "real estate of our conscience," in the words of Nguyen, in the present day?

The chapter proceeds as follows: in the next section, I review the current state of refugee video games and related scholarship. The chapter then turns to spatial theory and human geography to develop how these games relate empathy and game-space. Last, I analyze the three games mentioned above, comparing and contrasting how they contribute to the affective geography of refugee narratives. In particular, I am interested in how they develop a heightened awareness of the constructed nature of space and its influence on our capacity for empathy with refugee subjects. Spatial empathy—which is less an assurance of empathetic identification and more an engagement with the core elements of its potential emergence—is seen as the central mechanism for the activist dimensions of these diverse refugee games. Accordingly, I focus on the affective topography of things-in-space, spatial planning in the context of refugee camps, and the relationship between affect, space, and time.

Refugee Narratives, Video Games, and Empathy

Contemporary refugee narratives are critical of both the nation-state model of "humanitarian narratives" that privileges the final destination of refugee migration across states, and the neoliberal model of globalization that privileges continuous movement across undifferentiated global space. This doubly critical stance results from the precariousness of a situation in which, as noted by Yogita Goyal, "the refugee demands new paradigms for conceptualizing relation both historically and spatially."[4] As a result, refugee narratives have naturally gravitated toward new paradigms of contemporary media like video games.

The unique interactivity and relative newness of video games as a narrative form invite a baseline discussion of critical approaches to the medium and the current corpus of video games with refugee narratives. In terms of corpus, there are many games to consider; a short list includes *Against all Odds* (2006), an educational point-and-click game examining different aspects of migrants' experiences; *The Migrant Trail* (2014), a simulation game that is part of a larger transmedia project wherein players navigate border spaces from the perspectives of either the border patrol or refugees; and text-based games like *Two Billion Miles* (2015), *Syrian Journey: Choose Your Escape Route* (2015), and *Bury Me, My Love* (2017), which tell migrant stories in branching narratives delivered via text and images.

In terms of critical method, one could explore the text-driven narratives of the games themselves, analyze their material production, or undertake a reception-based analysis of their circulation within particular communities. Since my goal is to address the intrinsic features of game-space used by refugee games, I will draw on the media studies scholarship of Ian Bogost, Rita Raley, and Steve Jones. Ian Bogost describes "persuasive games" as an example of procedural rhetoric, by which he means persuasive efforts that result from "rule-based representation and interactions rather than the spoken word, writing, images, or moving pictures."[5] Bogost's work allows us to understand that refugee games are making arguments that are neither strictly didactic nor reducible to text. This chapter also incorporates Rita Raley's concept of "tactical media" to understand the political interventions made by refugee games, which participate in a "micropolitics of disruption" in the dominant media-scape.[6]

Finally, I look to Steve Jones' discussion of game space as the dynamic product of social conventions. Jones leans on bibliography and textual studies to understand the layers of activity and interaction

constituting game spaces, arguing, "The point is that the delineated space of any game is necessarily a social convention. That makes it very much part of the real world."[7] Game spaces, he notes, interact with other spaces from other games as well as spaces from outside of video games, even (as we will see) in the fantastical worlds of *Cloud Chasers* and *Resilience*. Jones further contends that video game space is "socially co-constructed, and you have to agree to 'see' it as the space of the game, for the duration of the game. Maybe another time, you'll modify or reconfigure it, because that possibility is always inherent in, built into, the kind of constructed spaces that define games."[8] This emphasis on the co-habitation, permeability, and adaptability of virtual and real spaces is crucial to my view of the empathetic response prompted by refugee games' affective geography.

Together, these authors suggest a method of approaching space in games that is at once social, political, and formal. It is not based on the one-to-one correspondence between the emotions of the player and the emotions of their avatar that often drives discussions of empathy in such games. Christoph Plewe and Elfriede Fürsich, for example, argue that refugee "newsgames" foster identification between players and their refugee avatars through verbal requests, graphics, and focalization on refugees. In these and other ways, the authors argue that newsgames "evoke emotions and feelings such as stress, trepidation or despair in the player in order to – at least to a certain degree – convey the emotions that the player characters would feel if the situation were real."[9] This identification creates a "reactive empathy" which they define as a "feeling of sympathy or pity, towards the refugees [that is] partly achieved by providing insight into the personal background of the refugees, their stories, their motivations, and their losses due to their escape."[10] Reactive empathy helps explain some of the characteristics of these refugee newsgames (in particular, their text-narrative aspects); however, it also arguably perpetuates the refugee narrative of abject pity that informs many twentieth-century refugee narratives. Reactive empathy demands a subject-to-subject empathetic response that risks paternalizing the refugee and avoids critiques of the power structures that produce refugeeism.

By contrast, the games in this chapter advance a more complex view of empathy in the game space itself. The spatial empathy elicited by these games is resolutely "non-reactive," as the games address the barriers to such one-to-one correspondences designed into their virtual environments. My view of spatial empathy runs closer to the work of Victor Navarro-Remesal and Beatriz Pérez Zapata, who argue that refugee games produce not pity but compassion, which they find more radical owing to its orientation toward justice. Compassion starts from the same place as reactive empathy: overlap between real and fictive elements in gameplay creates an interconnectedness between player and refugee avatar. However, compassion derives less from exposure to, for example, the refugee's backstory, and more from gameplay: "By placing the players as protagonists and/or in very short proximity to the refugees' experiences, these games aim to bring to the fore more reflective forms of compassion that go beyond both acting 'on the spot' and bearing witness, by questioning the rules within and outside their ludofictional worlds. They are based on a procedural rhetoric of suffering."[11] Players connect the frustration they feel when navigating the game to the suffering of the refugee, which the authors argue creates compassion.

By moving away from empathetic paternalism, the ludofictive model of compassion is, as mentioned, closer to the politics of contemporary refugee games analyzed in this chapter. And yet, reactive empathy and compassion both prioritize identification between player and avatar. Even compassion remains bound to a substitution of emotion which is, at heart, subject-to-subject. At the risk of being reductive, this substitution says, "My frustration as a player equates to the refugee's suffering as a displaced migrant." The clear discordance between these experiences should lead us to question the claims of reactive empathy and compassion, while still pursuing the empathetic aspirations of these games. To develop this idea, I turn to affective geography to map out the spatial empathy prompted by these games. Affective geography helps disclose the spatial nature of emotional identification in a way that avoids subject-to-subject correspondences and instead emphasizes how the bodily experience of socially constructed space potentiates emotion, and by extension, empathy. By looking at the affective geographies of refugee games, we can adopt a new view of the political dynamics regulating empathetic responses to refugee experiences—a view grounded in spatial experience.

Navigating Affective Geography

Analyzing the uses of space in refugee games both contributes to and builds from a broader "spatial turn" in the humanities and social sciences. While this turn toward what Michel Foucault calls "the epoch of space" includes theorists like Michel de Certeau, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, and Henri Lefebvre, the present chapter will focus on the human geography associated with geographers like David Harvey, Gillian Rose, Doreen Massey, and Edward Soja.[12] These geographers offer "a model of geography that studies the interrelationship between people, places, and the environment and how these vary spatially and between locations."[13]

The "human geography" developed by these and other scholars has branched into more specific subfields like "emotional geography" and "affective geography." While often used interchangeably, "emotion" and "affect" have distinct meanings in human geography, as discussed by Steve Pile: "emotional geography emphasizes the significance of expressed emotions while non-representational theory emphasizes the importance of inexpressible affects …. That said, there remains broad agreement, in the study of emotions and affect, on the importance of the bodily and on the difficulty (at least) of expressing emotions."[14] In other words, while affect and emotion both deal with feelings, they take different points of emphasis in terms of consciousness, physicality, representation, and temporality. Affect describes the physical relations that form the precondition for emotional ties between people, places, and things. As noted by Keith Woodward and Jennifer Lea, it is "the medium through which bodies sustain and transform each other, and, as such, it is fundamentally social: a materialist account of bodily association."[15] Affect encompasses the inexpressible elements of our physical configurations, which form the baseline for a whole host of other relations.

Affective geography's focus on non-representational forms of embodied knowledge stems from a desire to "conceptualize the world beyond its representation through a variety of mediatory forces, such as text, maps and photography for example, that capture and express the world and, in so doing, render it intelligible."[16] The assumption of an originative and non-signifiable basis for our emotional experience positively invites post-structuralist critique, but for this chapter, affective geography enables an exploration of how refugee games combine space, emotion, and empathy. If affect is the physical potentiality of emotion, and emotions are necessary for empathy, then we can pause to consider how the non-representable category of affect might be represented in refugee games through the interactive spatial elements of the medium.

These games challenge what Benjamin Fraser calls spatial epistemology through the embodied knowledge of "mētis,"[17] which in the context of video games he defines as a form of knowledge that is gained "not through the passive absorption of images, but rather through an active and largely self-directed process of exploration."[18] The player's apprehension of space in video games is, by virtue of the interactive and open-ended nature of games, not reducible to one single experience: "video games successfully create a more visible model of how we form knowledge of our spatial environment not merely through abstract modelling and static representation, but through the embodied experience of movement."[19] Video games, in Fraser's view, thus show how we form knowledge of space in a way that is distinct from more traditionally narrative aspects of the games, like dialogue. He notes that "mētis is not merely abstract and representational, but rather embodied, active, mobile, and always rooted in accumulated time."[20] Refugee games demonstrate affective geography by exploring how space, and our movements through it, set the limits of our available emotional responses.

This idea has significant consequences for spatial empathy in refugee narratives. By presenting space as a process-driven and embodied experience, refugee games foreground the web of spatial identifications governing empathy. Refugee games model how we come to know space as an intimate physical process, which offers an opportunity to critically reflect on the affective geography undergirding our empathy, or lack therefore, for the material experiences of crossing borders, fleeing hardships, facing scarcities, and so on. As seen in the following analyses, the materialist spatial knowledge of mētis in refugee games generates uniquely spatial forms of empathy that should influence our assessments of the forms and politics of twenty-first-century refugee narratives.

Objects in Space: The Affect of Things in *Cloud Chasers*

Cloud Chasers is a climate refugee game that meditates on how material objects not only define our sense of space but also take on affective qualities, especially in contexts of involuntary migration and resource scarcity. Billed as a "Decision Making Migration Story," *Cloud Chasers* was released in 2015 by Blindflug Studios, whose previous game *First Strike* (2016) dealt with the environmental catastrophe of nuclear fallout. *Cloud Chasers* tells the story of a corn farmer and widower Francisco and his daughter Amelia, who inhabit a world desiccated by business interests; these businesses use machines called "cloud harvesters" to monopolize the available water in the clouds, which they redistribute to the ultra-rich living on islands floating above the clouds. Francisco sees no future for his daughter in the scorched and empty village—his narration is overcast by feelings of loss and mourning for what the space used to be—and he thus decides that he and Amelia will undertake a perilous journey to reach "The Spire," a gate leading to the islands where their resources have been diverted, and where Amelia might have a better life. As climate refugees, they take on environmental hazards, policing, and resource scarcity with only a family glider, which Amelia can use to harvest water from clouds, and whatever items they can find during their journey.

Given its focus on climate refugeeism, it should come as no surprise that in terms of game dynamics, *Cloud Chasers* is very much a resource-gathering game, with water playing the role of primary resource. Gameplay is centered on the need to constantly assess dwindling water supplies, which drain as the two characters navigate the desert spaces; water therefore acts, in essence, as both a secondary life bar and in-game currency. This shows how resource scarcity works on the body of the refugee, as water is linked to health statistics and access to restorative items. The game is based on the primary interrelationship between resources—which manifest as in-game items, and which I will later rethink as "things"—and space. In *Cloud Chasers*, for example, space is inconceivable outside of the framework of water, which defines the spaces navigated by Francisco and his daughter in terms of urgency and danger. This inter-relationship forms the basis for an affective geography that engenders empathy through an emotional cartography of resources. I would thus like to focus on how the dynamics of resource gathering relate to the space of the game, and to players' affective investment in the plight of the climate refugees.

The game-space of *Cloud Chasers* is split: one part of the game takes place in the skies, and one part of the game takes place on the ground. In the first case, Amelia flies with a glider to collect water from the clouds, evading the cloud harvesters and spatial obstacles (mountainous formations and defense systems) that can damage the glider. This sky-level experience of space is defined by velocity and instant feedback—players have real-time handling of the glider and can perform acrobatic turns that lend this part of the game a feeling of insurgent possibility mirroring the freedom of movement found in globalization rhetoric. This stands far apart from the game's second engagement with space on the ground level, where the main camera adopts a birds-eye, cartographic view as we watch the father and daughter trudge across the barren deserts. Their movement is directed by clicking on the landscape, at which point Francisco and Amelia move to the spot in question. Movement generally proceeds from left to right and is very "hands off"—while the player can signal their destination, they cannot control the two refugees in real-time, leading players to experience a sense of partial control at best. Space on the ground is made especially treacherous by this juxtaposition of excruciatingly slow and uncontrolled movement against the gradual draining of the water tank and the intermittent encounters with border patrols and natural obstacles.

Francisco and Amelia's movement on the ground is punctuated by their encounters with clickable entities: homes, fire sites, downed airplanes, plants, and so forth. Some of these entities contain items which players can collect to use or trade; often these items are accompanied by persons who will relate their own experiences with the items and may ask for help from or offer choices to the characters. Space in *Cloud Chasers* is only comprehensible through these items; the dead and dusty landscapes assume meaning only through the evocations of the past and the potential future utility found in disconnected and scattered objects.

The mediating influence of these items shapes the space of the town, where players can exchange items for more necessary ones. Towns themselves are only inventories of items in the game (literally), and the geography of the otherwise-featureless desert is measured by the distance between such items. The items and their location thus define space: these items constitute the very conditions for the player's survival, and the game-space thus organizes itself around their presence or imperiling absence. In this way, *Cloud Chasers* shows how environmental refugeeism reorients space around resources; Francisco and Amelia, and the player, experience space as the distance between items like water or scraps.

Indistinct in times of abundance, these items now dictate the way the player navigates and experiences space. Crucially, this knowledge builds from the embodied experience of vulnerable, limited movement from one item to the next, and especially from the emotional resonance that develops around items in such a precarious landscape. In this way, items are not only a part of the game's affective landscape but also form an independently affective landscape of their own—an affective map of things-as-landmarks.

For this reason, it is useful to conceive of these items in terms of the "physicality of things" emphasized by thing theorists like Bill Brown, and to understand the game-space of *Cloud Chasers* as an affective geography that grows around things-as-landmarks. The space between physical things is a precondition for their emotional meaning, and this physicality is first disclosed by the scarcity causing and shaping the refugee narrative.[21] The natural landscape itself is barren in *Cloud Chasers*; however, its space of things creates the narrative foundation for emotional attachments in the game. Players move from haunted thing to haunted thing, making decisions about resource use and survival routes based on feelings of empathy for non-player-characters that arise not from the subject-to-subject sympathy seen in many refugee narratives, but from the emotional attachments to past and present spaces generated by navigating around the objects littering an often-hostile landscape.

In contexts of abundance, the freewheeling collection and consumption of indiscriminate goods (as, for example, undertaken by the cloud harvesters) is normative. In the skies, space is unconstrained and undifferentiated in such contexts, and goods are also abundant and indistinct. At the ground level, however, things stand out from the background precisely because of their affective force. The sense of loss driving this refugee narrative inheres in a landscape of things; things become cartographic markers of both past trauma and future possibility. *Cloud Chasers* discloses how scarcity rearranges space into a constellation of material things that map out the parameters of collective emotions; to develop its sense of spatial empathy, the game models how conditions of resource abundance obscure these parameters, and how conditions of resource scarcity reveal them.

Spatial Planning from the Ground Up in *Resilience*

Resilience is a city-building game developed by Sungrazer Studio; it began as a senior capstone project at Drexel University, where it was executive produced by Lily Lauben. The game was built over a ten-month period based on multiple collaborations with different team members, and it went on to win the Best Student Game award from Games for Change. During the initial brainstorming sessions for the game, the team members decided to address refugee issues with a science fiction theme to, in the words of Lauben, "speak more allegorically about the refugee experience," which may help to defamiliarize the space of the refugee camp as seen by most players in news footage, emphasizing the space itself as a political force, as opposed to a mere after-effect of intractable and abstract geopolitics.[22] As with *Cloud Chasers*, though, the fantasy and science fiction elements of *Resilience* are overlaid atop extensive and contemporary research on the dynamics of spaces like Greece's Moria Refugee Camp.

Nasia Anam argues that refugee camps represent the stoppage of movement typically associated with refugee narratives: "during this time we also saw the condition of being a refugee transform from a state of migration and mobility to one of detention and stagnation."[23] In this argument, refugee camps arrest movement, but in so doing, they develop as colonial outposts until they reach a certain level of infra-structural sophistication, at which point the colonies must be eradicated as they threaten the security of the state. *Resilience* reinforces Anam's insights into the defining condition of immobility and the colonial

logic that marries humanitarian resettlement to a perpetually insufficient budget. But it also seeks to mitigate the risk of colonization by introducing an innovative, bifurcated experience of space and spatial planning that has the potential to facilitate spatial empathy with displaced refugees.

As noted, *Resilience* is a real-time city-building game that at least in the abstract takes inspiration from open-ended planning games like Will Wright's *SimCity*. In the words of Larry Schooler, "Wright's game-play was based on a high-level view of town planning practice: players outlined zones (residential, commercial, and industrial) and built hard infrastructure such as roads, trains, and power stations as well as services such as schools, hospitals and police stations."[24] *SimCity* is a game of development that relies on the fixed, omniscient, and distant perspective of the planner. Ted Friedman describes how this hugely influential, all-seeing perspective relies on the "empiricist, technophilic fantasy that the complex dynamics of city development can be abstracted, quantified, simulated, and micromanaged."[25] *Resilience*, I argue, critiques this fantasy by applying the game dynamics of *SimCity* to the space of the refugee camp; by bifurcating the traditional planner's view with a ground-level perspective, the game introduces affective dimensions to spatial planning in ways that disclose how the potential for empathy for refugee experiences, particularly on the part of administrators, is conditioned by spatial perspective.

Before gameplay begins, *Resilience* opens with a news bulletin, much like the ones that might circulate through global media systems on developing refugee situations in different parts of the world. The game's preface describes a black hole crisis in the Mirhelm star system, which has forced a mass evacuation of the Murian community. The R.O.A.M. agency (Relocation and Occupation Agency of the Macrocosm) is charged with relocating the Murians to the remote moon of Obios. The player is an agent of R.O.A.M., and when gameplay begins, the agent is put in charge of onboarding Murian refugees to an empty moon with only an intake desk set up for infrastructure. The basic space of the game, then, is defined only by the boundaries of the refugee camp, which are invisible by sight, noted on the maps, and rigidly enforced.

The goal of the game is to increase the number of refugees entering the camp while also making sure that there is an equilibrium between the number of refugees and the available food, water, medicine, sanitation, housing, and so forth. Building the infrastructure of the camp requires funds, which are periodically replenished on the basis of a game clock, and infrastructure is subject to wear and tear and random environmental phenomena. However, in order to know what to build, the player needs to toggle between two experiences of space. The first experience is a first-person, on-the-ground perspective that has the player directly interacting with the incoming rush of refugees. As noted, this is how the game begins—the player assumes the first-person perspective and learns to navigate the game space before entering a tutorial on how to access the second spatial experience, which is the more abstract, distanced, and managerial perspective of cartography. Pressing the tab button takes the player to the second experience of space via a map, on which they make administrative decisions about where to build things, assess how their current infrastructure is holding up, and receive diplomatic opportunities and requests.

This bifurcated experience of space provides a view of the difference between the detached nature of traditional planning and the emotional experience of place on the ground. In order to decide what to construct next in the refugee camp using the map view, the player needs to switch back to the ground view and interact with the refugees themselves—to see how they are adapting to the new designs, and to hear from them regarding their needs. Often, while trying to glean pragmatic information from them, players will hear Muriens discuss their feelings about the camp and their journey, and memories from their previous home. This is a key difference from other planning games like *SimCity*; by designing the camp, players understand better its affective underpinnings—how the space works on the body to prioritize needs and effectuate emotions, and how its design responds to the presence of refugees who carry with them impactful memories of their previous homes. Such design factors challenge the spatial homogeneity often seen in planning games writ large.

The act of toggling between these contrasting views of space acts is a critique of the managerial perspective of spatial planning in the context of refugee experiences, as it reintroduces players to the bodily, affective dimensions of space, and invites meditation on how these dimensions produce—or fail to

produce—the conditions for emotional and by extension empathetic identification with refugees. The embodied, first-person perspective on the ground allows players to see the effects of the spatial layout of the camp in ways that are impossible to discern from the map view. For example, when an adverse weather event hits the colony, it results in an abstract problem on the level of the map: the impact of the event is translated into a quantified cartography of management that speaks in a language of infrastructure damage and available funding. On the ground, however, the scene is very different. Players confront confusing lights, smoke, and bodies in motion. The effect is horrifying—it obliterates the known space of the camp laid out on the map. In this gap between perspectives, players can get a sense of how space involves affective configurations of the bodies and infrastructure that mediate emotional and empathetic responses to others. In this way, *Resilience* introduces a new, affective dimension to spatial planning games that challenges perceptions of empathy as an abstract and disembodied phenomenon and invites what this chapter calls spatial empathy.

Emotions and the Space of Time in *Path Out*

Path Out is the product of Causa Creations, a studio founded in 2014 by Tilmann Hars and Georg Hobmeier. Previously, the team produced games like *Burn the Boards* (2015), which examined e-waste recycling in developing countries. For *Path Out*, they turned their attention to the Syrian refugee crisis. *Path Out* immediately situates the player in a third-person avatar, on a dark plot of land, without spatial markers to help orient the player—no indication of where to go, or what to do. The effect is confusing and menacing in its lack of direction. The player moves their avatar in this space and, by game design, invariably takes a wrong step, hitting a landmine. The feeling of unfairness at this death is instant—it produces an internal dialogue in the player that says, "Nobody told me what to do; the rules of this space were not clear, and therefore my death was unjust." The concept of injustice is thus an early learned feature rooted in the practical experience of navigating the gameworld, recalling the epistemological category of Fraser's mētis.

A video recording of a young man interrupts the gameplay. He introduces himself as Abdullah Karam, and informs the player that they have just killed him, as he is actually the player's avatar and the main character of the game. *Path Out* is developed around his lived experience as a real-life Syrian refugee, and from this point forward, he offers sporadic commentary on the player's progress.

The game then reboots to a time in Karam's past, and players find themselves in an identifiable space: a bedroom, in a home, in what turns out to be a representation of Karam's village in Syria. In contrast to the dark and bewildering space of the game's opening scene, players are now surrounded by bright colors and a familiar-looking domestic space, reminiscent of the layout and stability of other such spaces in different games. From this initial flashback, *Path Out* establishes an important sense of spatial contingency—of vulnerability in our known spaces—that it posits conditions Karam's Syrian refugee experience, and by extension, the player's.

The player's death, Karam's commentary, and the following jump-cut to a space from the past work together to develop an important interrelationship between emotions, time, and space in the game. Karam's narration introduces a perpetual then/now dynamic that runs throughout the game and has been treated in previous research.[26] Here, though, I would like to emphasize how *Path Out* plays with the "spatiality and temporality of emotions" by presenting space as a marker of time. By emphasizing the temporality of space, *Path Out* imbues space with feelings of loss and vulnerability, charting an affective geography in which the player recognizes the degree to which empathy for refugees is conditioned by recognition of changes to space over time.

The opening scene and Karam's narration produce a sense of contingency that shadows the secure and recognizable space of the household that re-opens the game. Players soon learn of the war encroaching on this space, which is constructed from Karam's memory, albeit in collaboration with the game makers. Karam's displacement from the war is foreshadowed through small moments of direct narration from non-player characters, but primarily from directly navigating the village and noting with increasing

urgency the vulnerability of this space. In response to power outages, for example, Karam's father tells Karam—the player—to retrieve some gasoline and a pump from the basement of the complex. This task takes the player outside of the apartment and into the broader courtyard, where they witness changes to the quotidian environment while interacting with and learning about other members of the community, often through the details of their intimate domestic spaces, which change as the violence escalates.

As the player navigates the village, the spaces of the village gain sentimental importance through the prolepsis of Karam's narration—the actual task of finding items is secondary to the experience of exploring the reconstructed village and pausing on spatial markers like pictures on the wall. The ordinariness of the space assumes an emotional charge due to its vulnerability. Eventually, the player walks outside the village, where the space changes radically: fires burn and soldiers patrol the streets. After this encounter, the player retreats back into the village, but as the game progresses, this kind of retreat becomes less and less possible. The war gradually reshapes the interior space of the village: the central fountain runs dry, cracks appear in facades, and people that were once fixtures of the space of the village disappear.

At this point, the player arranges to flee across the border and relocates to a husk of a village. This new spatial terrain is nevertheless eerily familiar due to the player's recent experience of how war reshapes space over time: it is an accelerated version of the spatial ruination of a village that Karam saw gradually overtaking his own home. In this way, the game demonstrates the emotional force of space-in-time: it shows how knowledge of physical changes to space condition our emotional responses to war zones, and it helps players reimagine the seemingly static image of war-torn cityscapes as functioning, living cities. The "after" image of a devastated public square, in other words, assumes affective force when paired with the "before" image of its previous quotidian reality and a related sense of the continuum between both images.

Outside the village, Karam navigates obstacles that were once schools, as the game intermingles present-tense feelings of terror with recognition of the past lives of these buildings and by extension their inhabitants. By having players navigate such a spatial palimpsest of different moments in time, *Path Out* shows how material changes to surrounding spaces are central to affective responses to the impacts of war. Through strategically mixed chronologies, the game defamiliarizes refugee spaces to show the role space-in-time plays in eliciting empathetic responses. The ordinariness of Karam's home village is drawn into the future destruction portended in the opening sequence and in Karam's narration; and yet, it also helps draw the desolate later landscapes through which Karam flees as a refugee back into their own pasts, in ways that revitalize war zones that might otherwise seem always-already decimated. The look-and-find/stealth gameplay is ultimately a vehicle to experience this kind of spatial change in ways that allow players to understand the spatial-temporal conditions for emotional and empathetic attachment.

This approach to space-time challenges the narrative arc of twentieth-century refugee narratives predicated on unidirectional flight and arrival in safe harbor. It is yet another demonstration of how refugee games introduce a novel approach to space that has significant impacts on our understanding of what constitutes a refugee "narrative." Using the experiential, interactive qualities associated with game space, *Path Out*, *Resilience,* and *Cloud Chasers* trace the contours of affective geographies, including the process of knowledge production via physical movement, that cannot be represented by textual narrative devices. Their affective-geographical framework discloses the spatial underpinnings of empathetic engagement, and the resulting sense of spatial empathy developed across these games yields a new view of refugeeism in the twenty-first century—one that is less centered on the bordered space of the nation-state or the purported spacelessness of globalization, but instead on concrete examinations of space as constructed and experienced.

Notes

1 Nguyen, "Viet Thanh Nguyen on Being a Refugee."
2 Nitsche, *Video Game Spaces.*
3 Jung, "Mapping the Media of Aleksandar Hemon's Diasporic Time-Geography," 37–62.

4   Goyal, "Un–American," 383.
5   Bogost, *Persuasive Games,* x.
6   Raley, *Tactical Media*, 1.
7   Jones, *The Meaning of Video Games*, 15.
8   Jones, *The Meaning of Video Games*, 15.
9   Plewe and Fürsich, "Are Newsgames Better than Journalism?," 2479.
10 Plewe and Fürsich, "Are Newsgames Better than Journalism?," 2479.
11 Navarro-Remesal and Zapata, "First Person–Refugee Games," 6.
12 Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," 22;.De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*; Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*; Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*; Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*; Rose, *Feminism and Geography*; Massey, *Space, Place and Gender*; Soja, *Thirdspace.*
13 Castree, Kitchin, and Rogers, "A Short Definition for Human Geography."
14 Pile, "Emotions and Affect in Recent Human Geography," 7.
15 Woodward and Lea, "Chapter 6: Geographies of Affect," 157.
16 O'Grady, "Geographies of Affect."
17 Fraser, "Why the Spatial Epistemology of the Video Games Matters," 93–106.
18 Fraser, "Why the Spatial Epistemology," 94.
19 Fraser, "Why the Spatial Epistemology," 94–95.
20 Fraser, "Why the Spatial Epistemology," 96.
21 Brown, "Thing Theory," 4–5.
22 Butler, "This Award Winning Video Game Designed by Drexel Students Shows the Plight of Refugees."
23 Anam, "Encampment as Colonization," 405.
24 Schooler, "Playing With Urban Life."
25 Friedman, "The Semiotics of SimCity."
26 Navarro-Remesal and Zapata, "First-Person Refugee Games"; Wulansari, Pirker, Kopf, and Guetl, "Video Games and Their Correlation to Empathy," 1134.

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PART X

Temporality and Futurity

35

SONGS AGAINST BOREDOM

Youth, Music, and Bosnian Exile[1]

Alenka Bartulović and Miha Kozorog

In a short memoir entitled *A Letter to My Parents* (1993), Farah Tahirbegović describes the fateful days leading up to her refugee displacement.[2] She had just started studying literature at the University of Sarajevo when the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina (1992–1995) broke out.[3] On her nineteenth birthday, on April 6, 1992, the first clashes of arms began around Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Farah was in her hometown of Zenica celebrating her birthday with friends at her parents' apartment. Stubbornly, they dispelled an ominous future with vodka and loud music: "Metallica should wake us up … 'Child in Time,' that's our anthem … We're singing. Blues, r'n'r, sevdalinka, ballads, and again Čorba, Dugme, Putnik … Again sevdah and ćejf."[4] In May, Sarajevo was besieged, and Farah's opportunity to continue studying was cut off. She emigrated to Slovenia, another constituent republic of the dissolved Yugoslavia. In *A Letter to My Parents,* Farah describes her memories of Bosnia-Herzegovina and her efforts to leave a mark in Slovenia's capital, Ljubljana. One of her lasting traces was the influential and successful band Dertum, which she and her friends founded in 1995.

This chapter explores music as a social activity, experience, and narrative that has the potential to blur the lines between the displaced refugee and the settled resident in the wake of war. In particular, we investigate how music and feelings of boredom, which some Bosnian refugees and Slovenian residents shared, fueled connections between them.[5] This allowed refugees to contribute something meaningful to their new environment and shape their self-understanding. We will delve into the stories of two underground bands that formed independently in different refugee centers (RCs) in Slovenia:[6] Dertum in the capital, which performed traditional music, and Nešto između at the Slovenian periphery in Ilirska Bistrica, which played punk. While the name Dertum derives from the word dert, borrowed from Turkish, denoting sorrow and grief, Nešto između means "something in-between."

Both punk and sevdalinka enabled specific narratives about refugeehood: While sevdalinka was a cultural heritage that represented unique emotional states connected with loss, punk as a musically and lyrically straightforward genre instigated critical messages about exile. In following these two bands, we reveal how music—encompassing genre, sound, and lyrics—is a manifold narrative form, which provided the means for people to narrate different dimensions of refugee experiences. We explore music as a tool for self-expression without the necessity of being heard by others, hence, a personal strategy of coping with exile; a reflection and struggle against the living conditions in exile; and an unintentional narrative about cultural taste and youthhood that engendered closeness and bonding with non-refugees, which in turn enabled public expression of refugees' identities and fueled stories about their refugee years. That is, music created narratives of youthful life in exile and enabled that life to be narrated.

We focus on a particular generation of young people who were in touch with international popular music and shared a pan-Yugoslav taste for Yugoslav rock, while also discovering and reinventing Bosnian

musical traditions, especially the genre of sevdalinka, under the circumstances of war, refugeehood, and exile. Sevdalinka is a traditional urban genre that developed during the Ottoman era in parts of the Balkans. Today it is often regarded as Bosnian traditional music. The lyrics are characterized by melancholy, love, yearning, loss, and sorrow. These affects are musically emphasized by slow tempos and expressive singing.[7] Musical genres such as sevdalinka, rock, and punk are central to this chapter's driving questions: How did this music shape refugees' subjective and social experiences? What did young Bosnians share—and not share—with their resident peers in Slovenia? And how did their commonalities influence Bosnian exile and refugeehood? It is challenging to compare the experiences of people whose lives were forcibly interrupted and displaced with those who witnessed the disintegration of Yugoslavia from a safer distance. A friend of the young refugees displaced to Slovenia told us that, like many Slovenes, he was living "in a comfort zone" and was unaware of what Bosnians were actually going through. Nonetheless, we suggest that what Bosnian and Slovenian youth had in common musically and affectively was relevant to refugees' experience of exile and influenced the narratives of their refugee years.

Youth in Yugoslavia, regardless of nationality, loved Metallica, Deep Purple, and "Čorba, Dugme, Putnik." Rock and punk functioned as a unifying sound, yet Bosnian musical traditions were foreign to Slovenia. Before the Yugoslav collapse, sevdalinka was relatively unknown in Slovenia. As Bosnian refugees migrated, they introduced sevdalinka to the local audience, but made it more attractive for Slovenes by fusing it with rock and jazz, and by mixing traditional instruments like the accordion and saz with electric guitar, electric bass, and drums. In doing so, they re-tuned it as "world music," an approach to music that was very popular in 1990s Slovenia. Dertum was at the forefront of this movement, which fused tradition and experimentation, connecting groups of alternative youth through music.

In addition to music, however, there were other layers of commonality that touched on more fundamental states of being young in a modern society. A daily rhythm around school, the inclination to make friends and have fun, a desire to achieve something while growing up, and a specific kind of boredom, were mundane but central dispositions that facilitated the musical and other creative activities of refugee and resident youth.[8] Via an anthropological analysis of archival research as well as interviews with band members and their peers conducted in the 2010s, we examine how these shared dispositions resulted in the formation of two bands, Dertum and Nešto između, and how they were pivotal in bridging the gaps between refugees and residents. The collectively made music examined in this chapter enabled youth to cope with the dull time they shared regardless of their citizenship status, transforming predictable space-time into a meaningful experience. We will argue that dull time was central to the formation of the two bands. Moreover, music-making allowed refugees to connect beyond the immediacy of refugeehood and express themselves publicly.

The academic literature on music in exile suggests that refugees tend to engage with music from their home environment in order to capture the sense of home in a foreign country. Refugee musicians are often portrayed as performing and exploring traditional music with reference to cultural roots to alleviate the pain of exile and stimulate belonging.[9] However, limiting research to cultural traditions risks reducing music-making to a narration of cultural identity. Moreover, reducing refugee music to a cultural narrative risks ignoring the material conditions that stimulate and enable musical activities. In order to avoid such an identitarian trap, we will point out interconnected conditions that shaped young refugees' musical and other activities, such as space, time, and opportunities to connect beyond the RCs. In what follows, we first present how some refugees expressed themselves, their pain, and their worries through music. Then we present their experiences of alienation, stuckness, and boredom as an inherent part of a specific structure of exile and later compare it with a youth-related kind of boredom that was chased away with music. Finally, we turn to how music enabled refugees to present themselves publicly and conclude with nostalgic memories, which rewrote the often-painful narratives of exile. By exploring these performative contexts of musical narratives and narratives about music, we demonstrate refugees' capacity to lastingly enrich their lives and the lives of locals in Slovenia.

Narrating Struggles, Narrating the Self

Nešto između's opus gives a tangible impression of the living conditions that the five young band members experienced. Nešto između was formed in 1995 in an RC on the outskirts of the town of Ilirska Bistrica: Amir, Dado, and Mohe lived there, Dži was studying in Ljubljana and gradually joined them during visits, and Pino was a Slovenian native of the town. As the genre of punk encourages a critical stance toward society, they strived to lyrically point out what was bothering them. In our conversation with Amir, he explained that they simply felt the need to tell stories about themselves. These stories were not necessarily meant to reach anyone else. For them, it was simply important to narrate their experiences out loud. As anthropologist Michael Jackson states, storytelling is "a vital human strategy for sustaining a sense of agency in the face of disempowering circumstances. To reconstitute events in a story is no longer to live those events in passivity, but to actively rework them, both in dialogue with others and within one's own imagination."[10] This is also what these young men did: they created a narrative of their own conditions and concerns, while creatively intervening in those conditions and concerns.

For example, Nešto između's song "Peggy's Farm" depicts their "temporary home" in the RC as a farm. It describes a nasty building on the outskirts of the town, which only small children, who do not yet understand their situation, call "home." The trope refers to the official and public discourse about Bosnian refugees in Slovenia more broadly. Slovenia gave refugees the status of "temporary refugee" instead of "refugee," which, for example, deprived them of the possibility to work legally.[11] Moreover, the mass media warned citizens about excessive humanitarianism and refugees' financial burden on the state, while ironically praising "Slovenian good-heartedness."[12] Satirizing this particular legal status and public perception of Bosnian refugees, the song portrays the inhabitants of "the farm" as strange, ungrateful, and rude, who *"*don't know how to say 'Please!', Peggy's temporary refugees." However, since the public discourse presented Slovenia's policy as welcoming, the refrain goes: "Welcome, welcome, welcome to the Peggy's farm." The second part of the song is in Slovenian and is an invitation to a Slovene to meet the refugees. It gives spatial directions on how to find them, saying that although it might sound illogical, their "center," i.e., RC, is not located in the center, but on the edge of the town. The RCs in Slovenia were in many cases set up in barracks left behind by the former Yugoslav People's Army and located on the outskirts of towns, which was also the case here. As the band members emphasized in the interviews we conducted with them, spatial marginalization was frustrating for a number of reasons, but primarily because it was difficult to socialize with peers from the town. "Peggy's Farm" ends with sounds imitating animals. The bitter analogy of Bosnians as animals locked in a "farm" far away from the center of human interaction was thus complete.[13]

The experience of space is a prominent theme in the band's opus. The song "Muhiba/Bad Feeling" (Ružan osjećaj) portrays an elderly refugee woman who continuously interrupts the narrator by breaking into his room. She has nothing to do, so she constantly invades his privacy, his "dirty little world." She repeats boring stories and focuses on what the "idiot on the TV is saying," showing no empathy for the young man, who has his own thoughts about the "mosque, Mak,[14] Marx, and Nietzsche." The experience of not having a private space was common in Slovenian RCs.[15]

While the RC was geographically marginalized and often suffocating, the members of Nešto između eventually discovered a venue in the town of Ilirska Bistrica, which enabled them to escape from an environment preoccupied with the stories of exile and synchronize with the space-time of the local Slovenian youth. The venue, MKNŽ, was one of the most vibrant alternative music clubs in the country.[16] A few refugees, who were inclined toward punk and related music, would secretly leave the RC at night, which was forbidden, jumping through windows and over walls to arrive at the club. The song "The Streets of Ilirska Bistrica" (Ulice Ilirske Bistrice) speaks about their visits to the club, juxtaposing two faces of the town. As the narrator walks the streets during the day, he meets familiar faces of residents, but does not know their names. Moreover, strangers "pass me by, no one notices me, on the street I leave no trace." But at night, he walks the streets again, this time with his peers.

He calls them "eternal walkers," because of their long walks between the RC and MKNŽ, which stood on opposite sides of the town. These walks were not always pleasant, because "the policemen – our old acquaintances" keep interrogating them, not as refugees, but more likely as young people visiting the suspicious underground venue. However, for young refugees, these episodes were tolerable because of the music and like-minded youth they found at MKNŽ.

While Nešto između expressed themselves lyrically and though aggressive sound, the genre of sevdalinka is differently conditioned for self-expression. As a mellow genre with emotional lyrics, it enabled a different kind of narration, which was not directly reflective of the setting, but rather expressed the internal states of refugees—feelings of loss, pain, and longing. Farah had a reputation for her love of singing sevdalinka. In her book, for example, she mentions a boring lecture at the university, which she desperately wanted to interrupt by standing up and singing.[17] Musician and journalist Vesna Andree Zaimović, in a documentary entitled *Sevdah* (2009), commented that Farah's passion for sevdalinka was contagious: "[Farah] implanted love for sevdalinka in me. She opened the door of sevdalinka to me." Farah's roommates remembered often encountering a room full of people singing and crying upon their return from high school. As DeNora puts it, "music is appropriated by individuals as a resource for the ongoing constitution of themselves" and "has transformative powers, it 'does' things, changes things, makes things happen."[18] For some young refugees, hence, sevdalinka was—similarly to what punk was for Nešto između—a musical narrative used to articulate their struggles with their existential conditions.

Founding Stories: Stuckness and the Sense of a Future

Underground bands often tell stories about how they started, for example, describing troubles with the place of rehearsals. For refugee bands, these stories were quite pronounced, encompassing much more fundamental obstacles, starting with the living conditions in the RCs.

Many adult refugees, who were used to working in their home country and were legally prevented from working in Slovenia, spent their days in RCs waiting for daily meals, which led to much frustration. This feeling is articulated in the title of Nešto između's instrumental song, "When Is That Damned Supper?" (Kad će ta prokleta večera?). Residents of RCs often felt stuck in the sense that they were spatially confined without any prospect of change. Daily, repetitive acts, such as maintaining personal hygiene, sweeping rooms and exteriors of residential buildings, and eating in the canteen at specific times, generated the "sense of not making progress, of not seeing a future."[19] Women thus often strived for empowerment by searching for the opportunity to cook for their families.

The anthropological literature on the experience of stuckness associates it with time rather than space.[20] It is not so much spatial confinement (seclusion in environments like prisons, refugee camps, and ghettos) as it is deprivation of the ability to influence the events that give pulse to a person's life that engender the feeling of stuckness. Rather, stuckness is an experience of time as monolithic, as built of repetitive events, as bringing no change in its course, as creating no difference, as containing no movement, as merely passing. It is closely related to the experience of boredom, which "often includes the sense that one needs to fill large blocks of time or that time is standing still."[21] Studies of boredom, too, have analyzed it "in relation to time and the subject's perceptions thereof and often link the concept to monotony and repetition. Specifically, boredom is discussed as a state of being where the experience of time dissolves or stops being of relevance."[22] To represent this particular experience of time, members of Nešto između, which experimented with different creative forms, created an art installation entitled *One Hundred Days of the New Government,* composed of one hundred consecutive weather forecasts from a newspaper. By using the newspaper, which refugees in the RC received a day late, the art installation referred to people living in a timeless zone, for whom time does not really matter when the daily news reaches them. Simultaneously, it was about the Slovenian government's intensive first hundred days, which for the refugees were merely repetitive days filled with boredom. However, as we will point out later, boredom has other contours, not all of which are related to stuckness.

The experience of Bosnian youth, and especially the musicians among them, was quite different from what their elders lived through. Adults and young people shared the cleaning of buildings and waiting in lines for meals, for example, but youth had more social prospects. When journalist Erika Repovž shared a room with two boys in an RC in Ljubljana for a week in December 1993, she too noticed similarities and differences. In a report, entitled *Day-by-Day Life Passes in Queues*, she observes that an ordinary day in an RC is divided between three meals and a cleaning order.[23] But, while old women "sit around a big table all day" and while "children are restless, bored mothers rattle knitting needles, and old men sit in front of a TV," youth had the privilege of leaving this environment more regularly. While this journalist was partly essentializing genders and generations, she nevertheless exposes a difference in generational opportunities. In the 1993/1994 school year, Slovenian secondary schools and universities accepted Bosnian refugees. According to the register of the Slovenian Ministry of Education and Sport, in the 1994/1995 school year, 1,060 refugees attended secondary schools and 140 were students at the 2 universities.[24] This created a critical difference in the experience of exile between youth and elders. A February 1997 document on the RC on Šmartinska street in Ljubljana, where Dertum was founded, states that out of 230 refugees, 19 were studying at university and 17 at secondary schools.[25] The youth, then, were a minority, but a visible one, because they were active smugglers of experiences and ideas between spaces. This created a sense of having a future among youth, which was essential for their musical engagement.

While they were able to leave the RCs for school, young refugees often found the RCs confining. Because of the chronic lack of space in RCs, young people looked for hidden corners to catch some privacy. Erika, the journalist, recounts what Farah achieved in a room she shared with few other young people:

> But [one] room is special. Farah, Sanja, Željka, Irena, Sandra, Haris, and Ivona live there. It smells like books. […] Whenever entering [this room], I've never felt like living among refugees. Conversations about exams were familiar to me too, timetables on the walls also, and so was quickly prepared spaghetti for a dinner. Everything is mainly taken care of by Farah, even though she is only 20. She's far too young to step in as the mother of six adolescents.[26]

Part of this atmosphere was also music. Benjo, one of the founders of Dertum, testified that Dertum began with youth hanging out in a room:

> [Dertum] started in 1995, in a room in the refugee center […]. There, because of boredom, amusement and nostalgia, we started to sing and play [traditional] songs. In the beginning, nothing was planned, Farah, Erol and I were living together, and that's how the first repertoire and the first arrangements for two guitars and one vocal started to emerge.[27]

Nešto između too, emphasized the centrality of sharing a room to their band's development. They mentioned that they had a bit of luck, because two members shared a room, which happened to be at the end of the building's corridor; thus, their evenings together listening to music did not disturb too many neighbors in the RC. When three young men returned from the school, they would meet up with Dži, a student at the time, who was staying in the room, studying, reading, and writing poetry. They shared with him the events of the day. Once, they enthusiastically named manifestos of the twentieth-century artistic avant-gardes they were learning about in school. Dži replied that perhaps they should also create such a manifesto. To come up with a name for their newly formed artistic "movement," they grabbed an English dictionary and blindly pointed to a word. It happened to be the word "sprung." They thought that it precisely depicted what they were trying to achieve, namely, that they "have jumped out" from the conditions of exile with art and music. SPRUNG thus started to represent all their various creative activities, including the band Nešto između.[28] They even occupied an unused storehouse within the complex of the RC for rehearsals and creation. In a play on words based on the Bosnian word for

"place"—*prostorija*, they called it "space and me"—*prostor i ja*. This action demonstrates bluntly how central space was for youthful creativity.

We have already pointed out the importance of MKNŽ for Nešto između. Similarly, in Ljubljana, cultural venues beyond the RC affected Farah and her companions, and later their band Dertum. One such venue was the Manor, a cultural center where Bosnian intellectuals designed a cultural and educational program for refugees. As then young refugee musician, Hazemina Đonlić, states in her memoir, prior to the Manor hosting a program for young refugees, youth "wandered aimlessly around Ljubljana or lived through quite monotonous days in the refugee centers, where their only obligation was to wait in line for food and to clean the corridors."[29] Yet afterward, more than a hundred youth participated in Manor's programs.[30] Hence, many young people looked for occasions to express themselves with creative means to overcome the claustrophobia of the RCs.

Narrating Proximity: Shaping Dull Time Musically

In *A Letter to My Parents*, which opened this chapter, Farah wrote:

> Another Friday in Ljubljana. Another pause between [university] lectures and the first lesson at the Manor [cultural venue]. I stumble through the snow […]. I walk up and down Čopova street, stare into shop-windows, count shoes from the left and right sides of the showroom. […] The coffee bars are full. […] Unconsciously, panicky, insanely stubborn, I have been searching, for a year now, for a familiar face. I wish so much to greet someone on the street. Deliberately, I forget it's Friday, 2.30 PM. Everyone is running home, family lunch, white tablecloth, tableware and hot soup. […] I walk along Ljubljanica river, I made the whole circle […] [S]omeone took my hand. […] Maja. […] My warmth on the cold streets of Ljubljana. […] "Let's go, little girl, to the Manor, do you have time?"[31]

Farah's space-time was not synchronized with most people's space-time. In this excerpt, she looks for a hopeful encounter in order to escape the repetition engendered by not having anything meaningful to do (counting "shoes from left and right"). She desires and is actively searching for action. Killing time was an everyday practice among youth, which resulted in productive activities and facilitated meaningful connections, often beyond the refugees' circles.

For children, school was "an important factor that functioned preventively because it structured their time," writes anthropologist Natalija Vrečer, who studied living conditions in Slovenian RCs in the 1990s. For young adults, school also functioned in this way, yet with a substantial difference.[32] Youth were less dependent on parents than children were, and many young people were in exile without parents. Hence, the way they structured their time around school was very much their own concern. Moreover, they made friends with Slovenian peers, and after school they spent their time hanging out together, struggling with the same question: What to do with their spare time?

Aimless time or "empty time,"[33] "having nothing to do,"[34] or "nothing exciting to do,"[35] are feelings that people in modern societies associate with boredom, which is why they actively seek time-enriching activities.[36] Boredom is a sense of "failure to engage, to make a connection with a thing or activity."[37] Young people too, when not occupying themselves with "meaningful" activities, but merely hanging about, say that they are bored. Our interlocutors often recalled this feeling, associating it with aimless hours after school, dull evenings, and weekends at the RC. Yet this is a different kind of boredom from the one discussed above in relation to the monotonous days of unemployed refugee adults. Here boredom refers to how one estimates time as more or less rich in experience, and consequently makes an active effort to do something with the time available, whereas above it refers to systemically produced stuckness that inheres in boredom. Following Lars Svendsen's typology of boredom, Yasmine Musharbash distinguishes between "situative boredom" as "the kind that people are reflexive about—that is, the kind that is generally verbalized" and "existential boredom" as "the kind that deeply and

profoundly affects the person and is more or less expressionless."[38] Young refugees' boredom was not "a kind of 'emptiness' resulting from the sufferer's seeing him- or herself as isolated from others," as Peter Toohey[39] describes existential boredom. On the contrary, theirs was of the kind that a person engages collectively with others. Bosnian refugee youth were active and often allied with non-refugees to chase the boredom away. In this case, music as a form and performance was a testament to shared taste, values, and existential perspectives, which created closeness.

A Slovenian friend of a Dertum member recalled that they sat around in parks, smoked joints, and otherwise passed the time together, just like many teenagers did in Slovenia at that time. Although in Slovenian society, "the epithets of being a loafer or a slacker are ones that should be avoided,"[40] bohemian indifference was a prominent "subcultural capital"[41] in the Dertum members' school milieu.[42] Playing a guitar among friends was part of this pose too. Playing specific songs and in particular settings was a clear message about intimacy and proximity among peers.

Slovenian friends also visited refugees at the RCs, searching for fun. A regular visitor was Marjan, a schoolmate, who became Dertum's drummer and percussionist. Young people in the RCs had something that their Slovenian friends, who stayed with their parents, did not have. They were sharing living space with their peers at all times of the day and week, and they had the ability to organize their activities. There was a certain sense of freedom from being together. Dertum's singer Maida recalled that in their room they were eating, drinking, listening and playing music together in a chaotic, but inviting atmosphere.

Nešto između hosted fewer Slovenian friends at the RC than Dertum. An exception was Pino, a local who became a band member. Nevertheless, the band pointed at a common "structure of feeling" among young people, dedicating a song to a Slovenian friend and schoolmate, who was also "often bored," misunderstood, and who found refuge at Friday concerts.[43]

Music and creativity were primarily means to cope with dull time, yet they had farther-reaching consequences. Locals like Pino and Marjan did not visit the RC with a definite goal of helping the refugees, as some aid workers did; rather, they shared everyday life with them, including the love of music, the search for fun, and the killing of time. Youth were spending time together simply because it was fulfilling for all involved. Sharing commons in horizontal relationships was hence substantially different from a vertical relationship inherent in the humanitarian discourse of helping refugees.

Narrating Identities: On the Stage

Establishing relationships through hanging out led to public performances by refugee bands. If music was at first a narrative of proximity among peers, later it became an opportunity to share a public message about who these refugees were and what they stood for. For young musicians, it was appealing to appear on stage. In this regard, local alternative culture venues were crucial to their musical development and public recognition. Both bands started with Yugoslav rock, but ended up with very different kinds of music, which met the standards of the crucial venues and their respective audiences.

As mentioned, the high schoolers from Nešto između discovered that the youth of Ilirska Bistrica gathered at MKNŽ. When the staff of the club recognized them as refugees, they were exempted from paying the entrance fee, and were invited to help with the do-it-yourself organization of concerts. For hard-core, punk, experimental, and avant-garde rock bands touring Europe, MKNŽ was a mandatory stop. The young men absorbed these sounds and transformed them into their own expression. In December 1996, Nešto između was invited to perform at a festival at MKNŽ. In August 1997, MKNŽ arranged a studio recording session for Nešto između and released its demo cassette *Antilogija* ("anti-logic," paraphrasing "anthology"). The collaboration with MKNŽ (and other alternative culture organizations) enabled the band to perform on several stages around the country and even to organize public events of alternative music and art within the RC.

Encounters and collaboration with local organizations, venues, and individuals were also crucial to Dertum's career, which was more successful than that of Nešto između, partly because of its musical choice. The members of Dertum realized that if they continued as a school band playing Yugoslav

rock, they would be just one among many similar bands in the post-Yugoslav Slovenia. As innovative interpreters of traditional music as Bosnian "world music," they were much more unique and interesting for the Slovenian audience. What MKNŽ was for Nešto između, the Ljubljana alternative culture venue KUD was for Dertum.[44] The latter ran the Exiles program, whose aim was to encourage artistic activities among refugees (occasionally, they also worked with Nešto između). An early collaboration between KUD and Dertum members was a 1995 play *At Least Come to Yourself, If You Don't Have Anyone Else* (*Dođi makar sebi ako nemaš kome drugom*), whose core theme was Bosnian exile. In December 1996, Dertum played a concert at KUD, which was recorded and released by KUD in 1997. This became a cult CD in Slovenia and an important source of information about sevdalinka for the Slovenian public. In addition, KUD organized numerous concerts for Dertum in RCs and alternative music venues around the country, as well as at "world music" festivals abroad. The highlight of the band's career was a performance at the biggest such Slovenian festival, Druga Godba, in 1998.

If Nešto između had few public appearances and focused much more on the internal "art world" of SPRUNG, Dertum was one of the most active bands in Slovenia at that time, playing on stages almost every weekend. Nevertheless, in both cases, music was a way to become part of Slovenian society. The members of Nešto između proudly mentioned that they were the only active local band at that time in Ilirska Bistrica and the only one who dedicated a song to the town (*The Streets of Ilirska Bistrica*). Hence, although four out of five members were refugees, they left a permanent trace in the local environment. At the same time, Dertum became a cult band in Slovenia and beyond, bridging the divide in musical taste between Bosnians and Slovenes. Slovenian youth followed them from venue to venue, singing sevdalinka by heart. For band members, thus, music was a way to ensure their representation as young, alternative, creative refugees and locals, and, especially in the case of Dertum's sevdalinka, as Bosnians. But most of all, music provided a narrative that presented them foremost as musicians who moved freely between spaces and contributed to different imaginations and narratives about "refugees" in Slovenia.

Bad Times, Good Times: Narrating the Past

After the war, some members of both bands returned to Bosnia-Herzegovina, while others continued their projects in Slovenia. Dertum released a studio CD in 1998 and continued playing for several years, while Nešto između disbanded at the end of 1997. However, Amir, Dži, and Mohe agreed that SPRUNG was not dead and that they would continue to be creative while "separately united." Mohe, who was the first returnee to Bosnia-Herzegovina, wrote a letter to Dži and Amir, stating:

> Some of our members are still refugees, while the rest of us, who have returned, are trying with the help of SPRUNG to escape the daily routine that surrounds us and, which is, if not worse, than at least the same as life in exile.

Via SPRUNG, Mohe, Amir, and Dži felt connected and engaged in the interpretation of their surroundings on an artistic level. For the same reason, they preserved it, because the manifesto functioned as a limitless resource of imagination. This was helpful in the post-war Bosnian reality, where the "situative" was replaced by an "existential" boredom. Most refugees, as well as survivors of the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, were deeply disappointed in the post-war reconstruction process that followed the Dayton Peace Accord in 1995. Everyday insecurities, a sense of loss, high unemployment, poverty, corruption, and the state's inefficiency were just some of the problems refugees faced upon their return.[45] The sense of alienation that Farah described in her first year in Ljubljana became something Bosnian youth felt regularly upon their return home. Because of their experiences in Slovenia, the young refugees presented in this chapter also kept alive their spirit of active engagement with a forward-moving sense of living, and hence their "existential mobility."[46] On her return to Sarajevo, Farah started to work in a bookstore which, thanks to her enthusiasm, became a cult meeting place for

local intellectuals and artists; moreover, she also inspired young local musicians to take on the world music revival of sevdalinka in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

It is therefore not surprising that our interlocutors from the two bands remember exile as a "good" part of their lives. Dado from Nešto između started our interview by saying, "I do not say that we were bored, we were always creating something, well, we were such an age, some revolt, some love, somehow we had to store away that energy, so we started scratching the instruments." Amir too recalled that, "Those were beautiful times, you know, when you remember it retrospectively. We really had nothing, 1% of this standard now, nothing, nothing, materially nothing, but there was… […] happiness, friendship, relationships." In turn, Dži mentioned, "I love that period […] because we really lived a life of creativity, of arts. It was that part of the age when we were not too overloaded with life problems, but were fully engaged in [arts]." Mohe, moreover, liked "to remember that time, although there was war in Bosnia. […] But that period, when this band was active, the activities of SPRUNG, I comprehend as one of the happiest parts of my life, the most productive, when we could come together to make agreements and have fun." Maida from Dertum spoke similarly about her time with six other young people in the room: "I often remember it with nostalgia and [a] smile." And Erol from Dertum felt self-fulfilled, saying: "I remember it fondly, it was a super period, I [always] say it was the best time of my life so far in terms of the quality of life."

The band members describe their exile in Slovenia with severe nostalgia, erasing the struggles they had and remembering the joyful events. These young adults had each other, they spent cheerful moments together, and they traveled, performed, and met people at concerts in Slovenia (and sometimes abroad). This generally positive recollection of time spent in a band contrasts sharply with their previous mentions of boredom. However, as we've shown, boredom was a crucial motivator for musical and artistic activities,[47] as well as a shared condition that enabled understanding between refugee and local youth.

Indeed, the band members' pleasant memories of the brutal 1990s stem precisely from musical activities and other creative acts they engaged in to overcome the constraints of the secluded environment and stuckness that characterized the daily lives of many fellow refugees in the RCs, and the dull time they struggled against alongside their peers. In this way, they also forced some Slovenes to rethink the dominant political, media, and bureaucratic discourse about refugees as passive victims of circumstances. By playing music, they claimed agency and expanded their space-time both physically and imaginatively, efficiently escaping the "stigmata of refugeeness."[48] Their music-making allowed them to express their feelings, but also to tell their own narratives about life as a refugee in their own way—indirectly with sevdalinka or more directly with punk. As Jackson notes, one can replace the given with the chosen by simply telling his or her version of the story.[49] With its emotional and connective capacity, music proved to be an efficient and affective narrative tool for changing "the parameters of agency."[50] Besides, as a genre and performance, music allowed refugees to speak to a larger society and narrated the proximity created between the refugees and locals.

Notes

1 The authors acknowledge financial support from the Slovenian Research Agency within the following research programs and projects: research core funding No. P6-0088 and No. P6–0187, project Music and Politics in Post-Yugoslav Space: Toward New paradigm of Politics of Music at the Turn of Centuries (J6-9365) and project Young Entrepreneurs in Times of Uncertainty and Accelerated Optimism: An Ethnological Study of Entrepreneurship and Ethics of Young People in Modern-day Slovenia (J6-1804).

2 We dedicate this chapter to Farah Tahirbegović (1973–2006), whom many of our interlocutors remember as a genuinely inspiring person.

3 The war began when a referendum resulted in a majority of the inhabitants of the former Yugoslav Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina voting for a sovereign state. The country followed Croatia and Slovenia in demanding independence, but Serb paramilitary units and the Army of the Republic of Srpska proclaimed vast areas of the internationally recognized state as Serbian. The war was one of the most brutal events in recent history, marked by the siege of Sarajevo, ethnic cleansing, and genocide in Srebrenica. It also caused a massive exodus; some refugees found their temporary home in the countries that were part of their former Yugoslav homeland.

4 Tahirbegović, *Pismo roditeljima,* 12–13. Čorba, Dugme, and Putnik are abbreviations for Yugoslav rock groups. Sevdah and ćejf represent the moods of sevdalinka, a genre we explore in this chapter.

5 Bosnian(s) stands for Bosnian(s)-Herzegovinian(s).

6 Not all refugees stayed in RCs. Many lived with their relatives, who settled permanently in Slovenia. This chapter focuses on the people who lived in RCs.

7 Karača Baljak, "Bosnian Urban Traditional Song in Transformation"; Pennanen, "Melancholic Airs of the Orient."

8 "Youth" is understood here in the conventional sense: the age of secondary school and university students.

9 See Andree Zaimović (2001, 2003); Baily (2005); Baily and Collyer (2006); Diehl (2002); Gonzales (2017); Öğüt (2015); Pettan (1996, 2010); Reyes Schramm (1986, 1989, 1990, 1999); Talam (2019); cf. Kozorog and Bartulović (2015); and Bartulović and Kozorog (2017, 2019).

10 Jackson, *Politics of Storytelling*, 15.

11 Vrečer, "The Lost Way of Life," "Human Cost of Temporary Refugee Protection," "*Integracija kot človekova pravica*."

12 Simonič, "Begunci, begunke," 55, 60, 61.

13 As Giorgio Agamben observes, "the man who becomes bored finds himself in the 'closest proximity'—even if it is only apparent—to animal captivation" (Agamben, 66). Both the bored individual and the captivated animal are stuck in spaces lacking in meaning and purpose (O'Neill, 21).

14 Bosnian poet Mak Dizdar (1917–1971).

15 Vrečer, "Human Cost of Temporary Refugee Protection," 6; Vrečer, "*Integracija kot človekova pravica*."

16 Filak and Gorišek, *Mlada nada/Young Hopefuls*.

17 Tahirbegović, *Pismo roditeljima*, 28.

18 DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, 48.

19 Jefferson et al., "Introduction," 3.

20 Hage, "Waiting Out the Crisis"; Jefferson et al., "Introduction."

21 Jervis et al., "Boredom, 'Trouble,' and the Realities of Postcolonial Reservation Life," 40.

22 Musharbash, "Boredom, Time, and Modernity," 307.

23 Repovž, "Življenje mineva v vrstah iz dneva v dan," 28–29.

24 Đonlić and Črnivec, *Deset let samote*, 25–26.

25 Archives KUD F. P. 1997.

26 Repovž, "Življenje mineva v vrstah iz dneva v dan," 28–29.

27 Begović, "Dertum."

28 SPRUNG consisted of Nešto između and various artistic expressions of the band members: film, poetry and visual arts (e.g., the above-mentioned installation *One Hundred Days of the New Government*).

29 Đonlić and Črnivec, *Deset let samote*, 40.

30 Đonlić and Črnivec, *Deset let samote*, 41.

31 Tahirbegović, *Pismo roditeljima*, 30–32. Farah ran a literary workshop and taught accordion there, while Maja was a piano teacher.

32 Vrečer, "Human Cost of Temporary Refugee Protection," 11.

33 Peeren, "You Must (Not) Be Bored!," 103.

34 Frederiksen, "Man Walking into Woods," 209.

35 Kelly, "The Attractions of Accountancy," 364.

36 Peeren, "You Must (Not) Be Bored!"

37 Jervis et al., "Boredom, 'Trouble,' and the Realities of Postcolonial Reservation Life," 40.

38 Svendsen, *A Philosophy of Boredom*; Musharbash, "Boredom, Time, and Modernity," 309.

39 Toohey, *Boredom: A Lively History*, 28.

40 Frederiksen, **"**Man Walking into Woods," 211.

41 Thornton, *Club Cultures*.

42 The core of the members of Nešto između and Dertum were secondary school boys. In Dertum, university student females, e.g., Farah, played a considerable role, which we discuss elsewhere (Bartulović and Kozorog, "Gender and Music-making in Exile").

43 Williams, *Marxism and Literature*.

44 The venue's full name was KUD France Prešeren.

45 Bartulović, *"Nismo vaši!"*; Jansen, *Yearning in the Meantime*.

46 Hage, "A Not So Multi-sited Ethnography of a Not So Imagined Community."

47 cf. Gonzales, "Displacement and Belonging."

48 Malkki, *Purity and Exile*.

49 Jackson, *Politics of Storytelling*.

50 DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, 20.

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ON WATER, ON LAND

Sustainability of Refugee Lives in an Era of Ecological Crises

Emily Hue

Eco-design or ecological design, a field that emerged in the 1970s, focuses on sustainable design processes, from biodegradable or recyclable material to reducing emissions or pollution, in the hopes of mitigating harm to the environment. Yet, the "greening" of some but not all aspects of design, such as retrofitting "sustainable" architecture, can participate superficially in sustainability without fully addressing the ongoing effects of settler colonialism or global capitalism. While the unmitigated effects of eco-design on humans, flora, fauna, and environments are wide-ranging, this chapter examines how some contemporary approaches to eco-design regulate the notion of sustainability in reference to refugee displacement. Working at the intersection of twenty-first-century sustainable design and regimes of humanitarian benevolence, this chapter considers eco-design proposals to house soon-to-be climate refugees. These proposals illuminate what is not sustainable about conditions of global capitalism and genocide under which refugees are produced. I bring together conversations on eco-design and refugee cultural advocacy to highlight how current global initiatives to address *future* displacement need to consider the intersections of these fields in order to more ethically act on climate change and refugee resettlement. Among these proposed "green housing" solutions are refugee housing flat packs, by the design firm LifeArk, and self-sufficient "ecopolises," such as the Lilypad proposed by architect Vincent Callebaut. LifeArk hopes to replace stilted housing of entire villages along the Amazon River with packable and adjustably fitted floating home and commercial solutions over the next few years and proposes similar solutions to under-resourced areas of Los Angeles and Coachella Valley. In a parallel vein, the Lilypad's architects propose floating ecopolises comprised of vertical buildings that host self-sustaining farms, homes, and offices designed to produce renewable energy for decades into the future.

In contrast to LifeArk and Callebaut's eco-design proposals, I turn to environmental justice scholar Julie Sze's concept of sustainability, not as an end goal but as a process that engages various stakeholders (not limited to scientists and policy-makers) within broader processes to "move towards justice in a rapidly warming world":

> "sustainability as process," rather than an object-oriented sustainability, I (with others), suggest that we need to move and advance a reflexive politics of knowledge co-production in environmental sciences coupled with a democracy in action. Both co-production and democracy in action are central in a context where uninterrogated references to the "scientific enterprise" and "solutionist" ideology go largely unchallenged.[1]

In this chapter, I heed Sze's call to challenge romanticized "solutionist" ideologies in the name of scientific enterprise as they can uproot ongoing place-making projects that displaced communities engage to

make semi-permanent housing into *home*.[2] I parse apart dynamic narratives of building environmentally friendly and durable housing in climate-impacted areas, especially in promotional advertising for eco-design projects that negate narratives of cultural sustainability—that is, the sustainability of refugees' cultures—in the lives of climate refugees-to-come. I argue that these building initiatives can unwittingly perpetuate settler colonial futures around and beyond the environment in which new eco-design housing is built by effacing current and past relationalities between land, water, and people.

In future-oriented sustainable design for refugee crises, how do structures of semi-permanent refugee housing, preceded by models of long-term refugee encampment, also characterize racialized debates around migration? How do contemporary ecological design projects inculcate refugees into "sustainable" settler colonial narratives and projects? What other blueprints lay outside of settler colonial solutions to climate crises and instead heed calls for sustainable relationalities between human and non-human worlds? What is the significance of designing housing to be more green and more "sustainable" if it does not ultimately sustain refugee life after displacement? At stake in these proposed models, and the narratives they propound, are refugee futures—including how to address future climate catastrophes while semi-permanent housing is only one stop gap measure in ethical and robust approaches to sustain refugee life. Putting critical refugee studies in conversation with settler colonial studies, Evyn Lê Espiritu Gandhi compellingly names the "refugee settler colonial condition," arguing that "tracing refugee routes across settler colonial spaces requires attending to the liminal spaces of US military empire, identifying those who reside outside the borders of the US nation-state but whose displacement can be traced to US military intervention."[3] Gandhi's generative concept opens up the possibility to consider how machinations of (militarized) humanitarian projects can produce climate "refugee settlers"—those present and yet-to-come—as fallout from the climate policies emanating from U.S. empire.

In a parallel vein, I argue that some proposed solutions for housing displaced Indigenous communities (turned climate refugees) that "fix" spaces of encampment also have implications for "fixing" refugees' lives and "fixing" refugees *to* those spaces. For example, the advertising around housing flat-packs, that are malleable to any given climate situation, narrate potential climate refugeehood as inevitable but also temporally indefinite. Here, "fixing" contributes to an aesthetics of encampment in the present but does not necessarily intuit what the future outcome of fixture is nor the import of infrastructures that move more easily than displaced people do. In the examples that follow, I interrogate the multi-faceted discourse of "fixing," as uncritical improvement of spaces of encampment that also "fix" refugee subjects in space and time. As I consider an aesthetics of encampment, I draw on human geographer Jessie Speer who examines how houseless communities in the U.S., who are subject to transformational "makeover" narratives by popular media and policymakers, challenge "aesthetics of displacement."[4] Speer contends that popular representations around contemporary houseless communities often code these communities as "aesthetic failures" to urban beautification projects.[5] In a parallel vein, eco-design campaigns for climate refugee housing, that insist on an aesthetics of encampment, also distract from the possible dissolution of systems that sustain displacement and the long-term ecological aftermath of ongoing climate change.

In light of these analyses of LifeArk and the Lilypad, this chapter also situates alternative models of ecological sustainability as part of refugee settler place-making; the latter that wrestles with language reclamation, art-making, and food cultivation rather than reproduce extractivist practices toward land and water resources. This other narrative of sustainability posits the future as contingent on interdependent, intergenerational, and coalitional modes of care rather than austerity. This chapter closes with an overview of the current arts and cultural advocacy work at Southeast by Southeast, a Philadelphia-based arts non-profit organization and community center established in 2011, that primarily serves new refugee communities from Southeast Asia (Nepal, Myanmar, and Bhutan) in Southeast Philadelphia, including Karen refugees from Myanmar.[6] Karen communities have been displaced from their lands while in dispute with the ethnic majority Burman government of the Myanmar state that has engaged in multiple regimes of ethnic cleansing. As of April 2021, some of the most recent developments include a

Myanmar government army offensive that has driven over 8,000 Karen people from their homes into neighboring jungles, in what aid groups have called the worst upheaval there for nearly ten years.[7] This most recent crisis in Myanmar's southeast borderlands has been further compounded by the deadly government crackdown on the mass protests across Myanmar following a military coup usurping power from the democratically elected National League of Democracy Government in February 2021. Here, I emphasize these communities' efforts to "make place," both in their uprooting from Myanmar but also in cities dealing with concurrent and recent histories of urban upheaval.[8] To take seriously the call for a sustainable environment is to attend to how militarized capitalist infrastructures evade liability for environmental degradation, including deforestation and overbuilding—especially as they narratively distance themselves from the geographic, racial, and spatial violences that contribute to Indigenous displacement in the first place.

Life (Saving) Arks, the Lilypad, and the Resurrection of the Ecopolis

LifeArk is the inaugural project of GDS Innovation Lab, a social innovation research and design arm of the international architecture firm GDS Architects, with offices in Pasadena, Seoul, and Taipei. Spanning both private and public sectors in major cities in East Asia, the Middle East, and the U.S., their range of projects include the "master planning" of high-rise towers, municipal and civic facilities, and large-scale mixed-use commercial and retail developments. This constellation of transnational business connections underwrites a history of industrial resurgence in the lengthy aftermath of intra-Asian colonialisms between Taiwan and China as well as South Korea with Japan and the U.S.[9] Korean American architect Charles Wee, president of the company, founded the social innovation research and design arm of GDS Architects in 2014 after learning about his missionary cousin living on Santa Rosa Island, also known as Santa Rosa de Yavarí, situated along the Amazon River between Brazil, Peru, and Colombia.[10] The initial catalyst project for LifeArk was to support Santa Rosa's Indigenous communities, the Ticuna and Yagua peoples, whose traditional housing built on stilts meant spending 8 months of the year battling flooding with water levels fluctuating up to 25 feet, and the looming threat of increasingly dramatic flooding due to climate change. LifeArk's name could easily draw on the Judeo-Christian biblical narrative of Noah's ark's life-saving capacity in a catastrophic flood, especially in consideration of the Christian mission trips that first inspired Wee's interest in flood zones. In an interview with Forbes Magazine, Wee notes his and others' previous complicity in the displacement of vulnerable communities by his firm's buildings, and what he wants to do with respect to global flooding crises beyond Santa Rosa Island:

> For many years, I participated in this race to create new mega-cities, blanketed with towers, without much regard to what it was replacing … In the process, I witnessed thousands of years of history, culture, environment and people literally bulldozed away. Architects trained to solve complex societal problems became active partners in leaving a long and wide path of destruction, driven by the greed of developers and governments. I had to jump off the bandwagon and seek something new.[11]

In trying to redeem some of this devastation, LifeArk also acknowledges the protraction of refugee encampment as what they hope to solve on their website: "Refugee camps designed as temporary shelters are housing families for upwards of 30 years. Without proper support, these refugee communities scrape by in very poor conditions, unable to thrive." Yet, in their own FAQs, they also note that their own design solution does not shift this timeline: "LifeArk units have a life cycle of 30+ years with little maintenance." Santa Rosa Island, their first projected launch site, would have limited options: either join LifeArk or submit to becoming climate refugees for generations ad infinitum. This ultimatum hinges on the proposition of refugee life as indefinitely positioned for precarity despite the seeming benefit of a more eco-friendly physical living environment.

Here, LifeArk situates the fate of Santa Rosa's communities as a shift from an indigenous way of life to potential climate refugeehood without explicitly stating how LifeArk might ease any transition between these statuses nor noting the difference between long-term refugee encampment and their version of semi-permanent housing. While the flooding is urgent, there are not many clues in LifeArk's web materials that suggest the long-standing histories of missionary work and deforestation that have also shaped the landscape of Santa Rosa.[12] Before the arrival of Spanish and Portuguese colonizers in the fifteenth century, Ticuna peoples had previously lived inland. To some degree, they were able to avoid some of the decimation by disease that came with colonization.[13] However, as colonizers developed rubber plantations, fishing, and logging industries, Ticuna and Yagua peoples were taken as forced labor.[14] Similarly, Ticuna and Yagua peoples have historically been pursued by various Christian and Catholic missionaries as this island sits on intersecting rivers that cross Peru, Colombia, and Brazil.[15] These coercive traditions of religious conversion and land grabs have been elaborated upon by American missionaries beginning in the 1960s and have proliferated to include controversial Brazilian, Peruvian, and intra-community Ticuna and Yagua-led Christian missionary work today.[16]

In mission statements and literature on the website, the process of integrating LifeArk modular systems into existent precarious landscapes is seemingly seamless rather than reminiscent of any violent intrusions of the past.[17] Yet, perhaps unsurprisingly, on Santa Rosa Island, LifeArk plans to deploy their first pilot community in league with Wee's cousin's Christian U.S.-based non-profit called Buenos Amigos that has been in the area since October 2010. The mission statement suggests a simultaneous spiritual and structural uplift of Santa Rosa's people that is "centered around the well-being and empowerment of children and youth" through after-school programs, the building of homes and bridges, and "discipleship and counseling."[18] As the site notes, the more recent history of flooding meant that Santa Rosa's population was "trapped in a cycle of poverty generation after generation," and "as architects we sought to solve this fundamental problem through *good design* [their emphasis]."[19] This narrative of sustainable solutions as tied up in "good design" blends the capitalist proliferation of building structures with Christian missionizing as a multi-pronged effort that will improve the present circumstances and spiritual afterlife of Santa Rosa's population. Here, the "fixing" that frames LifeArk's mission is further entangled in the legacies of religious missions and industrial expansion in which the land, lifeways, and livelihoods of the Ticuna and Yagua peoples have been capitalized upon.

In late 2019, a concurrent narrative of fixing emerged within the local and international response to the region's ecological devastation when both the U.S. and Brazilian governments pledged $100 million dollars toward a biodiversity conservation fund for the Amazon led by the private sector, in which Brazil's foreign minister at the time, Ernesto Araújo said, "We want to be together in the endeavour to create development for the Amazon region which we are convinced is the only way to protect the forest."[20] While forwarding anti-refugee and anti-migrant policies under President Jair Bolsonaro's government, such as withdrawing from a UN Global Migration Pact, these concurrent efforts to encourage private investment in the rainforest come after more than 80,000 fires broke out in the Amazon rainforest in 2019.[21] Environmentalists attributed this increase in fires to government-backed razing of Indigenous lands for farming, mining, and logging that have led to subsequent changes in weather patterns and further harm to surrounding ecologies.[22] Yet, as humanitarian projects such as LifeArk use the seductive language of "sustainability," echoed by the Brazilian state, these contradictions highlight how the projection of Indigenous communities as future climate refugees obscures them as key figures in currently ongoing U.S.-backed policies for Latin American deforestation and globally expansive eco-design.

Turning to the visual narrative provided by the advertisements and introductory videos on the websites of both Buenos Amigos and LifeArk, it echoes the same notion of imminent fixture of these programs in Santa Rosa and the "fixing" of Santa Rosa's people through their presence. For example, one Vimeo clip titled "Amazon 2017 Vision Trip" features footage of Wee's cousin's team engaged in the transportation of unnamed materials dispatched by boat to surrounding villages. These scenes are set to Spanish-language worship music that repeatedly establish the refrain of glory to God with triumphant repeating choruses. The end of the clip overlays the text of biblical quotations in English onto

footage of worship leaders, assumedly from Buenos Amigos, cheering ecstatically with new believers in a circle whose arms are raised to the heavens.[23] In a parallel vein, LifeArk's visual introductions of their work in Santa Rosa begin by grafting animated simulations of LifeArk modular systems directly onto pixelated images of palm trees and green flat land mass, graphically rendered from original photo images of aged stilted houses weathered by repeated flooding. This fictive rendering blurs the real-time existence of current stilted homes and the not-yet-here LifeArk improvements, again reinforcing the latter as a necessarily foregone conclusion in the name of settler colonial, religious, and global capitalist expansion for the foreseeable future.

The Lego-like modularity of the eco-design system is presented such that in some cases, what was a roof structure could be adaptable as a door, and solar panels can be flexibly attached to structures based on land or water. The reproducibility of LifeArk settler structures populates the speculative landscape to block out Indigenous water, land, people, flora, and fauna and further discipline the space itself and how the people who live there might comport themselves in it. The image simulation of this process populates white SimCity-like water sanitation systems, a community center, and even a "farmers market" where there were none before, positing scenarios that could reorient social and commercial hubs of a city, town, or village.[24] Additionally, LifeArk's deracinating and expansionist aspects, that manifest through white and sterile structures that "can be built anywhere," suggests both potentiality and encroachment on existing land while obscuring the ecological and geographic specificities of community relocations on the Amazon River.

The transformative properties of LifeArk's projections lend themselves to a figurative "whitening" of the landscape, where stark white structures are superimposed onto land and water already populated by Indigenous communities and non-human life. This "whitening" also intuits a racialized form of erasure that supposedly adapts the space for climate change but also relies on terra nullius logic in which Santa Rosa's land and peoples start afresh with the neo-colonial arrival of LifeArk. Here, LifeArk's graphic narrative of modular futurity posits a seamless transformation between states of Indigeneity and refugeehood—the latter status as easily "avoided" with the addition of sustainable architecture. Thus, LifeArk's visual projection of Santa Rosa as a speculative landscape invites viewers to witness the transformation of the land into dedicated spaces of Christian discipleship and commerce as well as prepare Santa Rosa's people for the climate refugees they are expected to become.

In eco-design geared toward climate change, framed by existing rampant xenophobia and global immigration restrictions, these structures beg the question of the purpose of sustainable refugee housing and whom it benefits most. Thus, questions that align with a critical refugee studies framework might ask what it means for refugees to be encouraged by these types of sustainable projects to "make place," when that place is temporally precarious (with similar timelines to that of current refugee encampment) but physically more stable than traditional housing.[25] In a similar inquiry, Marguerite Nguyen looks to Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) and refugee coping practices in the face of regional displacement over time for answers. She asks how Black and Vietnamese refugee communities enact place-making by revitalizing post-Katrina New Orleans foodways, such as aquaponic farming, in the face of repeated flooding, loss of fisheries, and structural inequalities leveraged by the state. Nguyen's insistence on reimagining land and water as interdependent sites of sustenance has implications for similar revitalization movements elsewhere.[26] Notably, these approaches also dispense with a discourse of sustainability that is anchored by reproducibility and market growth, instead seeding questions of both environmental impact and community longevity.

In contrast to more grassroots approaches, high-tech solutions to ongoing climate crises can sometimes revive discourses around specific populations' existence as an excessive tax on the environment. According to technology journalist Amica Graber, unpackable, modular forms of eco-design do not even tackle the whole issue of environmental impact:

> The EPA has defined green building as structures designed to reduce environmental impacts …
> by efficiently using resources like energy and water, protecting human health, and reducing

pollution, environmental degradation, and waste … Structures like tiny houses and prefab homes have been commended for reducing emissions, but in light of the threat of overpopulation, it's a short-term solution.[27]

While overpopulation is not Graber's main focus, the underwritten assumption of this statement is that most of the racialized "threat" of overzealous postcolonial and deindustrialized populations or those who live off the land are usurping the world's natural resources. Yet, these austerity discourses as related to "overpopulation" and "inefficiency" can sometimes lead to racist policies on forced removal, immigration, population control, as well as stymie governmental responses to other forms of mass displacement due to climate change.[28]

Other options of sustainable architecture for cases of mass displacement induced by climate crises are meant to be less ephemeral than those of LifeArk but require even lengthier time, resources, and capital investments. The Lilypad by Vincent Callebaut, a Belgian-born, Paris-based architect, "is a concept for a completely self-sufficient floating city intended to provide shelter for future climate change refugees."[29] Callebaut's designs for so-called "ecopolises" were proposed for over a dozen cities across the world from 2008–2017. The designs rely on a projection of 250 million future climate refugees, a large percentage of whom would be from major port cities and island nations. One journalist notes the zero-carbon emission design of this "amphibian sea city" that imitates water lily pads could house 50,000 people, produce its own energy, collect and purify rainwater in lieu of a desalination plant, and also process carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and absorb it into its titanium dioxide skin. Planting the seeds for disaster capitalism, The Lilypad's architects hope to launch in the year 2100. However, this work of "future" oriented ecopolises have been revived repeatedly in different moments of land and water crises for over five decades.

According to Brydon T. Wang, ecocities are not a novel proposal. He traces how this proposal of "cities on water" or "seaborne leisure colonies" in their original inception has been in constant and unsuccessful development since the 1960s, as models to develop tourism, resources for farming, and to settle "inhospitable landscapes" as means of space solutions to population overcrowding.[30] As recently as 2019, the UN also expressed support for further research into floating cities as sea levels rise and the question of how to house climate refugees becoming increasingly pertinent.[31] Yet even those debates over whether floating cities would be independent city-states or micro-nations (with sovereignty and citizenship) have raised concerns about residents using their privileged class status in these spaces to escape paying taxes or circumventing legal restrictions on medical research illegal in their home countries.[32] For decades, environmental historians and geographers of Oceania and Pacific Islander studies such as Jenny Bryant-Tokalau have argued that the dangers of climate change cannot simply be solved by "innovation." Rather, for Bryant-Tokalau and others, the distinctly neocolonial building of artificial islands circumvents existing Pacific Island countries' community-centered approaches to self-determination through food sovereignty, storage, and strategic relocation of communities.[33]

Rather than stem the danger of climate change for vulnerable populations, Wang projects that Callebaut's and other floating city proposals will encourage "seasteading" in the form of technology-driven universities and tourist destinations for commercial gain.[34] Joe Quirk and Patri Friedman make even more boldly optimistic claims that seasteading will "restore the environment, enrich the poor, cure the sick and liberate humanity from politicians," as do their supporters—some of who have noted that this "survival of the fittest" and "entrepreneurial" approach without international or national regulation is a libertarian utopia on the horizon.[35] In these scenarios that transform existing ecosystems into spaces of racial capital, citizenship is not necessarily even entertained for refugee nor Indigenous populations, but forecasted for those who may, by extension, be able to seastead their way into multiple forms of national belonging and unaccountability. The extended colonization of the sea, due to untenable land conditions, further cements that land- and sea-scapes *must* be tamed and made profitable by settlers in order to be considered hospitable. In this light, seasteading initiatives such as Callebaut's Lilypad can also further reinforce settler colonial logics and further displace recent (climate) refugees through

modes of design and architecture meant to fix crises of climate, refugees, and sustainability, without critically confronting the systems of dominance producing those crises. Here, the notion of "fixity" resonates in how eco-design proposals, like the Lilypad, attempt to stem climate crises that *conditionall*y "fix" refugees to specific spaces they design. At other times, the same proposals conveniently exclude them when they don't meet the most capitalist requirements of "sustainable" populations. Within this expansive future-oriented proposal, this "fixing" of accommodations for a world in indefinite climate crisis effectively further displaces displaced populations—people that these types of projects purportedly hoped to support most in the first place.

Southeast by Southeast and Critical Refugee Place-Making

Whereas LifeArk and the Lilypad posit future climate refugee resettlement as a projection of terra nullius onto existent land, water, and lifeworlds, the organizers of Southeast by Southeast emphasize the urgency of decolonial approaches to existing infrastructures of local place-making among historically displaced populations. Again, to compare these projects to that of LifeArk and the Lilypad is to regard a marked contrast from the one-size-fits-all type of technologies that would propose to seamlessly fit into "any" situation. Southeast by Southeast's work is rooted in how refugee groups situate ongoing struggles over place-making and opens up potential avenues to consider parallel narratives of historical reclamation by other displaced populations. Southeast by Southeast insists on their constituents' presence vs. their disappearance, a mode that has precedence in the efforts of Lenape peoples, the original caretakers and their descendants of the land now known as Philadelphia, as well as working-class communities of color dealing with the environmental, economic, and social impact of commercial and residential development in the city.[36]

Originally, Southeast by Southeast was a joint-venture project of the Mural Arts Program, the Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disability Services, the Philadelphia Refugee Mental Health Collaborative, and the Hummingbird Foundation.[37] Their website serves as an archive of their past and ongoing projects as well as a space to showcase their ongoing connections with other non-profits in the Philadelphia area. Rather than focus solely on the services provided, this community center stands out from others in terms of approaching refugee communities as leaders of how these services are distributed and tailored for community needs. At this intersection of state and non-government service providers, the project is intended to connect refugee resettlement with art therapy, including but not limited to painting, drawing, textile design, weaving, and mural making as a means of intergenerational community storytelling. Southeast by Southeast also cultivates the sharing of community farming space among various refugee communities. As refugees enact these place-making practices in resettlement, especially in shared spaces with other refugee communities, they ensure cultural sustainability in their shifting relationships to place. In contrast to the earlier projects mentioned, these practices foreground the question of resettlement by developing critical understandings of refugees' displacements in relation to ongoing and historical displacements of other populations in Southeast Philadelphia.

How do recently arrived ethnically Karen refugee communities originating from Myanmar situate their displacement from Myanmar's borderlands alongside other refugee communities in the U.S. as "settlers of color"?[38] In conversation with Kanaka Maoli feminist scholar Haunani Kay Trask, Dean Itsuji Saranillio elaborates on the difficult convergence between hegemonic Asian American history and its sometimes complicit and colonial relationships to the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous communities throughout the U.S. and the Pacific. Recognizing a "settler of color" intervention, Saranillio refuses to conflate these histories or frame "Asian 'Americans' and Kānaka Maoli as always already in solidarity or opposition but instead articulates these different groups' oppressions as 'overlapping without equivalence.'"[39] As some of the newest refugee groups to the U.S. over the last two decades, these communities are taking seriously the intersection of "Southeast by Southeast" that identifies the specific space of Southeast Asia and Southeast Philadelphia, from where clients are displaced and resettled.[40] Rather than foreground "vertically" oriented technological eco-design solutions—both

literal and figurative—for climate crises, a critical refugee and ethical settler of color ethics toward land and water stewardship maps horizontal, non-linear, decolonial, and anti-capitalist possibilities for disparate scales and sites of displacement.

For example, the recent "redevelopment" of Center City, Philadelphia has led to dramatic increases in housing prices within South Philadelphia, leading to gentrification and displacement of former residents.[41] In the midst of these concurrent upheavals, Southeast by Southeast promotes English as a Second Language (ESL) education, public mural projects by recently arrived communities, as well as arts and crafts classes and sales, food drives, and other programming. What started up in 2011 as an informal series of pop-up projects turned into collaborative long-term mural works between organizers and clients that have been archived on the center's website. In 2012, one of these murals was painted on a wall at 2106 South 8th Street in Philadelphia and still re-appears on many parts of their promotional material across various web platforms.

The mural features a wall-scale series of juxtaposed flashcards that mimic what you might find in an introductory ESL language class but turns the pedagogical encounter on its head. This mural pairs each of the brightly painted images of an elephant, a deer, a palm tree, a flower, a small universe with planets, with the word for that image translated *directly* into Burmese, Spanish, and Nepali text, underneath. The chosen images that suggest difference, interdependence, and co-existence among these languages, flora, fauna, and the universe repeat every so often such that English translation is not necessarily central. Instead, the mural invites cross-language and cross-cultural translation across various communities in the neighborhood who encounter this mural to situate mutual interdependence, a sense of place, as well as sustainable efforts to initiate communication in ways that foreground their positions as settlers of color and new Philadelphians.[42] This ongoing work to provide access to services, shared space, as well as cross-racial and cross-cultural conversation has built an infrastructure including artists of color based in the South Philly area, administrators, community programming specialists, and others who exchange skill-building techniques with refugee clients who have been recently resettled within constantly shifting Philadelphia communities. Rather than a unidirectional effort on the part of city bureaucracy, Southeast by Southeast adapted their operations based on changing community needs and mutuality.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, a collection of South Philadelphia organizations encouraged their clients to participate in urban farming initiatives within community gardens, planted with vegetables that are native to the places from where residents have been displaced, and used for keeping familiar rituals, recipes, and hearth. Karen, Chin, Nepali, and Bhutanese clients have tended to tatsoi (mustard greens), chin bang ywet (a sour leafy herb and part of the hibiscus family), bitter melon, roselle, and Thai chilies to fit the tastes of and steward intergenerational knowledge from some of their previously agrarian communities in order to create a sense of place within their new surroundings.[43] While South Philly is not a food desert, stores within accessible distance do not carry the kind of specialized produce that make up these communities' regular diets.[44] Transnational feminist Burmese American scholar, Tamara Ho, illuminates the roles that Karen communities have played in the U.S. food service industry as well as their mutual aid work in the U.S. and Myanmar while noting that popular Christian media accounts of contemporary Karen refugee farmers often focus on "traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) [that] has enabled Burmese immigrants to create refugee farms that foster and feed their individual and collective well-being."[45] Thus, Southeast by Southeast's version of sustainability centers around long-term community health in relation to spatially, culturally, and economically accessible foodways. This work notably contrasts to how LifeArk and the Lilypad operate on a foregone conclusion of resource scarcity, with recently displaced Indigenous communities and refugees seen as inherent dependents.

Southeast by Southeast clients and organizers, alongside other local organizations, situate shared farms and gardens as an ad hoc community pantry that combats the extractivist tendencies of settler colonial relationalities. As of January 2020, 67 percent of edible gardens in Philadelphia grow in areas where poverty rates run higher than the city average. More than 50 percent of those households are

Black, Latinx, or immigrants. Due to billions worth of urban development, hundreds of gardens risk being converted into new residential constructions and growers face evictions.[46] Bridging conversations with other scholars in Native and Indigenous studies about the critical notion of "sustainable self-determination" through food security, Kanaka Maoli scholar Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua suggests:

> Restoring the ability to feed ourselves is an important aspect of what Tsalagi (Cherokee Nation) scholar Jeff Corntassel calls "sustainable self-determination." As Corntassel writes, "The freedom to practice indigenous livelihoods [and maintain food security] … which includes the transmission of these cultural practices to future generations" is essential to sustainable self-determination.[47]

The author's alternative invocation of sustainability linked to self-determination, and in her examples of work to restore Native Hawaiian 'auwai and lo'i kalo (irrigation ditch systems), lends itself to broad conversations in critical refugee studies. Here I link together parallel concerns over intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge as well as place-making approaches that necessarily complicate the responsibilities of settler, Black, and Native communities to steward knowledge production and also avoid the pitfalls of romanticized solidarities. In these conversations about community farming and health, refugee subjects occupy a fraught position—neither settler nor indigenous to the particular lands they are often resettled on, once again the notion of the "refugee settler condition" hints at what processes of transformative, transparent, and healing modes of relational land sovereignty could be.

Disparate refugee communities, with their own specific agrarian histories, do not do the same culturally specific work with respect to Native Hawaiian farming practices and sovereignty. Yet, there are also resonances at Southeast by Southeast that simultaneously dismantle the colonial, Protestant-rooted missionary work that farming has occupied on the part of the settler colonial state, by reimaging the cross-racial and intergenerational collectivist work of various communities to heal and feed themselves and each other.

In turn, the community center also has classes led by members of the communities they serve, such as Karen language revitalization for youth.[48] During the pandemic, the community center has drawn on its semi-annual workshop series that highlights the communities' experts in Karen, Chin, Nepali, and Bhutanese weaving traditions that have been adapted to mask-making efforts to donate to Philadelphians.[49] This refugee space within Southeast by Southeast has also recently responded with a call to hold the Myanmar army responsible for the illegal seizure of the government, as well as sharing an open letter from 165 ethnic minorities written from the U.S. Campaign for Burma.[50] Historically, the Karen National Union Army has provided food, security, and supplies—a role this faction has taken since Myanmar's independence from the British colonial government after WWII, even in the midst of periods of armed conflict with the central Myanmar governing body in an effort not to cede sovereignty, territory, or autonomy.[51] Nodding to transnational non-statist approaches to community care in the face of displacement, Karen refugee communities have adapted some of these strategies to Philadelphia. In bringing attention to their history in Myanmar and the diasporic ties therein, Karen refugees also seek out connections to local co-existent refugee populations in Philadelphia while refusing to lose sight of concurrent struggles of land sovereignty.

On Collective Futures

Thus far, I have contextualized innovative eco-design projects that hope to stem the ongoing displacement heralded by climate change but sometimes reinscribe the racialized economic and political hierarchies that make long-term displacement seemingly inevitable for some—such as Indigenous communities and refugee communities—and not others. While LifeArk offers stunning proposals for the structural and spiritual reorganization of Santa Rosa to be more modular and convenient, these metrics invigorate settler colonial logics to "fix" that narratively block out existing lifeworlds. The Lilypad

projects self-sustaining ecopolises 80 years into the future, with an emphasis on efficiency and transportability, yet also recycles colonial narratives of seasteading in the Pacific to achieve these ends. The friction of this moment between Indigeneity and refuge(e)hood, displacement and resettlement, is brought to bear on how to engage a potentially ethical settler of color politics that acknowledges both ongoing loss and stewarding of currently occupied lands. LifeArk, the Lilypad, and Southeast by Southeast offer disparate approaches on what it means for refugees to be in place. Yet, perhaps what holds these projects in productive tension is how they present urgent issues of housing insecurity, ecological welfare, and community building as catalyst narratives of *possibility* about refugee life rather than foreclosure.

Writing at this moment where refugees and asylum-seekers are being produced in increasing numbers, these questions have become even more pressing. For Southeast by Southeast, what does it mean to make place in the midst of upheaval, not in ways that cordon off ties with one's homeland, but that bring direct attention to them, and to a sense of place in both Southeast Philadelphia and Southeast Asia? While not the only example, Southeast by Southeast's current projects humbly offer alternate possibilities for sustainable relationalities between human and non-human worlds, and foreground expansive ideas about community-oriented modes of care. In theorizing these modes of relationality, what other possibilities might there be for sustainability as a process that is essential for collective thriving, that enacts modes of being outside dominant settler colonial logics, and that topples the divides between human, non-human, and ecologically sustaining worlds?

Notes

1 Sze, "Situating Justice and Sustainability," YouTube video.
2 I rely on human geographer Yi-fu Tian's definition of place-making: "Place incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people. Place is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning." Tuan, "Space and Place," 387.
3 Lê Espiritu, "Vexed Solidarities: Vietnamese Israelis and the Question of Palestine," 16.
4 Speer, "Urban Makeovers, Homeless Encampments, and the Aesthetics of Displacement," 589.
5 Speer, "Urban Makeovers," 579.
6 From the mid-2000s and 2015, over 60,000 Karen refugees have resettled across the East and West coasts of the U.S., and increasingly throughout the Midwest in states like Indiana, Nebraska, Minnesota, and Illinois. Burmese American Community Institute, "Burmese Refugee Population in the US-Burmese American Community Institute."
7 Harmer, "In Myanmar's Hinterland, Army Uproots Ethnic Karen Villagers."
8 For a comparative study on refugees from Burundi, Sudan, Bhutan, the Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Chad, and Cuba, and how they have engaged farming as a type of place-making process in resettlement see Jean, "The Role of Farming in Place-Making Processes of Resettled Refugees."
9 Between the early 1960s and 1990s, the discourse of the four tigers included Taiwan, South Korea, Hong Kong, and Singapore as particularly ripe for rapid industrialization. Li, *Capitalist Development and Economism in East Asia*.
10 Mun-Delsalle, "Architects Worldwide Invent Groundbreaking Waterborne Solutions to Climate Change, Part 7."
11 Mun-Delsalle, "Architects Worldwide."
12 "Ticuna—Indigenous Peoples in Brazil."
13 "Ticuna—Indigenous Peoples in Brazil."
14 "Ticuna—Indigenous Peoples in Brazil."
15 "Ticuna—Indigenous Peoples in Brazil"; "Indigenous Ticuna and Yagua at risk of contracting coronavirus due to lack of control in the tri-state border between Peru, Colombia and Brazil."
16 Branford, "Bringing Christ and Coronavirus"; Organización Regional de los Pueblos Indígenas del Oriente, "Indigenous Ticuna and Yagua at risk of contracting coronavirus due to lack of control in the tri-state border between Peru, Colombia and Brazil"; "Ticuna—Indigenous Peoples in Brazil."
17 "About."
18 "About."
19 "About."
20 "US and Brazil Agree to Amazon Development."
21 "Brazil Quits U.N. Migration Pact, Will Still Take in Venezuelan Refugees"; "US and Brazil Agree to Amazon Development."

22 "US and Brazil Agree to Amazon Development."
23 "Santa Rosa—LifeArk."
24 "GDS Architects."
25 Tuan, "Space and Place," 387.
26 Nguyen, "Vietnamese American New Orleans"; Nguyen, "New Orleans and Asian American Literature and Culture."
27 Graber, "Beyond Green Building: Seasteading, Vertical Farming."
28 Kaplan, "It's Wrong to Blame 'Overpopulation' for Climate Change."
29 "LILYPAD."
30 Wang, "Are Floating Cities a Washed-Up Idea … or Are They the Future?"
31 Wang, "Are Floating Cities."
32 Wang, "Are Floating Cities."
33 See Bryant-Tokalau, "Adaptation to Climate Change in the Pacific Islands"; Hau'ofa, "Our Sea of Islands"; Mawyer, "Floating Islands, Frontiers, and Other Boundary Objects on the Edge of Oceania's Futurity."
34 Wang, "Are Floating Cities a Washed-Up Idea … or Are They the Future?"
35 Quirk and Friedman, *Seasteading.*
36 Croog, "The Urban-Agricultural City as a Historical Geography"; Shurley, "Philadelphia's Forgotten Forebears."
37 "Homepage"; "Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual DisABILITY Services"; "Philadelphia Refugee Health Collaborative."
38 Trask, "Settlers of Color and 'Immigrant' Hegemony: 'Locals' in Hawai'i."
39 Saranillio, "Settler Colonialism," 293.
40 Philadelphia sits on the ancestral lands of the Lenape. It is unclear if communities associated with the center are in open conversations with current descendants who still live in the area. See Shurley, "Philadelphia's Forgotten Forebears."
41 Central Philadelphia Development Corporation | Center City District Foundation, "Center City District."
42 "Southeast by Southeast."
43 Nationalities Service Center, "What's Growing."
44 O'Callaghan, "Refugee Urban Farm Brings Immigrants to Their Roots and Jobs."
45 Ho, "BurmAmerican Foodscapes: Refugee Re-Settlement and Resilience," 15.
46 "Three Maps Tell the Story of Urban Farming in Philly Right Now."
47 Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, *The Seeds We Planted: Portraits of a Native Hawaiian Charter School*, 136.
48 "Southeast by Southeast—Posts | Facebook."
49 "Creative Neighbors"; "Handmade Face Masks."
50 uscampaignforburma, "Burma Community Organizations Call on UN Human Rights Council to Support Ethnic Nationalities and Prioritize Human Rights."
51 Harmer, "In Myanmar's Hinterland, Army Uproots Ethnic Karen Villagers."

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THE MARSHALL ISLANDS, GUAM, AND THE FIGURE OF CLIMATE REFUGE(E)S

Olivia Arlene Quintanilla

Climate change is a multiplier issue for the Pacific region. That is, climate-induced change can multiply existing vulnerabilities and make poverty and health disparities for Pacific Islanders exponentially worse. Climate change occurs when there is a long-term change in average weather patterns, and a consensus of international climate scientists argues that our current global temperature increase is attributed to the release of carbon dioxide stored worldwide through activities like fossil fuel burning, animal agriculture, and deforestation.[1] These activities release greenhouse gasses that trap heat in the atmosphere and have caused significant increases in Earth's temperature since 1900, rapidly accelerating the pace of environmental and climatic change. Global rising temperatures lead to droughts and cause glaciers to melt, which can induce flooding and sea-level rise, making some lands uninhabitable and others at risk of being completely underwater. Internationally, people are primed to *fear the sea* because of the increased strength and frequency of storms and rising sea levels. At the same time, we must look at the ways Pacific Islanders continue to *care for the sea*.

The figure of the Pacific climate refugee is frequently invoked in the context of sea-level rise through water. Water is everywhere. There is either too much water in the form of rising tides flooding coastal areas, storms thrashing communities with rain and wind, or too little available freshwater. The population of low-lying islands Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI) are discussed across international news and global climate change policy discussions as "future climate refugees" because they are most vulnerable to rising sea levels and a lack of fresh water in the immediate future. In contrast to these low-lying islands narrated as sinking and disappearing, Guam, which is at a higher elevation and experiencing island-wide climate change consequences, is increasingly targeted for military buildup. Guam has historically served as a refuge for displaced refugees because of its status as a militarized colony of the U.S. It is thus likely to become a climate refuge for future climate refugees.

In this chapter, I consider the narratives and discourse surrounding climate refugees: the narratives put forth by environmental impact statements (EIS) and the narratives Pacific Islanders tell about themselves and the surrounding marine life in response to ongoing militarization, settler colonialism, and climate change. The 1969 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) made EIS required by U.S. federal environmental law if a proposed activity is expected to impact the environment significantly. As a result, the stakes of EIS narratives are high. They can dictate whether a project gets denied, requires further study, or gets approved as environmentally safe. Moreover, they narrate past, present, and future environmental conditions with material and often irreversible consequences.

Environmental assessments, in any shape, are important sites to study the intersections of culture, ecology, law, history, nation, race, empire, ideology, and urban planning. Interpretations about environmental data are presented in the content of the EIS in narrative form throughout its different

lengthy sections. The EIS can be difficult to understand as it is filled with federal and legal jargon and can be hundreds to thousands of pages long. The length and content alone make it extremely challenging for community members to understand, especially within the short minimum public comment period of 45 days.

I selected EIS as a critical site to study *the figure of the climate refugee* and the kinds of storytelling that point both to the militarized past and to catastrophic imagined futures. I build from Aimee Bahng's assertation that "the future is always already occupied space" to examine how the past and present are already (pre)occupying the climate future-scape.[2] With understandings of climate-induced migration still unfolding, it is important to interrogate how climate refugee situations are narrated by reading between the lines. Without directly referencing climate refugees, EIS still plays a role in narrating climate refugee conditions, especially as "climate change is a global issue for the DoD."[3] The EIS analyzed in this chapter comes from the 2010 and 2015 EIS and Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) as part of the U.S. Japan Alliance Agreement.

I (re)consider the figure of the climate refugee through two militarized archipelago communities to make two related arguments: the first contends that the Pacific region's legacy of military colonialism has reconfigured realities of climate-induced displacement for Guam and the Marshall Islands; the second claims that Indigenous Pacific Islanders critique climate refuge(e) representations that predispose the inevitability of militarization of their homelands, forced migration off-island, and the condition of becoming "island-less."[4] By looking at historical legacies of Pacific displacement and dispossession, we can better understand contemporary power arrangements and socio-economic-political processes that lead up to the marking of specific island communities as climate refugees (Marshall Islands) or as sites for climate refuge and climate refugee relocation (Guam). For these reasons, I delve into the narrative production of both the figure of the climate refugee and the figure of climate refuge as interconnected processes.

As climate stressors converge with existing environmental threats and socio-economic-political struggles, it has driven displacement and increased the vulnerability of those forced to flee. I argue that the future and the present meet in this figure of the climate refugee, in what Kyle Whyte has described as an "intensified déjà vu experience of climate change."[5] As Indigenous Studies scholars have argued, contemporary climate challenges include intensification and continuity of colonialism and prior military violence that have shaped future conditions but have not foreclosed all possibilities.[6] Whyte explains how Indigenous people's concerns about the future—from mass extinctions to the disappearance of certain ecosystems—did not emerge from human intervention of the Anthropocene but rather commenced through colonialism where "the colonial period already rendered comparable outcomes that cost Indigenous peoples their reciprocal relationships with thousands of plants, animals, and ecosystems—most of which are not coming back." Whyte asserts Indigenous peoples "survived then and will survive again."[7]

Fast forward to the present: the frameworks for how we think about climate change and the term "refugee" collide with established conceptions of forced migration. The term "climate refugee" belongs to a larger category of immigrants known as "environmental refugees" or "environmental migrants" that encompasses humans forced to flee their homelands due to climate change impacts of extreme weather events, including drought, water scarcity, and sea-level rise.[8] In its 2018 Global Compact on Refugees, the United Nations (UN) stated that "climate degradation and disasters increasingly interact with the drivers of refugee movements" but this does not automatically grant people displaced by environmental stressors refugee status under international law. International refugee law does not include environmental issues, such as climate change, as a qualifying reason to seek asylum. "Refugee" is a legal term defined by the Refugee Convention centered on fear of being persecuted, and it does not recognize the environment as a persecuting agent. In 2020, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR) issued a set of legal considerations to "guide interpretation and steer international discussion" on climate refugee claims.[9] Rather than endorse the term climate refugee, it said "it is more accurate to refer to persons displaced in the context of disaster and climate change."[10]

Applying the term "refugee" to climate-induced migration comes with possible humanitarian protections and legal implications but can be difficult to claim legally. I build from the work of the Critical Refugee Studies Collective (CRSC), which acknowledges experiences of displacement that transpire outside of any international or government refugee framework.[11] The climate refugee experience is not one-size-fits-all, and some worry that such an umbrella term could naturalize climate crises while "minimizing the possibility for taking difference into account—whether difference in regard to cultural, political, or economic context, or the manifestation of climate change effects."[12] Global capitalism and militarism are naturalizing planetary alterations at alarming rates and marginalized communities, especially Indigenous Pacific Islanders, are often those most disproportionally affected by the impacts. The framework of climate justice has made these connections more visible.

Climate justice is a term used for framing climate change as an ethical and political issue rather than one that is purely environmental or material. A fundamental proposition of climate justice is that those least responsible for climate change suffer its gravest consequences. The climate justice movement is a continuously growing and evolving transnational network of groups and individuals acting through different strategies to achieve socially just and scientifically sound responses to a changing climate. Climate justice concerns include efforts to reduce global consumption; leave fossil fuels in the ground; invest in clean, safe, and sustainable renewable energy; and rights-based resource conservation that enforces Indigenous rights.

A key theme from Pacific Island climate justice struggles is a concern for the health of the marine environment, from available freshwater to the viability of coral reefs, whales, and fish, and how these affect Indigenous people's capacity to remain in their homelands, thus affecting the likelihood of displacement. Put another way, environmental factors influence (im)mobility, and (im)mobility influences the environment.[13] For Indigenous Pacific Islanders, climate-induced migration represents a cultural loss as people are deeply connected to the land. And as peoples whose cultures, traditions, and histories depend on the availability of marine life and resources, migration experiences for those living within island ecologies continue to be shaped by the health of coral reefs. Coral reefs are central to Pacific Island identity and climate change concerns. Marine life is a central component of CHamoru cultural identity, where the land and the ocean are not only considered sacred and limited resources but understood as ancestors. Healthy reefs serve as protectors for the Marshall Islands and Guam, acting as barriers between shoreline communities, rising tides, and storm surges. CHamorus, the Indigenous peoples of Guam and the Mariana Islands, and Marshallese communities have developed deep connections to reefs through cultural practices and the resources reefs provide. For Indigenous Pacific peoples, the loss of marine and coastal ecosystems is also about losing human culture.

Since the mid-2000s, there has been an increase in coral reefs as one of the frames and organizing principles in which climate activists push for clean energy and divestment from fossil fuels. Much of the coral reef climate justice activism works to bring awareness to coral bleaching, acidification, and the importance of a healthy reef to protect islands from climate impacts among a long list of other critical functions reefs serve to regulate the health of our oceans and communities. Despite the militarization of Pacific coastal environments, impacts on coral reefs are rarely mentioned in colonial and military history of the region beyond a rare mention of a reef or atoll as a backdrop for experiments or excursions. Today, reefs around Guam are already dying with(out) the military's help as reefs continue to be targeted for dredging, underwater detonations, and pollution.

Rarely discussed are the connections between coral reef health and Indigenous rights even though as Whyte notes, "shifting habitats and climate-induced displacement have implications for Indigenous self-determination."[14] Indigenous rights are critical to mitigating greenhouse gases, protecting biodiversity, and realizing global goals of limiting global temperature rise.[15] The lack of Indigenous rights and second-class citizenship experienced by CHamorus of Guam because of their island's unincorporated status makes it more challenging to influence decision-making in ways that will respect and protect marine life. And as a result, Guam is unable to address the existential threats of climate change and coral reef health on its own because of its occupation by one of the largest polluters on the planet.[16]

Throughout this chapter, I examine the narrative implications of environmental assessments, how Indigenous rights influence marine resource management, and the evolving figure of the Pacific Island climate refuge(e).

The Marshall Islands and the Discourse of Disappearing

As "climate change is both a material and discursive phenomenon," the climate refugee as a symbol represents different ideas about the future.[17] The Pacific Island climate refugee figure produced through media reporting is often portrayed as a nameless passive victim of mother nature, lacking power and desperate for humanitarian aid and a place of safe refuge. The "victim of mother nature" rhetoric often acts as satirical commentary while maintaining a colonial gaze that predicts or rather guarantees islandless futures. For example, news articles and online videos titled, "The Marshall Islands are Drowning," "The Marshall Islands are Disappearing," "How to Save a Sinking Nation," "These Islands are Literally Drowning," and "These Nations Guaranteed to be Swallowed by the Sea," illustrate how connection to the ocean is used to capture attention using spectacle-driven messaging that activates harmful island tropes.[18] According to Heather Lazrus, "Climate refugees and sinking islands have become popular tropes in climate discourse"; yet, "[w]hile highlighting the plights of islanders, such metaphors do more harm by removing agency from these people."[19] The invocation of water and ocean metaphors used in conjunction with words associated with crises, security threats, despair, and erasure depict environmental change as always already out of control and with no solution other than immediate adaptation to this new normal. Such climate refugee narratives are not neutral depictions but representations already imbued with colonial memories, meanings, and fantasies about Indigenous futures. The climate refugee signifies a critical trope that has circulated to represent crises for the planet.

U.S. national security has depended on the displacement of native peoples from their lands and waters. It has created multiple layers of inter and off-island displacement in the Pacific context. For example, a significant factor that shaped the present-day conditions of Marshall Island communities was nuclear weapons testing by the U.S. military on and around the archipelago between 1946 and 1958. The nuclear testing at Bikini Atoll, part of the Marshall Islands, was a series of 23 nuclear devices detonated by the U.S. at seven test sites on coral reefs, in the sea, air, and underwater. The bombings forced inter-island displacement routes onto different atolls and created the Marshallese experience of "nuclear refugees." Eventually, many Bikinians resettled on Kili Island because it was uninhabited, but they did not have enough support or infrastructure to sustain a viable relocation. Years of displacement caused generations of Marshallese communities to struggle with health issues and food insecurity while many still desire to return to their home atolls. In 2016, Kili Island began experiencing devastating sea-level rise, and Bikinians living on Kili will soon be dislocated again, but this time because of climate change. This example demonstrates how the past and present meet in the figure of the Pacific climate refugee, where "nuclear refugees" become "climate refugees." These co-constitutive challenges highlight why environmental justice and anti-nuclear and anti-military activism are always connected to health and climate justice.

The Marshallese story is one of many examples from Pacific Island history in which Pacific people and environments were treated as an oceanic laboratory, signaling the start of a new era of Indigenous dispossession and displacement through the transformation of healthy reefs and coral atolls to officially recognized "radiation atolls." The colonial conceptualizations and characterizations of Pacific islands as small and sparsely populated, comparatively "empty" of people, as scholar Epeli Hau'ofa has pointed out, has played a role in racialized spatial mythologies that positioned Pacific environments as a key site for military testing. In "The Myth of Isolates," Elizabeth DeLoughrey argues that the Pacific Islands were transformed into vital laboratories for experiment through "metaphorical concepts of island isolation and distributed visually by the Atomic Energy Commission films that upheld an aerial vision of the newly acquired atolls for an American audience."[20] Military narratives of isolated Pacific island ecologies legitimized ideas about "safe" island contamination. To counter-narrate island ecosystems as

disconnected and to recognize evolving climate refugee conditions requires a focus on how nature and humans function in relation.

Like coral, a migratory organism, many people have voyaged across the sea to the Marshall Islands, bringing their histories and creating new history.[21] In *Coral and Concrete*, Greg Dvorak details how the Ri-Kuwajleen, the Islanders who first settled in Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands, told history through coral. Dvorak writes, "It is understood in their oral traditions that the entire atoll, this whole ring of islets, originated from one massive coral head in the center of the lagoon, known as Tarl̦ān … a central symbol of Kuwajleen identity."[22] Today, the RMI is self-governed and a "freely associated republic" with the U.S. as a result of the 1983 Compact of Free Association (COFA) that gave the Marshall Islands independence and sovereignty. Included in the Compact was the stipulation that the U.S. military could lease Kwajalein Atoll for 50 years from Marshallese landowners. Although the terms of the Compact were supposed to guarantee sovereignty, it perpetuated American military control over their islands and reconfigured Marshallese internal and off-island mobilities. The Compact has new significance now that the Marshall Islands are experiencing climate change impacts and renewed threats of displacement. The Compact set terms for resettlement off-island but does not explicitly address additional resettlement stressors from climate impacts.

Marshallese continue to assert visions of their desired futures and reclaim their islands through climate justice. Many islanders push back against or refuse to be labeled climate refugees because it assumes no drastic action will be taken globally to lower greenhouse gases, foretelling a seemingly inevitable future where their homelands are underwater or uninhabitable. Some worry that focusing mainly on mitigation and adaptation of climate impacts diverts attention away from what should be a top priority: the right to stay in one's homeland and build an abundant future. Kanaka Maoli and CHamoru writer and activist Leilani Rania Ganser reminds us, "As Indigenous Pacific Islanders, climate adaptation plans cannot override our fight for sovereignty and self-determination."[23] The "right to stay" and the "right to return" have become a focal point in Pacific climate justice activism and climate negotiations.

In December 2008, the RMI made a detailed submission to the UN Human Rights Commission analyzing the implications of climate change. The report concluded that "the reclassification of Marshallese as a displaced nation, or, loosely defined, as 'climate refugees,' is undesirable and unacceptable as an affront to self-determination and national dignity."[24] Marshallese are fighting to ensure they do not actualize the climate projections that mark them as future climate refugees, activating and pushing back against representations, simulations, and narratives that assume their islandless future. In many ways, engaging with the figure of the climate refugee is a strategy to counter climate victim narratives by offering alternative images and language that assert Pacific agency, vision, and vibrancy instead of demise.

Guam and Climate Refuge(e)s

As some lower elevation island communities like the Marshall Islands are becoming known as climate refugees because their islands are "drowning," other island communities such as Guam are being marked for military buildup and relocation sites. For example, the Ronald Regan Ballistic Missile Defense Test Site on Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands, which provides intercontinental ballistic testing and space operations support programs, is described as a sinking soon-to-be non-operational base. In response to sea-level rise and water supply challenges to low-lying and coastal military bases like Kwajalein, the U.S. military is investing in higher-elevation islands like Guam and Hawai'i. According to a report commissioned by the Department of Defense (DOD), the multibillion-dollar installation on Kwajalein is expected to be entirely submerged by seawater at least once annually by 2035.[25] The same DoD report highlights the need to relocate the installation and raises the question, where will they select to build another test site next? Climate projections and recent DoD reports on climate change point toward the likely selection of another, higher-elevation Pacific Island, such as Guam, as the most suitable relocation site for its at-risk bases and to house future climate migrants.

It is unclear how the military will use Guam in climate mitigation planning, but history provides some clues. In 1975, Guam played a central role in housing Vietnamese refugees or "evacuees" at the close of the Vietnam War.[26] In *Archipelago of Resettlement*, Evyn Lê Espiritu Gandhi speaks to the double displacement that transpired on Guam through "Operation New Life." Gandhi writes, "the rescue of Vietnamese refugees during Operation New Life was co-constitutive with the ongoing displacement of Indigenous Chamorro people; the 'conversion' of US military bases in Guam into 'places of refuge' for Vietnamese refugees did not preclude the settler imperialist role these bases continued to play in securing US interests across Asia and Oceania."[27]

The use of Guam as a safe haven for refugee displacement foreshadows possibilities for its use as a refuge for natural disaster displacement. CHamoru scholar Tiara Na'puti examines the increasing role of military humanitarianism in global disaster response that reflects the phenomenon of disaster militarism, "'a pattern of rhetoric, beliefs, and practices' reflected in media discourse that 'naturalizes and calls for military action in times of environmental catastrophes.'"[28] In her analysis of the U.S. military response to typhoon Yutu in 2018, Na'puti argues disaster militarism "perpetuate[s] the ideology of U.S. military presence as a necessity for security in the face of climate change."[29] Na'puti suggests that Indigenous responses to Yutu are examples of resilience rhetorics—discourses and practices of survivance by Indigenous peoples characterized by developing and sustaining relationality, responsibility, reciprocity, and justice with environments that challenge narratives of disaster militarism.[30] Gandhi and Na'puti's work illuminates how refugees and sudden-onset natural disasters can become ripe targets for disaster militarism. Critical analysis of environmental communication is an urgent challenge to militarization as the military continues to (re)brand itself through sustainability, humanitarian, and climate disaster language in response to the sudden and slower disasters expected from climate change.

While CHamorus are not depicted *as* climate refugees in narratives of disaster militarism, it is clear their livelihoods and the future of their ancestral homelands are being impacted by climate change, climate displacement generated from other islands, and the U.S. military's climate change planning that is renewing Guam's strategic importance to U.S. national security. Since Guam is an unincorporated territory, in other words, a colony and "possession" of the U.S., but not a part of the U.S., the DoD, not the local population, has the authority to decide the ecological fate of the island. The island's history of colonization and militarization has created the conditions whereby CHamorus cannot make enforceable decisions about their environment, interfering with their capacity to address climate change and their future meaningfully. The U.S. claimed sovereignty over Guam in 1898 and has continued to militarize the island and community, a form of settler militarism, the dynamics through which "settler colonialism and militarization have simultaneously perpetuated, legitimated, and concealed one another."[31] The DoD currently controls over thirty percent of the Guam's land and resources. It has built bases in critical areas home to ancient villages, cultural sites, and areas where precious medicinal plants are known only to grow. Militarization of the island has caused far-reaching threats to cultural and natural resources and environmental contamination, "with toxic chemicals and heavy metals sludging through the island's arteries."[32] The military's power to declare national/climate security "emergencies" and construe its pollution as environmental "accidents" puts Guam's future at stake, especially as the military expands its base operations in Northern Guam.

The figure of the climate refugee is actively posing new questions of futurity for CHamorus as Guam is likely to become a climate *refuge* for migrants from other Pacific Islands. During disasters throughout Micronesia, "people from atoll islands historically migrate to Guam because it usually has more food and water resources available."[33] Guam's resource needs may exceed its carrying capacity with increased future migration from climate change combined with population growth from the ongoing military buildup.[34] Guam's climate change vulnerabilities include impacts to coral reefs, drought, and risks of overdrawing from the island's only freshwater aquifer, leading to salt-water intrusion and even greater dependence on off-island water and food. These gradual and out-of-sight impacts are examples of "slow violence," or harm that plays out over more extended periods that does not garner the same kind of

media hype that sudden inundation from waves does. Guam's pre-existing vulnerabilities and structural inequities are already impacting the island.[35] Climate change and militarization create slow threats to biodiversity, freshwater, Indigenous sovereignty, and human rights, which all factor into (im)migration pressure and planning decisions.

Gandhi offers a productive analysis of CHamoru agency amidst the development of the "refugee settler condition" on Guam: the concurrent processes of refugee resettlement and settler colonial displacement.[36] While her analysis focuses on Vietnamese refugee processing in Guam during Operation New Life, her insights can be extended to climate refugees during the contemporary moment of climate change. Rather than read CHamorus willingness to aid Vietnamese refugees as "acquiescence to the US military's continual destruction of and encroachment upon their native lands and waters," she points to the agency of CHamorus to act with critical empathy toward the refugees' plight and welcome them to Guam as "alternative forms of relationality routed through Chamorro epistemologies of *inafa'maolek*."[37] Most powerfully, she asserts that welcoming refugees does not signify CHamorus consent to militarization. She contends, "an embrace of displaced Vietnamese refugees need not entail an embrace of the military institution that hosted them."[38] By extension, CHamorus' embrace of climate refugees can go hand-in-hand with their critique of military buildup. It is necessary to draw connections between prior and projected refugee experiences as they foreshadow the rhetorical devices that can be used in climate narratives to justify continued settler militarism.

There are multiple and essentially endless futures CHamorus are contending with: military fantasies of their island as a base, Guam as a climate refuge for displaced climate refugees from the Marshall Islands and other low-lying island atolls, as well as futures where the island is demilitarized and Indigenous life and leadership is restored. Because imagining futurity is necessary to engage with issues such as climate change, critical attention to how and why narratives about climate futures are produced is urgent. Bahng's work on speculation in finance capitalism is helpful to understand the figure of the climate refugee as a site of historical and ongoing speculation.[39] According to Bahng, "statistical projection transforms the untenable future into a futurescape—that materializes the abstract rendering it available for possession, even as a sight to behold, or an imaginary to occupy."[40] Bahng's analysis of how "the future becomes terra nullius, emptied of its true uncertainty, filled with scrutinized risk" translates to how the future of climate change is also calculated through speculation, assessment of projected risk and vulnerability, and engulfed in uncertainty, while always still driven by existing assumptions.[41]

Assessing Environmental Impact Statements and Climate/Refugees

NEPA and EIS have proven to be both useful and destructive tools. In 2010, We Are Guåhan, the Guam Preservation Trust, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation sued the Department of the Navy (DoN), arguing the DoN failed to consider all "reasonable alternatives" for the planning of a new firing range complex at the ancient CHamoru village of Pågat. A popular image from the protests was a painting of Guam's black eight-spot butterfly on a red background with large letters reading "Save Pagat Save Me" across its wings. We Are Guåhan's CHamoru attorney Leevin Camacho told local KUAM News at the time, "Pagat is the most glaring example of how the DoD made its decision a long time ago with how the buildup was gonna proceed, and litigation is never what you want to do. I say that as a lawyer. I hope this sends a message that the people of Guam are not going to sit by, as bystanders on our own island and we're going to do whatever we can to protect our home, including legal action."[42] The community groups used U.S. environmental law to sue the military, and the EPA ruled the military's draft EIS was unsatisfactory. This strategic coming together of community-deployed tactics forced a "pause" and a slowing down of environmental destruction, another form of *slow resistance*. In this case, the EIS was utilized by the community as a source of power to blunt military maneuvers and prevent the seizing of sacred land in one area. Though this meant that efforts to save Pagat were successful, it forced the military to start the location selection process again. This time the DoN set their eyes on another ancestral village outside the largest military landholding on the island, Litekyan.

Currently, on Guam, the military is building a massive live firing range over the island's primary water source, the Northern Lens aquifer, and next to Litekyan, also known as the Ritidian Wildlife Refuge, is an ancient CHamoru village and area with significant cultural importance. The base expansion will destroy 1,000 acres of limestone forest, which are habitats for numerous endangered species. Limestone forests were once submerged tropical reefs made by corals and other organisms that produce calcium carbonate skeletons, and now contain many trees that grow in the limestone rock. While climate change is discussed in Guam's military buildup SEIS, which spans a whopping 1,596 pages, it primarily addresses how climate change will impact bases. Climate refugees and climate migration are not directly mentioned. Still, the military uses climate change data in the space of the SEIS to acknowledge massive risk on the horizon and to position itself as the primary responder to large-scale human-induced emergencies and natural disasters through various rhetorical strategies. Whereas Indigenous islanders interpret vulnerabilities to environment and community health as reasons to protect and preserve, military narratives reframe environmental data to support its ideas about national security through environmental communication that supports the buildup.

The climate adaptation section states, "The DoD already provides environmental stewardship at hundreds of DoD installations throughout the U.S. and around the world, working diligently to meet resource efficiency and sustainability goals as set by relevant laws and executive orders."[43] This discourse galvanizes the military's fit and readiness to provide future humanitarian and disaster relief, acting as a primer to naturalize future disaster militarism. It also states their actions will follow "relevant laws and executive orders," insinuating a prioritization of military and federal approaches rather than the needs of local Indigenous communities. The DoD's capacity to recognize what is relevant to environmental health should face the highest degree of scrutiny.

The size and scope of the military's ecological footprint are consistently downplayed and underreported globally and locally. For example, in the space of the EIS, the military frequently discusses their projects on Guam as separate activities that will have isolated impacts on the environment, meaning consequences from activities occurring in one area will not impact another part of the environment. I term this problematic theme as the *isolated ecosystems* narrative. Pollution, desecration of ancient sites, coral reef dredging, and cutting off access to and illegally confiscating lands should be assessed for their cumulative effects rather than isolated events with expiration dates. Climate change responses greatly depend on the ability of people to make decisions about how to protect their natural resources. The local Guam community has used legal challenges to demand the DoD abide by federal laws and has forced the military to revise multiple EIS.

In the 2020 *Tinian Women Association v. U.S. Department of the Navy*, the Tinian Women Association filed a lawsuit challenging the EIS and SEIS prepared as part of the relocation of troops from Okinawa, Japan to Guam.[44] The plaintiffs argued that the Navy's decisions to relocate troops and construct training facilities on Tinian Island in the CNMI north of Guam were "connected actions" that must be assessed in a single EIS, an example of what I term as *connected ecosystems* discourse, to argue that these activities are connected. The court ruled in favor of the Navy and held that the relocation of troops to Guam and CNMI facilities were not connected. The court decision set a precedent for future guidance on evaluating cumulative impacts under NEPA. The court held that if two related actions have independent utility, they are not connected and need not be analyzed in the same EIS. The court ruled, "The Navy has impliedly promised to consider the cumulative effects of subsequent action in the future EIS and the Navy should be held to that promise."[45] It is cryptic and unsettling that Guam and the CNMI's environmental protection comes down to a military promise.

The EIS appears to provide the military with a safe place to deny culpability. Though the military must respond to comments it or the EPA deem "substantive," they are not held accountable for inaccuracies or insufficient responses. Many DoN responses repeat prior content or outright deny allegations to rebuff community concerns without providing evidence for their explanations. For example, in response to a public comment raising concerns about how the military would prevent future contamination, citing documented use of Agent Orange during the Vietnam War, the military stated,

"The U.S. Department of Defense has searched the records, and there is no indication that Agent Orange was used, stored, or shipped through Guam."[46]

In another public comment, a community member critiqued the absence of cumulative impact assessment, stating:

> The negligible short-term and long-term cumulative impacts outlined are dismissive of many of the unresolved issues that our islands continue [to] face, especially with regard to high rates of rare cancers, skin disorders, respiratory issues, and heart disease. There is a kind of injustice in having to read through actions and impacts deemed negligible and minimal given that we have seen and continue to see the cumulative ill-impacts of military actions on our environment, in effect, on the livelihood of our people.

The military's avoidance of the cumulative impacts of their activities is an example of the isolated ecosystem's narrative at work. In response to this comment, and despite studies that prove otherwise, the DoN dismissively responded in the EIS, "The diseases mentioned by the comment, such as rare cancers, skin disorders, respiratory issues, and heart disease, have not been linked to military training and testing activities."[47] A connected ecosystems framework challenges the isolated ecosystems discourse to illuminate how cumulative damage from pre-existing public health and structural inequities compound the most significant health threat facing humanity, climate change, thereby decreasing community resilience. Along these lines, I argue understanding climate refugees and climate refuge together also necessitates a connected ecosystems narrative.

Reef Resilience and Regeneration

Indigenous communities play a vital role in protecting and caring for the ocean and the remaining biodiversity of their islands. Building on Else Demeulenaere's research on biological resources as cultural resources, we can understand Pacific coral reefs and marine ecosystems as part of "Indigenous and natural and cultural heritage—biocultural heritage" packaged within the submerged Indigenous land where coral grows.[48] Such biocultural perspectives are necessary for climate change planning. For Guam to recover and regenerate from the physical and socio-economic impacts of militarized environmental violence and climate change, biocultural resources must be respected and protected.

Indigenous Islanders are concerned about how marine management impacts their health, well-being, and connections to the sea. Guam's reefs are home to over 4,500 species, including a thousand species of fish, hundreds of species of coral and algae, giant clams, crabs, and endangered sea turtles. The sharing of reef fish is used for CHamoru cultural events like weddings and village fiestas, providing for families every day. The degradation and loss of healthy coral reefs compound the problem of sea-level rise, among other critical socio-cultural-economic factors. As environmental stressors in coastal areas threaten the sustainability of marine resources, it reduces their resilience to climate change impacts.[49] Therefore, the health of coral reefs can mitigate the likelihood of relocation and forced migration off-land.

There are many parallels between coral reefs and Pacific Islander life and lessons to be learned from their resilience and capacity to regenerate. A lesser-known connection between the figure of the climate refugee and the figure of coral reefs is how coral reef data contribute to the (re)production of climate refugee discourse and cultural productions. When reefs are narrated as healthy and recovering, it communicates hope for islands and climate refugees. Coral reefs' degraded health is often cited as proof that Pacific islands are disappearing and beyond repair. Non-contextualized discussions of reefs as forever intensely bleaching with no recovery in sight can fuel "drowning islands" and "dying reef" narratives. Both figures are often represented as passive victims. This can be seen in before and after photos of reef bleaching and images of islanders pushed around by encroaching tides. As is true with Indigenous communities, understanding vulnerabilities are important, but we must also tune into

possibilities for resilience. More research on coral reef resilience is emerging that demonstrates corals can recover from bleaching, but it can take many years to restore the right temperature before they can heal. While environmental storytelling can communicate doom and gloom, it can also communicate hope for reefs and thus hope for Pacific futures.

Guam's waters are experiencing extreme warming and coral bleaching, but those are not the only risks to reefs. Guam's military occupation has constantly threatened the island's reefs and Guam's legal status impacts CHamorus' capacity to protect reefs. One key aspect of an EIS is the statement that outlines the "purpose and need" for the proposed activities. Part of the argument outlined in the 2010 EIS is the military's "need" to dredge over 70 acres of mostly coral-covered seabed to expand Apra Harbor to allow additional ships to dock as part of the military realignment plan. The military used the vehicle of the EIS to narrate a sense of national security urgency by depicting a future filled with inevitable warfare to justify harm to reefs.

In another iteration of the isolated ecosystems narrative, the EIS deemphasizes the natural flows of rainwater that flush sediment from the higher elevated parts of the island down to the ocean. It acknowledged "a potential for construction-related discharge to the ocean" but that "it is highly unlikely that it will occur and would be limited to extreme events with very heavy rainfall, such as tropical storms and typhoons."[50] Given that the climate change considerations section of the same EIS reports expects an increase in tropical storms, the argument that it is still unlikely to occur is unfounded. It also argues that construction is safe around the aquifer because "the limestone geology would filter substantial amounts of soil particles."[51] This logic attempts to use the natural characteristics of the geology of the aquifer to argue the aquifer will filter out any sediment or pollution and take care of itself.

EIS has played an important role in asserting Indigenous priorities for urban planning in Guam, but it has not been enough to assert CHamoru's Indigenous rights. CHamoru lawyer/poet/activist Julian Aguon of Blue Ocean Law submitted a letter on behalf of Prutehi Litekyan to the special UN rapporteur on human rights to address concerns about the ways CHamorus have been treated. The rapporteurs formally expressed concern over "America's increased military presence in Guam and the failure to protect the Indigenous Chamorro people from the loss of their traditional lands, territories, and resources."[52] They also called on American officials to give CHamorus the "right to free, prior, and informed consent and self-determination."[53] This acknowledgment signals hope for future litigation CHamorus can pursue to assert their rights in the protection of their culture and environment.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined how the Marshall Islands are discursively marked as drowning/disappearing while considering how the island of Guam is increasingly targeted for military buildup to consider how the figure of the climate refuge(e) has come to represent more than climate-induced migration. Instead, it encompasses established systems of natural resource exploitation, racial capitalism, and settler militarism that continue to create the conditions for environmental destruction and legacies of forced displacement using narratives of isolated ecosystems, militarized environmental stewardship, and national security. The figure of the climate refuge(e) also embodies generations of Indigenous communities who fight against environmental harm and dispossession using narratives and resilience rhetorics of connected ecosystems, Indigenous rights, and biocultural resources.

Indigenous imaginations of our futures in relation to climate change offer radical hope for what is possible through a sober reality of what is required of all of us. The resiliency of the CHamoru and Marshellese communities in the face of genocide, ecocide, and military violence has taught us similar lessons as coral reefs—that regeneration and healing are possible even in the grimmest and seemingly impossible circumstances, if given the right conditions. The evolving figure of the climate refuge(e) reveals the urgency for more nuanced understandings of migration to address the ways global warming is transforming how displacement happens. Climate justice activists from island communities are responding by actively working to create a more complex picture of the climate refuge(e) that

is inclusive and historicized. In conclusion, let us look at the ways Pacific Islanders use environmental law, climate policy, and activism to (re)tell narratives about displacement and natural resources as both a model and strategy to (re)claim visions of Indigenous Pacific futures.

Notes

1 IPCC, "Global Warming of 1.5°C."
2 Bahng, *Migrant Futures.*
3 Naval Facilities Engineering Command Pacific, "Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement Guam," 7–99.
4 Espiritu, *Body Counts.*
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18 Grijalva and Diniega, "Thinking of Environmental"; Klein, "Eight Low-Lying Pacific Islands."
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26 Gandhi, *Archipelagoes of Resettlement.*
27 Gandhi, *Archipelago of Resettlement*, 85.
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29 Na'puti, "Disaster Militarism," 2.
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31 Nebolon, "'Life Given Straight from the Heart,'" 25.
32 Kuper et al., "Living at the Tip of the Spear."
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35 Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor.*
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39 Bahng, *Migrant Futures*, 21.
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38

REFUGEE WRITING AND THE PROBLEM OF THE FUTURE

Hadji Bakara

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, refugees began to play an increasingly important part in ideas about the future. Not the future in general, but a specific iteration: the future as catastrophe. How did this come about? We might begin by pointing to widespread consciousness of climate change, the epistemic turn to the Anthropocene, neoliberalism's pervasive dispossessions, and the coming of a global precariat. For all these things have come to induce a feeling of planetary crisis and the sense of a collective future "without refuge."[1] The novelist Kim Stanley Robinson can thus imagine the future as "a meltdown in history, a breakdown in society, a refugee nightmare," and variations on this sequence repeat across every kind of speculative thinking today, from Hollywood films to literary fiction and social theory.[2] Even the literature of humanitarian organizations augurs a future world where "[m]illions of desperate victims of climate change… [will be] walking in lines, with waters up to their chest … Climate refugee camps installed in the symbolic epicenters of global capital."[3] In a very real sense, refugees have become both harbingers and proleptic denizens of the *bad future*—a future to be avoided, feared, and intervened in at any cost.

And yet these visions of the bad future are catastrophic only if the very things that refugees threaten—personal and political sovereignty, a sense of global equilibrium, and the integrity of national borders and ethnic identities—are considered a "natural order of things."[4] Refugees, that is to say, are omens of a future radically severed from the imagined equipoise of an idealized present. And in this way, they exist in an inverse relation to the child. If, in Lee Edelman's well-known terms, the child "enacts a logic of repetition" through which the future is anticipated as the reproduction of "social order," then the refugee enacts a logic of dissolution, in which "social order" is overturned and the future is anticipated as cataclysmic.[5] So, whereas the child must be protected and reproduced to ensure what Rebekah Sheldon calls the "clean future," refugees must be immobilized, contained, surveilled, and nationalized in order to protect against "harmed futurity, future DOA."[6]

Some scholars and writers consider visions of the bad future to be constructive because they inspire forms of "radical action" in the present.[7] Yet there is clearly something unethical about associating a living group of people—who today number in the tens of millions—with a future of collective ruin. For as narratives of refugee apocalypse accrue, they will give shape to and reinforce a set of political, epistemic, and narrative positions that dictates how we imagine the present to connect to the future, and to which kinds of human beings (or what kind of legal status) we choose to grant legitimate access to rights and belonging. And as it becomes increasingly difficult to envision refugee futurity as anything but catastrophic, prospects of making a better world with and for refugees *as refugees* recede. This recursive projection of refugees into the bad future will have the effect of barring them from the good future, or any future that is imagined as livable. And this is a largely unacknowledged problem.

The argument I make in this chapter is not about narratives of refugee apocalypse *per se*, a topic taken up ably by scholars such as Nasia Anam and Shelley Streeby, and also a genre of writing that invariably moves us away from the writing of refugees themselves.[8] Rather, I argue that the connection of refugees to the bad future sheds light on the difficulties and possibilities of refugee narrativity *tout court*. What we are witnessing today in the popular conflation of refugee futurity with collective catastrophe is but the latest and perhaps most dramatic manifestation of a longstanding fear of and prohibition on refugees as historical actors rather than exceptional figures who exist in what Didier Fassin has called a "history without history."[9] Stories of refugee apocalypse are today's narrative script of a longstanding injunction on the refugee's rightful inhabitation of historical time. And to further understand this injunction, I will return to some of its earliest textual expressions: the work of a mid-century generation of refugee writers who first experienced and represented an epistemic, even civilizational, prohibition on their own futurity. Before refugee futures became a feature of the catastrophic imagination, these futures were simply not imagined at all—except by refugees themselves. It's these inaugural imaginings of refugee futurity that I explore here.

My focus in this chapter is on the ways that modern refugee writing emerges within and against an imposed futurelessness. What kinds of thinking were catalyzed by this barred futurity?[10] I am specifically interested in how early refugee writers such as Hannah Arendt, Anna Seghers, and Bertolt Brecht, German Jews or Leftists fleeing Nazism, imagined and represented their own futurity. This generation is distinct, I argue, because while they pursued pathways to asylum in their lived experience, in their writing, they consistently imagined futures that did not end in the stability and sovereignty of national citizenship. Contrary to inherited expectations, early refugee writing does not resolve into a literature of humanitarianism or liberal recognition. It is oriented neither toward the atemporal intensity of the sympathetic encounter nor the rational progressivism of future citizenship and sovereignty. In fact, if there is a unifying theme in mid-century refugee writing, it is a speculative desire to imagine the endurance of political non-sovereignty into the future. Refugee writing, then, can be read as the document of a people whose very existence troubles ideals of the future, but who nonetheless continue to narrate their own endurance in time as historical and political actors *who have a future*. The product of this temporal endurance in writing, I conclude, is a kind of ad-hoc theory of futurity as a *catachresis*—an ongoing struggle, in-and-out of language, over who rightfully inhabits historical time and just futures.

This chapter begins with an account of Arendt's formative writing on the history and theory of refugees, re-reading this corpus for its politics of time. It then turns more generally to the problems and possibilities of writing the future experienced by Arendt's generation of refugee writers. It touches briefly on the unorthodox plot of Seghers's *Transit* (1944) and gives sustained attention to Brecht's unfinished *Refugee Conversations* (*Flüchtlingsgespräche*) (1961). I conclude with a theoretical conjecture about how early refugee writings speak to the politics of time in the present, when the future is increasingly difficult to imagine.

The Problem of the Future

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the founder of Open Society's forced migration project, Arthur C. Helton, scanned the global landscape and concluded that the world's growing population of refugees had come to "personify human insecurity." As "manifestations of instability," he went on, refugees "represent graphically" the "uncertainties and fears of coping with the future."[11]

How did refugees come to have this place in political modernity? According to the refugee and theorist Hannah Arendt, the problem arose through a conflict between the historical emergence of the modern refugee and the dominant temporal imaginary of the twentieth century. That imaginary, simply put, consecrated the sovereign nation-state and national citizen as the only viable future for humankind. This way of ordering the world left no place for refugees either in space or in time. Elsewhere, I have referred to this temporal ideology as "citizen time"—a vision of world temporality that is "naturally" oriented toward national sovereignty and national citizenship.[12] Within the scripted boundaries of

citizen time, it's possible to imagine that all humans will become citizens of a sovereign nation-state, whether by birth, naturalization, migration, repatriation, assimilation, or self-determination. And as long as one understands time and politics to connect in this way, then the citizen is always the future of the refugee. There are no exceptions.

This version of political temporality universalizes the nation and the national citizen as the only legitimate subjects of historical time and the future. Therefore, it can compass no alternatives, radical breaks, or new horizons. As Arendt came to see it, this political imaginary, which came into global dominance in the wake of World War II, was crippled by what Elizabeth Freeman has called "chrononormativity," or "a vision of time as seamless, unified, and forward moving."[13] The "liberal mind," Arendt complained in 1946, "puts before us the alternative between going ahead and going backward, an alternative which appears so devoid of sense precisely because it still presupposes an unbroken chain of continuity."[14] The eternal subject of this "unbroken chain of continuity" was the sovereign nation and national citizen. And when time itself is strictly oriented toward a particular iteration of community and political belonging, then "the futures of some can never be a *future*."[15]

Historical continuity doesn't sound like an especially sharp weapon in the manifold war against the lifeworld of refugees. Yet, as Arendt repeatedly argued, the dominant belief in an "unbroken chain of continuity" bore especially heavily on refugees because they embodied a dimension of the human condition radically new and unprecedented in political modernity—"a reality which no preconceived traditional idea of the world and man can possibly illuminate."[16] "New kinds of human beings" called for new kinds of human organization, human solidarities, and a "new law on earth," that would reimagine the scope of full and legitimate political life to include humans untethered from territory and national citizenship.[17] Yet the architects of postwar order chose a path of retrenchment rather than political reimagining. Instead of confronting the new political realities of refugees, the postwar victors chose to reproduce the past as a way of securing the future as the telos of an unbroken political and historical continuum. At the end of both world wars, it prevailed that "true freedom, true emancipation, and true popular sovereignty could be attained" only within the bounded territory of nation-states.[18]

Arendt set out to adapt the historical imagination to the political fact of refugees in her famous chapter in *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* "The Decline of the Nation State and the End of the Rights of Man" (1951). As is well known, in this chapter, she gives an account of the birth of the modern refugee after the outbreak of World War I. Far less noted, however, is that the chapter begins with a powerful appeal for a new, non-linear politics of time that would account for the historical ongoingness of refugees. At the outset of the chapter, Arendt describes World War I as an "explosion" that had simultaneously "shattered the façade of Europe's political system" and overturned European modernity's "preconceived" categories for linking past, present, and future:

> It is almost impossible even now to describe what actually happened in Europe on August 4, 1914. The days before and the days after the first World War are separated not like the end of an old and the beginning of a new period, but like the day before and the day after an explosion. Yet this figure of speech is as inaccurate as all others, because the quiet of sorrow which settles down after a catastrophe has never come to pass. The first explosion seems to have touched off a chain reaction in which we have been caught ever since and which nobody seems to be able to stop. The first World War exploded the European comity of nations beyond repair, something which no other war had done.[19]

Like her friend and fellow refugee Walter Benjamin's image of the "angel of history" blown by the winds of heaven, what Arendt hopes to make thinkable here is a political catastrophe that is ongoing and cannot be resolved through a process of return or reconstruction—a blast so totalizing that the old structures are "beyond repair."

Out of this "explosion" emerged the modern refugee, "migrant groups who, unlike their happier predecessors in the religious wars, were welcome nowhere and could be assimilated nowhere."[20]

In order to comprehend this political novelty, Arendt argues, we must unthink preconceived ideas of an end; that is, we must learn to perceive and narrate history's unfolding differently. To catalyze this rethinking, she offers the figure of an "explosion" without end to levy an alternative to sequential, linear time and historicity. Indefinite in duration and murky in boundaries, the metaphor of "explosion" conveys a "chain reaction" of events that do not unfold in a straight line or across straight time. Through this metaphor of an enduring event, she tries to adapt her readers to a way of thinking—a kind of refugee historicism—that can apprehend a new category of human being who will not be housed in the old political structures. In Arendt's thinking, refugees disrupt the continuum of historical time and create the need for alternative futures.

Arendt's "explosion" metaphor underlines her belief that thinking through non-linear temporalities could act as a counterforce to the failures of the political imagination that first created and then perpetuated the plight of refugees. Time and its figurations mattered in the battle over how and where refugees would belong. One principal opponent in this battle was the emergent norms of international refugee law. These laws recognized refugees only as past and future citizens, always moving on a unidirectional "pathway" toward sovereignty and security within a nation. "The status of the refugee," one international lawyer had written in 1939, "is not, of course, a permanent one. The aim is that he should rid himself of that status as soon as possible, whether by repatriation or by naturalization in the country of refuge."[21] In *Origins,* Arendt singles this out as a highly "ironical formulation," because in so swiftly adducing repatriation or naturalization as imminent salves to displacement, the lawyer assumed that some form of future sovereignty is always awaiting peoples who have been divested of a nation's protection in the past. In this "formulation," refugees are only recognizable as figures *between* sovereign states; their condition is defined solely by what they were in the past and what they will be in the future. In the present, they possess only a "status," of which they must "rid" themselves "as soon as possible."[22] This way of situating refugees only as interstitial subjects has endured in the so-called "pathways" to citizenship—repatriation or assimilation—offered by international law.[23]

But Arendt recognized that the rejection of refugee futurity by international law was not merely a matter of legal oversight. The force required to refuse a future to an entire people is too immense—this is the kind of force exerted not only by a legal system or political ideology, but by a civilization. As the postwar era took shape around the primacy of the sovereign nation-state, Arendt came to recognize that the dominant models and perceptions of future "stability" rested on the constitutive exemption of refugees. The world itself could only appear stable against the backdrop of refugees' unregulated movement. And the benefit of regarding refugees as "exceptional phenomenon" was that it left the "system itself untouched."[24]

The Emergence of Refugee Writing at Mid-Century

Against this backdrop of both a territorial and temporal banishment from the "stable" boundaries of global order, a generation of refugee writers such as Anna Seghers and Bertolt Brecht emerged in Europe. By and large, they joined Arendt in highlighting a fundamental failure of the dominant postwar political imagination—the failure to imagine futures beyond the primacy of the national citizen and sovereign nation-state. Refugee writers highlighted this failure by experimenting, in writing, with the bare facts of their own endurance in time and into the future *as refugees.*

Yet enormous epistemological and existential barriers confronted these refugee writers as they sought to imagine and represent their own historicity and futurity. As we have seen, following both world wars refugees were largely taken as exceptions to the rules of the treaties and agreements that reinstated global order and brought the causes of their displacement to an end. And so few of their contemporaries were willing to acknowledge postwar refugees as a historical people in their own right. As constitutive exceptions to the order of political modernity, refugees experienced the unwelcome status of a figure that is doubly displaced—from nation *and* from history, both outside and behind the order of modernity.

What's more, most refugee writers were active asylum seekers who were in the process of ridding themselves of their refugee "status." And as legal and affective claimants to asylum, they were forced into performances of national fealty. Refugees, Arendt wrote in her acerbic autobiographical essay, "We Refugees" (1943), were called on to inhabit a role that she derisively dubbed "prospective citizens."[25] Inhabiting this role meant adopting a comportment of both excessive optimism and strategic amnesia. "In order to rebuild one's life one has to be strong and an optimist," Arendt wrote, ironically: "So we are very optimistic." Moreover, "prospective citizens" were also quietly but firmly enjoined to suppress the remnants of their past and their trauma, to erase their culture particularities, to speak without an accent or not speak at all, to hide infelicitous knowledge of "concentration camps," and to suppress the damage of being treated everywhere one went as an "enemy alien." The refugee who outwardly lived as a "prospective citizen" was in fact a non-citizen whose everyday life had been distorted into an "optimistic" performance of future sovereignty.[26]

To counter this imposed optimism, early refugee writers who sought to represent their future as something other than imminent citizenship had to give up on the future as something that could be planned (in writing or elsewhere) or even something that could be represented in any direct way (since they were in effect barred from doing so without writing themselves out of existence). Yet rather than project themselves positively into the future in the form of a speculative refugee utopia—which, of course, could only be read by citizens as dystopia—they scaled down the purview of their writings to deal with the everyday experience of and resistance to the singular time of a nation-based political modernity.

In Anna Seghers's semi-autobiographical novel *Transit*, for instance, a nameless and stateless protagonist discovers a suitcase with a dead man's passport, exit visas, and transfer permits, which will allow him to escape the Nazis and gain asylum in the U.S. Like thousands of other refugees fleeing Europe, he travels to Marseille to find passage on a ship. Seghers herself had fled through Marseille in 1942, sailing with her family to the French Caribbean, and later the U.S. and Mexico. By contrast, however, the protagonist of *Transit* somewhat surprisingly decides otherwise. On the eve of departure, he chooses not to leave France and thus elects to remain stateless and continue living as a non-sovereign subject. Officially and legally, at least, Seghers's experience as a refugee was provisional, lived out in her time between flight and asylum. But the protagonist she created in *Transit* lives on indefinitely as a refugee, into a non-sovereign future. Through this critical endurance, Seghers explodes the linear chronotope of flight and rescue that would come to define popular representation of refugees over the next century.

In early refugee writing like that of Seghers, heterotemporalities and alternative futures percolate in the oblique sense that other routes to political belonging are possible. These prospective routes are too provisional to be utopian in a traditional sense. Seghers does not use her protagonist to map out an alternative future world where nations and sovereignty are dissolved. If anything, Seghers's desire to imagine a refugee who can electively turn their back on the nation and national citizenship foreshadows José Esteban Muñoz's conception of "queer futurity"—a "rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (a concept that Muñoz adapts, perhaps unsurprisingly, from a mid-century refugee, Ernst Bloch).[27] Put slightly differently, the plot of *Transit* nurtures what Jack Halberstam has called a marginalized people's ability to "believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside" the normative and prescriptive forms of ethnonationalism.[28] Refugee futures materialize in this writing not as competing systems of law or de-territorialized spaces-to-come, but as anticipatory ways of being toward community that are glimpsed dialectically when refugees simply endure as the outside or "otherwise" to citizen time and the so-called "pathway to citizenship" proffered by international law. By imagining refugee characters who willfully refuse or disengage the dispensations of political modernity—sympathy and sovereignty—early refugee writers distinguished between their lived experience of displacement and non-sovereignty and the existing forms of belonging and community that were offered up as resolutions to their condition.

Of course, defiant or inexplicable acts of refusal like those of Seghers's protagonist were impossible to assume in the day-to-day lives of the writers who imagined them into being. Had Seghers, a Jew and a Leftist, chosen to remain a stateless refugee in Marseille in 1942, she would have risked her own life and those of her children. As stateless peoples in a time of war and mass extermination, Seghers's generation of Jewish and Leftists refugee writers had no choice but to appeal to political and humanitarian norms. But as they pursued the security of the nation-state in their everyday lives, they used their writing as an experiment in thinking about the future otherwise.

No Future: Bertolt Brecht's Refugee Conversations

One of the most interesting and theoretically acute of these early experiments is Bertolt Brecht's *Refugee Conversations* (*Flüchtlingsgespräche*). Left incomplete, and published posthumously in 1961, the text is made up of a series of fictional dialogues between two displaced Germans. Ziffel, the "fat man," is an educated, middle-class physicist. Kalle, the "stocky man," is a laborer, socialist, and auto-didact who was previously detained at Dachau. The two refugees meet at Helsinki's Central Station sometime in 1940, where Brecht had passed through on his journey across the USSR to Vladivostok. From the eastern regions of the Soviet Union, Brecht and his family sailed for California, where they attained legal asylum in 1941. Yet Ziffel and Kalle take a different path; or rather, they take no path at all.

Although Brecht's journey to asylum was successful, the forward momentum of a flight narrative is nowhere to be found in *Refugee Conversations*. Instead, the text is decidedly about the dead-end pause experienced by refugees whose condition endures indefinitely. Put another way: Brecht's text stages what Eleni Condouriotis has called the "inescapable stagnation" of refugee lifeworlds.[29] And Brecht understood this "stagnation" well. By the time he began work on the dialogues in 1940, he had been a stateless refugee for close to eight years. Vitally, though, *Refugee Conversation* turns this stagnation into a laboratory for thought and speculation.

The plot of *Refugee Conversations,* if it can be said to have one, is simple. Every now and then, without much sense of urgency or purpose, Ziffel and Kalle meet to discuss beer, passports, socialism, food, Hegel, patriotism, asthma, bug extermination, and other matters. All topics seem equally pressing; few conversations reach anything like a resolution. Often, their conversations become meditations on human values. "One might say," Ziffel remarks, that "the human being is just the mechanical holder for the passport. He gets his passport stuffed into his breast pocket rather as a share certificate is stuffed in a safe. The safe itself is of no value, it's just a container for valuables."[30] Refugees are a vessel without any useable cargo: they have nothing to give; nowhere to go; nobody to take them. Although conversations like this abound in Brecht's dialogues, they begin and end abruptly, as questions of immense import are tabled, yet answers are rarely sought. Instead, Kalle and Ziffel's conversations are full of interruptions, suspensions, and dead ends.

Yet Brecht's interrupted form might also be read as a political philosophy of the future. On the one hand, *Refugee Conversations* feels *futureless.* Brecht's refugees aren't going anywhere; and they seem not even to want to. Any desire or hope for a better future is tempered by a clear-eyed view of the obstructing forces of modern nationalism that command the politics of the present and the shape of the future. On the other hand, however, when forward movement is suspended or foreclosed, the future can also be felt as particularly suffused with possibility because it is unchained from inherited ideas about continuity. Futurelessness, in this sense, can double as a critique of the past and present as well as the basis for the world to come; it can, paradoxically, be a call for the emergence of the radically new.

Brecht's placement of his refugee speakers within this double movement—in which a future that cannot be envisioned in the present generates dialectically a future that must be reimagined as radically disconnected from the present—marks his text as one of the first to explore the significance of the refugee's foreclosed futurity. Brecht recognized that confronting human beings who have no future invites radical thinking on the meaning and nature of the future itself.

Brecht's refugees understand and repeatedly state that they have no viable way out of their situation that will not reinforce—by seeking recognition from—modern ethno-nationalism. In other words,

they must supplicate to the very ideological system that has rendered them "useless" people in the first place. "What are we poor human beings to do?" Ziffel asks Kalle at one point, "Superhuman (*Ubermenschiches*) qualities are being demanded everywhere–so where are we to go? It's not just one or two peoples experiencing a momentous era: it's bearing down inexorably upon all peoples, and they can't escape it."[31] Here Brecht plays with the language of Nazism and weds it to the demands placed on refugees to prove their exceptionality as a means of acquiring asylum. Fleeing an ideology that seeks to create an exceptional race, Kalle and Ziffel must prove that they are exceptional; they must acquire passports, be recognized as citizens, and become "important people" once again.[32] But they can't. As ordinary human beings, Ziffel and Kalle have no future.

In *Refugee Conversations*, then, the new political reality of the refugee and stateless becomes a basic problem of narrativity. In order for the story to move forward, Kalle and Ziffel must either shed their status as "unimportant people" and become "superhuman" in order to attain asylum in a world of nations; or something fundamental must change—a new calculus for acknowledging human value has to emerge.[33] Brecht clearly wanted to imagine that such a new calculus could be achieved in the wake of Nazism and a postwar future. So, in the midst of the war, he invented two refugees who, unlike himself, would wait, indefinitely, for a better, more just future to arrive. Brecht thus found in the act of writing something that he could not achieve in his lived experience: a way of resting indefinitely in the pause between past and future. Whereas Brecht was forced to seek conditional belonging in the U.S., his refugee speakers resist the pull of a future that is co-extensive with a return to the bounded nation and modern ethno-nationalism. Through Ziffel and Kalle's futurelessness, Brecht speculated that another future was possible—yet one that he could not live out in his own historical present.

Moreover, Brecht suggests that rethinking the forms of refugee narrativity might be one way to reorient and reimagine our expectations about the future. One of the few recurring themes in *Refugee Conversations* is the existence of Ziffel's "memoir," a mass of paper he carries in his suitcase and periodically reads to Kalle. Ziffel's memoir is at least partially also Brecht's memoir, made up in part of fragments of Brecht's biography and drawn from the original manuscripts of *Refugee Conversations*, which began as a more conventional autobiography. Like Brecht, who continued to shift and experiment with different forms in the writing of *Refugee Conversations,* Ziffel is intensely invested in the formal composition and "method" of his memoir (his literary tinkering shadows Brecht's own deliberations about how to compose an account of refugee life). In fact, the two refugees often discuss the form that Ziffel's memoir should take. Through these scenes, Brecht makes clear his belief that narrative forms can unlock historical possibilities.

Early in Brecht's text, Kalle asks Ziffel if he will read some passages from the memoir. When Ziffel begins to read aloud, though, we discover that his compositional "method" seems to be madness. The "memoir" is an unordered catalog of raw information, in overlapping tenses, with no past, present, or future. Here is a brief, representative sampling:

> The vesper bells ringing at Santa Anna. Getting to fetch beer. The coachman in the Klauckestrasse has hung himself. Little Marie sat on a stone. Knifing pains in the finger joints, in the elbow, in the chin, in the head, in the shoulder. The knife can also go off course into the ground. He wrote something with chalk on the stable door. The police have been informed.[34]

Ziffel admits his fears that his writing will be difficult to follow, seem too disordered, or appear "outdated" (*Veraltet*). Is it too "modern," he wonders? He asks Kalle whether he should "arrange it into chapters" to give it the logical progression of a "story." But Kalle doesn't think so. "Don't let that sway you," he councils; "Humankind as such is outdated …Thinking is outdated, life is outdated, eating is outdated. I think you can write what you want because printing is also outdated."[35]

When Ziffel asks Kalle if he should put his memoir into a coherent order, he is in effect asking his fellow refugee if he should orient his writing, and himself, toward a particular iteration of the future in which a community of readers will recognize him and his "story." Of course, this query about narrative

form and audience has a deep political dimension. As many scholars have argued, forming a coherent story precedes and enables humanization.[36] Accordingly, Ziffel imagines that having a proper sequence to his life story will make possible a future moment of recognition. Properly sequencing his life story, he speculates, might help him become an "important person" and shed his status as a refugee. Kalle, though, sees no reason why his fellow refugee should order his life and writings in anticipation of a recognizable or *recognizing* future, since the world has been so completely transformed by the catastrophes of Fascism and nationalist wars. The world as they know it is "outdated," and the political future is radically uncertain. In Brecht's telling, this is the refugee's enduring message.

"Outdated" is a striking accusation to throw wholesale at the world. When we call something outdated, we imagine consigning it to the past; but at a finer scale, it renders an object disjointed, out of sync, and dragging behind the present. This historical disjointedness is especially salient for refugees, who are so often perceived and situated posterior to the norms of political modernity as sovereign, stable, and secure. As unincorporated aspirants to nation-based modernity, refugees are always, in a sense, outdated, lagging behind what they should be, chasing the future citizen that modernity promises them they can be. Yet Brecht, writing very near the beginning of the modern refugee, implies the opposite. Kalle's sweeping attribution of "outdated" to everything from "humankind" to "thinking," and "life" reverses the refugee's subjugation to a normative temporal regime. Brecht's refugees are not modernity's errant wanderers but rather special witnesses to the depth and magnitude of historical transformation in the present. As such, they can foresee the need for new forms and categories to take root in the future.

"Refugees are the sharpest dialecticians," Ziffel remarks at one point; "They've become refugees as a result of changes, and they spend all their time studying changes. They see the smallest signals as harbingers of the most significant events."[37] Ziffel and Kalle brandish their knowledge about the world through a command of what Gary Wilder has called "political tense," or the ability to use language to both consign foundational norms to the past and also imagine entirely new futures.[38] Kalle's sweeping condemnation of "outdated" to everything "modern" situates seemingly immutable concepts in the past; but it also clears out the future to be populated with new forms and meanings. It renders the future as a kind of catachresis—a contested territory awaiting the creation of new forms. If the world is outdated, something radically new and unprecedented must be possible.

Ziffel's unordered "memoir," which seems to move in every direction except forward, can be read as scripting the many possible routes to a future that is not yet legible. Just as the grammar of Ziffel's memoir fails to comply with a standard narrative temporality—to adopt a beginning, middle, and end—Brecht's refugees refuse to order their lives and stories in anticipation of a future that will simply reproduce the present. In failing to comply with any standard tense for his memoir, Ziffel, and Brecht, leave undecided the tense in which the future will be written.

Brecht's refugees are neither prophets nor optimists. They do not see an alternative future of utopian openness and cosmopolitan belonging. However, they refuse to cede that the future will simply be a repetition of the European nationalist past that has produced their refugee condition. Even as Brecht himself achieved some degree of relative security and asylum, in his writings, he refused to naturalize the course on which his own compromised circumstances had led him. Instead, he used the absurdity and recalcitrance of his refugee speakers to render untimely the very promises and expectations of political modernity: a stable and secure home within the bounded territory of a nation-state.

Conclusion: The Future as Catachresis

In this chapter, I have tried to show that modern refugee writing begins by contesting a progressive, teleological narrative that would cast refugees as interstitial figures, always on a unidirectional "pathway to citizenship." Another way of interpreting this pattern, however, is to say that refugee writers have always experimented with the raw facts of refugee futurity, refusing to make themselves into the past tense of the citizen.

This pattern might appear little more than a matter of narratology if it weren't for the outsized importance that refugees have come to exert on our ideas of the future. Today we are witnessing the acceleration of two ways of understanding refugee futures. On the one hand, there is a phenomenon with which I began this chapter: the increasing conflation of refugees with speculative visions of the bad future to be avoided at any cost. On the other, there is a choir of voices who see the growing number of refugees and migrants today not as harbingers of future catastrophe but rather as a mirror for an emergent human collectivity—evidence of a way of life to which all humans will eventually be subject.[39] "Persons in displacement may well be in the process of living an experience far more universal than it might appear," Michael Agier argues, "enable[ing] us to anticipate a way of being-in-the-world that might one day be generalized."[40]

To speak of refugee futures today is therefore to invoke a number of dramatic oppositions: impending catastrophe and unfolding collectivity; "end times" and radical beginnings; a humanitarian "emergency" situated outside of history or an emergent regime of historicity percolating in the present; signs of a civilization that has run its course and will implode (unless order and stability are restored) and evidence of a human species that is entering a new phase in its habitation of a fundamentally unstable planet (or perhaps returning to an older life that was only momentarily interrupted by settler modernity).[41]

But there is another way of understanding refugee futures—one that comes out of the tradition of writing I have explored in this chapter, wherein refugees choose to endure, indefinitely, into the future *as refugees*. Rather than the catastrophic or collective future, this archive speaks to what might be called the *catachrestic future*. A catachresis, literally the grammatical misuse of a word, can also mean an instance of semantic and social contestation over meaning—especially a contestation from below. Catachresis can function as a "subaltern hermeneutics," aimed at reversing and mitigating the effects of "epistemic violence."[42] The misappropriation of ideas can break up the bedrock of purportedly concretized knowledge, loosening up the terrain to make space for new ideas and ways of life to emerge. By misusing or misplacing an idea or word, the catachrestic can alter its meanings by "expand[ing] the set of subjects it include(s)."[43] Catachresis, in other words, is a process where the elasticity of semantic range has the potential to set social struggle into motion, where placing a word, idea, or person in the wrong place at the wrong time can be a catalyst for new knowledge to emerge.

By saying that refugee futures are catachrestic, then, I mean that we might encounter them not as the bad future (to be avoided) or a universal future (to be accepted) but a future that has heretofore been unacceptable, and to ask why. If refugee futures alarm, it is because of their contravention of liberal modernity, which envisions the future as stable, secure, and sovereign. Interrogating this unacceptability of refugee futurity can be a first step toward considering anew what and who has been left out of the future we hope for, and whether such desires and exclusions remain possible or just. To see refugee futures as catachrestic, therefore, is to accept the fact that while refugees might trouble our inherited sense of progress, this feeling of impropriety in fact signals the unmooring of previously accepted ideas of the good future, which are now buckling under the weight of new global realities. Today, refugees can no longer be imagined as an exception to an otherwise stable world order (as they had been after both world wars). Faced with this reality, one might imagine, in despair, that dystopia is upon us, or they might begin to assess what a century-long suppression of refugee futurity has hidden, what norms it has sustained, and what previously suppressed possibilities for political life open up when we allow all peoples to lay equal claim to the future.

Notes

1 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble,* 100.

2 See, for instance, Margaret Atwood, *The Year of the Flood* (New York, 2010); Jeff Vandermeer, *Borne* (New York, 2017); Donna Haraway *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham, 2016); William Connolly, *Facing the Planetary: Entangled Humanism and the Politics of the Swarming* (Durham, 2017); Jedediah Purdy, *After Nature: A Politics of the Anthropocene* (Cambridge, 2015); and Alfonso Cuarón, *Children of Men* (2006).

3 Bettini, "Climate Barbarians at the Gate?," 63.

4 Malkki, *Purity and Exile*, 5.

5 Edleman, *No Future,* 25.

6 Sheldon, *The Child to Come*, 35.

7 Bettini, "Climate Barbarians at the Gate?," 65.

8 See Streeby, *Imagining the Future of Climate Change*; and Anam, "The Migrant as Colonist."

9 Fassin, *On Humanitarian Reason*, 8.

10 This immense temporal bind and pressure on refugees suggests that their writing is an overlooked contribution to what Paul K. Saint-Amour, in reference to queer, black, and postcolonial theory, calls "critical futurities": forms of writing that respond to "critical pressures exerted by apparently foreclosed futures." See Saint-Amour, "The Literary Present," 3.

11 Helton, *The Price of Indifference*, 8.

12 See Bakara, "Time, Sovereignty, and Refugee Writing."

13 Freeman, *Time Binds*, xxii.

14 Arendt, "No Longer and Not Yet," 121.

15 Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment*, 28.

16 Arendt, "No Longer and Not Yet," 121.

17 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 431.

18 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 272.

19 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 267.

20 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 267.

21 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 221.

22 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 281.

23 A "path" or "pathway to citizenship" is the critical and legal nomenclature given to the rights granted to refugees under the United Nations 1951 Conventions relating to the Status of Refugees. See Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UN General Assembly Resolution 428(V), Annex, UN Doc. A/1775, para. 1, available at http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3ae6b3628.htm.

24 Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 276.

25 Arendt, "We Refugees," 266.

26 Arendt, "We Refugees," 266–7.

27 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

28 Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, 2.

29 Coundouriotis, "Improbable Figures," 240.

30 Brecht, *Refugee Conversations*, 8.

31 Brecht, *Refugee Conversations*, 93.

32 Brecht, *Refugee Conversations*, 76.

33 Brecht, *Refugee Conversations*, 73.

34 Brecht, *Refugee Conversations*, 26.

35 Brecht, *Refugee Conversations*, 27.

36 See, for instance, Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights*; and Slaughter, *Human Rights Inc.*

37 Brecht, *Refugee Conversations*, 64.

38 Wilder, *Freedom Time*, 4.

39 On the universality of refugees and migration, see Latour, *Down to Earth*, 5–8.

40 Agier, *Managing the Undesirables*, 3.

41 On citizenship and the nation as an interruption of a transhistorical human movement see, Colebrook "Transcendental Migration," 115–28.

42 Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, 61.

43 Taylor, *Empire of Neglect*, 58.

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