

Introduction

Experience of Refuge

THE LIVED FORM

How is refuge experienced?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

THROUGH THE OPENED DOOR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Refuge never ends.

EXPERIENCE AND EXPERIMENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

STRUCTURE OF REFUGE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

WHAT IS REFUGE?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ON WARS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

BEYOND THE MEMORY IMPERATIVE

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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