# REALIZING THE REFUGEE IN CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN LITERATURE AND ART

by

Brittany Kraus

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

at

Dalhousie University,
Halifax, Nova Scotia
August 2022

© Copyright by Brittany Kraus, 2022

*For those who cross borders*

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

LIST OF FIGURES …………………………………………………………………………….. iv

ABSTRACT ……………………………………………………………………………….... v

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS …………………………………………………………………… vi

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION …………………………………………………………… 1

CHAPTER 2: BUGS……………………………………………………………………… 33

2.1 The Roach's Revenge: Suicide and Survival in Rawi Hage's *Cockroach* ……………….. 36

2.2 "This Shit of the Earth": Against Narrative Humanity in Souvankham Thammavongsa's "Worms" …………………………………………………………………………….. 65

CHAPTER 3: BORDERS ………………………………………………………………… 90

3.1 Horizons of Success in Kim Thúy's *Ru* …………………………………………….. 96

3.2 "Bogus" Refugees and "Bloody Terrorists" in Carmen Aguirre's *Something Fierce* …... 117

CHAPTER 4: BODIES ………………………………………………………………….. 138

4.1 Tracing the Face: Abstracting the Self and Other in Francisco-Fernando Granados's Art ………………………………………………………………………………… 143

CHAPTER 5: BEYOND ……………………………………………………………….... 184

5.1 Undocumented …………………………………………………………………….. 188

5.2 The Detention and Deportation of Sophie Deraspe's *Antigone* ………………………… 214

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION …………………………………………………………….. 240

WORKS CITED ………………………………………………………………………… 252

## LIST OF FIGURES


Figure 1: *spatial profiling* 145

Figure 2: *refugees run the seas* (billboard) 162

Figure 3: *refugees run the seas* (postcard) 166

Figure 4: *The Ballad of ____ B* 180

Figure 5: *movement study* 183

Figure 6: Chak, Tings. 2014. *Undocumented*, 86-87 195

Figure 7: Chak, Tings. 2014. *Undocumented*, 91 197

Figure 8: Chak, Tings. 2014. *Undocumented*, 91 198

Figure 9: Chak, Tings. 2014. *Undocumented*, 93 201

Figure 10: Chak, Tings. 2014. *Undocumented*, 16-17. 203

Figure 11: Chak, Tings. 2014. *Undocumented*, 54-55. 207

Figure 12: Chak, Tings. 2014. *Undocumented*, 100-101. 207

Figure 13: Chak, Tings. 2014. *Undocumented*, 106. 208

Figure 14: Chak, Tings. 2014. *Undocumented*, 106 213

**ABSTRACT**

This dissertation joins the field of Critical Refugee Studies (CRS) in Canada to examine representations of refugees in contemporary Canadian literature and culture. Drawing on a wide range of literary, filmic, visual and performance texts, I argue that “the refugee” is a pivotal figure in understanding the vexed and intertwined relationship between forced migration and projects of nation-building and statehood. In particular, I consider how these texts, many of them by refugee and immigrant authors, challenge or complicate dominant ideals of Canadian hospitality to reveal the colonial, capitalist and patriarchal dimensions of Canada’s immigration and refugee regimes, and the many forms of exclusion and exploitation refugees and non-citizens routinely experience *within*, as well as beyond, the borders of this nation.

Chapter 1 introduces the theoretical framework used in this study, highlighting the ways in which refugee literature and art in Canada can contribute to critically reorient concepts of hospitality and the category of “refugee.” In Chapter 2, I examine Rawi Hage’s novel, *Cockroach*, and Souvankham Thammavongsa’s short story, “Worms,” in relation to the language of pestilence that pervades immigration discourse. Hage and Thammavongsa use bugs as an extended metaphor for the often denigrated yet ineradicable forms of human life that exist on the peripheries of social and political inclusion, offering productive interpretive ground for exploring the ways refugees, migrants, and non-citizens (or “quasi-citizens”) can negotiate and articulate their identities beyond normative structures of citizenship and belonging. These normative structures include, among other elements, an expectation for refugees to express gratitude to the host nation, often through telling first-person stories that adhere to prescriptive narrative frameworks of refugee trauma and success. Accordingly, in Chapter 3, I consider how Kim Thúy’s semi-autobiographical novel, *Ru*, and Carmen Aguirre’s memoir, *Something Fierce,* differentially navigate the difficulties of narrating traumatic histories within limited frameworks of representation, focusing on the importance of storytelling to refugee rights and recognition. In Chapter 4, I further explore the relationship between representation and recognition by analyzing the impulse towards abstraction in Francisco-Fernando Granados’s performance and visual art, while considering the dominant role of images in producing the refugee as an object of spectacle within discourses of humanitarian exceptionalism. In my final chapter, I turn from the abstract to the concrete, considering the ways Tings Chak’s graphic essay, *Undocumented: The Architecture of Migrant Detention*, and Sophie Deraspe’s film, *Antigone*, expose the brutal, though often concealed, realities of Canada’s crimmigration and deportation regimes to advocate for mobility justice and advance the refugee as a figure of potent political and social resistance.

This dissertation locates the refugee at the centre of political and social struggles for equality, while exposing the oppressive systems and exploitative structures that continue to force people to the peripheries of belonging, legality, and even humanity. Building upon current mobility and migration scholarship, as well as well-established critiques of Canadian nationalism, humanitarianism, and settler-colonialism, this dissertation demonstrates the ways in which refugee writing and art in Canada can intervene into spaces of control and confinement to realize the refugee as an agential, complex and dignified subject.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge my supervisor, Dr. Carrie Dawson, for all her support, guidance and compassion during this long and challenging process. Dr. Dawson introduced me to the field of Critical Refugee Studies, and has played a vital role in the development of this project, always prompting me, albeit gently, to think deeper, look closer, and trust more in the process and in myself. I have learned so much from Dr. Dawson, who has been a true mentor to me.

I would like to thank my committee members, Drs. Kiran Banerjee, Erin Wunker, and Vinh Nguyen, whose expertise, insight and experience have added immeasurably to my work. I would also like to thank my co-supervisor, Dr. Lyn Bennett, and graduate coordinator, Dr. Bart Vautour, for their time and dedication. In addition, I am grateful to Francisco-Fernando Granados, for his generous correspondence and granting me permission to use images of his work.

I am grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Nova Scotia Graduate Scholarship, and the Killam Foundation for funding this project, and to the Department of English at Dalhousie University for the many employment and professional opportunities (and free food!). A heartfelt thanks to Mary Beth MacIsaac and Pamela Decker, for their patience, kindness, and endless administrative support during my time at Dalhousie. Whatever (many) questions I had, they had the answer.

Finally, I'd like to thank my family, friends, and everyone else who made this degree possible, whether by providing comfort, consolation, or a much-needed "kick" of motivation. While I can't name everyone here, I need to name a few. Thank you *Dr*. Kaarina Mikalson, my

brilliant friend and kindred spirit, for encouraging me every step of the way and sharing in the highs and lows of graduate student life. Thank you Hala Nader, my super translator; Armin Mirsanaye, my partner-in-crime; and Mohammad Tahmasebi, the greatest of great believers. Thank you Jared Moldenhauer, for all the laughs and late night chats, and Bala Mitra, for all the cooking, company, and (Internet) cats. You have all helped me more than you know.

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

My Name is Patrick and I'm Calling from the Lindsay Institution.

— Patrick, "#Migrant Strike Day 3" n.p.

On September 17, 2013, nearly 200 immigrant detainees held at the Central East Correctional Centre in Lindsay, Ontario, began a hunger strike to protest their indefinite detention (Keung). Since then, detainees at the Central East Correctional Centre in Lindsay, Ontario, have repeatedly staged hunger strikes to protest the inhumane conditions of immigrant detention in Canada, from indefinite periods of incarceration to a lack of basic care and resources. In fact, as recently as June 2020, approximately 100 detainees at the Correctional Centre went on a hunger strike, reporting a lack of safe drinking water, clean clothing, and nutritional food, as well as heightened risks of exposure to COVID-19 due to issues of overcrowding and unsanitary conditions ("Inmates Launch"). "We're tired we're all tired of being in here," reads one detainees' statement. "I want [people] to know what we're going through in jail. The pain, the struggle and suffering…" ("#Migrant Strike"). Ontario's Ministry of the Solicitor-General responded by calling their complaints "unfounded" ("About 100 Inmates").

The Ministry's response is typical. As Lucy Fiske argues, "[w]hen detainees go on hunger strike or riot or occupy the roofs of detention centres, their actions are usually narrated by governments keen to discredit them or their actions as criminal, manipulative, and evidence of 'their' barbarity and difference" (3). In this way, the Canadian government's efforts to variously

discredit the legitimacy of the protests are exemplary of broader state efforts to increasingly deny the rights of refugees within political and discursive realms, in part by mobilizing categories of exclusion and exceptionalism that often construe the 'real' refugee as apolitical and inagential. Refugees who protest, after all, do not fit the picture of the 'right' kind of refugee that has been popularized by the media and political messaging: passive and pitiable, grateful and 'good.' As I explore throughout this dissertation, 'good' refugees are typically represented as those lacking in agency and speech, mere beneficiaries of Canada's benevolence and compassion. By this logic, 'good' refugees do not stage hunger strikes, or take to the roofs of detention centres; only 'bad' refugees protest—or, to use the more frequently employed term, 'riot.'

To protest is, as Deepti Misri writes, to "stake claims to humanity" (527). But not all protests take place on prison roofs. Some are enacted on the body, others in imaginative spaces. Despite state efforts to disappear, contain, regulate, and control them, refugees continue to protest against the ways in which they have been, and increasingly are, excluded from the category of the human via policies, practices, and representational frames that work to make them "vanish in reality" (Macklin 369), while at once calling upon them to appear as "easily consumable spectacle" (Granados, "Reciprocal Gazing" 31) and emblems of First-World hospitality. With this in mind, I consider the ways in which contemporary writers and artists in Canada are working to realize —that is, make real—the refugee as a social and political agent of change, a figure of irreducible agency and identity. Indeed, as I discuss later in this introduction, simply *being* a refugee, even without being formally recognized as such, is a form of protest against hegemonic systems of power and control. That is not to say that recognition does not matter: it matters enormously, and may, for some people, mean the difference between life and death. However, if "Canada has relied upon the rejection and inclusion of refugees as a crucial

means of statecraft" (Nguyen and Phu 16), then the ways in which refugees are or are not recognized by political and social apparatuses become key to understanding the inexorable role of 'the refugee' in contemporary and historical projects of nationhood and political struggle. The cries of "We are human" emanating from the voices and bodies of refugees worldwide thus take on a peculiar resonance.[1] For what is a refugee, if not a human being?

## Redefining the Refugee

Definitions belong to the definers, not the defined.

—Toni Morrison, *Beloved* 225

By definition, 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." As outlined in the 1951 Refugee Convention, this definition continues to form the basis of claims for refugee status in Canada and other signatory nations, where the notion of persecution is at the heart of the definition of a refugee.[2] Proving persecution is, however, an increasingly difficult task, as today's systems of immigration management create high barriers for people seeking refuge and protection by

[1] Variations of the rallying cry "We are Human" can be heard (and seen) in refugee protests and demonstrations across the globe. Multiple refugee rights organizations, including the Canada Council for Refugees (CCR), rely on a similarly humanizing rhetoric to raise awareness about refugee rights and issues. The CCR's current anti-trafficking campaign, for example, is called "Because I Am Human."

[2] On a universal level, refugee status is governed by the 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol. Canada signed the 1951 UN Convention in 1969; in 1976, the government officially added "refugee" as a "new class of immigrant in the Immigration Act of Canada" (Nguyen and Phu 6).

minimizing channels of legal movement and expanding categories of immigrant illegality. While more people are now displaced than at any time in recorded history, fewer 'real' refugees exist in the eyes of the state and, furthermore, the mainstream public imagination, due to a number of converging legal, political, and social factors that displace the refugee from various realms of legitimacy. Peter Nyers argues that refugees have become part of an ''abject class' of global migrants" ("Abject Cosmopolitanism" 1070) whose agency, credibility, and humanity are routinely called into question.[3] He writes: "Whatever their designation, these migrants are increasingly cast as the objects of securitised fears and anxieties, possessing either an unsavoury agency (i.e. they are identity-frauds, queue jumpers, people who undermine consent in the polity)" (1070). The notion of refugee agency is thus central to this dissertation, as I explore the intersections and gaps between refugee literature and representation, humanitarian discourse, and contemporary and historical paradigms of mobility and citizenship to consider the various ways refugees navigate the "fraught passages" (Nguyen and Phu 15) and proliferating borders of this world.

As Didier Fassin argues, fear of migration has given rise to a moral economy of suspicion that allows for the "renewed role of the nation-state to impose a surveillance of the frontiers and the territories, regimes of exception for the detention and deportation of illegal aliens, and a dramatic decline in the right to asylum" ("Policing Borders" 213). The dehumanizing metaphors of migration—refugees as waves, floods, swarms, and other non-human phenomena—play a key

[3] Nyers is a foundational scholar for refugee studies in Canada. His 2006 book, *Rethinking Refugees*, has become a critical touchstone for current scholarly debates and perspectives on immigration and displacement within Canadian and international contexts.

role in mobilizing what Audrey Macklin calls the "discursive disappearance of the refugee" (365). As Macklin wrote in her 2005 article, "Disappearing Refugees,"

> Refugees are disappearing from the territory of wealthy industrialized nations. I do not mean that refugees are literally disappearing … I refer here not to the legal and material reality of refugees, but rather to the erosion of the idea that people who seek asylum may actually be refugees. This erasure performs a crucial preparatory step toward legitimating actual laws and practices that attempt to make them vanish in reality. (365)

Since the publication of Macklin's article more than fifteen years ago, the legitimating laws and practices designed to make refugees "vanish in reality" (365) have only grown stronger and more heinous. The rise of immigration detention; the implementation of the Safe Third Country Agreement; the discursive de-legitimization of genuine refugees—these are some of the ways in which the refugee's rights and, indeed, basic humanity, are systematically denied and 'disappeared.'[4]

Like Macklin, I do not mean that refugees are "literally disappearing," nor do I mean to suggest that refugees are invisible to the public eye. In fact, refugees are a media mainstay, as forced migration and the refugee crisis/crises "have been among the most pressing issues of recent years, often stirring intense debate and contributing to political polarization" (Tirosh et al. 49).[5] The most famous refugee to emerge in recent years is, perhaps, Alan Kurdi, the three-year-

---

[4] Notably, the legal 'loopholes' in the Canada–United States Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA) have caused many asylum seekers crossing from the US into Canada to be misconstrued as illegal border crossers, or as simply 'illegal' themselves.

[5] There is something troubling about the ways in which 'refugee crises' are nationalized in media and political discourse. While, on the one hand, national designations of refugee crises (i.e. the Syrian Refugee Crisis) have the potential to counter the dominant image of the refugee as "universal humanitarian subject" (Malkki 378) through locations of the refugee in specific geopolitical, historical and cultural contexts, what invariably seems to happen is

old Syrian toddler who became a tragic icon of the horrors of war and displacement after photographs of his small, posthumous body went viral. In Chapter 4, I discuss the Kurdi photographs at greater length in relation to questions of refugee spectacle and visual regimes of suffering. So, for now, I merely want to emphasize the refugee's paradoxical position in the public sphere, at once hyper-visible and invisible, present and absent.

In her essay on the "'theatricality' of border space" (138), Sophie Nield writes,

> The border is a place where you have to appear. To pass through, the border-crosser must simultaneously be both present and represented. That representation has historically taken the form of papers: passports, permits to travel, proofs of nationality, photographs, or verbal accounts of reasons for travel. More recently, this representation has been drawn from the body itself: fingerprints, retinal scans—what Agamben has called the 'biometric tattoo.' (137)

Published in 2008, Nield's essay anticipates the rise of the body (part) as passport, and the now firmly entrenched dichotomy of visibility and invisibility that characterizes contemporary border regimes. In Canada, refugees, migrants, asylum seekers and other non-citizens are regularly displaced from the spaces of the state through "means that *invisibilize* the border" and "tactics of (un)provision, neglect, and selectivity" (Romero 9). These means and tactics manifest both in physical and discursive forms—for example, in the walls and cages of Canada's migrant detention system, or in the government's rhetoric of hospitality and openness.[6]

---

that the refugee is rendered non-existent beyond whatever nationality is designated. The Syrian refugee, for example, becomes the *only* refugee imaginable as a humanitarian subject, the only type of refugee that exists in the dominant public mind. See "Nationalizing the 'Refugee Crisis'" by Noam Tirosh et al.

[6] Romero adds that the government's efforts to "invisibilize" the border are also enacted by efforts to make visible "the border as a way to maintain the state narrative of protecting its integrity" (i), particularly in times of crisis. See Romero's *The Politics of the Visible/Invisible Border: Canada's Responses and (in)Actions Towards Refugee and Claimants' Protection*.

What role, then, does storytelling play in the "disappearance of the refugee" (Macklin 365), discursive or otherwise? How do stories *about* refugees, or stories told *by* refugees, operate to affirm or deny their humanity or existence? Narrative plays a significant role in shaping geopolitical conditions and public perception, where the "dominant narrative surrounding refugee and asylum seekers in the UK, Europe, Australia and North America is one in which the refugee is viewed as either victim or as a villain" (Fiske 4). This binary narrative not only limits the public's imagination of refugees, adding to the widespread fear and ignorance that surrounds immigration debates, but also plays out in legal and juridical realms—crucially, in the refugee claim process.

In the refugee claim or determination process, the Immigration Review Board (IRB) decides whether a claimant qualifies as a Convention refugee or "person in need of protection," based in large part on the claimant's ability to produce credible testimony.[7] According to the IRB website: "An assessment is customarily made of whether the witness is honestly endeavouring to tell the truth, that is, whether the witness appears frank and sincere or biased, reticent and evasive" ("Assessment of Credibility").

But what does it mean to tell the truth, and tell it *well*? In "Telling Stories from Start to Finish," legal scholar Anthea Vogl explores the centrality of narrative to the refugee determination process. Vogl argues that "part of the law's requirement for 'plausible' evidence involves an expectation that refugee applicants tell a good story—that is, one that predominantly

[7] To apply for refugee status, whether as a Convention refugee or "person in need of protection," the claimant must already be in Canada. As Canada further militarizes and securitizes its borders, however, it has become very difficult for people to enter into Canada without facing mandatory detention, deportation, and the denial of their claims for refuge.

conforms to the conventions of model narrative forms: refugee stories must have narrative qualities" (63). Stories that follow a linear progression—from start to finish—and adhere to "certain substantive narratives and narrative forms" (Vogl 64) tend to be seen as more credible than others that may more accurately reflect the gaps, detours, and discontinuities that characterize migrant and refugee journeys, and the difficulties of giving first-person testimony and recalling traumatic memory. "The problem with these demands for narrativity," Vogl argues, "is that neither a refugee applicant's experiences (life as lived), nor the person's subsequent accounts of them (life as told), can necessarily meet these expectations" (64).

Beyond the claim process, narrative shapes the everyday realities of refugees and migrants, helping determine how refugees and migrants are seen or not seen, recognized or misrecognized within public and political realms, and, crucially, what means and measures of mobility they can access (status, space, protection, opportunity). In 2012, former Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) Jason Kenney famously proclaimed that Canada's "generous asylum system has been abused by too many people making bogus refugee claims. Canadians take great pride in the generosity and compassion of our immigration and refugee programs. But they have no tolerance for those who abuse our generosity or take advantage of our country" ("Speaking Notes"). I refer to Kenney's words here to signal the vexed and intertwined relationship between narrative and law—speech and practice—that mobilizes refugee exclusion and 'disappearance.' In the same year, 2012, Canada passed Bill C-31, *Protecting Canada's Immigration System*. The act was purportedly designed to keep 'bogus' refugees from infiltrating Canada's 'generous' asylum system via increased security measures and restrictive border controls, marking the punitive turn in Canada's immigration and refugee laws. Since then, Canada has passed a series of laws and legislation that contribute to a "broader

transnational system of exclusion" (Nyers, "Abject Cosmopolitanism" 1070) that limits the pathways of legal migration and criminalizes people on the move—thus creating more and more 'bogus' refugees. While the government rhetoric on refugees has somewhat shifted under the Trudeau administration, as I will discuss shortly, the figure of the bogus refugee endures in the popular imagination.

The bogus refugee is a recurring but amorphous villain in the contemporary story of migration, as the lines between refugee victimhood and villainy often overlap and coalesce, and, indeed, are becoming more difficult to discern as human migrations—and migrants themselves—are increasingly made 'illegal.' According to Roger Zetter, "refugee, asylum seeker, and criminal identities have tended to blur into an indistinct and negative category of irregular migration" (174) in the popular imagination, deeply influenced by political rhetoric and repetitive media representations of 'good' and 'bad' refugees. In Canada, only the "most demonstrably abject of refugee claimants—those able to prove that they are utterly powerless and without hope" (Dawson, "On Thinking Like a State" 70) are typically seen to have legitimate claims for asylum, while claimants "deemed to have any agency" (70) are framed as undeserving, fraudulent, and/or dangerous. As Harriet Gray and Anja Franck argue, the binary categorization of refugees as either good or bad, deserving or devious, is mobilized in part by the "intertwined and mutually dependent representations of racialized, masculinized threat and racialized, feminized vulnerability, woven into the scaffold of colonial modernity" (275). In other words, race and gender play an important role in constructions of the refugee as either a figure of sympathy or suspicion, inextricable from legacies of colonialism, patriarchy, and neo-liberalism. The intersections between race, gender, and colonialism is thus a recurring point of inquiry throughout this dissertation, as I examine the various ideological, discursive and representational

frameworks that restrict refugee and migrant identities, movements, and mobilities. Paying particular attention to representations of refuge and refugees in contemporary literary and cultural texts by refugee and immigrant authors in Canada, I consider the various dimensions of normativity and racialized and gendered exclusions at play in the dominant narratives and discourses, policies, and laws that surround contemporary migrations and the figure of the refugee.

Like other signatories to the *1951 Refugee Convention*, Canada has increasingly shifted the state's legal obligations to protect refugees by relying on a discourse of hospitality that emphasizes a guest/host dynamic, in which the nation emerges as vulnerable to 'bogus' refugees but benevolently hospitable to 'guests.' As Carrie Dawson explains: "Typically, this means that refugees from outside of Canada are represented positively—as 'good refugees' and invited guests—while those who have the temerity and the resources to arrive uninvited at our borders or airports are represented as invasive, threatening 'irregulars' and mendacious queue jumpers" ("Refugee Hotels" 831). Canada continues to minimize its signatory obligations to refugees via contradictory and coalescing narratives of hospitality and security that mobilize exclusionary refugee laws and practices.[8] The government's use of "justificatory narratives"[9] is key to rationalizing the expansion of migrant detention regimes, the enhanced securitization of borders,

[8] For example, under the Safe Third Country Agreement (STCA), Canada and the US "each declare the country safe for refugees and close the door on most refugee claimants at the US-Canada border" ("Canadian Council for Refugees"). The STCA wrongly assumes that refugee claimants in the US are free from danger; furthermore, the agreement functions to create more categories of 'illegals,' as people who apply through formal immigration channels from the US are less likely to receive asylum or refugee status in Canada than those who cross the border illegally.

[9] Joseph Garcea and Daniel Kikulwe define "justificatory narratives" as the "explanations or stories designed to justify political or policy proposals, decisions or actions by both their proponents and opponents" (89-90). See Garcea and Kikulwe's 2019 essay, "The Liberal Plan for Resettling Syrian Refugees in Canada," for an analysis of the narratives and counter-narratives used by the Trudeau government to at once moralize the government's promise to resettle 25, 000 Syrian refugees and justify the government's failures to meet this target.

and the reduction of the refugee's "right to have rights" (Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism* 376).[10] Although government narratives are not the focus of this dissertation, I attend to the ways in which state narratives of hospitality coincide with, or chafe against, the narratives, or anti-narratives, offered in the literary, performative, and visual texts that are my primary sources.

As the novels, stories, poems, photographs, film, and art installations I examine demonstrate, human agency often exists within—and beyond—the "disputed terrain" (Fiske 8) of human rights and citizenship regimes in irreducible and indefinable ways. From detention centres to refugee camps, the streets of Montreal to the beaches of Lesbos, refugees are calling out for recognition beyond national identity constructs and dominant representational practices. They continue to speak their humanity, sometimes without words, from the peripheries of political and social life—what Hannah Arendt calls the "dark background of difference" (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* 383). As former immigrant detainee, Khalid Al Sharifi, powerfully declares: "I am a human being, I said."[11]

**Why Canada?**

[10] This phrase first appears in the following passage of Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: "We became aware of the existence of a right to have rights (and that means to live in a framework where one is judged by one's actions and opinions), and a right to belong to some kind of organized community, only when millions of people emerged who had lost and could not regain these rights because of the new global situation" (376). Arendt's argument about the 'right to have rights' has a profound relevance to current debates about citizenship and forced displacement.

[11] This line comes from an an untitled poem by Al Sharifi, a former detainee held at the notorious Port Hedland prison in West Australia: "What of human beings? / I am a human being, I said. / You are a refugee, they said" (9-11). The poem originally appeared in a 2003 issues of *Southerly Magazine*; however, I first read Al Sharifi's powerful words in Joseph Pugliese's 2007 article, "The Event-trauma of the Carceral Post-Human." I am thus indebted to Pugliese for this quote.

In January 2017, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau published the following message on Twitter: "To those fleeing persecution, terror & war, Canadians will welcome you, regardless of your faith. Diversity is our strength #WelcometoCanada." This tweet was promptly followed by another that depicted a 2015 photograph of Trudeau greeting a Syrian refugee (Nguyen and Phu 5). Published in direct response to former US President Donald Trump's announcement of a four-month hold on allowing refugees into the United States and temporary travel ban preventing citizens of seven predominantly Muslim countries from entering the US—popularly known as Trump's "Muslim Ban"—Trudeau's message was widely hailed as a gesture of 'heroic hospitality,' a true testament of True North hospitality. According to Vinh Nguyen and Thy Phu,

> These two tweets, a declaration of hospitality and visual evidence of this hospitality, exemplify Canadian "humanitarian exceptionalism," a belief that what sets Canada apart from the US and other nation-states is its distinct benevolence and commitment to human rights … At the moment of American humanitarian failure, Canada asserted itself as a leader in refugee humanitarianism. (3)

By August 2017, however, Trudeau's overtures of hospitality were striking a less than welcoming tone. After a meeting in Montreal with federal and provincial ministers tasked with managing the influx of asylum seekers in Quebec, Trudeau issued a warning to would-be asylum seekers: "You will not be at an advantage if you choose to enter Canada irregularly. You must follow the rules and there are many" (qtd. in Woods para. 4). It seems, then, that Trudeau's gesture of 'heroic hospitality' was just that—a gesture, devoid of real action or care. Canada's refugee system, after all, is hardly a paragon of hospitality, heroic or not. There is a massive backlog of refugee claims in this country. Deportations and deaths in immigration detention facilities have risen in recent years. Furthermore, thousands of refugees in Canada currently

struggle to find work and shelter, as COVID-19 has made it more difficult for them to acquire work visas or secure adequate housing. Many of these refugees "follow[ed] the rules" and came to this country legally, yet still face immense challenges to survive on a daily basis. The reality is, there is little heroic, and even less hospitable, about Canada's treatment of refugees, even those who "follow the rules." And there are, as Trudeau underscores, many.

Canada's reputation as among the most hospitable and peaceful nations in the world is often used to gloss over the human rights abuses and oppressive practices that occur on this soil or in the name of the global good.[12] As Sherene Razack warns, "[t]he hold that mythologies have should not be underestimated," as mythologies "help the nation forget its past and present" (9). The myth of Canada as a humanitarian and inherently hospitable nation to the world's needy and vulnerable has far-reaching effects and consequences, as it conveniently forgets, or works to conceal, this country's violent colonial past and present, and its ongoing abuse and abandonment of refugees and other non-citizens to spaces of discipline, assimilation, and expulsion. Moreover, the discourse of hospitality is often used to 'forget' Canada's current legal obligations to refugees while celebrating Canada's history of welcoming them.

Indeed, Canada's unsavoury history has long been subject to reinterpretation. Our military conquests are often framed as peacekeeping missions, our legacies of racist immigration policies and practices a thing of the supposed colonial past.[13] In his well-known 1922 article, "The Immigrants Canada Wants," the Canadian politician and former Minister of the Interior, Clifford Sifton, outlines a taxonomy of criteria for 'good' and desirable immigrants to Canada,

---

[12] As Johnathon Vaughn Strebly writes for Canada's *National Observer*, "Canada is among the most peaceful nations in the world, welcoming and celebrating diverse nationalities and cultures. That's not just a stereotype of politeness, apologetic kindness and quick smiles, it's a fact" (para. 14).

[13] See Sherene Razack's *Dark Threats and White Nights* for an analysis of the racist and colonial dimensions of Canada's modern peace-keeping missions.

arguing for the supremacy of white, English-speaking (and largely Protestant) immigrants "with the grit to fight out the battle of life in Canada" (para. 2) over immigrants from predominantly non-white, non-English speaking countries. "The fact remains," Sifton writes, "…that a country can only get the kind of immigrants which are suitable to it and can only hold and assimilate them if they have been wisely chosen" (para. 1).

Despite the all-too common belief that Canada, minus the occasional error, has for centuries been a safe haven for "the displaced, the persecuted, the hunted, the starving and the politically oppressed" (Scotti para. 4), the fact is that Canada's immigration system has always, as Sifton's article plainly reveals, been predicated on racialized and Eurocentric ideals of assimilation and preferential citizenship—'good' vs. 'bad' or 'undesirable' immigrants. These assimilationist ideals continue to undergird Canada's immigration and refugee systems, and play a key role in the nation's colonial genocidal legacy and forced displacement of undesirable, 'unassimilable' identities from realms of citizenship and human rights. The Komagata Maru incident, for example, provides a key example of how Canada's assimilationist immigration ideals have operated throughout history to deny refugees and immigrants entry on the basis of their racial and ethnic origins, as does the anti-Semitic history of the MS *St. Louis*.[14] However, while in the century since Sifton's article the government rhetoric on immigration has notably shifted from assimilation to hospitality, the nation's public face (as it were) of openness and multicultural welcome often conceals the brutal realities of Canada's current immigration and refugee system, and its assimilationist and exclusionary agendas.

[14] The Komagata Maru and MS *St. Louis* incidents are well-known historical blights on Canada's lauded record of hospitality. In both cases, racialized refugees were denied entry into Canada (Indian in the former case; Jewish in the latter), leading to many of their deaths. In 2018, the Trudeau government issued formal apologies for both incidents, an arguably empty gesture in light of the state's increasing use of "criminal law measures to deter and to punish migrants in irregular situations" (Atak and Simeon 5), for example, refugees who arrive by boat and sea.

The aim of this project, however, is not to demonstrate how 'bad' or 'worse' Canada is towards refugees and migrants than other Western nation-states, but rather to consider ways in which embedded hierarchies of knowledge, being, and belonging are used to reinforce power relations and systems of naturalized privilege or citizenship on both a national and global scale. Canada is not the only nation to deploy the language of hospitality to justify anti-immigration and anti-refugee policies and practices. Hospitality is a deeply ambivalent concept, as many scholars have noted, that is frequently deployed to serve "diverse and often incompatible agendas" (Dawson "Refugee Hotels" 827) in national and transnational contexts.[15] But the face of Canadian hospitality often disguises the colonial structures of power and political membership in this country in ways that make it very difficult to speak out against institutionalized discrimination and exploitative immigration policies and practices, or for Canadians to realize that, to quote Tony Keller, "[s]urrounding the Canadian welcome mat is a bed of nails" (para. 1).

Take, for example, Canada's migrant detention system. Asylum seekers, refugee claimants, and 'irregular' arrivals disappear daily within our borders to detention sites and other corridors of exclusion camouflaged by "buildings and landscapes so banal that they can go by unnoticed" (Chak 10). Many Canadians are unaware these places exist or, if they are, do not fully comprehend the degree to which Canada's immigration regime extends the state's power beyond the law and normalizes suffering through a "carefully contrived banality of migrant detention" (Dawson, "In Plain Sight" 128). In Judith Butler's view, indefinite detention—an ongoing practice in Canada's migrant detention system—constitutes a "new exercise of state

---

[15] Derrida's theory of hospitality influences many contemporary critical perspectives on refugee and immigration matters, particularly his conceptualizations of the Foreigner and the hospitality/hostility dyad. Derrida identifies that hospitality shares the same etymological root as hostility, and argues that hospitality is conditional in the sense that it is based on ideas and affirmations of proprietariness and host benevolence. See *Of Hospitality*.

sovereignty” (*Precarious Life* 51) that circumnavigates the law and the principles of freedom and democracy; the state is given “ultimate say” (51) and an “indefinitely prolonged power” (57) to detain whoever it pleases, for however long it pleases, without charge or trial.

Refugees—that is, people granted refugee status—experience more subtle forms of discrimination in Canada, particularly in discursive and representational realms. They face ongoing pressures to speak only about the “good of [their] arrival” (Ahmed 158), lest they appear ungrateful or unassimilated. They are called upon to repeat “the telling of a retelling of a story that is told again and again in repetitive trauma” (Hua 110) to comply with ethnocentric narratives of First World civility and Third World barbarity. They are largely limited to tell ‘refugee stories’ that ideologically reaffirm reductive assumptions about refugee and immigrant life in order to supply narratives “more palatable and easily digested by mainstream readers and state structures alike” (Nguyen 17). Moreover, because of the “unsavoury prejudices that circumscribe the refugee in everyday life” (August 68), many immigrant communities are “eager to leave the image of the powerless refugee behind” (68). As such, many mainstream refugee stories adhere to a prescriptive narrative framework that showcases refugees ‘overcoming’ perilous journeys and unthinkable horrors before finding peace, happiness, and success in their new home. While refugee success stories can themselves be strategically deployed as claims to humanity and belonging, particularly when they are told by refugees as a matter of choice, these stories may also hide painful realities. Feelings and experiences of unsettlement or alienation can persist well beyond the bureaucratic markers of citizenship. As Anh Hua writes in “The Blue Tank,” a semi-autobiographical short story: “Migrant. Refugee. Immigrant. Ex-immigrant. Am I settled yet? Where is this place called ‘home’?” (110)

**Why Refugees?**

> In the first place, we don't like to be called refugees. We ourselves call each other "newcomers" or "immigrants."
>
> — Hannah Arendt, "We Refugees" 264

"The Blue Tank" was published in *Canadian Woman Studies* as part of a longer article entitled "Travel and Displacement: An (Ex)Refugee and (Ex)Immigrant Woman's Tale-Tell." In this article, Hua argues for the importance of writing "'histories from below'" (112) to challenge hegemonic myths and narratives of being and belonging. Remembering, rewriting, recording and reinventing—these acts are crucial, Hua asserts, to address the "historical gaps and silences" in the "metanarratives of international politics and of nation-states which have reduced the experiences of the refugees [sic] to numbers and statistics" (111). Drawing on Chandra Mohanty's idea that storytelling can manifest a "discourse of oppositional consciousness and agency" (qtd. in Hua 111), Hua argues that refugee and immigrant (re)writing can "back talk" hegemonic historiographies and homogenizing constructs of identity by creating "new forms of resistance" (113). Storytelling, she argues, is perhaps one of the few sites where refugees can "claim political voice and epistemic terrain" (113) both within and beyond the borders of the nation-state.

The idea that refugees are at the forefront of creating "new forms of resistance" is particularly compelling in light of Giorgio Agamben's claim that the refugee's very being threatens the fictions and foundations of the modern state. In his essay, "Beyond Human Rights,"

Agamben radically claims that the very “political survival of humankind today” (95) relies on a recognition of the refugee as “perhaps the only thinkable figure for the people of our time and the only category in which one may see today … the forms and limits of a coming political community” (90). Building on Arendt’s concept of the refugee as vanguard—that is, a key figure in the struggle for political freedom—Agamben sees the refugee as playing a vital role in “perforating” the hegemonic “spaces of states” (95). He argues that refugees “act back onto” (95) the spaces and territories they inhabit in ways that fundamentally call into question the very shape of sovereignty and modern human rights frameworks: “Only in a world in which the spaces of states have thus been perforated and topologically deformed and in which the citizen has been able to recognize the refugee that he or she is—only in such a world is the political survival of humankind today thinkable” (95). The refugee is, in other words, a figure of the future.

Crucially, Agamben is referring to a stateless refugee, a “person who is not considered as a national by any state under the operation of its law,”[16] and, as such, is reduced to “bare life.”[17] However, as Anthony Downey notes, Agamben’s concept of the profound political agency of “bare life” provides a “significant way of reflecting on contemporary art practices that take migration, stateless, diasporic communities, human rights, and zones of conflict as their subject matters” (109). Agamben’s concept of bare life is useful for conceptualizing the ways that refugees can be agents of social and political change, rather than speechless, passive victims. But bare life is not to be glorified and challenging the ‘spaces of states’ may come at a high cost. What, then, does it mean to challenge the spaces of states from positions of marginality and

---

[16] This is the definition of a stateless refugee as it appears in the 1954 Statelessness Convention.

[17] Agamben chiefly develops his concept of “bare life” in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.

exclusion? How do refugees claim space and “epistemic terrain” (Hua 113) in a world increasingly built to exclude them? What narrative and representational tactics can ‘act back’ against hegemonic meta-narratives of citizenship and recognizable life, and what types of narratives confirm them? What does it mean to speak from below?

**A Note on Terminology**

> Yes, you need a passport to prove to the world that you exist. The people at passport control, they cannot look at you and see you are a person. No! They have to look at a little photograph of you. Then they believe you exist.
>
> — Jeffrey Eugenides, *The Marriage Plot* 5

The terminologies and classifications of non-citizens—refugees, migrants, irregular arrivals, asylum seekers, stateless persons, displaced persons, ‘illegals,’ ‘aliens’—play a critical role in determining what rights and protections individuals can lay claim to in Canada (and elsewhere), as well as the ways in which they are perceived and recognized in public realms. Throughout this dissertation, however, I often use the term “refugee” in a broadly inclusive and capacious manner. I do so for the following reasons.

Firstly, the current terminology of human migration is not only vast and ever-changing but mobilizes the discursive disappearance of refugees from realms of legitimacy and recognition. For example, the term ‘asylum seeker’ is a “relatively recent invention of Western governments” that arguably “creates a layer of suspicion around refugees” (Fiske 11). Moreover,

the terms ‘irregular arrival’ or ‘illegal’ actively dehumanize and de-legitimize migrants and refugees by casting them as outlaw, unnatural, animal or extraterrestrial. As Macklin writes, “illegal migrants’ outlaw designation exceeds the particular violation of immigration law and assumes a kind of existential totalizing character … They are not merely people who have commit[ed] an illegal act; they *are* illegal” (366-67). Indeed, the criminalization of people on the move—now commonly referred to as ‘crimmigration,’ a term coined by Juliet Stumpf in 2006 to refer to the nexus of criminal and immigration law—sets up both material and imaginative borders that divide people into categories of legal or illegal humanness.

Secondly, the overlap and fragmentation of the refugee label into numerous sub-categories (genuine/bogus refugee, asylum seekers, stateless person, migrant, undocumented) produces a “competitive space” (Safouane 23) of migration that divides people into different categories of being and worth. As Hamza Safouane argues, the logic of these categorizations is “self-sustaining” (17), and limits the rights and protections afforded refugees by creating a “competitive space that encompasses several contradictory discourses of migration that are in constant struggle against each other for seizing monopoly on meaning” (23). While refugees, for example, are often conflated with migrants in populist discourses of illegality and invasion—more members of the “abject class of global migrants” (Nyers, “Abject Cosmopolitanism” 1070) desperate for entry—refugees are also considered distinct from migrants at “highly politicized moments” (Nguyen and Phu 11) and crises. Although the political dimensions and categories of immigration seemingly strive to make refugees more easily identifiable in legal and political realms, the fragmentation of the refugee label makes refugees less intelligible and less visible as genuine subjects genuinely in need. As Diana Thomaz argues, categories of migration “reassert the state’s capacity to decide on issues of inclusion and exclusion from its bounded territory,

reproducing its sovereignty and allowing it to 'know' … its population" (201). Accordingly, the state reaffirms its authority by regulating who can come into frames of recognition, and who cannot.[18] Since intelligibility is "deeply linked to survival" (Dhawan 47), the more refugees are excluded from realms of recognition, the more their lives are put in danger.

Lastly, and most importantly, the term "refugee" can itself constitute a discursive site of resistance, as it asserts a refugee identity that exists beyond legal statuses and identity categories, and reflects more fully the vastness, diversity, and indefinability of the refugee experience. As Zetter argues, "we deploy labels not only to describe the world but also to construct it in convenient images … labelling [is] not just a highly instrumental process, but also a powerful explanatory tool to explore the complex and often disjunctive impacts of humanitarian intervention on the lives of refugees" (173). I use the term "refugee," therefore, to demonstrate the shifting boundaries and constant interplay between the instrumentalization and formation of the refugee identity, the competing logics and "overlapping processes that variably produce refuge(e)" (Nguyen and Phu 14). My usage corresponds with many contemporary migrant rights and refugee scholars who approach the "conjunctions between disparate subjects and between identity categories" as a generative "means of reflecting on the political potential of multiform responses to the state" (Nguyen and Phu 14). These conjunctions, and sometimes disjunctions, are vital for exploring the complex intersections between colonialism, imperialism, migration, and displacement, and for articulating the refugee's multiplicity and political potential both within and beyond Canada's history and borders. Furthermore, the many (mis)uses and abuses of

[18] The term "economic migrant," for example, is often used to deny refugee claims "on the grounds that migrants who move for better economic opportunities cannot be considered refugees" (Nguyen and Phu 7). This idea accords with the popular image of the (good) refugee as utterly passive and pitiable: 'good' refugees do not seek economic acceptance, but accept, gratefully, what is given.

the word "refugee" in political rhetoric and popular culture can help illuminate the "transnational corridors of expulsion" (Nyers, "Abject Cosmopolitanism" 1040) that deny people the right to be refugees and demonize or discredit their existence.[19] In this way, the very word 'refugee' can itself operate as a way to "stake claims to humanity" (Misri 527), to 'back talk' and 'act back' upon the hegemonic spaces of states. After all, as William Maley asserts: "A person can be a refugee without being stamped as such by the state" (9).

**Why This Dissertation?**

There is a breadth of scholarship and critical studies on the subject of refugees and contemporary migration (see Literature Review). However, there remains limited criticism of "refugee literature" in Canada—namely because "refugee literature" does not exactly exist (or exists precariously). That is, if, as Agamben argues "the status of the refugee has always been considered a temporary condition that ought to lead either to naturalization or to repatriation" ("Beyond Human Rights" 92), then the idea of a refugee literature in Canada or a "Canadian refugee literature" is deeply problematic and somewhat paradoxical, insofar as the refugee identity resists consolidation and co-optation by virtue of its impermanence and mutability. I do not mean to suggest that literature on migration or 'the refugee experience' does not exist, as the opposite is true. There is a wealth of immigration, refugee and diasporic literature within, and

[19] As Zetter notes, the label 'forced migrant' increasingly replaces 'refugee' in academic studies of migration: "Forced migrant' better captures the complexity of contemporary root causes, whilst at the same time contextualizing refugees within the wider migratory processes of transnational social transformations" (189). However, Zetter also acknowledges that the shift in terminology "reduces the focus on protection as the fundamental right of a refugee enshrined in the Geneva Convention" (189). While I use both terms throughout this dissertation, I use 'refugee' more frequently as a way to remind readers of what is increasingly at risk of being forgotten—that is, the fundamental and enshrined right of a refugee to be a refugee.

beyond, the canonical borders of Canadian literature (or "Can Lit"), as well as an emerging body of criticism on refugee literature and art in Canada, as attested to by a recent issue of *Canadian Literature*, "On Refugee Worldmaking." What I mean to underscore, instead, is that the idea of a consolidated genre of refugee literature is as unstable as the idea of a consolidated refugee identity: the literature, like the identity, is in flux.

Nonetheless, there is a growing body of writing and art in Canada that takes refugees and migration as its subject matter to interrogate the forms and limits of refugee agency in relation to state structures of citizenship and recognition. However, there remains a relatively limited amount of research within literary and cultural studies on the figure of the refugee in Canadian contexts, and, more specifically, the ways in which the refugee can destabilize deeply entrenched narratives of nation and citizenship and 'act back' onto the territorial, ideological, political, and imaginative spaces of states.[20] My dissertation aims to address this gap in the research literature by offering a close examination of texts by authors and artists in Canada that engage, in varying and diverse ways, with the politics of citizenship and migration in this country.

Because stories *about* refugees dominate mainstream media, I have chosen to primarily examine texts *by* refugee artists and authors, including Souvankham Thammavongsa, Kim Thúy, Carmen Aguirre, and Francisco Fernando-Granados, to counteract the ways in which refugees are frequently represented as objects of analysis, rather than as agents of their own lives and stories. However, my dissertation also examines representations of refugees in the work of Tings Chak, Rawi Hage, and Sophie Deraspe—who do not identify as refugees, but nonetheless

[20] Critical Refugee Studies (CRS) is a rapidly growing field, with Nguyen and Phu's 2021 edited collection, *Refugee States*, representing a landmark book for literary, political, and cultural criticism on refugees in Canada. *Refugee States* rigorously explores the historical, political, and cultural contexts of "refuge(e)" production within the locus of settler colonialism and, moreover, advances a framework for critical refugee studies that understands refugees as nuanced and "agential subjects, rather than passive objects of study" (Nguyen and Phu 16).

advocate for a radical rethinking of the refugee along aesthetic, generic, political, social, and ideological lines. While my primary research method for this dissertation is literary analysis, not all the texts I examine here constitute literature. Rather, I engage with a plurality of mediums and genres, and often employ an interdisciplinary perspective, to situate my project within the broad and intersecting fields of refugee and migration studies in Canada, and on global scales. As such, I analyse my primary texts with a view to Canada's past and (ever-changing) present immigration and refugee policies and practices.

**What Work? A Literature Review**

"Modern Western culture is in large part the work of exiles, émigrés, refugees" (137), argues Edward Said in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Said was himself an exiled individual—"the 'out of place' Palestinian in the USA" (n.p.) in Rehnuma Sazzad's description—whose work has had a profound impact on shaping the intellectual culture of the humanities and social sciences, resonating across literary, cultural, philosophical and political realms. While, in this dissertation, I draw less on Said's work than I do the work of other foundational thinkers (Agamben and Judith Butler, for example, loom much larger), I begin this literature review with Said for his cogent reminder that despite its imaginative lures, the harsh realities of displacement must not be forgotten: "Exile is strangely compelling to think about, but terrible to experience" (137). I read Said's words early on in my research for this dissertation, and I took them to heart. I am not, and have never been, a refugee. I am a cis-gender, Caucasian, Canadian-born citizen, with access to the many rights and privileges those categories confer. My thinking, therefore, on displacement and the conditions of refugeedom is just that—*thinking*, devoid of personal lived

experience. While the borders between fiction and reality, subjectivity and otherhood, are often blurry and shifting, as I explore in these pages, there remains a significant, even irreconcilable gap between thinking and being, art and reality. “And while it is true,” writes Said, “that literature and history contain heroic, romantic, glorious, even triumphant episodes in an exile’s life, these are no more than efforts to overcome the crippling sorrow of estrangement” (137).

I thus draw from a wide array of secondary research sources to engage with the many real and imaginary dimensions of contemporary displacements, and the complexities of refugee representation across media and political discourses. By taking an interdisciplinary research approach, I have tried to tether my literary and cultural analyses to the social and political realities of migration and displacement, necessitating a broad engagement with philosophy, law, policy, journalism, history, and media and visual studies. Suffice to say, the secondary literature that informs this study is as diverse as it is dispersed, reflecting the amorphous, intersecting, and cross-disciplinary research practices and critical perspectives that contribute to refugee and migration studies. In the following section, I provide a chapter overview, in which I detail my primary texts and arguments, and thematic organizing principle. Here, however, I want to explain my research approach, and some of the key theorists and researchers whose work has been instrumental to the development of this project.

Agamben’s thinking on migration underpins a lot of my own, in particular his concept of bare life (*homo sacer*), and the ways in which ‘the refugee’—an unstable, inherently liminal category of identity and existence, according to Agamben—threatens the fictions and foundations of the state (*Homo Sacer*; “Beyond Human Rights”). I apply Agamben’s theories of sovereignty and bare life to frame my inquiries into the forms and limits of marginality and subaltern resistance, most prominently in my readings of Hage’s novel, *Cockroach*, and

Deraspe's film, *Antigone*. Butler, also, plays a fairly prominent role in these pages, as her influential theories of precarity and grievability have proven salient for my inquiries into the material and immaterial conditions of forced displacement, and the ethical demands of witnessing and recognition. However, as I locate my study within Canada's borders (territorial, geopolitical, cultural and ideological), I am deeply indebted to the research conducted by Canada-based or affiliated scholars into the physical, affective, theoretical and political conditions of migration and displacement that occur within, around, and beyond the contexts and confines of this nation. These scholars include, but are certainly not limited to, Peter Nyers, Audrey Macklin, Carrie Dawson, Thy Phu, Vinh Nguyen, David Lyon, Stephanie Silverman, Daniel Coleman, Idil Atak, and James C. Simeon. The research activism undertaken by domestic chapters of Human Rights Watch and No One is Illegal, as well as the Canadian Council for Refugees, a non-profit umbrella organization that advocates for refugee and migrant rights and protections, has also been integral to helping me anchor my literary and cultural readings within the shifting contexts and political realities of forced migration and displacement. Additionally, I have drawn from a diverse cross-section of non-domestic scholars and research communities in an effort to engage with the transnational and 'extra-territorial' contexts, conditions, and realities of modern displacements and mobilities.

In their introduction to *Refugee States*, Nguyen and Phu rightfully assert that: "Any study of refugees in Canada must first acknowledge and reckon with the fact that the Canadian settler state's capacity to grant political asylum to refugees—and assert its sovereign power—is contingent on its centuries-long colonial suppression of Indigenous sovereignty over land, natural resources, and people" (11). Refugees, migrants, and immigrants participate, however unwittingly, in Canada's ongoing settler colonial project, even as they are often vulnerable to

state violence and discrimination. However, as Coleman argues in *Countering Displacements*, exploring the complex relationship between “Indigenous and refugee’ed experiences of displacement and agency” (ix) is crucial for rethinking the many forms and realities of displacement that occur within this country, and the ways in which people variously excluded “from statehood and citizenship can creatively express their protest” (x) within and “outside of conventional citizenship paths” (xi). Concepts of citizenship and “refuge” are both bound to and shaped by Canada’s imperial and settler-colonial legacies. Thus, while the focus of this dissertation is primarily on refugees and external migrations, forced internal displacements have been, and remain, key to the dispossession and oppression of Indigenous and diasporic subjects in Canada.

**Chapter Overview: Bugs, Borders, Bodies, and Beyond**

My dissertation is divided thematically into four body chapters: Bugs, Borders, Bodies, and Beyond. The thematic organizing principle operates to frame the key issues and processes of refugee displacement: dehumanization (“Bugs”); securitization (“Borders”); surveillance (“Bodies”); and deportation (“Beyond”). While the borders between these chapters, and their overarching topics, are themselves blurry, these indistinctions and overlaps are necessary: it is difficult to discuss, for instance, the securitization of borders without reflecting on the practices of dehumanization, surveillance, and deportation that enforce and enhance these borders, or the dominant ideologies and colonial dimensions that undergird their construction. In the pages that follow, I trace the figure of the refugee across national, historical, literary, philosophical, media

and virtual borders to argue that the refugee is a key and vital figure in forward-looking concepts of mobility, justice, and resistance.

And what is more resistant than a cockroach? In "Bugs," I examine Rawi Hage's 2008 novel, *Cockroach*, and the ways its narrator—an impoverished Arab immigrant to Montreal—contests the structures of citizenship and 'human being-ness' that reduce him to bare life. Examining the themes of exile and alienation in this novel alongside current discourses of global migration and state surveillance, I argue that *Cockroach* boldly calls for a re-examination of the narratives of Canadian hospitality that privilege certain 'species' of immigrant life over others. The narrator's deep and disturbed existential dilemma—is he human or bug?—stridently interrogates the degree to which the discourse of the human (and human rights) can exist beyond state apparatuses of citizenship and belonging. As the narrator, the eponymous cockroach, asks: "how to exist and not to belong?" (Hage 210).

I then turn to a reading of select poems by Souvankham Thammavongsa and her short story, "Worms." First published by the American literary magazine *Ploughshares* in 2018, "Worms" is a coming-of-age story about a teenage girl who, after working with her mother as a migrant labourer on a hog far somewhere in North America, becomes disillusioned with the contradictions of "liberal democracies that promise opportunity while creating categories of exploited workers" (Walia 76). In this brief story, Thammavongsa critiques the shifting legal frameworks and codes of intelligibility used to maintain refugees and migrants in a state of vulnerability and precarious life. By using the titular worms as metaphors for refugees, migrant workers, and perhaps all "lives forced underground" (Nyers, "Abject Cosmopolitanism" 1074), I argue that Thammavongsa critiques the politics of power and place that denigrate and dispose of

human lives as "this shit of the earth" (Thammavongsa 159), and furthermore asserts a refugee agency that is complicatedly situated in shit, soil, and small, often unseen acts of subversion.

In "Borders," I turn toward the realm of life writing, examining Kim Thúy's semi-autobiographical novel, *Ru* (2008), and Carmen Aguirre's controversial memoir, *Something Fierce: Memoirs of a Revolutionary Daughter* (2011). While both *Ru* and *Something Fierce* won the Canada Reads award, Thúy and Aguirre received markedly different treatment in the publicity and discourses surrounding their award-winning texts: Thúy was hailed as a "model immigrant," Aguirre labelled a "bloody terrorist." Therefore, in this chapter, I attend to the cultural and ideological function Canada Reads performs, and the ways the 'grateful' or successful refugee is (re)produced to reaffirm Canada's self-image as a welcoming and hospitable nation towards refugees. While *Ru* and *Something Fierce* vastly differ in content and form, I consider how both texts challenge readers to recognize the refugee beyond conventional stories of trauma and immigrant success.

In my reading of *Ru*, I focus on the ways in which the novel positions the refugee success story as both a site of agency and a space of suffocating silence. I argue that *Ru* does not "resist the refugee image" (Nguyen 32), but rather reproduces the tropes and aesthetics associated with 'the refugee experience' as a means of visibility and rethinking of the production and positioning of the refugee identity in relation to dominant narratives of multiculturalism and assimilation. As the success narrative forms part of the apparatus of silence surrounding Canada's refugee system, so too can authors work within its limiting confines to reorient "the question of success" (Nguyen 20) in ways that make visible the lives of refugees, and their unique and diverse struggles to negotiate the intertwining routes—and roots—of individual and collective experience and memory.

Subsequently, I analyze Carmen Aguirre's *Something Fierce: Memoirs of a Revolutionary Daughter* in relation to the rise of the "bogus" refugee in contemporary discourses on immigration. Unlike *Ru*, *Something Fierce* rejects "the refugee image" (Nguyen 32) and calls into explicit question the fairness and generosity of Canada's refugee and immigration system, and the success of Canadian multiculturalism. I argue that Aguirre performs the refugee/exile as a figure that contests the monolithic narratives of the state and disrupts deeply entrenched systems of power and patriarchy—even when those systems continue to prevail. As such, I look at the ways Aguirre situates Canada as a locus of pain, a home that is never truly inhabitable, alongside her representations of female sexuality and a 'fierce' refugee agency.

In Chapter 4, "Bodies," I go 'off the page' to examine Francisco-Fernando Granados's performance and visual art in relation to the spectacle of suffering that surrounds the refugee crisis. Given Granados's self-declared interest in creating art that advocates for a "two-way gaze" ("Reciprocal Gazing" 32)—that is, an ethics of witnessing that foregrounds mutual recognition and responsibility—I analyse the ways in which Granados 'acts back' against the representational norms and practices that construe refugees as "easily consumable spectacle" (31). As the politics of looking and recognition are inextricably entwined, I devote the first part of this chapter to consider the relationship between image and the inclusion or exclusion of refugee identities within normative frameworks of recognizable humanity. I then pivot to explore the role of the "surveillable refugee body" (Lemberg-Pederson and Haioty 607) in modern discourses and practices of border security and "biocitizenship."[21] My reading of select

[21] The term "biocitizenship" was first introduced by anthropologist Adriana Petryna in *Life Exposed*, a study of the aftermath of the Chernobyl disaster. Petryna defines biological citizenship as "a demand for, but limited access to, a form of social welfare based on medical, scientific, and legal criteria that recognise injury and compensate for it" (261). The idea of "biocitizenship" has since been applied to various critical contexts of migration and forced displacement.

performance and multimedia installations by Granados argues that he displaces the body from naturalized biological and cultural determinisms to call for a re-examination of the refugee or non-citizen as a figure of irreducible complexity and incommensurability—neither a spectacle of suffering nor corporeal dataset.

As Agamben argues, "the refugee is perhaps the only thinkable figure for the people of our time and the only category in which one may see today—at least until the process of dissolution and the nation-state and of its sovereignty has achieved full completion—the forms and limits of a coming political community" ("Beyond Human Rights" 90). With this in mind, my last chapter, entitled "Beyond," examines the ways in which Tings Chak's graphic essay, *Undocumented: The Architecture of Migrant Detention* (2014) and Sophie Deraspe's film, *Antigone* (2019), position the refugee as a figure that challenges the material and imaginative borders of the state and, as in *Antigone*—a modern adaptation of the classic Greek play that draws on the 2008 murder of Fredy Villanueva—openly defines patriarchal law and the authority of the nation state. As the protagonist of the film, the eponymous Antigone, states in front of a Canadian court, "I vomit on your proceedings" (01:24:33). In my readings of *Undocumented* and, more prominently, *Antigone*, I consider how Chak and Deraspe envision the refugee in future tense, beyond the forms and limits of territory, identification, and patriarchal control—beyond borders.

The borders, however, remain. As the texts I examine variously explore concepts of refuge and displacement, often in ways that challenge the exclusionary and intertwined logics of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy, so too do they remind us of the punitive forces that restrict human mobility/ies. They call upon the reader to recognize the many lives disappeared into spaces of expulsion, while simultaneously acknowledging the limits of recognition and

projects of bearing witness. Thus, while I argue in this dissertation for a rethinking of the refugee beyond dominant frameworks of citizenship, hospitality, and even humanity, I also demonstrate how this rethinking must take into account the social and political realities of displacement so as not to further displace the refugee from the lived realities of experience or the complexities of human identity. Taken together, these chapters illuminate the refugee's complex and contentious role in national and state formations, and the political, social, and imaginative potential of the refugee for current struggles and projects of mobility, social justice, and futurity. My hope is that this dissertation is a valuable contribution to the growing field of Critical Refugee Studies (CRS) and the literary and cultural criticism surrounding immigration, citizenship, and refugee resistance.

## CHAPTER 2: BUGS

The language of pestilence abounds in the contemporary rhetoric of forced migration. Popular arguments for restricting immigration and securing borders often rely on paradoxical representations of refugees, displaced persons, and migrants as threatening to "bring pestilence, race mixing, crime, and cultural decline" (Agnew 520) while simultaneously lacking in speech, agency, and reason—agents of insecurity on the one hand, "creatures of no consequence, no interests, and no rights" (Harris 9) on the other.[22] In either case, the dehumanizing metaphors of contemporary migration operate to reinforce hierarchies of humanity by eliding the refugee or migrant with the animal, insect, or otherwise inhuman entity (i.e., floods, tidal waves, natural disasters), a "creature" that exists outside of 'civilization' and the dominant frames of humanity. Of course, the metaphors of pestilence have long been used to mobilize xenophobic and racialized discourses that demonize and dehumanize the 'stranger' or 'foreign' enemy: the discourses of verminhood or 'savagism' are ubiquitous to projects of genocide, land expropriation, assimilation, and racial and ethnic oppression.[23] However, in today's era of mobility, wherein mobility is "regarded as both a condition of global modernity and as a source of insecurity" (Beauchamps et al. 1), the borders between inside and outside, 'natural' and

[22] During his fraught tenure as US President, Donald Trump routinely linked migrants to threatening narratives of crime, social corruption, and cultural decline. During his 2016 presidential announcement speech, Trump famously said: "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best. They're not sending you … They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people" (qtd. in Lee para. 1).

[23] Dehumanizing language plays a key role in how states engender public hatred/fear of the Other and mobilize support for exclusionary, oppressive, or genocidal projects and practices. This language, as Erin Steuter and Deborah Willis note, contains a "remarkably coherent and consistent set of metaphors which represent the enemy as animals, particularly noxious, verminous, or pestilential animals, or as diseases, especially spreading and metastatic diseases like cancers or viruses" (153).

'unnatural' are at once increasingly ambivalent and enforced. Who, then, constitutes the stranger in this age of anxious borders? Who—or *what*?

In this chapter, I examine Rawi Hage's novel *Cockroach* and Souvankham Thammavongsa's short story "Worms" to consider the agency of the bug—that is, the agency of those cast outside and underground, to the peripheries of recognizable humanity. As Catrin Lundström notes, the migrant or refugee "tends to be imagined as a non-privileged, non-white, non-western subject in search of a better future … and, as such, is a pre-constituted subject shaped by notions of marginalization and poverty" (79).[24] While both *Cockroach* and "Worms" draw on the stereotype of the refugee as poor, marginalized, and non-white, they do so in ways that subvert dominant representations of refugees and migrants and challenge essentializing, dehumanizing discourses of race, place, citizenship and identity. Significantly, both texts are set 'here': *Cockroach* in a cold and hostile Montreal, "Worms" somewhere in North America. In this way, Hage and Thammavongsa challenge the Western-centric perception that 'real' refugees only exist in far-off spaces and places, and instead foreground the refugee's struggle for survival, mobility, and recognition within the capitalist, patriarchal, and white supremacist structures of the Western nation-state, as well as in the spaces between and beyond dominant epistemological and ontological constructs of 'refugeeness.' Both Hage and Thammavongsa use bugs as an extended metaphor for the often denigrated yet ineradicable forms of human life that exist within and outside the purview of the nation-state and its normative structures of citizenship and

[24] With the onset of the "Ukrainian refugee crisis," the popular imagination of refugees has shifted somewhat, as the media discourse surrounding the current crisis frequently emphasizes the ways in which Ukrainian refugees are 'just like us' (i.e. white, middle class, Western subjects), serving to reinforce racial and socio-economic hierarchies of refugee inclusion/exclusion and, moreover, demonstrate the ways in which refugees are exceptionalized at times of international crisis.

belonging. As Hage has stated: "The fact that I chose this image of a cockroach is simply because they're the closest thing to the ground" (qtd. in East para. 3).

The metaphors and motifs of bugs—those 'things' closest to the ground—operate in Hage and Thammavongsa's texts to challenge the frameworks of "narrative humanity" that "create and cover over exclusionary understandings of the human" (Franklin 857). Cynthia Franklin defines "narrative humanity" as "the range of historically variable but persistently ideological generic and narrative conventions and codes that create understandings of the human" (860). To put it more plainly, stories play an important role in determining whether, and in what ways, people become recognisable, or unrecognisable, as human: "Stories constitute an important terrain for the making and unmaking of humans" (Franklin 859). With this in mind, I consider how *Cockroach* and "Worms" contest the narrative and generic frameworks that demand the refugee "prove one's humanness" (Franklin 859) in accordance with the "hegemonic narrative codes and conventions" (857) that reinforce dominant paradigms of humanity, steeped in colonial and capitalist ideology. As mainstream media stories about refugees frequently rely on frameworks of "narrative humanity" that represent the refugee as abject victim or menacing villain—in either case, Other—stories that subvert the dominant codes and conventions of "narrative humanity" perform a vital role in countering the many forms of dehumanization refugees experience within narrative and representational realms.[25] As Franklin aptly states: "This need to prove one's humanness is inherently dehumanizing" (857). In this chapter, I

---

[25] Drawing from Butler's theories of recognition and grievability, as well as Berlant's notion of affective experience, Franklin traces the significance of life-writing in projects of resistance, arguing that "different life-writing genres—including biographies, autobiographies, slave narrativs, oral histories, testimonios, diaries, documentaries, prison writings, and blogs—can be at the centre of human rights struggles, with individuals or groups telling their stories … in order to assert their humanness and counter myriad forms of dehumanization" (859). I address refugee and migrant life writing more specifically in Chapter 3, "Borders."

consider how Hage and Thammavongsa explore the production of refugee identity/ies within and beyond the dominant categories and hierarchies of in/humanity. I argue that the ways in which Hage and Thammavongsa represent the abject and inhuman (bugs, 'shit,' soil, and filth) operates to assert a refugee agency that exists beyond the normative codes and categorizations of recognizable humanity—an agency of the underground, and the overlooked.

### 2.1 The Roach's Revenge: Suicide and Survival in Rawi Hage's *Cockroach*

> Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity founder.
>
> — Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* 1

> He who makes a beast of himself gets rid of the pain of being a man.
>
> — Samuel Jonson, "Anecdotes by the Rev. Percival Stockdale" 333

In a 2011 interview with Rita Sakr, Rawi Hage characterizes his work as deeply "influenced by the crisis of identity and the conflictual nature of the question of belonging" ("Imaginative Migrations" 346). This statement certainly holds true for his 2008 novel, *Cockroach*. Set in Montreal—where Hage, originally from Lebanon, currently lives—the novel traces the movements and metamorphoses of its unnamed male protagonist as he attempts to survive poverty, racism, and the splintering of his sense of self. "I am only half human," the narrator

states (Hage 245). His other half, he asserts, is cockroach, an insect emblematic of squalid quarters, impoverished conditions, and dark, dank spaces. As an Arab immigrant to Canada from an unidentified, war-torn Middle Eastern country, the narrator's identification with the cockroach invokes the long use of metaphors of pestilence to dehumanize unwanted subjects. But in the context of today's global refugee and migrant crisis, the narrator's desire to become less human and more cockroach not only plays on the dehumanizing rhetoric of contemporary migration—"wherein the immigrant embodies the plague-like threat of the cockroach, the pestilent figure who takes over the clean space of a settler" (Bright 83)—but also indicates the ways in which the state's increased efforts to police the movements of people across borders coalesce with efforts to govern the very discourse of the human. How, in other words, do today's technologies and discourses of surveillance establish normative criteria determining who is human and who falls outside of that category? Who can enter spaces of belonging and recognition, into the "realm of common humanity" (Razack 8), and who is driven underground? What rights does a 'cockroach' have?

To date, Hage has published four novels—*De Niro's Game* (2006), *Cockroach* (2008), *Carnival* (2012), and *Beirut Hellfire Society* (2018)—and a collection of short stories, *Stray Dogs: And Other Stories* (2022). All of them focus, to different extents, on a "series of variously unstable, unreliable, and often unlikeable characters who face the difficult and amoral (rather than immoral) choices that they make in order to survive in contexts of war, subordination, abjection, and subalternisation" (Dobson 257). In *Cockroach*, the "unstable, unreliable, and often unlikable" protagonist assumes the role of a cockroach and seeks revenge against the forms of domination and subordination he deems responsible for his alienation. The cockroach—a creature of great resilience—knows no borders, no human hierarchies of being and order. As

Hage states, "I used a despicable insect as a metaphor for the ever-resilient mover for whom the architecture of human boundaries is nothing more than a stroll through the pipes and the underground, whose closeness to the ground mocks the idea of an afterlife, a being who defines upward mobility and its cloud of rewards" ("On the Weight of Separation" 230). In his cockroach form, the narrator imagines himself free to move as he pleases, strolling—or rather crawling—past property lines, codes of civility, and the bounds between truth and fiction, fantasy and reality. He increasingly believes in an "unhealthy, imagined underground world" (Abdul-Jabbar 181) in which he can find refuge from the hunger and cold that ravage his (human) body and escape the panoptical, socio-political gaze that seeks to regulate his identity and categorize his worth.

Since its publication, *Cockroach* has generated criticism that interprets the novel through diasporic, postcolonial, nationalist, psychoanalytic, and trauma frameworks. Little has yet been written on the novel in relation to current discourses of global migration and state sovereignty, despite *Cockroach*'s trenchant engagement with themes of security, citizenship, and nationhood, as well as the presence of multiple refugee narratives and identities in the novel. Although the narrator never self-identifies as a refugee—he disdains refugees, in fact—his experiences of dehumanization, disenfranchisement, and displacement; his tactics of escape and evasion; his ontological (and psychological) insecurity; and his desire for refuge and recognition typify the politics and aesthetics that accompany the refugee condition. Moreover, the narrator's deep ambivalence, which characterizes every aspect of his being—from his citizenship status to his species, his victimhood to his venality—challenges the codes of legibility and recognition that are used to sort people into categories that, as David Lyon suggests, may threaten their very survival (1). Drawing on Giorgio Agamben's concept of the refugee as "pure man" ("We

Refugees" 116), a figure who poses a radical threat to the foundations of state and sovereignty, I argue that Hage's *Cockroach* interrogates the degree to which the discourse of the human is shaped by state apparatuses of citizenship and belonging. Despite the many ways in which the narrator exercises his agency in his spectacular performance of a "despicable insect" (Hage, "On the Weight of Separation" 230), his metamorphosis from man to cockroach ultimately highlights how the discourse of the human fails to create the political and socioeconomic conditions necessary for his survival.

**Who Are You?**

From the outset of the novel, the narrator's humanity is called into question. His introduction is not as a man but as a mutant creature, driven by excessive sexual desire and primitive, predatory urges:

> When I see a woman, I feel my teeth getting thinner, longer, pointed. My back hunches and my forehead sprouts two antennae that sway in the air, flagging a need for attention. I want to crawl under the feet of the women I meet and admire their upright posture, their delicate ankles. I also feel repulsed … by slimy feelings of cunning and need. It is a bizarre mix of emotions and instinct that come over me. (Hage 3)

The narrator describes himself as being held captive by his compulsion to "seduce and possess every female of the species" (3), to dominate them as he, paradoxically, crawls under their feet. He admits to feeling repulsed by his insect urges yet clearly revels in unsettling his audience by incorporating lurid and spectacular details into his confession. As he fixes his gaze on a woman,

he describes his bodily transformation into the grotesque form of an insect. The narrator's metamorphosis from man to roach is, according to Gillian Bright, "a physical manifestation of his shame; his transformation denotes the affective symptoms of shame—the excruciatingly self-aware blush that leads its victims to feel grotesque—and transcribes them into the mutant figure" (69-70). Yet while the narrator's shame manifests in a fantastical form, transforming him into a slimy, sadomasochistic roach, his shame is borne of real experiences of trauma. Indeed, the narrator first locates the cockroach's origin in an extraordinary tale of his youth:

> 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?
>
> Because my sister made me one. (Hage 5)

We later learn in a flashback that the narrator's sister is dead, murdered by her husband, a militiaman, after he heard rumours of her alleged infidelity. Not only were the rumours dubious, the narrator was in fact responsible for spreading them in a backfired (and not altogether altruistic) attempt to save his sister from her husband's vicious abuse. Too cowardly to confront the husband and his thug friends in reality, the narrator begins fantasizing about seeking revenge in the form of an insect capable of "crawl[ing] under their doors at night and slay[ing] them all in their filthy bedsheets" (100). His initial fantasies of becoming cockroach are thus complicatedly borne of his feelings of impotence and shame at being unable to protect his sister from male violence or bring her killers to justice; in cockroach form, the narrator can imagine himself as powerful, transgressive—a creature that provokes both fear and revulsion, that 'crawls'

unfettered into private, vulnerable spaces. Yet the narrator is unable to imagine his transformation outside of a punitive and patriarchal framework, often enacting the same violent, misogynistic behaviour he claims to abhor. His desire for revenge operates within a self-perpetuating cycle of shame and violence, wherein blood is paid for with blood, filth with filth, trauma with trauma.

The death of the narrator's sister, and the responsibility he feels for it, is the original trauma, the terrible event that "casts a shadow over the narrator's whole life" (Urbaniak-Rybicka 457). However, the narrator's experiences of trauma are not restricted to his past or his homeland: his trauma is ongoing in Canada, aggravated by conditions of poverty, racism, and abjection, as well as the mechanisms of normalization and assimilation he is regularly subjected to. The narrator's shame, then, is a product not only of his traumatic past but also of his present circumstances. As Daniel Trottier argues, "[s]haming typically manifests in response to behavior or utterances that breach either legal or moral boundaries. Through mediated coordination, the perceived transgressor becomes the 'transgressor victim' of scrutiny and degradation" (171). In his relationship with his therapist, Genevieve—a white Canadian—the narrator frequently plays the part of the "transgressor victim," alternating between modes of sympathy and subversion. His belated realizations that Genevieve is not only a doctor but also a woman, and thus subject to his lustful gaze, "that same urge" (Hage 3) of sexual voyeurism, allows him to exercise the limited power he has in their doctor/patient relationship while embodying the stereotype of the hypersexual, chauvinistic Middle Eastern man. By identifying Genevieve as a woman rather than a doctor or representative of the state, the narrator attempts to divest her of any authority, subjecting her to the same objectifying and dehumanizing strategies he feels vulnerable to in their weekly therapy sessions. He tries to reverse the clinical gaze by placing her body on display

as an exotic specimen to be observed, assessed, fetishized, and shamed. In so doing, he embodies the male gaze and its histories of patriarchal and colonial violence.

Seeing, or, in Donna Haraway's words, "the power to see" (192), is a prominent theme in the novel that questions the ways human beings are ranked and (de)valued by visual regimes of power. Since Laura Mulvey's landmark essay on the male gaze in cinema, multiple theorists have identified how seeing is fundamentally inscribed by relations of power and violence. "Vision," as Haraway writes, "is always a question of the power to see—and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices. With whose blood were my eyes crafted?" (192). In his constant surveillance of women, *Cockroach*'s narrator embodies the "determining male gaze" (Mulvey 13) that objectifies and fetishizes its object. But as the narrator watches women, assessing their body parts and behavior— "their upright posture, their delicate ankles" (Hage 227)—so too is he watched and assessed. He feels "X-rayed … anticipated, watched, analyzed and bet upon" (227), a figure of constant suspicion and observation. He becomes obsessed with escaping the "permanence of the sun" (4), the light of which, as a symbol of (white) power and privilege in the novel, both excludes him and threatens to expose him. As Haraway argues, "[o]nly those occupying the position of the dominators are self-identical, unmarked, disembodied, unmediated" (193). The narrator's subaltern status in Canada—he is visibly poor and visibly 'foreign' (that is, non-white) — marks him as a subject of difference, a dark body in a white, light world. Only by ceasing to exist can the narrator imagine freedom from subjugation and the determining gaze of the state: "I felt oppressed by it all. The question of existence consumed me" (Hage 4). Thus, the narrator attempts suicide—in public and in broad daylight—as a desperate and defiant act of escape. He fails, theatrically, and is "handcuffed, and taken for, as they put it, assessment" (5).

Ironically, the narrator's drastic attempt to escape scrutiny places him under increased surveillance. His suicidal (and criminal) behavior marks him as a viable threat to not only himself but also public safety and sanctity: his suicidal body becomes a social problem. In his mandatory visits to the therapist, the narrator is scrutinized for signs of danger and disturbance, subject now to the clinical gaze. Outside of the therapist's office, his suicidal body is less of a concern than his visible foreignness and social abjection, which attracts, on more than one occasion, the attention of the police. As a poor, racialized and often indolent subject, the narrator is a highly conspicuous figure, especially when he is standing still: "But I couldn't just stand there on the street for too long, not working, not moving. I would raise the neighbours' suspicions. Everything on the street had to have a purpose. Stillness and piercing foreign eyes would soon be questions by uniforms under whirling police-car lights" (270). He must keep moving to avoid attracting attention. He is too visibly poor, too visibly foreign: his body gives him away.

With the rise of biometric technologies, the body emerges as a primary site of testimony, capable of affirming or denying one's public identity. The body is both an inquiry and an evidentiary text, analysed and assessed for signs of risk, truth, and falsehood. While biometrics are sometimes praised for their neutrality, they are, many critics argue, inextricable from biopolitical systems of power and domination. According to Joseph Pugliese, biometrics are "inscribed with infrastructural relations of disciplinary power underpinned by normative categories of race, gender, (dis)ability, sexuality, class and age" (*Biometrics* 2). The answer to the question "[w]ho are you?" Pugliese argues, "pivots on the specificity of the subject's embodiment and her or his geopolitical status. What you are—a person of colour and/or an asylum seeker—determines the answering of who you are" (2). Lyon asserts that modern

surveillance is equivalent to “social sorting,” a method of maintaining hierarchies of human value: “surveillance today sorts people into categories, assigning worth or risk, in ways that have real effects on their life-chances” (1). Security, then, rests on the demarcation of firm boundaries between the self and the other, between those who must be protected and those who are deemed threats (or would-be threats), those inside and outside the dominant order. While I discuss the rise and impact of biometrics in more depth in Chapter 4, “Bodies,” I want to signal here the ways in which biometrics can intersect with dominant notions of truth and regimes of bio-power. As Pugliese argues, biometric technologies transmute “a subject’s corporeal or behavioural attributes into evidentiary data inscribed within regimes of truth” (*Biometrics* 3) that are in turn inscribed with complex relations of power and knowledge. Biometrics demand that the refugee’s body is not only identifiable but also *verifiable*. If the body is shown to be false or ambiguous, the gait suspicious, the accent wrong, the refugee’s very life could be at stake. While the narrator is never explicitly identified as either a refugee or refugee claimant, his ‘cockroach-ness’ is nonetheless a strategic effort to at once evade and wrest control from the dominant regimes of power and surveillance that ‘fix’ and ‘sort’ migrant identities within hierarchies of citizenship and humanity.

For while he embodies the “desperation of the displaced, the stateless, the miserable and stranded” (Hage 151), the narrator’s disdain for Professor Youssef (“an Algerian pseudo-French intellectual … an unfortunate exile” [10–11]), and other Algerian refugees— “those welfare dogs” (144)—arises from his own shame at being “stuck at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy” (Beneventi 563), exiled from the promises of Canadian hospitality and multiculturalism. As the narrator is unable to experience the full benefits of ‘real’ citizenship, which are exemplified, in his view, by the lives of the wealthy and the white, he turns his anger

against the Algerians, aligning himself with the dominant culture and its "refusal to accept the new underclass of refugees" (Staels 17). The Arista Café on St. Laurent Street is a symbolic borderland in which a motley crew of immigrants, exiles, refugees, and undocumented migrants gather to, in the narrator's words, "howl about the past" and "sprinkle traces of their lives here" (Hage 144). He mocks the newcomers, perceiving them as "lost mutts" unable to assimilate into the dominant society: "I find it charming, the refugees' confusions and complaints … Lost mutts! They don't know what colour they are. They can't decide what breed they belong to" (144). In this passage, the narrator adopts the surveilling eye of the state that demands its subject identify herself in clear, classifiable terms: What race? What place? What breed of immigrant? Are you human or "miserable dogs?" (144). The narrator's contempt for the refugees arises from his own shame and self-loathing at being unable to assimilate into the dominant culture or knowing which "breed" he himself belongs to. Indeed, his citizenship status remains ambiguous throughout the novel. Most critics identify him as an Arab immigrant to Canada, though some critics, such as Marc Libin and Wisam Abdul-Jabbar, refer to him as a refugee.[26] The ambiguity of the narrator's citizenship status further emphasizes his alienation and estrangement: he identifies neither with the "taxpayers" (65) of Montreal's dominant class nor with the "welfare dogs" (144) of the city's diasporic and refugee communities. Rather, Hage's narrator exists in a precarious state of liminality, caught between various spaces and categories of citizenship and community, in which he can neither fully participate nor fully belong. He is neither in, nor out.

[26] Libin, for example, identifies the narrator as a Lebanese refugee, despite the fact that the narrator's homeland is never explicitly revealed. Nevertheless, Libin aptly identifies *Cockroach* as "markedly diasporic" (72).

### A New Kind of Human

In her 1943 essay "We Refugees," Hannah Arendt argues that "contemporary history has created a new kind of human beings" (265): the stateless refugee, the exile, those without countries or political status. As Arendt argues, being human does not guarantee human rights. Without legal or political status, the refugee or stateless person is subject to the "fate of human beings who, unprotected by any specific law or political convention, are nothing but human beings" (Arendt, "We Refugees" 265). In his reading of Arendt's essay, Agamben highlights how the refugee—the "pure man" ("We Refugees" 116), in his words—poses a radical threat to the concept of the nation-state:

> That there is no autonomous space within the political order of the nation-state for something like the pure man in himself is evident at least in the fact that … the status of the refugee is always considered a temporary condition that should lead either to naturalization or to repatriation. A permanent status of man in himself is inconceivable for the law of the nation-state. (116)

For Agamben, persons legally reduced to the status of 'bare life' may be subject to violence with impunity, as their existence is both "inconceivable" and radically incompatible with the foundations and formations of the nation-state. As *Cockroach*'s narrator does not lack legal or political status—he has papers, although their exact nature is unclear—he cannot be wholly elided with Agamben's stateless 'pure man.' However, the narrator's 'bare' existence in Canada, along with his shifting and uncertain legal, political, and perhaps even ontological identity, nonetheless positions him as a figure of 'bare life,' at once immensely vulnerable and threatening to the nation-state.

The philosophies of existentialism and absurdism thus play a key role in Hage's satirical exploration of the modes and methods of survival and self-determination available to human beings reduced to "nothing but human beings" (Arendt, "We Refugees" 265). Suicide—the "only truly seriously philosophical problem" (*The Myth of Sisyphus* 3), as Albert Camus famously argued—is taken up in the novel as a problem of freedom, indeed, a problem of light. Darkness becomes for the narrator the only imaginable source of freedom from the burdens of poverty and racism, and his (human) body's vulnerabilities to their effects: "It was my need to unfold an eternal blanket that would cover everything, seal the sky and my window, and turn the world into an insect's play" (Hage 11-12). Like Merseault in Camus's *The Stranger* (*L'Étranger*), the narrator desires to rid himself of the oppressive, intruding light. This time, however, the Arab man is not wielding a knife; he is dangling from a rope. As Camus writes, "[i]n a sense, and as in melodrama, killing yourself amounts to confessing. It is confessing that life is too much for you or that you do not understand it … It is merely confessing that [life] 'is not worth the trouble'" (*Sisyphus* 2). Denied access to the rights and privileges that Canadian citizenship supposedly confers—gainful employment, social welfare, freedom of mobility—the narrator 'confesses' via his suicide attempt that, as he cannot live as he wants, free from hunger, poverty and racism, he would rather not live at all.

But the narrator's suicide attempt is not only a confession: it is also an accusation. In his efforts to escape the "shameful, shaming structure of the Western gaze" (Bright 71) once and for all, the narrator enacts a public scene of violent, vengeful spectacle. The narrator's bathetic failure to achieve death does little to mask the gruesome reality of the scene: a man "hanging from a rope around a tree branch" (Hage 5) for all passerby to see, a ghastly spectacle of suffering and despair that confronts the dominant image of Canada as a welcoming multicultural

haven. The narrator has found nothing in Canada but “harsh terrain” (8), hunger, isolation, and impoverishment. Walking the streets of a wintery Montreal, he loses all sense of purpose, place, and identity: “Where am I? And what am I doing here? How did I end up trapped in a constantly shivering carcass, walking in a frozen city with wet cotton falling on me all the time? And on top of it all, I am hungry, impoverished, and have no one, no one” (9). He laments the hostility of the city’s inhabitants, the lack of human contact and social recognition he experiences: “Not even a nod in this cold place, not even a timid wave, not a smile from below red, sniffing, blowing noses” (9). The narrator’s disillusionment with the “promised land” (9) of Canada leaves him with a profound sense of alienation. He is a stranger to others and to himself.

After his suicide attempt, the narrator’s desire to end his life mutates into longing to rid himself of his humanity. Being human traps him in a “constantly shivering carcass” (9), a body surveilled for signs of danger and difference. As an impoverished, Arab immigrant living in the West in the early post-9/11 years, the narrator is a conspicuous figure: his clothes are too shabby, his skin too dark. When he applies for a job as a server at an upscale French restaurant, the maître d’ turns him down, saying “[l]*e soleil t'a brûlé ta face un peu trop* (the sun has burned your face a bit too much)” (29). The narrator immediately launches into one of his many spectacular tirades:

> Impotent, infertile filth! I shouted at Pierre. Your days are over and your kind is numbered. No one can escape the sun on their faces and no one can barricade against the powerful, fleeting semen of the hungry and oppressed. I promised him that one day he would be serving only giant cockroaches on his velvet chairs … Doomed you will be, doomed as you are infested with newcomers! (30)

As the narrator threatens the maître d' of the unstoppable invasion of "newcomers," his body shifts between human and insect form. His sputtering rage at the injustices of his life manifests as a promise of revenge and the inevitable destruction of the systematic structures of racism, colonialism, and capitalism that denigrate people to the status of bugs. He assumes the role of a mad prophet, a soothsayer of doom: no one can stop the "hungry and oppressed," he warns.

The narrator's apocalyptic vision of a world where the roaches rule signifies the depths of his feelings of injustice and entrapment in this "cruel and insane world saturated with humans" (Hage 23). His imagining of a roach-ruled, post-human world is initially inspired by two proselytizing Jehovah's Witnesses who warn of environmental catastrophe and human extinction: "Only the cockroaches shall survive to rule the earth" (7), they proclaim. As a cockroach, the narrator can imagine himself as sovereign rather than a mere survivor, a creature of dominance and power. As someone who has resorted to crime, namely theft and home invasion, as a means of basic survival, his desire to erase all trace of his humanity is a way to escape the punitive gaze of the state and to move, undetected and undeterred, across physical and ethical boundaries. Kit Dobson argues that the narrator's "morphing into a cockroach occurs whenever he begins to contemplate any questionable act" (263) of violence or violation. Certainly, this is the case when he stalks his therapist and later breaks into her home:

> I saw where Genevieve lived, and then I crawled home.
>
> THE NEXT DAY, FRIDAY, I woke up early. I returned to Genevieve's place and watched her leave her house for work. Then I slipped past the building's garage door, went down to the basement and crawled along the pipes. I sprang from her

> kitchen's drain, fixed my hair, my clothes, and walked straight into her bedroom. (Hage 80)

As the scene progresses, the narrator makes himself at home in Genevieve's private, (female) domestic space. He crawls into her bed, sniffs her clothes, looks at her photographs, and fixes himself a sandwich. He begins referring to himself in third person— "the stranger in the house" (84); "the intruder, feeling at home" (83)—linguistically juxtaposing the figure of suspicion and danger with the image of domesticity. He fantasizes that he is a welcome guest in Genevieve's home, a "considerate stranger" (81) rather than a dangerous intruder.

He is not, however, welcome. In "Refugees and Global Violence," Maude Lapierre argues that "the narrator's actions in the novel are always complicated by the fact that he tends to replicate the attitudes he criticizes" (3). The narrator's misogynistic and often predatory relationships with women thus reveals his complicity in patriarchal systems, where his self-proclaimed need to "possess every female of the species" (3) manifests as a violent disregard for—indeed, an intrusion upon—the realms of female safety and autonomy. Andre Furlani argues that the narrator, "Hage's diasporic malingerer" (79), attempts to gain agency and control over his own story through acts of physical and psychological trespass. Walking, for Furlani, plays a key role in the narrator's resistance to normative structures of therapy and social regulation:

> Not content to answer compliantly the therapist's questions and walk the straight and narrow, he follows his own plot and path—into private dwellings and even into other people's shoes. It is not by means of therapy but by errancy that the narrator hopes to regain command of his own narrative; the talking cure accedes to the walking cure. (78-79)

As an allegorical figure for the state, Genevieve embodies the ways in which migrant identities and bodies are often pathologized by political and social apparatuses as subjects 'errant' to national ideals and integrity. In this scene of home invasion, Hage is very clearly playing with the idea of immigrant invasion that underwrites anti-immigration politics and nativist rhetoric, with the narrator assuming the position of a pestilent, migrant creature: a cockroach invading the home. However, Genevieve's identity as female—an identity the narrator routinely draws (his) attention to—complicates her otherwise prescriptive role. If, that is, the narrator walks, slips, sniffs and crawls his way into her home as a way to "regain command of his own narrative" (Furlani 79), then he does so by reinforcing normative ideals of masculine power and feminine vulnerability through this act of violent intrusion. Despite the narrator's self-justificatory fantasies and depersonalized language, the fact remains: he *is* a dangerous intruder, a man who has broken into a woman's home.

Home, however, has multiple valences in the novel, and the narrator's invasion is at once an invasion of personal and political space. Though an act of gendered violence—multiple acts, in fact, as the narrator not only breaks into Genevieve's home, but also stalks her beforehand—it remains difficult to separate Genevieve from her representative state role. When the narrator later confesses to Genevieve he entered her home without her knowledge or consent, she (naturally) responds with shock and horror. But Genevieve knows the narrator is a thief. He has confessed to it:

> You stole things.
>
> Well yes, I did, I guess. But what kid does not steal?
>
> Do you steal now?

> I looked around, left my chair, opened the door, peered outside the room … and then I return to my seat and said: Yes, sometimes. I said this in a low voice. That's okay, Genevieve said. She cracked yet another big smile. That's okay. This is all confidential. (Hage 49-50)

Genevieve assures the narrator that "[y]ou can, and should, tell me anything and everything" (50), failing to acknowledge the seriousness (and ongoing nature) of his crimes until she is personally affected. The narrator calls her out for her moral hypocrisy and ethical lassitude: "You tolerated me breaking into other people's places, I said, but now that it is your own place …" (260). The narrator's rebuke of Genevieve indicates the hollow dimensions of state and social regimes of humanitarianism that locate the suffering of refugees and migrants conveniently elsewhere, "victims waiting in camps until they can be returned or be resettled … the 'neediest' of the needy" (Owen 21). Indeed, the narrator's illegal entry into Genevieve's home, which operates as a microcosm of the national domicile, evokes the ways in which refugee and migrant agency has become tantamount with criminality in dominant humanitarianism frameworks, such that "a refugee's plight appears morally tantamount to that of a baby who has been left on one's doorstep in the dead of winter" (Owen 21). It is not that of a 'bug,' who has let himself in.

"I just wanted to be invited in" (286), Hage's narrator says. Despite his vehement identification with the abject, the narrator yearns to transcend his social and economic position and rise above the baseness of his existence. Who wants, after all, to be poor and hungry? To live life as a bug, vulnerable and despised? To "exist and not to belong" (210)? The fact that his initial transformation into a cockroach occurs at a moment in which he is worried about how he will survive without money, food, or prospective employment indicates that the narrator's

cockroach-ness is born out of necessity. As his human body mutates into an insect's, growing "wings and many legs" (19), the realities of his life interrupt his Kafkaesque fantasy: "My welfare cheque was ten days away. I was out of dope. My kitchen had only rice and leftovers and crawling insects that would outlive me on Doomsday" (19). The narrator inhabits the physical form of a cockroach to distract himself from the harsh realities of his life and to disassociate from the human "filth" that he perceives as the source of his suffering, those "who more comfortably inhabit the city" (Dobson 260) because they can participate in the taxpaying economy of Montreal while he is deemed a tax burden, an economic parasite. As Dobson argues, the status of the human is not always a given but allocated on the basis of economic potential: "While, for instance, the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights assumes that what a human being is is self-evident and then sets out to discuss the rights accorded to such humans, one important function of the neoliberal is to police the borders of the human, allocating differential amounts of humanity to bodies based on their (economic) suitability" (268). The narrator is seen to have less humanity than the suit-wearing, tax-paying, identity card-carrying citizens that surround him. As Genevieve reminds him, he owes his life to the state and is therefore in its debt: "Yes, I am here to help you, but you know what? In the end I am an employee of the government. People are paying taxes for you to be here" (Hage 208).[27] Genevieve's care for the narrator extends only insofar as she continues to get paid and he continues to cooperate. He is a ward of the state, she reminds him, and he should be grateful.

[27] There is an emerging body of criticism on the intersections between race, disability, and migration. Mimi Thi Nguyen, for example, argues that because of their disenfranchisement, refugees and stateless people are often represented as damaged or abnormal subjects, paralleling the ableist constructions of people with disabilities as burdens on society. See Nguyen's *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages*.

Gratitude is, after all, the migrant's duty. As Sara Ahmed argues in *The Promise of Happiness*, the migrant who refuses to assimilate jeopardizes the so-called happiness of her host country, and risks being identified as ungrateful or, worse, dangerous:

> It is important to note that the melancholic migrant's fixation with injury is read as an obstacle not only to his own happiness but also to the happiness of the generation to come, and even to national happiness. This figure may even quickly convert in the national imaginary to the "could-be terrorist". . . [T]he duty of the migrant is to attach to a different happier object, one that can bring good fortune. (144)

The good migrant is a happy migrant, both contributing to and participating in the cultural and tax-paying economy of the host nation. The narrator's refusal to express his gratitude therefore identifies him as unsuccessful, undesirable, and untrustworthy. He is not only a bad migrant; he is a bad citizen: "TAXPAYERS, THE SHRINK SAYS. Ha! . . . Well yes, yes indeed, I should be grateful for what this country is giving me. I take more than I give, indeed it is true. But if I had access to some wealth, I would contribute my share. Maybe I should become a good citizen and contemplate ways to collect my debts and increase my wealth. That would be a good start" (Hage 65). The narrator is highly suspicious of the idea that good citizenry is synonymous with paying taxes and increasing wealth. He grows more and more disgusted with the human capacity for greed, telling his therapist that they are the only creatures who take more than they need (243), leaving only the crumbs for the roaches to scavenge. "Bourgeois filth!" he cries, "I want my share!" (88).

**The Insubordinate Insect**

> My characters are defiant. They're political. The fact that I chose this image of a cockroach is simply because they're the closest thing to the ground.
>
> —Rawi Hage qtd. in East para. 2

The narrator, of course, never gets his share. But while he is unable to secure any economic power by the novel's end, he exercises agency in his capacity as a storyteller. An unreliable narrator whose diatribes, rants, and lurid confessions of lust and deviant behaviour are frequently distasteful, and whose grasp on reality is often questionable, he blurs the lines between fact and fiction, truth and lies, fantasy and reality, human and insect. Considering *Cockroach*'s preoccupation with how human identities are verified and authorized (or unauthorized) by state practices of surveillance and security, the narrator's refusal to fully cooperate in his therapy sessions, or function as a reliable narrator in general, questions the degree to which narratives of refugee or migrant trauma have become a form of currency in the economy of state hospitality. While the narrator's skill as a storyteller allows him a degree of movement and agency within this economy—he knows how to incite both pity and fear in his audience, playing on his listener's sympathies, prejudices, and expectations—*Cockroach* invokes the reader as a kind of arbiter of truth, tasked with determining whether the narrator's stories are fact or fiction, truth or lies, and how much, if any, sympathy or aid he deserves.

In Canada and other Western nations, the refugee determination process requires claimants to prove a well-founded fear of persecution via data—stories, scars, identity

documents—that attests to the trauma of their past and, hence, their right to protection. However, as Peter Showler, a former member of Canada's Immigration and Review Board (IRB), suggests, the refugee hearing is itself a kind of performance space, in which "fact and fiction, communication and miscommunication … [and] insight and ignorance intermingle and combine to form a story that may or may not capture the truth of a refugee's experience" (210). Indeed, the mandated weekly therapy sessions play out as miniature hearings, in which the narrator is repeatedly reminded that he will be remanded to a psychiatric institution if he refuses to supply truthful answers to Genevieve's egregiously naive questions: "Do you want to tell me more about your childhood today? If we do not move forward, if we do not improve, I might have to recommend that you go back to the institution. Frankly, you do not give me much choice with your silence" (Hage 59–60). A representative of both the ideal citizen and the authority of the state, Genevieve equates the narrator's silence with insubordination. He must talk and lay bare the trauma of his past by telling the "tale of growing up somewhere else" (4) or return to the asylum.

Multiple critics have identified how refugees and refugee claimants must represent themselves in static and stereotypical ways to uphold Western narratives of hospitality and humanitarianism. Nyers, for example, argues that refugees and refugee claimants are expected to define themselves in relation to their "refugeeness" by emphasizing their helplessness and "general condition of homelessness" (*Rethinking Refugees* xv). According to Nyers, most Western countries view the figure of the "refugee warrior" (103) as an oxymoron. How can the helpless have agency? How can those deemed "speechless and invisible victims of oppression" (Lapierre 561) have any dignity or self-determination? The expectation for refugees to tell a static and verifiable story "again and again in repetitive trauma" (Hua 110) not only affirms

Western benevolence by reproducing national narratives of humanitarianism, but also confirms the refugee claimant's legitimacy and right to protection. As credibility is the key criteria used in the refugee determination process, stories of trauma have a great deal of weight: a claimant's life may depend on her ability to produce (or reproduce) a believable story.

Beyond the claim process, those who are granted refugee status are repeatedly called upon to speak of their pasts only in terms of violence and trauma while praising the benevolence and goodwill of the host nation: "Whatever the forum—courtroom, screen, stage, page—the refugee is expected to tell the same kind of story, one which testifies to trauma while supporting the familiar … script about 'deserving victims and benevolent helpers'" (Dawson, "The Refugee's Body" 52). In *Cockroach*, the narrator's refusal to go along with the script (he frequently lies to Genevieve or skews the details of his past) is at once a tactic of evasion and resistance against the demand for trauma stories that provide clear and consumable 'proof' of injury and victimhood. In one of his therapy sessions with Genevieve, the narrator criticizes how his so-called treatment is contingent on his ability to nakedly confess his trauma: "Here—is this what you want? Here—these are my tears. Does that make me sane, normal, cured?" (Hage 142).

Genevieve's myopic focus on the narrator's past denies him the care and treatment he requires in the present—care that may have prevented the murders he later commits and his complete descent underground by the novel's end. Early on in *Cockroach*, the narrator describes his rage toward his therapist's fundamental lack of understanding and insight:

> The therapist. . . brought on a feeling of violence within me that I hadn't experienced since I left my homeland. She did not understand. For her, everything was about my relationships with women, but for me, everything was about

> defying the oppressive power in the world that I can neither participate in nor control. (4–5).

Although Genevieve expresses her desire for the narrator's rehabilitation, for him to "reintegrate into society" (76), she fails to acknowledge that his most basic needs are not being met. When the narrator tells her of his "food envy syndrome" (87) because he is starving and desperately poor, she ignores his plea for help:

> Was your mother nourishing? Genevieve asked.
>
> With food, you mean?
>
> Well, okay, food. Let's talk about food.
>
> I like food, I said. Though I worry about food shortages lately.
>
> Did you have enough food in your youth? For now I am interested in your past. (49)

What the narrator needs is food, not therapy or pseudo-Freudian talking cures. The directive to talk only about the past is an ineffective treatment strategy, as it displaces the narrator's most pressing problems of subsistence and survival—lack of food and money—from the political and socio-economic conditions of his life in Canada: "According to Genevieve, neither poverty nor the hostility he experiences from mainstream Canadian society are to blame for his attempted suicide" (Forget 76). The narrator's suicidal inclinations, his tendencies toward theft and violence, his excessive/aggressive sexuality, and his obsession with the abject are all issues, in Genevieve's view, that are strictly rooted in the narrator's past and homeland. His suffering, in other words, exists somewhere else.

The therapist's refusal to concede that the narrator's problems may be a product of the perils he faces living in Canada indicates her failure to regard him as anything other than a

foreigner, a stranger whose ability to "reintegrate into [Canadian] society" (Hage 76) rests on his capacity to assimilate. As Julia Kristeva writes, "[t]he foreigner is at once identified as beneficial or harmful to that social group and its power and, on that account, he is to be assimilated or rejected" (*Strangers to Ourselves* 96). Paradoxically, the stories that excite Genevieve and capture her attention emphasize the violence and barbarism of the narrator's desert homeland and confirm his exoticism and otherness in her eyes. In a reversal of gender roles, the narrator adopts the persona of Scheherazade, the female storyteller of *One Thousand and One Nights*, to entertain the doctor, who, he perceives, "like sultans, is fond of stories" (Hage 102). He attributes Genevieve's gullibility to the privilege of her status as a white middle-class Canadian: "I knew she was hooked, intrigued. Simple woman, I thought. Gentle, educated, but naïve, she is sheltered by glaciers and prairies, thick forests, oceans and dancing seals" (104). Yet while the narrator plays the role of the "fuckable, exotic, dangerous foreigner" (199), he does so from a subordinate position: "The barrier between the narrator—a dark-skinned, traumatized, impoverished and psychotic immigrant—and a white, native-born, successful, and wealthy Canadian not personally involved in the sessions but relegated to the task by the government and hired by tax-payers, never disappears" (Urbaniak-Rybicka 454). Even as an audience, Genevieve is privileged. If the narrator's story goes off-script, if the story he tells does not accord with what she wants to hear, Genevieve has the authority to diagnose him as mentally unfit and send him back to the asylum. The storyteller must appease the sultan: his future depends on it.

Although storytelling is typically perceived as a uniquely human activity, stories can also have dehumanizing effects. According to Wisam Abdul-Jabbar: "Dehumanization is . . . prominent in the novel via the disparaging romantic notion that arriving in Canada marks the end of the immigrant's woes, the final haven for asylum seekers, and therefore the story of

immigration becomes a narrative about becoming human again" (175). The immigrant success story often relies on a rhetoric of salvation, wherein the First World extends a helping hand to a deserving victim, typically from the Third. Everything about the narrator, however, runs counter to the narrative of the successful, re-humanized immigrant. His story of "becoming human again" is interrupted by the fact that he lacks everything that supposedly defines a successful immigrant (and a successful citizen), such as economic and social mobility, law abidance, community support, and mental and physical health. It is no wonder, then, that the narrator attempts suicide: "All those who leave immigrate to better their lives, but I wanted to better my death" (Hage 160). Death offers him freedom from "the world that [he] can neither participate in nor control" (5).

As Arendt speculates, suicide may be the final hope for human freedom from oppression: "Perhaps the philosophers are right who teach that suicide is the last and supreme guarantee of human freedom: not being free to create our lives or the world in which we live, we nevertheless are free to throw life away and to leave the world" ("We Refugees" 268). The narrator's decision to end his life is, however, a dramatic failure, a "reminder that this whole comedy of my life was still at play" (Hage 33). The branch he hangs himself on cannot support the weight of his body and breaks, plunging him to the ground. Unable to find freedom in death or transcend the baseness of his living existence, the narrator splits in two, imagining himself as both human and insect. His feelings of alienation and estrangement are so powerful that the narrator hallucinates he is seeing—and talking—to a giant albino cockroach.

The white cockroach corroborates the narrator's suspicion that he is only half human and becoming even less human as time goes on: "But *mon cher*. The slimy creature at my door leaned its head sideways. The world ended for you a long time ago. You never participated in it.

Look at you, always escaping, slipping, and feeling trapped in everything you do … You are one of us. You are part cockroach" (Hage 201, 203). According to the giant cockroach, the narrator's inability to meaningfully participate in society is responsible for his dehumanization. Had he been able to secure economic and social privilege in the world instead of "always escaping, slipping, and feeling trapped," the world would, in the cockroach's view, still exist for him. Social participation, or citizenship itself, becomes an index of humanity.

In *Deaths of Man*, the American clinical psychologist Edwin S. Schneidman draws a correlation between social alienation and what he terms "partial death" or "death of an aspect of the self" (164). Not being "totally socially alive" (162), Schneidman argues, may bring about a kind of spiritual or psychic death:

> Its manifestations are an inner barrenness and aridity, accompanied by withdrawal from his society, grave social refusal … It has to do with the repudiation of one's society, of ostracizing people, cutting them dead; it also relates to society's repudiation and ostracism of the person. Thus there are deaths of aspects of the inner self, and deaths of aspects of the outer or social self. (162)

The narrator's "partial death" is literalized by his part human, part cockroach form. The more he feels ostracized from human society and its hierarchies of privilege and belonging, the less human he becomes, or imagines himself to be: "I bent my long whiskers and thought how self-absorbed these humans are. All they ever build is for their own kind and their own height" (Hage 285). In this way, the narrator's transformations into his insect-form are as painfully inevitable as they are strategic: as he cannot join the dominant class or aspire to "their own height" of wealth and social privilege, the narrator turns to the underground.

Characterizing humans as "jealous, vain gods," the giant albino cockroach invites the narrator to join the cockroaches in their underground revolution, in their "project to change the world" (202). The narrator refuses at first, stating that he will not participate in their mission to "subordinate and kill" (202) all those who resist the mission. But the cockroach reminds him that violence is inescapable, that there will always be those who subordinate and kill and those who are subordinated and killed. As violence shapes his past, so too will it be central to his future:

> I have known you since your childhood … That was me. When you hid in your mother's closet I was also there, and when you stole candy from the store I was there, and when you collected bullets, and when you followed Abou-Roro down to the place of the massacre and watched him pull golden teeth from cadavers, I was there. (202)

The cockroach reveals the trauma of the narrator's history, from his young apprenticeship with the thief Abou-Roro to the conditions of war and poverty that lead to his displacement from his homeland (and himself). But the enormous white cockroach is not only an external manifestation of the narrator's internalized trauma; it is also a symbol of the "dark power that oppress him" (Marchi 51): white supremacy, war, and capitalism. As Majeed, a refugee taxi driver, tells the narrator:

> You know, we come to these countries for refuge and to find better lives, but it is these countries that made us leave our homes in the first place … You know, these countries we live in talk about democracy, but they do not want democracy. They want only dictators. It is easier for them to deal with dictators than to have democracy in the countries we come from. (Hage 223–24)

The white cockroach symbolizes the lie of Western democracy and the violence and political corruption that has followed the narrator throughout his childhood and adulthood, displacing him from his homeland, ensuring his poverty and oppression, and inciting him to enact "revenge for past hunger, cold, and those days when the sun chased me from one room to another, making me sweat and making me blind" (225). In this way, the 'underground' operates as a metaphor for the hostile dimensions of hospitality regimes, the powerful means of statecraft that produce refugees through acts of war and violence, 'chasing' people from their homes into various spaces of exclusion and abjection.

At the end of *Cockroach*, the narrator not only joins the underground, he embodies it. After killing a rapist and arms dealer in a misguided act of revenge, the narrator casts off his human form entirely and descends underground with his "glittering wings" (305). While the romanticized language of the final passage suggests the narrator's triumphant escape from the "oppressive power" of the human world—he climbs aboard a leaf "carried along by the stream of soap and water as if it were a gondola in Venice" (305)—it cements the narrator's permanent exile from human discourse. Having killed a man with deep ties to the Canadian and Iranian governments (as well as the man's bodyguard), the narrator can never return to his human form without facing the punishment of incarceration, possible deportation, and even death. As a fully awakened cockroach, he is a fully estranged man. Indeed, the narrator's final metamorphosis into a cockroach signifies a second (but this time successful) suicide attempt, in which his cockroach form extinguishes his human body; the underground, which finally allows him to escape the light, disappears him in darkness.

In an earlier scene in the novel, the narrator imagines his dead body as "a large red fruit swinging from high up in the tree [,] … a red dot against the white horizon, suspended above the

earth" (Hage 175). He envisions his death as offering hope and solace to others: "Maybe that is all that is supposed to be left of our lives: a glimpse of beauty, an offering for those who are still trapped, a last offering to console them in their mundane existence" (175). But while the final passage of the novel offers that "glimpse of beauty" with its romantic, surrealist imagery, the reality is bleak. There is nothing left of the narrator's life but that glimpse. As Dobson argues, there is little triumph in the narrator's final act:

> It seems very difficult … to view his final turn to the underground and to his cockroach self as a return to equilibrium, ontological certainty, or a sense of home. Instead, in its final enactment of what is set up as justified revenge against a rapist and arms dealer, the protagonist appears to reject the human form, casting aside its limits and pretentions, and diving, instead, for the sewers that humankind already metaphorically inhabits in this novel. (269)

Though pessimistic, Dobson's reading of the novel's ambiguous conclusion cogently acknowledges how profound the narrator's sense of alienation is by the novel's end. Reading the narrator's final descent into the underground as regenerative and liberating runs the risk of minimizing the narrator's experiences of poverty, racism, and abjection and romanticizing the conditions that lead him to despise his own existence. As Said writes, "[m]arginality and homelessness are not, in my opinion, to be gloried; they are to be brought to an end, so that more, and not fewer, people can enjoy the benefits of what has for centuries been denied the victims of race, class, or gender" (385).

With its themes of alienation, metamorphosis and exile, *Cockroach* joins a rich literary tradition in the West that explores the complexities, ambiguities and profound dilemmas of subaltern existence and conditions of otherness and displacement. In fact, the novel does not so

much ‘join’ as ‘infiltrate’ this tradition, trespassing the spaces of cultural authority and canonical prestige to challenge the ways in which the figure of the exile or ‘stranger’ has been celebrated in Western literature (i.e. Ellison’s Invisible Man; Dostoevsky’s Underground Man; Camus’ Stranger; Kafka’s bug), while Western hierarchies of race, class, and gender remain intact. If, that is, “[m]odern Western culture is in large part the work of exiles, émigrés, refugees” (Said 317), *Cockroach* interrogates the degree to which the nation-state—Canada, in particular—co-opts the identities, experiences, and “work” of subjects of displacement, while continuing to deny them entrance to the realms of full citizenship. Indeed, the narrator’s “glittery” flight to the underground belies the brutal realities of modern citizenship regimes. Unable to access the benefits denied to him because of race, class, and citizenship status, the narrator disappears down the drain by the novel’s end, literalizing the ways in which bordering regimes produce refugees as subjects of excess or removal—“waste,” in Zygmunt Bauman’s formulation. Whether the narrator is alive or (more likely) dead by the novel’s end, one fact is indisputable: he is, irretrievably, underground. His alienation is complete and his foreignness absolute. He who makes a bug of himself gets rid of the pain of being human.

## 2.2 “This Shit of the Earth”: Against Narrative Humanity in Souvankham Thammavongsa’s “Worms”

As in Hage’s *Cockroach*, human bugs—that is, human beings reduced to the status of bugs—are a main theme of Souvankham Thammavongsa’s short story “Worms.”[28] First published by the

[28] Thammavongsa is a critically acclaimed and award-winning Laotian Canadian poet and short story writer. She has published four collections of poetry: *Small Arguments* (2003), *Found (2007)*, *Light* (2013), and *Cluster* (2019).

American literary magazine *Ploughshares* in 2018, "Worms" is the coming-of-age story of a teenage girl who, after working alongside her mother as a migrant labourer on a hog farm somewhere in North America, awakens to the realities of capitalist exploitation and racialized and gendered practices of migrant expendability. "Worms" critiques the shifting legal frameworks and codes of intelligibility used to maintain refugee and migrant workers in a "state of vulnerability, available as a pool of cheap labour but excluded from belonging to the nation" (Walia 71). By using the titular worms as (uneasy) metaphors for refugees, migrant workers, and, perhaps, all "lives forced underground" (Nyers, "Abject Cosmopolitanism" 1074), Thammavongsa ironizes discourses of pestilence to explore ideas of refugee/migrant vulnerability. "Worms" draws attention to the politics of power and place that denigrate and dispose of human lives as "this shit of the earth" (Thammavongsa 159), evoking the abject to question the exclusionary narratives of humanity and belonging that undergird contemporary citizenship and human rights regimes. What does it mean to live as "shit of the earth"? What are the rights of worms?

Despite the similarities between *Cockroach* and "Worms"—namely, their metaphorical use of bugs to signal refugee and migrant dehumanization—Thammavongsa does not, like Hage, flush her protagonist 'down the drain' by the story's end. While both texts highlight the challenges of living beyond normative frameworks of identity and recognition, "Worms" is a story of resilient life. Though Thammavongsa's characters, both human and worm, live in states of precariousness and vulnerability (sometimes fatally), they are dignified and celebrated in all their subaltern agency. Accordingly, while Thammavongsa invokes the titular worms as

---

Her debut short story collection, *How to Pronounce Knife* won the 2020 Scotiabank Giller Prize. "Worms" appears as part of this collection under the title "Picking Worms."

metaphors for refugees and non-citizens, the borders between human and ‘bug life’ are less porous in “Worms” than in *Cockroach*. Thammavongsa’s worms are, first and foremost, worms: her refugee characters, first and foremost human.

The essential humanness of the refugees, as well as the essential ‘worminess’ of the worms in “Worms,” is key to the story’s critique of the dehumanizing narratives of migration that uphold exploitative immigration regimes and reduce human life to “shit.” As Franklin argues, “[s]tories constitute an important terrain for the making and unmaking of humans” (859). In “Worms,” this terrain is literalized as soil and invoked figuratively through the “layered relationship” (Rattanavong para. 3) between mother and daughter, and the entrenched hierarchies of power and patriarchy that exist on the farm. The story departs from the usual ‘refugee story’ that aims to humanize refugees by, paradoxically, conforming to dehumanizing narrative frameworks—what Franklin calls “narrative humanity” (857). Indeed, while popular refugee stories often adhere to a readymade arc, wherein the refugee overcomes formidable odds and unthinkable horrors before being ‘saved’ by the compassion and goodwill of the good nation and its good people, “Worms” locates the refugee’s struggle for recognition and survival in the soil, quite literally, of the new land.

But the story’s main setting—a farm located somewhere in rural America—also draws attention to the increasing reliance of First World nations on cheap and disposable migrant labour while reducing the pathways of legal migration, as well as migrant workers’ rights. The farm is a hinterland, a metaphorical “zone of indistinction” (Downey 112) at the edges of legality, recognition, and human rights. Yet in this place of nowhere or ‘nether where,’ life goes on. In “Worms,” Thammavongsa asserts a migrant agency that is rooted in place and exists

beyond—and beneath—the designations of citizenship, codes of intelligibility, and normative markers of humanity. As Butler argues in *Precarious Life*,

> The term, and the practice, of "civilization" works to produce the human differentially by offering a culturally limited norm for what the human is supposed to be. It is not just that some humans are treated as humans and others are dehumanized; it is rather that dehumanization becomes the condition for the production of the human to the extent that a "Western" civilization defines itself over and against a population understood as definitionally illegitimate, if not dubiously human. (91)

With this in mind, I look at the ways "Worms," as well as select poems by Thammavongsa, interrogate the ways human beings are made "definitionally illegitimate" or differentially (in)human through exclusionary apparatuses of citizenship and naturalized codes of civility. In so doing, I consider how Thammavongsa challenges the ways in which exploitative border regimes produce "dubiously human" subjects and edify the structures of belonging and legitimacy that reduce human beings to capital and, worse, 'worms.'

**The Rights of Worms**

"Worms" revolves around two Lao refugees, a mother and her daughter, who work on a hog farm as part of a migrant labour force. Working the night shift alongside other Lao migrants—all men—the mother and daughter pick worms. The work is grueling and repetitive but, as the narrator observes, hardly the worst job on the farm: "I had heard from a friend that there are always jobs at the hog farm, for those who can handle it. You can clean the shit from the floor,

or clean their bodies when they are alive just before they put them out on the line. Or you can rub the male ones to get them excited to mate" (Thammavongsa 153). The daughter is, for obvious reasons, glad to discover the job her mother agreed to does not involve masturbating hogs or cleaning shit from the slaughterhouse floor. "But a job is a job," the mother states, "and even with one like that, you could still have your dignity" (153). Neither the mother nor daughter see their work on the farm as 'beneath' them, but rather a testament to personal resilience and, even, a source of pride. Only "those who can handle it" (153) do such 'dirty' work.

Of course, "those who can handle it" often have little choice but to "handle it." While the narrator works on the hog farm to "earn a little extra money" (153), her mother relies on the paltry income she earns at the farm, as she has few employment prospects beyond picking worms. While refugees are encouraged to work in their host countries, "thereby using their skills to meet their own needs and the needs of the host countries" (Musa and Zukari 49), they are frequently underemployed and at high risk of exploitation and abuse. Despite the international legal instruments and policies that enshrine refugees' "rights to work and other such rights and protection, so as to grant refugees a meaningful livelihood and existence" (Musa and Zukari 49-50), they often work in precarious conditions, where governments turn a blind or indifferent eye to unethical or unlawful labour practices. Moreover, Canada's systems of "labour immigration" operate to "produce new market realities and reinforce national identities predicated on protecting the composition of the nation while actively promoting global economic competition" (Trautman iv). While refugees are frequently cast as job-stealers or 'infiltrators,' Temporary Foreign Workers (TFW) are, by contrast, invoked in terms of hospitality—'guest workers' at low-skilled jobs, typically in agricultural, care-giving, hospitality, or construction sectors

(Trautman iv). As Laurie Trautman argues, "[s]uch workers, whether legal 'guests workers' or 'illegal immigrants,' reside within the borders of the state, yet remain permanent aliens" (iv).

"Worms" critiques the contradictory and exceptionalizing dimensions of Canada's immigration system by representing differential forms of privilege and emplacement, underscoring the ways in which contemporary migrant labour economies produce competitive categories of refugee identity and 'worth.' Though both refugees, mother and daughter occupy different spheres of mobility and privilege in America. The daughter speaks fluent English; her mother's English is broken. The daughter gets "good grades" (Thammavongsa 155) in school, signaling her chances at higher education and socio-economic advancement, while her mother lacks even primary education. A "peasant girl" (156) in Laos, the mother recalls envying as a child "school girls in their white collared shirts and navy-blue skirts walking to school, while she sat and watched, looking after chickens in her yard" (155). She dreams of a better future in America, where her daughter can transcend the barriers of race and class to become "one of them navy-blue-skirt-white-collared-shirt-wearing girls going to school" (156). But her dreams are misguided, her vision of America dim. As the narrator states, "I didn't want to tell my mother they don't wear uniforms in college. I wanted her to have dreams" (156). The mother has faced more economic hardship in America than in Laos, her station downgraded from chickens to worms. In Laos, though a peasant, she looked after chickens in her own yard. In America, she picks worms—food for chickens—on someone else's farm.

The daughter's sympathy for her mother, as well as the characters' differential privilege in America, expresses the "intricate tangle of attachments and divisions" (Foner 1) stereotypical of intergenerational relations in immigrant families. Despite their shared history of loss and displacement, mother and daughter live worlds apart in the new land, each inhabiting spaces the

other cannot easily access or comprehend. Cecilia Menjívar and Leisy Abrego argue that family separation is actually "built into" modern immigration regimes, as "tighter border controls, more temporary worker permits, and greater restrictions on the ability to acquire permanent status" (161) increasingly divide families across oceans and continents. While this is not strictly the case in "Worms" —mother and daughter live, and work, together in the host country—their relationship is characterized by palpable distance. The mother believes her daughter's future is bright, but only if she leaves behind a life in the soil. "You've got a chance in this life," the mother says. "Pick those worms and get out of this town" (Thammavongsa 160). Distance and darkness pervade the story, which is told, significantly, from the narrator's often naïve perspective. Only through the narrator's young eyes do we see her mother, and we see her only in the dark.

The story begins in the dark: "I remembered that morning because I woke up to such dark. It was my mother who woke me, came into my room, and said I could earn a little extra money now" (153). The mother and daughter's first journey to the farm—located on the distant outskirts of town—occurs well before daybreak: "We drove out there, quiet, no radio on, heading out into that dark" (153). Conversation is minimal between them. At fourteen, the narrator knows little of her mother—little of her past, little of her thoughts, little even of the type of work she does day-to-day. The daughter suspects her mother is "lonely and sad, listening to her Elvis tapes late at night in her room" (155), but she is unable to fully grasp the depths of her mother's longing for recognition in a world that racializes and degrades her. "What do you want me to do?" the mother asks. "Get one of them white guys? Can you imagine. They probably will want me to say things like 'Me lope you long tie' and pump me like one of the hogs" (155). The mother's American cultural references belong, like her dreams, to the past—specifically, the

bloody, interminable history of the Vietnam War. She does not speak, however, about her traumatic experiences of war or about life as a refugee —as one of the many "boat people" forced to flee their homes in the violent aftermath of the Vietnam War. Her memories are largely concealed from the narrator (and the reader), hidden deep, like the worms she picks, beneath the surface.

On the farm, the daughter gains a newfound respect for her mother as she watches her pick worms: "She really was a natural if there ever was one. She didn't pick like the others" (156). In "Worms," Thammavongsa portrays acts of looking and watching as having the potential to bring subjects into realms of intelligibility and recognition—or to refuse them access. On multiple occasions, the narrator is, quite literally, left in the dark about her mother's thoughts and emotions: "I looked over at my mother's face to see what she thought, but I couldn't tell anything because it was so dark" (158). The mother's unintelligibility signals, in part, her inability to survive beyond 'bare life' in America. As Nikita Dhawan argues, "[i]ntelligibility is deeply linked to survival, whereby the very possibility of life depends on being recognized as a legitimate subject" (47). But while language is one of the primary ways people are made intelligible and thereby "recognized as a legitimate subject" (Dhawan 47), Thammavongsa is interested in the way words can conceal or hide. "When I look at a word," she states, "I can see the thing inside" ("Notes on Craft" para. 10). In "Worms," language is often used to reveal, paradoxically, the concealed 'truth' of others, the "thing inside" the word. On her life in Laos, for example, the mother is quiet on the details. She tells her daughter, "I was a peasant girl. You don't know about that" (Thammavongsa 156). The story ends at "that" — a vague preposition that signals a world of possibility and experience but does not say 'that' much at all.

**On “That”**

Thammavongsa loves “that.” As Anita Lahey writes, “she relishes using ‘ugly’ words: this, that, is, here, its. ‘There is nothing elegant or delicate about them,’ she says. ‘They are small and poor’” (para. 9). Much of “Worms” focuses on the daughter coming to “know about that” (Thammavongsa 156) — the ugly things of this world, the unseen or hidden horrors, the ways people are made “small and poor” by human hierarchies and structural violence. One of the few memories the narrator has of her father is that “he used to call [her] Ugly” (155). But an ugly word can hide good intentions, just as ‘pretty’ words can conceal ugly realities: “My mother said he called me that so my looks wouldn’t get to my head. She said the time for thinking about looks was after you get educated and work a good job. Then looks, if they’re any good, are worth something to you” (155). Appearances, Thammavongsa suggests, are not only misleading, but also potential barriers to memory and survival. An ugly word can evoke a father’s care, even after his face has long receded from view. As the narrator states, “I can hardly remember his face or see it in my mind” (Thammavongsa 155). An ugly word can remember a prettier time, even when memory fails.[29]

The narrator’s relationship with language is fraught from an early age. Fleeing Laos at the young age of two, she learns about the power of silence. In a brief passage of “Worms,” the narrator recounts her father’s death:

> To put into words is to bring back what happened. He was there, head above the water, pushing me and my mother across, and then suddenly I looked over and

[29] See Sianne Ngai’s *Ugly Feelings*, in which Ngai argues for the political potential of ‘ugly’ feelings and aesthetics.

> saw his head go under. He had come back up once more, and his mouth opened, once it opened, with no sound, and he went under. I couldn't swim and my mother couldn't either. But she somehow managed to steer us across, holding on to a rubber tire. Afterward, my mother asked me if I saw what happened to my father, and I said I didn't. I didn't want her to know. (156)

Words are not only inadequate in the face of such scenes of suffering and loss, but they also have the potential to "bring back" histories of violence into the present. The daughter's silence closes off an important part of her family's history, but her silence also protects her—and, she believes, her mother—from the pain that words can bring. In "The Need for Cushions: Trauma and Resilience in the Life of a Refugee," Margaret Green argues that silence can 'cushion' refugees from the harshness of external reality as they struggle to live in the present. For many refugees, purposeful silence creates necessary barriers between past and present, and allows them to proceed with what Lauren Berlant calls the "ordinary work of living on" (761). The small cushion of grass that the mother places in each Styrofoam cup so "when the worms were put in there, they wouldn't land so hard" (Thammavongsa 154) is a complex metaphor for the ways people protect themselves—and each other—from the harshness of external reality and the pain of remembering. There is little chance the mother is under any illusions about her husband's fate. Yet between mother and daughter exists an unspoken understanding that sometimes ambiguity is better than acknowledgment, that "what happened" deserves no further explanation, that certain words are better left unsaid. Through silence and ambiguity, mother and daughter 'cushion' each other from "land[ing] so hard" (154) in the painful realities of their lives.

But silence is violence, too. Thammavongsa uses spare and ambiguous language to indicate the ways that people are made "small and poor" by regimes that denigrate their lives to

bare function. As Thammavongsa states: “Minimalism is a work of violence. It targets the fluffy or meaty stuff of language and rips it out. What we are left with is something bare” (qtd. in Peerbaye para. 16). Bare is the main aesthetic of “Worms.” None of the refugee workers, including the mother and daughter, are ever named. Nor is the exact location of the hog farm specified: the story is simply set somewhere in rural America. The farm—or, more specifically, the field where the refugees toil in darkness—represents a kind of Agambian “zone of indistinction,” where the “dividing line between citizen and outlaw, legality and illegality, law and violence, and ultimately life and death are strategically and at times fatally blurred” (Downey, “Zones of Indistinction” 122). In this no-man’s land, the refugee workers are viewed as indistinct as the worms they pick, their former lives and identities treated as inconsequential: “The men who worked in this field had been doctors, teachers, farmers with their own land, like my mom was, back in Laos. None had set out for a life crouched down in the soft earth, picking for faceless things in the night, this shit of the earth. And they picked like it” (Thammavongsa 158). Like the worms, the refugees have been uprooted, pulled violently from their homes to exist as “faceless things in the night” (158), in darkness and in dirt.

If, as V.S. Pritchett said, “details make stories human” (qtd. in Moore para.11), the lack of identifying details in this story highlight Thammavongsa’s ongoing interest in the (de)humanizing powers of identity documents and markers of citizenship. In an essay she wrote for *Granta* magazine, entitled “Notes on Craft,” Thammavongsa relays a personal history of smallness and vulnerability:

> After the war in Vietnam ended, we were some of those three million refugees nobody wanted. My father built a raft made of bamboo to cross the Mekong River. I was born in the Lao refugee camp in Nong Khai, Thailand in 1978. I was

> born weighing two pounds. My father tells me that this is the size of a pop can. I did not have a birth certificate. Nothing that said I was born. 'Stateless' is the word given to someone like me. At the time, we did not know what would happen to us, what our future might look like. I was not supposed to be there, and no one expected me to live. (para. 1)

Thammavongsa has frequently articulated how deeply influenced her writing is by her own history of statelessness. In an interview with *Wordsters* in 2006, she compares her debut poetry collection, *Small Arguments*, to an identity document: "You see, I was never given a birth certificate when I was born … We need documents to prove that we are alive and real. It isn't enough that I happen to be right here—a piece of paper needs to prove this. *Small Arguments* makes me feel real in that sense. It feels like I've been granted a place of belonging." *Small Arguments* also works to 'prove' the existence of others, to grant those who are overlooked and undersized a place of belonging and make their lives—and their dignity—known. In her poem "Earwigs," Thammavongsa indicates the power of a small gesture to overcome a world of neglect and exclusion:

EARWIGS
are born
holding out their limbs
to a world that will not
hold them

(*Small Arguments* 53)

With bare, microscopic precision, Thammavongsa imbues the earwig with a profound resilience and capacity for survival in a cold and uncaring world: “They know / this is a world/ that will not return this gesture / but they make it” (*Small Arguments* 53). The poem, like many others in Thammavongsa’s oeuvre, strives for a politics of recognition that foregrounds the autonomy and agency of trivialized or marginalized life forms, of people and things made “small and poor.”

**“This shit”**

Small things—bugs, a grain of dirt, a shaft of light—are Thammavongsa’s writerly domain. She has been described as a writer of “the overlooked and the undersized” (Silverberg para. 4), a “poet of the small moment” (Mclennan para. 1). Much of Thammavongsa’s writing focuses on the “overlooked and undersized” creatures that inhabit the natural world, namely insects and bugs. In an interview with Shoshannah Ganz, Thammavongsa stresses the importance of representing these creatures as they are: “I don’t make things up about them. A firefly is really a firefly—it doesn’t become some beast and start tearing up the town” (qtd. in Ganz 4). Accordingly, Thammavongsa’s bugs are often shown performing routine acts of sustenance and survival. In her poem “The Dung Beetle,” a dung beetle collects the excrement of larger animals “dropped / from pinned points / in the night sky”:

THE DUNG BEETLE

has been given

this

all its life

and all its life

it has quietly sifted and culled

each bit, each piece

(*Light* 34)

Like the earwig, Thammavongsa's dung beetle is dignified and whole, sifting through excrement with routine patience and care, "[a]s if / each bit, each piece / had been lost to us" (35). In the poem, the dung beetle appears not only as a salvager but also a custodian of the abject, caring for the bits and pieces of excrement, the "lesser light / dropped" (35) on the ground by creatures that overlook its existence. The dung beetle offers no complaint, feels no shame for the life it leads. The dung beetle is a dung beetle.

But the dung beetle also performs its duty because it has no other option: "this" — this shit—is all it "has been given" (*Light* 34). In "Worms," the mother performs her job with the same care and attention as Thammavongsa's dung beetle. While I do not mean to suggest that Thammavongsa's dung beetle resembles the refugee mother in "Worms," as there are vast and hugely significant differences between *being* a bug and being treated like one, there are nonetheless parallels in how Thammavongsa represents both mother and beetle as custodians of "lesser" things: the abject, the unsavoury, the "shit of the earth." As the narrator explains, "My mother called the worms shit of the earth. She would always say, 'Man I love shit of the earth,' after every pick we did" (156). The mother's term of endearment for the worms—and the soil they inhabit—reveals the affinity she feels with them, and the lack of shame she feels performing

a job the other workers on the farm find tedious and degrading. We are told repeatedly in "Worms" how much pride she takes in her job, how she picks barefoot and bare-handed — "It's natural" (Thammavongsa 156), she states—while the other workers wear gloves and rubber shoes. Out in the fields, she moves with speed and agility, unencumbered by protective equipment. Her bareness is dignified, freeing. In this way, "shit of the earth" represents life and vitality, and the inherent, irrevocable dignity of bare life. Shit, as Kristeva famously argued, is the matter of life: "These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live" (*Powers of Horror* 3).

The word "shit," however, also denotes division. As Cindy LaCom writes, "the word 'excrement' comes from the Latin 'excrementum,' meaning to 'sift out, to discharge' The word 'shit,' however, comes from the words 'skit' and 'skheid.' Related to the verb, 'to shed,' it means 'to split, divide, seperate [sic]'" (n.p.). The mother's nickname for the worms— "this shit of the earth"—thus signals an alliance forged between subaltern forms and identities: shit and 'bare life,' worms and refugee women. Her repeated invocation of the word "shit" instead of "excrement" not only reveals, perhaps, her limited English vocabulary, but also distinguishes her—and the worms— as allied against the destructive, dehumanizing conditions of the farm, where life is valued only as capital. As Zygmunt Bauman argues in *Wasted Lives*, the production and disposal of human waste, or more precisely wasted lives, is "an inevitable outcome of modernization, and an inseparable accompaniment of modernity" (5). Refugees, migrants, global outcasts—these marginalized populations are, in Bauman's view, the collateral casualties of economic progress, the waste or "shit" of capitalistic globalization. As such, "this shit of the

earth" carries a double meaning. On the one hand, the mother stakes her place of belonging in the earth, in the "shit," soil and darkness beyond the naturalized space of the nation and its man-made borders. On the other hand, the mother's alignment with the abject and the insect is an uneasy one. Her eventual disillusionment and even despair at her "shit" opportunities on the farm (and in America) re-affirm her position in the dominant order as excessive, "'out of place,' 'unfit' or undesirable'" (Bauman 5)—a human life valued no more, indeed less, than a worm: "this shit of the earth."

While Thammavongsa's bugs are, Dawson argues, "dignified and, indeed, celebrated in all their 'bugginess,'" they are also, she notes, "posited as metaphors for refugees, illegal migrants, and perhaps all racialized migrants who might be said to 'hol[d] out their limbs / to a world that will not / hold them'" ("On Thinking Like a State" 59). For Dawson, the 'bugginess' of Thammavongsa's bugs "encourages a meditation on the violent potential of the large, lumbering human forms that typically overlook or denigrate them" (59). The uneasy alliance or association of bugs with refugees in Thammavongsa's work not only critiques the metaphors of pestilence used to dehumanize refugees, but also signals the structures of violence that impact both human and non-human life. Thammavongsa's close-ups of 'bug life,' after all, reveal a world of violence. Reflecting on *Small Arguments,* Thammavongsa states, "[t]here is delicacy, but it all comes out of violence. The insects are dead or dying or being ripped apart" (qtd. in Peerbaye para.16). The worms of "Worms" are no less 'wormy' for the ways they compel the reader to meditate on the violence and injustice of systems, the "large, lumbering forms" that uproot lives and minimize existences. The farm is a hostile environment for the refugee workers, but it is often a fatal one for the worms. Dead, dying, or being ripped apart—such is their violent fate.

**Life as Usual**

When the narrator recounts her first days on the job, she characterizes the worms as furtive and evasive, evoking the ways refugees and migrants are frequently associated with criminality, illegality, and abjection: "I was not very good with what I was doing. I didn't stay bent down. Every time I picked, I stood back up, and by the time I got my fingers back to the ground, all the worms were gone. They heard me coming" (Thammavongsa 154). The narrator imagines the worms as fugitive subjects, burrowing deeper underground to avoid capture. She is repulsed by their wet, wriggling bodies: "The worms felt wet and soft and cold. And when they moved, I let them go or dropped them on the ground. I wanted to scream, to comment at how gross it all was ..." (155). Unlike her mother, the narrator is not a "good picker" (158) because she is unable to comprehend how fragile the worms really are: "I found a batch together and pulled at them. Only they did not come out smooth together, but in bits. I had pulled too hard and their bodies were broken" (154). In contrast, the mother practices small, routine measures of care that allow the worms an easy transition from soil to Styrofoam cup:

> Out on the field, my mother put on something like a headlamp … She got down, squatted, and crept along, pulling out the worms with her bare hands and putting them into two Styrofoam cups attached to her lower leg. Inside each Styrofoam cup there was a bit of grass so when the worms were put in there, they wouldn't land so hard and could have a bit of cushion. (154)

This scene underscores Thammavongsa's interest in the preservation and sanctity of all life, however big or small. But "it all comes out of violence." The worms are only valuable if they remain intact: "In half an hour, she had gone back and forth four times and dumped her

Styrofoam cup into a larger Styrofoam box next to which was a man keeping count of her harvest" (Thammavongsa 156). The harvest of the worms is eerily reminiscent of human smuggling and trafficking operations, where commodified bodies are kept intact only for the sake of profit and future (ab)use. In "Worms," however, the "harvest" refers more clearly to the commodification and dehumanization of refugees and migrants for 'First World' gain.

Labour has become one of the key issues in the debates surrounding human migration, as the economization and criminalization of migrants often goes, uneasily, hand in hand. As Katherine Donato and Douglas Massey argue, "illegal migration is built into the structure of the contemporary economy. Policymakers throughout the world have implemented treaties and trade agreements to integrate markets that ensure the free movement of economic inputs and outputs, with two notable exceptions: labor and human capital" (14). Put simply, while human beings cannot move freely across borders, money can. But there is a wrench in the system: human agency. Human agency is mobile, diverse, incalculable, unpredictable, and ungovernable:

> This is the fundamental contradiction of postindustrial globalism: nations today seek to create and participate in a global market in which only some factors of production are mobile. This paradox has forced policymakers throughout the world into a Faustian bargain: international factor mobility is encouraged and facilitated only to the extent that the factors in question lack agency. Under the terms of this bargain, immigration must be restricted because labor and human capital are attached to people and people have agency. (Donato and Massey 9)

In "Worms," Thammavongsa invokes the "Faustian bargain" of contemporary migration through the restrictions that James short-sightedly enforces on the farm—restrictions that not only put the

livelihoods of the refugee workers in danger, but also lead, by the story's end, to the narrator's refusal of the hierarchies of belonging that James represents.

That hierarchy comes into clear focus once James, a 14-year-old, English-speaking, 'All-American boy,' comes there to work—for free, no less. After only a short period, James is promoted to manager of the farm. The only named character in the story, James represents the privilege and entitlement of people who occupy positions of power simply because they are deemed to 'naturally' belong.[30] James' effortless existence on the farm is underscored by the narrator's desire to see him fail or, at the very least, struggle:

> James was so good at things, I wanted to see him fail at something. I wanted to see him struggle to fill a box, to step on the worms because he didn't know where to look for them, to pull too hard and have their bodies break apart. I wanted him to be yelled at when the count was low, and for him to experience the uncertainty of weather. (Thammavongsa 158)

James experiences no uncertainty or abuse, however. In fact, he quickly comes to embody the exploitative regimes of capital that lead to what Berlant calls "slow death." For Berlant, slow death is the "destruction of life, bodies, imaginaries by and under contemporary regimes of capital" (764). This destruction happens over time and is "often identified with the presentness of ordinariness itself, that domain of living on in which everyday activity; memory, needs, and desires; and diverse temporalities and horizons of the taken-for granted are brought into proximity and lived through" (Berlant 759). In other words, slow death is not an event, but an everyday process that occurs in spaces of ordinariness and life as usual.

[30] James' promotion to manager also echoes the language of migration 'management.'

Under James' management, the working conditions on the farm deteriorate: "The cans which had been filled with rice were replaced with sawdust. My mother got splinters drying her hands from it. They got infected from the fertilizer in the soil and kept the sores around longer than they should have been" (Thammavongsa 159). James enforces rules that make it harder for the mother to move in the fields: "Then James told my mother she couldn't go barefoot anymore" (159). In his role as manager, James represents state efforts to 'manage' migration by implementing restrictive policies and practices that make it harder for people to not only move across borders, but also to live within them. The mother's "slow death" is documented by the narrator: "I watched her slowly give up on being great at what she did. I watched her heart break" (Thammavongsa 159). The mother continues to work, but she suffers, physically and psychologically, under the new rules:

> To make up for the lower numbers, she stayed out on the field longer than she would have. She began to forget the things she did so well. She didn't move with the ease she had before and the worms all slunk back into the ground. It wasn't something she could control, but the numbers didn't give out that kind of detail. They could be used to say the picker was unskilled or lazy. (159)

Despite the worsening conditions on the farm, the mother is expected to perform her job with the same energy and vigor as before. To be called "unskilled or lazy" is to risk losing a job that many others are "waiting, willing to do" (Thammavongsa 159) for less pay, longer hours, and fewer benefits. There is, after all, always an underclass under the underclass. As human

migration is increasingly outlawed, the "pool of cheap labour" (Walia 71) comprised of temporary foreign workers, migrant labourers, and 'illegal aliens' grows deeper and wider.[31]

Notably, the refugee is more firmly emplaced within the social and economic structure of the nation than the undocumented immigrant or 'illegal alien.' As Menjívar argues, "legal statuses create a class of immigrants with rights and privileges distinct from those holding temporary work visas, and it can be said that documented and undocumented immigrants have such different experiences that they can be regarded as two different social classes" (1000). In "Worms," the refugees on the farm live in economic precarity—they can lose their jobs at any moment—but their place in America is secure, insofar as they cannot legally be deported. Walia argues that the "condition of being deportable" (73) is the prime way that migrant workers are maintained in precarious conditions and exploited as cheap labour. However, as Thammavongsa indicates, the refugees in "Worms" occupy shifting ground as legal statuses are not synonymous with gainful employment, socioeconomic mobility, and the right to live freely and with dignity. Refugee status confers legal recognition, but it does not necessarily confer a place of belonging. Moreover, as all refugees know from experience, lives can be uprooted at any moment; papers can be taken away; citizenship is sometimes just a word.

**Faces of Recognition**

[31] In response to COVID-19, Canada has increased its reliance on Temporary Foreign Workers, exempting them from the prohibitions on entry into Canada imposed by the Quarantine Act, while simultaneously implementing border restrictions for non-citizens like refugees and asylum seekers. See Zainab Abu Alrob and John Shields' "A COVID-19 State of Exception and the Bordering of Canada's Immigration System.

Yet the mother believes (or wants to believe) in the immigrant success story—for her daughter's sake, and for her own sense of worth: "I knew it wasn't going to happen for me. Not in my lifetime. But it's going to happen for you … I sure can be proud of that" (Thammavongsa 156). For Dina Nayeri—a writer, teacher, and former refugee— "heart-warming success stories" about "refugees who succeed against the odds" (para. 41) are afforded too much credibility and prominence in Western societies. What is more, these success stories are often appropriated to serve national agendas, where the immigrant's success is celebrated as the nation's own success, reinforcing dominant ideals of multiculturalism and hospitality, and, furthermore, the idea that refugees have a "debt to repay" (Nayeri para. 45) the host society. Recalling her family's experiences immigrating to the United States from Iran as refugees, Nayeri writes, "we sensed the ongoing expectation that we would shed our old skin, give up our former identities—every quirk and desire that made us us—and that we would imply at every opportunity that America was better, that we were so lucky, so humbled to be here" (para. 17). The expectation for refugee gratitude, she argues, silences people whose voices are crucial to contemporary political and social life—now, and in the future.

Reflecting on her experiences teaching immigrant and refugee children in the United States, Nayeri advocates that refugees throw off the "grateful face" and speak openly about experiences that do not fit the script of the immigrant success story:

> I want to show those kids whose very limbs apologize for the space they occupy … that a grateful face isn't the one they should assume at times like these. Because a person's life is never a bad investment, and so there are no creditors at the door, no debt to repay. Now there's just the rest of life, the stories left to create, all the messy, greedy ordinary days that are theirs to squander. (para. 45)

Like Thammavongsa's earwigs, which "hol[d] out their limbs / to a world that will not / hold them" (*Small Arguments* 53), Nayeri writes of the ways refugees' "very limbs apologize for the space they occupy" (para. 45). In Nayeri's view, refugees must take up space, deliberately and defiantly, discarding the "grateful face" (para. 45) that masks the pain, humiliation, and struggle to belong that so many refugees and immigrants face in their day-to-day lives. Gratitude, in other words, is "shit."

The mother's belief in the immigrant success story contributes to her undoing. When she finally realizes how precarious her position at the farm is, "this shit of the earth" loses its life-affirming meaning. "It's just shit of the earth. Shit of the earth" (Thammavongsa 158), she repeats. Her silence breaks in a foul-mouthed, excremental tirade:

> It all came out then. She said, 'That was nice, wasn't it? I brought that fucker. And he takes my job: Fuck. He's a fucking kid. What the fuck. And they accuse us of taking their jobs. Well, you know what? That was my job. My job! And he fucking took it … And why am I so pissed? It's just shit of the earth. Shit of the earth.' (Thammavongsa 159)

As Michelle Martin argues, anger can function as a "species of care," especially when "incorporated into a critique of biopolitical production" (192). The mother's rage-filled tirade opens her daughter's eyes to the precarity of her condition as a racialized, female immigrant, and the strategies of refusal required to circumvent or confront the hegemonic structures of power and privilege that threaten her existence—anger being one. But the mother's anger quickly turns to bitter resignation. By the end of the story, the mother has lost hope in the immigrant success story. There are no days for her to squander. There is only work and injustice: shit of the earth. Hers is a life of "slow death." And there is nothing to be done.

Doing nothing, or very little, however, can be an intentional exercise of agency and a form of awakening political consciousness. As Ahmed writes, it is crucial to "recognize the role of collective labor in the process of becoming conscious of class, race, and gendered forms of oppression" (162). Collective labour is literalized in "Worms": mother and daughter work alongside one another as part of a refugee labour force. While the narrator begins to realize the oppressive structures and hierarchies of belonging that allow for the destruction and disposability of human lives, the scene of recognition—or consciousness—occurs when she is alone and at home. When James comes to collect her for the school dance, the narrator does nothing but stand still—and look: "When I did not open the door, he banged and struggled to turn the locked knob. His hair had come loose. It was wild and undone. I saw it all, standing on the other side of the door, in the dark, watching him in the golden circle framed by the peephole. I did nothing" (Thammavongsa 160). By doing nothing but watching James struggle and sob, the narrator—wearing a "pink dress" (159) no less, which not only evokes conventional femininity but also the pink bodies of the worms—symbolically aligns herself with the force of her mother's anger and disappointment. She refuses him access into their home, their private, female, domesticated space. She reverses the privileged gaze of citizenship that abandons refugees and migrants to spaces outside or precariously situated within realms of legal, social, and civic recognition. It is James who stands outside, begging to come in.

At the end of the story, the narrator refuses the "grateful face" of the refugee and dehumanizing frameworks of "narrative humanity" that demand the refugee 'prove' her humanity. She allies herself with her mother, and the "shit," sorrow and degradation of belonging nowhere but "earth." In some ways, the ending of "Worms" conforms to the frameworks of the intergenerational immigrant success story, wherein children of immigrants

realize the lives and liberties of which their parents only dreamed. The narrator, after all, has the privilege of refusing James entry: he is not her boss. But the narrator's refusal to let James in symbolizes a process of de-naturalization and an act of powerful inversion. In the story's final scene, the narrator—allied with her mother, the workers, the worms, and all those "lives forced underground" (Nyers, "Abject Cosmopolitanism" 420)—claims her place as impenetrable, inviolable. She is watching him. And her eyes are wide open.

Over the course of this chapter, I have examined the motifs and metaphors of bugs, filth, and waste in Hage and Thammavongsa's texts to illuminate the many dimensions of refugee and immigrant expulsion that occur within the borders of the 'benevolent' host nation (i.e. Canada), as well as within transnational and globalized contexts. In these texts, the subaltern agent—whether invoked as human, "half human" (Hage 245), or bug—becomes at once representative of the limits imposed on refugee and migrant bodies, identities, and movements by contemporary border regimes, and the ways in which the refugee may challenge the spaces of states through creative acts of survival and subversion. Hage and Thammavongsa call upon the reader to recognize the refugee or non-citizen's vulnerability to systems of capital and exploitation, while foregrounding the refugee as an agential, even defiant, subject to the borders of exclusion.

## Chapter 3: BORDERS

“Ms. Yeung, I want to share my story” (al Rabeeah and Yeung 211). So concludes *Homes: A Refugee Story* by Abu Bakr al Rabeeah with Winnie Yeung. A work of creative nonfiction, *Homes* is based on Abu Bakr and his family’s accounts of their real-life experiences of war and displacement. With only a few possessions, and even fewer English words, the al Rabeeah family moved from Syria to Canada as refugees in 2014, leaving friends and family behind. While the book centers around “*our protagonist, often called Bakr*” (original emphasis), *Homes* is not solely his story, but rather a composite of stories that span generational and experiential divides. As Yeung notes in the afterword to *Homes*: “This book started out as one boy’s journey, but his parents’ and siblings’ perceptions and insights became equally important. Their recollections, our conversations and my observations of them all became the palette I used to colour in the rough outlines [they] gave me” (215). The initial inspiration for *Homes*, however, came from Bakr, who expressed his desire to Yeung—his ESL teacher at the time—to share his story. “When I heard those words from Abu Bakr,” Yeung recalls, “they moved me deeply. I told him I wanted to write his story for him, as a gift” (213). In 2019, *Homes* was nominated for the CBC Canada Reads award. The theme of that year’s competition was “One Book to Move You.”

While *Homes* did not win the 2019 Canada Reads award, it was one of the competition’s five finalists.[32] *Homes* was also a finalist for the 2018 Governor General’s Literary Awards for

[32] Max Eisen’s Holocaust memoir, *By Chance Alone*, won the 2019 Canada Reads award. Eisen is a Hungarian Jew who was deported to Auschwitz in 1944. In 2019, Eisen was a keynote speaker at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, for the opening of *Refuge Canada*, a travelling art exhibition that explores Canada’s role in the global refugee crisis.

Nonfiction. Though *Homes* did not win this award either, the book's high rank in both competitions prompts questions about the ways that refugee stories are received and promoted in Canada, particularly when they attest, or are *deemed* to attest, to the nation's pivotal role in saving refugee lives. Indeed, *Homes* has been endorsed as "a refugee story like no other" (cover copy), the "remarkable true story of how a young boy emerged from a war zone—and found safety in Canada—with a passion for sharing his story and telling the world what is truly happening in Syria" ("Homes"). In an interview for the Canada Reads 2019 launch, Chuck Comeau, the 'defender' of *Homes*, applauds the book for the ways it "makes you remember that we live in a special place, where we welcome these people with open arms."[33] Comeau says nothing in this interview of the fact that the al Rabeeah family struggled for many years to acquire refugee status, nor does he advertise that the family's transition into Canada has been a deeply difficult one. Of their early days in the country, Bakr explains, "we were each so wrapped up in our own kinds of loneliness that we got used to our little islands of grief … we had traded the raucous, tearing war for a suffocating, quiet safety" (203). Of course, the idea that Canada's "open arms" may, in fact, suffocate is hardly the thing Canadians want to hear, especially from a refugee. Aren't "these people," after all, supposed to be grateful for everything Canada has given them—safety, shelter, a place to call home? Shouldn't their stories reflect that?

Since "most refugee stories are never heard by the Canadian public"[34] (Showler xiv), it is crucial to consider how the stories that *are* heard, particularly those that enjoy critical and commercial success, shape the public's perception of refugees and discourses of forced

---

[33] Each finalist for the CBC Awards is 'defended' by a Canadian celebrity. Comeau is best known for his role as the drummer of the Canadian rock band Simple Plan.

[34] The main reason for this, Showler explains, is that refugee hearings are held, by necessity, behind closed doors

displacement.[35] The most popular of these stories is the refugee success story—that is, the story of an innocent who, after enduring terrible ordeals and fleeing terrible circumstances, finds safety and success in the new land, thanks to the compassion and civility of benevolent, Western strangers. Besides the surplus of visual images that show refugees in pitiable circumstances, or as pitiable themselves, the refugee success story or "inspirational refugee narrative" (Mahrouse 173) is one of the primary ways that refugees become visible in the public realm.[36]

While stories of refugee success are not in and of themselves something to admonish—refugees have as much right to success as anyone, and their stories of success can attest to individual and collective agency in powerful and provocative ways—the success narrative can also become, as Vinh Nguyen argues, "regulatory and punitive" (18) for the ways it "easily lends itself to appropriation by revisionist, nationalistic, and neo-imperial forces" (18). Furthermore, as Dawson identifies, those who are granted refugee status in Canada often "get called upon—by the media, the academy, and the publishing industry" to repeat stories of persecution and "offer confessional accounts of trauma to serve First World catharsis and shore up pleasing national myths" ("On Thinking Like a State" 58). The refugee success story, then, is often manifest in public discourse as an example of Western benevolence and hospitality, whereby the "remarkable true story of how a young boy emerged from a war zone" becomes the remarkable true story of how Canada saved him, and all the 'good' refugees like him, from the terrors of other, less 'civilized' nations. Bakr's story, thus, is appropriated as Canada's own, held up for the public as a real-life testament to Canadian benevolence—this "special place where we welcome

[35] Showler is a former member of the Immigration Review Board (IRB). His book, *Refugee Sandwich: Stories of Exile and Asylum* (2006), examines the complex intersections between storytelling and refugee law in Canada.
[36] The refugee success narrative is pervasive in popular culture. As Mahrouse notes, "a Google search of the term 'inspirational refugees' turns up tens of thousands of hits in which UNHCR refugees are hailed for being resilient, determined, and/or successful" (173).

these people with open arms" (Comeau)—rather than as the real-life story of a real-life boy who has been deeply traumatized by real-life experiences of war and displacement, and seeks to share his story as a way "to never forget" (al Rabeeah and Yeung 210) the friends, family, and country he has been forced to leave behind.

The publicity surrounding Kim Thúy's award-winning and semi-autobiographical novel, *Ru* (2008), exhibits a similar tone. Originally written in French and translated into English by Sheila Fischman, *Ru* traces a Vietnamese family's experiences of displacement and resettlement in a series of lyric vignettes. The narrator of the novel, An Tịnh Nguyen, is a fictional cipher of Thúy, who came to Canada with her family as refugees in 1979. Despite *Ru*'s autobiographical roots, Thúy "decided not to claim the text as an autobiography because her family's experience as refugees fleeing Vietnam after the south fell was much less devastating than so many other refugees whose conditions she describes in *Ru*" (Buss 606). Nonetheless, Thúy's own history and experiences as a 'boat person' are often the focus of the discourse and publicity surrounding the novel. As Nguyen identifies, "various glowing reviews in national newspapers have hailed the author as the 'perfect immigrant' and praised her story as one following the path 'from riches to rags to riches'" (17). Although Thúy has acknowledged on multiple occasions that the "book's events accurately reflect her personal recollections of a life characterized by dramatic environmental shifts" (Syms para. 2), *Ru* is a work of fiction. Yet rare is the review or interview that does not emphasize the novel's autobiographical roots or highlight Thúy's own rags-to-riches story from refugee to best-selling author, from helpless 'boat person' to happy Canadian.

The importance of storytelling to the perception and reception of refugees in Canada cannot be overstated, nor can the ways that refugees are often cast in the role of storyteller: "In

the process of seeking refugee status, they are asked for particular kinds of stories. Indeed, their well-being often hinges on their ability to tell verifiable stories of persecution and trauma in a manner that satisfies the state" (Dawson, "Treaty to Tell the Truth" 14). Those who are granted refugee status are, in turn, expected to tell stories that uphold white-washed ideals of the West and reproduce homogenizing notions of identity via the "telling of retelling of a story that is told again and again in repetitive trauma" (Hua 110). The success narrative, then, forms part of the apparatus of silence that surrounds Canada's refugee system, as it limits the ways refugees can publicly represent themselves and their experiences beyond the "metanarratives of international politics and of nation-states" (Hua 111), let alone speak out against racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination and exploitation. Moreover, the success story tends to downplay the state's treaty obligations towards refugees by casting the state in the role of "defender and saviour" (Nguyen 18) of vulnerable, innocent lives, in turn reinforcing the idea that refugees have a debt to repay. Consider, for example, how frequently refugees are quoted saying how lucky and grateful they are to be in Canada. How often is the inverse true? That is, how often is Canada portrayed as lucky or grateful to have refugees?

Yet the refugee success story can also function as an archive of individual and collective histories and memory, and work to challenge the "gaps and silences in hegemonic narratives" (Hua 112) about the refugee experience. Just as stories of success play a prominent role in how refugees are perceived in this nation, so too can they perform a "discourse of oppositional consciousness and agency" (Mohanty qtd. in Hua 111) that chafes, however gently, against national narratives and pre-conceived, often racialized images of the refugee. Moreover, refugee stories of 'making it' in Canada can be a source of healing and empowerment, both for the

individual storytellers and for the communities they represent, as well as a site of advocacy for refugee rights and a call for solidarity.

In this chapter, thus, I focus on the ways in which *Ru* positions the refugee success story as both a site of agency and a space of suffocating silence. I argue that while *Ru* often performs the refugee ideal, Thúy reproduces the tropes and aesthetics associated with 'the refugee experience' in a complex negotiation of the spaces and borders between private trauma and public testimony. As the success narrative forms part of the apparatus of silence surrounding Canada's refugee system, so too can authors work within its limiting confines to reorient "the question of success" (Nguyen 20) in ways that make visible the lives of refugees, and their unique struggles to negotiate the intertwining routes—and roots—of individual and collective experience and memory.

But what does it mean to reject the refugee success story altogether? To refuse to play the victim or "perfect immigrant" in accordance with nation-building projects or stereotypical visions of refugeeness? Following my reading of *Ru*, I analyze Carmen Aguirre's *Something Fierce: Memoirs of a Revolutionary Daughter* in relation to the rise of the "bogus" refugee, the bogeyman of contemporary immigration debates. Indeed, while Thúy and Aguirre both won the Canada Reads award—Thúy in 2008, Aguirre in 2012— Thúy was valorized for her depictions of refugee life; Aguirre denounced a "bloody terrorist." Unlike *Ru*, *Something Fierce* rejects "the refugee image" (Nguyen 32) and calls into explicit question the fairness and generosity of Canada's refugee and immigration system, and the success of Canadian multiculturalism. In so doing, Aguirre represents the refugee/exile as a figure of active and irrepressible agency who contests the monolithic narratives of the state and disrupts deeply entrenched systems of power and patriarchy—even when those systems continue to prevail. Instead of playing the role of

"pure victim" or "perfect immigrant," Aguirre challenges the hegemonic narratives of Canadian hospitality and multiculturalism by narrating her own 'refugee experience' in terms of failure: the failure of a revolution, the failure of Canadian hospitality, the failure of assimilation and multicultural success.

*Ru* and *Something Fierce* demonstrate the fraught relationship between refugee narratives of success (or failure) and projects of nation, humanitarianism, and historical memory. Throughout this chapter, I consider how Thúy and Aguirre differentially negotiate the expectations for refugees to tell their stories of displacement and resettlement in ways that work to reinforce dominant notions of Canadian hospitality and reproduce the refugee as a figure of passivity, gratitude, and humanitarian exceptionality. Since first-person refugee narratives of success perform key functions in immigration and hospitality debates, I also attend to the various strategies of self-representation and narration that Thúy and Aguirre perform to navigate the terrain of life writing, the ethics of witnessing, and the racialized and gendered grids of refugee intelligibility and recognition.

### 3.1 Horizons of Success in Kim Thúy's *Ru*

"Are We Still That Compassionate Canada?" ran the headline of an op-ed article written by Lorna Dueck for the *Globe and Mail*. The article was published on October 6, 2014, nearly one year prior to the media spectacle that surrounded the Syrian refugee crisis in the wake of Alan Kurdi's highly-publicized death. In this article, Dueck criticizes the Canadian government, then under the Conservative leadership of Stephen Harper, for failing to respond to the suffering of millions of Syrian refugees worldwide:

> Gone are the days when MPs of all stripes jockeyed to address human suffering. In 1979 and 1980, the plight of many hundred of thousands of Southeast Asian "boat people" refugees was near the top of the agenda, and Canadians responded by sponsoring almost 70, 0000, winning the UN refugee agency's Nansen medal for our efforts. But today, while more than three million Syrians languish in refugee camps in Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, nobody is debating in Parliament how many we'll sponsor. (para. 3)

By 2015, however, *everybody* was debating in Parliament how many Syrian refugees to sponsor. The refugee crisis was a central issue in Canada's 2015 federal election, with the leaders of the Liberal and NDP parties, Justin Trudeau and Tom Mulcair, using the "Kurdi crisis" to criticize the Harper government, and gain moral advantage (Siddiqi and Koerber 412). "You don't suddenly get to discover compassion in the middle of an election campaign," Trudeau said in a press conference that took place on September 3, 2015, the day after Kurdi's death. "You either have it or you don't" (qtd. in "Refugee Crisis" para.8).[37] Trudeau's words were met with applause.

The Kurdi tragedy and the Trudeau government's high-profile initiative to resettle 25, 000 Syrian refugees elicited heated public debates about Canada's role in international humanitarian crises, focalized around the refugee as either a figure of compassion or suspicion. Indeed, in the wake of the toddler's publicly mourned death, allegations against his father, Abdullah Kurdi, began to surface: "Some implied that he was opportunistic; that the family was in no danger in Turkey and that he was to blame for Kurdi's death. A story also appeared that

[37] Trudeau made this statement in response to a question from the media about then Minister of Immigration Chris Alexander's decision to suspend his campaign in order to 'look into' the Syrian refugee crisis ("Refugee Crisis").

Abudllah Kurdi was a people-smuggler and personally responsible for the boat tipping over and killing his wife and two sons" (Adler-Nissen et al. 86). While the accusations against Abdullah Kurdi did not "question the constitution of Alan Kurdi as worthy of grief, sympathy, and compassion" (Adler-Nissen et al. 87), they did cast doubt on the credibility of a bereaved refugee father, thereby reinforcing binary notions of refugees as 'good' or 'bad' and distracting from Canada's role in Kurdi's death.[38]

The Kurdi case exemplifies the ways in which refugee identities are often constructed along lines of victimhood or villainy, producing differential categories of need and worth. The narrative of the successful refugee, or "super refugee" in Gada Mahrouse's formulation,[39] plays into such essentializing discourses, as 'good' or deserving refugees are often linked to economic utility, as well as racialized notions of immigrant exceptionality. As Nguyen argues, the figure of the "well assimilated and successful Vietnamese refugee" (18) has often been held up as a paragon of refugee success and proof of Canadian hospitality, inscribed in pervasive stereotypes of Asian Americans as model minorities.[40] Following Kurdi's death, there was a rise in the circulation of inspirational stories that celebrated the extraordinary resilience and success of Canada's Southeast Asian "boat people," as refugee advocates turned to the nation's

---

[38] See Sara Siddiqi and Duncan Koerber's "The Anatomy of a National Crises" for their analysis of Canada's role in Kurdi's death.

[39] Mahrouse formulates the "super refugee" in relation to the "super crip," a term used to describe "how individuals with disabilities are required to display perseverance, bravery, or extraordinary feats to be positively acknowledged" (174). See "Producing the Figure of the 'Super Refugee' through Discourses of Success, Exceptionalism, Ableism, and Inspiration."

[40] In "Race, Visuality, and COVID-19," Danielle Wong argues that "the pandemic is made to 'reveal' a lot" (13). Indeed, the pandemic has 'revealed' the racist logics and structural inequalities that have always underpinned the stereotype of the Asian model minority, as revitalized racist narratives of "yellow peril" rapidly circulated in early pandemic discourse. Almost overnight, the Asian subject was reframed from being a 'good' model immigrant to a menacing harbinger of plague, creating a "staggering rise" (Wong 13) of Anti-Asian violence and hate crimes in Canada and the US.

humanitarian past to promote public compassion and political intervention.[41] However, despite the ways in which these stories were, and continue to be, deployed for humanitarian purposes, they tend to operate within broader neoliberal and capitalist discourses of hospitality and exceptionalism "that can limit, rather than empower, refugees in the West" (Mahrouse 174). Nguyen and Pho put it well: "the extraordinary success of a few refugees are held up as special cases that prove the rule that all refugees can and should succeed—thereby obscuring the unseemly fact that the infrastructures which determine success are inaccessible to most refugees" (216). So, while my intention is not to diminish individual accomplishments or deny the humanizing potential of positive representations of refugees, the refugee success story often produces refugee identities and experiences in accordance with nationalist aims and mythologies, wherein the refugee's success becomes the "nation's own success at multicultural, collective-building projects" (Nguyen 19), undermining the ways in which success—and the narration of that success—constitutes for many refugee and migrant subjects a space of healing and mode of articulation for difficult histories and traumatic experiences.

**Formulas of Success: What's Luck Got to Do with It?**

For Nguyen, the critical and commercial success of *Ru*, and the publicity surrounding the novel, has tended to reinforce "the image of Kim Thúy as a model refugee" (17) in ways that validate and further rationalize the false divisions between 'good' and 'bad refugees.' As Nuygen argues,

[41] For example, UNHCR Canada recently established the speaker series initiative "Ref Talks" with the expressed aim to "connect the Canadian public with personal stories of refugees and celebrate their success, their contributions and accomplishments in their host country" ("Ref Talks").

the "'good refugee' is often also constructed as a model minority, who is perceived as hardworking and resourceful and, through both innate and cultural qualities, is able to achieve education, economic, and social success with no or very little assistance from the state" (23). Whether deliberately or not, Thúy plays into the role of the "model refugee." In multiple interviews, Thúy repeatedly expresses her awe and gratitude for Canada, underscoring how lucky Vietnamese refugees were to have found refuge in Canada—and how grateful they are for it. Even when called upon to discuss Canada's controversial role in the ongoing refugee crisis, Thúy chooses not to openly criticize Canada. In an interview with CBC's Mike Finnerty, for example, Thúy responds to a question about how her own experience compares with "what's happening in Syria" by emphasizing how "really, really very lucky" she and so many Southeast Asian refugees were "back then." As she states: "Back then, we felt like the international community was waiting for us when we left Vietnam. We knew if we made it through the ocean, through the trip, then somebody would welcome us on the other side…We cannot compare because back then we were really, really very lucky" (qtd. in Finnerty para. 5). If Thúy is critical of Canada's current refugee system, or the nation's delayed (and deficient) response to the 'Syrian refugee crisis,' her criticisms are veiled by the language of luck and gratitude that so often forms the rhetoric of refugee success in Canada. Of course, Thúy's decision to forgo public condemnation of Canada's refugee system does not reflect poorly on her, but rather raises questions about the types of stories refugees are expected to tell in public forums.

Indeed, expressions of refugee gratitude are not always made in the service of the state. As Nguyen argues further,

> [W]hile the 'good refugee' is a construct that ultimately directs us to the contours of the nation-state, the grateful refugee allows us to focus in on the lives of

> refugees themselves. As a figure, it carves out a critical space for the expression of various forms of immigrant success and for feeling of gratitude to those peoples, institutions, and nations that have in one way or another provided the opportunity for such successes to materialize without being necessarily or automatically regarded as fodder for ideology or ideological maneuverings. (23)

Thúy's expressions of gratitude, both in the pages of *Ru* and in public, thus invite a consideration of the ways in which gratitude can be invoked to demonstrate the complexities and particularities of refugee experience, rather than automatically buttress the dominant narratives of the nation-state. The problem is not with the ways that refugees speak gratitude, per se, but rather with the ways in which they are expected to reproduce stories of success and gratitude—replete with white saviours and lucky refugees— regardless of whether those stories represent the refugee's true experiences or emotions. Refugees have the right to feel "really, really very lucky" and publicly express gratitude: the issue lies with mainstream expectations for refugees to express nothing else.

Luck plays a prominent role in Thúy's public narration of her own success. In an interview with Lilou Mace, Thúy claims she never set out to write a novel: "I didn't know [*Ru*] was a book … it didn't even have a title. When the [agent] took it to the publisher, it was just a bundle of paper" (6:16-21). Of course, this "bundle of paper" went on to become a best-selling and multi award-winning book. In addition to winning the Governor General's Award, the highest of Canadian literary accolades, *Ru* was selected as the winner of the Canada Reads awards in 2008. As Jenny James notes, winners of the Canada Reads competition are all but assured widespread readership in Canada and promoted "as part of a national book group, thus

heralding *Ru* as a book that every Canadian must read" (45). The question is, who counts as Canadian here? Which Canadians "must read" *Ru*, and why?

For Nguyen, *Ru*'s induction into the canon of Canadian literature has largely to do with the ways in which the novel, and the casting of Thúy as model refugee, reinforce myths of Canadian multiculturalism and binary distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' refugees. In Nguyen's view, the "novel's overarching theme of personal and collective resilience in the face of struggle, and triumphant final note, makes it an emblematic case of the Vietnamese refugee success story" which has become a "hallmark of *mainstream* Asian North American literature" (17). Citing Viet Nguyen's book, *Race and Resistance: Literature and Politics in North America*, Nguyen observes that not only are these stories "most likely to read by non-Asian [North] American readers and critics" (17), but also most likely to garner mainstream critical and commercial success for the ways they "confirm liberal ideals of freedom, democracy, and equality" (17). Thúy repeatedly offers "proof of [Canada's] inclusive, tolerant, and fundamentally non-racist constitution," both in the pages of *Ru* and the surrounding publicity. In her interview with Mace, for example, Thúy refers to Canadians as possessing "a generosity that you cannot imagine. Just pure, pure generosity" (13:01-07). She speculates that this "pure generosity" is a product of Canada's inherently peaceful and non-violent history, a nation that, in her expressed view, has not seen the same horrors as elsewhere. "Here, on this soil," she states, "there has not been any blood" (12:48-50).

There are, however, bedbugs. Despite the ways that Thúy chooses to proclaim Canada's "pure generosity" in interviews about *Ru*, there are moments in the novel that belie this generosity, or, at the very least, hint at the ways that public demonstrations of Canadian generosity and refugee gratitude often hide unsavoury realities. While the Nguyen family

receives a generous supply of “warm clothes, toys, invitation, dreams” (Thúy 22-23) upon arrival, their Canadian benefactors are often ignorant of, or uninterested in, the refugees’ true need. In one scene, An Tinh recalls how her family’s Canadian sponsors “spent their Sundays taking us to flea markets. They negotiated fiercely on our behalf so we could buy mattresses, dishes, beds, sofas—in short the basics, with our three-hundred dollar government allowance” (Thúy 24). Despite their good intentions, the sponsors neglect to tell the Nguyen family that the old mattresses may be full of fleas, or that the red cowl-necked sweater An Tinh’s father is given—and wears proudly every day of the family’s first spring in Quebec—is a “woman’s sweater, nipped in at the waist” (Thúy 24). Nor do these benevolent strangers question the lengths the Nguyen family must go to in order to survive on such a paltry government allowance, the daily degradations and struggles they must endure, the ways in which acts of charity may in fact do more harm than good.[42] In a moment of rare cynicism, An Tinh comments on the ways that images of happy refugees are often used to gloss over or hide unhappy realities. “But these details don’t matter,” she states, “because they don’t show in the pictures” (Thúy 24).

An Tinh’s cynicism, however, quickly gives way to an expression of gratitude: “We threw out the mattresses without telling our sponsors. We didn’t want them to be disappointed, because they’d given us their hearts, their time” (Thúy 24). In fact, An Tinh emphasizes that her family did not show *enough* gratitude: “We appreciated their generosity, but not sufficiently: we did not yet know the cost of time, its fair market value, its tremendous scarcity” (Thúy 24). Here, as in many other scenes in the novel, An Tinh gestures towards the cracks in the veneer of

[42] Not to mention dangers. An Tinh recalls, for example, working illegally with her family as migrant labourers in Quebec: “I travelled hidden in a cube van with fifty other Vietnamese to work in fields around the Eastern Townships after school…I waited every afternoon…for the farmers’ trucks that would take us to work illegally in the fields, earning a few dollars in exchange for the sacks of beans we picked” (Thúy 23).

Canadian hospitality but quickly reprises the role of the good refugee. It was the refugees, she underscores, who failed to appreciate the tokens of Canadian generosity, however ill-fitting and infested with fleas. Moreover, it was their fault for growing too accustomed, too quickly, to the comforts of Canadian life: “we thought we were immunized against stings, that no flea could pierce our skin bronzed by the Malaysian sun. In fact, the cold winds and hot baths had purified us, making the bites unbearable and the itches bloody” (Thúy 24). Canada is portrayed not only as a place of “pure, pure generosity” but also of purification. The Nguyen family’s pains of resettlement—manifest, quite literally, by the unbearable bites and “itches bloody” (Thúy 24) inflicted by bedbugs—are narrated as inextricable from the comforts and purifying elements of Canadian life, the “cold winds and hot baths” (Thúy 24) that cleanse the refugees from the blood and violence of their past and figuratively baptize them as ‘new Canadians.’ The process is not entirely without violence—the bedbugs, after all, have drawn blood—but the refugees’ pain and discomfort are, An Tinh suggests, small sacrifices made for a “glimpse of a new horizon” (Thúy 17). Nonetheless, the refugees’ decision to quietly throw out the bug-ridden mattresses without telling their sponsors subtly subverts the idea that refugees lack agency and are always in a position of need. Through this act of quiet disposal, the refugees display generosity towards their sponsors, sparing them any feelings of embarrassment and disappointment—a gesture that suggests the fragility of white civility (the refugees seek to preserve their sponsors’ sense of benevolence and belief in the good of their humanitarian efforts). Yet the Nguyen family also acts quietly out of a need not to appear ungrateful in the face of Canada’s “pure generosity,” not to vocalize any unhappiness or reveal the unsavoury details that lurk, bite and crawl behind the image of Canadian hospitality.

**Snow, "Shit," and Salvation**

As Thúy's interview with Mace (among others) suggests, Thúy herself feels compelled to express white-washed visions of Canada that accord with ideals of Canadian hospitality and generosity to reiterate the dominant narrative of Canada as a peaceable and bloodless nation. Thúy's declaration, for example, that Canada is free of "any blood" is patently false, but nonetheless appeals to a popular vision of the nation that has endured for centuries. The portrait of Canada as a peace-keeping and peace-loving nation remains in the public imagination (both domestic and international), despite the ways it "often chafes against the country's narrative" (See 510) and history. As Scott See writes, "from the earliest moments of European contact with Indigenous peoples through to the recent past with the country's participation in the Afghanistan war, Canadians have engaged in violent episodes and armed conflict" (510). Moreover, multiple critics, such as Sherene Razack, have rigorously exposed the racism and violence inherent in Canada's modern peace-keeping missions.[43]

Nonetheless, *Ru* reproduces the image of Canada-the-good with sentimental, snowy gusto, championing—via an image of snow no less—the virtues of white civility. Upon arriving in Granby, Quebec, An and her family are awestruck by Canada's great beauty and bounty, and a blinding vision of snow: "After such a long time in places without light, a landscape so white, so virginal could only dazzle us, blind us, intoxicate us (Thúy 8). Here, Canada's snowy landscape is invoked as a symbol of freedom and purity, a dazzling white light penetrating the world's darkness.

[43] See *Dark Threats and White Knights: The Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping, and the New Imperialism* (2004).

The correlations between snow and whiteness are, as Richard Dyer argues, common to "nineteenth- and early twentieth century notions of Canadian identity, where the experience of the cold North is claimed to have moulded in the white settler people a distinct white national character" (21). That the refugees' first encounter with snow—the "whitest thing on earth" (Dyer 21)—is described in Romantic terms of the sublime thus heralds the Nguyen family's process of transformation from refugee to citizen, and the start of their successful integration, or settling, into (white) Canadian life. That, too, their bodies are temporarily rendered immobile by the sight of snow—they are dazzled, blinded, and intoxicated—suggests that they are unable to navigate this "brilliant foreign landscape" (James 59) on their own. Luckily, the Nguyen family is greeted with an outpouring of Canadian hospitality, both upon arrival and throughout their process of resettlement:

> After she disembarks, An Tinh is met with a display of Canadian hospitality: her family's local sponsors have organized a lavish reception with a spread of "canapés, hors d'oeuvres, tasty morsels, each more colourful than the last." In spite of the fact that the protagonist has no knowledge of these dishes, the reception achieves its goal of representing Canada as a "place of delights" and *un pays de rêve* —a multicultural mecca where every culture is accepted, valued and seen as "more colorful than the last." (James 59)

This "multicultural mecca" is replete with "angels"—a word Thúy uses throughout *Ru* to describe the predominantly white Canadians who tenderly and selflessly guide the refugees out of the darkness, so to speak, and into the multicultural light of Canada. If, as Nilmini Fernando argues, refugees are often represented or called upon to "act as a humanitarian alibi that re-signifies the white saviour discourse" (393), Thúy reproduces the image of the white saviour in

the form of angels and pure white snow. The hyperbolic nature of her descriptions, however, suggests that Thúy is acutely aware of the ways refugee stories are expected to provide "a humanitarian alibi" (Fernando 393) that attests to white civility and re-scripts stories of refugee success as stories of refugee salvation and trauma for mainstream consumption.

In one scene of the novel, An Tinh performs in a "smoky lounge" (Thúy 136) for friends and strangers, regaling them with bits of her past "as if they were anecdotes of comedy routines or amusing tales from far-off lands featuring exotic landscapes, odd sound effects and exaggerated characterizations" (136). This scene bears resemblance to the scenes in *Cockroach*, where the narrator recounts for his therapist the types of exotic tales and characterizations he knows will excite her and satiate her appetite for sensationalized otherness and trauma. However, as Nguyen notes, An Tinh's "ethnic minstrelsy" not only caters to "the desires and expectations of a particular audience hungry for stories of trauma" but also allows her to create space between herself and her past, "rendering the traumatic past for herself in a particular way that can be accommodated by the present" (32). By putting on a spectacle of her pain, An Tinh can temporarily forget the pain of her past, and the pain of being racialized and "marked" as different: "When I sit in that smoky lounge, I forget that I'm one of the Asians who lack the dehydrogenase enzyme for metabolizing alcohol, I forget that I'm marked with a blue spot on my backside, like the Inuit, like my sons, like all those with Asian blood" (Thúy 136). There is comfort, even freedom, *Ru* suggests, to be found in the telling of a retelling of the types of stories audiences want to hear, insofar as such stories might enable the refugee storyteller to exercise control over who may, or may not, access the private spaces of her memory and experience.

This scene of ethnic minstrelsy operates, in many ways, as an overarching metaphor for *Ru*. After all, while *Ru* formally echoes the shape of water and memory, fluidly moving between

past and present, individual and collective, poetry and prose, the novel nonetheless follows a conventional trajectory of refugee suffering, salvation, and success. The refugee salvation story and refugee success story are often inextricable, as narratives of refugee success are obliged to follow a persecution-salvation story arc. In other words, the refugee success story must, in many ways, make visible the refugee's suffering for the "white gaze of white Western societies" (Fernando 394) to prove her right to salvation. As Fernando notes, Third World women are in particular "constructed in global refugee representations as hypervisible, abject victims, speechless and devoid of agency" (394). While An Tinh possesses a complex, albeit often muted agency and subjectivity, *Ru* nonetheless contains the kinds of graphic scenes of war and displacement readers have grown accustomed to and, indeed, expect from a refugee story. Fleeing Vietnam in an overcrowded boat, the narrator recalls experiencing a collective fear so acute it was "transformed into a hundred-faced monster who sawed off our legs and kept us from feeling the stiffness in our immobilized muscles" (Thúy 5). Darkness and horror accompany the Nguyen family's journey across land and sea until they finally reach the safe and welcoming shores of Canada. An Tinh recalls "rubb[ing] shoulders with flies" (25) in overcrowded refugee camps, where "gaping holes filled with the excrement of the camp's two thousand people" (17) constantly threaten disease and death. In one particularly gruesome scene of the novel, a woman literally drowns in shit, "her head plunging into a hole full of excrement" (Thúy 34). Unlike Thammavongsa, who invokes the abject as a site of struggle and solidarity in "Worms," Thúy represents no dignity in the abject. To be sure, there is a stark difference between the conditions of abjection depicted in each text. In "Worms," the abject operates within an economy of farm labour, where "shit of the earth" refers at once to practices of dehumanization, as well as biological processes of food production and fertilization—the matter of life. Contrarily, in *Ru*,

"shit" is a matter of death, at once emblematic of the dangerous and life-threatening conditions of the refugee camp and a literal site of death. The "flies, worms, and nauseating smells" (Thúy17) —the "shit" —these are things, the novel suggests, that no human being should have to endure.

The novel's representations of refugee life are not in and of themselves problematic. After all, refugees live, and die, in deplorable conditions every day. Moreover, Thúy's depictions of refugee life are rooted in historical reality: "For those who escaped [Vietnam], the dangerous journeys often involved illness, starvation, and death, and many boats encountered deadly storms and pirates, who plundered the passengers and raped women and children, on the South China Sea" (Nguyen 25). Thus, Thúy's portrayal of the immense suffering, loss, and violent uprooting of Southeast Asian people may hold true to her own experience, and the experiences of so many others. Where the problem lies, however, is in the ways the novel contrasts these hellish images of refugee life with paradisiacal images of Canada in ways that help resignify the white saviour discourse.[44] As Daniel Coleman argues, "whiteness in Canada is consistently preoccupied with shoring up, measuring, asserting, and reasserting itself by means of the discourse of civility" ("From Contented Civility" 222). Thúy's idyllic portrayal of Canada as not only a haven for refugees, but a heaven full of angels, endless skies, and the "unspeakable beauty of renewal" (Thúy 140), feeds into the discourse of white civility, and supplies Western audiences "hungry for stories of trauma" (Nguyen 32) with all the harrowing details they expect from a refugee story.

[44] Throughout *Ru*, Thúy invokes the language and imagery of Heaven and Hell to juxtapose the horrors of displacement with the hope of survival/arrival: "Heaven promised a turning point in our lives, a new future, a new history. Hell, though, displayed our fears: fear of pirates, fear of starvation…fear of never again setting foot on solid ground" (3-4).

Throughout *Ru*, Thúy repeatedly juxtaposes the horrors of refugee life with the happiness of immigration in ways that underscore refugee passivity, gratitude, and a lack of individual or collective agency. An Tinh, for example, fully attributes her personal and artistic development—the novel is, in many ways, a *künstlerroman*—to the generosity and plenitude of Canada, rather than to her own imagination, will, and labour. She credits Canada as the source of her creativity, claiming that she could not have written "this book" (Thúy 140) anywhere else: "Elsewhere, people are too preoccupied with their day-to-day survival to take the time to write their collective history" (38). The narrator praises the "majestic silence of great frozen lakes" and the "humdrum everyday life of peace" (100) in Canada for giving her the time, space, and inspiration to write her narrative. Indeed, the novel not only emphasizes Canada as a force of good in the world, but as an ideal space for individual and collective re-creation, a place of endless horizons and opportunity for success.

The inspiration and nurturing that Canada provides is further emphasized by Thúy's frequent use of maternal images and metaphors. An Tinh compares her first English teacher, Marie-France, to a "mother duck" who carefully watches over the refugees' "transplantation with all the sensitivity of a mother for her premature baby" (Thúy 9). Marie-France gives An Tinh her "first desire as an immigrant: to be able to sway my bum the way she did" (9). In contrast to the "opulence" and "generosity" of Marie-France's body—a metaphor for Canada's opulence and generosity—An Tinh and the other refugees possess bodies that are "all angular, bony, hard" (Thúy 9). An Tinh's "first desire as an immigrant" (Thúy 9) is, thus, to rid herself of Vietnamese body to enter into the collective body of Canada—an opulent, generous, and nurturing body. "This picture of a nurturing Canada," writes Nguyen, "neatly aligns with official state multiculturalism: it also rehearses the common belief in Canada's 'white civility'"

(24). Indeed, in these early scenes of arrival and resettlement, *Ru*'s refugees largely typify the passive and mute victims that have increasingly come to represent the 'good' kind of refugee—that is, the refugee that *deserves* Canada's hospitality by virtue of her silence and suffering. They are like infants, learning how to speak, eat, and exist (again) via the instruction and generosity of white strangers and the saving grace of the nation. Only here, the novel suggests, in this nation untouched by war and violence, can those who have lived so long in darkness be given back to light. Only here, on this "virginal" (Thúy 8) earth, can they be reborn.

**The Weight of Words and 'Waking' Lives**

Nonetheless, while An Tinh lavishes praise on Canada and the fount of inspiration it provides, she is, importantly, the author of her own life's story. Significantly, Thúy's portrait of a nurturing Canada is inextricable from the novel's representations of motherhood, female embodiment, and the endless cycle of death and rebirth. As the epigraph to the novel reads: "In French, *ru* means a small stream, and, figuratively, a flow, a discharge—of tears, of blood, of money. In Vietnamese, *ru* means a lullaby, to lull" (Thúy xi). Thúy signals the novel's meditation on the various forms and processes of reproductive life, and the fluidity of language across borders. The word *ru*, Thúy suggests, is intimately connected to the matter of life— "of tears, of blood, of money"—and provides the link, both tenuous and binding, between multiple homes and languages, bodies of blood and water, mothers and their children.

The novel fittingly begins with An Tinh recounting her birth amidst scenes of violence: "I came into the world during the Tet Offensive, in the early days of the Year of the Monkey, when

the long chains of firecrackers draped in front of houses exploded polyphonically along with the sound of machine guns" (Thúy 1). From the beginning of her life—and the onset of her narrative—An Tinh exists in the shadow of death. Three times she recalls her birth on the novel's first page, each to more vivid and violent effect: "I first saw the light of day in Saigon, where firecrackers, fragmented into a thousand shreds, coloured the ground red like the petals of cherry blossoms or like the blood of the two million soldiers deployed and scattered throughout the villages and cities of a Vietnam that had been ripped in two" (1). In her third and final incantation, An Tinh once again sets the scene of her birth against a backdrop of breathtaking beauty and unthinkable violence: "I was born in the shadow of skies adorned with fireworks, decorated with garlands of light, shot through with rockets and missiles" (1). This time, however, the narrator shifts from poetic language to plain speech: "The purpose of my birth was to replace lives that had been lost. My life's duty was to prolong that of my mother" (1).

The narrator subsequently reveals that her own name is but a mark away from her mother's: "My name is Nguyễn An Tịnh, my mother's name is Nguyễn An Tịnh. My name is simply a variation on hers because a single dot under the *i* differentiates, distinguishes, disassociates me from her" (Thúy 2). This distinguishing dot, the narrator explains, was obliterated by war and displacement, and with it, her sense of both collective and individual identity:

> The History of Vietnam, written with a capital H … flung the accents of our names into the water when it took us across the Gulf of Siam thirty years ago. It also stripped our names of their meaning, reducing them to sounds at once strange, and strange to the French language. In particular, when I was ten years old it ended my role as an extension of my mother. (Thúy 2).

The loss of the dot cuts the narrator off from her past in ways that carry into her present—and future. “Because of our exile,” she explains, “my children have never been extensions of me, of my history. Their names are Pascal and Henri, and they don’t look like me” (Thúy 3). An Tinh’s disconnection from her mother (and motherland) delays her own maternal connection to her white-skinned sons, “clamped onto my breasts as 3 a.m., in the middle of the night” (Thúy 3). She explains the “natural feelings of motherhood” only came to her “much later, over the course of sleepless nights, dirty diapers, unexpected smiles, sudden delights” (3). Like An Tinh’s own sense of emplacement in Canada, her ability to feel at home in motherhood occurs only after she earns, through a series of trials and small but vital acts of care, the right to those “natural feelings” (Thúy 3). The narrator’s process of becoming a mother is not only linked to her process of becoming a naturalized citizen, but also, importantly, deepens her connection to her past and mobilizes her process of healing. Only after carrying through the “course of sleepless nights [and] dirty diapers” (Thúy 33) does she “understand the love of the mother sitting across from me in the hold of our boat, the head of the baby in her arms covered with foul-smelling scabies” (33) and why many parents chose to murder their children rather than let them “be captured by Communists or pirates” (6) during the Vietnam War and its aftermath. An Tinh reveals that her own father planned to poison her and her siblings with cyanide pills should they have fallen into violent hands. “For a long time afterwards,” she writes, “I wanted to ask why he hadn’t thought of letting us choose, why he would have taken away our possibility of survival” (Thúy 6). Motherhood, however, puts a stop to this line of questioning: “I stopped asking myself that question when I became a mother” (6), the narrator states.

This is not the only instance in *Ru* where An Tinh ‘stops’ the story and makes space for silence. In fact, blank space is as prominent on the pages of *Ru* as the words themselves, and An

Tinh's narrative is characterized by sudden stops, shifts, and detours across space and time. As James argues, the novel's fragmented and non-linear construction formally echoes the "unavoidable moments of interruption, juxtaposition, and translation that constitute living in diaspora" (42). The detours, drifts, and wide-open spaces of *Ru* also formally gesture to the difficulties of representing refugee experience in words and revisiting sites of individual and collective trauma. Memory is fraught territory in *Ru*, as An Tinh must not only recall her own suffering, but also bear witness to the silence and suffering of those who "died anonymously" (Thúy 14) in open seas, mass graves, bombed-out cities, disease-ridden refugee camps. Words alone, the novel suggests, cannot account for such nameless suffering or hold the weight of so much history and violence. Each of the novel's vignettes—a French term that translates as "a little vine" (Buss 607)—are thus tenuously connected by sensory and formal details that mimic the winding and ephemeral nature of memory, whereby "a visual cue, a scent, or a turn of phrase connects each section of text to the preceding one, disrupting the reader's sense of time and simulating the ebb and flow of personal reminiscence" (Syms para. 3). These cues, scents, small details and turns of phrase allow the narrator to bear witness to the spaces and silences of the past—the oblivion—while forging paths to the present.

As Nguyen argues, the "conscious forgetting of a refugee past" can allow "the former refugee to exist in the present moment of success without mental torment, psychic split, and affective guilt or shame" (32). The spaces and silences of *Ru* thus signal Thúy's engagement with the "critical work of forgetting … that enables the 'post'-refugee subject to accommodate the profound contradictions, the existential ironies, and the complications that make daily life difficult or impossible to live" (Nguyen 32). If the blank spaces and conspicuous silences of *Ru* function as sites of refuge—where An Tinh can momentarily retreat from the weight of

insufficient words—they also pose a threat to the writing of her narrative, her source of healing and self-renewal. Words are An Tinh's link back to the present, her life raft, so to speak, across the wide-open seas and spaces of traumatic memory and oblivion that are necessary for her to revisit, and to leave behind.

Much critical attention has already been given to *Ru*'s form and the ways it represents traumatic memory. Helen Buss, for example, argues that *Ru*'s "short anecdotal style" mimics the "suddenness and quick movement of involuntary memory" (607) that often stems from experiences of trauma: "Traumatic memory is a common result of the refugee experience and can extend into the immigration and settlement that follows, even when that settlement experience is as successful as Thúy's has been in her real-life roles as seamstress, interpreter, lawyer, and restaurateur as well as wife and mother, and now writer" (607). Drawing on Jeanne Perrault's concept of *autography* as a gendered form of life writing, Buss suggests that traumatic memory may "form the core of what can become creativity … [and] shape the act of life writing" (607), particularly by women. She argues that the flashbacks and fragments of *Ru* help to shape and create Thúy's "present moment of her own 'auto' or self-in-progress while avoiding a dominant 'bio' that more traditional generic approaches would emphasize" (607). In so arguing, Buss foregrounds the importance and uniqueness—and, perhaps, subversive force—of refugee women's writing within the broader genre of migrant and refugee literature.

Nonetheless, by the novel's end, An Tinh's *autographical* narrative is largely subsumed by—or offered to—the "dominant bio" of the nation-state. The novel not only ends on a happy note but arrives at the apotheosis of refugee success where "all those individuals from [the narrator's] past have shaken the grime off their backs in order to spread their wings with plumage of red and gold, before thrusting themselves sharply towards the great blue sky"

(Thúy 140). In *Ru*'s conclusion, An Tinh awakens from the nightmare of her past to find her dreams fulfilled in Canada, "where the scent of a newly blown poppy"—a flower endemic to Asia—"is no longer a perfume but a blossoming: where the deep red of a maple leaf in autumn is no longer a colour but a grace" (Thúy 140). After invoking the well-worn image of a "phoenix reborn from its ashes" (140), Thúy invokes a "series of seemingly cliched nationalistic images" (James 61) that reinforce the idea of Canada as a haven and promise land for refugees. The maple leaf figures "a redemptive, hospitable 'grace'" (James 60), while the "scent of a newly blown poppy" gestures towards "newly blown" refugee and diasporic communities 'blossoming' into Canadian multicultural life.

On the one hand, the novel's ending culminates An Tinh's struggles to reconcile the past with the present and forge difficult and winding paths to healing and possibility. "As for me," she writes, "it is true all the way to the possibility of this book, to the moment when my words glide across the curve of your lips, to the sheets of white paper that put up with my trail, or rather the trail of those who have walked before me, for me" (Thúy 140). In this way, An Tinh positions the "possibility of this book" as rooted in the site of collective memory and experience, and following the routes of all those who have walked before her, for her. On the other hand, however, the novel's fantastical ending also caters to Western demands for refugee stories to function as "spectacle for white, mainstream consumption" (Nguyen 32) and for refugees themselves to 'let go' of any "attachments that cannot be reconciled into the colorful diversity of the multicultural nation" (Ahmed 158). While echoes of Vietnam can be heard (and seen) in the novel's "triumphant final note" (Nguyen 32)—the phoenix's "plumage of red and gold" is, for example, a direct reference to Vietnam's national colours—the final scene of *Ru* is one of hard-won but nonetheless happy assimilation. The refugees are no longer uncertain of their place in

Canada or traumatized by their past but have risen from the "poverty of refugee migrants to the socio-economic success of model minority citizens" (Nguyen 22), represented, in large part, as the result of the generosity of Canadian strangers and Canada's enduringly open arms. Indeed, the novel ends with the image of an "outstretched hand" that demonstrates the refugees have not only been welcomed into Canada, but also given a lasting place in this so-called peaceable nation, "where an outstretched hand is no longer a gesture but a moment of love, lasting until sleep, until waking, until everyday life" (Thúy 140).

In this way, the novel reproduces the persecution-salvation arc that stories of refugee success typically follow, and "easily lends itself to appropriation by revisionist, nationalistic, and neo-imperial forces" (Nguyen 18). However, *Ru* also resists this appropriation by constructing a form of gratitude that enables the refugee subject "who has had the stability of meaning pulled away" (Nguyen 24) to reconstruct a sense of self, identity, and home. Indeed, the "outstretched hand" that appears in the novel's final passage may embody problematic images of Canadian hospitality, but that "outstretched hand" is also that of the author's—writing, remembering, and sharing her story, "waking until everyday life" (Thúy 140).

### 2.2 "Bogus" Refugees and "Bloody Terrorists" in Carmen Aguirre's *Something Fierce*

Gratitude plays no part in Carmen Aguirre's *Something Fierce: Memoirs of a Revolutionary Daughter* (2011). Who has time for gratitude, after all, in a revolution? In her 2011 memoir, Aguirre, a prominent and outspoken theatre artist in Canada, recounts her experiences as a member of the underground Chilean resistance against Augusto Pinochet's military

dictatorship.[45] Her memoir traces her experiences of exile and resistance from childhood to adolescence, and follows her across multiple state lines: Canada, the US, Peru, Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile, Aguirre's homeland. Aguirre came to Canada as a Chilean refugee in 1974 but returned to South America in 1979 with her sister, mother, and stepfather. From 1979-1990, Aguirre was, as the title of her memoir suggests, embroiled in a "fierce" fight to free Chile from Pinochet's tyranny, and to usher in a new era of social, gender, and economic equality in Latin America. But by 1990, the "resistance had been spectacularly defeated" (Aguirre 267) and Aguirre was forced to return to Canada, her "heart heavy with defeat" (267). Unlike the apotheosizing ending of *Ru*, *Something Fierce* ends without triumph or success. The resistance has been "spectacularly defeated" (Aguirre 267), the return unwanted: "I wondered for the millionth time what the hell I was doing living in Vancouver" (267). The exile has returned to the "exile land" (16).

In many ways, *Something Fierce* is an anti-model minority story, offering a counterpoint to the gratitude expressed in *Ru*. Aguirre explicitly identifies Canada as a locus of pain, rather than a haven (or heaven) for refugees and immigrants. Unlike *Ru*, *Something Fierce* does not reproduce benign images of Canadian hospitality and immigrant happiness, or easily lend itself to "appropriation by revisionist, nationalistic, and neo-imperial forces" (Nguyen 18). Quite the opposite, in fact. If *Ru* reads like a "catalogue of gratitude" (Nguyen 23) that extols, among other things, the virtues of Canadian hospitality, *Something Fierce* is a defiant manifesto against the "imperialist North" (Aguirre 2) and the governing systems of power and patriarchy

[45] Aguirre has been an outspoken advocate for "fair representation when it comes to race" (qtd. in Pablo para. 7) in Canadian arts and theatre practices. In fact, Aguirre halted the first production of her semi-autobiographical play, *The Refugee Hotel*, at the Factory Theatre in 2003, criticizing the director for failing to cast Latino actors in the play's majority Latino roles. More recently, Aguirre sparked controversy by releasing a video polemic on "cancel culture" in Canadian theatre.

that displace, disappear, disenfranchise, and dehumanize refugees and other stigmatized and marginalized groups. In place of the grateful refugee, we find the refugee as powerful, courageous, and resistant—something fierce, that is. Aguirre rejects the popular construction of refugees as "politically impotent victims" (Bradley 102) and instead foregrounds the refugee as an agent of social and political change. Furthermore, she asserts an ongoing need to dismantle the borders of privilege and domination through individual and collective action and politically engaged art. In the last lines of her memoir, Aguirre invokes the famous words of the revolutionary icon, Che Guevara. The resistance has been defeated, the return unhappy, but the struggle for freedom and justice continues: "Hasta la victoria siempre. Until the final victory, always" (Aguirre 274).

**Canada Reads Refugees**

Published in 2011, *Something Fierce* became a national bestseller after winning the Canada Reads award in 2012. Unlike Thúy, however, Aguirre was not championed as a model immigrant in the discourse and publicity surrounding her book. On the contrary—one of the judges for that year's competition, Anne-France Goldwater,[46] publicly denounced Aguirre as a terrorist: "Carmen Aguirre is a bloody terrorist. How we let her into Canada, I don't understand" (qtd. in Lederman para. 5). Goldwater pointed to passages in *Something Fierce* where Aguirre describes

[46] Goldwater is a Canadian lawyer based in Quebec. She is best known for her role on *L'Arbitre*, a Quebec reality court show inspired by *Judge Judy*. I address Quebec's politics of immigration and 'accommodation' more fully in Chapter 5.

herself transporting ‘goods’ across state borders—namely between Bolivia and Chile—and expresses sympathy for controversial organizations and figures, such as Guevara and Salvador Allende. Aguirre was not Goldwater’s only target either. Goldwater also accused Marina Nefat of fabricating her refugee memoir, *Prisoner of Tehran*, in which Nefat recounts her imprisonment in Iran’s notorious Evin prison. According to Goldwater, “Marina Nefat—and it’s known to other prisoners; other prisoners who shared her experience—tells a story that’s not true and you can tell it’s not true when you read it” (qtd. in Lederman para. 5). Once again, Goldwater suggests, the proof is in the pages.

Notably, 2012 was the first year Canada Reads included non-fiction titles since the contest was established in 2002. In an article for the *Globe and Mail*, Barber asserts that “[i]n extending Canada Reads to include works of non-fiction … the CBC has inadvertently transformed a friendly, domestic literary debate into a geopolitical furor focused on volatile questions of truth and justice in distant totalitarian regimes” (para. 1). Canada Reads, however, has never merely been a “friendly, domestic literary debate.” As Laura Moss argues, Canada Reads has always functioned as an “instrument of cultural formation” and “purveyor of cultural values” (8). While the prize may not be “high on prestige,” the “economic and cultural spin-off is enormous” (Moss 8), as winning titles are all but assured commercial success and widespread readership. As Moss argues, the texts themselves are often relegated to the background of the Canada Reads debates, merely “pawns in a game” where the “entertainment value of the discussion takes precedence” over in-depth critical engagement: “With the watered-down aestheticism of the readings, most often it [is] the politics of the novels that is lost in the commentary on the texts” (8). Indeed, while in recent years, Canada Reads has adopted a more

political tone,[47] the *Survivor*-inspired format of the program continues to privilege entertainment over political engagement. Panelists and books are pitted against one another and voted "off the bookshelf" until only one book remains: the book all Canada should read.

Despite its entertainment factor, Canada Reads is a deeply, inextricably political "game." As Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo argue, the program's "engagement with the culture of spectacle and celebrity threatens to obscure the producers' nationalist project" (10) and the ideological and political work that Canada Reads performs. Of course, as Daniella Zanchi notes, "the ideological implications of and political motives behind a state funded and nationwide book program are not particularly subtle. After all, CBC's mandate includes a responsibility to 'safeguard, enrich and strengthen' the country's cultural sovereignty and to maintain a national identity" (565). However, while Canada Reads continues to play an important role in promoting national literacy and advancing the profile of Canadian literature domestically and internationally, its aim to protect "cultural sovereignty" and "maintain a national identity" often relies on an "uncritically multicultural" (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo 5) and ideologically conservative model of nation. In "The Culture of Celebrity and National Pedagogy," Smaro Kamboureli asserts that Canada Reads "reconstructs the nation in the political unconscious of the citizens by eliding certain parts of its history while foregrounding others" (47). In other words, the nation-building rhetoric of the program tends to champion mainstream ideals of Canadian multiculturalism and democracy, while glossing over histories of racism, discrimination, and

[47] In "Playing for Good: The Public Value of CBC's Canada Reads," Zanchi argues that the politics of race, class, and identity in Canada have been brought to the fore in recent seasons of Canada Reads: "The debates on and winners of Canada Reads, especially in seasons 2015-18, reflect an engagement with and a recognition of Canada's sociopolitical circumstances by arguing the value of their books based not only how they represent an issue but also on their relevance to current crises" (565).

exclusion. Even Goldwater, in her response to Nefat's request for an apology, justified her attacks on the author by appealing to popular (and anti-Muslim) notions about Canadian democracy and tolerance:

> I'm really sorry she's hurt, but that's part of what life is in Canada … In this country … we're not going to imprison you, we're not going to torture you, we're not going to bomb you and we're not going to assassinate you. In this country there is a difference of opinion, and if somebody just doesn't buy your story, they just don't buy their story. (qtd. in Lederman R3)

As Goldwater suggests, Nefat is not only a liar, she is also a sore loser, unable to understand the way "we" do things "in this country." Her message is clear: *if you don't like the way we do things in this country, go home.*[48]

Whether or not Goldwater's comments were made in earnest or as part of a publicity stunt for Canada Reads is largely irrelevant. If Canada Reads functions as a microcosm of national values and politics—and I am suggesting it does, albeit in deeply complicated ways—Goldwater's polemics should be understood in the context of larger narratives about "bogus" refugees and the controversial changes made to Canada's refugee determination system in 2012. After all, 2012 was not only a notable year for Canada Reads, but also for Canadian politics. In February 2012, the Harper government implemented Bill C-31, or the Protecting Canada's Immigration System Act. Bill C-31 proposed numerous changes to Canada's immigration and refugee policy "in line with the worldwide trend toward the securitization of

---

[48] It is important to remember that, as Zanchi points out, "celebrity panelists have skin in the game" (571) and that the "narratives produced by celebrity panelists when discovering the sociopolitical relevance of their book plays a significant role in creating space for counternarratives to emerge in response" (571). Aguirre, after all, won the 2012 Canada Reads award in spite of—or, perhaps, because of—the controversy surrounding her memoir.

asylum and the enhanced policing of borders" (Diop 68). The bill, which passed into Canadian law in December 2012, legalized measures of systemic refugee exclusion and represented a deliberate move to "bolster state sovereignty as the refugee regime increasingly moves towards a 'guilty until proven innocent' model" (Diop 68). Indeed, the language of Bill C-31 drew problematic links between refugee and criminal identities: "irregular arrivals" were linked to smugglers; failed claimants to "bogus" refugees. Moreover, Bill C-31 expanded Canada's immigration detention regime, and placed an increasing burden on refugee claimants not only to prove a "well-founded fear of persecution" but their very right to claim asylum. "[A]ny semblance of a fair refugee determination process," argues Diop, "transformed into an uncovering of those claimants who [were] 'bogus' and out to cheat the benevolent Canadian system" (68). Guilty until proven innocent; "bogus" until proven bonafide.

Kenney's formulation of the "bogus" refugee took hold of the Canadian imagination in 2012, as the then Minister of Citizenship effectively launched a smear campaign against refugees and migrants under the guise of national security and well-being. Via the vehicle of the "bogus" refugee, Kenney helped establish a "powerful narrative and moral theory" (Holtzer et al. 50) that most refugee claimants were seeking to manipulate the system. In this way, Kenney (as a spokesperson for the Harper government) justified the restrictive measures imposed by Bill C-31 on the refugee determination system, including mandatory detention, deportation, and the automatic and irreversible denial of claims for asylum from irregular migrants. The official rhetoric surrounding Bill C-31 drew a "causal story" (Holtzer et al. 49) between the rise of the "bogus" refugee and the urgent need for government intervention—both fictions of the contemporary neoliberal narrative on migration. Indeed, 2012 marked a notable shift in the

discourse of Canadian hospitality from helping those in need to "cracking down" on "bogus" refugees—terrorists and liars, that is.

The fact the Aguirre and Nefat's credibility and, to some degree, citizenship, were called into question during the 2012 Canada Reads debates speaks volumes about the efficacy of the discourse of the "bogus" refugee to mobilize fear and suspicion towards refugees and create a national "culture of disbelief" (Zimmermann 338). Credibility, after all, is the keystone of a refugee claim. Claimants must prove a "well-founded fear of persecution" in order to achieve refugee status in Canada, in part via testimonials of trauma. But how can a "bogus" claimant produce a credible narrative, a story the state will "buy"? Indeed, the rhetoric of the "bogus" refugee and the attendant policy changes to Canada's refugee determination system exacerbated the difficulties for claimants to prove a "well-founded fear of persecution." As Amy Shuman and Carol Bohmer identify, refugee testimonials of trauma are always "complicated by cultural differences, bureaucratic demands, and the challenges presented by a representation of trauma" (394). Moreover, a claimant's failure to represent personal traumatic experience in terms the state will 'buy' can have terrible consequences. While neither Aguirre nor Nefat were at risk of, say, deportation or detainment based on Goldwater's racist charges of fraudulence or "bloody" terrorism, the controversy surrounding their memoirs attests to the demand for refugees to tell certain kinds of stories that accord with cultural and political perceptions of what a refugee should look like, and how she should act.

Suffice to say, the refugee has come to occupy an increasingly precarious position within political and cultural realms. Thus, it is difficult to read the Canada Reads debates as merely a "friendly, domestic literary debate" gone awry. After all, Goldwater singled out Aguirre and Nefat for attack, the only immigrant *and* only female authors in the competition. Both

former refugees and racialized women, Aguirre and Nefat were effectively 'tried' on the truth of their memoirs, their credibility called into public question. Barber blames the "intensely personal, unverifiable" nature of their memoirs for the Canada Reads controversy, as they challenged readers to "re-imagine the clouded borderland between fact and fiction" (para. 3). But all the shortlisted titles that year were non-fiction—four out of five were, in fact, memoirs. Yet no one questioned how accurately Dave Bidini recounts his experiences touring with the Tragically Hip in *On a Cold Road* (1998), or Ken Dryden on the "unverifiable" details of his hockey memoir, *The Game* (1983).[49] There was no need: their 'Canadianness' was self-evident, inscribed in dominant racial and gendered norms of intelligibility and authorship. The "clouded borderlands between fact and fiction" (Barber para. 4) only became an issue for Aguirre and Nefat's refugee memoirs—texts that raise complicated questions about the ways in which refugees are constructed and 'read' as credible or non-credible in relation to dominant discourses and narratives about immigration, sovereignty, security, and nationhood.

**The Age(ncy) of the Refugee**

While the complex cultural, political, and economic dimensions of Canada Reads deserve further analysis, as too does the controversy surrounding Nefat's *Prisoner of Tehran*, I focus for the rest of this chapter on the ways *Something Fierce* disrupts "the refugee image" (Nguyen 32) to contest state narratives of hospitality and deeply entrenched systems of power and patriarchy. As

[49] John Vaillant's non-fiction book, *The Tiger*, was also a contender for the 2012 Canada Reads award. *The Tiger* was defended by Goldwater.

Said writes in *Reflections on Exile*, "the differences between earlier exiles and those of our own 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 the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration (138). *Something Fierce* reorients the exile/refugee as an "active shaper of her own life" (Behrman 38) and agent of history, irreducible to either a victim or a villain. In the epigraph, Aguirre signals her lack of interest in "the refugee thing" (20)—that is, in playing the part of the abject or grateful refugee for Western audiences. The epigraph is a poem from Cristina Peri Rossi's *State of Exile*, entitled "Valor," the Spanish word for courage.

Because courage, Aguirre suggests, is what refugees need—not gratitude. It takes courage to fight, and courage to take flight; it takes courage to live in exile. In *Something Fierce*, Aguirre identifies Canada almost exclusively with exile and exclusion. Canada is "the land of late-night janitor work, hand-me down Barbie dolls and Salvation Army clothes" (Aguirre 3), a place where people "sometimes crossed the street when they saw us coming, just because we were poor and brown" (50). Unlike Thúy, Aguirre directs an overtly critical gaze at the hostile dimensions of Canada's hospitality narrative and the colonial politics of recognition. Canada offers the Aguirre family no sense of belonging or frame of recognition: "In Vancouver, we and the few dozen Chilean families had been the only Latinos. That city, where you could buy tropical fruit in the dead of winter, was full of white people who kept their bodies and faces perfectly still when they talked" (Aguirre 2). Only after a young Carmen departs from Canada for South America does she discover how profoundly foreign she feels in "the exile land" (Aguirre 15).[50] On a layover in Los Angeles, en route to Lima, Carmen experiences a sense of

[50] In an interview with George Stroumboulopoulos, Aguirre distances herself from her protagonist when asked if she felt angry about being called a 'terrorist.': "No—I mean, [Goldwater] was talking about the book, she was

belonging and identification foreign to her since her family's resettlement in Canada: "At LAX, we were surrounded by the sound of Mexican-Spanish, and there were black people everywhere. For the first time in five years, I thought maybe I belonged somewhere" (Aguirre 2). This feeling, however, is short lived. Carmen's allegiances lie with the South, and the revolutionary politics of Latin America—politics antithetical to the capitalist and consumerist societies of the "imperialist North" (Aguirre 2). As she states, the "North was a forbidden place of belonging" (2).

Nonetheless, the fact that Carmen's brief glimpse of belonging "somewhere" occurs in a space of transition—that is, an international airport—signals Aguirre's critique of the liminal spaces and "forbidden place[s] of belonging" (2) engendered by imperial/colonial patriarchal power structures and contemporary citizenship regimes. As Susan Zimmermann argues, "[u]nlike other regulated forms of mobility, including formal economic migration, asylum has come to be seen as an uncontrolled 'back door' route to immigration" (332). For Zimmerman, the increased criminalization of migration relies on an assumption that there is a "high degree of 'abuse of the asylum system, and that true or false, bogus or genuine asylum seekers not only exist but that policies can be developed to address the alleged problematic kinds" (336). However, the criteria used to determine the "problematic kinds" (Zimmermann 336) of refugees and asylum seekers is itself problematic, as it fails to recognize the ways categories of migrants may overlap or differentiate. For example, an undocumented person could also be an asylum seeker, but not necessarily. As Christina Oelgemöller identifies, migrants in 'transit' countries—the countries in between their homelands and supposed destination—are overwhelmingly

talking about the person that was being portrayed in the book. She wasn't talking about me—the mother of the 5-year old son, the actor, the friend, the sister, the daughter, so no" (5:52-6:09). Like Aguirre, I refer to the protagonist as "Carmen."

assumed to be "'would-be asylum seekers' and are automatically understood as illegal" (408), whether there is any "evidential basis whatsoever" (408) of their intent to cross the border or claim asylum.

Sanctioned immigration, thus, is often framed as a matter of hospitality and moral prudence: "Legal migration has come to mean any movement of persons regarded as productive, efficient, and framed as a lawful act, whereas illegal migration already connotes any mobility which deviates from the norm" (Oelgemöller 409).[51] In other words, "good" refugees do not break the law, even when those laws are increasingly designed to deter people from seeking asylum and fail to account for the complexities of need, identity, mobility, and experience. Moreover, the dominant construction of migrants as "invisible, illegitimate or in need of humanitarian aid … leads to the assumption that they can be found, enumerated, and categorized" (Oelgemöller 408). However, in the opening scenes of *Something Fierce*, Aguirre suggests that migrant identities often resist categorization and are, crucially, subject to reinvention: "We were no longer exiles. We were a resistance family headed who knows where" (9). Through this simple declaration, Aguirre attests to the ungovernability and mobility of human agency, particularly in spaces of transit— "who knows where" (9). She asserts the capacity for refugees to redefine their identities beyond (or between) the realms of jurisdiction and the categorizations of bogus/bonafide. Furthermore, Aguirre signals the porous boundaries between the markers of identity and (de-)legitimizing frames of reference used by the state to find and 'fix' migrant identities in place. As the state increasingly labels

[51] In her semi-autobiographical play, *The Refugee Hotel* (2010), Aguirre satirizes and critiques the forms and limits of Canadian hospitality. See Sheila Rabillard's "Carmen Aguirre's *The Refugee Hotel* and the Space Between Limited and Unlimited Hospitality."

(and redefines) refugees and migrants in terms of illegality and criminality, Aguirre's reframing of her family from exiles to dissidents demonstrates the ways refugees can reshape and remake their identities—forging, in both senses of the word, a world without borders.

**Proof of Dissent**

Throughout *Something Fierce*, Aguirre attests to the necessity of breaking laws in the face of injustice and rigidly policed borders. In her role as a "revolutionary daughter"—a term that plays on multiple levels—Carmen engages in multiple criminal activities, from participating in underground meetings to smuggling "goods" across state borders to simply holding her political beliefs. As Aguirre writes, "if we were to keep people safe and transport goods across borders without being caught, we had to hold our beliefs inside" (58).
Torture, imprisonment, execution—these are the consequences of "being caught" (Aguirre 58). Disguise is, therefore, central to survival: "We had to look normal. Mainstream. We had to stand out for the right reasons from now, not the wrong ones" (Aguirre 17). The wrong clothes, the wrong accent, even the wrong game could alert the authorities to the "terrorists" in their midst. On a train bound for Chile, Carmen's sister, Ale, nearly exposes their chaperone as a member of the resistance:

> Ale had pulled a deck of cards from her bag and was shuffling them like an expert. "Señora Zamora, do you know the game Mao-Mao?" she asked Trinidad. I froze, because Ale had just put her foot in it. Mao-Mao was a game Trinidad had taught and anybody in the know would recognize it as one of the games, like Ho

> Cho Minh You're the Bomb and Run Ché Run, that had been invented by political prisoners to pass the time in concentration camps. (Aguirre 61).

While Ale's error passes by unnoticed by the other passengers on the train—among them "at least one informer" (61)—the scene indicates the constant vigilance needed to maintain the "little world of façades we'd built to keep going" (272), the deception integral to survival.

Carmen learns the price of resistance early on. The "scars and broken bodies" (Aguirre 7) of her family members and fellow refugees bear witness to the horrors of Pinochet's regime: "Lots of our friends in Vancouver had come straight from detention centre in Chile. They'd arrived with crooked spines, missing an eye or their balls or nipples or fingernails" (7). Some costs are less visible, like the way her family was "broken forever" (Aguirre 4) by exile: "My mother and father had gotten a divorce, joining so many other Chileans whose marriages had not withstood exile" (3). People disappear from Carmen's life—and from the pages of Aguirre's memoir—with disarming frequency. Sometimes they return; most often not (and those who return are often unrecognizable). In this way, Aguirre evokes "Pinochet's disappeared": the countless men, women, and children abducted, detained, tortured, and murdered by the regime, their bodies disposed of in "unmarked holes" and remote locations where they were (and still are, to some extent) unlikely to be found. To this day, Chile continues to mourn "those who never grew old" (Aguilar 413) under Pinochet's regime, the dead and disappeared of the nation's narrative of horror and trauma. Aguirre's memoir, thus, works to commemorate the innumerable and unenumerated lives disappeared by state apparatuses of power and violence, whether in unmarked graves, unwritten histories, or unknown spaces of trauma.

In *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth recalls Freud's theory of trauma to explore the relationship between truth and narratives of trauma. Trauma, Caruth argues, is "much more than

a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded trauma: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (4). Carmen herself begins to disappear as she starves herself "thinner than a ghost" (Aguirre 153) to cope with the weight of constant vigilance and The Terror[52] that surrounds her: "My bones protruded all over the place. I ate only once or twice a day, and tiny portions at that. Sometimes I wouldn't eat at all and would just subsist on tea" (153). She begins to compulsively clean, obsessing over the smallest detail out of place, the tiniest speck of dirt on her aggressively bleached floors—a gesture towards white-washed histories and systems of racialized exclusion/expulsion, as well as exilic projects of making home. In Carmen's view, her self-destructive and compulsive behavior is a testament of the "inhuman demands" placed on her (merely a "teenager fucking up all over the place") to commit to the resistance "body and soul" (Aguirre 272). As she states: "[w]e lived in a state of terror, and it was unrevolutionary to feel it, let alone speak of it" (272). On one occasion Carmen attempts suicide: "I sawed through the skin on my left wrist. The blood appeared immediately. I continued to cut" (Aguirre 166). Afterwards, she pleads with her stepfather, Bob: "I want us to go home" (166). She is unsure, however, what she means by home: "Vancouver, Bolivia or Chile? I wouldn't have known the answer" (166).

Indeed, Carmen cries out like a "wounded animal" after cutting her wrist, failing to recognize her own voice: "My voice was new to me" (Aguirre 166). Her self-inflicted wounds make visible the wounds in her psyche and tell "the story of a wound that cries out" (Caruth 4) in

---

[52] As Aguirre states in her interview with Stroumboulopoulos, terror is a prominent theme in *Something Fierce*: "What it's like to live in a state of terror, 24 hours a day." Carmen, accordingly, names this climate of constant fear and dread "The Terror."

anguish and exile. Yet Carmen remains unable to fully articulate or identify the source of her trauma or reconcile her self-destructive behavior with her desire to "go home" (Aguirre 166). Where, after all, is home? For Caruth, the truth of trauma "cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language" (4). Throughout *Something Fierce*, Aguirre indicates that trauma takes on many forms and expressions, often outside narrative frames of recognition: a body starved dangerously thin, a voice unrecognizable, a compulsive desire to return home—wherever home may be. In so doing, Aguirre draws attention to the profound difficulties of narrating trauma in intelligible and recognizable ways. Moreover, she raises questions about the role of testimony in traumatic witnessing and historical memory, and the artist's duty to "be ruthless" in "pursuit of the truth"[53] (Aguirre 42), however elusive or dangerous the truth may be. How can personal testimony attest to collective suffering? How can the artist account for the unaccountable? Speak the unspeakable? What *lies* in truth?

In her work on refugee and migrant theatre, Julie Salverson argues that the "performance of testimony" is often "caught in an aesthetic of injury and an overly simplistic 'standing in' for another" (35). Such performances, she argues, "reinscribe a victim discourse that sustains the psychic residues of violent histories, codifying the very powerlessness they seek to address" (35). While trauma plays a key role in *Something Fierce*, Aguirre rejects an "aesthetic of injury" (Salverson 35) that complies with demands for refugees to appear powerless and forever beholden to the host nation. Not only does Aguirre overtly criticize white-washed ideals of

[53] At a school in Bolivia, Carmen listens to her art teacher lecture on the duty of the artist to tell the truth: "The artist must be ruthless in his pursuit of the truth, he said, and when he found the truth, he must utter it with love and beauty, whatever the danger involved. 'An artist who does not risk his art and himself is to be pitied'" (Aguirre 42). This scene functions as a kind of meta-commentary or "Artist's Statement" on *Something Fierce*, as it reflects Aguirre's engagement with the truth that lies in the artifice of memoir, the unreliability of memoir, and the coercive and performative power of narrative.

Canadian hospitality throughout *Something Fierce*, she also frames her psychic and physical trauma as acts of resistance and solidarity. Her anorexic behaviour recalls the 1977 hunger strike against forced disappearance that took place inside the United Nations headquarters in Santiago, Chile—a strike predominantly mobilized by women. Her obsession with cleanliness, which manifests during her time in Argentina, is a form of protest against the country's rigid borders of gender, class, and race: "I was ashamed to be mestiza in a country full of whites" (Aguirre 48). Indeed, Carmen 'acts out' in ways that both embody and resist patriarchal and imperialist systems of domination and control, and the limits imposed on marginalized bodies and identities.

Aguirre's overt descriptions of female sexuality and pleasure, for example, not only underscore the patriarchal dimensions of Pinochet's regime, but also the ways in which gender and sex can operate as sites of political resistance. Carmen is repeatedly labelled a "slut" for her self-described role as the "kissing queen of the lane and alleys" (Aguirre 83); however, her sexuality is never portrayed as a source of personal shame. It is, however, a source of risk. Despite her family's progressive politics on gender and sex education — her mother, Mami, for example, insists that her daughters call "the private parts of the body by their proper names" (Aguirre 10)—Carmen risks exposing her family's identity and political beliefs simply by engaging in intimate and sexual acts with members of the social and economic underclass. Not only does Carmen defy patriarchal demands for female chastity, she also draws attention to the ways in which gender and sex are inextricable from structures of class and race: "If a maid was impregnated by one of the males of the house she'd get fired and thrown into the street, and then what?" (Aguirre 38). Aguirre is unequivocal about the ways

revolutionary politics must account for issues of gender and sex, and actively confront the "sexist fucking pigs" (142) of authoritarian and patriarchal systems.

Sex—that is, consensual, pleasurable sex—rarely features in mainstream refugee narratives, as it does not accord with the construction of refugees, specifically refugee women, as pure victims. Of course, gender is a "major factor in global human rights violations" (Denzongpa and Nichols 130) and female and non-normative migrant identities are more likely to experience "very limited bodily autonomy" (130) and sexual violence under oppressive regimes and in spaces of transit. However, while testimonials of sexual violence may indeed hold true to a refugee's experience, they also form part of the "aesthetic of injury" (Salverson 35) refugees are expected to perform for mainstream audiences. Sex trafficking, slavery, violence, forced marriage, rape—these are the kinds of violent and sensational details demanded from women's refugee narratives as they underscore the passivity of the refugee, and the progressive gender politics of Western nations.

Aguirre does not play to these expectations. Instead, she foregrounds female sexual agency and represents a female alliance fighting for equality and bodily autonomy. As Carmen explains, "My mother said I could make love anytime I wanted to but there was one condition: I had to be on the Pill" (Aguirre 740). Even Carmen's virgin aunts—who are known to masturbate to portraits of Pinochet—identify the need for female bodily autonomy and escape from patriarchal control: "My great-aunts Milagros, Remedios, and Perlita had make a blood pact back then to remain virgins, so that no man would ever control their lives. Their pact also required them to make a fortune" (Aguirre 66). While ardent supporters of Pinochet's regime, the aunts nonetheless embody the ways economic power can afford female agency and mobility within patriarchal systems of control. No female in *Something Fierce* is portrayed as passive,

regardless of how heinous her politics may be. All are actors in a theatre of war and revolution, prepared to die for the resistance, or "defend their riches at gunpoint" (Aguirre 66).

Indeed, one of the primary ways Aguirre resists a victimizing "aesthetic of injury" (Salverson 35) is by calling attention to her memoir as performance—a dramatic *act*. Like *Ru*, *Something Fierce* is a *künstlerroman* that traces the author's development as an artist along with her story of exile and trauma—and, in Aguirre's case, political dissidence. Through theatre, Carmen learns how to "play the verb *convince*" (130), to play the part of the middle-class, Canadian-born and altogether 'normal' teenager. After all, the Aguirre family must keep up the 'façade' at all costs. In the opening of *Something Fierce*, Aguirre recalls a conversation between her mother and sister:

> "What's a façade?" Ale asked. Ronald McDonald spied on us from the balloon bobbing above her head.
>
> "A façade is when you make up a story because it's dangerous to tell truth," Mami said. "It's a story you make up when you're involved in something bigger than yourself and you don't want to risk your life or the lives of others." (Aguirre 4)

Ale, however, is not content with her mother's answer: "You mean a façade is when you tell a big fat lie" (Aguirre 4), she responds. This scene not only signals Aguirre's exploration of the blurred lines between fact and fiction in *Something Fierce*, but also raises compelling questions about the complex relationship between telling truth and "big fat lies" (Aguirre 4) in processes of refugee determination. After all, a refugee claimant's well-being (and perhaps life) hinges on her ability to produce a compelling narrative of trauma and persecution, which may prompt her to embellish, conceal, or even fabricate elements of her story: "Regardless of the refugee

applicant's genuine need for protection, it is his or her narrative that is adjudicated and that must meet the standards of plausibility, coherence and consistency" (Vogl 82). But how is plausibility measured, and truth decided? How can the refugee *convince*?

It is not enough, after all, to simply *be* a refugee: claimants must play the part of 'the refugee.' As Vogl argues, refugee testimonies are not only evaluated on how well they establish the claimant's fear of persecution, but also on how well they "constitute and reflect the non-citizen subject whom refugee-receiving states are willing to accept" (82). Christopher Kyriakides similarly argues that claimants must supply narratives that attest to their roles as "'non-threatening victims of high risk non-Western regimes' if they are to be granted recognition in a securitized culture of (mis)trust which simultaneously signifies refugees as potential carriers of non-Western risk'" (933). In simpler terms, the refugee claim process relies on the assumption that claimants' stories—and, increasingly, their bodies, a point I discuss in Chapter 4—should provide credible and unambiguous proof of their victimhood in ways that buttress narratives of Western civility and foreign persecution.

As such, refugee claimants may feel pressure to alter, "make up," or even appropriate their stories to satisfy the state's demand for compelling, credible testimony. As Michael Helm identifies in an interview for his 2011 novel, *Cities of Refuge*, "[e]ven a claimant who has a legitimate story that should give them refuge might be tempted to tell a better one to give them a better shot at [asylum]" (318). In *Cities of Refuge*, Helm explores, in part, the complex intersections between fact and fiction in Canada's refugee determination system, and the challenges that refugees face to tell the truth within limited spheres of representation. In one scene of Helm's novel, a refugee claimant acknowledges that she "had her own history to tell, but wanted a better one" (Helm 26).

But a “better” story is not necessarily a “bogus” one. The truth of trauma or persecution may reside beyond the page (or the performance) in spaces in-between recognition, articulation, and knowing. As Yến Lê Espiritu notes, “the messiness, contingency, and precarious nature of refugee life means that refugees, like all people, are beset by contradiction: neither damaged victims nor model minorities, they—their stories, actions and inactions—simultaneously trouble and affirm regimes of power” (2). Fear, success, failure, trauma, persecution, gratitude, alienation, resistance—these are all part of the ‘refugee experience.’ Both *Ru* and *Something Fierce*, thus, challenge readers to rethink the role of the refugee in political and narrative realms, signalling the multiple, incomplete, and fragmented nature of refugee experience and the vast heterogeneity of refugee identity. Is she grateful or recalcitrant? Powerless or powerful? “Bogus” or genuine? As Thúy and Aguirre suggest, she is both, and neither: such binary categories cannot contain the contradictions and complexities of refugee life.

# CHAPTER 4: BODIES

In Francisco Fernando Granados's performance installation, *I have only ever been a lover in English* (2010/11), spit tells the story of a journey. Granados stands in front of a small group of spectators, his tongue tracing a line across a white gallery wall. He is barefoot. His back faces the audience. He follows a set of instructions:

> press tongue against the wall
> salivate
>
> move slowly across the space
> the tongue draws a line
>
> ("I have only")

The tongue—an instrument of speech and sense, of expression and exploration—moves "slowly across the space," its journey documented only by the traces of saliva that are left behind on the gallery wall. As the spit dries, the story of a journey disappears. There is evidence of movement, but it is invisible to the naked eye—just a trace of DNA left on a wall, a "haunting relic. A ruin. Saliva. Dust" (Granados, "Artefact" 130).

Granados is a Guatemalan Canadian performance and multimedia artist, writer, migrant rights activist, and former refugee. Part of his *spatial profiling* and *contact studies* series, *I have only ever been a lover in English* debuted shortly after Granados was granted Canadian

citizenship.[54] As Granados explains, the installation "came about in the context of a series of formal studio explorations where I would press my body on different kinds of architecture and look for ways to leave traces" ("Re: Recent Performance") By producing and leaving behind enigmatic traces of his body on multiple structures in both private and public spaces, Granados attempts to disrupt the codes of intelligibility and knowledge that reduce refugees to silent victims or spectacles of otherness. As the word 'trace' implies both movement and stasis—that which is tracked, as well as that which is left over—Granados's performances attest to the ways that refugees often exist on the thresholds of recognition, at once invisible and hyper-surveilled, absent and present, "visible without being knowable" (August 68).

In an age where citizenship is celebrated as the "authentic political identity" (Nyers, *Rethinking Refugees* 2), the non-citizen (or the subject whose citizenship is called into question) constitutes the "shadow of the bona fide citizen of the nation-state" (Camacho-Light, 2). Her body is surveilled, but not recognized. Her identity is scrutinized, but not sanctioned. For the non-citizen—the refugee, the asylum seeker, the undocumented or 'illegal'—visibility is often a site of peril and risk, as border technologies work to apprehend and (un)authorize unknown bodies. Indeed, the politics of visibility are inextricable from the politics of space and the power relations that determine who can appear and in what ways. But if, as Xavier Marquez argues, "visibility always constrains as well as empowers" (10), the ways in which refugees choose to appear (or disappear) in public and virtual spaces has the power to resist the dominant and often limited frameworks of representation available to them. As "every discussion of politics or aesthetics must take up at some point the question of representation" (Limbu 258), it

[54] Granados first performed *I have only ever been a lover in English* as part of *Revisiting Ephemera*, a graduate conference and exhibition held at the ArtLab Gallery at Western University from January 10-15, 2011.

is necessary to examine the forms of representation that are ‘authorized’ the refugee in discursive, political, visual, and aesthetic realms.

Until now, I have focused on representations of refugees and migrants in Canadian literature and life-writing. In this chapter, however, I go ‘off the page’ to examine Francisco-Fernando Granados’s performance art in relation to the spectacle of suffering that surrounds refugees and ‘refugeedom.’ As such, I turn from the page to the stage—more particularly, the stage of the body—to explore the role of the “surveillable refugee body” (Lemberg-Pederson and Haioty 607) in contemporary citizenship and security regimes. As the “very foundations of performance art speak to, of and from the dynamics of power, oppression, and the traumatized body” (S. Oliver 122), I analyze select performances and installations by Granados for the ways in which they ‘speak back’—often without words—to the systems and technologies of power and oppression that seek to disappear, detain, and discipline the refugee body. Because the suffering body is increasingly seen, as Fassin argues, as proof of the refugee’s “right to life” (“Compassion and Repression” 371), the body that does not visibly suffer is often viewed as illegitimate, suspicious, criminal—in any case, undeserving of human rights. In what ways, then, are refugees called upon to prove their right to life, or what Fassin terms “biolegitimacy” (“Another Politics” 49)? How does the refugee body become a site of spectatorship and knowledge? How does the spectacle of refugee suffering mobilize or stall humanitarian responses to the global refugee crisis? How do we watch? How can we witness?

In the previous chapter, I invoke Salverson’s argument that refugees are frequently expected to reproduce an “aesthetic of injury” (35) in their performances of testimony. While I have already examined the demand for refugees to appear powerless and pitiable in my analysis of Hage, Thammavongsa, Thúy, and Aguirre’s respective texts, the anti-testimonial

and abstract nature of Granados's art allows for further examination into the ways the politics of looking and recognition transform refugees into "easily consumable spectacle" ("Reciprocal Gazing" 31). In his artistic practice, Granados rejects an "aesthetic of injury" to advocate for what he calls a "two-way gaze" or "reciprocal gazing" (32)—that is, an ethics of witnessing that foregrounds mutual recognition and inter-relationality. As Granados writes, "[w]hen the dominant paradigms of nationalism and capitalism fail to recognize the humanity of those who are not legible within its structures, this kind of recognition provides not only an important political statement, but a necessary means of validation" ("Reciprocal Gazing" 32).

As the politics of looking are inextricably entwined with the politics of recognition, I explore in the first part of this chapter the relationship between image and the production of identity. I read Granados's *spatial profiling* and *apostrophe* series alongside a discussion of the ways in which images (mis)direct our understanding of the Other within normative frameworks of recognition. Accordingly, I read the most iconic image of refugee suffering in recent years—the photograph of Alan Kurdi, dubbed the "Boy on the Beach"—as well as famous photographs of Omar Khadr. While Khadr is not a refugee, his extended exile/expulsion from Canada and recent rebranding as a model Canadian citizen allows for further analysis of the 'dual face' of the stranger in the popular imagination: victim or villain, human or subhuman.[55] As Marquez argues, human identities are formed by the ways in which they become or are made visible: "Who we are depends on where we are seen . . . The significance of our existence and activity is confirmed

[55] Allison Mackey uses the metaphor of indigestion to explore Khadr's liminal position in Canada, arguing that he represents an "inassimilable figure…neither successfully assimilated nor 'excreted' by the state" (157). See "Troublesome Indigestion: The 'Return' of Omar Khadr and Post-Racial Politics of Citizenship in Canada."

by others who are watching us from multiple perspectives" (7, 19). Images, thus, play a key role in determining human or subhuman identities, and photographs of the refugee crisis, which overwhelmingly illustrate refugee suffering and abjection, actively produce the social imagination of refugees as either the "dangerous outsider" or "vulnerable outsider" (Georgiou and Zaborowski 3). The binary imagination of "good" or "bad" refugees often displaces these people from their unique historical, political, and cultural contexts, and transforms them into spectacular image-objects. As the French philosopher Guy Debord asserts, "the spectacle is the acme of ideology, for in its full flower it exposes and manifests the essence of all ideological systems: the impoverishment, enslavement, and negations of real life" (67). With Debord's theory of spectacle in mind, I consider how Granados challenges spectacles of refugee suffering and Otherness and advocates for an ethics of witnessing that recognizes the inherent value of life beyond normative frames of representation.

In the second half of this chapter, I analyse Granados's *The Ballad of ____ B* and *Artefact* to further consider the ways Granados uses an aesthetics of absence and trace to challenge the "exclusionary mechanisms of identity-production" (Klein and Kothari 1) that seek to govern and control the refugee body. Not only does the presence or absence of documents such as passports, permits and identity cards regulate the movement of people across borders, but the state's increasing reliance on biometrics to "assign identities to people and ascertain their associated rights as citizens or non-citizens" (Klein and Kothari 1) has rendered the body a site of truth and evidence. These technologies of security and surveillance are themselves a manifestation of the state's increasing power over the politics of life, whereby the state decides "the sort of life people may or may not live" (Fassin, "Another Politics" 49). In my reading of *The Ballad of ____ B* and *Artefact*, I thus argue that Granados displaces the body from naturalized biological

and cultural determinisms to call for a re-examination of the refugee or non-citizen as a figure of irreducible complexity and incommensurability—neither a spectacle of suffering nor corporeal dataset. Through his use of abstraction, absence, and bodily or visual trace, Granados critiques the normative codes and technologies of intelligibility used to control mobility, and gestures towards the indelible and ineradicable forms of identity that exist on the peripheries of recognition.

## 4.1 Tracing the Face: Abstracting the Self and Other in Francisco-Fernando Granados's Art

What is intimate is the face and never the refugee.

— Yousif Qasmiyeh, "If this is my face, so be it" 121

In 2016, Granados took part in a group exhibition at the Hessel Museum of Art in the Center for Curatorial Studies and Art in Contemporary Culture at Bard College in Annandale-on-Houston, New York. The exhibition, entitled *Standard Forms*, was curated by Christian Camacho-Light and featured works by Granados, VALIE EXPORT, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Julio César Morales, Robert Morris, Ulrike Müller, and Martha Rosler. As part of *Standard Forms*, Granados performed *spatial profiling*, a durational performance[56] and site-specific drawing in which he repeatedly traces the outline of his profile on a blank wall—once again with his back turned

[56] Sometimes referred to as "endurance art," durational performances are a form of performance art that take place over extended periods of time.

toward the audience—until his profile is "abstracted in space" and "all perceivable identity has been lost in line" (Camacho-Light 31). He follows a set of instructions:

> face touches wall
>
> repeatedly outline profile using mark-making tool
>
> move through space
>
> abstract pattern results
>
> ("Spatial Profiling" 58)

In *spatial profiling*—a title that evidently plays on the term (and practice of) racial profiling—Granados explores the ways in which "the body can mobilize its agency" ("Spatial Profiling" 58) beyond the limits of perception and knowability. Like the spit left on the walls to dry in *I have only ever been a lover in English*, all that attests to the presence of a body in *spatial profiling* is a trace, an outline of a face—indeed, of multiple faces, intersecting and overlapping. The face is displaced, obscured, made ambiguous. "In place of a figure," observes Camacho-Light, "we find a blank, a trace, and outline. Form emerges as a politics which inhibits the standardizations and ontological capture of the non-citizen by the nation state. And yet, the body can be glimpsed between the lines and from the edges, though remaining inapprehensible and just out of frame" (Wall text). In *spatial profiling*, the act of repetition becomes a way to both conceal and allow for the emergence of identity and difference across space and time: "[t]he pattern that emerges

not only points toward past iterations, but also begins to slip away, to be both an iteration and a process of differing" (Granados qtd. in Orlowski).

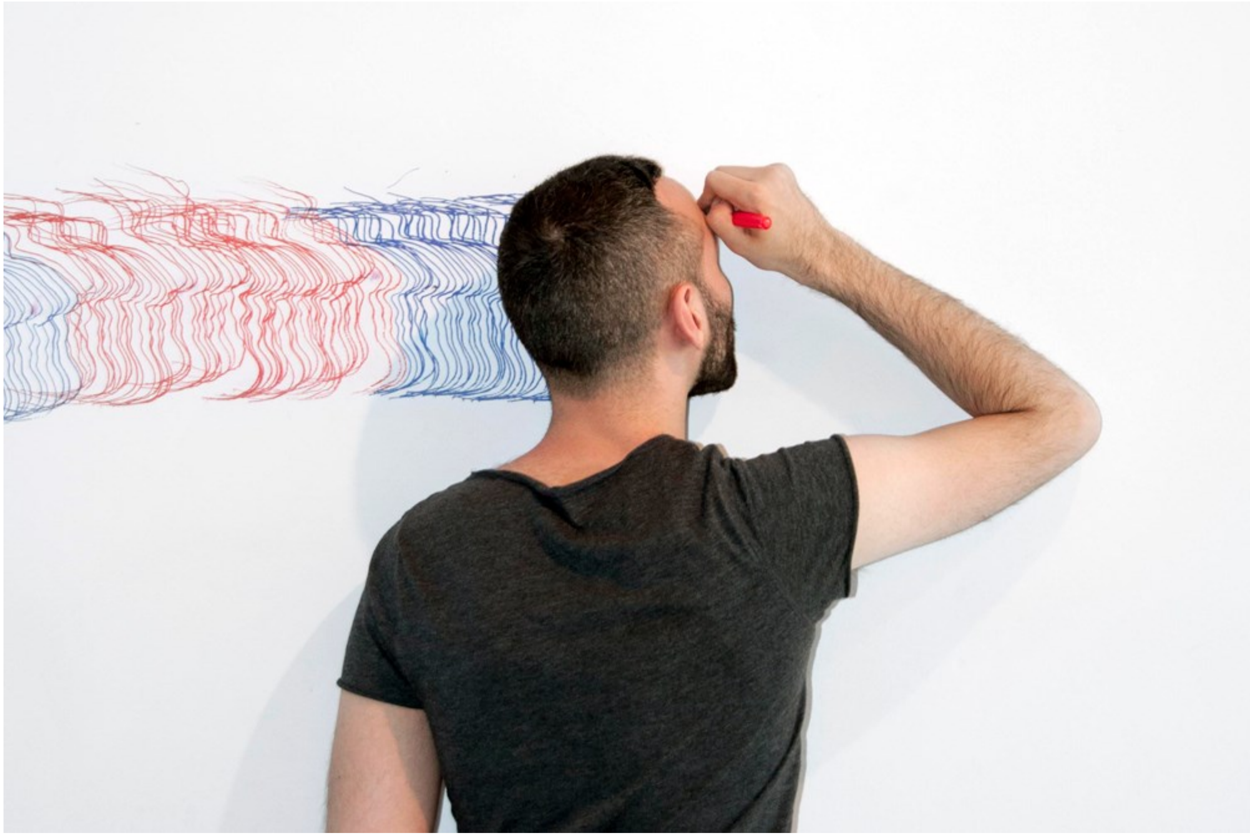

**Fig 1:** ***spatial profiling***

The impulse towards abstraction in Granados's work aligns with a growing trend in contemporary refugee art that eschews mimetic forms of representation to critique state technologies of surveillance and confront stereotypes of refugees as lacking "visibility, agency, and rational speech" (Nyers, *Rethinking Refugees*, xv). All the artwork showcased in *Standard Forms* focused, to one degree or another, on issues of citizenship, movement, and the politics of recognition, prioritizing "the abstract, the non-figurative, and the indexical over mimetic representations of the human body" (Camacho-Light para. 1). As Camacho-Light explains in the exhibition text to *Standard Forms*,

> Historically, art and social practices directed toward the exposure of human rights violations have maintained an investment in the politics of visibility, thus turning to the photograph, the documentary, and forms of mimetic representation as their methodologies of choice. The unidirectional vector of viewing that this formulation may impose, however, often fixes the subject of this image as an object instead, overdetermining from without and negating individual agency. (4-5)

In his own words, Granados aims in his artistic practice to "create a visual manifestation of the circumstances that shape the lives of refugees without rendering the experience of those who participate as easily consumable spectacle" ("Reciprocal Gazing" 31). By refusing to face his audience and rendering his profile ambiguous in *spatial profiling*, Granados disrupts the "unidirectional vector of viewing" (Camacho-Light 5) that fixes the refugee as an object of pity or fear and instead "demand[s] that onlookers consider whether they are invited to watch and how they are implicated in what they see" (Dawson, "The Refugee's Body" 59). Moreover, as many of Granados' performances take place in total silence, audiences are denied the catharsis of a clarifying narrative, and are left with only traces and gestures towards meaning— vague instructions and ambiguous profiles; lines that blur into one another; the bewildering sight of a barefoot man licking a gallery wall.

The politics of looking are paramount to Granados's work. While all performance art operates, in a broad sense, as spectacle (insofar as performances are meant to be *seen*), the fact that most of Granados's performances are conducted in silence and do not include explanatory text invites a reading of his work as anti-spectacle. Indeed, as Dawson notes, Granados rarely reveals to his audiences that his performances are "explicitly or overly concerned with refugees"

("The Refugee's Body" 61), to the effect that audiences "may not identify the work as having to do with refugees" or "be aware that they are seeing performance art and thus may not even construe themselves as part of an audience" (59). Certainly, this raises questions about the efficacy of Granados's art, and, as Dawson underscores, "any study of his work needs to raise the question of 'performance efficacy,' what Baz Kershaw calls the potential to 'influence, however minutely, the general evolution of wider social and political realities" ("The Refugee's Body" 59). Yet the level of audience awareness largely depends on where Granados performs—that is, whether he performs in public or private spaces. Gallery goers will, for example, automatically understand their positioning as audience more clearly than people who encounter Granados's work by chance in public spaces—for example, the back alleys and entrance ways of Vancouver.[57] Nonetheless, in either case (or space), self-aware spectators and unwitting passersby alike are included in his performances by virtue of encountering, however momentarily or accidental, the trace movements or still forms of his body. In doing so, Granados shifts the usual power dynamics and demarcations of space that typify conventional performances, wherein the stage acts as a border between audience and performer. The border is, instead, wherever the body is, whatever the body has left behind.

Abstracting borders is a feature of Granados's work, whether it be the borders of space, language, embodiment, subjectivity or identity. Given his interest in constructing a "two-way gaze," it is crucial to remember that "borders and bordering technologies are not always rendered

[57] To protest the 2010 Vancouver Olympics, Granados performed *Stillness Studies*, a durational performance wherein Granados stood still for days in doorways "that led from public to private spaces, silently forcing passersby to 'negotiate their relationship to [his] body'" (Dawson, "The Refugee's Body" 55). See Dawson's "The Refugee's Body of Knowledge: Storytelling and Silence in the work of Francisco Fernando-Granados."

visible" (Klein and Kothari 2), that they too may escape perception or recognition, and are subject to interpretation. As Elise Klein and Uma Kothari argue,

> [B]ordering technologies are exclusionary and affective mechanisms that are perceived and conceived by people in different ways for instance through the separation and othering of gendered, racialized, colonized and indigenous bodies. Thus, bordering processes and practices produce and maintain subjective but at the same time distinguish between those who belong and those excluded or considered strangers. (2)

Even in his gallery-based performances, Granados blurs the borders between audience and performer. In *spatial profiling*, for example, Granados encircles the gallery space as he repeatedly outlines his profile, thus demanding his audience continuously readjust their vantage points. By encircling the gallery space, Granados also encircles his audience. The audience stands in the center of the performance space, too preoccupied with the strange image in front of them—*what I am looking at? What does it mean?*—to recognize that they are slowly and silently being surrounded by a 'sea' of faces, at once distinct and indistinguishable. In this way, Granados alludes to the ways in which the 'refugee crisis' is repeatedly, albeit erroneously, cast as a problem of somewhere else.

As Macklin writes, "[m]any critics of refugee regimes in western nations are quick to admit that there are millions of 'real' refugees in the world today. These refugees, however, are necessarily elsewhere, suffering quietly and passively in squalid camps far away in places like Afghanistan, Ghana, Tanzania, and Iran" (369). By encircling his audience, in effect enclosing them in a mass of faces/abstract patterns, Granados rejects the idea that 'real' refugees only exist

in foreign places and spaces. Rather, he suggests, *we are here, in your midst*; everyone is always already in relation.

All this is said, of course, without words. After all, when it comes to representations of refugees, the image supersedes the word. As Liisa Malkki observed in 1996, "[t]he first thing to be noted about the mutual relationship between image and narrative, spectacle and self-representation, is that photographs and other visual representations of refugees are far more common than is the reproduction in print of what particular refugees have said" ("Speechless Emissaries" 386). Malkki's statement is perhaps even more relevant today. In his article, "Moving Images," Terence Wright highlights how the "visual story" has become the primary way in which refugees are made known to the public: "[w]hile numbers of those forced to migrate increase, we are witnessing a global revolution in mass communication … One of the consequences of our 'digital era' is a considerable reduction in communication through language in favour of relying on the visual story" (53). This "visual story" frequently communicates a one-sided narrative, where names, places, histories, and political contexts are effaced by an image of uniform suffering and universality. In this way, refugees constitute an "anonymous corporeality" (Feldman 407), both menacing and pitiable. "An utter human uniformity is hammered into the viewer's retina," writes Malkki. "This is a spectacle of 'raw,' 'bare' humanity" (387).

Unfortunately, the spectacle of 'bare' humanity has done little to alleviate the realities of mass migration and human displacement. In fact, as Cetta Mainwaring and Margaret Walton-Roberts argue, the number of displaced people worldwide is rising at such a rate that that the "humanitarian crisis and the associated unequal access to mobility are now normalized features of our 'globalized' world" (131). As migrants "continue to die in seas and deserts," the call for humanitarian action is countered by state efforts to "craft new legal mechanisms to deter and

contain human mobility; legal mechanisms that erode and circumvent the limited legal protections migrants currently have" (Mainwaring and Walton-Roberts 131). These mechanisms operate firmly within the discourses and apparatuses of humanitarianism and citizenship. The site of spectacle—the refugee camp, the rickety boat, the dead body on the beach—is inextricable from state practices of power and exclusion that seek to justify the erosion of migrant rights and keep the refugee from entering the "realm of common humanity" (Razack 8). The ubiquity of graphic images depicting refugees as an undifferentiated mass not only depoliticizes and dehumanizes individuals, but also fuels the climate of fear and helplessness that surrounds current discussions of immigration and displacement. As Louise Oliff notes, the very term "refugee" has become synonymous with images of "vulnerability, pathologization, suffering and loss, infantilization, or increasingly, security threat" (658), reinforcing the divide between the citizen and other, 'us' and 'them,' consumer and commodity. Indeed, as Malkki writes, "[i]t becomes difficult to trace a connection between me/us—the consumers of images—and them—the sea of humanity" (388). The swarms and seas of anonymous, displaced bodies thus emerge as both an abstract problem and a corporal threat to the economic and social security of the state — "an iteration and a process of differing" (Granados qtd. in Orlowski).

In *spatial profiling,* Granados quite literally performs an act of tracing—of his own face, no less, and in permanent ink—to attest to the forms of identity that are held on the thresholds of recognition. The audience, looking on, is compelled to trace (as in follow, track, examine and ascertain) Granados's marks and movements, thus enacting the scrutinizing and sometimes punishing gaze of the state. *spatial profiling*, after all, not only invokes police practices of racial profiling but also the rise of biometric technologies, such as facial recognition, to apprehend human movements and identities. While recognition is desirable, to some degree—legally, a

refugee only becomes a refugee once recognized as such by the state—recognition can also be dangerous for those whose survival and mobility rely on their ability to remain ambiguous and elusive, to pass as citizen or 'real' refugee, or evade detection altogether. Indeed, the fact that some of Granados' performances may escape the audience's awareness (whether as to the meaning of the work, their role as audience, or both) evokes the ways in which the refugee or non-citizen must elude apprehension to avoid being 'captured' by the state. To move through space is always, Granados suggests, to risk capture and apprehension by racializing and normalizing scopic regimes. As such, those movements must sometimes occur under the cover of disguise, where the face and body are rendered indistinct and undetectable. At the same time, Granados invokes the indelible forms that exist on the peripheries of surveillance or dominant epistemological frames and invites audiences to consider the inerasable traces of movement and presence across time and space; the marks of a body on a white wall; the face of one and many.

As Peter Gale argues in "The Refugee Crisis and Fear," the refugee possesses a dual face in the public imagination, and, increasingly, an 'illegal' or subhuman body: "The notion of illegal is employed in the construction of a binary between deserving and undeserving refugees—those that warrant rights under the international covenant on refugees and those who jump the 'queue' and are not seen to be deserving of humanitarian response" (330). Focusing on Australia's critically maligned refugee and immigration system, Gale argues that the dual face of the refugee is invoked to "reconcile the apparent incompatibility of Australia being a compassionate nation and the policy of mandatory detention of asylum seekers, including children" (330). Indeed, the 'face' of the nation relies on images and rhetoric that repeatedly emphasize the state's role in saving so-called deserving refugees while protecting the nation's

citizens from shadowy hordes of illegals—not dissimilar, as I have previously shown, from Canada's own rhetoric of hospitality and compassion. Moreover, as Michael Barnett argues in "Humanitarianism with a Sovereign Face," there is an inextricable, though discordant, relationship between humanitarianism and the state:

> State and sovereign practices shape the discourse and practices of humanitarianism. States are understood to protect 'national interests' while humanitarianism refers to transcendental values … States defend their citizens and have a territorial imperative, while humanitarianism invokes the attempt to reduce human suffering regardless of spatial, political, or cultural boundaries. (250)

As such, the state can justify restrictive border practices, invasive technologies, carceral regimes, and the reduction of refugee rights in the name of "national interests"—that is, by claiming to protect Canadians against criminals, illegals, queue jumpers, and other mendacious marauders while 'saving' those innocents deserving of help and humanitarianism. Yet as Alexander Mann underscores, "the very concept of the refugee is being eroded in Canadian society and replaced with the image of the *illegal migrant* … Unlike refugees, who have a right to make a claim for protection, illegals are transgressors who are perceived as unworthy of Canada's compassion" (191-92). Suffice to say, there are more 'illegals' and less 'innocents' than ever—that is, less people deemed worthy and deserving of Canada's compassion.

As Joseph Pugliese demonstrates in his scholarship on the "brutalizing regimes" ("The Tutelary Architecture" 210) of migrant detention that many developed nations, including Canada, currently practice, the notion of the 'illegal' or 'undeserving' refugee is often deployed to supply 'proof' of refugee sub-humanity and thereby sanction state violence and human rights

abuses, as well as reinforce the state's hegemony, within a spectacle of "necessary suffering" (212). Invoking Debord's idea that the spectacle "represents the dominant *model* of life" and "serves as a total justification of the condition and goals of the existing system" (2), Pugliese reads the media coverage of the 2002 protests at the Woomera Detention Centre in South Australia as effectively reinforcing state structures of discipline and power. He argues that the "spectacular images of riots and refugee self-harm" (Pugliese, "The Tutelary Architecture" 210) that emerged in the wake of the Woomera protests were mobilized to confirm the refugee's sub-humanity, and thereby justify the sub-human conditions in which many migrants are forced to live:

> The televised images of the prisoners who 'indulge' in spectacular forms of violence and self-harm—launching their bodies onto the razor wire coils, cutting their bodies with broken glass, setting fire to themselves—function to confirm that this other is, in fact, subhuman and deserves to be treated as such, thereby justifying the traumatic conditions that are imposed upon these refugee prisoners and legitimating, in Debord's words, 'the existing system.' (Pugliese, "The Tutelary Architecture" 210).

For Debord, the spectacle negates "real life" (67) because it is always in the service of justifying and reinforcing the ideologies and norms of dominant society: "Its sole message is: 'What appears is good; what is good appears" (3). The images of abject and desperate refugees that have come to emblematize the global refugee crisis therefore function as a "visual reflection of the ruling economic order" (Debord 3) that determines which subjects can enter spaces of recognition and privilege, and which subjects remain peripheral or unseen altogether. Even images that apparently expose the barbarity of state practices like migrant detention are

imbricated within a spectacle of suffering used to characterize and categorize the "good" refugees from the "bad." Pugliese takes up Debord's notion that the "root of the spectacle … is the specialization of *power*" (5) to argue that the images of refugee suffering frequently cast refugees in a state of 'necessary suffering' to uphold the power structures of the state: "The relay of refugees as spectacular image-object captivated in their transparent razor wire prisons materializes this 'specialisation of power' whilst functioning to constitute a scene of 'necessary suffering' and a spectatorship of violence" (212). Thus, the borders between inclusion and exclusion, human and inhuman, 'necessary suffering' and 'justified violence' are reasserted and reified.

**Acting Like a Refugee: (De)Composing Pathos and the Performance of Empathy**

In *What Do Pictures Want?* W.J.T. Mitchell asserts that images are not simply inert objects but have an agency and mobility—a life of their own: "They function both as 'go-betweens' and scape-goats in the field of human visuality" (46). Significantly, Mitchell argues that the meaning of an image is constituted and reconstituted "through a dialogue with others" (46) that informs the ethics of public life and personal and collective responsibility:

> Stereotypes, caricatures, classificatory figures, search engines, mappings of the visible body, of the social spaces in which it appears would constitute the fundamental elaborations of visual culture on which the domain of the image—and of the Other—is constructed. As go-betweeners of 'subaltern' entities, these images are the filters through which we recognize and of course misrecognize other people. (351)

For Mitchell, images mediate our encounters with others, and inform our construction of the Other. They frame the interpretive norms of humanity—the “dominant *model* of life” (Debord 2)—that shape public and political responses to war, violence, and suffering. As Mitchell poignantly articulates: “Mere images dominate the world” (76).

The most iconic image (or, to use Debord’s term, “image-object”) of the refugee crisis in recent years is, perhaps, Nilüfer Demir’s photograph of Alan Kurdi, the Syrian boy whose drowned body became an internet sensation and symbol *par excellence* of the global humanitarian crisis.[58] Initially circulated under the Twitter hashtag #humanitywashedashore, Kurdi's image went viral soon after its release, and was “instantly declared to be iconic for powerfully symbolizing the humanitarian disaster caused by the ‘refugee crisis’” (Mortensen 1147). Yet while the photograph of Kurdi (dubbed “The Boy on the Beach”) bore dire testimony to the perils of forced migration and elicited an outpouring of public outrage and sympathy, the image also , as Yasmin Ibrahim argues, became “trapped in an aesthetic regime which re-centered the migrant body as a new type of (in)humanity in Europe” (1). Kurdi’s body became a “*memento mori* of the West’s frozen inhumanity” (Ibrahim 3) at the same time it entered an economy of mass and virulent consumption. Images of refugee suffering, abjection, and even death are constantly reproduced and disseminated across numerous platforms and spaces, where viewers can watch the terrible atrocities of forced migration without reckoning with the realities of war, displacement, and global inequality: “This non-stop gaze through image platforms transforms the Other into a spectacularized body where there is an insatiable appetite to consume trauma and to commit them as objects of gaze but not as subjects of abandonment”

[58] Kurdi was photographed in a set of images by news photographer Nilüfer Demir. The most iconic of these images shows Kurdi lying face-down in the sand on the shores of Turkey. He appears to be sleeping.

(Ibrahim 2). This type of trauma voyeurism brings to mind Berlant's notion of "cruel optimism," which refers to a vague hope that human suffering can be alleviated without political action or intervention—by simply watching, in other words.[59]

In her book on war photography, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag criticizes the ways in which watching is often confused with witnessing. "Watching at a distance or watching up close," she writes, "is still watching" (117). For Sontag, photographs of human suffering and violence—what she terms "shock-pictures"—are "themselves a species of rhetoric. They reiterate. They simplify. They agitate. They create the illusion of consensus" (8). Indeed, part of the reason why the Kurdi photographs became so iconic had to do with how they 'spoke' to a shared experience of human suffering and sacrifice, constituted on the body of an innocent. As Gale argues, the "metaphor of the 'human face' of refugees" (327) is often used to create a false sense of recognition with the suffering of millions of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees across the globe. Similarly, Ibrahim argues that "[o]ur incessant gaze seeks to impress an immediacy and proximity to the Other without perhaps an attendant intimacy and understanding of their predicament" (2). Thus, the image of Kurdi's dead body reiterated the horror of the refugee crisis at the same time it simplified the vast experiences, histories, and situations of the millions of migrants and refugees still living and in urgent need of aid.

Kurdi's body became recognizable as human the moment it entered the frame of 'universal experience.' As Ibrahim argues,

> In contrast to Kevin Carter's photo of a Sudanese child with a bloated stomach and emaciated frame, Alan Kurdi's chubby legs and "sleeping" pose in

---

[59] Berlant's notion of "cruel optimism" has had a major influence on affect theory, queer and gender studies, and critical concepts of resistance and political engagement. See her 2011 book, *Cruel Optimism*.

> the arms of the policeman was not an alien image. The resonance and the dissonance of the beach as a space of pleasure and retreat and the confusion over whether the child was dead or alive keep the spectator hoping for a different outcome. To the Western audience, he did not produce a disconnect as an alien migrant body. He could be anyone's child. His face pressed into the sand of the beach was accessible to a global audience, thus eradicating race and space in a composition of pathos. (3)

Because of his visual proximity to "anyone's child" and his dislocation from "race and space," Kurdi emerged from the category of the refugee and acquired the status of human, posthumously. He became the faceless "human face" of the refugee crisis—a small, speechless, "sleeping" model of suffering. "If humanism," Malkki warns, "can only constitute itself on the bodies of dehistoricized, archetypical refugees and other similarly styled victims … then citizenship in this human community remains curiously, indecently, outside of history" (398). Indeed, Kurdi is immortalized in perpetual limbo, suspended between life and death, sea and shore, infamy and anonymity.

The central 'Boy on the Beach' photograph and its "composition of pathos" (Ibrahim 3) allowed viewers a degree of moral fantasy and voyeurism, even as it briefly mobilized political action and humanitarian response. Kurdi become the tragic icon of the refugee crisis, whereby the refugee emerged as a figure of vulnerability and victimhood within a "singular category of humanity within the international order of things" (Malkki 378), producing the refugee as a uniform object of pity within an economy of spectacle. As David Hadar argues,

> In representations of refugee lives, a sensationalist tendency is visible, whether its aim is to protect against the refugees' arrival or to elicit sympathy and aid

> for them. There is no doubt of the effectiveness of sensation for achieving certain political goals. And yet, sensation also blinds audiences to the ways displaced persons continue to be agents with some control over their own lives and the power to mediate these lives as narratives. (667)

Kurdi's image may have made space for migrants and refugees to appear as victims in the public mindset, deserving of compassion and sympathy. But as Hannah Bradby provocatively states, "Showing migrants and refugees as innocent victims is achieved with a picture of a dead child. Seeing migrants and refugees as people is altogether more problematic" (para. 9).

The degree to which humanism "can only constitute itself on the bodies of de-historicized, archetypical refugees" (Malkki 398) is perhaps best illustrated by the controversy surrounding internationally acclaimed artist Ai Weiwei's 2016 restaging of the 'Boy on the Beach' photograph. As part of a series of projects intended to raise awareness about the refugee crisis, Ai recreated the iconic photo of Kurdi by posing as the drowned toddler on a rocky beach on the Greek island of Lesbos.[60] In a 2016 interview with the UN Refugee Agency, Ai explains his motivation for the work: "Alan Kurdi is not just one person. In the past year, in 2015, everyday two persons, two young persons just like him drowned. It's very important to put myself in that condition and I always believe you have to be involved, you have to act" (0:25-50). For Ai, the act of putting himself "in that condition" involved a meticulous and high-production re-staging of Kurdi's death scene, in which Ai "imitated Kurdi's pose to accentuate the symbolic meaning of the original photographs" (Mortensen 1154). Ai's appropriation of the

[60] The highly stylized black-and-white photograph of Ai was taken by photographer Rohit Chawla for the magazine *India Today*, as well as an exhibit at the India Art Fair. Ai recreated the scene of Kurdi's death with help from his professional team.

child's image—and, to some degree, the child's body—garnered a sliver of critical acclaim and a surplus of backlash.[61] Despite Ai's assertion that, in the face of mass suffering, "We have to always think as one" (1:03-05), his own 'Man on the Beach' photograph was largely viewed as egotistical, self-promotional, and exploitative. Yet Ai's photograph was just one of the multitude of appropriations and re-appropriations of Kurdi's image that populated the media in the wake of #humanitywashedashore. Why, then, was Ai—himself a political refugee—so harshly criticized for his artistic attempt to highlight the suffering of refugees worldwide? Why did Ai so dramatically fail to evoke our empathy? To compel us to "think as one"?

In his article, "Why is so much art about the 'refugee' crisis so bad?" Jerome Phelps identifies the ways in which the "performance of empathy" has become increasingly depoliticized and devoid of real care:

> The performance of empathy has become something of a cultural trope, from students sleeping out in support of the homeless to campaigners undertaking the challenge of living on the financial resources of destitute asylum-seekers. In each case, the position in all this of the hypothetical recipient of empathy is rather unclear. By displacing the victim from the visual field, Ai's image has the virtue of literalising this problematic. (para. 6)

By substituting Kurdi's body with his own, Ai in effect claimed the space and the suffering of the refugee boy and the multitudes of refugees, asylum seekers, and migrants Kurdi has come to

[61] As Mette Mortensen explains,

> Ai's work was met with harsh critique for being a 'crass, unthinking selfie' (Jones, 2016), 'crude', 'thoughtless', 'egotistical' (Ratnam, 2016), 'overt[ly] insensitiv[e]' and 'vulgar' (Amirkhani, 2016), 'blunt', 'deluded,' 'very frivolous', a 'very cold-hearted exploitation' (Korte, 2016), 'bad taste', 'victim porn' (Steadman, 2016), and a way to 'sensationalize' and 'aestheticiz(e)' the refugee crisis that was reminiscent of a 'fashion shoot' (Biri, 2016). (1155)

represent. Given Ai's celebrity status, and his access to the wealth, power, and influence so seemingly at odds with the realities of global migration, Ai's image illustrates the hierarchies of privilege and difference that inform border politics and systems of refugee exclusion, and the hollowness of performances of empathy devoid of political action. In claiming the space of suffering as his own, Ai further displaced the realities and contexts of global migration in a grotesque "performance of empathy," wherein refugee suffering only becomes recognizable as universal cause—that is, in how 'their' suffering becomes relatable to 'us.'[62] As Phelps writes: "The crisis becomes the existential death, the great sea that awaits us all" (para. 7).

Yet perhaps Ai's photograph, crass as it may be, points towards something more troubling about the ways in which suffering is framed as necessary for humanitarian response. Critics took issue with how slick and stylized Ai chose to make his black-and-white image, remarking that the project was a mere photo-op, "reminiscent of a 'fashion shoot'" (Mortenson 1155). The thoughtless remarks of photographer Rohit Chawla only inflamed critical ire: "I am sure it wasn't very comfortable to lie down on the pebbles like that. But the soft evening light fell on [Ai's] face when he lay down" (qtd. in Lakshmi para. 5). "Can you imagine," wrote blogger Karen Archey, "the discomfort Ai Weiwei must have experienced while *acting* like a refugee?" (para. 6). How dare Ai exploit *their* suffering and *our* sympathy?

Of course, Ai *is* a refugee—Ai was exiled from China in 2015—but his wealth, power, and privilege seemingly prohibit him from *acting* like one. In an interview with Aimee Dawson,

---

[62] Art scholar Jordan Amirkhani argues that Ai's 'vulgar' image distracted from the realities of global migration, and 'stole the spotlight' away from its victims:

> By harnessing a viewer's attention and emotional investment in the image through pity, he bypasses any contextual elements of the causes of explanations for Kurdi's death, and mobilizes the image to represent the entirety of the Syrian humanitarian crisis. In doing so, [Ai] Weiwei turns the spotlight toward himself rather than prioritizing and creating space of the suffering to speak for themselves. (para. 10)

Ai states, “I’m very fortunate—I'm like a high-end refugee. I can speak to the media and I get to do so many shows but I have a nation I cannot go back to” (para. 7). While, as previously discussed, refugee success is linked to economic utility, refugee need is often measured in terms of desperation and disenfranchisement.[63] The idea of a “high-end refugee” is so at odds with popular conceptions of ‘real’ refugees as poor and abject that Ai cannot help but appear disingenuous. His is not the image of the refugee, innocent and destitute. His is not the image of a dead little boy.

Whether deliberately or not, Ai illustrates how deeply ingrained the image of refugee suffering has become in popular culture, to the extent that the humanitarian subject is rendered largely inconceivable beyond visual regimes of bodily harm and mimetic ‘proof’ of need. In fact, Ai’s failure to evoke empathy reveals the paradoxical nature of dominant modes of humanitarian representation and the imaginative limitations embedded in processes of ‘knowing’ and ‘seeing.’ Ai put on a spectacle of a spectacle, evoking the ways in which the spectacle functions as “both the *meaning* and the *agenda* of our particular socio-economic formation” (Debord 4). To put it another way, while Ai may not have compelled us to “think as one,” the appropriative nature of his performance demonstrates the life-negating effects of attempts to universalize suffering and precariousness. As Butler argues, beyond our “social existence as bodily beings … precarity is to a large extent dependent upon the organization of economic and social relationships, the presence or absence of sustaining infrastructures and social and political institutions” (“Precarious Life” 148). Precarity is not a shared experience but distributed unevenly: different people in different places are “differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death” (*Frames of*

[63] Economic migrants, for example, face difficulties appearing credible, as persecution and prosperity are often viewed as incompatible.

*War* 25). Thus, we cannot "think as one" because we do not live as one; the conditions of precarious life vary in vast and irreducible ways. Difference is not an image of the same.

### ***refugees run the seas***

What happens, then, when the image is withheld? When there is no face or body to apprehend, no spectacle to consume? In *refugees run the seas* (2014-15), Granados invites audiences to reimagine the refugee outside of dominant representational frameworks and regimes of identification by refusing a "composition of pathos" (Ibrahim 3) and "performance of empathy" (Phelps para. 6). *refugees run the seas* was presented as part of Toronto's Nuit Blanche 2015 and, as Granados explains in an interview, attempts to "imagine bodies who are affected by migration" ("Scotiabank Nuit Blanche 2015").

**Fig 2: *refugees run the seas* (billboard)**

Noticeably there are no bodies—at least no human bodies—depicted in *refugees run the seas*. At first glance, the image appears solely composed of a blue background captioned with the phrase "refugees run the seas cause we own our own votes," a play on the last line of Wyclef Jean's rap from Shakira's song, "Hips Don't Lie (feat. Wyclef Jean)"[64] Upon closer look, however, one can make out the faint image of the moon (or is that the sun?)—in any case, a celestial body. Nonetheless, there is little remarkable or arresting about the image; indeed, the simplicity of its composition and lack of human imagery implicitly critiques the iconography of "necessary suffering" (Pugliese, "The Tutelary Architecture" 212) that dominates popular representations and media coverage of refugees.

On the one hand, the absence of human bodies (or faces) depicted in *refugees run the seas* gestures towards both the perils and possibilities associated with undocumented or 'illegal' migration—the dangers of moving, as well as the dangers of staying put. On the other hand, Granados resists viewer's expectations for graphic and exploitative images of refugee vulnerability and trauma, "shock-pictures" (7) in Sontag's terms, or what other critics term "disaster porn."[65] Instead, Granados quite literally places refugee agency at the fore. While the blue background invokes both sea and sky—gesturing towards paths of migration, perilous ocean crossings, dim horizons of the future—the foregrounded white text clearly articulates the refugee as a figure of indomitability and agency with ineradicable claims to ownership and civic rights. By replacing "boats" with "votes," Granados imbues Wyclef Jean's original line—already a statement of resistance—with even more political and social import. The right to vote, after all, is not only a hallmark of citizenship, but also "widely recognized as a fundamental human right"

[64] The original lyrics are "refugees run the seas cause we own our own boats."
[65] Such as Ibrahim. See "Self-representation and the Disaster Event: Self-imaging, Morality, and Immortality."

(Ziebertz 153).[66] The idea, then, that refugees "own [their] own votes" challenges the dominant systems and structures that work to exclude refugees and migrants from participating in social and political life, and, in some cases, deny them basic human rights. In Granados's own words, *refugees run the seas* "inverts the logic dominance that keeps migrant bodies beyond the lines of social mobility. Territory turns to ocean, day turns into night, and displaced bodies turn into agents of movement, rather than victims" ("refugees run the seas"). No dead or dying bodies here: these bodies are in motion.

Like many of Granados's installations, there are multiple iterations of *refugees run the seas*: the project was not only displayed as a billboard but also as a postcard. As a billboard, *refugees run the seas* demands onlookers' attention by virtue of its large size and high-traffic, high-visibility location. A billboard, after all, is a physically imposing structure intended for mass viewership, not to mention an expensive means of advertising imbricated within the economic, political, and social systems of consumer capitalism. In this way, the billboard version of *refugees run the seas* gestures towards the ways in which refugees are frequently represented as commodities, their trauma advertised and made visible for public spectatorship and consumption (particularly by large-scale humanitarian campaigns which often rely on shocking and grotesque images of human suffering to elicit public sympathy and financial support). Moreover, in its billboard form, *refugees run the seas* contains an inherent critique of the ways in which "the development and transformation of capitalism has depended upon coerced forms of mobility" (Montegary and White 4) and deeply uneven distributions of power, rights, resources,

[66] Hans-Georg Ziebertz is quick to point out that while the right to vote is widely recognised as a fundamental human right, it is one many people in the world still do not possess (153). Moreover, securing the right to vote has historically, and continues to be, a key aim of human rights and social justice campaigns: the right to vote is inextricable from determinations of personhood and humanity.

space, and visibility. Indeed, the billboard's strategic placement at the Jarvis and Gerrard street intersection in Toronto—a densely populated and high traffic area with a large immigrant and Indigenous presence, as well as close proximity to Toronto's Gay Village—evokes histories of displacement and resettlement, marginalization and persecution, as well as current practices and industries of human trafficking and exploitation.

By contrast, postcards are a (nostalgic) technology of communication that evoke intimacy, brevity, and travel. Indeed, the most famous phrase associated with the postcard, "Wish you were here," emphasizes the postcard as a medium through which to express intimacy and invite pleasurable voyeurism and escape into picture-perfect places and exotic locales. Yet postcards also perform a commemorative function: they can, as Hsiao-Yueh Yu notes, "convey a sense of history" as they "represent noteworthy spheres of human activity" (89), thus operating as archives of private and public memory. In fact, as Zena Kamash argues, contemporary artists (like Granados) are increasingly utilizing the postcard to engage the public in debates "concerning aesthetics, authenticity, authority, colonialism" (608), as well as histories of war and displacement.[67] Moreover, the postcard—as an expression, technology, and document of mobility—necessarily raises questions about the ways in which places, spaces, persons, histories and experiences are commemorated, constructed, and communicated via the ways in which they are made visible. To quote an excerpt from *Postcard* (2018), a performance installation by artist Angus Balbernie, "How do we know the shape we are in? I guess it depends if bodies create and carry the meaning, or give it edges, frame the territories and language of shape …Whatever happens is shaped by how it is invited to be seen" (360).

---

[67] See "'Postcard to Palmyra': Bringing the Public into Debates over Post-Conflict Reconstruction in the Middle East."

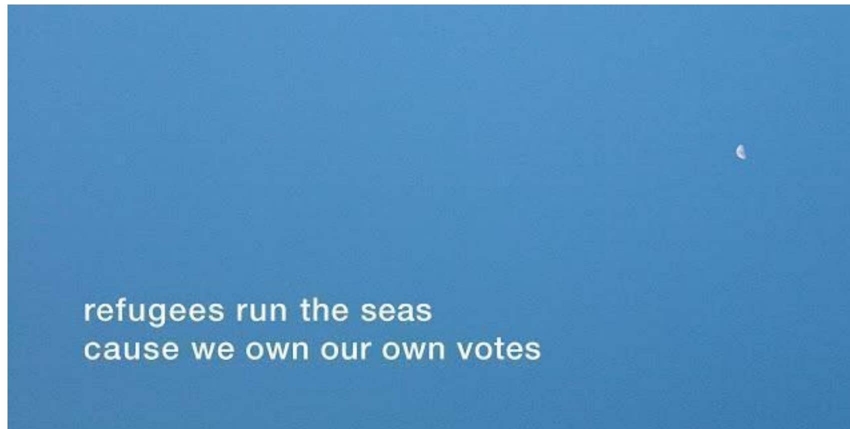


**Fig. 3: refugees run the seas (postcard)**

Thus, as a postcard, *refugees run the seas* encourages viewers to 'see' refugees in a more personal, intimate light, insofar as the viewer is effectively positioned as the recipient of said postcard—that is, in direct correspondence with the sender, those refugees who "run the seas." In this way, Granados uses the medium of the postcard to construct a "two-way gaze" or mode of witnessing enacted across the real and imagined boundaries of place, space, self and other. Yet there is also a degree of irony at play, as postcards typically function as paraphernalia of travel—not forced displacement—and often depict images of picturesque land, sea, and cityscapes, a far cry from the predominant visuals of squalid refugee camps and overcrowded boats that the very word "refugee" typically evokes in the public imagination. As such, Granados plays on the traditional functions and meanings of the postcard to displace the refugee from stereotypical images of abjection and desperation and gesture towards the ways in which refugees can navigate, resist, and transform material and imaginative spaces and forms.

At the same time, however, the postcard also connotes smallness and precarity. Postcards are easily lost in the mail and may never arrive at their intended destination; the very transience and precariousness of this small and personal document evokes the ways in which identity documents can be lost or revoked, paths of mobility altered or obstructed. Indeed, as a postcard,

*refugees run the seas* attests to the precariousness of those lives moving between and across the borders of nation, politics, belonging and bureaucracy—the ways that people, like postcards, can be 'lost,' disappeared, or 'caught' in the spaces between departure and arrival. Nonetheless, the postcard marks the presence of an individual in a particular place, at a particular time, the ineradicable traces and vestiges of human presence.

As Liz Montegary and Melissa Autumn White assert in *Mobile Desires: The Politics and Erotics of Mobility Justice*, the relationship between mobilities and immobilities encompasses "large-scale patterns of travel, migration, and displacement, bodily motions at an individual and even microscopic level, and the immaterial but no less politically important movements of affect and desire" (5). The two iterations of *refugees run the seas* thus signal the complex relationship between individual and "even microscopic" movements and large-scale mobilities, and the ways in which the politics of mobility are intertwined with the politics of place, desire, consumerism, and looking/visibility. While both versions of *refugees run the seas* show the same image—a blue background with white text—the contrast in their modes of display invites audiences to not only consider the relationship between form and image, but also that between the commodification and spectacularization of suffering. By absenting human imagery, Granados resists the dominant perception of refugees or other marginalized identities as existing solely within frames of suffering or abjection and attests to the uncontainable, irrepresentable nature of human agency and mobile identities, even as he draws attention to the commodification and consumption of those same identities and their precarious emplacement within the "political, economic, and cultural structures that make the freedom of movement possible for some and impossible for others" (Montegary and White 4).

**“Tracing the shape of his absence”: The Case of Omar Khadr**

Absence is, after all, presence. In *Invisible Violence*, a group publication and “discursive project” held by the artist-run Gallery TPW in Toronto, Ontario in 2013, and curated by Liz Park, Granados interrogates the ways in which images direct (or misdirect) our understanding of the subjects (and situations) they show, and thereby prevent these subjects from entering spaces of recognizable humanity. As Granados explains, his contribution to the exhibition came from his *apostrophe* series, a project initially inspired by a postcard that he had “picked up a number of years ago” (“Abstracting the Self” para. 3) depicting the famous photograph of Omar Khadr as a 14-year-old boy, half smiling and staring straight into the camera. Granados states,

> [S]omething about the image compelled me … as I was coming into subjective civic recognition—from having been a refugee claimant, a Convention refugee, a permanent resident, and then a citizen—there was someone else who, at the same time, had left the frame of citizenship, had left the frame, at least juridically, of recognizable humanity. (“Abstracting the Self” para. 3).

In *Invisible Violence*, Granados displays the original postcard but redacts Khadr’s image and name. Instead, Granados includes a short, handwritten note on the back of the postcard that describes a photograph of an unremarkable boy—a boy, who, like Kurdi, could be “anyone’s child.”[68]

[68] This installation is but one iteration in Granados’s *apostrophe* series. In another version, Granados displays a postcard written on behalf of Omar Khadr and addressed to former Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper. All of Khadr’s identifying details are whited-out, signalling the ways Khadr has been both a subject of erasure and ‘whitewashing’ by the Canadian government.

By redacting Khadr's image and name, Granados calls attention to the power images hold over the subjects they portray, and the ways in which that power is made, mediated, manipulated and mobilized within material and imaginative spaces. As Butler argues, it is crucial to examine "'the frames' that work to differentiate the lives we can apprehend from those we cannot … our very capacity to discern and name the 'being of the subject is dependent on norms that facilitate that recognition" (*Frames of War*, 3-4). For Butler, images do not perform merely a documentary function, but rather help frame and conduct "the dehumanizing norm, that restricts what is perceivable" (100) and, by extension, who is 'grievable'— that is, which lives are worth grief. The value of life, Butler argues, largely depends on the ways in which that life is framed as worthy or unworthy of mourning: "Only under conditions in which the loss would matter does the value of the life appear. Thus, grievability is a presupposition for the life that matters" (14). So, while Kurdi's grievability was instantly recognizable, Khadr's own grievability—that is, whether he possesses a "life that matters"—has long been the subject of controversy, with Khadr framed as either victim or villain.

In his 2015 article for the *National Post*, Joseph Brean notes that the dual perception of Khadr has been mobilized, in part, by two photographs:

> There are two famous photographs of Omar Khadr. One is of a slim boy in a black golf shirt, with the first sign of fuzz on his upper lip, as he looked before he was severely wounded and captured by U.S. forces in Afghanistan in 2002. The other is of a solidly built, fully bearded man, smiling but weary after years spent in the Guatemalan Bay prison camp. Together, they illustrate the double-sided symbol Khadr has become in the Canadian psyche, at once villain and victim. (para. 1-4)

These two images—the first of a boy on the verge of manhood; the second of a man whose boyhood is long gone—constitute Khadr's double portrait in the Canadian imagination and, moreover, signify his public 'rebirth' from a figure of terror to "a figure for Canadian care" (Kouri-Towe 261). As Audrey Macklin notes in her 2015 interview with Brean, one of the ways in which the Canadian government justified Khadr's torture and prolonged detainment was to keep him from appearing human. "At every point when Omar Khadr might have been rendered visibly human," argues Macklin, "the government expended its maximum effort to prevent that from happening … the government was not afraid of Omar Khadr the terrorist, they were afraid of Omar Khadr the human being" (qtd. in Brean para. 11). Only after Khadr was released on bail on May 7, 2015—the same year the Canadian government came under scrutiny for its role in Kurdi's death—was Khadr able to shed his fearful image and emerge as a symbol of Canada's benevolence and commitment to human rights: "No longer deemed a threat to national security, Khadr became a symbol of Canadian compassion, and representing a hope of return to a nation concerned with upholding human rights" (Kouri-Towe 261).

Yet Khadr's resignification from security threat to symbol of care did not render him "visibly human" but rather shifted the frame of his representation, and the images, affects, and narratives that could come into view. Now a Canadian citizen, Khadr represents a "rehabilitated figure" (Kouri-Towe 261) in Canada, whose smiling, gentle demeanor and much-publicized desire for a 'normal' Canadian life fits comfortably within Canada's self-image as a hospitable and compassionate nation. As Allison Mackey points out, the image of Khadr's 'rehabilitation' is bound up with narratives that attest to the good of capitalism: "In order to convince people how non-radicalized he has become in prison, Khadr's advocates often rely on the normative language of consumerism: 'He wants to be normal: pay his bills, go shopping" (121). The image

of Khadr as a typical citizen thus relies on his ability to perform the role of consumer—participating in the dominant model of Western, capitalist life—and engage in normative processes of individual and social betterment: "The narrative about Khadr's desire for a 'normal' Canadian life is tied to the promise of getting an education and the strength that he garnered from taking refuge in reading … emphasizing the normalcy of these desires (Mackey 121). Khadr's entrance into the "sentient and rights-bearing category of the 'human'" (Pugliese, "Apostrophe of Empire" 13) thus relies, in part, on his ability to appear 'normal' within dominant frames and discourses of recognition, whereby the violence and trauma of his past recedes from view in place of an image of someone 'saved' by Canada.

If, as Butler contends, "recognizability precedes recognition" (*Frames of War* 5), then Granados's *apostrophe* project can be interpreted as working to dismantle the very frames of recognizability that circumscribe certain lives as grievable or ungrievable. "With *apostrophe*," Granados states, "I was making a work about Khadr without using his likeness, creating a portrait that wasn't a portrait in the traditional sense. I thought of my approach as tracing the outermost contour of his figure, and, as carefully as I could, tracing the shape of his absence" ("Abstracting the Self" para. 7). Indeed, the title of his project, *apostrophe*—a punctuation mark used to indicate either possession or omission; a rhetorical device "by which a speaker or writer suddenly stops in his discourse, and turns to address pointedly some person or thing, either present or absent" (OED)—indicates Granados's interest in an ethics of witnessing that works to bring those subjects and lives cast to the "outermost contour[s]" of humanity back into the frame of recognizable humanity while avoiding the "exploitative trappings of conventional representation" ("Reciprocal Gazing" 31). As an apostrophe is both a literal mark and a form of address (typically enacted on the theatrical stage), Granados at once evokes the corporeal and

performative nature of identity and gestures towards a politics of recognition that allows the subject to remain autonomous yet ambiguous, present yet absent. Like *contact studies* and *spatial profiling, apostrophe* works to disrupt the dominant modes and technologies of seeing that limit the ability to witness the fullness, complexity, and ultimately untraceable, unknowable alterity of the Other.

### 3.2 Bodies of Truth and Trauma: *The Ballad of _______ B* and *movement study*

Trauma, vulnerability, power and exposure are common themes in Granados's multidisciplinary practice, and, as he explains in an interview, his attraction to performance art, in particular, has to do with the space and mobility it provides for artists who have been marginalized or excluded from dominant art communities and art-making practices:

> There are many histories of performance and one of the liberating things is that it doesn't have a single origin. Performance art coagulated around, as Margaret Dragu puts it, all of these refugee practices.[69] There was a moment when people started making things in time and space, and those practices were later historicized as performance art. (Granados qtd. in Durbano 20-21)

If performance art is the "refugee" of the art world, it is also radical, insofar as it allows artists opportunities to explore, resist, and transform the conventional limits of art, embodiment, space, and identity beyond institutional structures and dominant modes of representation and

[69] According to Dragu, "[p]erformance art is historically the refuge for immigrants and refugees of other disciplines—a safer haven for artists/workers booted out the backdoor of painting, theatre and various widget-making. Disenfranchised artists wash up on the shores of performance but they bring traces of their original practices with them" (para. 6). See "La Dragu Artist Statement."

recognition. In this way, Granados's use of the trace at once bears witness to the untraceable origins of performance art, and the indelible, though perhaps unknowable and undocumented, traces of those people and practices "booted out the backdoor" (Dragu para. 6) of dominant society and culture.

As Diana Taylor asserts in *The Archive and the Repertoire*, performance is an important means of passing on cultural knowledge and memory: "Performances function as vital means of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity" (2). For Taylor, performance extends beyond conventional spaces, such as the stage, and into the realms of everyday life. "Civic obedience, resistance, citizenship, gender, ethnicity, and sexual identity"—these are all "rehearsed and performed daily in the public sphere" (3) in ways that challenge or reinforce the status quo. Crucially, Taylor asserts that the definition of performance varies considerably across cultural, social, and spatial boundaries, and is often imposed as a way to subsume "subjectivity and cultural practice into normative discursive practice" (6). She argues that our understanding of a performance *as performance* often indicates more about our own desire for access and "the politics of our interpretation" than it allows for "access and insight into another culture" (6). Yet the very nature of performance resists appropriation to a degree, by virtue of its transience, mutability, and movement. "Performances travel" (3), Taylor writes.

One of the difficulties I have encountered in my research and writing on Granados's art has to do with the ways his work rarely "stays put." In other words, Granados' performances move across the boundaries of form, genre, discipline, space, place and time, as his artistic practice is at once itinerant, iterative, and inter-subjective. Many of the individual performances I have previously analyzed are part of a larger series: for example, *I have only ever been a lover in English* is part of Granados's *contact studies*, a project that itself intertwines and overlaps with

Granados's *spatial profiling* and *movement study* series. Granados frequently works in collaboration with other artists, and re-stages individual works under different titles or in different mediums and forms.[70] Furthermore, Granados quite literally travels across state and geographical borders to perform in public and private spaces, ranging from galleries to festivals to city streets and back-alleys—and, in this current pandemic era, increasingly digital realms.[71] As a literary scholar, I am used to (and most comfortable) working with physical texts—books, that is—and have found myself overwhelmed on occasion by the sheer multiplicity and evolving forms of Granados's work, and how to 'read' them. Do I treat individual performances as discrete entities or part of an "analyzable 'whole'" (Taylor 3)? What assumptions or biases undergird my own reading and interpretive practices, my impulse to analyze, categorize, and assess? What violence?

In "The Refugee's Body of Knowledge: Storytelling and Silence in the work of Francisco-Fernando Granados," Dawson argues that Granados's work "seeks to expand the kinds of stories refugees are invited to tell" (55) by contrasting "the increasing instrumentalism of statist readings of refugees with creative work that fosters more open-ended and imaginative reading practices" (57). Dawson asserts that Granados's embodied performances "foster an appreciation for the refugee's body of knowledge while encouraging scrutiny of the policies and procedures that treat refugees as bodies of evidence, or data sets" (57-58). Thus, the difficulties associated with reading, as well as categorizing Granados's work, speak volumes about the

[70] *contact studies*, for example, includes a variety of site-specific performances, multi-media installations, and collaborative engagements.

[71] In response to the COVID-19 restrictions and safety measures, Granados has created a series of 'mail art performances' that respond to the state of emergency ("Co-Respond-Dance-Version-II"). Part of Granados's *letters* and *Co-respond* series, the project was partially inspired by the use of mail art as a form of political resistance against the dictatorships in Latin America during the 20th century.

performative nature of storytelling, memory, and identity, and the need to employ interpretative practices that make space for ambiguity, variability, and that which cannot be fully known or said.

While many of Granados's embodied performances are conducted in complete silence, many are also, as has been shown, accompanied by a written script, or "score" in his words. In this way, Granados constructs a liminal performance space that blurs the borders between what Taylor calls the "archive" and "repertoire"—that is, recorded history and embodied memory—and, in so doing, encourages the potential for 'reciprocal gazing.' Indeed, part of the ways in which Granados advocates for the "exchange of the gaze" (Phelan 4) is by confusing and collapsing the borders between text and performance, movement and stillness, and generic and disciplinary divides. In this way, Granados works to demonstrate the fraught relationship between the "'politics' of the imagined and actual exchange of gaze" (Phelan 4). Abstraction cannot exist apart from the concrete; witnessing cannot occur solely in imaginative domains or beyond social activity. Trace, space, silence, script—these becomes markers of the 'real' in Granados work, where the interplay between the ephemeral and the permanent attest to the co-existence of boundless and bordered identities. In this way, Granados seeks to challenge the appropriative norms and practices that transform the refugee from a real person to spectacle, image, object or aesthetic—or, in the case of *The Ballad of _______ B,* a lesson.

As evidenced, Granados frequently works with readymade or found materials, such as postcards, to explore the limits of representation and critique normative frames of recognition. *The Ballad of _______ B* is another such readymade work. As Granados explains, the project originated from a "random, wonderful, and disturbing find":

> The Ballad of _______ B is a fill-in-the-blanks performance script based on the account of my life that appeared in a 2003 *Vancouver Sun* article titled "Climbing Mount Canada" (Howard). The tale told comes from an interview I gave to journalist Cori Howard when I was eighteen years old. I decided to work with the text as a rectified readymade after a dear friend of mine who works in English language learning (ELL) with adults in Vancouver brought to my attention a passage from a vocabulary lesson in the textbook *Canadian Snapshots: Raising Issues*. I was shocked to see that the copyrighted text in the book was lifted word for word, without my knowledge or consent, from "Climbing Mount Canada." All identifying details had been kept in the textbook: my name, age, country of origin, the place where I lived … In the lesson, the story is turned into a linguistic case study. I had been designated a 'student' and given a letter before my name: "Student B: Francisco." ("The Ballad" 42)

Certainly, the fact that the authors of *Canadian Snapshots* plagiarized Granados's story word for word and disclosed his personal information without his knowledge or consent (and for profit, to boot) indicates a startling lack of publishing ethics and integrity. But it also signals the troubling ways that refugee stories are appropriated, commodified, and disseminated as 'case studies' of Canadian multiculturalism and hospitality—as 'Canadian Snapshots,' as it were, of a happy and well-assimilated nation—while refugees themselves are treated as "bodies of evidence, or data sets" (Dawson, "The Refugee's Body" 58).[72] Not only was Granados's privacy and intellectual

[72] It is perhaps worth underscoring that Granados' story was used as a vocabulary lesson for adult learners of English, namely immigrants to Canada.

property violated, his body was also compromised. His real name, age, country of origin, the place where he lived—all was given out in "the lesson."

In an essay entitled "Why a Ballad? – Refugee Politics, Poetics, and the Need for Redistribution," Granados expresses concern over the "ways in which refugee stories become instruments for the legitimization of political claims" (para. 2) as, too, do their bodies. "How can the bodies of the people who make a claim for protection prove that they are 'true' refugees?" (para. 3) he asks. The essay provides a conceptual and formal overview of *The Ballad of _______ B,* which, as Granados explains, is "scored through a series of found texts that deal in one way or another with narratives of displacement" and the "evidentiary role" of the body in refugee determination processes (para. 5). In *The Ballad of _______ B*, Granados redacts all of "Student B: Francisco's" identifying details (that is, his own) and instructs the audience to "fill in the blanks." Here is a short excerpt from *The Ballad of _______ B:*

> *FILL IN THE BLANKS*:
>
> _______ B's new life is
>
> fraught with challenges. In
>
> _________ his family
>
> had a big house, a nice
>
> car, and all three boys in

his family had weekly

allowances. Now he sleeps on the couch…

(40-41).

On the one hand, the lines and blanks attest to the difficulties of giving personal testimony, particularly testimonies of trauma and persecution, in a clear, compelling and, above all, convincing manner. Drawing from Elaine Scarry's work on the affective, ideological and political power of pain, C. Christina Lam argues that silence is the "hallmark of trauma"—that indeed, "trauma, by its very nature, resists articulation" (37). But how to articulate the inarticulable, the gaps in memory, the failures of communication, the words and wounds too painful to recall? In *The Ballad of _______ B*, Granados employs blank spaces, lines, and redactions to critique the demands for "the voice of the refugee to be clear and coherent … to narrate the self only as a sign to be clearly read" (Granados, "Why a Ballad?" para. 3). The literal holes in _______ B's story thus signal the silence of trauma, the elusiveness of human identity, the limits of cognition and representation, and the violence inherent in and enacted by policies and practices that reduce human voices and bodies to mere commodities or "sign[s] to be clearly read."

On the other hand, the blanks signal possibility and a gesture towards reciprocity, "both traces of a withdrawal and an invitation for the reader/viewer to imagine a new character" (Granados, "The Ballad" 43). The audience is not only compelled to "hear more than words and

facts" (Salverson "The Art of Witness" 37) by virtue of what is conspicuously absent or 'unmarked' in the text, but also to actively engage in the storytelling process. In this way, the audience becomes responsible for the story, and for the ways in which _______ B is brought into being and recognition. For Granados, the blanks point towards a "movement toward abstraction that creates the possibility of an autobiography that gives writing over to the other" ("The Ballad" 43).[73] Importantly, however, the audience does not take control of the narrative; _______ B's story and identity remain in constant flux. The play between legibility and illegibility, text and image, and speech and silence mirror what Filippo Menozzi calls the "double bind at the heart of the situation of people on the move today" (151). As Menozzi explains, "while migrants are recognized and authenticated through forms of differential inclusion and biometric registration, they are at the same time excluded from rights to political membership" (151-52). Indeed, in *The Ballad of _______ B*, Granados formally plays with this notion of the migrant's double-bind: by reworking the original text into the form of a ballad, he "redistributes the story without destroying it" ("The Ballad" 43), allowing the story to resonate and echo across multiple registers: prosaic, musical, and lyrical. In this way, Granados signals the ways in which the refugee or migrant identity is both "performative and malleable" ("The Ballad" 43) while simultaneously 'fixed' by bureaucratic and legal markers and biometric registration.

[73] Granados is echoing a line from Spivak's essay, "Acting Bits/Identity Talk," in which she writes: "If the tale told … is a divided moment of access to autobiography as the telling of an absent story, here autobiography is the possibility of writing or giving writing to the other" (772).

**Fig. 4 *The Ballad of _______ B* (2014)**

Granados performed the first iteration of *The Ballad of _______ B* at the Harbourfront Centre in Toronto in 2014, alongside artists Manolo Lugo and Maryam Taghavi. The three performers shared the stage with the audience, thus subverting the traditional divisions of theatrical space. The performance took the form of an "action-based installation" (Granados, "The Ballad" 43) in which the performers responded with their bodies to the audience's interactions with the script. Moreover, as Granados explains, "[b]right text-based images...were projected in the space as a counterpoint to the narrative" (43). As Benita Parry argues, the "proximity of discordant discourses and discrete narrative registers, can be seen as aesthetic forms that transcend their sources … becoming abstract significations of the incommensurable and the contradictory" (39). *The Ballad of _______ B* traffics in the incommensurable and the contradictory—at once prose and performance, biography and autobiography, script and improvisation, narrative and counter-narrative.

Yet Granados is wary of art that overly aestheticizes the migrant or refugee experience, glorifies the peripheral and eschews the political. “There is no room,” he states, “for the kind of abstraction associated with the aesthetic experience of memory in a refugee hearing. There is no room to think of the figure of the refugee outside of their displacement and their need for protection” (“Why a Ballad?” para. 4). The seating arrangements for this live performance of *The Ballad of _______ B* thus serve as a reminder of the power differentials and unequal forms of distribution that restrict human mobilities and rights: “Chairs for the public were placed in rows along each side of the length of the stage, facing one another, with a corridor for the performers in between” (“The Ballad” 43). While the audience was seated “facing one another,” thus gesturing towards the possibility of a reciprocal gaze, the performers nonetheless were positioned in a corridor “in between” them—watched, in effect from both sides. And, despite the interactive, collaborative, poly-textual and multimedia format of *The Ballad of _______ B*, _______ B remains a peripheral subject, a figure without a discernible name, origin, identity, or place to call home. “Between the lines,” Granados writes, “_______ B waits to be filled” (“The Ballad” 44).

But where is the body? As Renate Lorenz asks, “How can a body be ‘there’ if distance from the body is simultaneously suggested?” (21). For Granados, the answer lies in the reciprocal gaze, in a radical engagement with both the actual and imagined frames of recognition, the fluid and static spaces upon which citizenship is practiced, observed, measured, made, and resisted. In *movement study—standard North American strip search procedure*, Granados enacts the tension between the imaginative spaces of recognition and the embodied materiality of subjects and systems of recognition, invoking the refugee’s body as a site of ‘marked’ vulnerability and incalculable resistance to the technologies and punitive practices of

identity construction and control. Arguably his most embodied performance, Granados first performed *movement study—standard North American strip search procedure* at the Darling Foundry in Montreal Quebec.[74] As its title suggests, *movement study* chronicles and enacts the movements of detained people during the standard strip search procedure used by police. Granados stands before his audience—this time, facing forward. He follows a set of instructions:

> empty pockets
>
> remove accessories
>
> place the contents out of reach
>
> take off clothing
>
> article by article
>
> shake out each piece
>
> place clothing out of reach
>
> ("movement study")

By the end of the performance, Granados is completely naked and bent over, having performed all the instructions, including those that require him to engage in deeply intimate, if not degrading, acts: "lift penis, retract foreskin; "bend forward / spread buttocks / squat / cough" ("movement study"). As Granados explains, the "score/stage directions" to *movement study* are

[74] Granados subsequently performed *movement study* in Chicago, Illinois; Toronto, Ontario; and Kingston, Ontario.

based on his own research on strip searches, a practice the Supreme Court of Canada has called "one of the most extreme exercises of police power" and "inherently humiliating and degrading." (Canada, Supreme Court). Granados uses his (nude) body to comment on the brutalizing carceral and security practices that traumatize, humiliate, and degrade human beings to 'bare life,' as well as the "the eroticized configurations of power that actively shape our intimate lives, that interfere with how we move, and that inflect the way we feel" (Montegary and White 6). Unlike Granados's more abstract performances, *movement study* offers a sobering reminder of the body's vulnerability to detainment, discipline, and degradation; to hegemonic systems of power and control; to the appropriating gaze of the Other. Still, the body—though bare, bent over, emptied and "out of reach"—remains, facing towards us. In this way, Granados reorients the question of hospitality as an ethical exchange between self and other, wherein the refugee invites us to rethink the boundaries of citizenship and hegemonic bases of belonging, to 'reach out' beyond the borders of recognition and face the other facing us.

**Fig. 5 *movement study***

# Chapter 5: BEYOND

"So how do we remove the elements of distinction, challenge the integrity of the wall, how do we make the borders disappear?" (Chak 31). These questions come from Tings Chak's *Undocumented: The Architecture of Migrant Detention*. In Chak's own words, *Undocumented* is an "illustrated documentary" that offers an "incomplete view into the world of migrant detention in Canada, explored at scales descending from physical landscapes to the human body" (1). Multimodal in form, minimalist in design, *Undocumented* is a work of activist art that explores the 'built forms of inequality and oppression that "control when, where, and how one's body moves" (Montegary and White 4). But for all the ways in which *Undocumented* works to expose the Canadian state's "secretive incarceration" (Rifkind 650) of migrants and the physical and ideological apparatuses that disappear people and freedoms, the burden of bearing witness, of documenting the undocumented, weighs heavily on Chak's text. How, after all, can "we make the borders disappear" (Chak 31) when the borders, and the bodies they restrict, go unseen? What is the relationship between the politics of visibility and the politics of movement? Witnessing and recognition? Where do the borders of justice lie?

In this chapter, I read Tings Chak's graphic essay *Undocumented* and Sophie Deraspe's film *Antigone* in relation to current theorizations of mobility justice to consider how refugees express resistance and make political claims for equality, arguing that the refugee is a central figure in the struggle for social justice. First theorized by Mimi Sheller, mobility justice refers to "an overarching concept for thinking about how power and inequality inform the governance and control of movement, shaping the patterns of unequal mobility and immobility in the circulation of people, resources, and information" ("Theorising Mobility Justice" 30-31). In other words,

contemporary mobilities are allocated and impinged upon by political, economic, and social power structures; mobility itself can be understood as a "violently and unfairly distributed resource" (Montegary and White 4) across economic, political, cultural, and ideological spheres. "Freedom of mobility," Sheller argues, "may be considered a universal human right, yet in practice it exists in relation to class, race, sexuality, gender, and ability exclusion from public space, from national citizenship, from access to resources, and from the means of mobility at all scales" (*Mobility Justice* 20). Accordingly, I look at the ways in which *Undocumented* and *Antigone* contest the ideological and state apparatuses of power and control that restrict human mobilities. In *Beyond Walls and Cages*, Jenna Loyd, Matt Mitchelson and Andrew Burridge argue that the future of mobility relies on a paradigmatic shift in the thinking around borders from the question of "who crossed the line" to "questions of 'who drew the line'—and who has the power to move and reshape the lines in question" (18). With this in mind, I consider how Chak's graphic essay and Deraspe's film 'trespass' and intervene into the physical, social, and symbolic spaces of confinement and control, memory and silence in an effort to perforate the spaces of states and reshape "the lines in question"—the borders that divide us, the futures denied.

In the first part of this chapter, I analyse the ways in which Chak's *Undocumented* takes the reader/viewer into the hidden spaces and hidden horrors of Canada's immigration detention system to expose and interrogate the "Canadian state's role in a refugee crisis that many Canadian citizens imagine takes place elsewhere" (Rifkind 650), and, more importantly, to advocate for the human rights—indeed, the very humanity—of those locked in cells and cages within Canadian borders. While immigration issues are often talked about as separate to issues of incarceration, prisons and border regimes "are the culmination of many histories of struggle over

colonialism, the nation-state, and what it means to be human" (Loyd, Mitchelson, and Burridge 2). It is important, therefore, not to lose sight of the colonial dimensions of Canada's immigrant detention system. Canada is a settler colonial-state that has, and continues to, discriminate against Indigenous peoples through policies and practices of "genocidal carcerality" (Woolford and Gacek 401), whereby "space is implicated in the physical, biological, and cultural destruction of group life" (401).[75]

While, in this chapter, I primarily analyze access to space and mobility through the lens of immigration and refugee politics, I want to emphasize here that immigration detention represents yet another form of colonial violence, as "the exclusion and detention of migrant bodies is fundamentally grounded in the same economic and ideological conditions which serve to legitimate and affirm the settler state, through the exclusion and detention of internal populations" (Evans 188). To speak of refugees and Indigenous peoples in the same breath is not to diminish the uniqueness of their identities or experiences, but rather to acknowledge the complex relationship "between indigeneity, migration, colonialism, and settlement" (Coleman et al. xii), and the ways in which displacement must be understood within the context, history, and continued "goals of control, assimilation, and dehumanization" (McGuire and Murdoch 2) of Canada's colonial project. As Daniel Coleman et al. assert in *Countering Displacements: The Creativity of Indigenous Peoples and Refugee-ed Peoples*, "human displacements are

[75] Woolford and Gacek focus on Canada's residential school system as a key example of "genocidal carcerality"; however, genocidal carcerality has a wide scope. In their 2021 article "(In)-justice," Michaela McGuire and Danielle Murdoch apply Woolford and Gacek's notion of genocidal carcerality to "the intersectional forces of systemic racism and discrimination" (2) that result in the over-incarceration of Indigenous women in Canadian federal prisons. According to McGuire and Murdoch, Indigenous women "represent the fastest growing prison population in Canada" (1). I take up the colonial and gendered dimensions of Canada's crimmigration system in my reading of Deraspe's *Antigone*.

fundamentally about removal from and of the land" (x); Canada has been trying to remove Indigenous peoples from and of the land—*their* land—for centuries.

In the last part of this chapter, I examine the politics of resistance in Deraspe's *Antigone*. As its title indicates, *Antigone* is a modern reworking of the Greek classic, *Antigone*, by Sophocles, and is based on the real-life killing of Fredy Villaneuva, a Honduran immigrant, by a Montreal police officer in 2008. The film's basis in tragedy, both fictional and real, mobilizes its exploration of the colonial and patriarchal dimensions of Canada's deportation regime, and the violent frameworks of illegality that undergird Canada's immigration and criminal justice systems. I consider how the film critiques migrant illegality—that is, "the processes that *make* people illegal, processes that illegalize certain bodies in particular spaces within the globalizing nation-state system" (McDonald 33)—and hierarchical categories of citizenship. If, as Agamben argues, "the refugee throws into crisis the original fiction of sovereignty" ("We Refugees" 117), then Antigone—the film's "brilliant, fiercely loyal" (Santoro 228) female protagonist—becomes emblematic of the refugee's challenge to the state. As Antigone states in court, "I vomit on your proceedings!" (0:1:24:33).

At the heart of both *Undocumented* and *Antigone* lies the question of futurity. What futures exist in a world of proliferating and increasingly hidden or masked borders? How do refugees, migrants, non-citizens and other people *made* illegal negotiate the spaces and apparatuses of power and control that restrict mobilities and possibilities for social change and 'becoming'? How can the refugee "act back onto the territory of the state" (Agamben, "We Refugees" 95) and, in so doing, usher in a new paradigm of social justice? In what follows, I consider how *Undocumented* and *Antigone* work to de-naturalize the borders of the state—its sites of power and control, its systems of expulsion and discrimination—to imagine the

possibilities of a future, or *futures*, beyond the horizons of colonial capitalism, patriarchy, and hegemonic systems of injustice and control.

### 5.1 Undocumented

no one leaves home unless
home is the mouth of a shark

—Warsan Shire, "Home" 0.06-09

Born in Hong Kong, raised in Toronto, and currently living and working between Toronto and Shanghai, Chak is a multimedia artist, architect, and migrant rights activist. She originally developed *Undocumented* as her dissertation for a Master's in Architecture from the University of Toronto; *Undocumented* was subsequently published and marketed as a graphic novel (Rifkind 650). Rendered in black-and-white, *Undocumented* is stark in its design, stylistically evoking the harsh penal environments and "brutally oppressive structures that, at times, mobilize and, at other times, demobilize individual bodies and entire populations" (Montegary and White 4). The book's black-and-white format not only visually echoes the (outdated) black-and-white striped prison uniform, as well as the bars of prison cells, but also invokes contemporary markers of global capitalism and technologies of identification—the ubiquitous barcode, for instance. In this way, Chak visually alludes to the ways in which contemporary im/mobilities and carceral regimes are inextricable from the distribution of wealth and capital.

As Michael Gordon argues, "the state practice of bordering has become a routinized form of both structural and direct violence against migrants through the development of state-led border industries (41). Borders are big business, with immigration detention representing the "fastest growing sector in an already booming prison construction industry" (Chak 26); indeed, immigration detention is the "central node of the border enforcement archipelago, which, in the context of migration, helps secure and reproduce global apartheid" (Moffette 275).[76] Yet, although multiple actors and researchers are working to draw attention to Canada's immigration detention system, the subject of migrant detention remains on the fringes of public and political discourse.[77] In part, the silence that surrounds Canada's migrant detention system stems from deeply entrenched myths about Canadian hospitality and humanitarianism, as I have discussed in previous chapters. But as *Undocumented* illustrates, the silence is also by design: "Spaces of incarceration are both nowhere and everywhere, blended into our landscapes. But their invisibility is no coincidence" (Chak 18).

Architecture is not neutral. "While the built environment is often considered an invisible backdrop to our everyday lives," argues Jennifer Meakins, "in reality it has a profound impact on our cultural, economic, political, and social condition" (para. 1). Following Foucault, Molly Glenn argues that "[a]rchitecture is intricately tied to political power … Architecture

---

[76] Anthony Richmond was among the first scholars to discuss the rise of global apartheid in the context of migration in his 1994 book, *Global Apartheid: Refugees, Racism, and the New World Order*. For more recent scholarship, see Catherine Besteman's *Militarized Global Apartheid* (2020) and Harsha Walia's *Border and Rule* (2021).

[77] There are, for example, a growing number of researchers in Canada focused on the links between state violence and surveillance (e.g. Dawson 2016; Mainwaring and Silverman 2017); the detention of children (Kronick, Rousseau, and Cleveland 2018); the implications of detention for immigrant health (e.g. Vogel 2018; Human Rights Watch 2021); the relationship between immigrant and refugee displacements (e.g. Coleman et al. 2012); and the rise of 'crimmigration' and global apartheid regimes (e.g. Atak and Simeon 2018; Walia 2021).

demonstrates possession of power and the nature of that power" (3).[78] What powers, then, are at play in the construction, and concealment, of Canada's immigrant detention system? What movements, what lives, are possible in spaces of forced confinement and control designed to be "largely invisible to the public" (Chak 1)? As Chak writes, "[t]here a lot of hands in this industry, but there aren't many faces. In these authorless spaces, we hide the casualties of poverty and displacement, we even try to hide the spaces themselves" (91). Chak's prolific use of white space contrasts with stark black borders, thus signalling the hidden faces and hidden spaces of Canada's migration detention system, while formally gesturing towards the complexities of political and visual representation, and the challenges of gaining access to such "authorless spaces." Indeed, not only are the places of migrant detention difficult to access, the people are too. A 2021 report by Human Rights Watch on migrant detention states: "Access to immigration detainees and former immigration detainees was a key challenge, not only because of pandemic-related restrictions, but also because of individuals' fear of reprisal by CBSA and continued uncertainties with respect to their legal status in Canada."[79] How, then, "do we make visible the sites and stories of detention" (Chak 26) when those sites and stories remain largely off-limits? When fear and uncertainty force people into silence, when prison extends far into society? The central question of *Undocumented* is thus: how to document the undocumented?

This question, and its attendant ethical obligations, drives the conceptual design of *Undocumented*. As Chak explains: "This illustrated documentary is an ongoing project

[78] Foucault's theories of power are often invoked in contemporary scholarly analyses of state apparatuses of surveillance and exclusion, in particular those articulated in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) and *The Birth of Biopower* (1979). Moreover, Foucault's thinking on the ways in which the built environment can function as a regulatory force has had a notable influence on contemporary architectural theory and design.

[79] Human Rights Watch is an international non-governmental organization (NGO) that conducts research and advocacy on human rights.

developed through reading, listening, organizing, writing, drawing, and imagining. The stories are borrowed from the lived experiences of anonymous individuals and all figures are taken from official sources" (1). With this statement, Chak signals the book's creative ambition and collective scope, while emphasizing its fundamental incompleteness. Throughout *Undocumented*, Chak provides a "density of documentation" (Rifkind 649) drawn from both 'official' sources (statistics, photographs, infographics) and 'unofficial' sources (anonymous testimony; "borrowed" stories) while simultaneously preserving an abundance of white space. In this way, Chak foregrounds the necessity of *making* visible, through acts of documentation and imagination, the physical and ideological structures of migrant detention, while gesturing towards the limits of access and representation. The reader is called upon to engage in the documentary process, to participate in the "ongoing project" of *Undocumented* through imaginative and interpretive acts (reading, listening, looking, imagining) that necessitate seeing beyond the borders of the page into the spaces, gaps, and silences. In this way, Chak invokes the American philosopher Kelly Oliver's "response ethics":

> Acknowledging the realness of another's life is not judging its worth, or conferring respect or understanding or recognizing it, but responding in a way that confirms response-ability. We are obligated to respond to what is beyond our comprehension, beyond recognition, because ethics is possible only beyond recognition. (144)[80]

[80] In its most basic sense, 'response-ability' refers to the ability to respond. However, the concept of 'response-ability' has been theorized by scholars such as Karen Barad, Donna Haraway, and Vinciane Despret for the ethical and political possibilities it affords. Barad, for example, conceptualizes 'response-ability' as "a matter of inviting, welcome, and enabling the response of the Other" (81).

Knowing and seeing are bound up in one another, but there are limits to what, to *who*, can be seen and known.

Documentation plays a crucial role in making people 'real.' As Lisa Gitelman argues in *Paper Knowledge*, "Documents help define and are mutually defined by the know-show function, since documenting is an epistemic practice: the kind of knowing that is all wrapped up with showing, and showing wrapped up with knowing" (1). What is not shown in *Undocumented* thus becomes an aesthetic strategy of resistance against the practices, ideologies, and epistemic practices that characterize and classify migrants and refugees as either subjects of protection or objects of violence. Indeed, *Undocumented* resists formal categorization, its composite and fragmented form at once representative of the "interruptions and discontinuities" (Chak 1) that characterize migrants' journeys, as well as the ways in which documents "can never capture [the] weight" (92) of human lives and experience. Moreover, Chak uses comics to formally interrupt the reader's ability to fix meaning, employing techniques of seriality, fragmentation, and juxtaposition to enact a "disruptive countervisual tactic of witnessing and memory" (Rifkind 653) in which proximity and distance occur simultaneously.[81] In this way, *Undocumented* "fits with many recent refugee and migrant comics projects that use the form to interrupt static images with the plenitude, fragmentation, and unruliness of the comic's page" (Rifkind 649).[82] But what

[81] As Rifkind notes, "[o]ne of the central tenets of comics theory is that comics depend on seriality, juxtaposing framed images across and down pages, between which there are gaps, known as the gutter, into which the reader projects meaning" (653).

[82] Such as Kate Evans' *Threads: From the Refugee Crisis* (2017) and Don Brown's *The Unwanted: Stories of the Syrian Refugees* (2020). Most refugee or 'crisis comics' are "usually drawn by Western cartoonists and based on testimonies by migrant and refugees" (Rifkind 648); *Undocumented* is no exception in this case. However, as Rifkind argues, many of these comics "visualize difference to educate and advocate; in so doing, they perpetuate the management of 'empathetic identification' within neoliberal discourse of human rights" (649). Chak refuses the impulse to "visualize difference," instead relying on space, subtext, and aesthetic strategies of displacement to emphasize the limits, and dangers, of representing refugees and migrants as objects of Western pity and protection.

sets *Undocumented* apart is its self-reflexive exploration of the powerful and precarious connections between people, papers, and power—and the "ambiguous spaces" that lie between.

**Parts of Power: The Making of Migrant Detention**

*Undocumented* is dedicated "to the people who have resisted, and continue to resist, borders everywhere" (n.p.). The dedication appears in a small, hand script font, seemingly scrawled in the center of an otherwise blank page. The words appear vulnerable to the dominant white space, a visual gesture to the vulnerability of (racialized) migrant bodies within spaces of detention, deportation, and dispossession. At the same time, the handwritten quality of the text, an aesthetic strategy Chak uses throughout *Undocumented*, denotes intimacy and personal resilience: the words mark the presence of a human subject, interrupting the silence; a human hand, authoring the space. "Using hand drawings," Chak has stated in an interview, "was not just an aesthetic decision":

> A lot of what I'm talking about is about paper, of having papers as a proof of personhood and the fragility of paper. Having certain documents can determine a lot of things in our lives. For a migrant, it can determine your freedom, what rights or services you have access to, and what protections you might have. Hand drawing the book helped emphasize that arbitrariness and fragility. ("Q&A" para. 8)

Chak's hand drawings are meant to emphasize how deeply and precariously intertwined human lives are with pieces of paper. As Dawson notes, they "bear traces of human individuality, will, and frailty, while also reminding readers of our reliance on papers as arbiters of rights and

freedoms" ("In Plain Sight" 133). The hand drawings also remind readers of the arbitrariness of status designations in the face of state power and control. "Status is a fickle thing," writes Chak, in a small, shaky script. "[I]t can be taken away from you, and at any moment, it can be lost" (92).

Of course, no one *loses* status: status is given and taken. And what are papers without power? In "The State versus the Alien," Godfried Engbersen and Dennis Broeders explore the exclusionary power of documentation in the context of migration. They argue that "the link between the exclusion of illegal immigration and policies can follow two separate, and essentially contradictory, logics":

> The first logic is 'exclusion from documentation' and the second is 'exclusion through documentation and registration'. Policies operating under the first logic block irregular migrants' access to documentation and registration in order to exclude them, while policies operating [under] the second logic aim to register and document the individual irregular migrant himself in order to exclude him. (Engbersen and Broeders 881)

To be undocumented, then, is not simply to lack the proper papers or registrations, but to be pushed "towards the fringes of legality and beyond" (Engbersen and Broeders 881). As states possess "classification power" (the power to decide what, or who, is legal) and "identification power" (the power to surveill, register, capture and evict), states "not only have the monopoly over the control of the 'legitimate means of movement,' but also over the allocation of citizenship and residence rights" (Engbersen and Broeders 869). Migrants and refugees are expelled from national territories through rigorous measures designed to identify and instrumentalize their bodies and control their movements.

In a single panel that extends horizontally across two pages—arguably the most striking image of the book—Chak depicts ghostly human shapes in various states of mobility (e.g. walking, working, sleeping, squatting), their blank bodies superimposed on photographs of urban and suburban landscapes.

**Fig. 6. Chak, Tings. 2014. *Undocumented*, 86-87**

There is a surreal, purgatorial quality to this panel, deliberately evocative of the ways in which the carceral landscape extends beyond the walls and cages of prison cells into the sites and spaces of everyday, routine life. Chak plays with perspective here, disrupting the reader's sense of space and time; the bodies appear to be moving, but they are simultaneously frozen in place, trapped in a tableau of "placelessness and radical discontinuity" (Dawson, "In Plain Sight" 132). This image, haunting and disorienting, visualizes the ways in which the "criminalization of migration has been bound into a broader strategy of carceral expansion" (Evans 188) designed to exploit and exclude undesirable bodies *within* state borders. The figures—recognizably human but lacking distinguishable features—appear to drift through space(s), but they are in fact surrounded by borders on all sides. Significantly, these figures cannot be definitively identified as migrants, refugees, or 'illegals' by the reader. They are simply bodies, any bodies, moving and

bound in space, evoking the ways in which refugees are at once made exceptional and invisible, paradoxically displaced and emplaced within the borders of the nation.

**Spaces of Exception**

In their 2017 review of Canada's immigration detention system, legal scholars Siena Anstis, Joshua Blum, and Jared Will point out that Canada's immigration detention laws operate on a policy of exceptionalism:

> Canada has maintained a distinct legal regime for the detention of non-citizens under its immigration laws. The power to detain non-citizens is broader, and the protections afforded to non-citizen detainees fewer, than under any other legal regime known to Canada. Under this regime, where detention is, by definition, of indeterminate length, long-term detentions in maximum-security criminal facilities have become common and widespread. (3)

Under Canada's immigration laws, the Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA), created by the Canadian government in 2003, is given "sweeping police powers—including the powers of arrest, detention, and search and seizure" (Human Rights Watch). Significantly, the CBSA "remains the only major law enforcement agency in Canada without independent civilian oversight to review policies or investigate misconduct" (Human Rights Watch).

The eeriness that pervades *Undocumented* thus derives, in part, from the ways in which Chak represents Canada's immigration and refugee system as an "apparatus of disappearance" (Nield 144). Bodies are rendered blank, faces fade away. People disappear:

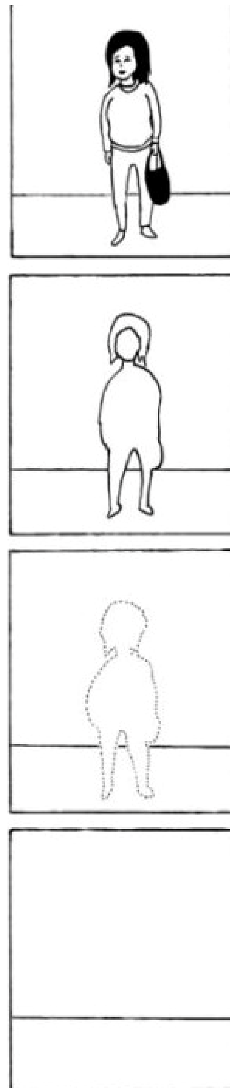

**Fig. 7. Chak, Tings. 2014. *Undocumented*, 91**

In fact, faces are a rare sight in *Undocumented*, as Chak employs a strategy of disembodiment to indicate the depersonalized nature of immigrant detention. Significantly, while Chak occasionally represents the faces and bodies of immigrant detainees (though often receding from view, as shown in the figure above), we never see any faces of authority—only body parts, "lots of hands" (Chak 91) carrying out the daily business of detention. Wrists are cuffed, legs frisked,

but by whom? The human agents of migrant detention are shown as merely instrumental to the system.

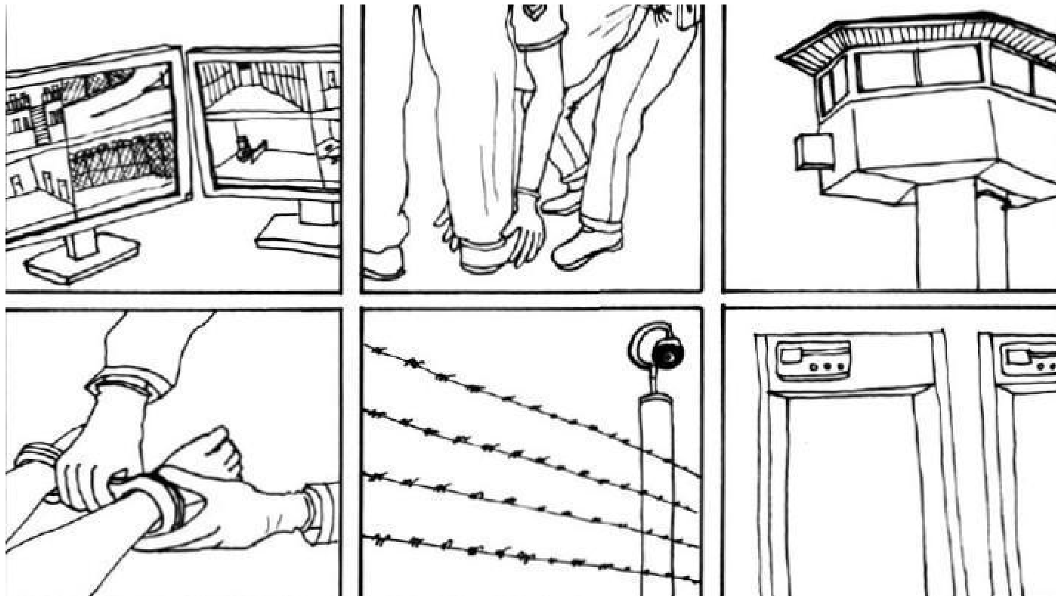

**Fig. 8. Chak, Tings. 2014. *Undocumented*, 91**

The concealment of authority is part of the state's design for unaccountability. In 1983, Don C. Gibbons coined the term 'mundane crimes' to refer to a "variety of commonplace, low visibility, and often innocuous instances of law breaking" (213). Since then, Gibbons' concept of 'mundane crimes' has been taken up by immigration and criminal justice scholars, such as David Friedrichs, to analyze the powerful and oppressive workings of global and domestic crimmigration regimes. As Friedrichs argues, "mundane crimes of the state refers to the routine exercise of power by relatively low-level agents of the state—civil service or justice system bureaucrats and enforcement personnel—in ways that impose significant costs on vast numbers of people" (111). Indeed, Canada is a master of the mundane, as painfully evident in the nation's

long legacy of 'bureaucratic assault' on Indigenous peoples.[83] But while Canada's genocidal crimes, both monumental and mundane, against Indigenous peoples are becoming more painfully (and corporeally) visible, the state's systematic subjugation, abuse, and abandonment of refugee and migrant bodies largely continues in routine, unseen fashion.[84]Accordingly, Chak represents any human agents of incarceration, such as security personnel, as largely indistinct from their technological counterparts. There are hands, and screens, and cameras—all mundane mechanisms of surveillance, parts of power and control.

While immigrant detention is typically administrative in nature, detainees are often subjected to criminal treatment and conditions:

> Immigration detainees are held for non-criminal purposes but endure some of the most restrictive conditions of confinement in the country … [T]hey are often treated like people incarcerated for criminal offences: handcuffed, shackled, searched, subjected to solitary confinement, and restricted to small spaces with rigid routines and under constant surveillance, with severely limited access to the outside world. (Human Rights Watch)[85]

In these spaces of confinement, where "those without status or identity are caged" and constantly surveilled, "the struggle is against the disappearance of one's self" (Chak 111). Disembodiment

---

[83] I have borrowed this phrase from Dean Neu and Richard Therrien's 2003 book, *Accounting for Genocide: Canada's Bureaucratic Assault on Aboriginal People*.

[84] I am referring to the recent "discovery" of the remains of thousands of Indigenous children buried in unmarked graves at former residential schools in Canada, which brought Canada's genocidal crimes—a national open secret—to international attention.

[85] There are three main immigration detention centers in Canada, located in Toronto, Laval, and Vancouver, but the landscape of migrant detention extends far beyond Canada's official 'holding' centers. In her 2017 article, "Refugee Comics and Migrant Typographies," Rifkind notes that "migrants are detained across the country in 142 facilities, and some of them are in rented cells in maximum-security prisons" (650). As I discuss later in this chapter, however, COVID-19 has increased the number of detainees held in provincial jails.

thus becomes a feature of detention, in which harsh penal practices, such as solitary confinement, render the individual indistinguishable from the carceral landscape: “Prisoners held in prolonged segregation speak about the feeling of merging with the walls … where the distinction between an individual’s body and self becomes indistinguishable from the individual cell itself” (Chak 95).[86] Chak aptly represents the experience of being held in solitary confinement, now termed “structured intervention,” as obliteration. She includes a large white square, a blank but heavily bordered box, to apparently indicate the “too blank, impossible, and violent” (Chak 96) effects of prolonged segregation. Inside the box, there is nothing but blank, oppressive space, visualizing the ways in which, to quote Ivan Zinger, the current Correctional Investigator of Canada, solitary confinement constitutes “the most onerous and depriving experience that the state can legitimately administer in Canada” (qtd. in Grace, para. 8).

Deprivation and detention go hand in hand. As Rifkind notes, “the use of solitary confinement, including for children, is a documented part of migrant detention” (650), despite its well-known adverse effects on detainees’ physical and psychological health (including depersonalization and de-realization, both common symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder). However, as Lauren Vogel indicates, even short periods of time spent in detention can have severe consequences: “After even a short time, both children and adults can suffer increased symptoms of anxiety and post-traumatic stress. Children may have trouble eating and sleeping, and suffer delays in their development, in some cases losing the ability to speak” (E867).

[86] The use of solitary confinement in Canada’s federal prisons officially ended on December 1, 2019, after the practice (euphemistically called ‘administrative segregation’) was deemed to violate Canadians’ Charter rights and, in some cases, meet the United Nations definition of torture. However, a 2021 report by Jane Sprott and Anthony Doob argues that the federal government has merely rebranded segregation as Structured Intervention Units (SIUs). Notably, the report finds a “lack of systematic oversight” (1) and reliable government sources on the practices and effects of ‘structured intervention.’

In one particularly haunting scene of *Undocumented*, Chak depicts a child waiting silently "behind barbed wire and a security gate" (91) for a bus to take her to school. Chak closes in on her face, until we see little more than an eye, peering out from the borders of a cell. "It becomes," Chak ominously writes, "a ritual that spells trauma" (93).

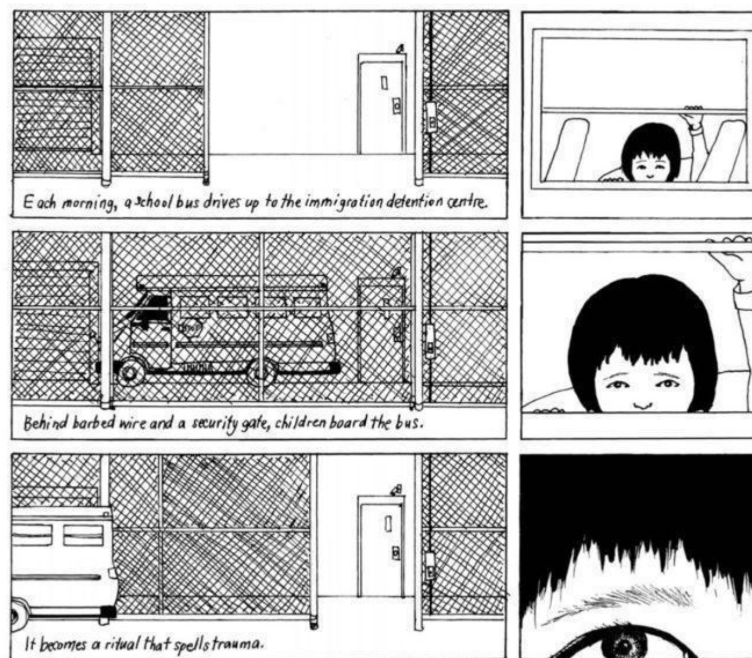


**Fig. 9. Chak, Tings. 2014. *Undocumented*, 93**

These rituals of trauma are a routine and normalized part of migrant detention, where lives are held in indeterminate limbo. As Rifkind notes, "Canada is one of the few Western states with no limit on the detention length for migrants; in the US and Europe, the limit varies between 90 and 180 days" (650). Not only are people held, however, for sometimes "five, six, seven years without charge or trial" (Chak 4), but they are held in "bare minimum" (99) conditions. Chak writes:

> The penitentiary was born of a modern desire for more efficient punishment … Existenzminimum (subsistence dwelling) became a design sensibility that sought

> the highest comfort through the most efficient means. Since then, the logic of the minimum has permeated the design of our world. The bare minimum becomes regulation. (99)

Earlier in *Undocumented*, Chak uses the metaphor of a "processing machine" to describe Canada's immigration detention system, underscoring the cold efficiencies of structural violence: "you are the input, and the output, a detainee to be deported" (33). The "bare minimum" becomes a regulation of violence, a "design sensibility" mobilized to reinforce hierarchies of power and privilege, where humans are reduced to being 'bare life' for the sake of capitalist 'efficiency.'

It is important to note that, soon after the Canadian government established the CBSA in 2003, Canada launched a "multiborder strategy that included inland enforcement by both uniformed and plain-clothed officers seeking out undocumented migrants in workplaces, hospitals, transit, schools, child welfare and women's shelters" (Abji 71). What that meant, and continues to mean today, is that undocumented migrants have become 'illegal' in all spheres of social and political life, a strategy in line with the ways in which state governments have increased their focus on fortifying the interal borders of nationalized space to keep undesirable bodies 'out': "Gradually, states have realised that 'keeping them out' is only part of the possible answer to unwanted migration … 'keeping them out' (border policies) has to be supplemented with policies of 'getting them out' (internal migration control and expulsion" (Engbersen and Broeders 870, 874). In either case, the aim is expulsion.

*Undocumented* is structured to mirror this "processing machine." The first twenty-five pages of the book quickly move the reader through a series of hand-drawn sketches of seemingly

innocuous streetscapes and suburban environments; above many of these images are small, aerial photographs of Canada's prisons and immigration detention centers:

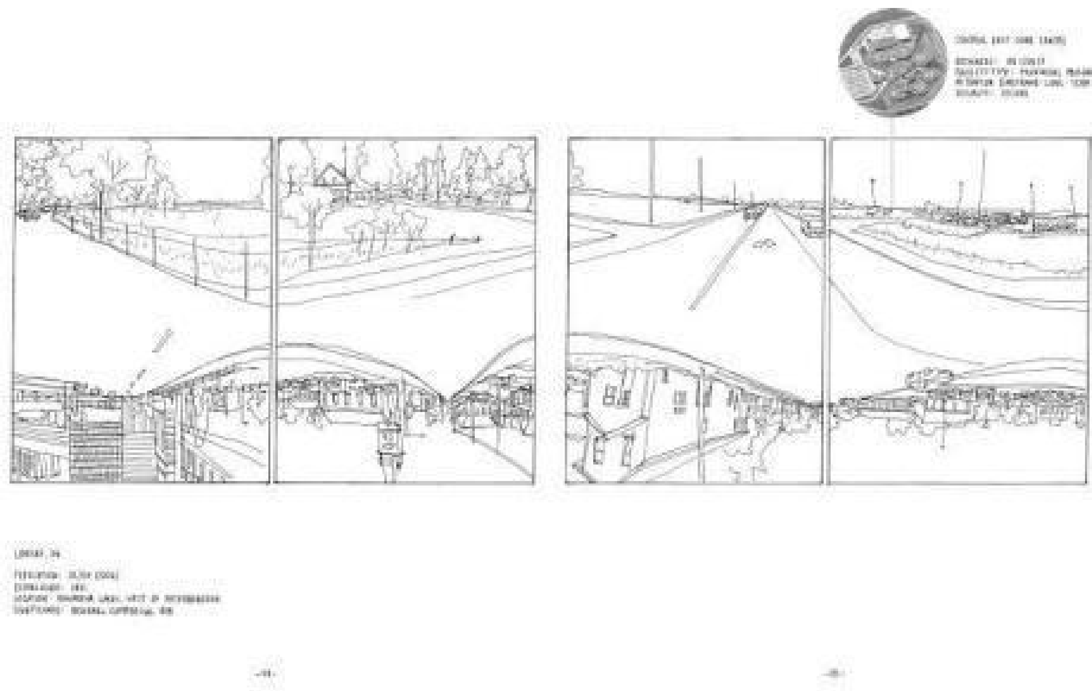

**Fig. 10, Chak, Tings. 2014. *Undocumented*, 16-17.**

The perspective given is one of looking out the window of a car. To put it simply, we are driving, or more likely, being driven to detention. As Dawson writes,

> Chak's use of rounded lines and inverted images creates a convex effect that reproduces the 360-degree perspective of the full-dome cell mirrors often used for monitoring prison inmates. Because they render streetscapes, the drawings also mimic the perspective produced by looking in a car's rearview window. As such they might be understood to invite the reader to assume the perspective of a driver, thus underscoring the comparative immobility experienced by detainees. ("In Plain Sight," 130-31)

At the same time, the reader's perspective belies a far more vulnerable position: "And yet, the disorienting images also position the reader as a detainee who is whisked through a landscape that is simultaneously unexceptional and unhomely, familiar but somewhat distorted" (Dawson, "In Plain Sight, 131). The uncanny effect of these disorienting images is further produced by the fact that there are no people anywhere to be seen; the images show only the banal features of banal buildings and streetscapes, largely indistinct, blurring into one another. In fact, the reader may be enticed to skim quickly through these opening pages—the images are visually unremarkable, dull even—a testament to the ways in which the "dispersed bordering practices that contribute to controlling and limiting the presence of non-citizens within nationalized spaces" (Moffette 273) operate under the guise of ordinariness and banality. The reader may overlook, or miss entirely, the crucial fact of these pages—that they are taking her, without her consent or complete understanding, to prison.

Or something *like* prison. Increasingly, the "line of demarcation between the civil and the penal" (Pugliese, "Civil Modalities" 149) is being blurred as states appropriate "seemingly benign and innocuous civil states, spaces and technologies" for the purposes of detention and eviction. In an article on Australia's use of hotels to detain asylum seekers (a practice Canada also follows), Pugliese uses the term "vernacular violence" to describe the ways in which state violence against refugees and migrants increasingly occurs "within the unexceptional spaces and sites of everyday life" ("Civil Modalities" 156). As Pugliese argues, "[t]he very civil status of these technologies, sites and spaces effectively occludes their role in the production of refugee trauma outside of the official designated prisons" ("Civil Modalities"149). Violence is made unrecognizable through disguise, whereby hostility is rebranded as hospitality, brutality as banality: "This is a violence that is masked by its very ordinariness; this is a violence made

invisible by its very vernacularity" (Pugliese, "Civil Modalities" 153). Banality is the point. As Dawson argues in her analysis of Canada's use of "suburban hotels as 'residential prisons'" ("In Plain Sight" 130), there is a "carefully contrived banality" (129) to Canada's migrant detention system that belies the violence refugees and migrants experience in the contexts of everyday civilian life.[87] Chak visualizes the banal surface of Canada's "apparatus of disappearance" (Nield 144) through her literal representations of the unexceptional and easily overlooked buildings and streetscapes that operate as spaces of incarceration and abandonment: "These spaces," writes Chak, "are where people without status are expelled to, to buildings and landscapes so banal, that they can go by unnoticed. Just as the people detained are without papers, so too are the buildings. [W]ithout photos or drawings (or only highly classified ones)—they, too, are undocumented" (10).

**Inside the Cage**

> The least controversial observation that one can make about criminal justice today, is that it is remarkably ineffective, absurdly expensive, grossly inhumane, and riddled with discrimination.
>
> — David J. Rothman, "The Crime of Punishment," para. 1

NAMELESS NOW

I AM

[87] For more extensive criticism on Canada's use of hotels and other civic spaces as detention sites, see Dawson's "Refugee Hotels: The Discourse of Hospitality and the Rise of Immigration Detention."

NUMBER

456

— Alejandro, “Alien” 24-27 [88]

From the section entitled “intake” on, the reader is clearly behind prison walls. Chak shifts to second person: “Following an intake sequence for arrivals, you face a complex set of stations for observation, verification, and neutralization (33). At the same time “you,” the reader, are cast as a detainee undergoing processing and registration, “you” are also cast as an observer being taken on a visual tour of the small spaces and restrictive conditions to which detainees are consigned. As the figures below show, Chak attempts to document these spaces in anatomical detail, mapping their physical dimensions and infrastructure, layout, and security features—a move that evokes the state’s use of mass surveillance and biometric technologies to apprehend, and anatomize, moving bodies. By documenting these sites and spaces of incarceration, Chak turns the surveilling gaze of the state upon itself. Each building, each cell is effectively given an identity document, effectively made to appear.

[88] These are the final lines of a poem entitled “Alien” that appears on the Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Services (LIRS) website. The poem is attributed to an immigrant detainee identified only as “Alejandro, who refers to himself as Alien 456.”

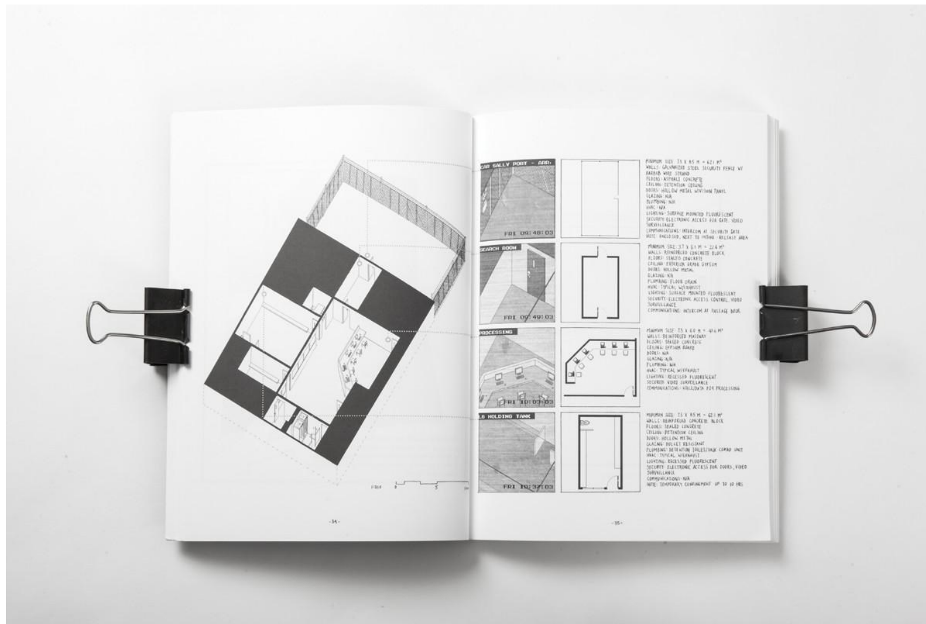

**Fig. 11, Chak, Tings. 2014. *Undocumented*, 54-55.**

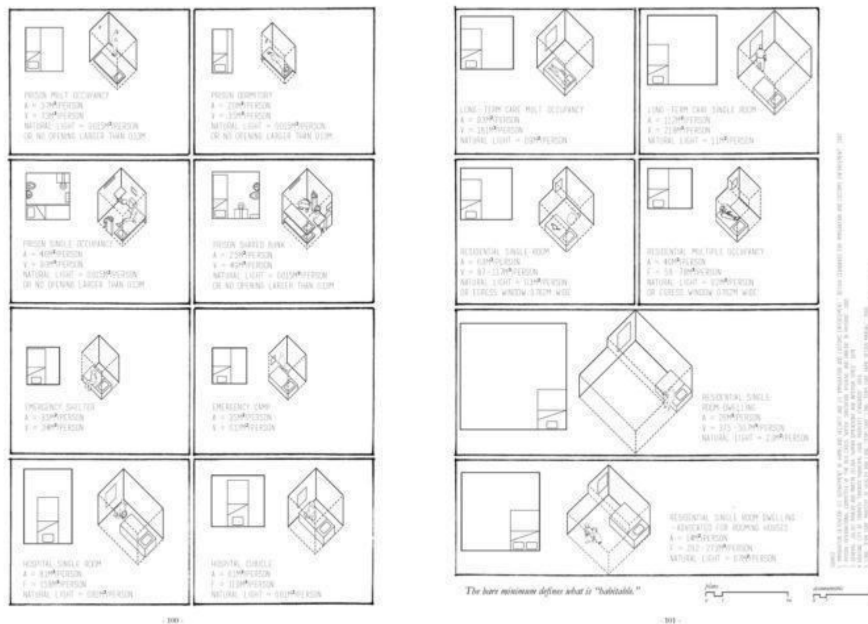


**Fig. 12, Chak, Tings. 2014. *Undocumented*, 100-101**

But in contrast to the detail of these images, many of Chak's illustrations of the places and spaces where migrants are held are bare in their design, as Chak "uses the clinical minimalism of architecture drafts" to "walk the viewer through the detention center as if we are being processed" (Rifkind 651). The deeper we are taken into the "maze" (Chak 33) of the building, the more minimal, confined, and impersonal our surroundings become. Yet "[o]ne pictorial icon is a constant" (Rifkind 651) throughout the book: there are security cameras in every frame. We—*you*—are closely, constantly, being watched.

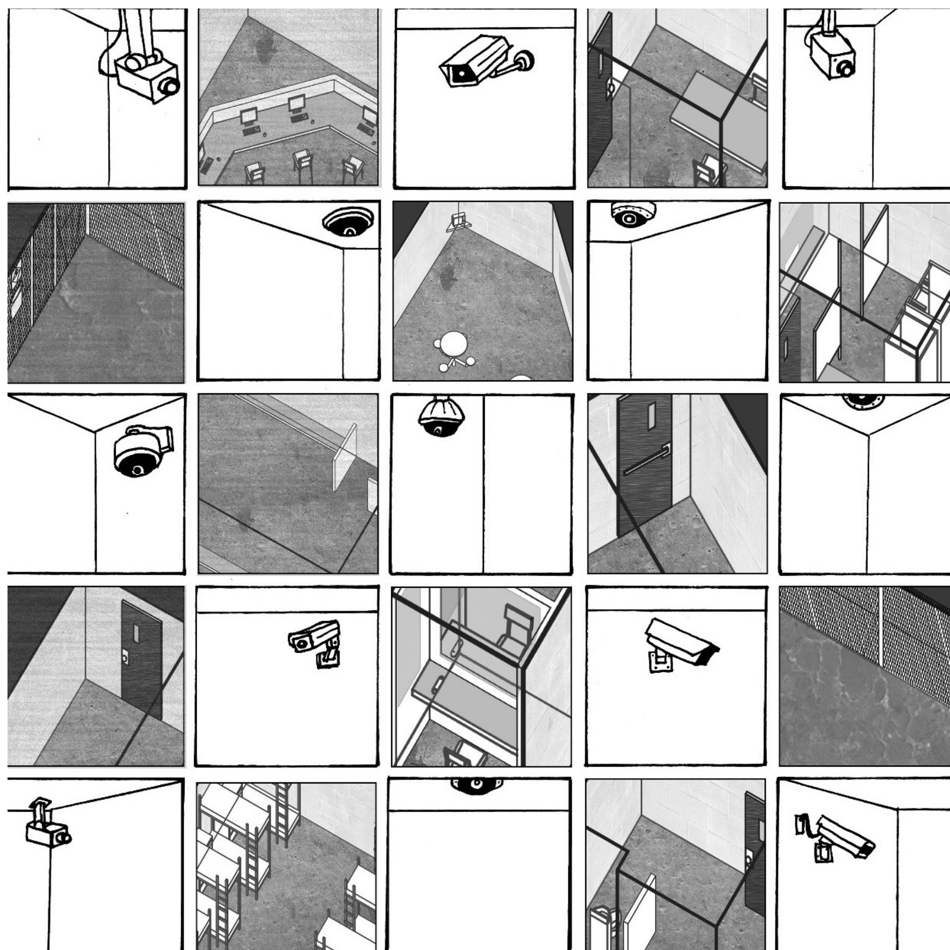

**Fig. 13, Chak, Tings. 2014. *Undocumented*, 96**

Chak is careful, however, not to conflate the reader's position too closely with that of a detainee. While *Undocumented* draws the reader in affectively, "moving us through secret spaces and making us feel the terror of unknowability that rises in their banal, bureaucratic emptiness" (Rifkind 651), the reader always retains the privilege of distance: "we can see the border around the frame; we can apprehend the security-state ideology that places the migrant within its borders" (651). In this way, the border becomes an immutable fact, an uncrossable threshold between affect and experience, through which Chak represents the limits of recognition and representation. To truly live inside the cage, Chak suggests, is to live in a state of disorientation and fragmentation: "You can never wholly grasp it. Inside, you lose your spatial bearings and markings, you lose your identity … and subjecthood" (90). Put another way, to live inside the cage is to *live* bare life, to struggle daily against the forms of dehumanization inherent to contemporary regimes of incarceration and removal: affect and experience are not the same thing.

Chak resists the impulse to universalize by emphasizing "the fact that something always 'exceeds the frame,'be that the literal cell or the ideology that apprehends the detainee as an inmate but fails to recognize her as a person" (Dawson, "In Plain Sight" 137). As I argue above, Chak unsettles the reader's perspective, placing us in the position of a detainee, while simultaneously emphasizing the limits of our view and empathetic identification. On the one hand, we are brought into close, suffocating proximity with the horrors of detainee life: the daily degradations, the walls "too thick, impenetrable" (Chak 96). On the other hand, we are made complicit in this violence. In her depictions of solitary confinement, for example, Chak refers to "white blindness" (97), a consequence of extreme sensory deprivation and constant exposure to white walls and fluorescent light, where people lose the ability to see colour, "or to see at all"

(97). Certainly, Chak's invocation of "white blindness" works to document the debilitating and potentially fatal effects of solitary confinement, and thereby further highlight the human rights abuses that regularly occur within Canada's carceral spaces. However, Chak's reference to "white blindness" also gestures towards the racialized nature of detention, raising "important questions about what we (don't) see and why, or how it is that we, who are citizens of a largely privileged and mostly white nation, remain blind to the fates of mostly non-white migrants detained each year" (Dawson, "In Plain Sight" 132). The large blank square that accompanies Chak's discussion of "white blindness" thus functions to signal the whitewashing strategies used to obfuscate the racism inherent in Canada's bordering practices, and the links between immigrant detention, rising global disparity, and hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion.

As Catherine Besteman argues in *Militarized Global Apartheid*, the ongoing securitization of borders

> dehumanizes racialized others through blocking their routes of mobility, channeling them into the most dangerous regions of the sea and the desert, incarcerating them in refugee camps in remote and inhospitable regions for indeterminate periods, and subjecting them to removals from white space over and over again.[89] (n.p.)

Canada routinely removes unwanted racialized bodies from "white space" through practices that deny, dehumanize, deport and disappear. But, as Aviva Chomsky compellingly argues, race is often subtext, space and silence, in modern immigration discourses and practices: "Restricting

[89] "[T]o the current moment," argues Besteman, "the global north has been engaged in projects of racialization, segregation, political intervention, mobility controls, capitalist plunder, and labor exploitation of people in the south" (n.p.). Of course, Canada engages with these projects on a domestic scale as well, having expelled Indigenous, Black, and racialized bodies from "white spaces" since the nation's foundation.

freedom of movement, as in apartheid, is a way of enforcing domination and maintaining inequality … Global apartheid is enforced with walls, stadium walls, lights, and guns. And global apartheid never talks about race, only nationality" (36-37).

I had difficulty understanding Chomsky's meaning at first, as the rhetoric surrounding immigration has become, especially in recent years, highly racially charged and, at times, openly white supremacist. Then I read this: "In a February 2021 interview, CBSA indicated the agency does not collect data disaggregated by race. It only collects data disaggregated by country of nationality" (Human Rights Watch). It is a small, easily overlooked detail that deliberately hides the ethnic and racial disparities of migrant detention, particularly as immigrant detention overlaps with criminal justice systems: "Increasingly, the immigration system functions—like the criminal justice system—to socially control through confinement in secure, disciplinary facilities the unpopular and the powerless, which in this case are undocumented people of color" (Miller 216). In Canada, non-white migrant detainees, Black men in particular, are often incarcerated in harsher conditions and for longer periods of time (Human Rights Watch). In Nova Scotia, "where immigration detainees are held in provincial jails by default," the "CBSA is more likely to invoke grounds of danger to the public for Black detainees, and Black detainees are often required to provide higher bonds to obtain release from detention" (Human Rights Watch).[90] According to one critic of immigrant detention in Canada, "the system is predicated on race."[91]

[90] Nova Scotia does not have any official immigration holding centers, hence why migrant detainees are sent to prison "by default."

[91] This quote appears in the 2021 Human Rights Watch report, *Immigration Detention in Canada*, and is attributed to an unidentified "Toronto-based legal representative who has worked with hundreds of immigration detainees over several decades."

*Undocumented*'s black-and-white format and abundance of white space thus signals, without words, the 'colour line' (or the "impute [of] crime to colour," as Frederick Douglass put it [para.5]) foundational to carceral and border regimes. However, Chak never talks about race in her book, at least not explicitly. While some of her human figures include markers of ethnic and racial identity (a woman in a hijab; a family of faintly South Asian descent), they are, as I have argued above, rendered largely anonymous and unidentifiable—blank bodies without names or discernible origins and identities. In this way, "Chak disrupts the photographic regime of the migrant image with drawings that refugee to show migrant bodies as sites of difference and signs of precariousness" (Rifkind 652), while simultaneously invoking the ways migrants and refugees are often dehumanized and depersonalized through images and discourses that emphasize their abject universality. Moreover, Chak indicates how detention regimes codify racial discrimination as arbitrary detail and benign discourse. As Peter Li argues, "The use of a racial subtext, that is the hiding of racial signification in benign discourse and conveying it in coded language, represents a sophisticated way of articulating 'race' in a democratic society that makes such articulation socially possible" (77). Li made this argument back in 2001 in an article on Canada's immigration discourse, but his argument still applies, only now in a broader, more insidious, context. The "hiding of racial signification" (Li 77) has become a feature of Canada's immigration system, pervasive in all areas of discourse, policy, and practice. And how better to hide than in plain sight? Everywhere, every day, there are borders "proliferating around and between us" (Chak 1), but they are designed to be missed: violence is masked by banality, silence, and disguise.

**“I will not forget your departure”**

The ways in which detainees’ assert their humanity and ‘act back’ onto oppressive carceral spaces thus becomes key to Chak’s exploration of the interplay between the politics of recognition and the politics of embodied resistance: “Our bodies always find ways to carve out space, to refocus our attention from geometry to the lived experience, from the container to the contained” (103). Throughout *Undocumented*, Chak celebrates refugee resilience and ingenuity in the face of systematic dehumanization by representing the ways in which detainees undertake creative ways to “assert and protect the personal” ((Dawson, “In Plain Sight” 134). As I discuss refugee protest and transgression in more detail in the following section on *Antigone*, I will limit myself here to some brief remarks about Chak’s use of objects as markers of humanity and mnemonic devices. Objects are key to resistance, Chak argues, as they “can build space, and that space can become a refuge, a home for the self” (106). Accordingly, Chak illustrates a series of household objects repurposed by detainees: a box of laundry detergent is fashioned into a picture frame; sheets of toilet paper hang as a privacy curtain (Fig. 15). Chak even includes a recipe for a “jail cake” (107), further emphasizing how people assert their humanity in hostile spaces through everyday acts of homemaking and domestication.

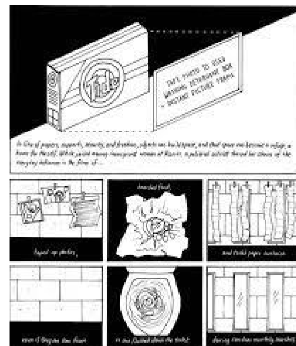

**Fig. 14, Chak, Tings. 2014. *Undocumented*, 106**

But there is also something deeply unsettling about the ways the objects appear on their own in these panels—that is, without people. If the objects mark humanity, they also mark its absence, reminding the reader that "resisting being reduced to bare life by simply finding ways to live" (Chak 107) does not barricade against the horrors of bare life, or guarantee survival. While, as Rifkind argues, Chak "demands the right to look at the secretive spaces of migrant detention whose dehumanizing practices are unrepresented in dominant discourse" (652), she is also acutely aware of the limitations of her view, and the many lives that have been, and continue to be, disappeared in "secretive spaces" on a daily basis. Therefore, if documentary is, as Kiki Tianqi Yu defines, "an art form, an enquiry into reality, a space for social engagement and act of political intervention" (7), it is also, *Undocumented* asserts, a way to mourn and remember, to bear witness to the unseen and unrepresentable. Chak thus concludes *Undocumented* with a statement of acknowledgement: "There are so many undocumented lives amongst us and in this world that can never be captured in numbers, barred by material and immaterial borders, or be confined to anonymous spaces" (112). What follows is a promise: "So I write this today only to say, that I will not forget your departure" (Chak 112).

## 5. 2 The Detention and Deportation of Sophie Deraspe's *Antigone*

> I did it. I don't deny a thing … It wasn't Zeus … who made this proclamation—not to me. Nor did that Justice, dwelling with the gods beneath the earth, ordain such laws for men. Nor did I think your edict had such force that you, a mere mortal, could override the gods, the great unwritten, unshakeable traditions. They are alive, not just today or yesterday; they live forever, from the first of time…

— Sophocles, *Antigone 495-56*

I broke the law, but I would do it again. My heart tells me to help my brother.

— Sophie Deraspe, *Antigone* 01:06:23-29

Memory plays an important role in Sophie Deraspe's *Antigone* (2019), a film adaptation of Sophocles' classical tragedy. Set in modern-day Montreal, the film revolves around a family of first-generation Algerian immigrants (the Hipponomes) who originally came to Canada as refugees from Kabylia. Death precedes their arrival. In an early scene, the film's protagonist, Antigone Hipponome, recalls in "moving, hazily-remembered detail" (Kiang para. 3) the story of her family's arrival for a class assignment. "Our whole family was leaving for Canada, my parents, grandma, two brothers, sister and I" (00:03:57-04:01), Antigone begins. Her class members pay her no attention at first. But as Antigone continues, the fragments of her speech begin to form a story of violent tragedy and trauma: "A white truck pulled up at the house. Grandma told us to hide. We hid upstairs. My sister told me not to look, but I looked anyway" (00:04:29-45). Antigone's story reveals how her parents were murdered, their bodies shrouded and dumped in front of the Hipponome family home in Kabylia.[92] "I saw my mother's shoe," Antigone states—by now to the class's full, wide-eyed attention (and the delayed intervention of the teacher)—"...my mother's shoe fall out and roll next to the bodies" (00:5:08-16).

[92] Kabylia is a region in northern Algerian with a long and violent history of colonialism and persecution against the Arab and indigenous Berber (Amazigh) peoples of the region (Carroll 811). Although the Hipponomes' racial and ethnic identity is never explicitly identified in the film, Menoceus's traditional ethnic clothing, as well as the family's traumatic history of persecution, suggests the Hipponomes are of Amazigh descent, tying the film's critique of Canada's colonial legacy to the legacies of colonialism and genocide in Algeria.

While Antigone's story of arrival accords with the kinds of refugee horror stories Canadian have grown accustomed to—stories of foreign persecution and shocking violence—this scene of traumatic recollection frames Antigone's trenchant refusal to allow suffering to remain on the "edges of social consciousness" (Ahmed 75), her refusal to bury 'unhappy' histories of trauma and violence. To recall Ahmed's argument that the "happiness duty for migrants means telling a certain story about your arrival as good, or the good of your arrival" (158), Antigone's refusal to stay silent about her family's traumatic history and, henceforth in the film, the violent injustices of Canada's immigration and criminal justice systems, instantiates her political and affective resistance against the systems of assimilation and control that consign refugees, migrants and other non-citizens (or 'would-be' citizens, to use Ahmed's term) to spaces of illegality, silence, and immobility. In her reworking of Sophocles' play, Deraspe re-inscribes the original conflict between Antigone and Creon to a conflict between two forms of remembrance, "one enacted by the sovereign state with its material excess and set of exclusions, the other enacted politically by resourceful, dispossessed strangers with their efforts to continue affirming their existence" (Castro 308). That is, in her legal and ideological conflicts with the Canadian state (Creon, allegorically), her transgressive kinship with both the living and dead, and her emergence as a controversial public icon, Antigone embodies a politics of resistance that identifies the refugee as central to contemporary projects of mobility justice.

In the remainder of this chapter, I move from a discussion of the spaces and sites of migrant control to consider the politics of refugee resistance. In so doing, I read Deraspe's *Antigone* as reinforcing Agamben's claim that "the refugee is perhaps the only thinkable people for our time and the only category in which one may see today—at least until the process of dissolution of the nation-state and of its sovereignty has achieved full completion—the forms

and limits of a coming political community" ("Beyond Human Rights" 90). While, as I have indicated previously, Agamben is referring to a stateless refugee—the embodiment of 'bare life' in his view—his articulation of the refugee as a figure of radical futurity is relevant to my analysis of the ways in which *Antigone* represents refugee or non-citizen resistances: "Only in a world in which the spaces of states have been thus perforated and topologically deformed and in which the citizen has been able to recognize the refugee that he or she is—only in such a world is the political survival of humankind today thinkable" (Agamben, "Beyond Human Rights" 95). With this in mind, I argue that *Antigone*, both as text and figure, articulates and embodies the possibilities, ambiguities, and ambivalences of subaltern resistances—and existences—in the face of violent hegemonies and regimes of expulsion and forgetting. As Antigone exclaims to a Canadian judge, "Your disguise as a citizen hides your heart! Where is your heart?" (01:25:23-27).

**Troublesome Resistance**

> Once upon a time, resistance was a relatively unambiguous category, half of the seemingly simple binary, domination versus resistance. Domination was a relatively fixed and institutionalized form of power; resistance was essentially organized opposition to power institutionalized in this way.
>
> — Sherry Ortner, "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal" 174

"A paradoxical community is emerging, made of foreigners who are reconciled with themselves to the extent that they recognize themselves as foreigners."

— Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves* 195

As in Sophocles' play, the central conflict in Deraspe's *Antigone* is between civic and familial life; however, Deraspe draws on the main themes of the original—family, duty, exile, justice, law—to explore the politics of contemporary migration, and the fraught intersections between memory, protest, and political membership. In Sophocles' play, Antigone buries her brother, Polynices, in defiance of Creon's law; in Deraspe's adaptation, Antigone breaks Canadian law to save her brother, also named Polynices, from deportation.[93] In the course of her highly publicized trial and detention, Deraspe's Antigone emerges in the public eye as a dual figure of heroism and criminality: on the one hand, she becomes a kind of idealized folk hero, a female David against the Goliath of the state; on the other, hers becomes the face of immigrant criminality, 'proof' of the socially corruptive forces of migration and the need for strict border regimes.

Yet like her Sophoclean predecessor, Deraspe's Antigone is not easily identified as a hero or villain, despite the ways in which the film casts her in an inspirational light (aided in large part by actor Nahéma Ricci's captivating performance). Since her inception, Antigone has been troubling the borders of representation and interpretation, at once a figure of ethical action,

[93] Deraspe's decision to retain the original names from the Greek play not only works to acknowledge the film's basis in tragedy, but also indicates the ways in which *Antigone* blurs the borders between familiar and unfamiliar, or citizen and 'stranger.' I address the film's 'generic transgressions' later in this chapter.

radical feminism, pathological desire, and moral and political ambivalence.[94] In *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*, Butler argues that Antigone is a threshold figure, whose speech and actions challenge the borders between kinship and state, female and male, nature and culture, oppositions that the play overall appears to endorse. For Butler, Antigone's ambivalence—her 'troublesome' nature—is what invigorates her radical potential and identifies her as a venerable figure of resistance. Antigone is a problem for politics:

> But can Antigone herself be made into a representative for a certain kind of feminist politics, if Antigone's own representative function is itself in crisis? … it is not just that, as a fiction, the mimetic or representative character of Antigone is already put in question but that, as a figure for politics, she points somewhere else, not to politics as a question of representation but to the political possibility that emerges when the limits to representation and representability are exposed. (Butler, *Antigone's Claim* 2)

In other words, Antigone's political power lies in her capacity for possibility, as she represents the "trace of an alternate legality that haunts the public sphere as its scandalous future" (Butler, *Antigone's Claim* 40). Despite its ancient roots, the play has trenchant relevance to today's politics of mobility and migration. In his recent reading of Sophocle's *Antigone*, Andrés Fabián Henao Castro argues, for example, that Antigone's "performative claim to be a 'stranger'" (309) symbolizes the "counter-politics instantiated by strangers today (refugees, undocumented

[94] The philosophical and critical literature on Sophocle's *Antigone* is vast and exhaustive, with contemporary philosophers such as Butler, Irigirary, and Žižek taking up the play to theorize the complex political, cultural and ideological dimensions of war, exile, marginality, identity and resistance. My own thinking on Deraspe's *Antigone* is most clearly indebted to Butler, who reads Sophocle's play alongside Hegel's famous reading of *Antigone* in *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807).

immigrants, noncitizens) as they experience the global conditions of political membership for those ontologically divided between two polities" (308). By claiming "the political subject-position of the stranger as her own" (307), Castro argues, "Antigone stands for refugees, undocumented immigrants, and noncitizens in the reinvention of the play's symbolic repertoire in the twenty-first century" (309).[95]

In Deraspe's adaptation, Antigone does not merely stand for the refugee, she *is* a refugee. That is, while the main action of the film takes place over a decade since the Hipponomes came to Canada as refugees—the traumatic scene of their arrival shown in an early flashback that replays during the scene of their departure in the film's tragic resolution—they continue to lack secure citizenship as permanent residents.[96] The precariousness of the family's legality is confirmed after Polynices (who is eighteen, the legal age in Quebec) is arrested and charged with breaking parole and assaulting a police officer after witnessing the police unlawfully shoot and kill his beloved older brother, Eteocles. Because of his age, immigrant status, and prior criminal record for petty crimes—Polynices is a low-level member of the street gang, the Habibis—Polynices is set to be deported.[97] The scenario is borrowed from real life. In an interview,

---

[95] As Castro explains, he uses the word "stranger" as a multi-faceted referent for the "complex and irreducible set of categories" (306) that circumscribe contemporary mobile identities: refugee, noncitizen, stateless, migrant, foreigner, undocumented. He notes that Antigone's use of the ancient Greek word "metic" ("μέτοικος") in the play establishes her identification with the stranger, as it means "resident alien" (Castro 307).

[96] Unlike the 'happy' scene of refugee arrival depicted in Thúy's *Ru*, the Hipponomes' arrival in Quebec is characterized by fear, claustrophobia, and confusion—children crying, papers frantically waved, officials in black uniforms, white walls. This scene of arrival, which doubles as a scene of departure at the film's end, underscores the hostile and carceral dimensions of Canada's 'hospitality' regime.

[97] Habibi ("حبيبي") is an Arabic word that literally means "my love" or "my lover." It is widely used as a term of affection and endearment for friends, family members, and significant others. In this way, Deraspe not only adds another referential layer to the film's predominant metaphor of the heart, but also signals the 'unnatural' kinships that form in opposition, or in tension with, the dominant apparatuses of law and citizenship. The Habibis are at once a violent and socially corruptive force, as well as a source of (toxic masculine) community and social and economic mobility for Polynices and Eteocles. Eteocles, for example, pays the rent for his family's apartment with the money he earns from his drug-related activities for the gang.

Deraspe explains that she was inspired to adapt Sophocles' tragedy after learning about the police killing of Fredy Villaneuva:

> The play stayed with me in the corner of my head and my heart for many years. It was sleeping there. One evening, I was reading online and watching YouTube [videos] about a tragedy that happened in Montreal in 2008. It's called the Villanueva Affair. A 14-year-old young man was gunned down by the Montreal police in a park, and not long after, his older brother who was on the scene was threatened with deportation because of petty crimes. They were permanent residents, and they felt they were at home in this country. This family immigrated as refugees to Canada, and tragedy hits again. (qtd. in Heeney para. 5)

The repetition of tragedy thus constitutes the film's organizing principle, as Deraspe blends fiction and reality, past and present, to explore the precarious spaces between domesticity and displacement; the dangerous intervals, as well as sites of possibility, between inclusion and exclusion, hospitality and hostility.

Similar to *Cockroach*, *Antigone*'s Montreal alternates between homely and hostile. However, while Hage's protagonist embodies alienation, living cold and alone in the spaces of a hostile city (and a hostile mind), Deraspe's Antigone is part of a loving family, whose humble but colourful Montreal apartment deliberately contrasts with the "strip-lit, claustrophobic" (Carr para. 2) spaces of expulsion that comprise the film's overall harsh aesthetic—courtroom, immigration detention centre, airport, morgue, and cell. Indeed, the film opens on a scene of surveillance and arrest. "Take off your vest.[98] Look at the camera. You're allowed to make one

---

[98] Vest" here refers to the jacket—her brother Eteocles' jacket—that Antigone wears throughout multiple scenes in the film. Since I am working from the English subtitled version of the film available on Apple TV, there are no

call" (00:00: 41-46) instructs a disembodied voice of authority.[99] A young, androgynous-looking girl, the 17-year-old Antigone, responds uncertainly, her body language at once fearful and defiant. She is wearing a white-striped red jacket, a garment symbolic of both Canadian identity and 'thug criminality'—in other words, citizenship and lawlessness.[100] Only Antigone is shown in this scene, surrounded entirely by white space and white walls, evoking the racialized dimensions of Canada's crimmigration regime, as well as the particular ways in which Muslims have long been framed as threatening to Quebecois identity. As Naved Bakali argues,

> At varying points in Quebec's recent history, political parties have gained prominence through employing identity politics, framing Muslims as a threatening 'Other,' This occurred during the Reasonable Accommodation debates from 2006 to 2008 and more recently in discussions over Bill 60, a proposed law that would have prohibited government employees or employees of state-funded institutions from wearing conspicuous forms of religious attire. (412)

Although Antigone is not shown wearing religious attire in this scene or any others, she is a conspicuous figure, her red jacket vibrant against the whiteness of her surroundings.[101]

---

doubt a variety of words, symbols, and meanings that have been lost in the film's translation from Canadian French to English.

[99] Deraspe casts many of the figures of the state (police officers, the state prosecutor, the judge) as female, further blurring the lines between traditional gender roles and indicating the genderless nature of power—that is, the ways in which power is enacted by multiple agents of the state, whether male, female, or gender-non-conforming. In this way, Creon's character becomes an insidious, invisible force, manifest in multiple legal and bureaucratic bodies and actions.

[100] In her reading of Claudia Rankine's elegiac *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014), Shermain M. Jones identifies the hoodie as "an article of clothing that functions as a kind of metonymy for 'thug' or black male criminality" (40). Similarly, Deraspe employs urban clothing (i.e. 'streetwear') as a metonym for immigrant criminality, signifying the racial dimensions of crimmigration, and as key symbol in the film's lexicon of urban youth and minority subcultures.

[101] In vibrant contrast to the film's use of white, the colour red plays a key role in the film's visual grammar of (female) resistance, disrupting the film's largely stark, monotonous palette to infuse the frame with vitality and violent energy. Red—arguably the colour of love and war—is favoured by Antigone and representative of her fierce social conscience and blood-and-heart ties to her family.

Deraspe's critiques of the colonial dimensions of Canada's crimmigration system, as well as Quebec's historical debates over 'reasonable accommodation' and the enactment of Bill-21,'[102] are made more explicit when Christian—a wealthy, white Montreal politician, former lawyer, and father of Haemon, Antigone's boyfriend—visits the surviving female members of the Hipponome family (Antigone, her sister Ismene, and their grandmother Menoeceus) at their apartment to inform them Polynices is facing deportation.[103] Christian, whose name evokes the deep links between Christianity and settler/invader colonialism, while simultaneously ironizing Quebec politics of secularity, emerges as a paragon of white male privilege and, moreover, a paragon of citizenship. Despite her limited grasp on the French language, Menoeceus (Méni) immediately understands Christian's use of the word "extradition"; in fact, she understands exceedingly better than him the brutal realities of extradition: "Do you know what it's like? A crowded cell where people eat and shit … No, you don't understand. You live in cotton. And you don't stop to pick it. Damn winter is your biggest worry!" (00:26:01-18).[104] Méni's emotional rebuke of the sympathetic though naive politician underscores what Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodriguez terms the "coloniality of migration," that is, the connection between settler colonialism, "racial capitalism and the asylum-migration nexus" (17). Moreover, the film's inversion of the typical host/refugee dynamic of hospitality locates the film's allegory of

[102] On June 16, 2019, Quebec's National Assembly passed Bill-21, which prohibits public-sector workers in Quebec from displaying religious symbols, specifically when on duty. Bill-21 has been widely criticized for the ways it targets religious minorities, specifically Muslims, and "resembles criminal legislation" (Ahmad).

[103] While some reviewers of the film (Van Hoeij, Carr) identify Christian as a contemporary version of Creon, this is only partially true. Christian is an extension of Creon's character, not the embodiment of it: "Creon's character is spread around many aspects of the system" (Dunlevy para. 16).

[104] Interestingly, neither Ismene nor Antigone translate Méni's words into French for Christian to understand, in keeping with the film's representations of the Hipponomes' apartment as a welcoming, hospitable place. Indeed, prior to her outburst, Méni brings Christian (and Haemon, who accompanies him) a tray of gum and cigarettes, traditional symbols of Arab friendship and hospitality. Visibly bewildered by this 'strange' cultural ritual, Christian refuses the cigarettes, though Haemon takes a piece of gum.

resistance within both federal and uniquely Quebecois contexts and competing notions of nationhood and citizenship.

In 1950, sociologist T.H. Marshall famously articulated the shifting and differential dimensions of modern citizenship in relation to social class ("a system of inequality"):

> Citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of community … There is no universal principle that determines what those fights and duties shall be, but societies in which citizenship is a developing institution create an image of an ideal citizenship against which achievement can be measured and towards which inspiration can be directed. (149-50)

Citizenship, in other words, is always in flux, at the same time it is bound to "an image of an ideal citizenship" (Marshall 150) based on a variety of civil, political, social and economic factors. As a white, wealthy and Canadian-born male, Christian is an 'ideal citizen,' who enjoys full membership in the community of Canadian citizenship.[105] However, Christian's absence as a father, as demonstrated by Deraspe's portrayal of his son Haemon as effectively a 'latch-key kid,' signals the limits and failures of colonial regimes of citizenship and patriarchal care (e.g. the welfare state).[106] In fact, despite Christian's wealth and influence, he is in many ways an impotent figure, too concerned with his political career—that is, in caring for the matters of the

[105] The idea of an ideal *Canadian* citizenship is, however, complicated by the film's Quebec setting, given the historically and contemporaneously fraught Canada-Quebec relationship—the "two solitudes" of English and French Canada. While the notion of "two solitudes," popularized by Hugh Maclennan's 1945 novel of the same name, has been rigorously critiqued by Indigenous, postcolonial, and decolonial critics for the ways in which it reinforces Canada's colonial master narrative, "two solitudes" remains a problematic emblem of the long-standing divides between English and French Canada.
[106] For an in-depth analysis on the historical development of Quebec's welfare system and its intergenerational consequences and effects, see Dominique Marshall's *The Social Origins of the Welfare State.*

state—to properly care for his own kin, or meaningfully respond to Antigone and her family's plight.

Although well-meaning, Christian's offer to become Antigone's legal guardian, and thereby 'save' her from deportation, aligns with the projects of white saviourdom—"the narcissistic product of white people's superiority complex" (Milazzo 60)—that operate to disavow the agency and subjecthood of the racialized 'Other' and reify colonial systems of racism and xenophobia. As Marzia Milazzo writes,

> A white saviour narrative is a story in which a white messianic character guides or 'helps' a person of colour (or a community of people of colour) so that change is represented as occurring thanks to the actions of the white character rather than the initiative of people of colour themselves … Genuine transformation cannot occur based on such a colonial relationship, which serves to maintain the racist power structure intact. (60)

While the film's treatment of race is complex—Antigone, for example, is light-skinned and blue-eyed, her racial and ethnic identity somewhat ambiguous—Christian's well-intentioned but ultimately misguided offer signals the fantasies of colonial rescue and "'settler moves to innocence' that problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity" (Tuck and Yang 1).Despite his kindly portrayal, Christian emerges as a stereotypical white saviour of white futures, whose offer of legal guardianship reflects the deeply "entangled histories of adoption and colonialism" (di Tomasso and de Finney 7) that inform Canada's genocidal and assimilationist legacies. Antigone's refusal of Christian's guardianship therefore constitutes a refusal of the colonial apparatuses of wardship and "white care" (Seiler 17) that continue to displace Indigenous and racialized subjects from their homes, families, and

futures. Christian's offer, after all, comes at a high cost of family separation and sacrifice: he can only legally 'rescue' Antigone, not her brother and grandmother, from deportation, forcing Antigone to choose between her duties of care and commitment to her family—the allegiances of her heart—and adoptive citizenship: family, for a place of belonging.

But what does it mean to belong in this era of shifting borders and contested citizenships? What are the terms and conditions of membership? As Magnus Dalhstedt et al. argue,

> [T]he contract between the individual and the state that gives citizenship its content does not last forever but is constantly rewritten, especially as a result of different interests … The question of membership in the community of citizenship, who are included and who are not, is anything but uncomplicated. There are always a few who write the contract, not everybody is included and those who are do not necessarily all enjoy the same conditions. (90)

In *Antigone*, Deraspe critiques the disparities of citizenship in physically obvious ways—Christian's white suburban mansion, for instance, stands in stark contrast to the Hipponome's poor but colourful urban apartment—and in more subtle, less tangible forms.[107] While the film's central conflict is between two polities, the family and the state, neither polity is free from internal disparity or the "anything but uncomplicated" (Dalhstedt et al. 90) politics of membership. As the film demonstrates, the Hipponome's liminal place of belonging in Canada is

[107] For example, the suburban location of Christian's affluent home symbolizes the spatial demarcations and displacements of racialized and immigrant communities to often poor, urban 'ghettos.' In "Ghettos in Canadian Cities?" R. Alan Walks and Larry S. Bourne employ the phrase "spectre of ghettoization" to conceptualize the "growing relationship between the clustering of certain visible minority groups in urban neighbourhoods and the spatial concentration of poverty in Canadian cities" (273). This "spectre of ghettoization" is not, however, limited to inner-city areas, but also extends to the outer suburbs of Canada's metropolitan areas where "many newcomers suffer 'hidden homelessness'" (Preston et al. 288).

only partially informed by their legal status, however undeniably significant legality is to citizenship. Poor, racialized quasi-citizens, the Hipponomes face a variety of obstacles to becoming full citizens of Canada; however, the ways in which each member of the family polity negotiates the complex terrain of (un)belonging crucially differ.

Ismene, for example, claims to "want a normal life" (1:35:13), which she imagines accordingly in normative terms of heterosexual marriage, property ownership, and average economic success. Normality becomes a cipher for colonial happiness. As Ahmed argues, happiness is "used as a technology of citizenship, as a way of binding migrants to a national ideal" (133). In this way, Ismene's dream of a "normal life," which never materializes in the film, accords with Ahmed's idea of the happiness duty for migrants: the social obligation to become 'well-adjusted' and thereby gain membership in the "good family" (148) of the colonial host nation. Silence and forgetting become markers of adjustment:

> To become well adjusted is to become adjusted to colonial history … Migrants as would-be citizens are thus increasingly bound by the happiness duty not to speak about racism in the present, not to speak of the unhappiness of colonial histories, or of attachments that cannot be reconciled into the colorful diversity of the multicultural nation. (Ahmed 132, 158)

Ismene's is a dream of the future, insofar as she envisions a "normal life" as freedom from trauma, a refuge from the violences and displacements that have thus far characterized her life. But as Antigone reminds her, normal is an illusion: "[W]e're not normal. We can't erase our family's past" (01:35:18-23). The past shapes the future.

Polynices and Eteocles' gang membership symbolizes a different, more immediately fraught, strategy of belonging enacted in direct conflict with the legal and moral apparatuses of

the state. Polynices' prospects for a "normal life" all but disappear with his violent initiation into gang life, his bruised and bloodied face a corporeal testament of his departure from the realms of legality to illegality: this departure is literalized by Polynices' deportation at the film's conclusion. In "Crime, Deportation and the Regulation of Immigrants in Canada," Wendy Chan argues that "deportation is as much about the expulsion of particular 'undesirable' immigrants as it is about making 'good' citizens" (154). Published in 2006—the same year Juliet Stumpf coined the portmanteau "crimmigration"—Chan's essay focuses on the racialized and gendered dimensions of Canada's deportation system, and the ideological and structural overlaps between immigrant criminality and punitive regimes of surveillance and conformity. "Concerns around criminality," Chan writes, "rationalizes [sic] the ongoing regulation and surveillance of immigrants and the threat of deportation ensures their compliance" (153). Chan's insights into Canada's use of deportation (or the *threat* of deportation) as a regulatory political and social force are particularly compelling in light of *Antigone*'s exploration of the interconnections and interstices between mobility and membership. Polynices' gang initiation, for instance, darkly parallels a citizenship ceremony, both involving highly ritualized rites of passage from 'outsider' to 'insider,' and the conferral of rights and responsibilities. The film's representations of gang culture, police brutality, and immigrant crime are key to its critiques of the "inherent punitiveness" (Kiely and Swirak 61) and racialized and gendered dimensions of contemporary immigration controls and state justice systems.

As Elizabeth Kiely and Katharina Swirak argue in their 2022 book, *The Criminalisation of Social Policy in Neoliberal Societies*,

> Both civil and immigration and criminal law fulfill the same social function of creating 'insiders' and 'outsiders.' The rise of crimmigration regimes also

> parallels broader societal changes, moving punitive ideologies from the 'rehabilitative idea' … towards the 'new punitiveness' of advanced liberal societies, which emphasises prevention and risk management. (61)

This new paradigm for punishment plays out in Antigone as a conflict for space and mobility, where the non-citizen struggles against the state's "power to exact extreme sanctions and the power to express society's moral condemnation" (Stumpf 410). Both Polynices and, as we come to find out, Eteocles have committed crimes, but their punishments are disproportionate to their crimes. Polynices faces deportation; Eteocles is shot dead. The tragedy of Eteocles' murder is compounded by the fact that the officer that shot him is not held accountable, demonstrating the 'blind eye' of the state to police brutality and racially targeted violence. This blindness is literalized by Theresa, the blind court-appointed psychiatrist, who forespells Antigone's doom.

In a review of the film, T'Cha Dunlevy aptly notes that "Creon's character is spread around many aspects of the system, which is ultimately what Antigone is fighting against" (para. 16). But how does one fight against power that is dispersed, pervasive, ubiquitous? In "Dead Zones of the Imagination," David Graeber argues that structural violence entails a "tendency towards abstraction that makes it possible for everyone involved to imagine that the violence upholding the system is somehow not responsible for its violent effects" (113-114). He stresses that the structures of violence are not, as they are often imagined, "abstract free-floating entities," but rather "material processes, in which violence, and the threat of violence, play a crucial, constitutive role" (Graeber 113). Significantly, Eteocles is not doing anything illegal when he is shot to death; moreover, we do not see the scene of his death (in the tradition of Greek tragedy), or the face of his killer. If the system is the real criminal in the film, it is a

system abstracted from accountability, where violence is “spread around,” unevenly and unequally, the material and symbolic spaces of bureaucracy and suspicion.

**My Heart Tells Me (“Mon Coeur Me Dit”)**

As drone and surveillance expert Arthur Michel argues, “[f]undamental to liberal democracy is the ability to have sacrosanct private spaces. That is where the life of civil society exists. It is where our personal lives exist, where we are able to pursue our dreams and passions. And it is often where we hold power to account” (qtd. in Goldstein para. 25).[108] Antigone’s fight against the ‘system’ thus becomes a struggle for the private and the personal, the “life of civil society.” The vitality of this life is symbolized in the film’s many metaphors and symbolism of the heart and Antigone’s unwavering loyalty to her brother. In court, Antigone deliberately cries out: “I broke the law, but I would do it again. My heart tells me to help my brother!” (1:06:23-29). Antigone instantly goes viral, her words and image rapidly disseminated across social media and various online platforms—the virtual courts of public opinion:

> A rapid montage of images demonstrate how her police mug shot is edited for different purposes. In one rendering she is reframed with gang symbology, captioned as a “habibi sister” or “radical bitch”; in another scene the outline of her short hair and wide eyes are printed as a stencil, Che Guevara-scene. She is

[108] Michel makes this argument in relation to the Gorgon Stare, a U.S. military-drone surveillance technology that can monitor and track multiple moving targets simultaneously (and surreptitiously): “it’s a way of seeing everybody all the time” (qtd. in Goldstein para. 25). For Michel, the Gorgon Stare—the name comes from the Gorgon monsters of Greek mythology, whose terrible gaze could instantly transform anyone who looked at them into stone—is the technological embodiment of the state’s increasing violation of its own citizens’ (disappearing) rights to privacy and space. See Michel’s interview with Sam Goldstein, entitled “‘Nothing Kept Me up at Night the Way the Gorgon Stare Did.’”

> repurposed as Algerian, Canadian, guilty or innocent, depending on the particular slant. (Carr para. 2)

While Carr argues that Antigone's "lack of control over her own destiny is exemplified in the manipulation of her image" (para. 7), this is only true to an extent. After all, Antigone intends for her message of love ("My heart tells me") to go public: it is part of her legal strategy to generate public support and expose the realities of the state's deportation regime to public scrutiny. "It won't be your trial," Antigone's lawyer states. "It'll be your podium" (01:02:56). Thus, these 'mash-up' montage scenes, which jar against the film's overall social realism, become formal representations of Antigone's chorus, a diverse body of dispersed physical and virtual identities and voices, in unity and in discord. As Creon is "spread around many aspects of the system" (Deraspe), so too is the chorus spread around many aspects of contemporary social life and (sub)culture, from the physical protesters who advocate for Antigone's freedom to the online commentators who rally for her deportation, or even death.

In *Choral Mediations in Greek Tragedy* (2013), Renaud Gagné and Marianne Govers Hopman compellingly argue that the choruses of Greek tragedy "creatively combined media and discourses to generate their own specific forms of meaning." They write,

> There is something distinctive about choral mimesis in Greek tragedy. The tragic chorus is never just a group of old men or captive women, never just a ring of ships or dolphins or the circle of stars of its imagery, or masked citizens dancing in the theatre—never just one chorus. It will rarely be entirely by its fictional character, narrative, or performance at any one moment. In a genre defined by impersonation, it can push the referential limits of embodiment and enactment

> beyond any strict equivalence. Its boundaries, like its movement, are always shifting. (Gagné and Govers Hopman 1)

The chorus is boundless by nature, ungovernable, endlessly contravening the borders of space, place, time, form and identity— "simultaneously here, there and elsewhere, now and then, this and that" (Gagné and Govers Hopman 1). In this way, Derapse's dispersal of the chorus across virtual and physical spaces, forms, and identities not only signals the complex relationship between technology and social life, but also the possibilities inherent to acts of protest and public dissent. According to Paulo Gerbaudo and Emiliano Treré, "social media has become the key site where protest identities are created, channelled, and contested" (866). While there is much to say in relation to the politics of resistance as "created, channeled, and contested" in social media and other virtual spaces, I am primarily interested in the ways Deraspe uses these media montages—just one of the chorus's many forms in the film—to perform the competitive discourses around refugees and immigration and gesture wildly towards the horizons of change. For as Gagné and Govers Hopman argue, the choruses of Greek tragedy are always pointing elsewhere: "They revel in abrupt transitions and oblique side glances, the lure of roads not taken and the overabundance of possible interpretations" (2). Antigone's chorus of advocates and antagonists—the many disharmonious voices of 'the people'—thus operates as a (dis)collective body of transgression into the hegemonic spaces of power and silence. Whether those voices champion the authority of the state, or decry it, is beyond the point. The point is to agitate.

Because as the state intrudes further into the realms of the private through insidious practices of surveillance capitalism and opaque border controls, holding power to account increasingly necessitates a struggle over space. In the film, natural space—public parks, urban gardens—are represented as oases of community and freedom, "sacrosanct public spaces" (Carr

para. 2) threatened by the encroachments of capitalist development and government surveillance. Natural spaces are "green and sunny" (Carr. para. 2), in vibrant contrast to the concrete highways and chain-link fences that surround and cut through them. Indeed, the film's penal grammar is routinely interrupted by warm, hospitable visions of common, collective space. As Serena Viola argues, "[c]ollective spaces are the underlying armatures of societies, a physical, economic, social framework that supports the creation and growth of shared identities. Since antiquity, common spaces have been the connective textures of community" (141). Accordingly, love flourishes in *Antigone*'s common spaces, heavily symbolized by the scene in which Antigone makes love for the first time with Haemon among the tall grasses and wildflowers of a public green space. This love, however, is unauthorized, not least for the fact that public sex (or 'indecency') is illegal in Canada, but moreso for the ways in which this act of literal and symbolic act of communion challenges the larger destructive forces of capitalist development and mobility controls that threaten environment and social futures. The film's lush common spaces, symbols of social growth, fertility, and futurity, exist in precarious tension with the cold, concrete buildings, bars, and borders that dominate the film's aesthetic.

Restricting bodies—and the things people do with their bodies—is fundamental to border practices and the policing of socially desirable or deviant identities. So, while the film's sexual politics are representatively heteronormative (there are no openly gay, queer, or transgender characters in *Antigone*), the borders between male and female, natural and unnatural, are nevertheless unstable. Gender, after all, is hardly a fixed concept in Greek mythology: gods and mortals alike are constantly shifting between sexes, genders, forms, and even species to pursue their desires, punish their enemies, or escape from danger. And if "tragedy is a genre defined by impersonation" (Gagné and Govers Hopman 1), the film follows suit, with Deraspe employing

themes of disguise, doubling, androgyny and anonymity to explore the shifting boundaries and relations between subjectivity and otherness, mobility and stasis, and categories of identity and access. Disguised as Polynices, Antigone quite literally enters into a forbidden, hostile zone—a male prison—to covertly exchange places with her brother. This act of impersonation, of strategic metamorphosis, works against the negative perceptions and portrayals of refugees and migrants as imposters and interlopers—liars, criminals, and frauds—by demonstrating the courage and creativity it often takes for people to cross into, or live between, the borders of hostility. When Ismene objects to Antigone's plan to break Polynices out of prison, for the dire consequences it will have on Antigone's freedom and future, Antigone tells her sister to be silent. "Shut up," she says. "This is taking all the courage I have. Cut my hair" (00:29-25-35).

Antigone's literal and symbolic passage from quasi-citizen to 'crimmigrant Other' thus emphasizes the "series of displacements experienced by immigrant refugees as they reconcile their in-between states of being" (Tembo 1), as well as the inherent possibilities, and inherent dangers, of crossing borders. If the "plural, differential, discursive and double nature of identity associated with migrants" (Tembo 1) operates to disavow the legality and legitimacy of refugees and migrants, then it also, the film demonstrates, allows for the creative re-negotiation of the 'fixed' borders and constructed categories of identification that reify systems of power and control. While Antigone's deviation from legal and social conventions, manifest most plainly in her disruptive behaviour in court, ensures her expulsion from Canada, her (pre-written) tragic fate, Antigone's refusal to abide the 'sacrosanct' spaces of states offers potent criticism of the increasing weaponization of identity and citizenship as a strategy of social conformity and coercion. For example, when the judge presiding over her case asks Antigone, "Do you care about getting citizenship?" (1:24-53) Antigone responds with incredulity and disbelief:

“Citizenship? Citizenship … A piece of paper. Pardon?” (1:25:01-08). For what is a “piece of paper” when it comes at the price of silence, betrayal, kinship and family? What sacrifices must people make for a “piece of paper”? As Antigone tells the judge, “You can go wipe your ass with it!” (01:25:11)

**In Memoriam**

The politics of mourning have become a key subject of contemporary critical inquiries into the ways in which racialized and gendered subjects navigate terrains of historical and on-going violence within, and beyond, the realms of citizenship and spaces of states. Scholars such as Claudia Rankine and Alfred Frankowski have examined the politics of mourning in relation to anti-black racism and legacies of violence and oppression in the United States. In her 2015 article for The New York Times Magazine, entitled “The Condition of Black Life is One of Mourning,” Rankine describes mourning as an “open dynamic…that bears both the vulnerability inherent in black lives and the instability regarding a future for those lives” (para. 1). Similarly, Alfred Frankowski argues for mourning as a political act: “A political sense of mourning is not an outcome, a development, or an attunement, but a position one can take up relative to the shifting frameworks of violence we live out. It is one that is not for the sake of any outcome, but intervenes in our productive activities to take up lines of questioning anew” (98). In this way, mourning becomes a method of negotiating the fraught relationship between remembrance and forgetting, and a way to enact ongoing political protest against the structures and shifting contexts of racism, violence, and oppression.

In *Antigone*, the politics of protest are inextricable from the politics—and work—of mourning, as exemplified by the ways in which various characters, namely female, stake claims to the future through public displays of grief and suffering. As Méni cries out after seeing Etoecle's dead body, "They're going to take away all my children!" (00:19:25). Méni, who Antigone refers to as her "home" (01:34:50), contests the authority of the state and patriarchal regimes of control in a small, but powerfully symbolic act of spatial occupation and public mourning.[109] After Antigone is arrested and detained, Méni begins to come every day to sit and (literally) sing outside the detention center—150 meters away, the legal distance from the center—in a one-woman protest vigil for justice. Day by day, people gather around Méni in solidarity and remembrance for the children 'taken away,' the families severed and broken, by unjust systems and laws and violent regimes of expulsion. Méni's daily vigil, staged on the physical and symbolic peripherals of the detention center, "disrupts the logic of representations that justify and perpetuate penal violence" (Skitolsky 370) against ethnic and racial minorities, women, and LGBTQIA2+ identities. Her aging body and voice bear physical and emotional witness to the present and on-going suffering inflicted by patriarchal systems of violence, and the past "wounds that can never be healed" (Skitolsky 368). Embodying Niobe, the archetype of the bereaved mother in Greek mythology, Méni sings, as Niobe did, for the loss of her children, challenging the authority of the gods—in this case, the state—to inflict violence and suffering

---

[109] In Greek mythology, Menoeceus is the name of two male Theban characters, "related by genealogy, the first being the grandfather of the second'" ("Menoeceus"). Deraspe's re-casting of Menoeceus as a matriarchal female typifies the ways in which the film blurs the borders between traditional female and male identities, indicating the slippages between concepts of gender and sex, and the film's feminist critique of rigid patriarchal systems of control on female and gender non-conforming bodies and identities. The name Menoeceus means "strength of the house" (*menos* "strength"; *oikos* "house"), a referential layer that adds to the film's location of the female or fluidly gendered body as a site of resistance and futurity.

without end.[110] In her mother-tongue, Méni sings in mourning of the past and in memory of the future, of the *many* futures, taken away by global and domestic regimes of war, violence, persecution and punishment. For what future exists when all the children are dead, detained or deported? When power is not held to account?

In the scene that immediately follows Eteocles' death, Deraspe shows Antigone reading a passage from a poem out loud to Méni. The poem, entitled "Antigone, la fleur dans la coeur"—in English, "Antigone, the flower of the heart"—was written by the Montreal-born poet and painter Hector de Saint-Denys Garneau.[111] Antigone reads the following lines:

> There's no point in living
>
> And surviving the flowers
>
> And surviving the flames, the ashes
>
> It is far better to die each heart a flower. (00:17:16-38)

The poem allegorizes the tragic paradoxes of Antigone's position, her "impossible choice" between the laws of her heart and the laws of the state—in her words, "Citizenship or my brother" (01:29:02). Antigone must die and die again: it is the nature of her tragedy, her eternal sacrifice. But what is she dying for? While in Deraspe's adaptation, Antigone does not literally die, she is deported, it is death by another name. As Theresa, a blind court-appointed psychiatrist, forespells: "The combat between the law of heart and the law of man is insoluble. I'm sorry,

---

[110]The film's nominal fidelity to the figures of Greek mythology is vital to its extensive interlacing of past and present and, of course, its basis in classical tragedy. However, Deraspe's characters are not bound to a single mythological identity or figure, but are rather composites of multiple identities and origins, both mythic and real, further demonstrating the film's politics and poetics of mobile resistances.

[111] *Ru* also contains a reference to a poem by de Saint-Denys Garneau, a parallel that emphasizes the discrete cultural politics of migration and citizenship in Quebec.

there's no other outcome. You shall be walled up alive" (01:31:09-20).[112] This strange, otherworldly scene—which is revealed to be Antigone's nightmare—underscores the film's dialectics of the future, in which the future depends on a radical transformation of the current social, political, and cultural orders, and a fearless reckoning with the past.

If *Antigone*'s vision of a future beyond the borders and networks of power and immobility is utopian, it is a utopian vision rooted in the dystopian realities of the present. In the film's conclusion, which shows Antigone, Polynices and Menocene being escorted by a host of immigration officials for deportation, Antigone passes by a family of refugees—a grandmother and four young children—on their arrival in Canada. While the family looks exactly the same as the family shown in the flashback to the Hipponomes' arrival in an earlier scene of the film, this scene is not a flashback. Both families are at the threshold of arrival and departure (as signified by the liminal space of the airport corridor), their futures uncertain and ambiguous. Will the arriving family find refuge in Canada? Happiness, hospitality, belonging? Or are they doomed to play out this tragedy of death and deportation again and again until the "process of dissolution of the nation-state and of its sovereignty has achieved full completion" (Agamben, "Beyond Human Rights" 90)? The film ends with a scene of silent confrontation, in which Antigone, breaking the fourth wall, looks back and stares directly into the camera. Antigone's violation of the fourth wall, her final transgressive and accusatory act, challenges the audience's privilege, anonymity, and passivity, making us complicit in the tragedy of her departure.

In January 2022, a family of four were found dead at the Canada-United States border, after a fatal crossing attempt into Manitoba during freezing blizzard conditions. While Canadian

[112] Theresa is a composite figure of the mythological prophet, Tiresias, and the figure of Lady Justice—that is, blind fate and blind justice.

authorities had difficulty establishing their identities due to the "frozen state in which the bodies were found" (Hill qtd. in Unger and Rosen para. 5) the RCMP later confirmed the identities of the deceased as Jagdish Baldevbhai Patel, a 39-year-old man, Vaishaliben Jagdishkumar Patel, a 37-year-old woman, and their two children, Vihangi Jagdishkumar Patel, an 11-year-old girl, and Dharmik Jagdishkumar Patel, a three-year-old boy (Unger and Rosen para. 2). In a press conference, Prime Minister Trudeau made the following statement:

> It was an absolutely mind-blowing story. It's so tragic to see a family like that, victims of human traffickers … and of people who took advantage of their desire to build a better life. This is why we are doing all we can to discourage people from crossing the border in an irregular or illicit manner. We know there are great risks in doing so. (qtd. in Cecco para. 2)

Yet there is little "mind-blowing" about this story: it replays again and again as people are increasingly forced to risk their own lives, and the lives of their loved ones, to gain entry into the hostile borders of this nation. As the channels of legal migration diminish and the categories of illegality expand, the refugee's story will continue to end in tragedy. But if the "stories of immigrants, refugees, and exiles can tell the history of a nation" (Poetry Foundation), what then can they tell about a nation's future? Will we fight for freedom, for movement, for justice? Or will we build more borders "around and between us" (Chak 1)? Antigone's question comes to the fore: Where is our heart?

# CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

When the sun is coming up, and the world has come ashore,

If you're hoping for a harbor then you'll find an open door.

— "Welcome to the Rock," *Come From Away* 3:42-48

In March 2017, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau made international headlines by attending a Broadway premiere of the "breakthrough Canadian musical" (Otis para. 1) *Come From Away* at New York City's Gerald Schoenfeld Theatre. Written and developed by Irene Sankoff and David Hein, *Come From Away* is based on events in Gander, Newfoundland, when, in the days following the 9/11 attacks, thirty-eight planes were rerouted to Gander International Airport, stranding more than 7, 000 people on "the Rock." The musical celebrates the efforts of the town's residents to welcome these strangers—"the true story of when the isolated community of Gander, Newfoundland played host to the world" (*Broadway.com*)—and has received rave critical acclaim. "(E)ven the most stalwart cynics may have trouble staying dry-eyed during this portrait of heroic hospitality under extraordinary pressure," *New York Times* theatre critic Ben Brantley wrote in his review.

*Come From Away* debuted in New York amid ongoing debates over former US President Donald Trump's controversial "Muslim ban," providing Prime Minister Trudeau with yet

another strategic opportunity to publicly champion the Canadian government's commitment to hospitality at "the moment of American humanitarian failure" (Nguyen and Pho 3). Indeed, Trudeau's high-profile attendance at the show was a show all its own: Trudeau was accompanied by 600 delegates, including 125 ambassadors of the United States and, most significantly, Trump's eldest daughter and former senior advisor, Ivanka (Paulson). Prior to the start of the musical, Trudeau took to the stage to give a 'surprise' speech about the importance of helping those in need, praising the musical for its message of tolerance and hospitality: "The world gets to see what it is to lean on each other and be there for each other" (qtd. in Paulson para. 4), he said, touching his hand to his heart. Trudeau's 'heartfelt' message subsequently went viral on Twitter under the hashtag, "Come From Away," further demonstrating the ways in which stories of individual and collective acts of humanitarianism are strategically co-opted and disseminated by the state to serve political agendas and mobilize myths of Canada's "heroic hospitality," while reinforcing measures designed to exceptionalize, deter, and exclude refugees.

Canada's humanitarian tradition, as this dissertation has demonstrated, is often invoked in ways that obfuscate histories of violence, racism, and discrimination, as well as ongoing hostilities towards refugees. Building upon current mobility and migration scholarship, in addition to well-established critiques of Canadian nationalism, humanitarianism, and settler-colonialism, I have examined a range of literary and cultural texts to explore the pivotal though vexed role the refugee plays in projects of nation-building and statehood. Accordingly, I have considered how these texts variously 'vex' the dominant narratives, ideologies, and political and aesthetic practices that produce the refugee as a binary locus of identity ("good" or "bad," victim or villain) and, in doing so, reinforce oppressive systems of power and (im)mobility. While, as Nguyen and Pho assert, "Canada *has* opened its doors, if only slightly, to many refugees"

(*Refugee States* 4) at varying moments of crisis, celebrations of that history tend to neglect or harmfully conceal the current realities of Canada's current refugee and immigration system, and the limits of the nation's humanitarian tradition. In the preceding pages, I have thus traced the figure of the refugee across national, historical, literary, philosophical, media and virtual borders to better understand the refugee as a key and vital figure in forward-looking concepts of mobility, justice and resistance.

Refugees have, as Nyers argues, "a paradoxical relationship with the Canadian citizenship regime" ("Petitions and Protest" 99), typically cast as paragons of Canadian hospitality and multicultural success or, alternatively, harbingers of insecurity and threat. In my readings of Hage's *Cockroach* and Thammavongsa's "Worms," I examined the ways in which pestilential metaphors and discourses of forced migration operate to produce the refugee as a dubiously human subject, reinforcing neoliberal hierarchies of race, space, gender, status and citizenship. In particular, I focused on the ways Hage and Thammavongsa mobilize the metaphor of migrants-as-bugs to critique the racialized and gendered dimensions of Canada's refugee and immigration regimes, and subvert dominant paradigms of mobility, citizenship and humanity. In these texts, subalternity becomes a complex site of resistance against the capitalist and neoliberal structures of citizenship and hospitality that denigrate and exploit refugee'd people and internally displaced subjects, and, moreover, edify apparatuses of punishment, exclusion, and control. As Hage's half roach, half human narrator states: "Other humans gaze at the sky, but I say unto you, the only way through the world is to pass through the underground" (24).

The dichotomy of refugees as victims or villains not only deny the inherent heterogeneity and complexity of the refugee experience, but also influence allocations of rights, resources, and political and social belonging, often in ways that mobilize racial and gendered exclusions.

Accordingly, in Chapter 3, I focused on the importance of refugee women's writing and testimony in processes of refugee recognition and political representation. As Hua argues, storytelling is "one of the few sites in which refugee and immigrant women can claim political voice and epistemic terrain" and develop "an oppositional consciousness necessary for the collective struggles of politicized communities" (113). As such, I examined Kim Thúy's semi-autobiographical novel, *Ru*, and Carmen Aguirre's memoir, *Something Fierce*, in relation to the significance of refugee storytelling and women's life writing to political and social apparatuses of recognition, and processes of refugee determination. In particular, I considered how Thúy and Aguirre differentially perform 'the refugee' and 'refugee story' to negotiate the demands for refugees to produce stories of gratitude and success in accordance with national myths of hospitality and 'happy' multiculturalism. As Nyers argues, "while refugees are expected to be grateful, dutiful, and productive subjects, they are at the same time often forced to advocate and mobilize for their own political, social, and human rights" ("Protests and Petitions" 99). In this way, I have read *Ru* and *Something Fierce* (as well as the publicity and discourse surrounding the books and their authors) for their productive engagements with the politics of forced displacement, focusing on the ways Thúy and Aguirre challenge, albeit in dramatically different ways, hierarchies of recognition and experience and the patriarchal, racializing assumptions of female refugee identity as passive, vulnerable and apolitical. As "storytelling allows refugee women to refashion, reinvent, and remember their personal and collective identifies and identification" (Hua 113), I have also attended to the ways in which *Ru* and *Something Fierce* variously perform the work of memory on narrative, aesthetic and generic levels, navigating fraught passages of displacement, resettlement, sexuality, trauma and (re)creation.

Refugee protests have become of increasing interest to migrant and refugee scholars in recent years for the critical possibilities inherent in such acts of protest to reveal and reorient dominant notions of the nation, citizenship, 'the political' and 'the refugee' at the junctures of race, space, class and gender. As I demonstrated in this dissertation, however, refugee protests are diverse and multilayered, enacted in both extraordinary and banal sites and forms, though very often corporeally: "Citizenship has a long, complex relationship with the body" (Johnson et al. 1). The centrality of the refugee body to political struggles for space and mobility is the focus of Chapter 4, in which I examined a range of performance and "body art" by Francisco-Fernado Granados in relation to contemporary regimes of biopower and enhanced border governance. Granados, as I have shown, often works with an aesthetics of silence, abstraction, and unknowability—nude bodies bent in deference and defiance, images without description, traces of saliva on gallery walls—to critique the regimes of knowledge and visibility that render the refugee "easily consumable spectacle" ("Reciprocal Gazing" 31), paradoxically visible and invisible. Drawing from Debord's theory of spectacle, I examined Granados's performance and visual art for the ways it challenges, in deliberately recalcitrant and often visceral forms, the neoliberal and normative structures of refugee recognition in Canada (and globally). In so doing, I considered the prominent role of images in producing the refugee as an object of spectacle within discourses of humanitarian exceptionalism, invoking the famous photographs of Alan Kurdi and media discourse around Omar Khadr as exemplary of the refugee's "dual face" in the popular imagination—either an object of care or subject of insecurity. The political efficacy of Granado's art, I have argued, lies in its capacity for abstraction, countering dominant frameworks of refugee recognition with gestures towards the refugee's intractable agency, resilience, and unknowability. Granados advocates for an ethics of witnessing that foregrounds the alterity of

subjectivity, the irreducibility of refugee experience to hegemonic categories of identity, knowledge, and power— a politics of recognition based on, in his words, "reciprocal gazing."

The place of witnessing in refugee and immigration politics takes on a material dimension in Tings Chak's graphic essay, *Undocumented: The Architecture of Migrant Detention in Canada*, as Chak illustrates (quite literally) the sites and spaces of migrant expulsion in Canada, revealing the material and immaterial dimensions of Canada's crimmigration regime. In *Undocumented*, Chak employs an aesthetics of hybridization that operates, as I have argued, on formal, generic, and conceptual levels to advocate for mobility justice and migrant and refugee rights, while grappling with the limits of representation and intelligibility. The concept of mobility justice, as theorized by contemporary refugee and migration scholars, is at the fore of Chapter 5, serving as a lens through which I examined *Undocumented* and, in the latter half of the chapter, Sophie Deraspe's film, *Antigone*. Both texts exemplify the ways in which the refugee is, as Arendt and Agamben have famously argued, a vanguard of political futures. However, at the same time that *Undocumented* and *Antigone* variously celebrate refugee activism, whether through invocations of absence, protest, silence, or disguise, they also demonstrate the powerful and increasingly insidious forces that *make* refugees illegal, denying them safety, resources, rights and protections—and in some, indeed too many, cases, a future.

In 2015, members of the Non-Status Women's Collective, a group that includes many refugee women who do not have formal status in Canada, gathered outside of Trudeau's constituency office in Montreal, dressed as ghosts. Their campaign of "haunting" came about after the Collective petitioned the (then) newly elected prime minister to recognize the rights of non-status refugee women in Canada with an open letter on the precariousness of their

immigration status. The letter received no response. Thus, the Collective decided to 'go a-haunting,' donning ghost costumes richly symbolic of the ways non-status refugees are often simultaneously invisible and hyper-visible in Canada—precarious, in either case. In "Petitions and Protests," Nyers argues: "Both the petitioning and the ghostly political actions of the Collective suggest that there is an 'irregular' or 'haunted' form of citizenship that refugees enact in relation to 'regular' citizenship" (100). The key word is "enact." As this dissertation has shown, refugees *enact* power and agency in extraordinary and everyday acts of survival and movement, contesting the borders of nation, identity, statehood and citizenship in ways both visible and beyond recognition. "We are women and mothers who live in the shadows, invisible and excluded," reads the Collective's mission statement. "We live in precarity because of our immigration status. Our precarious status threatens our security, our liberty as women, our rights as workers, our families." Their statement concludes with a powerful declaration: "We live here; we will remain here."

**(Don't) Come From Away: Shifting Contexts and Borders**

Protests characterize the contemporary moment. Since the onset of Covid-19, mass protests have become a common, even banal, phenomenon, as the pandemic has made more transparent the structural inequalities embedded in our societies, resulting in competitive and often politically contentious claims to access, space, freedom and mobility. While the protests associated with, for example, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) or "Freedom Convoy" movements are outside the scope of this dissertation, the critical intersections between the politics of protest culture(s) and the politics of forced migration certainly warrant further critical research. For the purposes and contexts of this dissertation, however, I mean to restrict myself here to some brief, concluding

remarks on the impacts of COVID-19 on refugee and migrant populations, and the shifting contexts of forced migration in the present moment.

"We Stand with Ukraine." This is the message of solidarity that has spread across the nation following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Not since the famous photographs of Kurdi went viral has there been such a public show of support for refugees. However as Kieran Oberman succinctly puts it: "All refugees are in need but not all are treated the same" (1). Indeed, the mainstream media representations of Ukrainian refugees are often coded with racial bias, emphasizing the "civilised," "educated" and "middle class" status of refugees from Ukraine—the ways in which they are *just like us.* Khaled A. Beydoun has called it the "journalistic humanization of white plight" in an article for Anadolu Agency, a Turkish media outlet. "Meticulous vignettes," he writes, "about real people packing their bags and fleeing their homeland powerfully connected the refugee crisis with viewing audiences worldwide. Ukrainian refugees had real names and stories, with real children and real lives left behind for an uncertain future in a foreign land far from home" (para. 6). Meanwhile, refugees from Aghanistan, Syria, and Rohingya, among other "non-white" nations, do not receive the same type or level of media coverage and public support. Even when Arab, African, Black and Muslim refugees are represented favourably, it is often, in service of racist ideology: "Non-white refugees do not simply exist to evidence racism in refugee resettlement and immigration. Nor are they a homogenous bloc that only warrants reference to gratify the liberal sensibilities of journalists, or entire media outlets, keen on representing themselves as non-racists" (Beydoun para. 2). What these refugees really need, Beydoun argues, are the kinds of "humanized tales and layered storytelling" (para. 2) that have characterized the media surrounding Ukrainian refugees. Storytelling makes 'the refugee' real.

Until recently, with the onset of the "Ukrainian refugee crisis," refugee stories have been relatively absent in the public realm for the past few years, as news of COVID-19 has dominated the media in recent years, including sensationalized coverage of the historical political and social events that have ensued in its wake. To put it plainly: we live in different, and changing, times. Yet the harsh realities for many refugees remain. In fact, conditions of refugee life have significantly worsened since the pandemic began. As John Shields and Zainab Abu Alrob demonstrate in their 2021 report, "The Political Economy of a Modern Pandemic," the pandemic has disproportionately affected refugee and immigrant populations: "Migrants and immigrants carry the unequal burden of COVID-19 because of racialization, labour precariousness, and exposure to health risks on job sites and in the poor neighbourhoods and overcrowded housing in which many live in" (137). Moreover, rapid border closures and state pandemic restrictions have resulted in increased difficulties for refugees attempting to cross borders to safety, as horrifically exemplified by the fate of the Patel family—a family who tried, and consequently died, to 'come from away' to Canada. Mobility and borders have been cast as "a particular threat" (Shields and Abu Alrob 137) during the pandemic, falsely construing the refugee body as a source of contagion and risk, and transforming the pandemic "from a crisis of health to a crisis of mobility" (141). Indeed, in May 2022, amidst public and political demonstrations of support for refugees from the Ukraine, Premier François Legault justified the Quebec government's closure of Roxham Road, a popular unofficial border crossing, by claiming border-crossers "are not really refugees": "You have to understand, the problem is that many of these people are not really refugees. A refugee is someone who is physically at risk in their country. But the majority are not refugees; eventually, when the file is analyzed, they are refused, returned back home" (qtd. in Serebrin para. 16). Legault not only echoes the denigrating anti-immigration rhetoric that

casts border-crossers as “bogus,” frauds, and invasive marauders, but also, perhaps unintentionally, reveals the ‘real’ realities of Canada’s immigration and refugee system. Refugees are not, as the dominant national narrative goes, largely welcomed with open arms and hearts. Rather, they are often subject to intense scrutiny, restrictive practices, and various mechanisms of exploitation and expulsion—“analyzed … refused, returned back home” (Legault qtd. in Serebrin para. 16).

What is a refugee? *Who* is a refugee? What makes a refugee “real”? These questions guided my critical investigations into the role of refugee storytelling, literature and art in projects of mobility, nation, citizenship and state. This dissertation joins the rapidly growing interdisciplinary field of Critical Refugee Studies (CRS) in Canada, demonstrating the importance of creative interventions for reconfiguring notions of “refuge” and “the refugee” in various political, national and citizenship contexts. Refugee storytelling—whether enacted with or without words, within the spaces of the body, prison, or page—serves as a powerful vehicle to mobilize more nuanced, complex understandings of ‘the refugee’ and illuminate the inherent complexities of human experiences of displacement and resettlement. Moreover, it can operate as a complex site of protest and agency, through which the refugee becomes realizable as a focal figure in contemporary political struggles for equality and justice, challenging embedded hierarchies of race, space, and humanity both within and beyond the spaces of states. The refugee does not, to reiterate Beydoun’s impassioned claim, “simply exist to evidence racism” (para. 2) or exemplify national ideals of hospitality, democratic liberalism, and minority success. The refugee is already, and has always been, “real”—real people with real need for protection, safety and care.

As award-winning filmmaker Carol Nguyen suggests in her short film, “Petrichor,” it is our duty to extend that recognition, that care. “As a child, I had a duty that could only be fulfilled during the dampness after a rainstorm” (00:00:20-27), begins the narrator. We do not see the narrator’s face—only images of a young girl, carefully collecting worms surfaced from the rain, their bodies fleshy and wriggling, viscerally vulnerable to their new concrete environment: “I’d prowl around the neighbourhood walking with great purpose. With my eyes cast to the ground, I’d step with care to assure that I did not accidentally harm those that I’d come to aid” (00:00:34-46). While the film does not explicitly engage with refugee and immigration politics, it elegantly gestures towards the ethical responsibility to care for and create hospitable environments for subjects of displacement and abandonment. Nguyen, whose parents are former refugees from Vietnam to Canada, provides multiple close-ups of the worms, as the film’s narrator marvels at their significant ecological role and anatomy of five hearts: “I regarded them as spectacular creatures, who were important and worthy of extended existence” (00:01:01-7).

Similar to Thammavongsa, Nguyen posits worms as metaphors for refugees, while at once emphasizing the irreducible ‘worminess’ of the worms. Sparse with dialogue, slow and drifting in movement, “Petrichor” offers a powerful meditation on the necessity to extend care and worth to the “spectacular creatures” of this earth, to think beyond binary frameworks and recognize the inherent dignity, importance, and indeed, ‘realness’ of refugee lives. The film ends with an enigmatic statement of reverence and awe, narrated over moving images of a hand gently, tenderly, *lovingly* cradling a worm. “Even now, I cannot imagine,” the narrator states, “how intense it would be to love with five hearts” (00:01:40-45). Yet unlike *Come From Away*, “Petrichor” does not operate to reinforce the dominant power dynamics of the refugee/host relation, with “us” saving “them.” Rather, the film invites a rethinking of hospitality beyond

political categories and dehumanizing concepts of “refugee” and the “refugee,” calling upon the viewer to reflect on what it means to practice care in ways that do no further harm, affirm and dignify life, and mobilize futures of equality and symbiosis—to imagine the possibilities of “loving with five hearts.”

## WORKS CITED

Abdul-Jabbar, Wisam. “The Internalized Vermin of Exile in Montreal: Rawi Hage’s *Cockroach*.” *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 52, no.1, 2017, pp. 169-82.

“About 100 Inmates to Stage Hunger Strike at Lindsay Jail Over Inhumane Conditions.” *CBC News*, 15 Jun. 2020, https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/hunger-strike-central-east-correctional-centre-lindsay-jail-inhumane-conditions-1.5611936.

Abu Alrob, Zainab, and John Shields. “A COVID-19 State of Exception and the Bordering of Canada’s Immigration System: Assessing the Uneven Impacts on Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrant Workers.” *Studies in Social Justice*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2022, pp. 54-77.

Adler-Nissen, Rebecca, et al. “Images, Emotions, and International Politics: The Death of Alan Kurdi.” *Review of International Studies*, vol. 46, no.1, 2020, pp. 75-95.

Agamben, Giorgio. “Beyond Human Rights.” *Social Engineering*, special issue of *Open*: *Cahier on Art and the Public Domain*, no. 15, 2008, pp. 90-95.

—. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Translated by Daniel Heller-Roazen, Stanford UP, 1998.

—. “We Refugees.” *Symposium*, vol. 49, no. 2, 1995, pp. 114-19.

Agnew, John. “The Asymmetric Border: The United States’ Place in the World and the Refugee Panic of 2018.” *Geographical Review*, vol. 109, no. 4, 2019, pp. 507-26.

Aguilar, Mario I. “The Disappeared and the Mesa de Dialogo in Chile 1999-2001: Searching for Those Who Never Grew Old.” *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2001, pp. 413-24.

Aguirre, Carmen. *Something Fierce: Memoirs of a Revolutionary Daughter*. Douglas &

McIntyre, 2011.

Ahmad, Tariq. “Canada: New Bill Prohibits Religious Symbols for Public-Sector Workers in Quebec.” *Library of Congress*, 2019, https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2019-08-06/canada-new-bill-prohibits-religious-symbols-for-public-sector-workers-in-quebec/.

Ahmed, Sara. *The Promise of Happiness*. Duke UP, 2010.

Ai Weiwei. “Alan Kurdi is Not Just One Person.” *Facebook*, uploaded by *UNHCR*, 2 Sept. 2016, https://www.facebook.com/UNHCR/videos/ai-weiwei-alan-kurdi-is-not-just-one-person/10155380042238438/.

“Alien: A Poem From Detention.” Lutheran Immigrant and Refugee Services (LIRS), 6 Jan. 2020, https://www.lirs.org/alien-a-poem-from-detention/.

Al Rabeeah, Abu Bakr, and Winnie Yeung. *Homes: A Refugee Story*. Freehand Books, 2018.

Al Sharifi, Khalid. “Untitled.” Translated by Hassan Sabbagh. *Southerly*, vol. 64, no. 1, 2004. p. S52.

Amirkhani, Jordan. “Between Citizenry and Privilege: Ai Weiwei and Bouchra Khalili.” *Art + Citizenship*, special issue of *Art Practical*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2016, http://www.artpractical.com/feature/between-citizenry-and-privilege/.

Anstis, Siena, et al. “Separate but Unequal: Immigration Detention in Canada and the Great Writ of Liberty.” *McGill Law Journal*, vol. 63, no. 1, 2017, pp. 1-44.

*Antigone*. Directed by Sophie Deraspe, performances by Nahéma Ricci, Rawad El-Zein, Hakim Brahimi, Rachida Oussaada, Nour Bekhiria, Antoine Desrochers, and Paul Doucet, Association coopérative de productions audiovisuelles (ACPAV), 2019.

“Apostrophe.” *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), Oxford UP, 2022.

Archey, Karen. “For Photo Op, Ai Weiwei Poses as Dead Refugee Toddler From Iconic Image.” *e-flux conversations*, 1 Feb. 2016, https://conversations.e-flux.com/t/for-photo-op-ai-weiwei-poses-as-dead-refugee-toddler-from-iconic-image/3169/6

Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.1951. Shocken Books, 2004.

—. “We Refugees.” *The Jewish Writings*, edited by Jerome Kohn and Ron H. Feldman, Schocken Books, 2007, pp. 264-74.

“Assessment of Credibility in Claims for Refugee Protection.” *Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada*, 31 Dec. 2020, https://irb.gc.ca/en/legal-policy/legal-concepts/Pages/Credib.aspx#:~:text=In%20assessing%20credibility%2C%20the%20Board,claimant's%20demeanour%20at%20the%20hearing.

Atak, Idil, and James C. Simeon, editors. *The Criminalization of Migration: Contexts and Consequences*. McGill-Queen’s UP, 2018.

August, Timothy. “Re-placing the Accent: From the Exile to Refugee Position.” *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*, vol. 41, no. 3, 2016, pp. 68-88.

Bakali, Naved. “Contextualising the Quebec Charter of Values: How the Muslim ‘Other’ is Conceptualised in Quebec.” *Culture and Religion*, vol. 16, no. 4, 2015, pp. 412-29.

Balbernie, Angus. “Postcard.” *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2018, p. 368.

Barad, Karen. “Intra-actions: An Interview of Karen Barad by Adam Kleinmann.” *Mousse*, vol. 34, 2014, pp. 76-81.

Barber, John. “Canada Reads Caught in Fact-Fiction Divide.” *Globe and Mail*, 07 Feb. 2012, theglobeandmail.com/arts/books-and-media/canada-reads-caught-in-fact-fiction-divide/article544434/. Accessed 9 Nov 2019.

Barnett, Michael. “Humanitarianism with a Sovereign Face: UNHCR in the Global Undertow.” *International Migration Review*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2001, pp. 244-77.

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*. Polity Press, 2014.

Beauchamps, Marie, et al. Introduction. *Security/Mobility Politics of Movement*, edited by Stef Wittendorp and Matthias Leese, Manchester UP, 2017, pp. 1-14.

“Because I Am Human - Anti-trafficking Campaign.” *Canadian Council for Refugees*, Oct. 2019, https://ccrweb.ca/en/because-i-am-human.

Behrman, Simon. “Between Law and the Nation State: Novel Representations of the Refugee.” *Refuge*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2016, pp. 38-49.

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke UP, 2011.

—. “Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency).” *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2007, pp. 754-80.

Beneventi, Domenic. “Montreal Underground.” *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes*, vol. 46, no.3, 2012, pp. 263-86.

Besteman, Catherine. *Militarized Global Apartheid*. Duke UP, 2020.

Beydoun, Khaled A. “When Immigration is No Longer a Wedge Issue: Ukrainian Refugees and Journalistic Humanization of White Plight.” *Anadolu Agency*, 25 Mar. 2022, https://www.aa.com.tr/en/analysis/analysis-when-immigration-is-no-longer-a-wedge-issue-ukrainian-refugees-and-journalistic-humanization-of-white-plight/2545523. Accessed 6 May 2022.

Bradby, Hannah. “Alan Kurdi.” *Cost of Living*, 11 Sept. 2015, https://www.cost-ofliving.net/alan-kurdi/.

Bradley, Megan. “Rethinking Refugeehood: Statelessness, Repatriation, and Refugee Agency.”

*Review of International Studies*, vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 101-23.

Brantley, Ben. "'Come From Away,' a Canadian Embrace on a Grim Day." Review of *Come From Away*, directed by Christopher Ashley. *New York Times*, 12 Mar. 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/12/theater/come-from-away-review.html.

Brean, Joseph. "Omar Khadr, Victim and Villain: Former Guantanamo Detainee a Divisive Canadian Symbol." *National Post*, 7 May 2015, https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/omar-khadr-villain-and-victim-former-guantanamo-detainee-a-divisive-canadian-symbol.

Bright, Gillian. "On Being the 'Same Type': Albert Camus and the Paradox of Immigrant Shame in Rawi Hage's *Cockroach*." *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2018, pp. 69-98.

Buss, Helen. "Kim Thúy's *Ru* and the Art of the Anecdote." *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2018, pp. 605-12.

Butler, Judith. *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*. Columbia UP, 2000.

—. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* Verso, 2010.

—. *Precarious Life. The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso, 2006.

—. "Precarious Life, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Cohabitation." *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2012, 134-51.

Camacho-Light, Christian. *Standard Forms*, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, 2016.

Camus, Albert. "The Guest." *Exile and the Kingdom*. Translated by Justin O'Brien, Knopf, 1963, pp. 233-57.

—. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Translated by Justin O'Brien. Penguin, 1942.

—. *The Stranger*. Translated by Stuart Gilbert, Vintage, 1946.

"Canada Reads: Why Chuck Comeau is Championing Homes by Abu Bakr al Rabeeah and Winnie Yeung." *CBC Radio*, 19 Feb. 2019, https://www.cbc.ca/radio/q/tuesday-feb-19-2019-michael-mann-megan-gail-coles-and-more-1.5021391/canada-reads-why-chuck-comeau-is-championing-homes-by-abu-bakr-al-rabeeah-and-winnie-yeung-1.5021490.

Canada, Supreme Court. *R v. Golden*. 6 Dec. 2001. *Supreme Court Judgments*, https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/1924/index.do.

Carr, Georgie. "Fate and the State: Sophie Deraspe's 'Antigone.'" Review of *Antigone*, by Sophie Deraspe. *Another Gaze*, 13 Sept. 2019, https://www.anothergaze.com/fate-state-sophie-deraspes-antigone-tiff/.

Carroll, David. "'Remains' of Algeria: Justice, Hospitality, Politics." *MLN*, vol. 121, no. 4, pp. 808-27.

Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.

Castro, Andrés Fabián Henao. "Antigone Claimed: 'I Am a Stranger!' Political Theory and the Figure of the Stranger." *Hypatia*, vol. 28, no. 2, 2013, pp. 307-22.

Chak, Tings. *Undocumented*: *The Architecture of Migrant Detention*. The Architecture Observer, 2014.

— "Q&A: Recent Graduate Tings Chak Shines a Light on the Architecture of Migrant Detention in a Book and Exhibition at the Eric Arthur Gallery." Interview by Josie Northern Harrison. *Daniels*, 20 Oct. 2014, www.daniels.utoronto.ca/news/2014/10/20/qa-recent-graduate-tings-chak-shines-light-architecture-migrant-detention-book-and.

Chan, Wendy. "Crime, Deportation and the Regulation of Immigrants in Canada." *Crime, Law,*

*and Social Change*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2005, pp. 153-80.

Chomsky, Aviva. *Undocumented: How Immigration Became Illegal*. Beacon 50 Press, 2014.

Chouliaraki, Lilie. *The Spectatorship of Suffering*. SAGE Publications, 2006.

Cicco, Leyland. "Family's Death at US-Canadian Border Underscores Desperate Journeys of Migrants." *The Guardian*, 21 Jan. 2022, www.theguardian.com/law/2022/jan/21/familys-death-at-us-canada-border-desperate-journeys.

Coleman, Daniel. "From Contented Civility to Contending Civilities: Alternatives to Canadian White Civility." *International Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 38, no. 38, pp. 221-42.

Coleman, Daniel, et al., editors. *Countering Displacements: The Creativity and Resilience of Indigenous and Refugee-ed Peoples*. U of Alberta P, 2012.

"Come From Away." *Broadway.com*, groups.broadway.com/show/come-from-away/. Accessed 5 May 2022.

Dahlstedt, Magnus, et al. "Citizenship - Rights, Obligations, and Changing Citizenship Ideals." *International Migration and Ethnic Relations*, edited by Magnus Dalhstedt and Anders Neergard, edited by Routledge, 2015, pp. 86-114.

Dawson, Aimee. "Ai Weiwei: "I'm Like a High-End Refugee." *The Art Newspaper*, 27 Mar. 2018, https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2018/03/27/ai-weiwei-im-like-a-high-end-refugee.

Dawson, Carrie. "In Plain Sight: Documenting Immigration Detention in Canada." *Migration, Mobility & Displacement*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2016, pp. 126-40.

—. "On Thinking Like a State and Reading (About) Refugees." *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'Etudes Canadiennes*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2011, pp. 58-75.

—. "Refugee Hotels: The Discourse of Hospitality and the Rise of Immigration Detention in

Canada." *U of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 83, no. 4, 2014, pp. 826-46.

—. "The Refugee's Body of Knowledge: Storytelling and Silence in the Work of Francisco-Fernando Granados." *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 29, 2013, pp. 55-72.

—. "Treaty to Tell the Truth: The Anti-Confessional Impulse in Canadian Refugee Writing." *Canadian Literature*, vol. 182, no. 234, 2017, pp. 14-31.

Debord, Guy. *The Society of the Spectacle*. 1967. Translated by Ken Knabb. Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014.

Denzongpa, Kunga, and Tracy Nichols. "We Can't Step Back: Women Specially… A Narrative Case Study on Resilience, Independence, and Leadership of a Bhutanese Refugee Woman." *Journal of Women and Social Work*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2020, pp. 129-45.

Deraspe, Sophie. "Living by Personal Laws." Interview by T'Cha Dunlevy. *Montreal Gazette*, 9 Nov. 2019, https://montrealgazette.com/entertainment/local-arts/from-greek-tragedy-to-bill-21-quebec-film-antigone-bridges-millenniums.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Hospitality*: *Anne Dufourmantelle Invites Jacques Derrida to Respond*. Translated by Rachel Bowlby. Stanford UP, 2000.

Dhawan, Nikita. "Hegemonic Listening and Subversive Silences: Ethical-political Imperatives." *Critical Studies*, vol. 36, 2012, pp. 47-60.

Diop, Petra. "The 'Bogus' Refugee: Roma Asylum Claimants and Discourses of Fraud in Canada's Bill C-31." *Refuge*, vol. 30, no. 1, pp. 67-80.

di Tomasso, Lara, and Sandrina de Finney. "A Discussion Paper on Indigenous Custom Adoption Part 1: Severed Connections - Historical Overview of Indigenous Adoption in Canada." *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 7-18.

Dobson, Kit. "Neoliberalism and the Limit of the Human: Rawi Hage's *Cockroach*." *Textual Practice*, vol. 29, no. 2, 2015, pp. 255-71.

Donato, Katherine, and Douglas Massey. "Twenty-First-Century Globalization and Illegal Migration." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 666, no. 1, 2016, pp. 7-26.

Douglass, Frederick. "Address to the Louisville Convention (1883)." *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, edited by Philip Foner, New York, 1950.

Downey, Anthony. "Zones of Indistinction: Giorgio Agamben's 'Bare Life' and the Politics of Aesthetics." *Third Text*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2009, pp. 109-25.

Dragu, Margaret. "La Dragu Artist's Statement." *CRAM International*, www.craminternational.ca/artist-statement.html.

Dueck, Lorna. "Are We Still That Compassionate Canada?" *Globe and Mail*, 6 Oct. 2014, theglobeandmail.com/opinion/are-we-still-that-canada/article20924259/.

Dunlevy, T'Cha. "From Greek Tragedy to Bill 21, Quebec Film *Antigone* Bridges Milleniums." Review of *Antigone*, by Sophie Deraspe. *Montreal Gazette*, 8 Nov. 2019, www.montrealgazette.com/entertainment/local-arts/from-greek-tragedy-to-bill-21-quebec-film-antigone-bridges-millenniums.

Durbany, Tyler. *and where is the body?* 2018. Western University, Master's Thesis.

Dyer, Richard. *White: Essays on Race and Culture*. Routledge, 1997.

East, Ben. "From the Ground Up." Interview with Rawi Hage. *The National*, 7 Jun. 2009, thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/books/from-the-ground-up-1.562054. Accessed 8 Jan. 2018.

Engbersen, Godfried, and Dennis Broeders. "The State versus the Alien: Immigration Control

and Strategies of Irregular Immigrants." *West European Politics*, vol. 32, no. 5, 2009, pp. 867-85.

Esperitu, Yến Lê. *Body Counts: The Vietnam War and Militarized Refuge(es)*. U of California P, 2014.

Eugenides, Jeffrey. *The Marriage Plot*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2001.

Evans, Jessica. "Crisis, Capital Accumulation, and the 'Crimmigration' Fix in the Aftermath of the Global Slump." *A World Without Cages: Bridging Immigration and Prison Justice*, edited by Sharry Aiken and Stephanie J. Silverman, Routledge, 2022, pp. 188-202.

Fassin, Didier. "Another Politics of Life is Possible." *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 26, no. 5, 2009, pp. 44-60.

—. "Compassion and Repression: The Moral Economy of Immigration Policies in France." *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2005, pp. 362-87.

—. "Policing Borders, Producing Boundaries. The Governmentality of Immigration in Dark Times." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, vol. 40, no. 1, pp. 213-26.

Feldman, Allen. "On Cultural Anesthesia: From Desert Storm to Rodney King." *American Ethnologist*, vol. 21, no. 2, 1994, pp. 404-18.

Fernando, Nilmini. "The Discursive Violence of Postcolonial Asylum in the Irish Republic." *Postcolonial Studies*, vol. 19, no. 4, 2016, pp. 393-408.

Finnerty, Mike. "Kim Thúy on how her Vietnam experience compares to Syrian refugee crisis." CBC News, 28 Sept. 2015, www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/kim-thuy-vietnam-syrian-refugees-1.3246678.

Fiske, Lucy. *Human Rights, Refugee Protest and Immigration Detention*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Foner, Nancy. "Intergenerational Relations in Immigrant Families." *Across Generations: Immigrant Families in America*, edited by Nancy Foner, New York UP, 2009, pp. 1-20.

Forget, Andre. *Cockroaches: Refugee Justice in the Novels of Rawi Hage*. 2013. Dalhousie University, MA Thesis.

Franklin, Cynthia. "Narrative Humanity at the Intersection of 9/11 and Katrina: Dave Egger's *Zeitoun*." *American Quarterly*, vol. 69, no. 4, 2017, pp. 857-81.

Frankowski, Alfred. *The Post-Racial Limits of Memorialization: Toward a Political Sense of Mourning*. Lexington Books, 2005.

Friedrichs, David. "Rethinking the Criminology of Crimes of States: Monumental, Mundane, Mislabeled and Miscalculated Crimes." *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2015, pp. 106-19.

Fuller, Danielle, and DeNel Rehberg Sedo. "A Reading Spectacle for the Nation: The CBC and 'Canada Reads.'" *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2006, pp. 5-36.

Furlani, Andre. "'Flânoter':The Montreal Pedestrian Narrates." *Canadian Literature*, vol. 236, 2018, pp. 71-82.

Gagné, Renaud, and Marianne Govers Hopman. "The Chorus in the Middle." *Choral Mediations in Greek Tragedy*, edited by Renaud Gagné and Marianne Govers, Cambridge UP, 2013, pp. 1-34.

Gale, Peter. "The Refugee Crisis and Fear: Populist Politics and Media Discourse." *Fear and Loathing in the New Century*, special issue of *Journal of Sociology*, vol. 40, no. 4, 2004, pp. 321-40.

Ganz, Shoshannah. "Interview with Souvankham Thammavongsa." *Postcolonial Text*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2014, pp. 1-7.

Garcea, Joseph, and Daniel Kikulwe. "The Liberal Plan for Resettling Syrian Refugees in Canada: The Justificatory Narrative and Counter-Narrative." *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, vol. 51, no. 2, 2019, pp. 87-106.

Georgiou, Myria, and Rafal Zaborowski. *Media Coverage of the 'Refugee Crisis': a Cross-European Perspective*. Council of Europe, 2017.

Gerbaudo, Paulo, and Emiliano Treré. "In Search of the 'We' of Social Media Activism" *Social Media and Protest Identities*, special issue of *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 18, no. 8, pp. 865-71.

Gibbons, Don C. "Mundane Crime." *Crime and Delinquency*, vol. 29, no. 2, 1983, pp. 213-27.

Gitelman, Lisa. *Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents*. Duke UP, 2014.

Glenn, Molly. *Architecture Demonstrates Power*. 2003. Haverford College, Undergraduate thesis.

Gordon, Michael. "Bordering Through 'Crisis.'" special issue of *Migration, Mobility & Displacement*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2020, pp. 39-58.

Grace, Anita. "Why a Federal Bill About to Take Effect Won't Be the End of Solitary Confinement in Canada." *Toronto Star*, 15 Nov. 2019, https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2019/11/15/why-a-federal-bill-about-to-take-effect-wont-be-the-end-of-solitary-confinement-in-canada.html.

Graeber, David Hau. "Dead Zones of the Imagination: On Violence, Bureaucracy, and Interpretive Labor: The Malinowski Memorial Lecture." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2012, pp. 105-28.

Granados, Francisco-Fernando. "Abstracting the Self." Interview by Christian Camacho-Light.

*Pelican Bomb*, 1 Jun. 2016, http://pelicanbomb.com/art-review/2016/abstracting-the-self-an-interview-with-francisco-fernando-granados.

—. "Co-Respond-Dance-Version-II." *Skol*, 15 Nov.-12 Dec. 2020, https://skol.ca/en/programming/co-respond-dance-version-ii/.

— "Francisco-Fernando Granados." *Blogger*, francisco-fernando-granados.blogspot.com/2014/03/ihave-only-ever-been-lover-in-english.html. Accessed 16. Nov 2018.

—. "I have only ever been a lover in English." *Revisiting Ephemera*, Artlab Gallery, University of Western Ontario, 10 Jan. 2011.

—. "movement study—standard North American strip search procedure." *Place Publique*, June 14-27 Sept. 2012, Darling Foundry, Montreal.

—. "The Ballad of _______ B." *Canadian Theatre Review*, vol. 162, 2015, 41-45.

—. "Reciprocal Gazing: Reflections of an Ungrateful Refugee." *Fuse Magazine*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2010, pp. 30-32.

—. *refugees run the seas*. Nuit Blanche, 3 Oct. 2015, Toronto.

—. "Re: Recent Performance Art." Received by Brittany Kraus, 7 Nov. 2018.

—. "Scotiabank Nuit Blanche 2015."*CCCA*, 2015, http://ccca.concordia.ca/nuitblanche/nuitblanche2015/artists/a004.html

—. "Spatial Profiling: (After Margaret Dragu's *Eine Kleine Nacht Radio*). *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2014, pp. 58-61.

—. Wall text, *Standard Forms*, Hessel Museum of Art, Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, 2016.

—. "Why a Ballad? - Refugee Politics, Poetics, and the Need for Re-distribution." *Praxis*

*Theatre*, 13 Mar. 2014, praxistheatre.com/2014/03/why-a-ballad-refugee-politics-poetics-and-the-need-for-re-distribution/index.html.

Granados, Francisco-Fernando, and Jessica Karuhanga. "Artefact." *cmagazine*, vol. 130, 2016.

Gray, Harriett, and Anja Franck. "Refugees As/At Risk: The Gendered and Racialized Underpinnings of Secularization in British Media Narratives." *Security Dialogue*, vol. 50, no. 3, 2019, pp. 275-91.

Green, Margaret. "The Need for Cushions: Trauma and Resilience in the Life of a Refugee." *International Journal of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2013, pp. 133-44.

Hadar, David. "The Ungrateful Child Refugee: The Anti-Sensationalism of Lore Segal's *Other People's Houses*." *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, vol. 32, no.3, 2017, pp. 667-72.

Hage, Rawi. *Cockroach*. House of Anansi Press, 2008.

—. "On the Weight of Separation and the Lightness of Non-Belonging." *Finding the Words: Writers on Inspiration, Desire, War, Celebrity, Exile, and Breaking the Rules*, edited by Jared Bland, McLelland & Stewart, 2011, pp. 227-35.

Happe, Kelly E., et al. *Biocitizenship: The Politics of Bodies, Governance, and Power*. NYU Press, 2018.

Haraway, Donna. *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Routledge, 1991.

Harris, John. "Xenia: Refugees, Displaced Persons and Reciprocity." *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2020, pp. 9-17.

Hasham, Alyshah. "Inmates Launch Hunger Strike over Conditions at Lindsay Super Jail." *The Peterborough Examiner*, 16 Jun. 2020, https://www.thepeterboroughexaminer.com/news/peterborough-

region/2020/06/16/inmates-launch-hunger-strike-over-conditions-at-lindsay-superjail.html.

Heeney, Alex. “Sophie Deraspe on her Modern Adaptation of *Antigone*.” *Seventh Row,* 11 Dec. 2019, www.seventh-row.com/2019/12/11/antigone-sophie-deraspe/.

Hein, David, and Irene Sankoff. “The Cast of Come From Away Perform ‘Welcome to the Rock’ Live in Studio q.” *YouTube*, uploaded by q on cbc, 8 Feb. 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=p8JI70eXjG8.

Helm, Michael. *Cities of Refuge*. McLelland & Stewart, 2010.

—. “Putting the Strange in the Stranger.” Interview with Smaro Kamboureli and Hannah McGregor. *U of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 82, no. 2, pp. 314-30.

Holtzer, Ethan, et al. “Reforming Refugee Healthcare in Canada: Exploring the Use of Policy Tools. *Healthcare Policy*, vol. 12, no. 4, pp. 46-55.

“Homes.” *CBC Books*, 31 Jan. 2019, www.cbc.ca/books/homes-1.4843360.

Hong, Mai-Linh K. “Reframing the Archive: Vietnamese Refugee Narratives in the Post-9/11 Period.” *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States*, vol. 41, no. 3, pp. 18-41.

Hua, Anh. “Travel and Displacement: An (Ex)Refugee and (Ex)Immigrant Woman’s Tale-Tell.” *Canadian Woman Studies*, vol, 19, no. 4, 2000, pp. 110-14.

Human Rights Watch. ‘*I Didn’t Feel Like a Human in There’: Immigration Detention in Canada and Its Impact on Mental Health*. 2021, www.hrw.org/report/2021/06/17/i-didnt-feel-human-there/immigration-detention-canada-and-its-impact-mental.

Ibrahim, Yasmin. “Self-representation and the Disaster Event: Self-imaging, Morality, and Immortality.” *Journal of Media Practice*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2015, pp. 211-27.

—. "The Unsacred and the Spectacularized: Alan Kurdi and the Migrant Body." *Social Media + Society*, vol. 4, no. 4, 2018, pp. 1-9.

*Invisible Violence*. 15 Feb.-2 Mar. 2013, Gallery TPW, Toronto.

James, Jenny M. "Frayed Ends: Refugee Memory and Bricolage Practices of Repair in Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For* and Kim Thúy's *Ru*." *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States,* vol. 41, no. 3, 2016, pp. 42-67.

Johnson, Samuel. "Anecdotes by the Rev. Percival Stockdale." *Johnsonian Miscellanies*, edited by George Birkbeck Hill, Oxford Clarendon, 1897, pp. 330–34.

Kamash, Zena. "'Postcard to Palmyra': Bringing the Public into Debates over Post-Conflict Reconstruction in the Middle East." *World Archaeology*, vol. 49, no. 5, 2017, pp. 608-22.

Kamboureli, Smaro. "The Culture of Celebrity and National Pedagogy." *Home-Work: Postcolonialism, Pedagogy, and Literature*, edited by Cynthia Sugars, U of Ottawa P, 2004, pp. 35-55.

Keller, Tony. "Canada Has Its Own Ways of Keeping Out Unwanted Immigrants." *The Atlantic*, 12 Jul. 2018, theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/07/canada-immigration-success/564944/.

Keung, Nicholas. Immigration Detainees in Lindsay Jail Stage Protest and Hunger Strike." *Toronto Star*, 20 Sept. 2013, www.thestar.com/news/immigration/2013/09/20/immigration_detainees_stage_protest_and_hunger_strike.html.

Kiang, Jessica. Review of *Antigone*, by Sophie Deraspe. *Variety*, 7 Oct. 2019, variety.com/2019/film/reviews/antigone-review-1203360911/.

Kiely, Elizabeth, and Katharina Swirak. *The Criminalisation of Social Policy in Neoliberal Societies*. Bristol UP, 2022.

Klein, Elise, and Uma Kothari. “Bordering: Creating, Contesting and Resisting Practice.” *Borderlands*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2020, pp. 1-7.

Kouri-Towe, Natalie. “National (In)Security and the Shifting Affective Fields of Terror in the Case of Omar Khadr.” *Norma: International Journal for Masculinity Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3-4, pp. 250-64.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia UP, 1982.

—. *Strangers to Ourselves*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia UP, 1991.

Kyriakides, Christopher. “Words don’t come easy: Al Jazeera’s Migrant-Refugee Distinction and the European Culture of (Mis)Trust.” *Current Sociology*, vol. 65, no. 7, 2017, pp. 933-52.

LaCom, Cindy. “Filthy Bodies, Porous Boundaries: The Politics of Shit in Disability Studies.” *Disability Studies Quarterly*, vol. 27, no.1-2, 2007, n.p.

Lahey, Anita. “Souvankham Thammavongsa Shows Us the Beauty of a Furious Poem.” *The Walrus*, 20 Jan. 2021, thewalrus.ca/souvankham-thammavongsa-shows-us-the-beauty-of-a-furious-poem/.

Lakshmi, Rama. “Chinese Artist Ai Weiwei Poses as a Drowned Syrian Refugee Toddler.” *Washington Post*, 30 Jan. 2016, www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/01/30/chinese-artist-ai-weiwei-poses-as-a-drowned-syrian-refugee-toddler/.

Lam, Christina C. “Trauma and Testimony: Embodied Memory in Loida Martiza Pérez’s

‘Geographies of Home.’” *Rocky Mountain Review*, vol. 69, no. 1, 2015, pp. 37-48.

Lapierre, Maude. “Refugees and Global Violence: Complicity in Rawi Hage’s Cockroach.” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 50, no. 5, 2014, pp. 559-70.

Lederman, Marsha. “In a Debate, I Think It’s Gloves Off.” *Globe and Mail*, 8 Feb. 2012, R3.

Lemberg-Pederson, Martin, and Eman Haioty. “Re-assembling the surveillance refugee body in the era of data-craving.” *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 24, no.5, 2020, pp. 607-24.

Li, Peter. “The Racial Subtext in Canada’s Immigration Discourse.” *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2001, pp. 77-97.

Libin, Marc. “Marking Territory: Rawi Hage’s Novels and the Challenge to Postcolonial Ethics.” *English Studies in Canada*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2013, pp. 71-90.

Limbu, Bishupal. “The Permissible Narratives of Human Rights; or, How to Be a Refugee.” *Criticism*, vol. 60, no. 1, pp. 75-98.

Lorenz, Renate. *Queer Art: A Freak Theory*. Transaction Publishers, 2012.

Loyd, Jenna M., Matt Mitchelson, and Andrew Burridge, editors. *Beyond Walls and Cages: Prisons, Borders, and Global Crisis*. U of Georgia P, 2012.

Lundström, Catrin. “The White Side of Migration: Reflections on Race, Citizenship and Belonging in Sweden.” *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2017, pp. 79-97.

Lyon, David. “Surveillance as Social Sorting: Computer Codes and Mobile Bodies.” *Surveillance as Social Sorting: Privacy, Risk, and Digital Discrimination*, edited by David Lyon, Routledge, 2003, pp. 13-30.

Mace, Lilou. “Following Where Life Leads You - Kim Thúy.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Lilou Mace, 25 May 2014, www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkD5zjYPqTM.

Mackey, Allison. "Troublesome Indigestion: The 'Return' of Omar Khadr and Post-Racial Politics of Citizenship in Canada." *TOPIA: Canadian Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 35, pp. 107-35.

Macklin, Audrey. "Disappearing Refugees: Reflections on the Canada-US Safe Third Country Agreement." *Columbia Human Rights Law Review*, vol. 38, 2004, pp. 365-426.

MacLennan, Hugh. *Two Solitudes*. 1945. New Canadian Library, 2008.

Mahrouse, Gada. "Producing the Figure of the 'Super Refugee' through Discourses of Success, Exceptionalism, Ableism, and Inspiration." *Refugee States: Critical Refugee Studies in Canada*, edited by Vinh Nguyen and Thy Phu, U of Toronto P, 2021, pp. 173-93.

Mainwaring, Cetta, and Margaret Walton-Roberts. "Governing Migration from the Margins." *Social & Legal Studies*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2018, pp. 131-41.

Maley, William. *What is a Refugee?* Oxford UP, 2016.

Malkki, Liisa H. "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism and Dehistoricization." *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 11, no. 3, 1996, pp. 377-404.

Mann, Alexandra. "Refugees Who Arrive by Boat and Canada's Commitment to the Refugee Convention: A Discursive Analysis." *Refuge*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2009.

Marchi, Lisa. "From the Dark Territories of Pain and Exclusion to Bright Futures? Rawi Hage's *Cockroach*." *Agency & Affect*, special issue of *Canadian Literature*, vol. 223, 2014, pp. 50-65.

Marqez, Xavier. "Spaces of Appearance and Spaces of Surveillance." *Polity*, vol. 441, no. 2, pp. 6-31.

Marshall, Dominique. *The Social Origins of the Welfare State: Quebec Families, Compulsory*

*Education, and Family Allowances, 1940-1955*. Translated by Nicola Doone Danby, Wilfred Laurier UP, 2006.

Marshall, T.H. *Citizenship and Social Class*. Cambridge UP, 1950.

Martin, Michelle R. "Toward an Aesthetics of Existence in the Contemporary Novel." *Journal of Modern Literature*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2014, pp. 190-93.

McDonald, Jean. "Migrant Illegality, Nation-Building, and the Politics of Regularization in Canada." *Refuge*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2009, pp. 65-77.

McGuire, Michaela M., and Danielle J. Murdoch. "(In)-Justice: An Exploration of the Dehumanization, Victimization, Criminalization, and Over-Incarceration of Indigenous Women in Canada." *Punishment & Society*, 2021, pp. 1-22.

Mclennan, Rob. "Souvankham Thammavongsa, *Light*." *Rob Mclennan's Blog*, 28 Dec. 2013, www.robmclennan.blogspot.com/2013/12/souvankham-thammavongsa-light.html.

Meakins, Jennifer. "Not Neutral: Architectural Elements + Power." KENT CAED, 7 Apr. 2021, https://www.kentcaedlectureseries.com/lectures-1/jenny-meakins. Transcript.

Menjívar, Cecilia. "Liminal Legality: Salvadoran and Guatemalan Immigrants' Lives in the United States." *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 111, no. 4, 2006, pp. 999-1037.

Menjívar, Cecilia, and Leisy Abrego. "Parents and Children across Borders: Legal Instability and Intergenerational Relations in Guatemalan and Salvadoran Families." *Across Generations: Immigrant Families in America*, edited by Nancy Foner, New York UP, 2009, pp. 160-89.

Menozzi, Filippo. "Fingerprinting: Imtiaz Dharker and the Antinomies of Migrant Subjectivity." *College Literature*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2019, pp. 151-78.

Michel, Arthur. "'Nothing Kept Me Up at Night the Way the Gorgon Stare Did.'" Interview by

Sam Jaffe Goldstein. *Longreads*, 21 Jun. 2019, longreads.com/2019/06/21/nothing-kept-me-up-at-night-the-way-the-gorgon-stare-did/.

"#Migrant Strike Day 3: My Name is Patrick and I'm Calling from the Lindsay Institution." *End Immigration Detention Network*, 13 Jun 2016, https://endimmigrationdetention.wordpress.com/category/from-detainees/.

Milazzo, Marzia. "Speaking for the Refugee Other: Missioneering, White Saviourism, and the Politics of Ethnographic Representation in Luis Alberto Urrea's *Across the Wire*." *Scrutiny*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2019, pp. 58-72.

Miller, Teresa A. "The Impact of Mass Incarceration on Immigration Policy." *Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonmen*t, edited by Marc Mauer and Meda Chesney-Lind, New Press, 2002, pp. 214-38.

Mitchell, W.J.T. *What do Pictures Want?* U of Chicago P, 2005.

Misri, Deepti. "Showing Humanity: Violence and Visuality in Kashmir." *Cultural Studies*, vol. 33, no. 3, 2019, pp. 527-49.

Moffette, David. "Immigration Status and Policing in Canada: Current Problems, Activist Strategies and Abolitionist Visions." *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2021, pp. 273-91.

Montegary, Liz, and Melissa Autumn White. *Mobile Desires: The Politics and Erotics of Mobility Justice*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2015.

Moore, Lorrie. "Ordinary Life Always Went Too Far." *New York Time*s, 22 Oct. 1989, https://www.nytimes.com/1989/10/22/books/ordinary-life-always-went-too-far.html.

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. Knopf, 1987.

Mortensen, Mette. "Constructing, Conforming, and Contesting Icons: The Alan Kurdi Imagery

Appropriated by #humanitywashedashore, Ai Weiwei, and *Charlie Hebdo*." *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 39, no. 8, 2017, pp. 1142-61.

Moss, Laura. "Canada Reads." *Canadian Literature*, vol. 182, pp. 6-10.

Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Visual Culture*, edited by Jessica Evans and Stuart Halls, Sage, 1999, pp. 381-89.

Musa, Habiba, and Mohammed Yaro Zakari. "Refugee Crisis and Labour: Employing Proactive Measures to Curtail the Exploitation of Refugees in Labour Relations." *International Journal of Arts & Sciences*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2016, pp. 49-61.

Nayeri, Dina. "The Ungrateful Refugee: 'We Have No Debt to Repay.'" *The Guardian*, 4 Apr. 2017, theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/04/dina-nayeri-ungrateful-refugee.

Neu, Dean, and Richard Therrien. *Accounting for Genocide: Canada's Bureaucratic Assault on Aboriginal People*. Fernwood Publishing, 2003.

Ngai, Sianne. *Ugly Feelings*. Harvard UP, 2005.

Nield, Sophie. "The Proteus Cabinet, or 'We are Here but not Here.'" *Research in Drama Education*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2008, pp. 137-45.

Nguyen, Carol. "Petrichor." *Vimeo*, 2017.

Nguyen, Mimi Thi. *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages*. Duke UP, 2012.

Nguyen, Vinh. "Refugee Gratitude: Narrating Success and Intersubjectivity in Kim Thúy's *Ru*." *Canadian Literature*, vol. 219, 2013, pp. 17-36.

Nguyen, Vinh, and Thy Phu. Introduction. *Refugee States: Critical Refugee Studies in Canada*, edited by Vinh Nguyen and Thy Phu, U of Toronto P, 2021, pp. 3-20.

Nyers, Peter. "Abject Cosmopolitanism: The Politics of Protection in the Anti-Deportation

Movement." *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 6, 2003, pp. 1069-93.

—. "Petitions and Protest: Refugees and the Haunting of Canadian Citizenship." *Refugee States: Critical Refugee Studies in Canada*, edited by Vinh Nguyen and Thy Phu, U of Toronto P, 2021, pp. 99-114.

—. *Rethinking Refugees: Beyond States of Emergency*. Routledge, 2006.

Oberman, Kieran. "Refugee Discrimination – The Good, the Bad, and the Pragmatic." *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, vol. 37, no. 5, pp. 695-712.

Oelgemöller, Christina. "'Transit' and 'Suspension': Migration Management or the Metamorphosis of Asylum-Seekers into 'Illegal' Immigrants." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 37, no. 3, pp. 407-24.

Oliff, Louise. "From Resettled Refugees to Humanitarian Actors: Refugee Diaspora Organizations and Everyday Humanitarianism." *Everyday Humanitarianism: Ethics, Affects, and Practices*, special issue of New Political Science, vol. 40, no. 2, 2018, pp. 93-99.

Oliver, Kelly. *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*. U of Minnesota P, 2001.

Oliver, Sophie Anne. "Trauma, Bodies, and Performance Art: Towards an Embodied Ethics of Seeing." *Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2010, pp. 119-29.

"Open Letter from the Non-Status Women's Collective of Montreal." *Solidarity Across Borders*, 10 Jan. 2016, https://www.solidarityacrossborders.org/en/open-letter-from-the-non-status-womens-collective-of-montreal.

Orlowski, Sammy. "Abstract Bodies: Francisco-Fernando Granados." *LondonFUSE*, 6 July 2017, https://londonfuse.ca/abstract-bodies-francisco-fernando-granados/.

Ortner, Sherry. "Resistance and the Problem of Ethnographic Refusal." *Comparative Studies in*

*Society and History*, vol. 37, no.1, 1995, pp. 173-93.

Otis, Daniel. "Trudeau in New York to See Canadian 9/11 Musical 'Come From Away.'" *CTV News*, 17 Mar. 2017, ctvnews.ca/entertainment/trudeau-in-new-york-to-see-canadian-9-11-musical-come-from-away-1.3325530?cache=kcfnyoei%3FclipId%3D89563%3FautoPlay%3Dtrue. Accessed 5 May 2022.

Owen, David. "Ambivalences of Hospitality." *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, vol. 89, no.1, 2022, pp. 153-77.

Pablo, Carlito. "Writer and Actor Carmen Aguirre Raises Concerns Over Casting of Latino Characters in Vancouver Play." *The Georgia Straight*, 6 Jan. 2016, www.straight.com/news/607891/writer-and-actor-carmen-aguirre-raises-concerns-over-casting-latino-characters-vancouver.

Parry, Benita. "Aspects of Peripheral Modernisms." *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, vol. 40, no. 1, 2009, pp. 27-55.

Paulson, Michael. "Justin Trudeau Brings Ivanka Trump to Broadway Show on Welcoming Outsiders." *New York Times*, 15. Mar. 2017, nytimes.com/2017/03/15/theater/justin-trudeau-ivanka-trump-broadway-come-from-away.

Peerbaye, Soraya. "Interview with Souvankham Thammavongsa." *Poetics.ca*, no. 5, 2005. Accessed 10 May 2015.

Petryna, Adriana. *Life Exposed: Biological Citizens after Chernobyl*. Princeton UP, 2013.

Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. Routledge, 1993.

Phelps, Jerome. "Why is So Much Art About the 'Refugee Crisis' So Bad"? *Open Democracy*, 11 May 2017, opendemocracy.net/en/5050/refugee-crisis-art-weiwei/.

"Poems on Immigration." *Poetry Foundation*, 2022, www.poetryfoundation.org/collections/144265/poems-on-immigration.

Preston, Valerie, et al. "Immigrants and Homelessness - At Risk in Canada's Outer Suburbs." *Canadian Geographer*, vol. 53, no. 3, 2009, pp. 288-304.

Pugliese, Joseph. "Apostrophe of Empire: Guantanamo Bay, Disneyland." *Borderlands*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2009, pp. 1-26.

—. *Biometrics: Bodies, Technologies, Biopolitics*. Routledge, 2012.

—. "Civil Modalities of Refugee Trauma, Death and Necrological Transport." *Social Identities*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2009, 149-65.

—. "The Tutelary Architecture of Immigration Detention Prisons and the Spectacle of 'Necessary Suffering.'" *Architectural Theory Review*, vol.13, no. 2, 2008, pp. 206-21.

Qasmiyeh, Yousif. "If this is my face, so be it." *Modern Poetry in Translation*, 2016, p. 121.

Rabillard, Sheila. "Carmen Aguirre's *The Refugee Hotel* and the Space Between Limited and Unlimited Hospitality." *Theatre Research in Canada*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2015, pp. 216-37.

Rankine, Claudia. "The Condition of Black Life is One of Mourning." *The New York Times Magazine*, 22 Jun. 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/22/magazine/the-condition-of-black-life-is-one-of-mourning.html.

Rattanavong, Savannah. "Writer Souvankham Thammavongsa Featured in Award-Winning Literary Journal." *Little Laos on the Prairie*, 15 Jan. 2019, littlelaosontheprairie.org/2019/01/15/writer-souvankham-thammavongsa-featured-in-award-winning-literary-journal/.

Razack, Sherene. *Dark Threats and White Knights: The Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping, and the New Imperialism*. U of Toronto P, 2004.

"Ref Talks Canada." *UNHCR*, 2022, www.unhcr.ca/news-stories/special-features/ref-talks-canada/.

"Refugee Crisis, Drowned Syrian Boy Shift Focus of Election Campaign." *CBC News*, 3 Sept 2015, www.cbc.ca/news/politics/syria-migrants-canada-drowned-migrants-leaders-respond-1.3213878.

Richmond, Anthony H. *Global Apartheid: Refugees, Racism, and the New World Order*. Oxford UP, 1994.

Rifkind, Candida. "Refugee Comics and Migrant Topographies." *Auto/biography Studies*, vol. 32, no. 3, 2017, pp. 648-54.

Rodriguez, Encarnación Gutiérrez. "The Coloniality of Migration and the 'Refugee Crisis': On the Asylum-Migration Nexus, the Transatlantic White European Settler Colonialism-Migration and Racial Capitalism." *Intersectional Feminist Interventions in the "Refugee Crisis*," special issue of *Refuge*, vol. 34, no.1, 2018, pp. 16-28.

Romero, Monica. *The Politics of the Visible/Invisible Border: Canada's Responses and (In)actions Towards Refugee Claimants' Protection*. 2021. Wilfrid Laurier University, PhD dissertation.

Rothman, David J. "The Crime of Punishment." *New York Review*, 17 Feb. 1994, nybooks.com/articles/1994/02/17/the-crime-of-punishment/.

"Safe Third Country." *Canadian Council for Refugees*, ccrweb.ca/en/safe-third-country.

Safouane, Hamza. *Stories of Border Crossers: A Critical Inquiry Into Forced Migrants' Journey Narratives to the European Union*. Springer VS, 2019.

Said, Edward W. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Harvard UP, 2000.

Sakr, Rita. "Imaginative Migrations: An Interview with the Lebanese-Canadian Writer Rawi

Hage." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 47, no. 3, 2011, pp. 343-51.

Salverson, Julie. "The Art of Witness in Popular Theatre." *Canadian Theatre Review*, vol. 90, no. 90, pp. 36-39.

—. "Transgressive Storytelling or an Aesthetic of Injury: Performance, Pedagogy and Ethics." *Theatre Research in Canada*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2999, pp. 35-51.

Santoro, Miléna. Review of *Antigone*, by Sophie Deraspe. *The French Review*, vol. 94, no. 2, 2020, pp. 228-29.

Sazzad, Rehnuma. *Edward Said's Concept of Exile: Identity and Cultural Migration in the Middle East*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017.

Schneidman, Edwin S. *Deaths of Man*. Quadrangle, 1973.

Scott, See. "The Intellectual Construction of Canada's 'Peaceable Kingdom' Ideal." *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2018, pp. 510-37.

Scotti, Monique. "Is Canada's Reputation as a Safe Haven for Refugees Deserved?" 10 Jun. 2017, *Global News*, globalnews.ca/news/3502905/is-canadas-reputation-as-a-safe-haven-for-refugees-deserved/.

Seiler, Cotten. "The Origins of White Care," *Social Text*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2020, pp. 17-38.

Serebrin, Jacob. "Quebec Asks Feds to Close Roxham Road, Says Province Can't Handle Influx of Refugees." 11 May 2022, *CBC*, cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/legault-wants-roxham-closed-1.6449302. Accessed 14 May 2022.

Shakira. "Hips Don't Lie (feat. Wyclef Jean)." *Oral Fixation Vol. 2*, Epic Records, 2005. *Spotify* app.

Sheller, Mimi. *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes*. Verso, 2018.

—. Theorising Mobility Justice. *Tempo social: revista de sociologia da USP*, vol. 30, no. 2, pp.

17-34.

Shields, John, and Zainab Abu Alrob. “The Political Economy of a Modern Pandemic: Assessing Impacts of COVID-19 on Migrants and Immigrants in Canada.” *Alternate Routes: A Journal of Critical Social Research*, vol. 32, no. 1, pp. 137-61.

Shire, Warsan. “Home.” *YouTube*, uploaded by Garrett Mogge, 13 Mar. 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=nI9D92Xiygo.

Showler, Peter. *Refugee Sandwich: Stories of Exile and Asylum*. McGill-Queens UP, 2006.

Shuman, Amy, and Carol Bohmer. “Representing Trauma: Political Asylum Narratives.” *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 116, no. 446, 2004, pp. 394-414.

Siddiqi, Sara, and Duncan Koerber. “The Anatomy of a National Crisis: The Canadian Federal Government’s Response to the 2015 Kurdi Refugee Case.” *Canadian Journal of Communication*, vol. 45, no. 3, 2020, pp. 411-35.

Sifton, Clifford. “The Immigrants Canada Wants.” *Maclean’s*, 1 Apr. 1922, https://archive.macleans.ca/article/1922/4/1/the-immigrants-canada-wants.

Silverberg, David. Review of *Small Arguments*, by Souvankham Thammavongsa. *Quill & Quire*, 2 Dec. 2004, www.quillandquire.com/review/small-arguments/.

Skitolsky, Lissa. “The Politics of Mourning in the Neoliberal State.” *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Association*, vol. 57, no. 2, 2018, pp. 367-82.

Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Picador, 2004.

Sophocles. *Antigone*. Penguin Classics, 2015.

“Speaking Notes for the Honourable Jason Kenney, P.C., M.P. Minister of Citizenship,

Immigration and Multiculturalism." *Government of Canada*, 07 Mar. 2012, canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/news/archives/speeches-2012/jason-kenney-minister-2012-03-07.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Acting Bits/Identity Talk." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1992, pp. 770-803.

Sprott, Jane, and Anthony Doob. *Solitary Confinement, Torture, and Canada's Structure Intervention Units*. U of Toronto, 2021, https://www.crimsl.utoronto.ca/sites/www.crimsl.utoronto.ca/files/Torture%20Solitary%20SIUs%20%28Sprott%20Doob%2023%20Feb%202021%29.pdf.

Staels, Hilde. "The Unsettling Portrayal of Migrant Existence in Rawi Hage's Urban Fiction." *Journal of Canadian Literary and Cultural Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2018, pp. 15-24.

Steuter, Erin, and Deborah Wills. "Discourses of Dehumanization: Enemy Construction and Canadian Media Complicity in the Framing of the War on Terror." *Global Media Journal - Canadian Edition*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2009, pp. 7-24.

Strebly, Johnathon Vaughan. "Why did Canadian Police Cars Become so Menacing?" *National Observer*, 20 Oct. 2016, https://www.nationalobserver.com/2016/10/20/opinion/why-did-canadian-police-cars-become-so-menacing.

Stroumboulopoulos, George. "Full Interview: Carmen Aguirre." *YouTube*, uploaded by *Strombo*, 3 May 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=C98UWGvlpZQ.

Stumpf, Juliet P. "The Crimmigration Crisis: Immigrants, Crime, and Sovereign Power." *American University Law Review*, vol. 56, no. 2, 2006, pp. 367-419.

Syms, Shawn. Review of Ru, by Kim Thúy. *National Post*, 3 Feb. 2012, nationalpost.com/afterword/book-review-ru-by-kim-thuy.

Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Duke UP, 2003.

Tembo, Nick M. "Reframing Migrant Identities. Namelessness and Impersonation in Dinaw Negestu's *All Our Names*." *Literator*, vol. 40, no.1, 2019, pp. 1-6.

Thammavongsa, Souvankham. "Interview with Souvankham Thammavongsa." *Wordsters*, 2006. Accessed 4 Mar. 2015.

—. *Light*. Pedlar Press, 2013.

—. "Notes on Craft." *Granta*, 2 Jan. 2018, https://granta.com/souvankham-thammavongsa-notes-craft/.

—. *Small Arguments*. Pedlar Press, 2003.

—. "Worms." *Ploughshares*, vol. 44, no. 4, 2018, pp. 153-160.

Thomaz, Diana. "What's in a Category? The Politics of Not Being a Refugee." *Social & Legal Studies*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2018, pp. 200-18.

Thúy, Kim. *Ru*. Translated by Sheila Fischman, Vintage Canada, 2015.

Tirosh, Noam, et al. "Nationalizing the 'Refugee Crisis': A Comparative Analysis Exploring How Elite Newspapers in Four Countries Framed Forced Migration During World Refugee Day." *Newspaper Research Journal*, vol.43, no. 1, 2022, pp. 47-64.

Trautman, Laurie. *Temporary Worker, Permanent Alien: An Analysis of Guest Worker Programs in the United States and Canada*. 2014. University of Oregon, PhD dissertation.

Trottier, Daniel. "Coming to Terms with Shame: Exploring Mediated Visibility Against Transgressions." *Surveillance & Society*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2018, pp. 170-82.

Trudeau, Justin."To those fleeing persecution, terror & war, Canadians will welcome you,

regardless of your faith. Diversity is our strength. #WelcomeToCanada." *Twitter*, 28 Jan. 2017, 4:20 p.m., twitter.com/justintrudeau/status/825438460265762816?lang=en.

—. "You Don't Suddenly Get to Discover Compassion in the Middle of an Election Campaign" *You Tube*, uploaded by *CBC News*, 3 Sept. 2015, www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tdhIygns0c.

Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. "Decolonization is not a Metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1-40.

Unger, Danton, and Kayla Rosen. "Family of Four Found Frozen to Death Near Canada-U.S. Border Identified; RCMP Investigation Continues." *CTV News*, 27 May 2022, winnipeg.ctvnews.ca/family-of-four-found-frozen-to-death-near-canada-u-s-border-identified-high-commission-of-india-1.5757107.

United Nations, General Assembly. *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*. Resolution 429 V, 28 Jul. 1951, www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/refugees.pdf. PDF download.

—. Convention *Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons*. Resolution 526 A (XVII), 26 Apr. 1954, www.unhcr.org/ibelong/wp-content/uploads/1954-Convention-relating-to-the-Status-of-Stateless-Persons_ENG.pdf. PDF download.

Urbaniak-Rybicka, Ewa. "Broken Dreams, Trampled Lives: Contesting Multiculturalism in Ann Ireland's *Exile* and Rawi Hage's *Cockroach*." *Towards Critical Multiculturalism: Dialogues Between/Among Canadian Diasporas. Acts from the 5th Polish Canadianists*, edited by Ewelina Bujnowska, Marcin Gabrys, and Tomasz Sikora, Agencja Artystyczna PARA, 2011, pp. 443-61.

Van Hoeij, Boyd. Review of *Antigone*, by Sophie Deraspe. *The Hollywood Reporter*, 15 Dec. 2019, www.hollywoodreporter.com/movies/movie-reviews/antigone-1241323/.

Viola, Serena. "Intercultural Welcoming Spaces in Montréal: Harmonization Drivers for a New

Sense of Identity." *City, Culture and Society*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 141-49.

Vogel, Lauren. "Health Professionals Decry Detention of Migrant Children in Canada." *Canadian Medical Association Journal* (CMAJ), vol. 190, no. 28, 2018, p. E867.

Vogl, Anthea. "Telling Stories from Start to Finish: Exploring the Demand for Narrative in Refugee Testimony." *Griffith Law Review*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2013, pp. 63-86.

Walia, Harsha. *Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism*. Haymarket Books, 2021.

—. "Transient Servitude: Migrant Labour in Canada and the Apartheid of Citizenship." *Race & Class*, vol. 52, no.1, 2010, pp. 71-84.

Walks, R. Alan, and Larry S. Bourne. "Ghettos in Canada's Cities? Racial Segregation, Ethnic Enclaves and Poverty Concentration in Canadian Urban Areas." *Canadian Geographer*, vol. 50, no. 3, 2006, pp. 273-97.

Wong, Danielle. "Race, Visuality, and COVID-19." *Pandemics*, special issue of *Canadian Literature*, vol. 245, no. 2, 2021, pp. 13-15.

Woods, Allan. "Canada is not a Safe Haven for Asylum Seekers, Trudeau Warns." *Toronto Star*, 23 Aug. 2017, www.thestar.com/news/canada/2017/08/23/canada-is-not-a-safe-haven-for-asylum-seekers-trudeau-warns.html.

Woolford, Andrew, and James Gacek. "Genocidal Carcerality and Indian Residential Schools in Canada." *Punishment & Society*, vol. 19, no. 4, pp. 400-19.

Wright, Terence. "Moving Images: The Media Representation of Refugees." *Visual Studies*, vol. 17, no.1, 2002, pp. 53-66.

Yee Hee Lee, Michelle. "Donald Trump's False Comments Connecting Mexican Immigrants and

Crime." *Washington Post*, 8 Jul. 2015, www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker/wp/2015/07/08/donald-trumps-false-comments-connecting-mexican-immigrants-and-crime/.

Yu, Hsiao-Yueh. "Postcard Narratives: A Case of Vichy in France." *Tourism Management* Perspectives, vol. 26, 2018, pp. 89-96.

Yu, Kiki Tianqi. "Documentary." *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, vol. 10, no. 1, 2016, pp. 7-11.

Zanchi, Danielle. "Playing for Good: The Public Value of CBC's Canada Reads." *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 52, no. 3, pp. 564-91.

Zetter, Roger. "More Labels, Fewer Refugees: Remaking the Refugee Label in an Era of Globalization." *Journal of Refugee Studies*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2007, pp. 172-92.

Ziebertz, Hans-George. "Human Dignity - The Foundation of Political Human Rights? Empirical Research Among Youth in Germany." *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2016, pp. 151-71.

Zimmermann, Susan. "Reconsidering the Problem of 'Bogus' Refugees with 'Socio-Economic Motivations' for Seeking Asylum." *Mobilities*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2011, pp. 335-52.