UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, MERCED

A Cycle of Violence: Hmong Refugees, Household Decisions, Economic Transnationalism, and Identities

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in

Sociology

by

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To Clark and Kingston Vang

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CRS	Critical Refugee Studies
MAAG	Military Assistance Advisory Group
PEO	Program of Evaluation Office
UN	United Nations
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
PRS	Permanent resident status

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I am indebted to the Hmong families who shared their stories with me. I also could not have finished data collection without key informants who helped create chains of referrals.

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A CYCLE OF VIOLENCE: HMONG REFUGEES, HOUSEHOLD DECISIONS, ECONOMIC TRANSNATIONALISM, AND IDENTITIES

ABSTRACT

The question of citizenship and belonging continues to be important in an era of mass displacement as a result of violence and conflict. This dissertation is an interdisciplinary approach in examining the question of belonging and citizenship for *war* refugees. I examine how war refugees belong and do not belong in different periods: from the journey to "refuge," in the refugee camps, and the current resettled country. Each chapter in this dissertation addresses a specific question. In Chapter Two, I ask, how do gender and age shape refugee journeys? Chapter Three addresses the question, how does time shape refugees' participation in economic transnationalism? And Chapter Four addresses the question, how does previous war experience (captured through refugee identity) in conjunction with current experiences (legal status, view on America/n) shape belonging (ethnic and racial identities)?

The Hmong from Laos makes a good case study because they have been in the U.S. for four decades. Their duration in the U.S. is long enough that they can take on new legal statuses but recent enough that they can still recall war experiences. The study consists of a total of 50 semi-structured life history interviews with refugee adult children and refugee parents. Adult children refer to participants who were children during the war or lived in refugee camps, and at the time of the study are adults.

There are three main findings. One, gender and age shape the decisions during the journey to refuge in Thailand. Further, the new economic household decision theory can be expanded to examine refugees if the reasons for migration shift from economic incentives to interests in preserving human life. Two, transnationalism can also be used to understand refugee participation in the global economy through economic transnationalism, namely through sending goods to sell and remittances. I show that Hmong participated in the alternative global market by sending *paj ntaub*[1] to sell in the United States. This economic transnationalism is made possible through what I consider *involuntary transnational networks* that consist of other refugees who are mostly kin. I argue that participation in the global economy occurs not only once the Hmong are in the resettled society, but even when they are residing in refugee camps. However, the commodification of the *paj ntaub* represents cultural violence that justifies the structural violence within the camps. Three, I find that refugee experiences of war continue to permeate into the present, shaping ethnic and racial identities. Specifically, identification with the refugee identity reflects the present attachment to previous war experiences. And detachment from the refugee identity is a coping mechanism to treating war experiences

[1] Paj ntaub translates to "flower cloth" in English. It is a Hmong textile art found on clothing, hats and baby carriers (Craig 2010).

as something of the past. Participants coped with war experience differently, but most identified as Hmong as opposed to a hyphenated or American identity. Therefore, many respondents saw themselves as American citizens, but not as full Americans. I term this notion of simultaneous belonging and not belonging as *social liminality*. Finally, those who are too young to understand or recall the experiences of war identify more with a hyphenated or racial identity and never saw or no longer see themselves as refugees. Collectively, this dissertation underscores Hmong refugees' belonging before they became refugees (in the journey to Thailand), when they are refugees (camps) and when they become citizens (in the U.S.).

CHAPTER ONE: *Introduction, Theoretical Framework, Historical Background, Methods*

In an era of globalization and mass displacement resulting from conflict and violence, the question of belonging and citizenship will remain significant in everyday politics and in scholarly work. It is a complex question of inclusion(s) and exclusion(s) operating simultaneously and affecting populations at the individual level. For example, while unauthorized immigrants are included in the work force, they are denied legal status, which excludes them from other aspects of society and denies them access to basic rights. To highlight how displacement impacts citizenship and hence belonging, I examine refugee experiences. Throughout refugees' lives, they occupy various legal statuses, and this dissertation helps to provide an understanding of how refugees are included and excluded at various points in time, in various societies, relative to and beyond the legal status. Thus, my general guiding question is, how do people experience *becoming* refugees and *becoming* citizens? I maintain that the Hmong are subjected to violence on their exodus from Laos into Thailand, in the refugee camps, and in the U.S. where many have become citizens. This violence points to the long-term consequences of U.S. intervention and war. Hmong refugees' experiences consist of a simultaneous casting outside of the nation-state and within it—a simultaneous belonging and non-belonging—which becomes especially apparent once they become legal refugees and legal citizens. Despite this liminality and the subjection to violence, the Hmong are remaking what it means to become Hmong in America.

I examine the experiences of Hmong refugees as a case study. It is ideal to look at the Hmong because they have resided in the United States for four decades, long enough to assume other legal statuses, but recent enough to still recall the war experiences of the past. Before the Secret War, Laos had just received its independence from French colonial rule. However, the country was in the midst of a civil war. Many countries like Vietnam and the U.S. also intervened (Chan 1994). The Hmong in the U.S. became involved in the war through the recruitment of the U.S. CIA (Chan 1994). Therefore, the Hmong refugee figure exists to also critique U.S. policies, war, and militarism (Vang 2012). While the Hmong in America are from the highland mountainous regions of Laos, they are geopolitically *stateless*. This statelessness could take a different meaning from the ones they will experience when they *become* refugees and *become* citizens.

This dissertation is situated broadly in the literature on immigration, citizenship, and Critical Refugee Studies (CRS). I envision my work situated between two seemingly competing approaches on studying refugees. One approach underscores how refugees are incorporated into the host society or becoming citizens (segmented assimilation). The second approach critiques and calls into question U.S. war and militarism, or what produces the refugee figure (critical refugee studies). In doing so, I am also simultaneously centering and decentering the nation-state. In sum, I conceptually think of my work taking this in-between position that shows how people *become* refugees and

become citizens, while simultaneously critiquing U.S. war and militarism. Therefore, I backdrop the cycle of violence and rescue, that CRS scholars propose to underscore the violence refugees experience, while also engaging in relevant literature in the different chapters when I focus on the journey to refuge (Chapter Two), the refugee camps (Chapter Three), and the U.S. (Chapter Four).

Each of the chapters addresses the following specific questions relevant to the extant scholarly literature. I focus on how the Hmong became refugees in Chapter Two. Specifically, I intervene in the sociology of international migration literature by bringing the refugee into this conversation. I suggest the new economic household-decision theory can be expanded to explain forced migrations, by specifically focusing on the risk-assessment aspect of this theory (FitzGerald and Arar 2018). In this chapter, I ask specifically, how do gender and age shape refugee journeys? In Chapter Three, I bring a transnational lens to assess refugee experiences while living in camps. Therefore, I ask, how does time shape refugees' participation in economic transnationalism? And in Chapter Four, I bring the refugee identity (war experience) into the scholarly literature on racial and ethnic identities to underscore belonging and citizenship. I ask, how does previous experience (captured through refugee identity) in conjunction with current experiences (legal status, view on America/n) shape belonging (ethnic and racial identities)? I maintain that refugees are simultaneously cast in and out of spaces as a global project between many nation-states, after U.S. intervention in Laos. They belong and do not belong and continue to experience various forms of violence. However, they are also social actors simultaneously making sense of their experiences of war and belonging.

Defining Terms: Refugees, Asylees, Forced and Voluntary Migrants

Who is considered a refugee? Bohmer and Shuman (2008) state that common usage of the word refugee refers to someone who left their country by force. A more specific definition may describe refugees as those who are fleeing from persecution or violence. However, as a legal status, a refugee is a person able to resettle in another country and obtain public benefits. Not everyone who has endured persecution and violence obtains refugee status though. For example, the 1980 Refugee Act was meant to redefine and accept refugees escaping from various regimes (not just communist regimes). In actuality, most refugees in the United States came from communist regimes (Portes and Rumbaut 2014). Further, the definition of who is considered a refugee is an ongoing and important debate. I do not engage in this debate since I am focusing on a population who have obtained refugee status. Given the history of the Hmong, I conceptualize them as refugees who were forced to leave Laos in the aftermath of the Secret War, and seek refuge in Thailand and eventually the U.S. However, I do take a realist approach in that people are refugees if they are fleeing violence *even if they are not legally recognized* or fit the legal construction of what should constitute a refugee (Hein 1993).

Obtaining refugee status allows people access to some protection and resources. Scholars suggest that a refugee status "…is a privilege or entitlement, giving those who qualify access to certain scarce resources or services outside their own country, such as admission into another country ahead of a long line of claimants, legal protection abroad, and often some material assistance from private or public agencies" (Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1989:3). This points to the social and legal gains this recognized status can accord, and the potential consequences of not receiving this status (e.g. deportation, undocumented status). A portion of this dissertation addresses the period before the Hmong *became* refugees and were, therefore seeking asylum in Thailand.

When I am discussing war refugees in reference to voluntary migrants, I use forced migrants and refugees interchangeably, especially when I discuss forced and involuntary migration theories. Nonetheless, these terms refer specifically to *war refugees* who are *forced migrants*. Further, "refugee identity" and "*becoming* refugee" in this dissertation have different meanings. In Chapter 4, I use refugee identity to capture refugee experiences or how former refugees cope with their experiences of war. The term "becoming refugees" refers to a notion of emptying conventional and ascribed understandings of what a refugee is, to give agency on how refugees construct and reconstruct what it means to be a refugee. In the same vein, "becoming citizen" also entails people's own construction of it.

Approach to Studying Refugees: Segmented Assimilation and Critical Refugee Studies

I bring together two different approaches on studying the refugee and argue that by bringing both approaches together allows for a critique of how people *become* refugees and *become* citizens. Specifically, I bring segmented assimilation and Critical Refugee Studies into conversation.

A segmented assimilation approach centralizes the factors in the resettled society and does not question the refugee experience or migration. This framework was developed from sociology to explain immigrants who arrived in the U.S. after 1965. Unlike earlier waves of immigrants, these immigrants were mostly nonwhites. Segmented assimilation is mostly attributed to Portes and Zhou (1993). This theoretical framework suggests there are three trajectories that immigrants become incorporated into the host society. The first is an upward path, where immigrants are acculturated and incorporated into the middle class. The second path is downward mobility into the underclass. And a third path in which immigrants maintain values of their immigrant community, but are still economically integrated into the middle class (Portes and Zhou 1993). Segmented assimilation theory also underscores various modes of incorporation that contribute to immigration assimilation, for example, political refugees qualifying for government programs (Portes and Zhou 1993). And other context of reception like the hourglass economy that could hinder integration because there are fewer opportunities to move up (Portes and Zhou 1993).

This approach on studying refugees centralizes the resettled nation, the notion of becoming citizens, and does not question the refugee status. In other words, acknowledging the context of reception that takes into account the availability of

governmental programs for refugees is also acknowledging the state. Further, by assessing adaptation, this approach implicitly assumes that refugees will or should eventually become incorporated (even if in different segments). The becoming part of the society is then underscoring the potential of *becoming* citizens. And lastly, the refugee status is taken as a given in that there is no questioning of the experiences this status might embody.

Nonetheless, this approach still holds some value, especially on the premise that the current society immigrants reside in shapes their experiences. For example, Zhou and Bankston III (1998) underscore how the ethnic community can support Vietnamese children in Versailles Village towards upward mobility, as the ethnic community grew, became more structured and established businesses and familial networks. In Portes and Zhou's (1992) study on Cubans, Dominicans, and Chinese, they concluded that immigrants who stayed within their ethnic economies fared better than those who left. These studies then focus on how refugees are incorporated into the local economy and how refugees have incorporated into the school system. For example, a study on Hmong refugees and other Southeast Asian youth in the San Diego area found that Hmong students had better GPAs than their white counterparts, but Hmong girls had lower GPAs than Hmong boys (Rumbaut and Ima 1988). Despite focusing too closely on ethnicity, and the presumed notion that immigrants and refugees would inevitably incorporate into the host society, the idea that the receiving societies' context and factors can shape refugee experiences is what I employ by bringing this approach into conversation with the Critical Refugee Studies literature.

Critical Refugee Studies (CRS) treat the refugee as a paradigm to critique U.S. war and militarism. CRS draws from various critical thinkers like Giorgio Agamben that acknowledge statecraft and its "power over life" (Agamben 1998). More specifically, CRS "conceptualizes the 'refugee' as a critical idea but also as a social actor whose life, when traced, illuminates the interconnections of colonization, war, and global social change" (Espiritu 2014:11). For instance, Vang (2012) highlights that the Hmong Veteran's Naturalization Act of 1997 introduced what she calls a "refugee soldier"—a person who exists as a soldier because of U.S. recruitment during the Secret War in Laos, but also a refugee because of U.S. abandonment. Furthermore, she argues that while the U.S. accepts this person into society, the figure exists to critique and contradict U.S. policies in its nature of creating both the violence and the rescue. This approach then decentralizes the state by calling it into question. Taking a Critical Refugee Studies approach, Espiritu (2014:29) shows that the U.S. used military bases to support the "refugee rescue operation." Military bases are present in various countries (e.g. the Philippines and Guam), and while refugee rescuing is a humanitarian concern, the placement and usage of these countries for military bases and refugee camps are evidence of U.S. colonization and subordination of other countries (Espiritu 2014).

Bringing both approaches together allows me to question how refugees are cast in and out of societies while also critiquing how U.S. war and intervention contribute to these experiences. Therefore, I am simultaneously centering and decentering the state. Acknowledging ways in which refugees are "incorporated" into various parts of society is

acknowledging the state (e.g. governmental programs, legal status), and hence, the centering of the state. While this incorporation is often examined in the resettled society, I also question in what ways refugees are or are not incorporated in the transit society, the *becoming* of citizens. The Critical Refugee Studies' approach enables a critical lens on examining the factors that created the refugee person, or the *becoming* of refugees. This approach decenters the state not because it does not consider the state, but rather in its critique of the state. In sum, my dissertation focuses on how Hmong become refugees and become citizens.

To do this, I draw specifically from CRS's cycle of violence as my main theoretical framework to capture the various violence that refugees undergo in the journey, in the refugee camps, and in the U.S. I describe this framework next.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Yen Le Espiritu (2014) critiques U.S. war and militarism and argues that refugees experience what she considers a cycle of violence. For example, this cycle starts with U.S. intervention into a country through war. This starts the violence and the creation of the refugee figure that did not exist before the war. Bringing refugees into the U.S. marks the "rescue." Espiritu (2014) argues that through media representations of the refugee as needing to be saved, portrays the U.S. as saviors, and renders the war as necessary. Likewise, I consider the violence that is experienced by refugees in various stages of their becoming refugee and becoming citizens as legitimized by either another form of violence or access to certain rights through legal status. For example, while not everyone who fled violence will obtain legal refugee status, those who do, gain access to food rations and resources in a refugee camp. Thus, the subjection to physical violence in the jungles while seeking asylum is implicitly justified by the "rescue" through a refugee status and receiving these rights.

Adding to this cycle of violence, I suggest that at various stages of the refugee experience, different forms of violence exist. I do not perceive these forms of violence to be mutually exclusive. I envision various forms of violence existing simultaneously in different context and time for refugees, and even with a possibility of less apparent forms of violence simultaneously operating in the backdrop. These forms of violence can include (but are not limited to) the following: structural, cultural, physical, legal, and symbolic. In this dissertation, I focus mostly on physical violence, cultural violence, and symbolic violence.

I conceptualize physical violence as the literal inflictions of pain or death onto persons. I borrow specifically from Espiritu (2014:16-17) who views war "…in terms of 'militarized violence'—not only epistemic or symbolic violence but the actual physical violence of 'guns and bombs' unleased on 'expendable nonpersons,' those devoid of names and faces, family and personal histories, dreams and hopes, politics and beliefs." In other words, the physical harm inflicted to people through military weapons and other

forms of violence in the aftermath of war. Thus, of all the violence I speak about, this form of violence is perhaps the most obvious and visual. For example, the death of family members is a form of physical violence for those who died or were injured as a result of gunshots, bombs, grenades, and other weapons. Another example of physical violence can be interpreted in the physical deprivation of services or food while residing in refugee camps. I discuss this form of violence in Chapter 2.

Galtung (1990: 291) defines cultural violence as "those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence—exemplified by religion and ideology, language, and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics)—that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structure violence." Cultural violence is this bottom layer that comes to justify both the structural and direct violence through various means like language, art, religion, and science, making the violence seem natural and right. I discuss this form of violence in Chapter 3.

I also employ the concept of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 2007). Bourdieu (2007: 339) states that "the dominated apply categories constructed from the point of view of the dominant to the relations of domination, thus making them appear as natural." In other words, this nonphysical violence operates at the subconscious level to maintain the status quo of domination. I talk about this form of violence in Chapter 4.

This cycle of violence then starts as CRS suggest with the U.S. intervention into Laos. I trace this through the journey, to the refugee camps, and to the U.S. I also included a category which I consider the full circling of the cycle of violence, the deportation of Hmong refugees (and other Southeast Asian refugees). However, this last category serves more like a potential future research endeavor rather than one that is answerable in this dissertation, given my sample and methods.

Figure 1 Cycle of Violence

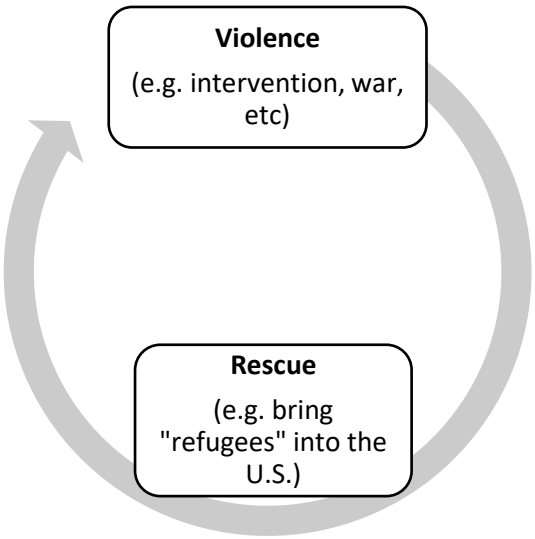
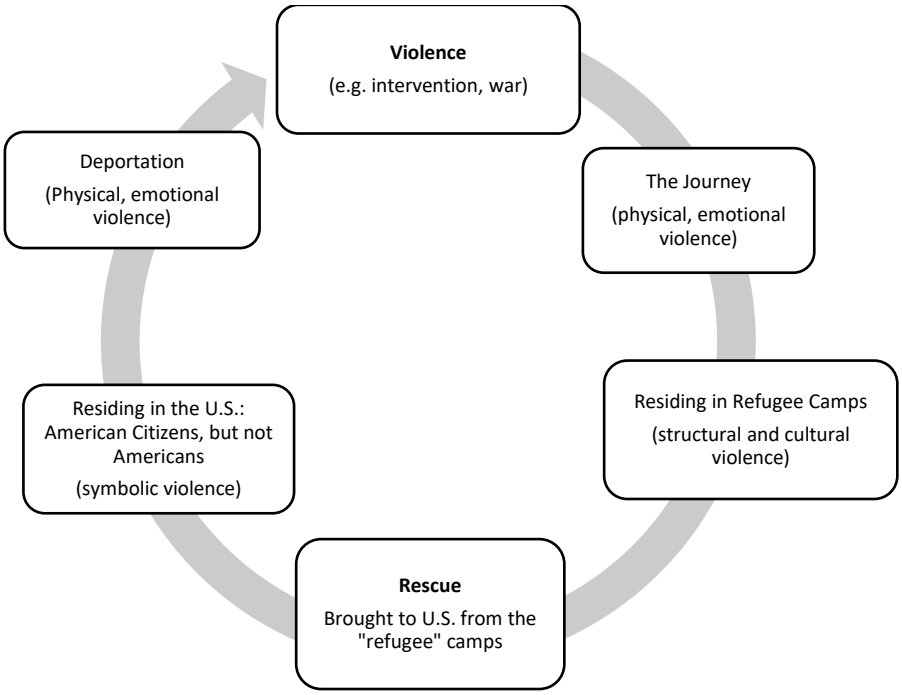


Figure 2 Cycle of Violence II



Conceptualizing Belonging

I borrow from Nibbs' (2014) conceptualization of belonging. While I bring two different approaches of studying refugees together, including the segmented assimilation approach, I do not conceptualize belonging as an inevitable process of adaptation. The term belonging challenges the notion of assimilation and underpinning assumption that it must happen (even if to a degree) for immigrants to be considered successful. While segmented assimilation acknowledges the context of reception, the focus on how ethnic communities impact incorporation, could potentially deflect the responsibility away from host society and place them on immigrants—that their lack of success is their inability to adapt. Rather, belonging connotes refugee's own interpretations and their understandings of how they have been treated based on ideologies of "them" vs. "us." Nibb (2014:10) suggests that "the concept of belonging moves us beyond the examination of normative models of integration to explore the refugee's orientation to connecting in specific contexts and points in time." This perspective, "…offer insights into where perceptions of membership derive from, how they are codified in the process or resettlement, and who has the power to define who can belong, and under what conditions" (Nibb 2014:10). As such, belonging recognizes the intricate and complex ways in which refugees make sense of the spaces that they are accepted and spaces they cannot penetrate both socially and physically.

I broadly conceptualize citizenship relative to legal status and other domains beyond the political. Relative to belonging, citizenship can vary—from basic legal status to "economic citizenship," and "cultural citizenship" (Bosniak 2006). As such, Bosniak (2006:18) views citizenship as "…a concept flexible enough to take on new meanings, even some that appear sharply in tension with earlier understandings." Namely being able to have access to, to participate, and have membership in certain aspects of a community (even in the absence of legal status). Therefore, I view citizenship and belonging in the broadest sense of participation in various communities.

BACKGROUND

Historical Background on the Hmong and U.S.

The Hmong in America are mostly from Laos. Many came as refugees in the aftermath of the Secret War that lasted from 1961-1975 (Vang 2016). In this section, I describe how the U.S. intervened into Laos, how the Hmong became involved, and their exodus into neighboring Thailand.

Laos is a country in Southeast Asia that was of little interest to other countries in the past. Initially, neither the United States nor the French were interested in Laos (Chan 1994). For example, the French entered Laos with the hope that the Mekong River would lead them into China, but when they realized it did not, they did not waste any efforts to develop the country (Chan 1994). In fact, during the French colonial rule of Laos, the only resource they ever exploited from the country was tin (Chan 1994). Likewise, U.S. interest in Laos peaked only when they wanted to contain communism (Chan 1994;

Hamilton-Merritt 1993). The 'domino theory' was the idea that if one country in SE Asia fell to communism, then all others will follow suit (Chan 1994; Hamilton-Merritt 1993). Laos became the country of focus given its geographic location as a landlocked country between many of the Southeast Asian countries and proximity to Vietnam.

The 1954 Geneva Accords prevented military troops from other countries in Laos. Thus, intervention from the U.S. came in the form of economic aid in the early to mid-1950s (Chan 1994; Hamilton-Merritt 1993), managed by the United States Operations Mission (USOM) (Chan 1994). Based on the Geneva Accords, the United States could not establish a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG), and instead created a Program of Evaluation Office (PEO) the following year (Chan 1994). However, the PEO included nonactive military officers (Chan 1994).

The Hmong entered the Secret War in Laos because they wanted to maintain their way of life. Despite French colonial rule, and the Lao Government, the Hmong continued their own governance through clans (Hamilton-Merritt 1993). The negotiations between Vang Pao (who would become a general) and Colonel Billy is that the Hmong would help fight off the communist soldiers while the U.S. would provide both military weapons and aid in the form of food, medical, and other supplies (Hamilton-Merritt 1993). The Hmong involvement in the Secret War had many causalities. As many as 50,000 Hmong civilians died or were hurt during the war (Hamilton-Merritt 1993).

In the aftermath of the Vietnam and Secret Wars, the Hmong were left to fend for themselves. When the U.S. pulled out of Laos, roughly 2500 Hmong were airlifted into Thailand (Vang 2010). With the communist takeover, the Hmong in Laos were persecuted for having aided the U.S. and many fled for Thailand by foot. This journey entailed crossing the Mekong River into Thailand. As I will show in Chapter 2, the journey from Laos to Thailand is far more complex. After residing in refugee camps (for some, for many years), they were able to resettle in countries like the United States, Australia, France, French Guyana, Canada, and Argentina (see Vang and Flores 1999). Hmong presence in the U.S. results specifically from the Secret War and U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia.

Today, the Hmong population in the U.S. is roughly 260,073 (Pfeifer, Yang, and Yang 2012). Lemoine (2005) suggest that about 20 years ago (in 2000), there were an estimated 4.4 million Hmong globally. In the U.S. the Hmong are most concentrated in California, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. California is home to the largest Hmong population at 91,224, followed by Minnesota at 66,181 and Wisconsin at 49,240 (Pfeifer, Yang, and Yang 2012). The sample in this study comes from California.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter One consists of the introduction, my approach of studying refugees, theoretical framework, the conceptualization of belonging, and methods. Chapters Two, Three, and Four provides a basis for understanding (war) refugee migration and hence, their belonging and underlying violence that occurs from the initial migration to resettling.

Chapter Two traces the Hmong journey to *becoming* refugees. Drawing from new economics household decision theory, I focus on the household risk-assessments that Hmong refugees make, arguing that rather than weighing out risks on economic gains like voluntary migrants, involuntary migrants assess risks to save as many lives as possible. In this chapter, I imply these experiences include physical violence that is experienced by those who are injured, died, or starved on the journey to seek refuge. And for those who had to witness the death(s) of relatives and leaving behind everything, experienced emotional violence. While voluntary migrants assess *economic risks* when they send off family members to another country or economy, involuntary migrants like refugees are assessing *risks pertaining to human lives* when they make decisions on who leaves for refuge first, and decisions for survival that impact children and gender differently. Their plight into Thailand unsettles what it means to belong. For the Hmong, the mountains and jungles of Laos are where they have set up their communities, but in their plight, these jungles became a place of both physical belonging and erasure of their presence (no footprints, no noises), or what I consider as a *physical liminality*.

In Chapter Three, I focus on the experiences in the refugee camps. I argue that while existing research details how camps can serve as a political space, there is less understanding of how camps can also serve as an economic space. Specifically, I underscore how Hmong refugees participate in economic transnationalism through the process of sending *paj ntaub* for their relatives to sell in the United States. However, I also suggest that participation in the economy justified the structural violence of minimal food and resources available in the camps. Hence, I call these networks *involuntary transnational networks* to bring attention to the conditions in the camps that such transactions through these networks had to occur. Thus belonging looked different in the camps as the Hmong were able to participate in the global economy, but not incorporated into the Thai nation locally or nationally.

In Chapter four, I focus on the Hmong in the present, by assessing their belonging through their understandings of citizenship, racial identities, their thoughts on America/n, and refugee identity, to capture war experiences. I argue that despite having lived in the U.S. for decades, some Hmong still view themselves as refugees, and many continue to identify as Hmong rather than Hmong-American or American. In addition, they viewed their citizenship relative to the legal rights that a legal status affords them. I argue that viewing themselves as American citizens (American as relative to place), but not Americans point to this notion of "belong and not belonging," which I refer to as *social liminality.* I suggest this is a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 2007) that maintains the status quo of casting refugees outside of U.S. social membership.

Chapter five is the conclusion of the dissertation. It consists of a summary of the main findings, limitations, and suggestions for future studies.

METHODS

Sample

From 2018 to 2019, I interviewed a total of 63 parents and adult children. I conducted interviews in Northern and Central California. The sample in this study consists of the interviews in Northern California, a total of 50 parents and children who are now adults (see appendix). I chose to exclude the 13 interviews in Central California because where one lives could impact their racial identification (e.g.Telles and Ortiz 2008). Thus, those in the Central Valley may have experiences that could shape their ethnic and racial identity formation differently than those in Northern California. I excluded the 13 participants for this reason. Of the 50 participants, one of the adult child's parent was not willing to interview, and another adult child did not want to interview. I chose not to exclude these two participants because I did not analyze parents and children as a pair. The age range for parents is between 40 and 86. The age range for the children is 19 and 49.

I obtained participants through snowball sampling. I started multiple chains of referrals (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981) to recruit participants. Usually, I contacted someone I know, and then have them refer me to individuals who fit the criteria of being born in Laos or Thailand, came here to the U.S. as refugees, and at least 18 years of age. If my referral were older, I would ask if they had at least one child who was born in Thailand or Laos before I interviewed them. I also asked if it would be possible to contact the adult child. Other times, I was referred to a younger person and would ask if their parents were still alive, and if so, if they were well, and if I could contact them. I interviewed parents and children at different times. Participants are assigned pseudonyms.

I conducted interviews in public spaces like coffee houses and participants' homes. Participants chose the location of the interview. All of the participants had a choice of being interviewed in English, Hmong or Hmong and English. I interviewed most of the parents in Hmong. I recorded participants or took notes based on their preference. I made an extra effort to let them know they did not have to allow me to record, especially given the experiences of war and trauma. Some parents allowed me to record, while many preferred just to have a conversation and for me to take notes. For these participants, I took notes, quoting phrases they said where I could during the interview. Throughout this dissertation, if I discuss a specific conversation with a participant that I did not record, all words not quoted are my notes, quoted phrases are the participant's exact words. Interviews lasted from thirty minutes to three hours.

All the participants in this study came to the United States as refugees and became permanent residents or naturalized U.S. citizens. Except for two parents, all the participants in this study are U.S. citizens. The participants in this study mostly arrived in the 1980s and 1990s with a few arriving in the early 2000s. Based on their refugee status, many participants spoke about the programs that supported their adjustment to the United States, such as sponsorships that connects refugees directly to people already residing here. For some, it entails a church sponsorship, a church sponsorship with a relative to

help the refugee family resettle, or no church sponsorship, but relatives or family who can sponsor the family and help them adjust.

Data

I used a life history interview approach. This approach allows participants to talk about their life history while the interviewer listens (Goodson 2013). Then the interviewer can proceed with follow up questions (Goodson 2013). Life history interviews allow us to understand how people make sense of and respond to experiences during different time periods (Goodson 2013). In general, interviews can also provide insights to how individuals view and interpret experiences (Weiss 1994). This method could be helpful to understand how people become refugees and citizens since this happens within various context and time. Usually, life history interviews are more unstructured. I incorporated this in my interview guide with the first two questions asking if they remember how they came to the U.S. and if they could tell me about their migration history. This general question usually gears a conversation about life in Laos and Thailand and why they left. I listened to their experiences, and then I ask specific follow up questions later to have more clarity of an event they shared. I learned through the interviews that this process also included life in the refugee camps. As I progressed through the interviews, if parents or children did not initially share experiences in the camp, I ask if they could share that experience. I also included subtopics on social life, legal status, transnationalism, and race in the interview guide.

To analyze the interviews, I retyped the notes of the unrecorded interviews and transcribed the recorded interviews. The notes I took were in both English and Hmong even if the parent spoke in Hmong. However, if I quoted something they said, I wrote it in the language the participant used, and later translated it as best as I could. I typed the transcriptions in the language of the interview. To keep the data in original form, I translated only quotes presented in the dissertation. I started by open coding interviews, but I quickly noticed that there were distinct differences of experiences in the jungle, the camps, and the U.S. I decided to start thinking about my data in these three contexts. In the journey, as they fled violence, it was obvious they were physically leaving their communities or villages. I had to think about belonging in a broad way (e.g. physically belonging) or how they are making home in physical spaces. In the open coding process, I notice codes like “leave no footprints” and “make no noise.” Then I regrouped these codes into the theme “leave nothing behind." In open coding the refugee camp experiences, I saw things like, “food rations,” “can’t go anywhere,” and “undocumented.” I coded on how they made sense of legal statuses (e.g. easier to travel, can vote, etc.) and views on America/n and experiences in this U.S. context. In the analysis, I also depended on the summaries of interviews, and memos I took during the coding and analysis process.

As a member of the Hmong community, I am not aware of a commonly understood word for race. However, this does not mean the Hmong do not understand race or how to talk about it. Despite the differences in vocabulary, Hmong refugees describe hair color or skin color in the Hmong language, which signifies race (Smedley and Smedley 2005). In addition, there are words for racial categories such as Asian, “Es-

Xias," black "dub," or white "dawb." When asked what race participants identified as, many mentioned their ethnic identity, Hmong, rather than a racial or hyphenated Hmong identity. Afraid that participants did not understand, I often followed up asking like why not Asian, Asian-American, or Hmong-American. Even then, those who identified as Hmong continue to state they want to be identified by their ethnic identity.

CHAPTER TWO: *The Nonlinear Journey: Gender, Age and Household Decisions in Refugee Migration*

This dissertation examines how people become refugees and become citizens. In this chapter, I focus on the first portion of that process - becoming a refugee. For most Hmong people, becoming a refugee involves escaping the aftermath of the Secret War in Laos and seeking refuge in Thailand. I focus on how the Hmong made sense of their belonging, and the agency and decisions they made in this involuntary migration.

Scholars have long noted the divide in the involuntary and voluntary migration literature (Kivisto and Faist 2010). International immigration theories explain labor migrations (see Portes and Rumbaut 2014; Castles, de Haas and Miller 2009; Hatton and Williamson 2005; Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci and Pellegrino 1999). The existing literature explains refugee migration as a result of statecraft (Greenhill 2010; Soguk 1999; Zolberg, Zuhrke and Aguayo 1989) and or violence (Silva and Massey 2015). However, we understand less about how refugees as actors make decisions to move in the face of violence and forced circumstances. This chapter addresses this gap by examining the decisions that refugees make while on the journey to refuge. There are existing studies of the unauthorized journeys from Latinx countries to the U.S. This chapter contributes to this literature by focusing on the journey of Hmong into Thailand in the aftermath of the war in a different part of the world. Existing literature also tells us that gender (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999) and age (Mahler and Pessar 2006) shape migrations and migration experiences. Thus, I ask how do gender and age shape refugee journeys? Using the new economic household decision as a framework, I maintain that decisions made during the journey impact children, men, and women differently. Relative to belonging, I maintain that in the jungles and country that the Hmong have called home for centuries, they are forced to simultaneously make home "here and there" in the jungle and erase their physical presence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

I provide a review of some economic migration theories and highlight the new economic household decision as a possible theory to explain refugee decisions in the journey. Next, I review the literature on unauthorized journeys. And finally, I review the literature on how gender and age are important factors in shaping immigration experiences.

Migration theories

In the twentieth century, the U.S. became known as a country of immigrants (Ueda 1994). In fact, one-third of the world's immigrants came to the U.S. in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Ueda 1994: 1). In 2015, there were 41 million

immigrants in the United States (National Academies of Science 2015). This is not surprising given that migration is not a new phenomenon (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2009; Castles 2003) and that historically it has been "a normal aspect of social life" (Castles 2010: 1567). In other words, migration has occurred since people have existed. Scholars are probably not wrong for asserting that immigration will continue despite anti-immigrant sentiment (Kivisto and Faist 2010). Given that the factors generating immigration will not end, and that immigration will continue (Massey 1999), the topic will continue to be a social reality and a field of interest to scholars.

Economic migration theories explain voluntary migrants motivations to move. The earliest formulation of economic migration theory is the push and pull theory. Castle, de Haas, and Miller (2009) trace its origin to Ravenstein (1885). The push-pull theory posits that "population growth and population density, lack of economic opportunities" (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2009: 28) and political factors (Portes and Rumbaut 2014) "push" people to leave an area or country. "Demand for labor," available resources such as land, "economic opportunities" and "political freedoms" "pull" people to different regions (Castle de Haas and Miller 2009: 28). In other words, it assumes people make rational choices (Kivisto and Faist 2010) based on cost-benefit calculations. However, other scholars suggest that push and pull is much too simplistic to explain migration processes (Bean and Brown 2014; Portes and Rumbaut 2014; Castles, de Haas and Miller 2009). Particularly, such a theory does not account for why people from the poorest countries do not migrate (Hatton and Williamson 2005). Hatton and Williamson (2005) proposed a supply-constrained and demand-constrained framework and explained that even when the cost to move was high, if wages increased in the sending countries, people were still able to move. Nonetheless, migration theories in their simplest forms can only explain why *some* economic migrants move.

Other theories also explain economic migrant decisions to move. Neoclassical theories are slightly more complex. They focus on wage differentials between geographic locations (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2009). A micro- component highlights the rational cost-benefit choices *individuals* make to maximize their income. In their analysis on intra-European migration, Castles, de Haas, and Miller (2009) conclude that neoclassical models explain worker migrations to England, Germany, and France in the 19th and 20th centuries. Specifically, the shortage of labor during the industrialization period in France led to an increase in foreign workers from surrounding countries such as Germany and Switzerland. During periods of war, such as War World I, these countries continue to recruit for labor. New economic micro-migration theories focus on decisions extending beyond the *individual* to decisions made by *families* (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci and Pellegrino 1999). Contrary to neoclassical theories that focus on the individual, new economics focus on migrants making *household-decisions* to preserve capital and minimize risks (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci and Pellegrino 1999). Scholars suggest

this framework may help explain refugees (FitzGerald and Arar 2018).

Refugee migrations are a result of statecraft (Greenhill 2010; Soguk 1999; Zolberg, Zuhrke and Aguayo 1989) and violence (Silva and Massey 2015). Soguk (1999) argues that the "refugee" exists to legitimize the statist conventions of the citizen-subject as deserving of state protection. Therefore, the discourse on and problematization of the refugee is then central to statecraft. There is also evidence that violence and the presence of police in Colombia positively predict international migration from this area (Silva and Massey 2015). While this existing research shows how violence and states propel refugee migration, we know less about the decisions that refugees make in the forced migration. This chapter contributes to this literature by bringing in the new economic house-hold decision theory to explain refugee decisions while on the move.

Black (2001) proposes that rather than distinguishing between forced and voluntary migrants, it may be more useful to treat refugees analytically. In other words, how do refugee studies fit within the relevant larger theories and disciplines? Therefore, whether or not there should be separate theories for forced and voluntary migration is up for debate (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2009), and beyond the scope of this chapter. Following Black's (2001) suggestion, I focus instead on how voluntary migration theories can expand to include displaced migrants.

I contribute to this gap by utilizing the new economic household decision theory to understand refugee decisions in involuntary migration. Household *decisions* can serve as a place to understand war refugees (FitzGerald and Arar 2018). However, different from Fitzegerald and Arar (2018), I am expanding the theory by suggesting that the reasons for migration are to save human lives, rather than for economic benefits. I keep the risk-assessment component of the theory. For example, the component of assessing risk and decision-making of the household could help elucidate the strategies refugees make and hence, refugee agency in forced migration. However, applying this model to refugees requires arguing that economic incentives are insufficient in explaining refugee movement. Thus, bringing refugees into the international migration theory literature requires reshifting the reasonings for migration from economic to human life, and imbuing this life with social value.

The Journey

Benezer and Zetter (2014) stated that few studies focus on the *refugee* journey. Perhaps the journey has little relevance for theory or understanding experiences of legal voluntary migrants (e.g. professional migrants); however, the journey has implications for war refugees. I define the journey for Hmong refugees as their path from Laos to Thailand. Below, I review the existing literature of the journey of unauthorized migrants.

This literature depicts the danger and hidden aspect of unauthorized migrants' journeys to the U.S. In Coutin's (2005:196) analysis of El Salvadorans' unauthorized migration to the U.S, she shows that the journey is undertaken clandestinely, which she considers as "…a hidden, yet known, dimension of social reality." She argues that hiring coyotes creates the entrance to this hidden dimension. De Leon (2015) shows that the

border patrol's practice of Prevention through Deterrence has claimed the lives of many unauthorized migrants who journey through the Sonoran desert. The hot temperature, animals, and terrain of the desert makes this journey nearly impossible to survive. Spener (2009) also provides a glimpse of the journey for a group of men from La Carmela, a small town, an hour away from San Luis Potosi in Mexico. This journey entailed crossing a river and walking through the brush country of Texas (full of mesquite and cactus and thorny bushes). The river, although shallow, some areas of the river has unexpected deep holes and in seasons of rain has claimed the lives of migrants. Animals like deers and rattlesnakes can also pose as a danger. Sometimes migrants also ran out of food. However, to make it into the U.S., migrants must be able to avoid border patrols. These studies show how dangerous the journey is for migrants. This chapter contributes to this literature by focusing on refugees' journeys.

The recognition of *Hmong* as *refugee* is not inherent upon their arrival in Thailand. Many of them remained undocumented and hid in refugee camps until they "had papers,"[2] which confirmed their refugee status and allowed them to receive food rations. Against this backdrop, I argue that by better understanding the decisions they made on their *journey*, we can expand voluntary migration theories that focus on micro-level household decision making to include forced migrants. However, it is the violence they experienced during the journey that asylees make claims to obtain refugee status. This status is granted in Thailand after the journey, making the trip or the experience of that violence as a precondition, but not guarantee, for refugee status.

I focus on the *decisions* involuntary migrants make to bridge the divide between the voluntary and involuntary migration literature. Refugees flee for reasons out of their control, like violence and conflict. However, I suggest that they make many decisions during their journey to seek refuge and that these decisions can inform migration theory. Refugees, like labor migrants, make decisions centered on family. However, in the case of refugees, the goal is to sustain life–to prevent the death of their loved ones. Golash-Boza (2015) takes a human rights approach in examining immigration policies, undocumented migrants and their networks, arguing that such an approach recognizes human lives and its value. In this chapter, I privilege the Hmong involuntary migration experience in transit. I ask the question, how do gender and age shape refugee journeys? The journey from Laos into Thailand is far from simplistic. Many decisions shape this journey. Thus, I argue that refugees make group and family choices to keep their loved ones alive and that these decisions are shaped by gender and age during their journey to refuge. Some of these decisions are made to erase their physical presence, so they will not be found, which also points to this notion of erasing their belonging as they inched closer to Thailand.

[2] Participants told me that they needed "ntaub ntawv" or "papers" to receive food rations. This refers to being documented in the camp.

Through the journey, the state and aid efforts reappear to "rescue" refugees once in Thailand. Despite the United Nations (UN) recognizing them as refugees, or some states stepping forward to resettle Hmong refugees, my research points out the neglect of states while refugees are on the journey: the Hmong were left to fend for themselves from the new regime in Laos. Scholars have argued that the state is undertheorized in the voluntary migration literature (Kivisto and Faist 2010), and Hein (1993) suggests that refugees are different from other immigrants due to their relationship with the state. I assert that the state is absent in the journey of refugees despite their involvement before the exodus. The participants with whom I spoke did not talk about the state in their journeys. Thailand only offered them protection if they did not perish on the way there. This protection was also contingent on the migrants becoming documented and recognized as *refugees*. Therefore, I backdrop the fact that Hmong were not always refugees, and the state only resurfaced when Hmong forced migrants made the journey *alive* into Thailand, not while in transit.

Gender and age

Previous research has long argued the importance of gender in immigration. In 1991, Silvia Pedraza published an article reviewing the existing literature in the Annual Review of Sociology, arguing for the inclusion of gender in migration studies. In 2006, Mahler and Pessar made the same argument, that gender is not considered much in migration literature, emphasizing a need to include gender. Other scholars have also made the same argument (e.g. Lutz 2010; Boyd and Grieco 2003). While some scholars recognized the growth of the gender and migration literature (Bretell 2016), this literature remained "balkanized" (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013). For example, those studying migration and transnational sexualities may not be in communication or aware of those who are studying migration and care work.

While it is presumed that men migrate more, findings suggest that women historically migrated, but have just been excluded from the literature (Houstoun, Kramer and Barrett 1984). Existing research shows that historically, the migration of women outnumbered men since the 1930s (Houstoun, Kramer and Barrett 1984). Studies also show that higher education can also increase the likelihood of migrations for Mexican women (Kanaiaupuni 2000). Similarly, gender can have implications for forced migrations. For example, scholars show that the United States disproportionately deports or forcibly removes more men than women (Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013).

Scholars suggest though that gender should be viewed as more than just sex roles or men and women. Specifically, immigration studies centered on gender should examine "both men and women as gendered actors in migration and that recognizes key institutions as distinctively gendered" (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1999: 565). Thus, focusing on refugees in the aftermath or during war should also consider how war and militarism as institutions operate in gendered ways as reflected in the decisions of individuals.

In times of conflict, the patriarchal structure of militarism shapes men, women, and children's experiences differently. Although there are certainly exceptions, for the most part, men are more likely to be recruited to serve as soldiers (Carpenter 2006; Lindsey 2003), and increasingly so, children (Bhabha 2014; Singer 2005). The patriarchal structure of war and militarism creates gendered hierarchies. As Carpenter (2006: 93) highlights, "gendered hierarchies result in men being pressed into military service, but masculinized and male-dominated military institutions in turn reify gender hierarchies, as 'women and children' are *made* defenseless by their exclusion from the bearing of arms, and as disproportions of male soldiers create the appearance of a masculinized nation-at-arms naturally willing (rather than forced) to fight." In addition, men are more likely to be selected for massacres in times of conflict (Carpenter 2006). Research show women experienced sexual violence (Keygnaert, Vettenburg, and Temmerman 2012; Hagan and Rymond-Richmond 2009). However, scholars have asserted that there are other issues such as: bearing the consequences of men leaving the country, and being displaced (Lindsey 2003). Highlighting the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995), Lindsey (2003) suggests that men made up the majority of those who died, even though not all were soldiers. Women stayed behind to protect their homes. Given that there has been less focus on the journey to refuge, how might gender shape this plight? And are decisions made by Hmong refugees cognizant of gender dynamics?

A focus on gender in migration studies generally then cannot ignore children (Mahler and Pessar 2006), or how age shapes migration experiences. The literature on child migration is growing given the unprecedented unaccompanied child migrations from Central America to the U.S. The literature on unaccompanied youth shows that the journey is a dangerous one that includes getting robbed, getting raped, riding on top of trains, and fleeing the police and border checks (Parish 2017; Zatz and Rodriguez 2015). Unaccompanied minors also report sexual violence in the UK (Lay and Papadopoulos 2009). Nonetheless, children make these dangerous journeys to reunite with their parents, (Bhabha 2014) and for some to escape violence (Zatz and Rodriguez 2015). Thus it is very probably that age and gender can factor in shaping the experiences and decisions during the journey while escaping violence for Hmong refugees.

The involuntary and voluntary migration literature are often separate, and I hope to bridge these two literature by applying the household economic theory to explain refugee decisions even in forced migration. Perhaps for voluntary migrants, the journey is a legal and facilitated trip. However, in forced migration, the journey may be an important space for assessing refugee experiences. Further, the patriarchal structure of the military creates a gender hierarchy and gendered-based experiences in which leads to the recruitment of men as soldiers and likely to be massacred, while women are left to protect homes and can experience sexual violence. Focusing on the gray space—the journey—that lies in between leaving and arriving or as Vang (2016) puts it, the *movement,* I ask, how do age and gender shape the journey for forced migrants?

FRAMING

Household-decision Model

The household-decision model focuses on labor migration based on risk-assessments and decisions in the family (Stark and Levhari 1982). More specifically, Stark and Bloom (1985: 175) explains that if a family member moves to a sector of the economy "where earnings are either negatively correlated, statistically independent, or not highly positively correlated with earnings in the origin sector" then the migration can have benefits for both if they share income. In other words, if the earnings in both places are not related, then they reduce the risks of both decreasing wages, so the migration and the shared income is beneficial for both. This theory focuses on labor migration, thus the focus on economic risks and voluntary migrants. My insertion here is to expand the theory by refocusing how it could explain refugee decisions if the reasons for migration are beyond economic survival to include literal survive. Sometimes, refugees families make decisions to send their children or the men first to the next country for refuge. There are certainly risks in the journey to seek refuge, but the refuge of the child or men does not necessarily mean those who remain in the jungles are automatically at risk of danger. Perhaps the main difference between refugees and labor migrants then is the degree of risk, and continuous lingering risks (of violence and death) that may not necessarily be the case for economic migrants. Nonetheless, I assert that refugees make the same kinds of *decisions,* except to prolong life and ensure that family members do not die. Voluntary migrants protect their economic interests, while forced migrants like war refugees are interested in protecting human life. If theoretical frameworks in the voluntary migration extend their scope of reasons beyond economic factors, they may also be able to illustrate how forced migrants face similar scenarios and decision-making, but with more to lose.

For the participants in this study, the violence escalated in various villages in the aftermath of the Secret War. A theme that permeates the chapters of this dissertation is the idea that the violence (emotional, physical, and otherwise) that took place in the jungles of Laos creates a notion of simultaneous "belonging and non-belonging." In Chapter Four, where I focus on Hmong refugees in the U.S. context, I underscore a physical belonging but not social belonging relative to the imagined community in which I call *social-liminality*. In this chapter, the erasure of Hmong footprints, and the silencing of children by covering their mouths and drugging them with opium—points to the simultaneous physical presence and physical erasure, which I call a *physical-liminality.*

FINDINGS

Like many participants, Der's journey from Laos to Thailand, and then the U.S. was not linear. Der is a 53-year-old self-identified female parent. Her relatives fled Laos in the aftermath of the Secret War and sought refuge in the jungles of Laos. When her family first started hiding in the jungles of Laos, she was only five years old. Her family

members were wounded, and some died in the process of trying to escape communist soldiers. Her father left for Thailand first, and the rest of her family did not attempt to seek refuge in Thailand until he came back for them. By the time they attempted to cross the Mekong River into Thailand, Der had a toddler son. She was separated from her son because she could not fit in the canoe. Her relatives took the child, and they arrived first in Thailand. Der reunited with her son in Thailand. Der's story illustrates a nonlinear journey from Laos to Thailand, how children experience the journey differently, and how men like her father might have to flee violence first and return for the rest of the family. Her story points to this notion of a back and forth in the journey to Thailand, and how gender and age can shape experiences of refugees. The paths to refuge are so complex and different, that unless people specifically traveled together throughout the entire journey, there is no identical journey. Some sought safety in their gardens away from the villages, returned to their villages before entering the jungles, and then to Thailand. Some went back and forth between seeking refuge in the jungles and the villages before attempting to go to Thailand. Thus, there is a variation of the journey. Those who left early or lived in villages that were not as impacted by the aftermath of the war had a straight forward trip into Thailand. Nonetheless, as I try to show in this chapter, the journey is nonlinear, and it is probably not possible to capture all the places people went to in the jungles before they came to Thailand. However, the main portions of the journeys for Hmong refugees are fleeing Laos into Thailand, living in refugee camps, and resettling in a third country. This chapter focuses specifically on the plight from Laos to Thailand.

In this chapter, I discuss the homes, animals, and people the Hmong left behind. Second, I show how the journey is not linear by underscoring that the jungles of Laos were the initial places of refuge. Followed by what the Hmong had to erase in those jungles, like their footprints and making no noises. Lastly, I illustrate that *decisions* made during the journey shaped who left first and who stayed behind, and how this is dependent on gender and age.

Leaving Everything: Land, Livestock, Crops, Loved Ones

The constant fear and possibility of death drove the Hmong to make the journey by foot into Thailand. One prevalent theme in the accounts of Hmong refugees who left Laos for Thailand is leaving everything and nothing behind at the same time. The Hmong left *everything* they had.

Participants discussed leaving behind all they had created and owned. For example, Soua, a 64-year-old self-identified female parent noted that they left all of their animals and what they planted, (unrecorded) *Leave behind all the animals, many mountains of crops behind.* Thong, a 73-year-old self-identified male parent echoes this by providing some details about the types of animals they left: (unrecorded) *In Laos, we had many animals, cows, chickens, pigs, but we couldn't sell them, we left them all*.

However, animals, crops, or the land they lived on were not the only things they left behind. They also left behind the dead. As Choua explains to me:

> …You all don't even know, as Uncle Cheng says, we are all running like this, but like a gourd of water, if it spills and the water gets on one, then we leave that person. They do not take the person. If you take that person, then they [communist soldiers] will catch up.

I asked if it was because it would slow everyone down. She answered:

> The gourd of water is a metaphor on getting shot at. If anyone is hit then we have no choice but to leave that one behind…No matter how much we love that person, we have to leave behind. You can't take him/her and run.

She further explained to me that it did not matter if they were injured or died on the spot. Those who were injured would eventually die because of lack of medicine:

> If they get hit, there is no medicine to save them, so they cannot go anywhere. A few days later, they will probably die because there is lots of bleeding.

I asked her if they left anyone behind. She added:

> Yes, there are instances…txom nyem kawg [so much suffering] during that period of time, just don't talk about it. Talk about it, so sad.

Choua speaks about having to leave people they knew behind even if they did not want to. Der discussed how her mother and brother were both injured. Her mother slowly recovered from her injuries. However, they later had to bury her brother. If it was dangerous, they were not able to bury their dead. If they were not being pursued, they had time to dig a shallow grave, but they couldn't hold a funeral of any sort.

> (unrecorded) My mother (stepmother) was injured in the leg. We need to carry both mom and brother. Relatives helped us carry them. We came [to a village]. We came to a mountain, my dad didn't want to give him water, but they gave him …warm water. Down under the trail, there was a small hut, and they took the kid there, the child said, "kuv kawg tuag lawm xwb" [I am going to die] and he died there. We had no hoes so we used sticks to dig holes and use bamboo to put him in the hole. Put him in it and covered him with leaves.

These stories show that the Hmong who fled left behind everything they ever knew and loved ones who were injured or died along the way.

Refuge in the Jungle of Laos

Some participants left Laos early or lived in villages that were not as impacted by the aftermath of the war. They did not experience the same violence many other Hmong Laotian civilians did. For these participants, the plight was dangerous, but in some ways

resembled traveling to another country as one would in peacetime. Gia, a 49-year-old self-identified female parent, told me about the village she and her family lived in:

> I was born in Laos and lived in Laos. But the village we lived in, there was no war. So, we don't know the aftermath of the war. We lived and lived, and then when they say come, we just came [to Thailand].

One participant, Shong, a 49-year-old self-identified male adult-child shared that his family had left early, and during that time, the impact of the Communist takeover or the aftermath of the war did not occur yet. Hence, as he states, it was not as "heated":

> During that time, '75 as the elders explain about running…as I remember, during that time, it was not as heated [communist soldiers has not penetrated the jungles and villages where the Hmong lived]. Coming to Thailand was not too hard a trip. However, after '75 it was a little more complicated. There were also robbers and communist soldiers, sometimes people were killed by robbers, or killed by communist soldiers on the way. So after '75, it was harder [to leave for Thailand].

Despite traveling into Thailand in 1975, earlier than most as he recalls, his family still sought refuge outside of the village they lived in.

> Also, I remember, I don't know if it's 1975 or earlier, I don't remember, and I don't know, but I remember that once my father took us to go hide in our poppy gardens. They told us that Communist soldiers came [to our village], so everyone ran. Everyone in our village left to the mountains or to their farms. Then we finally all returned to the village…then after that we came to Thailand.

When the communist soldiers began invading Hmong villages, he remembered that his family sought temporary refuge where they planted opium poppy (in Hmong, teb yeeb). These poppy gardens were typically far from their homes and sometimes far from their villages. They eventually returned to their village and then left for Thailand. This excerpt shows that before arriving in Thailand, people sought refuge elsewhere. It was not a linear path to Thailand, even for those who left Laos earlier than most.

When the Communists took over Laos, many people sought refuge first in the jungles. This marked the beginning of their journey. The jungle was a place of protection for their physical existence. But it also became a place of erasure (Vang 2016)– they could not leave any indication of being there. Eventually, they came back to their villages before fleeing to Thailand. Nou, a 60-year-old self-identified female parent shared that her family's initial journey started by seeking refuge in the jungles of Laos because living in the village was dangerous. They hid in the jungles until they knew of people who had knowledge on how to get to Thailand.

> (unrecorded) Nplog liab [the communist soldiers] follow you, scared, go to the jungle and don't want to come back to the village which we lived in prior to fleeing to the jungle…[we] stayed in hiding, and [we] were closer to Thailand, so [we] stayed for a few months. Some people knew the way, so we followed them. Some men, they know the jungle, and how to get to the Mekong River, and they also knew the different parts of the river.

Another participant, Mee, a 54-year-old female parent told me the first time they sought refuge in the jungle was in 1976 immediately after the killing of their village leader's entire family. In fear, everyone in the village sought refuge in the jungle. That was before she was even married. They returned to live in various villages as she explained "txav, txav" to indicate moving from village to village. Then ten years later, once again, their leaders were being targeted, and this time, they made the trip into Thailand. Mee said, "They killed our leaders, so we ran into the jungles and arrived at the river. We gave money for the Thai to take us across." This indicates just how forced the trip to Thailand was. People tried to live there and maintain their communities and villages in Laos. The first time that Mee took refuge was before she married, and since, they have been on the move. It was not until ten years later that her family made the trip to Thailand.

Another participant, Kang, an 86-year-old female parent reiterated this: (unrecorded) *When we ran to the jungles, I had seven kids…We lived in the jungles for two to three years and then we came back."Txom txom nyem."* When she mentions "came back," she is indicating coming back to live in the villages. She reiterates the phrase, "txom txom nyem," which is the Hmong equivalent to immense struggle and suffering. They were constantly on the move and lived in huts made from leaves they found in the jungles. For example, Choua shared:

> That life… we cut banana leaves to turn into a house [hut], live here a couple of days, live there a few days. Four to five days, we run to live in another place. Just like that.

Pa, a 55-year-old female parent, also confirmed that she too stayed under banana leaves. (unrecorded) *Live in banana leaves.* These excerpts underscore the making of temporary homes in the jungles.

Collectively, these participants speak about how many sought refuge in the jungles for different durations of time. Some resided there for months, and others resided for years before finally making the trip to Thailand. However, they never stayed in a single place in the jungle for long. Participants' emphasis on living in temporary huts made from banana leaves points to how they probably perceived their stay in the jungles to be temporary and the danger they felt while continuously on the move. The continuous going back and forth between the jungle and village shows that they wanted to maintain the life they had before. It also indicates how the journey was forced due to violence and not being able to continue their lives there. In addition, the initial refuge in the jungles,

and the varying time spent there, and returning to the villages shows once again that moving to Thailand was not a simplistic linear journey.

Eat not to Die

The constant moving made it impossible for Hmong refugees to grow food. Participants shared that in the jungles of Laos, they were always hungry. They used their knowledge of the plants in the jungle and ate what was edible. Occasionally, certain members of their family would return to the village to bring back rice. For example, Der shared with me, (unrecorded) "We lived in the jungles and had no rice to eat." *My father stole rice for us to eat.* Der's mentioning that her father stole rice for them to eat should not be interpreted as actual "stealing." Sometimes participants referred to stealing as going back to their old villages to get rice in secret, but not actual theft. This excerpt shows that the conditions in the jungle were harsh because there was no food.

Zeng, a 76-year-old female parent, shared that her husband was a soldier. She explained to me the many different places that she moved to and could not stay. Sometimes they would plant a season of rice, and then the communist soldiers shot again. Then they had to move again. How she described this journey to me gives way to how much running they did, and not having anything to eat. Zeng explains,

> We ran and ran and ran and ran and ate leaves and bamboo. We did not have a single grain of rice to eat. We dug up potatoes and bamboo shoots to eat. There was no rice.

Her repeating the word "ran" was to indicate how much and how long they ran for that they had no access to food, especially rice. She again repeated how they had no rice to re-emphasize the hunger they experienced in jungles. They resorted to eating bamboo shoots and potatoes to survive. Similarly, Thong also spoke about eating roots,

> (unrecorded) After seven days,[we] didn't have any more food. Then we ate "plawv hmab ntoo, thiab khawb qos noj" [vines and potatoes] thiaj txog Thaib teb [in order to make it to Thailand].

And as Choua recalled, if they had rice, they ate it raw by grinding it with their teeth, "there was nothing to eat, no salt, nothing, nothing to eat. We grind rice raw, each person a hand full of uncooked rice." They refrained from cooking the rice because smoke from the fire could alert soldiers, so to survive, they used their teeth to grind raw rice.

As these participants shared, conditions in the jungles were harsh. They had no shelter or food. Over time, as the conditions worsened due to constant moving and inability to plant crops, some Hmong refugees returned to live in the villages, sometimes to a new village, before making the trip to Thailand. The Hmong often returned to the villages because they hope they could continue their way of life, only to realize they could no longer live there due to the danger. The initial act of leaving their homes and villages often entailed leaving behind land, crops, and all they have ever known.

Perhaps the most extreme of this nonlinear journey into Thailand is Lou's description of how she came to Thailand not once, not twice, but three times. Lou is a 52-year-old female parent. Unlike other participants, it was not a going back and forth between the jungles and villages. Rather, her family made multiple round trips between the villages of Laos, the jungles, and Thailand. The first two times with her parents. Each time, her father refused to live in the camps and made the dangerous trip back to Laos. She explains the first time they moved to Thailand and the decision to move back,

> It was 1975. We live in Nong Khai for three months. One night my father and my uncle had a meeting and decided that too many people were dying and they were going to sneak back to Laos.

Once in Laos, they tried to resume their way of life, but they were forced to go back to Thailand. She told me,

> We planted three seasons of crops, lived there for three years. Then in 1979, the Vietnamese soldiers came back to oppress us. They tried to kill and they assaulted us. Then we ran again for Thailand…We came back to live in Vinai in 1979. In May of 1980, my father no longer wanted to live there. He said living in the Thailand refugee camps was full of struggles because the food rations were not enough. He wanted to return to Laos where he could grow his own crops…In May 1981, we returned to Laos. Then I got married in April of 1983 or 1984. We were once again oppressed by the Vietnamese soldiers. They tried to kill us, and we ran back to Thailand in 1985-1986 as I told you earlier.

In all, Lou came to Thailand three times before resettling in the U.S. Her parents never left Laos again. This excerpt shows how some Hmong hoped to continue their way of life and the communities they had in their villages. It further illustrates how they thought they could live there by going back, only to be chased out again. Therefore, it shows how the Hmong were forced to migrate to Thailand and how this journey is nonlinear.

Leave nothing: No footprints and Complete Silence

While they left behind their land, crops, livestock, and loved ones who died or could no longer go on, the Hmong refugees also left behind nothing. This refers to a type of silence, an erasure, that contradicts and aligns with the peaceful presence of the jungle. To survive, they could not make any noise or leave footprints. What participants shared about this experience shows that age played a role.

The silencing of the Hmong who were seeking refuge did not occur only during the journey; it started as soon as they *decided* they were going to flee to Thailand. Other than those leaving with them, they told no one. For example, Thong shared: (unrecorded) *At the time, when people left, we didn't tell anyone, I only told my closest friend.* Pa also shared that they used terms to indicate they were leaving for Thailand without saying it. (unrecorded)*…mus luaj teb, [go clean the weeds from our crops] as a way to move to*

Thailand. Dia echoed this by sharing that, (unrecorded) *No one tells each other they will go to Thailand.* These participants described a silencing that rendered their departure as something that never happened, even as it was happening.

Dragging and Carrying the Children

The journey from Laos to Thailand was dangerous and last many days, even weeks and months if they ran into communist soldiers, for example. Running away from communist soldiers or the fear of being caught by communist soldiers meant not staying in one place for too long. It also meant traveling faster at times. Sometimes, parents dragged and carried their children. As one parent recalled, she dragged her children along and unintentionally hurt them in the process. Soua recalls that her newborn was only one month old when she and her family decided to flee. She had two children at the time. She stated:

> (unrecorded) "Ntsai ntsai li mas, muab yus tej me nyuam luag luag, tes taw to tas." [So scared that we dragged our kids; they had open cuts on their hands and feet]. Only two kids, had my baby in the village for one month and then we ran.

Thong described in more detail that he would carry his children on his back, hold their hands, and carry them in front of him.

> (unrecorded). In 1975, September 2, I left Laos. Laos to Thailand took 11 days, lug kev [strayed away from the trial]. Didn't run into any communist soldiers…came in a group of about 100 people. Came to live in Thailand, "txom nyem heev." Lub sib hawm ntawv, muaj six kids, "txom nyem kawg, ev, thiab, tuav tes, thiab nqa thiab" [During that time, I had six kids, so much suffering, piggyback, and hold hands and hold them in front].

Thong told me that at the time, his eldest was about 11 years old, and the youngest was three months. Tria, a 54-year-old self-identified female parent, also shared, (unrecorded) *when [we] did cross [the river], kids were on the backs of adults*. These two excerpts shows how the children experienced the journey slightly different from their parents. Their age determined whether they walked on foot like their parents, were held, or piggybacked. This also points to how the decisions of the Hmong at the time focused on ensuring that as many of their family members survived the trip.

Children and parents who traveled on foot took precaution not to leave footprints. As Nou, recalls:

> (unrecorded) To leave no footprints or tracings of us, the adults often stepped on rocks, while the children walked in the river.

One strategy to not leave any footprints was walking in a single line. Another participant shared that they saw some footprints along the way, though she did not indicate who she

thought they belonged to. However, because of these footprints, they walked through a small river or creek instead. Tria shared with me:

> (uncorded) In the daytime, took the road. Sometimes they saw footprints, so they took the small river/creek so they will not leave footprints. They often did this in a line, and often followed where the water flowed.

These stories show that if you were an adult with children, your experience of the journey entailed protecting them, carrying them, at times dragging them, and ensuring that no one leaves a footprint behind. The experience of children who were old enough to understand who followed their parents' instructions, was different than those who were too young to understand, and simply went through the motions. This notion of leaving no physical signs of ever being there is contradictive to the fact that Laos and those very jungles were, what the Hmong called home for centuries. It shows this uprooting of what it means to belong.

Make no Noise

While in the jungles of Laos, the Hmong could not make any noise in fear communist soldiers would hear and kill them. Some children were too young to understand what was happening and were silenced by parents who covered their mouths or used opium to quiet them down. In times of danger, parents and family members had to take extreme measures to ensure the soldiers did not hear them. Nou told me:

> (unrecorded) Sometimes the communists [soldiers] would pass us but did not see us. All children, pos qhov ncauj [cover their mouths].

At other times, they drugged young children who did not quiet down. Soua remembers:

> (unrecorded) "Peb ntsai li ntsai." ["We were scared beyond scared"]. Sometimes there were communist soldiers blocking the path, so we had to take alternative routes. We did not run into any communist soldiers, but those who came after us, they had to drug their children with opium, some children died.

Pa also told me that they gave children opium, and some died.

> (unrecorded) We had to drug the children with opium. Some Hmong Her [clan last name], all kids died from opium.

As the other participants mentioned, they saw and knew of children dying from an overdose. Kang told me she resisted giving drugs to her children.

> (unrecorded) They dislike individuals with kids. When we were near Thailand, some elders wanted to feed our kids opium. So, my kids, I didn't give them opium. Yet, I lost two kids (teen daughter and infant).

She was aware that drugging her children could kill them. As she mentioned, even though she did not allow anyone to give her children opium, two of them still died. However, sometimes, an entire group had to decide to drug all their children to prevent being heard by soldiers.

Refugees left behind everything and nothing at the same time. They left their dead relatives, unable to bury them. But they also could not leave any signs they were ever there. To survive, parents silenced their children by covering their mouths and giving them opium. The Hmong refugee journey is one of silence and erasure, comprising of physical and emotional violence.

Further, their footprints from Laos to Thailand never existed since they took measures not to leave any behind. Thus, Hmong refugees similarly experienced what Coutin (2005) refers to as a clandestine journey. The Hmong took extreme measures and made hard decisions at times to ensure the lives of all those they traveled with were not in danger. Sometimes these decisions had grave consequences. This journey shows how what was once a place of home is no longer since they are simultaneously erasing that presence. The jungles and places they knew became both as a place of refuge and a place of erasure. Although the Hmong were there physically, they were also simultaneously erasing their physical presence of making no noises and leaving no footprints. I considered this a physical liminality—this notion of simultaneously belonging and not belonging physically.

Who Leaves, Who Stays, Who Comes Back

Inevitably, men, women, and children experience war violence. However, gender and age shape the decision-making processes for refugee men, women, and children, and impact them differently. Thus far, I have argued that the decisions Hmong refugees made while fleeing from Laos to Thailand were intended to ensure as many of their family members as possible stayed alive. Next, I suggest Hmong refugees also made decisions with an awareness of the gendered nature of war and militarism. Thus gender and age can also shape the decisions on who leaves first and who stays behind in various parts of the journey.

While families typically traveled together from Laos to Thailand, this was not always the case. Sometimes, parents and children are temporarily separated when they let the children go first. Other times, a leader or the men of the group would go first and then later come back for the rest of the family. These exceptions underscore how the gendered and aged structure of war can shape women's, men's, and children's journeys in search of refuge.

Men, women, and children experience various types of violence as a result of warfare. In the context of Laos, Hmong men seemed to be in greater danger of being shot if caught, compared to women. Hmong refugees are cognizant of the gender-based violence in warfare. In fact, a participant shared with me that men were more likely to be killed, hence the group they traveled with devised plans for the men to separate from the women and children. Kang shared:

> (unrecorded) One day communist soldiers shot a lot. Some told us not to run and go with communist if the communists come by. They probably will not kill the women so the men will run off and leave children and wife behind. Fortunately, we didn't run into any communist soldiers at that time.

Age and gender shaped journey trajectories. Sometimes, an entire group that was traveling together devise strategies that they carry out to try to sustain everyone's lives. Two participants who were children in Laos during the journey were sent to Thailand together as orphans, even though their parents were still alive. One of them recalls there were 70 of them, children, with a few adults. Tou, who is now 39 years old, and self-identifies as a male told me:

> So those of us who could walk and who could depart from our parents, they sent all of us to Thailand. Seventy of us total, saying that our parents have died. That communist soldiers shot our village, our parents died, and they sent [us] to Thailand…we came to stay in Thailand, but not in Vinai [or any of the refugee camps].

Another participant explained to me that the decision to send the children first was to ensure there was enough food for the rest of their party who still resided in the jungles of Laos. Also, reducing their group size in the jungle reduced their chances of being discovered by communist soldiers. It made fleeing and going back and forth in the jungle easier for the smaller group. At the same time, sending them into Thailand meant they would have some protection once they arrived. When I asked why they were sent as orphans to Thailand, Cheng, who is now 46 years old, and identified as a male shared:

> Yes, that, it's because if they let all the children live in the jungle, then it would be hard to find food for everyone. Secondly, since there are so many of us [large group], the communist soldiers might find us. Therefore, they all decided that they will send us younger ones to Thailand and the elders [parents] stay so that it would be easier for them to find food for everyone and also so that going back and forth in the jungle will be easier.

Other times, children were taken across rivers first. Der spoke briefly to me about how she was split from her toddler for a while when they were crossing the Mekong River. Shong shared that his parents hired Laotians to help them cross another river, which he recalled was after they crossed the Mekong River. The Laotians took all the children and their cargo across first, and then came back for the parents.

> When we crossed the river, they hired Laotians to piggyback me, and I remember a little bit that when we arrived, during that time, it was raining so hard, so we arrived at the river. When I think back, and I told my dad, "wow, you guys are really lucky." We all were very lucky at the time. Because that river, when we arrived, it was completely yellow, it was huge. So, Hmong people we often live on mountains, so some do know how to swim, but some do not. So, in our group, I believe that, uh, maybe most of us did not know how to swim. So, we had to hire Laotians to tie a string from one shore to the other side of the shore. I told my father," oh wow, everybody was so lucky at the time" because, during that time,

> Laotians were not mean. We had cargo and gave all the goods, like money, food, and children for the Laotians we hired to take to the other side first. Then they came back and retrieved the rest of the elders [parents]. So, I said, wow if those we hired were "siab phem" [mean] and had other ideas, they could have sent all the things and the children across and just abandon the parents on the other side of the shore. Because they told us that if they had to take everyone across, they had to first take the children and the things.

These stories indicated that sometimes age mattered for who was able to cross first. Sometimes this meant children and parents were separated for a few hours, or as in the example of the orphans, even months or years. According to Shong's situation, the Laotians they hired decided that they had to get their belongings and the children over first before coming back to get the parents. However, ultimately, this was the final decision of the entire group. The crossings of rivers and the dangerous journey share some resemblance with the descriptions of unauthorized journeys (e.g. De Leon 2015; Spener 2009).

Gender came into play, as some men sought refuge first and returned for their family later. Other men from Thailand returned to help their relatives get to Vinai, a refugee camp in Thailand. As such, who left to Thailand first and who stayed behind is a gendered process. For example, Der told me that her father first escaped to Thailand, and then came for the rest of her family and relatives.

> (unrecorded) Then we left to the jungle for another year, and my dad went to Thailand and then came back for us.

Choua shared that she and her family did not go to Thailand until two uncles returned from Thailand to get them.

> We ran [to the jungles] then we lua nyab laj [came back to the villages], we planted one season of rice then those from Vinai came to get us. They came to get us, so we came to Vinai…Those who came to get us were uncle Chue and uncle Tou [pseudonyms].

Der and Choua's stories show that sometimes men sought refuge first in Thailand and returned to Laos to bring their families to safety. Choua's account also shows that even when families arrived together to Thailand, sometimes the men made another journey back to bring their extended relatives into Thailand. These stories show that the journey to Thailand is not linear.

When fathers left their families in Laos, mothers were left to protect the children. There is also an increased chance of being exposed to danger and more violence for mothers and children. Existing research shows that refugees reported incidences of sexual assault against teenage girls and women (Hagan and Rymond-Richmond 2009). The men's return for the family meant they had to make the journey again, one that could include violence or death. Also, when men went to retrieve relatives in Laos, their family members in Thailand were left to manage life in the refugee camp. In other words,

women played just as central a role in this process as men. However, gender and age shaped how each experienced the nonlinear journey to Thailand differently.

The decision for men to leave first rested on a masculine portrayal of men as strong, and hence a threat to the opposing side compared to women and children. Children sometimes did not understand what was happening, as their parents carried them or held their hands as they made the journey to Laos on foot. Since noises would have made a group detectable by soldiers, parents made the hard decision to drug their children. They calculated risks of being detected by communist soldiers and the risk of accidentally killing the children from the dosage of opium. These stories reflect how age and gender determined who underwent what kind of experiences while seeking refuge in Thailand. They also show how belonging in the jungles were uprooted, as they belong physically, but erased that presence to survive.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This chapter also shows how the Hmong were uprooted from their communities and forced to make sense of their belonging. They understood the villages and the jungles to be their place of home. Thus, they tried to stay, but could not. Even while they sought refuge in the jungles that they knew well, they were also simultaneously erasing their presence. The journeys of the Hmong people amplify the importance of understanding the process of forced migration, and *how war* refugees survive violence, make sense of their belonging in the aftermath of state intervention and abandonment. This journey is one of erasing Hmong belonging, it is also one of physical violence and emotional violence. The simultaneous physical presence and physical erasure (no noises, no footprints) is what I refer to as *physical liminality*.

According to migration theories, voluntary migrants make cost-benefit decisions and assess the risks of sending their sons and daughters overseas. By contrast, Hmong refugees made decisions sometimes to send their children and at other times, male relatives first, in hopes of sustaining their lives and those of their family members who remained behind. In this case, the biggest difference between forced and voluntary migrants then is the interests they are protecting. Voluntary migrants seek to protect their economic interests. Involuntary migrants, like Hmong refugees, seek to protect *life*, literally. It is here that household-decision models can be expanded to include both kinds of migrants.

The nonlinear journey underscores how the patriarchal nature of war complicated experiences for men and women in different ways. Although the women in this study did not share encounters of gendered-violence, existing research shows women experienced sexual violence (e.g. Hagan and Rymond-Richmond 2009). Men sometimes separated themselves from women because they were more likely to be executed upon confrontation (Carpenter 2006). This meant women had to defend and protect their

children. Other times, children were sent first to seek refuge, but this was probably not an easy thing for parents. Sometimes families and entire groups had to make decisions to silence children who were too young to understand they should not make noises. These decisions at times had consequences as some of the participants discussed knowing people whose children did not survive the drug dosage. Nonetheless, Hmong refugees made these hard decisions during the involuntary journey in an attempt to keep everyone they traveled with alive.

These point to the relevance of age and gender in shaping the journey to seek refuge, illustrating the complexities, nonlinear, nonidentical journeys that many Hmong took that are sometimes reduced to simply as, “leaving Laos for Thailand.” Through the journey, Hmong *became* refugees–they had not always inherently occupied this status. As I will show in the next chapter, they also negotiated what it meant to be refugees in camps.

CHAPTER THREE: *Refugee Camps and Economic Transnationalism*

The transnational literature is vast. However, some scholars suggest that there are few studies centering time (Burrell 2017; Waters 2011). The existing studies on temporality focus on transnationalism relative to the *receiving* and *sending* nations. This leaves open the question of how transnationalism changes over time for refugees who often reside in a second *transit* country before they resettle. Do they participate in transnationalism then? This chapter addresses this very question, how does time relative to context shape refugees' participation in transnationalism? Drawing from transnationalism, as a process of the globalizing world that emphasizes how people, ideas, cultures, and the like transcends national borders, this chapter intervenes here by bringing the refugee camp literature into conversation with the transnational literature. I argue that the forced migration of war refugees and the conditions in camps push refugees to participate in the alternative global economy to survive, as they are simultaneously socially and legally cast outside of the nation-state.

Debates on transnationalism center on its applicability, immigrant agency, the diminished or continued significance of the state, temporality, and remittances. Time is implicitly noted in transnationalism and not centralized (Burrell 2017). Furthermore, we know less about how *forced* transnational networks and ties operate over time and their interlinkages with global economies. Much of the scholarship on refugee camps underscores how it can serve as a political space (Owens 2009; Werker 2007; Isin and Rygiel 2007; Ramandan 2012). This chapter contributes to the existing literature on economic participation while residing in camps. By bringing the transnational and camp literature together, I ask, how do different experiences across time and space (past in refugee camps, now in the U.S.) shape refugees' participation in economic transnationalism? War displaces people as they seek refuge in a second country and as they resettle in a third country. I focus on the networks between displaced refugees while they were residing in the refugee camps, and once they have resettled in the United States. Refugees had to create alternative ways to sustain their lives by sending *paj ntaub* to sell in the U.S because they did not receive sufficient basic living needs (e.g. food, clothes, services) in the camps. I extend this existing literature by arguing that the transformation of *paj ntaub* is a cultural violence in the face of confinement and barely livable conditions. Refugees use their kin networks while residing in the camps. I call this *involuntary transnational networks*. This participation in economic transnationalism cannot be viewed purely as voluntary. I further add that later participation in the economy through remittances is still through these networks, but that these occur less frequently and is not an exchange between U.S. Hmong and Hmong residing in the camps because the last wave of Hmong refugees in Thailand arrived in the U.S. in the early 2000s. Remittances then look more similar to those of economic migrants.

Significance

This chapter contributes to the literature on transnationalism, and refugee camps by considering temporality, or how transnational practices change over time in different contexts for war refugees. I focus on how refugees participate in another nation's economy while they live in refugee camps, and how they contribute to their country of origin's economy once they have resettled in the United States. More specifically, I focus on the exchange of goods and money while refugees are in transit, and remittances once they have resettled in the U.S. I view this exchange as both a result of structural forces (top-down) and individual agency (bottom-up). In other words, structural forces or top-down emphasizes how nations, governments, or macro forces shape transnationalism while agency (bottom-up) emphasizes how individuals participate in this process. This chapter illustrates that the existing transnational networks of refugees are a by-product of the intervention of U.S. militarism and war.

Further, by bringing in economic transnationalism, particularly how refugees participate in economies across borders, points to the agency of refugees. Agency is important particularly given that camps are viewed as spaces in which forced migrants are excluded from all forms of participation. As Agamben (2000) suggests, forced migrants are *included* only through their *exclusion*. However, existing research challenges the notion that the camp is a total space of exclusion. For example, Owens (2009) illustrate that the camp can also serve as a political space. I extend this to include refugees' economic participation while residing in the camps. To provide some background, I discuss the various refugee camps in Thailand in the next section.

Hmong Refugee Camps in Thailand

When the U.S. withdrew from Laos, about 2,500 Hmong were airlifted out of Long Cheng into Ban Nam Phong in Thailand (Vang 2010). Ban Nam Phong was the first temporary Hmong refugee camp with about 10,000 residents at the end of 1975. There are also other camps, Chiang Kham, Ban Nam Yao, Nong Khai, and Ban Napho. In 1975, camp leaders and the Thai government sought out a more permanent camp by clearing a forest area of what became Ban Vinai (Hillmer 2010). Camps often consisted of different ethnic groups from Laos (e.g. lowland Lao, Khmu and Mien). In 1979-1980, the Hmong section of Nong Khai was closed (Hillmer 2010) as Hmong from that camp were being move into Ban Vinai, and lowland Lao were being moved into Nong Khai. The camps were also designated for various ethnic groups; Nong Khai and Napho for lowland Lao and Ban Vinai, Chiang Kham and Nam Yao for other ethnic groups (Long 1993) including the Hmong.

Long (1993) described Ban Vinai as being more accessible because there were no barb wires like other camps. However, one must pass through a guardhouse with proper documentation in order to go into the camp. Ban Vinai, or "Village of Discipline," was named after Commander Vinai (Long 1993: 58). The camp was about 200 acres and organized into nine centers (Long 1993). Ban Vinai stopped accepting new refugees in

1983 and finally closed its doors in 1992 (Hillmer 2010). While the camps were designed as temporary places, in 1986, residents lived an average of seven years in Ban Vinai (Long 1993). Some Hmong were also resistant to resettling in the United States (Long 1993). Hence, understanding how refugees utilized this space to participate in the alternative global economy sheds some light on how refugee camps can also serve as an economic space and a space of cultural transformation.

In the mid-1980s the camp housed between 43,000-45,000 residents and about 2,000 of them were undocumented (Long 1993). Long (1993) spent time with an undocumented family whom she called the Sisawongs, a Lowland Lao and Khmu family who slipped into Vinai when they could no longer stand the unbearable conditions of camp Nong Khai. Around 1980, they bought a place in one of the nine centers and relocated. They did not receive food rations.

Transnationalism

Transnationalism is one framework that accounts for globalization and can serve useful in bridging the gap between analyses of forced migrants and the economy. I do not conceptualize transnationalism as having two homes in two different nations (e.g. Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994), or as no home anywhere (e.g. Waldinger 2004). Rather, I argue that the transnational participation of refugees underscore how the nation-state castes out its "unwanted" into detention like spaces while casting them back into the global economic structure through their "forced" participation in the global market; thus, their forced transnationalism in both their movement and economic exchanges. I conceptualize economic transnationalism as the participation in markets across borders. I start with a review of the origins of transnationalism, followed by debates on the contributions of transnationalism, if it is a top-down or bottom-up process, whether the nation-state continues to matter, temporality and remittances.

Transnationalism was coined in the late 1980s to mid-1990s. Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc (1994) started discussing transnationalism in the late 1980s. However, it was not until the early 1990s that transnationalism and publications on this topic garnered momentum (Kivisto and Faist 2010; Al-Ali, Black, and Khalid 2001). Scholars generally agree that transnationalism encompasses the relationships that transcend national borders in the globalizing world (Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc 1994; Ong 1999; Baubock 2003). More specifically, Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc (1994) define transnationalism as the process through which people create social relationships with both their societies of origin and settlement. They assert that these "social fields…cross geographic, cultural, and political borders" (Basch, Glick Schiller and Szanton Blanc 1994:7).

One debate surrounding transnationalism is whether it is a new theoretical framework or part and parcel of existing theories like assimilation. Skeptics suggest that the process of transnationalism is not convincing and provides no originality (Kivisto 2001). Specifically, Kivisto (2001) argues that transnationalism is not a replacement to

the former assimilation and cultural pluralism frameworks but is in fact, part of it. However, one central component of transnationalism that is often missing or implied at best, in theories like assimilation, is the recognition of globalization or interconnectedness of various nations. In Kim's (2010:4) study on the racialization of Koreans in Korea and in the United States, she fills this void that most assimilation studies typically do not consider, the historical "…western dominance over…home countries." More specifically, she argued that U.S. military, capitalist and cultural dominations formulated Asians understanding of race even before they arrive to the U.S. In line with this work, I view transnationalism as existing (even if in challenging ways) alongside assimilation that focuses on the resettled societal factors in shaping immigrant lives.

The tension between migrant agency and power structures, namely, whether this process is a bottom-up, a top-down phenomenon or both is debated in the transnationalism literature. For example, Smith and Guarnizo (1998) underscores a "from below" process focusing on the agency of participants of transnationalism. While transnationalism highlights an important component of human agency, it is undeniable that refugees' lives are shaped by structure, such as nation-states, war and militarism. Other scholars argue that transnationalism is a byproduct of the political constraints on immigration (Waldinger and FitzGerald 2004). In other words, it is the result of state and state policies. Castles (2003) asserts that we should move away from a nation-state analysis and focus solely on transnationalism. This view suggests that today's issues are between the global north and the global south and no longer between nation-states. However, nation-states continue to control their borders (e.g. Hernandez 2010; Massey, Durand, and Malone 2002). Thus, the nation-state continues to matter in this process of the movement of ideas, people, and culture across borders. Viewing refugees transnationalism solely as a bottom-up phenomenon is problematic because it erases the violence and structural forces that create the type of networks and transnationalism that refugees partake in. Therefore, I view transnationalism as both a process of structure and agency. Even though Ong (1999) focuses more affluent transnational actors, Ong (1999) suggest transnationalism relative to cultural logics and power contexts. Namely, that individuals and states adopt alternative forms of citizenship ("flexible citizenship") "to accumulate capital and power" (Ong 1999:6), and hence recognizing both the states and individual roles in this process.

Scholars have also engaged in debates about the importance of time. Some argue that transnationalism existed before it was coined (Foner 1997). Others suggest that participation in transnationalism is shaped over the life course (Levitt 2003). However, few studies have explicitly examined time (Burrell 2017) or assessed how transnationalism operates over time (Waters 2011). Some studies have looked at transnational relationships over time (e.g. Waters 2011; Dreby 2007). In a longitudinal study, Waters (2011) followed five immigrant families over eight years to assess their transnational relationships. She underscores that the social relationships, particularly

between a wife and husband, were strained through a separation in which the husband returned to another country for career reasons leaving the wife in Canada after immigrating there. Some families endured these transnational relationships over time. Nonetheless, her participants included individuals who immigrated for better educational opportunities, thus suggesting they are voluntary migrants and those who had the means to do so. In a study on Polish refugees who resettled in Britain, Burrell (2017) suggest that participation in transnationalism (e.g. traveling back) is shaped by a variety of events that now allow for these travels. However, we know less about whether refugees partake in transnationalism in a specific context in time. For example, is it possible that refugees partake in transnationalism while residing in a camp? Against the backdrop of *becoming* refugees, a transnational perspective furthers our understanding of how refugees react to such structural confinements; and respectively, the tensions between the macro- and the micro-.

Remittances

At the individual level, migrants participate in micro-economic transnationalism. In contrast, macro-economic transnationalism is exemplified by corporations or organizations that conduct business across national borders. One specific form of microeconomic transnationalism is remittances (Gammeltoft 2003; Vertovec 2004). The amount of remittances in 2018 was about $529 billion, according to the World Bank (World Bank Group 2019). Another less-considered way in which people can participate in economic transnationalism is through sending goods to be sold in another nation. This chapter focuses on the goods (e.g. *paj ntaub*) that are sent to be sold in other countries while refugees are in transit and remittances once they have resettled.

The scholarship on remittances highlight migrant workers and the process of sending money back to the country of origin (Vertovec 2004). If remittances represent a form of participation in the global economy, then how and in what ways did refugees participate in the economy across national boundaries while they are in transit should also be considered in the context of transnationalism. For refugees, remittances are not sent to the country of origin during times of conflict, but this changes when the conflict subsides (Gammeltoft 2003). As Hmong settle as permanent residents and citizens of the U.S., they may improve their economic status, which will also increase their ability to send remittances. Perhaps it is not surprising then that Hmong refugees in the U.S. send remittances to Laos, their country of origin (Vang 2010). For example, the Hmong in the U.S. sends remittances for requests pertaining to: “illnesses, marriage, home construction, education, business development, and the desire to satisfy their materialist whims and thereby keep up with neighbors receiving similar support from diasporic kin” (Vang 2010: 155). In this view then, Vang (2010) suggest that Hmong refugees have moved from a continuum from being forced migrants to transnational agents paralleling their current transnational practices relatively similar to voluntary migrants. Which brings up the question of, if refugees partake in economic transnationalism through remittances once they have resettled, how do they participate in the economy while they are still residing in refugee camps?

The existing literature on forced migrants illustrates transnational practices once they are deported (for example), or once they are resettled, but not so much on while they are residing in camps. Nonetheless, these studies illustrate how larger social forces, like state intervention shape participation in the market. One study argues that deportees participate in *forced* transnationalism to cope with their emotional and economic hardships by asking and borrowing from the family in the U.S. (Golash-Boza 2014). A study on Vietnamese refugees shows that remittances represent kinship support, the agency in giving, and social transformation of the person who can give the money (Small 2018). For example, the act of giving then represents the refugees' transformation, change in status and purchasing power. It also illustrates the agency of the recipient, particularly on how they want to spend that gift. Forced transnationalism then eludes to the historical context and conditions that shapes forced migrants' transnational practices.

Bringing the refugee experience into the transnationalism literature entails acknowledging structure and agency, or how this process is both top-down and bottom-up. The conditions that create refugees are a result of larger power structures, while refugee participation in remittances, and I add, sending goods to sell, is refugees' agency. I maintain that these forms of participation be considered *forced* transnationalism for *forced migrants,* like refugees. Delineating this participation as "forced" versus general transnational participation is important because the latter erases the violent history that created these networks and relationships in the first place. However, the differentiation between who is considered a forced migrant is not clear cut since some forced migrants are considered economic migrants. For example, if other countries are exploiting resources from a country, making the economic conditions unlivable, immigrants from the exploited country are arguably forced migrants.

Refugee Camps

Agamben's (1998) discussion of the camp continues to be one of the most engaging pieces of work on refugee and detention camps. However, to date, many scholars have challenged some aspects of this work, particularly in his discussion on 'bare life' (Oesch 2017; Ramandan 2012; Owens 2009). The camp was viewed as a place of "bare life" in which individuals are stripped of any political power and are only included through ones' very exclusion (Agamben 1998). Others have questioned this notion of "bare life" and have argued that the camp could be considered a place of ambiguities, of both inclusion and exclusion (Oesch 2017) and as a political space (Owens 2009) in which the actions of refugees are seen as political agency and not a reaction to 'bare life' (Ramandan 2012). I contribute to this literature on refugee camps, by focusing on how the camp is also a space of economic participation.

One study discusses refugee economies within a refugee camp in Uganda (Werker 2007). This study suggests that refugee participation in the local economy, and in the refugee-producing nation's economy are inevitable, but this participation is constrained through the inability to move outside the camp. Existing research on Hmong refugee camps, suggest that the camp was also a place in which Hmong sew *paj ntaub* to be sent to local and international markets. *Paj ntaub* or "flower cloth" is a textile art that is

passed for generations in the Hmong community and is created by cross-stitch, reverse applique, embroidery, and indigo batik (Craig 2010). Traditionally, there is flexibility in creating abstract and geometric designs of *paj ntaub* on clothing for funerals, on clothing to attend new year celebrations, on hats, and on baby carriers (Craig 2010).

Scholars argue that *paj ntaub* was transformed in the refugee camps from geometric and abstract designs into a pictorial textile detailing the Hmong exodus and life in Laos (Craig 2010; Long 1993). In other words, along with relief workers, Hmong women transformed *paj ntaub* into a commodifiable item to be sold in the local and Western markets (Craig 2016; Craig 2010; Long 1993; Peterson 1988). Long (1993:86) suggests the camp served as a "…manufacturing plant, with cheap and larger labor supply." In Craig's (2010) trip to Laos to assess if there were story cloths in smaller villages, she found that these items existed in the night market of Luang Prabang mainly for tourist consumption, and did not find them in smaller villages in Xieng Khuang and concludes that this new *paj ntaub* emerged from the refugee camps. This chapter builds onto this work by assessing how Hmong refugees partake in economic transnationalism in the face of confinement.

FRAMING

Tied to the concept of violence in my other chapters, I suggest that in the camps, refugees experience structural and cultural violence. Existing research suggests that in 1981, the Thai government implemented a "human deterrence" approach of providing bare minimum resources and food to camp residents to prevent more refugees from entering Thailand (Hillmer 2010). As I will show the conditions of the camp, restriction of movement, human deterrence of minimal food and resources for camp residents forced refugees to find other means to sustain their livelihoods.

An alternative way of making money is to send *paj ntaub* to sell overseas to sustain refugee livelihood in the camps. This participation in the economy of another country or economic transnationalism is made possible through networks between refugees in the camp and refugees who resettled in a third country like the U.S.

I suggest that portraying these networks as self-agency is not entirely accurate and viewing refugees as victims of macro and power structures are not entirely true either. Instead, it is important not to detach the circumstances that created the refugee. And thus, within that historical context to understand how refugees utilize their agency to create what I consider as *involuntary transnational networks* that allow them to participate in an alternative market economy. I use "involuntary" in the term "involuntary transnational networks" to point to the camp conditions that *force* people to participate in these networks to sustain their livelihoods, not to suggest that people were unwilling to keep in contact with their kin.

The participation in the market economy by sending paj ntaub to sell through the *involuntary transnational networks* implies that refugees have access to mail to send the paj ntaub overseas. This access to another country's economy is what I consider as a cultural violence that seemingly justifies the poor conditions in the camp.

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I draw from two periods and focus on economic transnationalism in the camps, and once they arrive in the United States. In doing so, I show that Hmong refugee participation in transnational networks occurred even when residing in confinement, but this transnationalism is forced in that the participation is necessary to survive in the camps.

I argue that while in confinement, refugees were cast outside the nation legally, socially, physically, but they were not cast out economically. However, their economic participation, especially the transformation of *paj ntaub* to sell in the U.S. and in local markets is a form of cultural violence that justifies the structural violence of human deterrence implemented in the camps. Sending remittances to relatives in Laos and Thailand in the present time resembles similarities to the transnational participation of economic migrants.

To contextualize, I show how the decision to come to the U.S. was forced for many Hmong. Then I underscore the conditions in the camps to illustrate why the Hmong participated in economic transnationalism. I conclude with the economic transnationalism in the camps (sending *paj ntaub*) and in the U.S. (via remittances).

Forced Resettlement in the U.S.A.

Even though some participants were willing to resettle, the decision to resettle was not always easy. Not all Hmong refugees were willing to migrate from Laos to Thailand, let alone from Thailand to the United States. Some participants like, Ka Zoua mentioned their families' desire to resettle. Ka Zoua explained to me that her father-in-law did not want to go back to Laos, so they came to the United States.

> (unrecorded) … "txom nyem" so when they closed Ban Vinai, we came to this country. Also, father in law did not want to go back to Laos, so…[we] came to the United States. (She later mentioned that both her mother-in-law and father-in-law have passed since).

Unlike Ka Zoua, many participants shared that their family members did not want to resettle. For example, Pao, a 30-year-old, self-identified male talked about how his grandparents did not want to come to America and wanted to someday return to Laos, but his dad eventually convinced his grandparents to come.

> Yeah so, he [father] had to come here because all of the close buddies/cousins that was with him, everybody was coming so…for him, we had no choice. We had to come. **He had to convince my grandparents to come, they did not want to come**. They were [grandparents] like "oh when it settles down, we're going back to Laos"...And then my dad's like no, "we're going to America". He [my father] kind of told them [my grandparents] that, if you guys don't come, I'm coming by myself you know. So, they were like, you know they only had two sons which is my dad and my uncle, and he [uncle] was only like 10 at the time. So, they had no choice but to follow my dad.

Pao's story about his grandparents not wanting to come and his dad wanting to come to America illustrates the complicities and heterogeneity in the decision to resettle. It shows that making that final decision was not easy. And that some Hmong hoped they could still return to Laos.

Mai explained that because she was the youngest and was not married, she stayed behind in Thailand with her parents since they did not want to come to the U.S. As a result, she lived in Thailand for many years until there was an opportunity to resettle the last wave of Hmong refugees in the early 2000s. Her family arrived in the U.S. in 2004. She explains,

> (unrecorded) Came to Vinai (grew up in Vinai), then to Chiang Kham, Napho, and finally Wat Tham Krabok. My mother (that gave birth to me) passed [away]in Thailand. My parents didn't want to come to the United States, so they lived in Thailand for a long time. All…older siblings…came with their families (since they were married).[I] was the youngest.

This excerpt shows that consequently, people were separated from other family members nonetheless. Mai's parents did not want to resettle, and her older siblings married and were able to resettle in the U.S. with their family. One of her parents died in the refugee camp. Mai spent 16 years living in refugee camps and then lived in Wat Tham Krabok for ten years before she came to the U.S. in the early 2000s. Wat Tham Krabok is one of the places that Hmong refugees resorted to after the official refugee camps in Thailand closed.

Sometimes, people did not want to come because they were anxiously waiting for the arrival of extended family members. Another participant, Nou left Laos for Thailand in 1979, and then finally came to the United States in 1991 explained that her husband did not want to come because he was still waiting for an uncle.

> (unrecorded**)** Can't live in village,[go] hav zoov, [jungle], go to Thailand. Xav tuaj [Wanted to come] but husband didn't want to come to the U.S.A., waiting on the uncle. When the uncle came, then the husband was willing. All clan members and friends registered to come to the U.S.A. or those that "ib txwm sib raws"[always lived together]. When everyone around you/relatives registered to come, that's when we registered.

Not only does Nou's story illustrate her husband not wanting to come, but it also sheds light on how the decision to come to the United States were also dependent on relatives and kin who has always lived and followed each other. This excerpt points to the forced nature of the migration, and also the importance of extended kin to Hmong families. In other words, being forced to leave Laos meant unwanted family separation. Even while families lived in harsh conditions in the camps, they continued to wait for family so they can move to another place together.

Pao, Nou, and Mai all spoke about how someone in their family did not want to come to the United States. This is not surprising given the existing research underscoring the uncertainty of the situation in Laos and not knowing what to expect once in the U.S. (Long 1993). Despite enduring various forms of violence, the resettlement into another country cannot be seen uniformly as a given. Some refugees had a yearning to return or to stay if they could.

Relocating to different countries was also another way Hmong refugees were separated. For example, one of the participants, Yee discussed how her aunts and uncles are dispersed between three countries: the United States, France, and Thailand. Some of her relatives have decided to reside in Thailand and sought ways to become Thai citizens because they did not want to resettle.

> …So my dad wanted to come so he told everyone to come…for all of us to come because living there txom txom nyem so for everyone to come. But my eldest uncle, my mom's eldest brother did not want to come…so my maternal grandfather said since the eldest uncle did not want to come then for everyone to stay so we can all help each other out. So, they did not come…then we came and they stayed behind in Thailand.

She added that her mother's siblings made hard decisions to be dispersed in different countries that correspond with living with kin. They viewed the close proximity of living in the same country as a way to love and care for one another. Her mom's two sisters decided to live in Thailand with the uncle who chose not to resettle.

> The eldest uncle did not want to come. So, he stayed in Thailand and my maternal grandma and grandpa stayed with him there, so they made a final decision to stay there and two aunties or his sisters stayed behind with him too.

Her mother, her two aunts and one uncle resettled in the United States. While one aunt and one uncle resettled in Australia.

> So, my mother came, her two sisters also came to America… a younger brother came to America too…However, one brother and one sister went to Australia.

She added that their decision to relocate with different siblings was because they were worried about the well-being of another sibling. Therefore, some siblings made decisions to go to a country because another sibling was going there.

> Yeah, some did not want to stay, those that did not want to come, they said they were going to stay. So, the brother and sisters, as I was saying, if all our sisters left and we leave this brother behind [eldest uncle], there would be no sister here and so they stayed behind with that uncle so they can love each other. And the one that came to the United States, he said I have two sisters who are going to America, so I will go there. So that if he goes with them then they can love each other. So, my younger uncle he came, my mom and dad were his sponsors who brought him to the U.S. The one that went to Australia, my uncle that went there, he is well-educated too. He said that if he came to the United States then all his friends who already came to the U.S. are already more educated so if he came he probably would fall behind so then he will go to Australia…so then my other aunty said, oh if everyone is going to the U.S., then he will be the only going to Australia and there will be no one to love him, so she and her husband decided they will go with that uncle to Australia. So right now, my mom's family is split into three countries.

This points to the notion that families are still tied to each other through kinship. It is conceivable that they will reside together if they did not have to resettle or first, be forced to flee Laos for Thailand or be separated by death in the aftermath of the war.

Up to this point, I have made the argument that Hmong movement is a result of war and hence forced migration. While seeking refuge in Thailand and then resettling in a different country was forced, Hmong refugees had limited autonomy in deciding where they wanted to resettle. Yee's story portrays the heterogeneity in decision-making regarding where some family members wanted to resettle, and how the decision to resettle for other family members is to be near kin and be each other's source of love and support. The decisions to move away from family are driven by war, and a push to resettle. Worried about the impact on their economy with the increase of refugees, the Thai government did not necessarily want Hmong refugees to resettle in Thailand permanently (Long 1993). Thus, the human deterrence in the camps of providing minimal food and services (Hillmer 2010) is not surprising. Next, I provide a glimpse of the conditions in the camp.

Refugee Camp Conditions

The refugee camps the Hmong resided in had rules and regulations. Participants described limited movement outside of the camps since most camps were gated. Refugee camps were often barbed-wired (Long 1993). However, sneaking into a camp can also make people undocumented since they did not go through the official process of obtaining access to the camp.

Dia shared her experience living in Thailand refugee camps. She explained that when she first arrived, there are fewer people, so the camp was not gated, but as the number of people increased, the camp was fenced with barbed wires.

> (unrecorded) We lived in 10X10 structures made of bamboo…When we first arrived, not gated. When there are more people, it became gated "xov pos hlau" [barbed wires], Ban Nam Yao (refugee camp).

She further added that venturing outside of the camp was not allowed and if one wanted to leave paperwork was required,

> (unrecorded) Can visit each other, but can't leave to go elsewhere…[have] to process paperwork. Can't go…buy things or work.

As Long (1993) shows through the Sisawong family, undocumentation can occur when families move from one camp to another. Mai told me she lived in at least three refugee camps before living in Wat Tham Krabok. She was born in Laos, and she arrived to Thailand with her parents in 1978. She was about four months old, and her family resided in Vinai first. It was unclear when Mai and her family were undocumented, but she remembers,

> (unrecorded) We were undocumented in the refugee camp. We couldn't go anywhere. (It was gated)…Rules were strict, can't leave, there's a gate, and if they see you outside, you get arrested and they beat the men.

In other words, being undocumented further restricted their movement in the camp, and hence also outside of the camp. Violation of these rules also had grave consequences, and as Mai discussed, men caught outside the camp risked physical violence. This was also the case for anyone who crossed the barbed wire fence. Neng recalls,

> When we lived in Chiang Kham, I had a younger cousin, my uncle's son. He was still young and went to play near the fence. The kids liked to go catch grasshoppers, and other bugs to eat, and he crossed the barbed wire fence over to the other side and they arrested him. He was just a kid, roughly about 4-5 years old. They were lucky too though, because they arrested him for about three to four days and then their names appeared on the resettlement list…then as they say, he came to the U.S. straight from jail.

This excerpt shows that even for young children who did not know any better, the rules did not exempt them. Fortunately, in this case, the child's family's name appeared on the list to resettle. This example and Mai's discussion of the strict rules points to restrictions of movement outside of the camp, and the potential violence refugees were subjected to while living there.

Kong also added that not being able to leave was stressful. (unrecorded) *Living in Thailand: Stress over can't go anywhere, can't leave. No food and water.* This shows that the restrictions in the camps brought about some distress for him, and it further points to this notion of limited resources like food and water. Mee, also spoke about food in the camps.

> We didn't have anything, whatever they sent us then that's what we ate. So those of us who didn't eat fish, then we starved and starved, and ate only rice. They sent

> fish, and on days they sent vegetables, for example, they might send some cabbage, then that day I got to eat. I'm the one who did not eat fish, so I suffered the most.

This excerpt indicates that camp authorities did not consider people's dietary needs. Therefore, for people like Mee who could not eat fish, there were days of starvation when fish was one of the main items.

Being undocumented also meant no food rations. Dao arrived to Nong Khai refugee camp in 1975, and then moved to Vinai. However, as he shared, when they came to Vinai, they were undocumented and that made it hard to access food. They ate food their relatives gave to them.

> Oh, when we came to live in Vinai we came from Nong Khai, as I told you, we were not documented. We came to live with our relatives, they helped us with food. If a family came to America, then they did not report that these families left, and we would use their names. I had eight members in my family, so we had to wait until a few families left, then I went to get their food rations. When we first arrived, we ate what my relatives shared with us, it was hard. After a year we finally became documented and received food rations.

Dao made clear that if you moved to another camp, you could be undocumented in that camp and would not receive food rations. His relatives stepped in to share their food and he used the names of families who resettled in the U.S. to get their food rations until he and his family finally became documented. The families that left for America had fewer members. Therefore, to get enough food rations for his family of eight, he had to use multiple families' names.

Participants spoke about the limited access they had to the extremities of the camp because camps were often gated and monitored. In addition, some participants talked about the limited food, and food choices that made their living conditions in the camp harsh. Not being documented in the camps also meant limited access to basic needs like food. These stories illustrate one aspect of the camp as a place of confinement outside and away from the rest of the world. Further, while documented refugees were provided for, resources like food were sometimes insufficient and inadequate. In addition, being confined in camps could also create distress on top of the trauma that refugees have experienced in their plight to reach Thailand. These experiences illustrate not only the potential physical violence one could be subjected to but also the physical deprivation of resources, and emotional violence of restrictions on one's mobility. This is what I consider as the structural violence in the camp that motivates economic transnationalism as I will elaborate in the next section.

Participation in Transnational Economy

The Hmong residing in refugee camps were already participating in transnationalism. Like the existing research on the production of *paj ntaub* in refugee camps (Craig 2010; Long 1993), the participants in this study spoke about how they utilized *paj ntaub* to help sustain their economic lives in the refugee camps. More specifically, some Hmong refugees residing in the camps sew *paj ntaub* and sent it to the United States to sell. I further suggest that this is made possible through the support of their already existing networks as Hmong people resettled in the United States. Pa elaborated, (Unrecorded) *Chiang Kham is gated, if you have people in the U.S.A., you have money. If you "ua paj ntaub" [sew/make Hmong embroidery]and send to the U.S.A.* In other words, she is explaining that the refugee camp is gated, indicating that there were few opportunities to make a living outside of the camp. Thus, the structural violence of the camp forces camp residents to participate in economic transnationalism. If you had networks or kin who resided in the United States where you could send goods like *paj ntaub* for them to help you sell, you were more likely to have money.

Yee whom I shared earlier about the different places her relatives chose to relocate to shared with me that when her aunts (and uncle, as in their husbands) came to the U.S., her parents switched over from picking cotton for the local Thai farmers to earn money by selling *paj ntaub.* She mentions,

> When my aunts and uncle came to the here [U.S.], then my mother shift a little to sell *paj ntaub*. So during that period of time, my aunt and uncle helped my mom and dad sell *paj ntaub*, and my mom and dad then paid other people to help them sew. And they also sew a little, and they also paid other people to help sew. When they finished, they sent it to my aunt and uncle to help my parents sell. So, this allowed me to see that yes, my parents worked really hard you know, but it's because there were a lot of us kids so they said they had to work hard. If they did not work hard, we might not have food to eat.

This except shows there were few opportunities to make money, but the shifting over to sell *paj ntaub* was possible for Yee's parents when her aunt and uncle came to the U.S. Further, it points to the importance of the money made from the *paj ntaub* to purchase food for Yee and her siblings.

Soua lived in Thailand for at least eight years before resettling in the United States in 1991. Soua was amongst those who did not receive food rations because she was undocumented when she first arrived in Thailand. While refugees experienced violence that drove them out of their villages in Laos, and for some, the continued violence on the journey crossing the Mekong into Thailand, these experiences did not make them "legal" refugees. The notion that one can be refugees by the definition of escaping violence and persecution, but still not legally classified, speaks to nation-states power in deciding who deserves protection and who does not. It is not clear when Soua's family was undocumented since she lived in multiple camps. They lived in Ban Namyao before resettling in Ban Vinai in 1983, so they were probably undocumented in Vinai since it

was also during that time when Vinai no longer took new refugees. Soua also shared that sewing was one way to make money,

> (unrecorded) Struggled a lot. [We] lived in a place called Puas, [we] had to purchase [our] own food since there were no food rations. Then in Nam Yao, no food rations, we were undocumented. We had a little bit of space to farm, and we sew paj ntaub to sell, to get a few hundred [indicative of earning some money].

She further added that,

> (unrecorded) If you did not know how to sew "paj ntaub" then you did not have money. Those who knew how [to sew], they fought for projects. We did not have money, and food to eat. Then later…some Hmong folks purchased *paj ntaub* and we received rations.

In other words, given that there were so few opportunities to make money, if you did not know how to sew, you did not have money. And even if you did, there were few opportunities, hence people fought for sewing projects. Some people directly sent *paj ntaub* to their relatives to sell in the United States, while others served as a middle-level person who assigned projects to other Hmong refugees in the camp, paid for their work, and sent the finished *paj ntaub* to sell in the United States. Ah was someone who received these assignments to help her parents purchase food. She explained,

> The way to make money is get paj ntaub from others and sew it. When you finish making it, then you send it back. One paj ntaub is about 50 baht to 100 baht. Sometimes I would work on one for about two weeks or three to four weeks; then I would return it. I would receive about 100 baht to purchase food to help my parents. I would also carry water and receive food rations.

The conditions of bare life in the refugee camps (Agamben 1998), forced refugees to recreate their own economic livelihood by transforming *paj ntaub* into a commodity to participate in the economy. Ka Zoua, like the other participants, also emphasized that there were few opportunities to make money, and sending *paj ntaub* to the United States to sell was one way to make money.

> (unrecorded) ….In Thailand, "txom nyem" because there was no way to [make] money. During that time…"ua paj ntaub" [sew paj ntaub] and sent it to the U.S. for relatives to help…sell it.

Collectively, these excerpts show that the conditions of the camp, like lack of food, or restriction to go out of the camps meant refugees must find alternative ways to survive. Participants spoke about participating in a transnational alternative market economy that was made possible by existing relationships with kin. The kin residing in the United States were there as a result of the war. Since prior to the Secret and Vietnam Wars, there were no Hmong residing in the United States. However, this form of economic

transnationalism is forced in that the Hmong had little choice given the living conditions in the camps. The camp was gated and there were few opportunities to make a living locally. Making money was important for their livelihood because only food and water were provided, and sometimes the amount was not sufficient. The commodification of the *paj ntaub* as a way to make money and survive in the camp is probably not surprising given that the Thai government implemented a "human deterrence" approach in 1981 to prevent people from trying to seek refuge in the camps (Hillmer 2010). This approach basically provides the bare minimum amount of services and food to those residing in the camps. They had no choice but to take their skills and transform *paj ntaub* into a commodity as a means to provide for their families. Similarly, existing literature shows that *paj ntaub* like the story cloth grew out of the refugee camps in Thailand (Craig 2016; Craig 2010; Long 1993).

Continued Participation in the Global Economy

Once the Hmong resettled in the United States and all Hmong refugee camps were closed in Thailand, the types of participation in economic transnationalism changes in frequency. Specifically, in speaking about the present, participants sent fewer remittances. These networks and relationships are not purely individual agency since the displacement of people across various nations as I have argued, are a result of war. However, the act thereof is self-agency. Not all refugees participate in remittances. Children participate less in these transactions. If they do participate, it is because their parents asked them to or they know someone there personally. For those who do send money, they assert that they only do so when there is an illness, a death in the family or when their family members are investing in items (e.g. farm equipment). Nonetheless, sending remittances to families oversea illustrate the continued participation in the global economy between former refugees who are in the U.S. and their relatives in their country of origin and Thailand. For example, Nou, a parent, explained referring to her brother residing overseas that she will send money related to health. And sometimes, she would also ask her children to donate.

> (unrecorded) Yes, money if there are health-related issues.
> Sometimes my kids will give $20, $30, $50 each.
> It depends if they are sick or hospitalized, but for something else, no. But for health, yes.

In other words, if her relatives were struggling because of health-related issues, she would send back remittances. This excerpt indicates that some participants sent money for serious matters. Meng, a male adult child who was born in Laos and arrived in Thailand when he was about two to three years old, adds that he sends money to his half-brother. When I asked him if he sent gifts or money, he answered, "Yeah, I do send. I would say, once a year. Or once in two years. He doesn't really need it unless, when he needs it, he'll call me." I asked Meng if he could explain what his brother usually asked the money for. He answered, "mostly for health." Like Nou, Meng only sends money

when his brother needs it, and often when his brother asks for money, it's for health-related issues. Dia also speaks about sending money to her elderly mom, but not often since she believes they can provide for themselves.

> (unrecorded) Maybe once or twice to mom, cause I don't have to. They can provide for themselves. But my mom is older, but I never give more than $100.

Participants also speak about their participation in sending remittances and how they only do so when their kin ask for it for serious concerns like illnesses. The sending of money for health-related reasons such as death or illnesses illustrates kinship support (Small 2018). The willingness and act of sending money indicate the importance of these relationships to these participants.

There is also some indication that relatives in Laos or Thailand can provide financially for themselves. Yee explained that her family typically did not send money oversea because her families are for the most part, socioeconomically well off. She stated that they had not sent remittances for almost a decade. Her father recently sent money because her uncle wanted to invest in some farm equipment.

> Like I was saying, they lived there for about 40 years already. So, they own businesses, so they have money too. I still hear my dad, the last time my dad said he sent some money to my uncle, it's probably been ten years now that they asked for some donation money because they wanted to buy a tractor to farm. So, my parents, they sent some money for that.

This excerpt shows that some relatives do not ask for money unless they are making major purchases and points to the decrease in sending of remittances for some participants.

Not many participants discussed helping relatives sell items from Laos or Thailand. However, Der spoke about how she helped sell things for her relatives. When I asked her if she sent money back, she stated that, (unrecorded) *Sometimes, $40-$50 or $100 once a year and sometimes they send things for me to sell.* What is illustrative through these participants' discussion of sending remittances is one, they continue to participate in economic transnationalism, and two, the frequency of how often they participate in terms of remittances decreases. The remittances occur because of ties displaced by war and have reduced over time. When they were residing in refugee camps, they participated by sending *paj ntaub* overseas as a means of surviving in the camps. Now that the Hmong are residing in the U.S., they send remittances to support their existing kin networks for only dire circumstances such as death or illnesses. Sending remittances is a voluntary act compared to when they were refugees, in which sending *paj ntaub* was a means to survive in the camps. However, both underscore previous ties that resulted from displacement.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

I suggest that the distinction between forced and voluntary transnational participation matters because the types of networks consequently result from displacement through war and utilizing these networks while in camps were necessary for survival. I am not making the case that familial networks do not exist for voluntary migrants, but rather that clustering the two, runs the risk of erasing the historical violence experienced by *war migrants*. Further, I am not asserting that relatives do not want to keep in contact, and hence, I am calling the network "involuntary." Rather, "involuntary transnational networks" calls into question the structural violence of providing bare minimal resources and food to camp residents. Thus "involuntary" highlight how refugees are forced to participate in economic transnationalism to survive.

Relative to belonging, this chapter points to how refugees continue to partake in the global economy while in confinement, and after they have resettled. They were not excluded from the economy, but were socially, legally, and physically excluded from the transit nation. This finding adds to the transnationalism literature on how practices change over time relative to context, illustrating that transnationalism does not occur only when refugees have resettled, but also while in transit.

The poor conditions influence the need to utilize kinship ties to make money (and hence the byproduct of participating in the global economy) in the camps. Thus, the transformation of Hmong *paj ntaub* is two folds. The first is that the Hmong had skills that enabled them to participate in the global economy, and in doing so, they utilize their agency and networks to provide for themselves in the camps. The second fold is that it unveils the harsh conditions or the structural and physical violence of being given minimal food to survive or to be placed in refugee camps, forcing refugees to commodify the *paj ntaub* to make money. This commodification and transformation of the paj ntaub is what I consider as a cultural violence. The restrictions of not being able to set foot outside of the barbed wire gates of the camp contradict having access to the postal mail service and hence access to other countries' economy. The contradiction is that refugees are restricted from going outside the gates, but they can send money and material items outside of Thailand. The Hmong's participation in economic transnationalism could be viewed as their agency. However, a critique renders the commodification and transformation of the *paj ntaub* (e.g. story cloth) as a cultural violence that normalizes the conditions in the camps. This is not to discredit the relief workers who supported the Hmong efforts to sustain their lives or to discredit the pictorial stories on the new story cloths. But rather, to bring in a critique of the social structure of the camp (e.g. resources, services) and to highlight the structural violence in the camps. As such, the *paj ntaub* is both a product of violence and self-making. Where voluntary migrants are motivated to

participate in a different nation's economy, forced migrants are forcibly participating in it as a means of survival.

CHAPTER FOUR: *Social Liminality: Refugee, Citizen, NOT American*

If Guatemalans' and El Salvadorans' unauthorized migration and denial of refugee status or legal status by the state speaks to the nation-states' power in deciding who is excluded (Menjivar 2006), then the resettlement of Southeast Asian refugees like the Hmong, is the other end of the nation-state deciding who is included (legally). Nonetheless, *both* represent the ongoing violence of nation-states in deciding who lives and who dies. On the one hand, Central Americans are cast out legally, while on the other, Southeast Asians are included—both of whom are refugees of war and violence—even if not recognized. In this chapter, I bring a discussion of legal refugees' war experience into the literature on racial and ethnic identities as well as citizenship and hence assess their overall belonging.

Legal status is about inclusion and exclusion. Latinx communities are racialized as undocumented, but Asians are not, despite a large number of undocumented Asians.[3] As research has shown, this racialization has detrimental effects on families and individuals in these communities (e.g. Zatz and Rodriguez 2015; Menjivar 2006). Refugees who were granted admission into the United States can receive governmental assistance (Portes and Zhou 1993). After a year of residing in the U.S., refugees can become permanent residents, and later apply for naturalized citizenship.

This legal inclusion of refugees does not necessarily mean full inclusion. In addition, insofar as Southeast Asian refugees are not white, their racialization shapes both how they are viewed and how they view themselves. Sociologists who study racial and ethnic identities among immigrants tend to focus on how the U.S. context shapes racial and ethnic identities. For example, these scholars find that factors like the life course, discrimination, situational context, location, and generation (Feliciano and Rumbaut 2019; Flores-Gonzales 2017; Dowling 2014; Telles and Ortiz 2008; Golash-Boza 2006; Tuan 1998; Rumbaut 1994) play a role in shaping ethnic and racial identities. Consequently, experiences prior to resettlement like war and violence are not considered in how these pre-migration experiences shape refugee understandings of belonging. At the same time, we know that refugees are often fleeing from violence and that this violence is likely to have enduring consequences. In this study, I bring in the historical experiences of violence that refugees had to endure to obtain entrance into the U.S. to assess how they make sense of their belonging, through the measurement of the way they view their citizenship, if they identify as refugees, and their racial and ethnic identities.

I conceptualize identity as a cultural practice that is shaped by histories (Lowe 1996) and also an ongoing process, of 'being' and 'becoming' (Hall 1990). I bring prior

[3] According to Pew Research Center, the number of unauthorized immigrants from Asia increased from 1.3 million in 2007 to 1.5 million in 2017. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/12/5-facts-about-illegal-immigration-in-the-u-s/

experiences to the existing literature on racial and ethnic identities to assess how it can shape that identity (especially in terms of how people choose to cope with these histories), and thus, the forming of what it means to be an ethnic person in America. I ask specifically, how do previous war experiences (captured through refugee identity) in conjunction with current experiences (legal status) shape views on America/n and hence, belonging (ethnic and racial identities)? This chapter shows that heterogeneity in refugee identities, views on America/n shapes various racial and ethnic identities. These variations suggest that being Hmong in America consist of a variety of identities and perspectives. As much as the Hmong are making sense of their war experiences, they are also making sense of their experiences in the U.S., and both complicate our understanding of identities. My interviews with Hmong refugees reveal that there are three main groups, those who a) identify as refugee, Hmong and view American as a category reserved for whites, b) no longer see themselves as refugee, Hmong, and view America/n in a positive light and c.) no longer see themselves as refugee, identify as a racial or racial- and ethnic-hyphenated identity, and view America/n as attitudes or practices. However, overall no one views themselves just as "American." Therefore, I argue that refugees in the United States experience this back and forth notion of belonging and not belonging. In discussing *liminal legality*, Menjivar (2006) captures the experiences of those who are in a gray area, the back and forth between undocumented and documented status. Similarly, I argue that *social liminality* is the gray space of back and forth between belonging and not belonging, or a social belonging consciousness—as legal residents, physically residing in the U.S.—but not a part of the imagined social fabric of the nation as true Americans. I extend this back to violence, and consider it a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 2007).

Citizenship

Citizenship as a legal status provides access to certain rights and protection. One debate in the citizenship literature is whether it should span beyond legal statuses to include post-national, cultural or social citizenship. Like Bosniak (2006) and Menjivar (2006), I take the approach that citizenship matters relative to the nation-state and beyond it. The nation-state remains relevant in understanding the new legal statuses refugees occupy, and how they process war refugee experiences, particularly since the intervention of one nation by another via war results in the production of the refugee figure.

At a basic level, citizenship is defined as the legal status, political and geographic membership and relationship between the state and the individual that entails privileges and obligations (Bloemraad and Sheares 2017; Bloemraad, Korteweg and Gokce 2008). According to the United States government website, legal citizenship status allows individuals to: "express yourself", "worship as you wish", "fair trial by jury", "right to vote", "right to apply for federal employment requiring U.S. citizenship", "right to run for elected office", and "freedom to pursue 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness'" (Department of Homeland Security 2018). Further, a legal citizenship status protects a person from deportation (Bloemraad and Sheares 2017).

The nation-state continues to be important relative to citizenship because lacking a legal status not only criminalizes people, but also subjects then to a variety of violence,

while those who have a legal status can obtain some rights. As Bosniak (2006:23) states, "citizenship is presumed, with little question, to be a national enterprise—a set of institutions and practices that necessarily take place within the political community, or the social world, of the nation-state." Legal immigration status and policies will continue to be significant since they shape who can or cannot be legally present. Notably, these statuses, undocumented, permanent resident, naturalized citizen, and others also shape social life. For example, the research on undocumented immigrants indicate they live in fear of deportations (Dreby 2015). More specifically, undocumented status creates various complications for couples of mixed citizenship status (undocumented married to U.S. citizen), tearing families up and creating "suddenly single mothers" (Dreby 2015). Clearly, the literature on the impact of undocumented status reveals struggles in daily life up until deportation (Dreby 2015), and even after deportation (Golash-Boza 2015). Further, for minors running from violence and seeking residence in the U.S., there is often a lack of legal representation (Zatz and Rodriguez 2015). While Brown (2011) focuses on alternative citizenship, Brown (2011) also underscores how refugees utilize their legal status to garner government resources by making claims of lost relationships as a result of their previous experiences, and the need for government support. This holds the government responsible for the support they need, and hence the continued relationship with the state via a legal status. Thus, relative to citizenship, legal status matters, and in that regards, the state continues to matter.

Why do people apply for citizenship? Research indicates that incentives to obtain U.S. citizenship are mostly for the basic rights this status affords (Gilbertson and Singer 2003; Brettell 2006) and pride as Americans (Brettell 2006). For example, focusing on a single Dominican multigenerational family, Gilbertson and Singer (2003) found that family members who arrived more recently did not apply for naturalization because they did not see the benefits to citizenship. However, other family members who have lived in the United States for some time naturalized because they saw the rights that came with U.S. citizenship, particularly for the ease of traveling between the Dominican Republic, the security of not getting deported or denied access when they want to return to the United States, and to avoid losing public assistance benefits (Gilbertson & Singer 2003). Similarly, in a random telephone survey of Dallas-Forth Worth foreign-born and native-born residents, Brettell (2006:83) found that one of the major reasons why people naturalized was "to have better legal rights and protection in the United States." The second most cited major reason for why people obtained naturalization, was "to show commitment and pride in being American" (Brettell 2006: 83). Therefore, existing studies on the motivations for naturalization could be due to the rights that citizenship affords as well as the pride in being an American. Refugees' view of their naturalized citizen status can provide insights if they view their legal status beyond the legal rights it gives them.

Typically, legal status (e.g. permanent resident) will minimize some experiences of marginalization; however, more recent deportations of refugees suggest that these legal categories are not always protected. Deportation orders of Southeast Asian refugees have brought to the forefront the consequences of not being a citizen by birth or naturalization. It underscores how even permanent residents and other legal residents (e.g. student visa

holders) can be affected by the presence of political changes—or changes in the administration. So while those with refugee status admitted into the United States are privileged at some point because that status gave them access to various institutional resources (e.g. faith-based sponsorships, governmental assistance) (Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1989), refugees with permanent resident status (PRS) can still be sanctioned for deportation. In this context, I assess how refugees make sense of their legal statuses as U.S. citizens.

There are also other forms of citizenship (Brown 2011; Flores 2003; Baubock 2001; Ong, Dominguez, Friedman, Glick Schiller, Stolcke, Wu and Ying 1996; Soysal 1994). Alternative forms of citizenship recognize agency and community formation beyond legal statuses. Some scholars suggest we broaden the scope of citizenship by decentralizing the state and focusing on other forms of citizenship such as transnational citizenship, global citizenship, post-national citizenship (Coutin 2000*a*), cultural citizenship (Flores 2003; Ong, Dominguez, Friedman, Glick Schiller, Stolcke, Wu and Ying 1996), and social citizenship (Brown 2011). As mentioned earlier, Brown (2011) argues that Liberian refugees draw upon lost relationships and legal protections to make claims for social rights from the U.S. government, and considers this social citizenship. Further, this approach treats citizenship as a practice that actors take up in different power settings (Ong 2003). In a study on Cambodian refugees, Ong (2003) shows that in the face of public housing regulations allowing only nuclear families to live together, Cambodian refugees created their own formulations of what household entails by bunking with different families in order to share housing costs so they can also save as much as possible. Thus, in the presence of norms imposed by public-housing, Cambodian refugees have reformulated who lives together in a shared unit, or the re-formulation of who is included. In another study on cultural citizenship, Flores (2003) argues that by defending those who are unauthorized, a Latino community in San Jose, California decided who was part of their community and who was not. In other words, by doing so, they are making the argument that community include both those who are citizens and those who are undocumented. Flores (2003) referred to this as cultural citizenship. These approaches on citizenship acknowledge self-agency and the idea of defining who is considered a part of the community. In this chapter, I consider how refugees make sense of their war experiences (resulting from their relationship with the nation-state), and their new understandings of it. Furthermore, how refugees unpack and make sense of their experiences to formulate understandings of what it means to be in the U.S.

In sum, citizenship includes both the nation-state and other subjective forms of citizenship beyond it. Legal status is directly connected to the nation-state. Whereas other forms of citizenship like cultural and social citizenship underscore ways in which people participate in various communities. This study aligns with both by recognizing the significance of the nation-state, and therefore, refugees' new legal statuses and how refugees make sense of this citizenship in terms of social belonging in the imagined community of the nation.

Refugee Identity

Since refugee status must be obtained before one arrives to the host society, studies on refugee status often focus on how this legal or acknowledged status is obtained (Kagan 2003), who is more likely to receive this status (Bohmer and Shuman 2008; Schoenholtz, Ramji-Nogales, Schrag 2007) and how this status is utilized to access certain resources (Brown 2011). In their analysis of policies in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US), Bohmer and Shuman (2008) found that where an asylee applicant is from impacts whether or not they will receive refugee status and hence protection. More specifically, if an asylee was from a country that the US is an ally, that the US has supported (e.g. Guatemala) or has "fragile" trade relationships with (e.g. China), then chances of receiving refugee status are slim (Bohmer and Shuman 2008: 15). In direct comparison then, asylees who come from enemy countries will have a better opportunity to obtain refugee status. Schoenholtz, Ramji-Nogales, Schrag (2007) also found that obtaining refugee status for asylum seekers in the U.S. varies substantially from one judge to another, and one court to another. They suggest that obtaining asylum status is like Russian roulette, which they referred to as refugee roulette, by the luck of the draw. Therefore, much of the work on legal refugee status focuses more on the process of obtaining that legal status and less so on how refugees view this status beyond its legal implications.

Refugee status is not only a legal status but also embodies the experiences of war. Menjivar (2006:1001) suggests it is not an undocumented status that "matters theoretically and analytically, but the long-term uncertainty inherent in these immigrants' status." Similarly, by focusing on refugees who are afforded "permanent resident" status, I am not necessarily interested in the theoretical and analytical aspects of the permanent residency status or later, naturalized citizen status, but rather how war and militarism afford this status and hence the impact of war on refugee lives. Such an approach then acknowledges the prevalence of the nation despite arguments of postnationalism (Menjivar 2006). In other words, one way to examine the impact of war is to treat the refugee identity as a proxy for war experiences. To be clear, I inquire about refugee identity to underscore how refugees themselves make sense of their war experiences, not to perpetuate Hmong as forever refugees (Vang 2010). The understanding of their refugee experiences through refugee identity can shed some light on other alternative subjective understanding of citizenship.

I examine the legal status that refugees now occupy (e.g. naturalized citizenship). Furthermore, I also assess how refugees make sense of their membership in this community by examining previous refugee experiences, or the lack or presence of the formulation of a refugee identity. By doing so, I also apply a critique of U.S. intervention in Laos in creating the Hmong refugee figure and hence, the refugee experience. A refugee identity indicates the continued saliency of state violence, but also refugee agency in the formulation of how they want to identify. And therefore, points to the importance of understanding refugee experience relative to how *they* decide to make sense of their experiences. Therefore, in this chapter, I juxtapose refugee's understanding of their naturalized citizen status, refugee status (experiences of war) to their

understandings of Americanness and racial and ethnic identities. Such an approach allows us to assess how refugees understand their citizenship relative to the state and beyond.

Racial and ethnic identities

Although ethnic and racial identities can change since they are socially constructed, how individuals identify point to collective events that lead to their racial and ethnic formulations at that time. In addition, ethnic and racial identities also point to enduring divisions and boundaries within groups in society, but identities become fairly stable when one reaches middle adulthood (Feliciano and Rumbaut 2019). This literature shows that racial and ethnic identification is a complex process that involves the tension between how experiences in the host society, and one's interpretations of these experiences, shape their identification (Telles and Ortiz 2008; Golash-Boza 2006; Tuan 1998; Rumbaut 1994). Despite these contributions to understanding immigrant experiences, there are fewer elaboration on how experiences prior to arriving in the United States shape immigrants' racial and ethnic identities, especially the experiences of colonialism, war and violence.

Scholars maintain that race and ethnicity remain separate concepts (Smedley and Smedley 2005; Alcoff 2000; Bonilla-Silva 1999; Wade 1997). Drawing from Balibar and Wallerstein (2011), Bonilla-Silva (1999) argues that race and ethnicity are different based on genealogy and histories; while race is linked to colonial encounters, ethnicity is linked to nation-state formation. Others assert that race is associated with phenotype (Wade 1997), while ethnicity pertains to culture (Brubakers 2009; Smedley and Smedley 2005; Alcoff 2000; Wade 1997; Nagel 1994). For example, some scholars agree that ethnicity is related to a common cultural trait, such as customs, language, religion (Alcoff 2000; Smedley and Smedley 2005) and in that regards ethnic identity should not be defined on the basis of physical features (Brubakers 2009; Smedley and Smedley 2005). In addition, these ethnic identities are flexible, self-defined (Smedley and Smedley 2005) and optional (Brubakers 2009; McDermott and Samson 2005), while race is an external categorization (Brubakers 2009). Despite distinctly underscoring the differences between race and ethnicity, scholars on the most part agree that race and ethnicity are both products of interactions (Cornell and Hartmann 1998/2006), socially constructed, changing, (Cornell and Hartmann 1998/2006; Lee and Bean 2004; Alcoff 2000), and are social identities (Alcoff 2000; Jenkins 1994). Thus, the types of identities that refugees also take on points to their collective experience based on how others ascribe them, their reaction to that, and overall, their understanding of who they want to be seen as.

Scholars conceptualize hyphenated American identities to represent some form of belonging in America since some attribute the refusal to identify with a hyphenated-American identity to racial discrimination (Golash-Boza 2006). Rumbaut (1994:763) notes four main types of ethnic and racial identification: 1) "ancestral, immigrant or nation-origin identity" (e.g. Laotian), 2) "additive, syncretic or hyphenated identity" (e.g. Hmong-American), 3) "assimilative or American national identity" (e.g. American), and 4) "dissimilative racial or pan-ethnic identity" (e.g. Asian).

Straight-line assimilation does not explain the post-1965 immigrants who vary on socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity (Zhou 1997; Rumbaut 1994). To explain earlier waves of European white immigrants, classical assimilation theorists, or straight-line assimilation theorists suggest that the utilization of ethnic identities will decline over time as immigrants become assimilated (Gordon 1964). Gordon (1964) suggests that assimilation is when people drop their ethnic identities, a process which he termed identificational assimilation, when people no longer use their ethnic identities. Gans (1979) proposed a bumpy-line assimilation and suggested that ethnic identity will not diminish entirely, particularly since some groups have the privilege to use their ethnic identities as needed and even as a last resort. Underpinning assimilationist frameworks is the notion that immigrants should or want to become more like the host society as indicated by the dropping of ethnic identities to assume identities relative to the current host society. Segmented assimilation theorists argue that neither will explain the new immigrants who are socioeconomically, racially, and ethnically different.

Most studies on racial and ethnic identities examine the factors in the present society in shaping the formulation of these identities. For example, some studies examine racialization and its impact on immigrants' ethnic identities (Golash-Boza 2006; Tuan 1998). These studies show that racism and prejudice shape immigrants' ethnic and racial identities (Golash-Boza 2006; Tuan 1998). Golash-Boza (2006) found that discrimination reduced identification with a hyphenated identity for those from Mexican, Cuban or Puerto Rican ancestry. In a snowball sample of 95 Asian ethnics from the middle class, Tuan (1998) found that they are using pan-ethnic labels while refraining from the "American" label since they feel this identity is reserved for describing whites. A recent study on second- and third-generation Latino millennials also show that they do not identify as full Americans (Flores-Gonzales 2017).

Location or situational context in the U.S. also shape racial identification (Feliciano and Rumbaut 2019; Dowling 2014; Telles and Ortiz 2008). Telles and Ortiz (2008) found that while San Antonians and Angelenos (Los Angeles) reported similar discrimination, those in San Antonio were more likely to identify as white. In a study on Mexican Americans, Dowling (2014) shows that U.S. born Mexicans used hyphenated identities (Mexican-American) and Hispanic more than did Mexican immigrants. However, the context in which they identify varied based on who they were talking to and how they wanted to include or exclude. For example, U.S. born Mexicans did not identify as Mexicano/a. The usage of the term Hispanic is also different for those who are immigrants and those who are U.S. born. Mexican immigrants used the term as a result of discrimination, U.S. born Mexicans used it to refer to themselves—individuals from Mexico, born in the U.S—or to distinguish themselves from immigrants. These studies show that the context shaped racial and ethnic identities.

The replenishment of immigrants can shape inter- and intra-group identities (Jiminez 2008). However, the focus is more on the impact of new immigrants on shaping these identities as oppose to how previous experiences shape identities. Jiminez (2008) shows that the replenishment of new immigrants creates group boundaries between Mexicans and non-Mexicans (intergroup), and boundaries between Mexican immigrants

and the second generation to assess what is an authentic identity of "Mexicanness." There may not be a Hmong immigrant replenishment to the existing community in the U.S. Many Hmong arrived in the '70s, '80s, and '90s. All Thailand refugee camps were closed in the mid-1990s (Grigoleit 2006), and the remaining refugees who lived in a Buddhist temple, Wat Tham Krabok, resettled in the U.S. in 2004. It is not likely there will be a continuous replenishment of Hmong refugees to the United States, at least not as recognized refugees. Certainly, globalization makes it possible for there to be voluntary Hmong immigrants. Immigrant groups that are experiencing replenishment will have higher percentages of those who are foreign-born. The rates of foreign-born for the Hmong population is 39% (Lopez, Ruiz, and Patten 2017). It is probable that without a continuous replenishment, the foreign-born percentage for the Hmong population will decrease over time. Focusing on Hmong refugees might provide some insight on how racial and ethnic identities are formulated in the absence of immigrant replenishment.

Asian American identification has taken new meanings. Earlier studies suggest that panethnic identities formulated out of social inequalities or through "categorization" as a result of power relations (Espiritu 1992). However, Park (2008) argues that the Asian American political term has diversified into various meanings. Seventy-seven of their 88 respondents who belong to groups like Chinese, Filipino, Indian, Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese identified with an Asian American identity. For these interviewees, Asian American identification points to four main factors: the increasing number of ethnicities that fit under the term, religious diversity, the persistency of the Model Minority Stereotype, and the second-generation experience.

Earlier studies on ethnic identifications based on generations hint at potential differences in prior experiences in the sending country but do not necessarily explore how prior experiences may play a role in the formulation of these identities. Previous research suggests that there is a generational difference in ethnic and racial identifications (Rumbaut 1994). For example, in an analysis of participants in the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study (CILS) dataset, Rumbaut (1994) found that those who are foreign-born were more likely to identify with national origin (44%) compared to those born in the U.S (11%). They were also less likely to identify as hyphenated-Americans (32%) compared to their U.S. born counterparts (49%). Generational differences suggest that children who are born overseas are less likely to identify relative to the U.S. and after residing longer in the United States, the 1.5 generation children identify more with the U.S. (Portes and Rivas 2011). Hence, the understanding of generational differences has mostly focused on current experiences shaping those formulations. This study addresses this gap by focusing on refugee status or identity, which is meant to capture the experiences of war that happened before arriving in the United States as refugees.

In sum, the literature suggests that for non-whites residing in America, ethnic and racial identities are shaped by their experiences in the U.S. However, while these studies show that duration in the U.S. context, experiences of prejudice and discrimination and our environment can shape or alter racial identities, less is understood about how war experiences shape refugee children and parents racial and ethnic identities. Despite these important contributions, this literature does not consider how experiences prior to coming

into the U.S. shape their racial and ethnic identities. I bring this into this literature by analyzing refugee identity and how it shapes racial and ethnic identities. While refugees certainly fit within this larger categorization of immigrants, I suggest that those who flee military violence and persecution or "refugeeness" whether or not they receive legal refugee status, bring with them an experience that may have some impact on how they interpret and understand their identities.

Conceptualizing Identity

Despite the changing characteristic of race and racial identities, there is a value to studying these identities at a given point and time because it unveils the logics of forming them. I conceptualize both refugee and racial and ethnic identities as a "cultural practice" (Lowe 1996). According to Lowe (1996: Preface) "culture is the terrain through which the individual speaks as a member of the contemporary national collectivity, but culture is also a mediation of history, the site through which the past returns and is remembered, however fragmented, imperfect or disavowed. Through that remembering, that recomposition, new forms of subjectivity and community are thought and signified." Identity as a cultural practice encompasses how people make sense of the past and can be helpful in understanding refugee identities. In addition, I also borrow from Hall (1990: 255) who discusses cultural identities as both, a part of the past as it is the future, and hence considers identities as 'being' and 'becoming.' The process of *becoming* refugees and citizens are, therefore, ongoing.

FRAMING

In this chapter, I borrow Menjivar's (2006) concept of "liminal legality." Drawing from Turner's (1967) concept of liminality and Coutin's (2000*b*) concept of "legal nonexistence," Menjivar's (2006) liminal legality captures a gray area of shifting legal immigration statuses. As she explains, "..a situation of 'liminal legality' is neither unidirectional nor a linear process, or even a phase from undocumented to documented status, for those who find themselves in it can return to an undocumented status when their temporary statuses end" (Menjivar 2006:1008). In the case of refugees who obtained legal statuses, I employ liminality to this notion of social belonging to communities. Refugees with legal status are less marginalized than those who do not receive the status. Nonetheless, for refugees who are "documented," experiences of othering persist, but in the form of limbo or liminality that is not legal, but social, which I term *social liminality.* In essence the gray area of being an American citizen (in which American is simply a notation of place), but not an American (or social membership). I view social liminality as more abstract than liminal legality in that there are no legal actions (e.g. renewing permits) that will move one back to "nonlegality" (Menjivar 2006). The indefinite betweenness that refugees experience socially is the tension of being an American citizen, but not viewing oneself as an American, or part of the social fabric of that community.

Anderson (2006) argues that the nation is an "imagined community" because members of that community may all not know each other but are willing to protect, fight, and die for it. In that sense, refugees may view themselves as part of the American nation as naturalized U.S. citizens, but not as Americans fully accepted in the U.S. social community, by their reluctance to identify as "American." However, as Turner (1967:95) suggests, this liminal space is not just movements between ascribe statuses, but also between achieved statuses, where the "group does not include the whole society." Thus, refugees can also develop other notions of American-ness that renders their belonging in other communities beyond the larger U.S. imagined community. Nonetheless, this notion of switching back and forth between "belonging and not belonging" is what I term as *social liminality*. This is a symbolic violence (Bourdieu 2007) that maintains the status quo of "othering" nonwhites.

FINDINGS

Experiences of war shaped racial and ethnic identity. However, the various ways in how former refugees cope with war by identifying or not as refugees, speak to how they formulate what it means to be Hmong living in America.

First, I provide an overview of participants' view of their legal status irrespective of their racial and ethnic identifications. Many participants perceived their citizenship relative to the basic rights that legal status affords them. Then, I discuss the three groups who either a.) identify as a refugee, saw self as Hmong, b.) did not identify as a refugee, identified as Hmong, and c.) did not identify as a refugee, and identifies with a racial or hyphenated identity. The heterogeneity of these identities simultaneously makes and unfixes the American category.

Citizenship: The Limitations of Naturalization

While there are variations in how the participants viewed their naturalized citizen status (e.g. ability to vote, easier to travel, cannot get deported, other forms of participation), many participants, both children and parents viewed their legal citizenship status in only this very regard—the rights they receive as a result of this status. A child, Xue mentioned that a naturalized citizen status allows him to be able to stay physically in the United States and not be deported,

> I mean, back then I always felt like out of place you know, like they call me a resident alien, maybe we'll ship you back one of these days. But now I guess, I have more sense of security of inclusion in the American community I guess yeah.

In other words, the extent to which he feels he is part of the community is relative to the mere rights that a naturalized citizen status gives him, to live here in this community, and hence be included by being physically present. Further, a legal status has transformed him from a "resident alien" to an American citizen.

Other participants also saw their citizenship relative to the rights it gave them. For example, Yang, a 68-year-old self-identified male mentions that naturalized citizen status will allow his children and grandchildren to participate in politics.

> The reason why I decided to become American [citizen] is that if my children and grandchildren have the ability/intelligence to do so, can have the right to participate in political office in this country. This is my goal.

Yang felt he was too old to accomplish much but hopes his legal status (and theirs) will enable his children and grandchildren to participate in political office, a privilege that often requires U.S. citizenship. Another parent, Mai also speaks to what having naturalized citizenship means to her. (unrecorded) *Happy that I have documentation. Ease in transportation. Ease in going places.* She speaks to how she is happy she is documented, and that such documentation allows for ease in traveling. Again, this speaks to the legal rights that citizenship status affords individuals.

As former refugees, some of these participants recognized the importance of documentation because, in the past, it allowed them to reside in refugee camps and to receive food rations. Hmong refugees saw their citizenship only relative to the rights that the documentation affords them. This reflects the existing research showing that other immigrants naturalize only for the rights and protection that this status affords them (Bretell 2006). There is also no indication that people naturalized to show their pride as Americans as previous research also suggested (e.g. Bretell 2006). Therefore, it is imperative to assess how refugees make sense of their refugee experience that allowed them to acquire various legal statuses, and how this shape their sense of belonging because legal citizenship did not mean more than legal rights.

Refugee and Ethnic and Racial Identities

Former Hmong refugees are aware they are no longer refugees by legal status. However, despite having resided in the U.S. for more than four decades, about half of those who gave substantive answers still saw themselves as refugees. For example, 22 view themselves as refugees, while 23 did not, and five were not sure.

If participants feel that a naturalized citizen status is limited only to the rights that it affords them, and they are not Americans, how do we interpret this? Strikingly, a majority of the participants—children and parents—identified as Hmong. The group of hyphenated or racial identities comprised mostly of children. Specifically, 39 identified as Hmong, and 11 children identified as Asian, Asian-American, or Hmong-American. Children who identified with a racial or hyphenated identity tend not to view themselves as refugees. For the most part, those who continue to see themselves as refugees in present time tend to identify as Hmong.

In this section, I argue that despite obtaining a naturalized status, some participants still consider themselves refugees, indicating that the experiences they have gone through as former refugees continue to leak into the present. More specifically, those who saw themselves as refugees and identified with their ethnic identity were more critical of the term “America/n.” In contrast, those who did not see themselves as

refugees and identified with other racial and hyphenated identities saw America as a set of attitudes. And finally, those who did not identify as refugee, but identified as Hmong were less critical of their definition of America/n. I argue that this distancing from the refugee identity is a coping mechanism of war experiences.

Refugee, and Hmong

Participants who continue to view themselves as refugee and Hmong were more critical about America/n because they viewed this category as marked specifically for whites. They saw themselves as American only to the extent that they are living in the U.S. context as American citizens. For example, when I asked what Pa thought about the word America/n. Pa equated Americanness to having specific phenotypes. (unrecorded) *Skin color is different, white and blonde. High nose bridge. Does not see self as American.* Similarly, Thao, who is 21 years old and is part of the most recent wave of Hmong refugees who came to the United States in the early 2000s, identifies as Hmong, and refugee. I asked him what he thought of the term America/n. He tells me: (unrecorded) *White skin, blue eyes, blonde hair, high nose bridge, and born here.* Participants' interpretations of Americanness to specific phenotypes such as white, high nose bridge, blue eyes, and blonde hair suggest that they do not see themselves as American because they do not carry these phenotypes. This viewpoint suggests that participants can see themselves as American citizens, but not as true Americans who they associate specific phenotypes to. Further, Thao's mentioning of also being born in the U.S. as someone who is American, further point to this notion that he will never be an American beyond his citizenship status since he was born in a different country.

This indicates that legal citizenship status does not necessarily mean that former Hmong refugees view themselves belonging beyond the legal rights that it affords them. To them, being an American citizen is different from being an American, a marked category that is specifically for whites. In this regard, obtaining full inclusion in the United States seems nearly impossible if one does not carry certain phenotypes. Next, I show how war permeates into the present.

Those who saw themselves as refugees talked about how the experiences of war permeate into the present. Some participants shared that they continued to see themselves as refugees because of the experience of war still resonates with them. For example, when I asked Shong if he ever saw himself as a refugee. He elaborated that he *still* sees himself as a refugee despite obtaining U.S. citizenship. Shong states, "Oh yeah, of course. Of course, because I am. Even now that I am a citizen, I still say I am a refugee." Similarly, when I asked Neng if he still saw himself as a refugee, he shares,

> In terms of that, it's always with me. Even though I have become a citizen, my paper still says I am a refugee who came here, and still, I consider myself as a refugee person who came here. Even though I have lived here for a while and got my citizenship, live like a citizen, that is still constantly with me; I still continue to think like that.

This excerpt of Neng explains that he has by documentation legally transitioned from a refugee into a U.S. citizen, however the fact that he came as a refugee remains with him, which is why he still considers himself a refugee. Although he did not elaborate, another participant, Tou explains to me in more detail why he continues to view himself as a refugee,

> Oh, yes…Yeah..that picture is still there….the picture as a refugee. The picture of running, the picture of being a refugee, running from one country to another, this picture is still embedded in my brain. Even though I have become a naturalized U.S. citizen, I still see myself as a refugee person.

Tou speaks about how the image in which he calls the "picture" of escaping war by running and leaving for another country continues to be embedded in his mind even as he has become a U.S. citizen.

Choua also speaks about how the experiences of the war continue to remain in her brain. She tells me, "Even now, it's still embedded in my brain, it fights with my brain. Whenever I think about it, it continues to be in my brain." When I asked her to elaborate what remains in her brain, she replies, "The running, people dying, war. It continues to remain in my brain." I asked if that occurs every day, she explains,

> As soon as you think about it, then it's there…even when you don't think about it, it's still there. Because you saw it with your eyes. You saw with your eyes, heard with your ears…so when you think, it is there. Even when I tell myself, don't think about it, it still does not disappear, it keeps lingering.

Choua speaks about how the experiences of war linger in her brain, even if she does not want to think about it. For individuals who experienced the violence in the aftermath of the war, the images and noises of that experience continue to circumvent their thinking, embedded in their mind and memory.

Shong, Neng, Tou and Choua speak to how they still identify as refugees. Like other participants, Shong and Tou who viewed themselves as refugees while acknowledging their U.S. citizenship. This shows that they interpret that people might see these identities as contradicting, but for them, they exist simultaneously. It is here that the idea that refugee identity captures the experiences of war becomes more evident since their identity as a refugee is connected directly to how that experience still remains as a picture or in their brain to this day. And thus, the experiences of war permeate to the present, which points to how state violence of the past continues to shape refugee's experience in the present. This contributes to the literature on immigrant racial and ethnic identities by underscoring that prior war experiences can continue to shape refugee understandings of themselves in the current resettled society.

Not refugee, but Asian, Asian-American, and Hmong-American

Participants who did not identify as refugees and identified as a racial- ethnic-hyphenated identity had more varied ideas on what America/n entailed. For example, Boua, a 27-year-old self-identified male explained:

> I would say, being an American is being someone who likes [to] pursue something…without letting other people tell you what to do. That's the most unprofessional way to put it, but (laughs). So, I think that being American has more to do with like an attitude than like anything else.

In other words, he saw being American as the freedom of choices and no constraints from others, an attitude that one can act on.

Children who identify with a racial or pan-ethnic identity tend not to view themselves as refugees. They attributed not identifying as refugees to their lack of war experiences. Most are the children who went through the motions of the migration into Thailand or were born in the refugee camps. Like those who no longer identify as a refugee but maintain their ethnicity, Hmong that I will talk about in the next section, these individuals disassociated themselves from refugeeness and treated it as a thing of the past or as an experience they did not go through. For example, Vang, a 43-year-old self-identified male who arrived in the U.S. when he was about four years old stated that he currently does not view himself as a refugee because he has put that behind him. (unrecorded) *No, I don't any more…That was a bad time and I have to grow and not linger with the bad time (being a refugee).* Another participant indicated that he did not view himself as a refugee because he did not experience the war as his parents did. Chue, also arrived in the U.S. when he was four years old. Chue states, "I think it's because I haven't experienced the way they [parents] experienced running out of the country." Chue did not view himself as having gone through the refugee experience in the same way that his parents or other refugees did and therefore, did not identify as a refugee.

Others did not see themselves as refugees because they never view themselves in this regard. Despite knowing that being a refugee was her point of entry into the U.S., Chee, a 29-year-old, self-identified female did not see herself as a refugee. In fact, she never saw herself as a refugee because she came to the United States at a young age and also did not have recollections of the hardship refugees endured.

> I don't know. I think I never really do consider myself a refugee just because I grew up here and I think, I think of myself as more of an immigrant, but I wouldn't really say a refugee. I would say, I know that we are refugee…we are under that category but um, I never really identify as that as much just because I guess I never went through that hardship of getting here and you know, that experience.

The reasoning to not identify as refugees point to this notion of distancing themselves from refugeeness, the experience and idea of having fled violence and war. For instance, viewing it as a thing of the past suggests that it is no longer something that permeates into their present lives. In addition, not recalling these experiences or being too young to have

any memories allows them to take on a viewpoint that they did not go through a refugee experience. In actuality, most did (in varying degrees) since they were either born in Thai refugee camps or Laos. However, their identification as hyphenated identities does not suggest that they feel a sense of belonging. For example, when asked why she identified as Asian American, Yer, a 32-year-old self-identified female, elaborates,

> Well, I identif[ied] as that because even the people I work with…in the state government, they don't know…they never heard of the Hmong, and they never hear about the Hmong American, and so I have always identif[ied] as myself with Asian American. Maybe as a safeguard rather than as Hmong-American—having to explain everything, having to explain the history… as a kid when someone asked me where I was from…I always tell them Hmong and we're from Laos and that I have to go into this whole description of who the Hmong are, and what they are and how we got here. And the reality, the sad part was that I didn't even know any of that answer. I didn't even know if that was the truth or not.

While such an identity may suggest she feels a sense of belonging, it is a response to how she perceived others' understanding of who she is, and how she is perceived within the U.S. context. Her experience taught her that others do not know who she is or her history, and to identify as Hmong would entail an entire explaining of her history, a history that she was not entirely sure herself.

Not refugee and Hmong

Participants who do not view themselves as refugees, and identified as Hmong were less critical of America/n than those who identify closely with their refugee identity. For example, they view America/n in a positive light, as a powerful country, or as a respectable group of people. For example, Nou mentioned that America is powerful and well known:

> (unrecorded) *It means that* "America," *is powerful and* most well-known.

Similarly, Lou states,

> Because they are a group of people, who have fame or a group of people who are more advanced than other countries.

Lou viewed American in a positive light, as those who are more advance and famous. Yet, she refers to American as them, also dissociating herself as an American. These participants' views on America/n as a powerful force suggest that they are less critical of the U.S., or as I suggest they are more hopeful about being here.

The participants who did not see themselves as refugees and identified as Hmong viewed their refugee status as something of the past that is no longer with them in the present. For example, Ka Zoua told me, (unrecorded) *I think I am a citizen so no, I don't feel like a refugee.* Pao did not see himself as a refugee because he is living in the United States, "Um, not really because you know, we're here in the United States. So yeah, we were but not anymore you know because from now on, this will be our country." In other words, participants who did not see themselves as refugees saw that experience as

something of the past. For example, Ka Zoua's view of the refugee as a status means that she no longer occupies that status as a citizen now. Further, Pao's mentioning that he is now in a new country points at the notion that refugeness was connected to another country that he once lived in, but because he is no longer there, it is something of the past.

I interpreted participants not identifying as refugees as their way of coping with experiences of war. Despite being optimistic about the people of this country and the country itself, they still did not see themselves as American despite obtaining citizenship. Even being physically present and legally documented, refugees still do not feel like full members of the imagined U.S. community. This notion of back and forth between belonging and not belonging, or the notion of being an American citizen, but not an American is what I term a *social liminality*. I consider this a symbolic violence that sustains and reserves the American category specifically for "them" and not "us." The American as white--makes this category unachievable. However, the variation in identities and perspectives of all the groups should be taken together to understand that being Hmong in America is a collectivity of all these, and hence fully identifying as "American" is also not required.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

After obtaining a naturalized citizen status, many still identified as refugees, suggesting that the experience of war remains with these individuals whether or not they talk about it. Further, the findings from this study suggest that Hmong refugees see themselves as American citizens but not American. Identification as a refugee is based on how they view previous experiences of war. War experiences permeate into the present, either silently or as individuals talk about it. This speaks to this notion of belonging as legal citizens, but still not viewing themselves as a part of the social fabric of the nation as Americans, a *social liminality*, and symbolic violence. While, the heterogeneity of the various identities of Hmong participants as indicated by the three groups illustrates that becoming refugee and becoming citizens varies, and collectively they point to various ways of what it means to be Hmong in America.

In addition to existing research on second-generation immigrants (e.g. Flores-Gonzalez 2017), this study finds that first-generation and one-point-five-generation individuals do not feel they are Americans despite obtaining naturalized citizenship. In other words, the experiences of othering result in similar identifications irrespective of generation and in the presence of legal citizenship. When considering immigrant (refugee) experience in the "resettled" country, research should take into account previous experiences of immigrants whose country of origin have experienced U.S. intervention. Treating identities as a cultural practice in which the past filters into the present to form new communities and identities (Lowe 1996), these findings push the literature on ethnic and racial identification forward because it considers how experiences before arriving in the U.S. can also shape refugee formulations of their ethnic and racial identities. Many participants saw themselves as Hmong, but their views of themselves as

refugees were divided. Those who still saw themselves as refugees viewed it as an experience that they went through, that continues to appear in their minds, continuously reminding them of that experience. While those who no longer saw themselves as refugee, treated this identity as a legal status or a thing of the past that is no longer in the present. In other words, both groups treated war experiences differently, but that experience plays a role in shaping their understanding of belonging. This is evident when I assess their views on America/n. Those who no longer saw themselves as refugees were more hopeful about America/n by regarding America/n as a powerful country or people. On the other hand, those who saw themselves as refugees, seem to view America/n relative to people with specific phenotypes. Adult children who did not see themselves as refugees viewed America/n as a set of attitudes or practices and identified by various hyphenated and racial identities.

The reluctance to consider oneself as full American unveils two things. The first is the continuing theme of violence. Refugees experienced physical violence as they fled Laos to Thailand, like death and starvation. In the camps, they experienced structural violence of inadequate resources and food, that seems justifiable by their access to mail to send *paj ntaub* to sell or participate in the economy across borders (cultural violence). In the U.S. their refugee statuses allowed them to obtain permanent resident status and many became citizens. However, this legal citizenship does not fully translate to viewing oneself as part of the social imagined community; participants do not view themselves as Americans despite stating they are American citizens. As I have suggested, this represents symbolic violence, a subconscious and nonphysical form of violence that maintains the status quo of immigrants as others, even as they have become U.S. citizens. On the flip side, Hmong refugees are formulating what it means to be Hmong in America as evidenced by how they make sense of their experiences of war. In this way, then the identities they forged, refugee or not, and the varied ethnic and hyphenated identities underscores this process of *becoming* refugees and *becoming* citizens as ongoing (Hall 1990). This is evident in the children who are formulating new racial, ethnic and hyphenated identities. Nonetheless, refugee formulations of identities (refugee, ethnic, racial), views on America/n and their legal statuses not only calls into question subjection of people to violence before they *became* refugees, but also after they *become* citizens.

CHAPTER FIVE: *Conclusion*

The main purpose of this dissertation is to assess how people become excluded or included in various points in time and societies in a world of conflict and violence that propels migration. My guiding question is to ask how people become refugees and become citizens, basically pointing to how refugees are included and excluded in various communities relative to and beyond their legal statuses. I examine Hmong refugees from Laos as a case study because they have resided in the U.S. long enough to take on a legal citizenship status, but migrated recently enough to recall experiences of war. I traced the Hmong refugee experience back to the jungles of Laos, to the refugee camps and to the present time in the United States to implicitly illustrate the process in which people are turned into refugees or the *becoming of* refugee and the *becoming* of citizens. I maintain that Hmong refugees experience a simultaneous notion of belonging and not belonging in the various societies that expel them or the societies they forcibly become a part of. I also argue that refugees experience violence before they become refugees, and even after they have become citizens.

In Chapter Two, I argue that migration theories on household decision-making could also explain refugee migration if the focus on the economy was expanded to encompass human lives. In doing so, I attempt to bring the involuntary and voluntary literature into conversation. I view— the decisions to migrate made by the household — as a meeting point between the two different literatures, despite a difference in the reasons for migrating. I am not equating human life with an economic value. Rather, I am suggesting that in certain situations, people make decisions to move relative to other things that matter more than money—like life—and that this should also be considered. Relative to belonging, I also make the argument that in a place that the Hmong have long call home, they are simultaneously erasing their voices (noises) and their footprints, or their physical belonging. Hence, I suggest the notion of being there, but erasing any presence as a *physical liminality*. In this chapter, I also show that the Hmong experience both physical and emotional violence due to the aftermath of the war and communist regime in Laos. The weapons, guns, and bombs inflicted physical violence to the Hmong in their villages and while they were on the journey to Thailand. They left everything (their homes, animals, life, loved ones) and nothing (no footprints, no noises).

In Chapter Three, I engage with the transnational and refugee camp literature. I suggest the camp can also serve as an economic space in that people participate in economic transnationalism. The lack of food in the camps forced refugees into transforming the *paj ntaub* into a commodifiable item in order to survive in the camps. While the nation-state cast refugees as *unwanted* as evident by their precarious living situation in the camps, the items they produced were *wanted* in the economy. This signifies a type of cultural violence. The access to mail or postal service and hence the

participation in an alternative economy seemingly justifies the structural violence of providing bare minimum food and resources for refugees in the camps. On the other hand, this shows that despite the lack of legal citizenship status, and being cast outside of the Thai social and economic communities, the Hmong forged transnational communities through their kin in the U.S. to sell *paj ntaub*. This can be another form of belonging to a space that transcends national borders. However, I call these networks *forced transnational networks* to critique and point to the structural violence of minimal services and food provided in the camps that these networks must be formed to sustain refugee lives. Once refugees are re-incorporated into the nation-state through their permanent resident status and eventually naturalized citizen statuses—their existing ties are maintained, and this is evident in the remittances that they send back home, although it occurs less frequently. However, as "legal" citizens, the Hmong experience a different form of violence.

In Chapter Four, I bring the ethnic and racial identity, and the citizenship literature into conversation, and add the refugee identity to capture the war experience. Despite obtaining legal status, and being physically present in the U.S., refugees continue to feel like they do not belong. This is evidenced by their unwillingness to identify as Americans despite recognizing they are American citizens. Thus, in the U.S. the Hmong feel like they do not completely belong while also belonging legally and physically. This is what I consider as *social liminality,* a form of symbolic violence. While this portrays their partial belonging in the US, the heterogeneity of the various identities also speaks to how the Hmong are making sense of their experiences in the US, their past experiences of war and hence belonging in the U.S. context.

In sum, this study implies three things. First, it shows refugees as social actors, even in forced circumstances like the journey to Thailand or in the refugee camps. For example, Hmong participated in economic transnationalism while living in camps. In doing so, it moves the refugee away from "victims needing rescue" to social actors. Two, using the cycle of violence framework enables one to assess the various forms of violence and how these become legitimized through the "rescue." And three, by asking how people become refugees and how people become citizens, this dissertation unsettles these categories of refugee and citizen, as an ongoing process. For example, in different contexts, what it meant to be a refugee is continuously negotiated by the Hmong. The deprivation of resources and food in the camps meant the Hmong had to recreate their livelihood, and they did this through utilizing their kin networks. In the U.S., people decided and coped with their war experiences differently. While some are remembering that experience and still viewing themselves as refugees, others treated that experience as the past. This has implications for research because it pushes the existing literature on immigrants (e.g. refugees, unauthorized) to consider how previous experiences of violence or otherwise, can shape people's understandings and experiences in the U.S. At the beginning of this dissertation, I assert that I take a realist approach in examining refugees (Hein 1993), which recognizes the experiences of war and violence even if the

person does not obtain a legal refugee status. This raises questions about unauthorized immigrants who flee from the aftermath of war and large scale violence. An unauthorized status makes people vulnerable to state-sanctioned deportations and violence. But how might their previous experiences of violence contribute to and exacerbate these experiences in the U.S.?

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

One limitation is that conducting the interviews occurred once. A series of follow up interviews can enrich this study. For example, repeated interviews can allow for more depth and perhaps even discussions of events or experiences that interviewees may not discuss the first time. Longitudinal interviews can also shed light on how peoples' interpretations of their war experiences and identities change over time. For example, how might people reinterpret their experiences of war in light of global events or different administrations? These interviews can also benefit from the inclusion of archival and other sources of data to situate the refugee experience historically. This may help contextualize and situate refugee experiences better.

The sample and data in this dissertation did not allow me to discuss the experiences of Hmong and other Southeast Asian deportees or to delve into the deeper meanings behind these deportations. However, the act of deporting former refugees or legal permanent residents is an act of violence experienced by this population. In other words, if we look at the cycle of violence proposed by CRS, the intervention of the U.S. into Laos starts this cycle of violence. When the Hmong come to the U.S. or are "rescued," what does the deportation of refugees represent? This would be an interesting point of inquiry, especially given that the number of Hmong and Southeast Asian refugee deportations are minuscule compared to that of the Latinx communities. More research on the reasonings for the deportation of Southeast Asians can also add to the forced migration literature and Critical Refugee Studies, respectively.

Future research can also delve deeper into the development of the *paj ntaub* in the refugee camps from the perspective of Hmong refugees themselves. I was not aware of the existing literature on *paj ntaub* until I read it after the analysis of my data. Given time constraints, I did not follow up for more information from participants. However, the existing literature suggests that this form of *paj ntaub* developed from the camps (Criag 2010; Craig 2016), and Long (1993) briefly mentioned seeing women sew *paj ntaub* and send it off to the U.S. Similarly, participants in this study echoed this, by sending it to kin to help them sell it, although they did not distinguish what type of *paj ntaub* they sent. Thus, future research can tease out what type of paj ntaub and where Hmong refugees sent and sold them. Further, central to this conversation should be how refugees decide the new form of *paj ntaub*. Existing research suggests that *paj ntaub* was tailored to Western taste and markets (Peterson 1988), but I wonder if these new form of *paj ntaub*

(story cloth) is also a contestation and protection of the classic *paj ntaub* Hmong refugees were not willing to commodify in the same way or to the same markets during that period. One way to know is to produce new research from the perspectives of the women and men who took part in it. Given that many who lived through the refugee camps have passed or are aging, it may be ideal to conduct these studies soon.

In closing, I reorient you back to why I felt the Hmong would be a good case study. I noted at the beginning of this dissertation that the Hmong were geopolitically stateless. However, I did not infer what that could mean. At the end of this dissertation, I question whether the geopolitical *statelessness* that the Hmong had before their involvement or the intervention of other states (first the French under colonial rule, and then the U.S.), was perhaps a better kind of statelessness, and different kind of belonging than they now experience. It is a far stretch, and further research is needed on this notion of statelessness in geopolitical terms compared to that of being stateless by refugee status or unauthorized statuses. But one is left to wonder, if it were possible, how might the Hmong have lived in the mountainous regions of Laos free from state intervention?

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Appendix A

Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Child/Parent
Ah	46	F	Child
Boua	27	M	Child
Chee	29	F	Child
Cheng	46	M	Child
Choua	60	F	Parent
Chue	29	M	Child
Dao	72	M	Parent
Der *	53	F	Parent
Dia*	53	F	Parent
Duachee	70	F	Parent
Fuechy	48	M	Child
Gia	49	F	Parent
IaOng	19	F	Child
Ka Zoua*	56	F	Parent
Kabao	80	F	Parent
Kai	47	M	Child
Kang*	86	F	Parent
Kaying	47	F	Parent
Kong *	66	M	Parent
Kue*	76	M	Parent
Lou	52	F	Parent
Mai*	40	F	Parent
Mee	54	F	Parent
Meng	35	M	Child
Nali	31	F	Child
Neng	42	M	Child
Nong*	33	M	Child
Nou*	60	F	Parent
Nyia	22	F	Child
Pa*	55	F	Parent
Palia	40	F	Parent
Pao	30	M	Child
Phia	31	M	Child
Phoua	30	F	Child
Shong	49	M	Child
Soua*	64	F	Parent
Suayee	38	F	Child

Thao	21	M	Child
Thong*	73	M	Parent
Tou	39	M	Child
Tria*	54	F	Parent
Txee	54	M	Parent
Vang*	43	M	Child
Xie	62	M	Parent
Xor	38	M	Child
Xue	33	M	Child
Yang	68	M	Parent
Yee	47	F	Child
Yer	32	F	Child
Zeng	76	F	Parent

*Not recorded

Appendix B

Interview Guide

Interviewee pseudonym: _____

Introduction

Purpose of research

Demographic Questions

Age:
Sex:
Married, Single, Divorced, Widowed? :
Highest Degree Received:
Highest grade/number of years in school:
Self-identified race:
Resident status (permanent resident, naturalized citizen, etc):
All Previous and Current Occupations:
Are you currently renting or own a home?
Do you have any children (how many)?
When did you come to the US?
How old were you when you came to the US?
What city did you reside in when you first came? (If different city from now, ask how their experience was like there… why move, etc.)

Migration Experience

1.) Do you remember how you came to the United States?
2.) Can you tell me about your migration story?
3.) Do you have any memories of the war? (If so, ask them to share these memories. If not, ask them what they know about the war and from where/whom?)
4.) What was your experience like when you first came to the U.S.? Can you share with me how life was like for you?
5.) What were your interactions like? (What did you do on a daily basis, who did you talk to, where did you go, were there special occasions you attend, etc?)
6.) Did you experience any kind of difficulties? (What were they, can you tell me more?)
7.) How is your current experience living in the U.S. (or local city)? (In other words, how do you feel like living in the United States now?)
8.) What is the hardest thing for you now?
9.)What would you say is your greatest accomplishments since arriving?

Life in the U.S.

Transnationalism?

1.) Do you keep in contact with anyone from Laos or Thailand? (Can you tell me about these experiences?)
2.) If so, how do you keep in touch with them?
3.) Have you ever visited? How often?
4.) Do you send money or gifts to Laos/Thailand?
5.) Do you have family members in other countries?

Race

1.) You mentioned that you identified as _____, can you talk about why you identify as that?
2.) What does being _____mean to you? (How much does your ethnicity or race play a role in your life or the friends and people that you interact with? Can you elaborate on that?)
3.) Can you talk about your everyday life and interactions with people? Who did you interact with, what did you do, etc.
4.) How do you define American?
5.) What is the race of your partner?
6.) What race and ethnicity are your friends? What about your children's/parent's friends?
7.) What does it mean to you to be _____ and living in this city?
8.) Do you ever experience discrimination? Can you talk about it?

Legal Status/War

1.) What are your thoughts about the (Secret) War?
2.) Do you ever talk about the War with your children/parents? What do you tell them? Are there any things from the war that you do not share with them? (Why or Why not)
3.) What does it mean to you to be a _____ (permanent resident, naturalized citizen, refugee)?
4.) *(IF not naturalized citizenship, why not and any plans to naturalize?)*
5.) *(Did you come to the U.S. as a refugee?)* Do you still see yourself as a refugee? (Elaborate..)

Social

1.) What is a typical day like for you?
2.) What do you do on your free time?
3.) Where do you eat/shop/do your laundry, etc.?

4.) Are there any clubs, organizations, teams, or activities that you were ever a part of? Still a part of?
5.) What are some social events that you participate in? (Who is there, what do you do at these events?)
6.) Are there any important social events to you? (Why?)
7.) What are some events, organizations, teams or activities that you will like to be a part of? (Why are you not currently participating?)
8.) What stores do you shop at?

Work/school (If they do not work or go to school, ask about what they do with their time?)

1.) Describe what work/school is like…
2.) What is a typical day at work like for you?
3.) Do you have friends?
4.) What kinds of interactions do you have at work? (Who do you talk to? What do you do?)

Would it be possible to contact you later to clarify questions I may have?